

Presentation:

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## **The Vienna Anti-Violence Programme**

A victim-oriented programme for perpetrators

### **1. Introduction**

In the last decades of the past century domestic violence came to be globally understood as a serious problem for society and was acknowledged by the UN, WHO and EU as a violation of human rights. The individual member states were called upon to take appropriate action to eliminate this crime.

In Austria, upon the initiative of the federal government a series of measures came into force in 1997 with the purpose of granting to victims the most comprehensive and complete protection possible. This includes three provisions:

- The police shall interfere if there are indications of a dangerous threat to the life, health and liberty of a person; they have to tell the person who represents a danger to leave the common household and to prohibit their return to the house and its environment for ten days (eviction, barring orders).
- Those affected by the threat are counselled about their situation, so that they can decide for themselves whether they want to apply for longer-term protection measures in the form of a preliminary injunction.
- The supportive counselling of the victims and the coordination of the measures to prevent violence is organised by intervention centres, an institution created especially for this purpose.

In this way victims and perpetrators\* are integrated in an intervention system which includes the police, the intervention centres and the courts as well as the Youth and Family Offices, in cases where children are directly or indirectly affected by domestic violence. Work with violent men can be regarded as one element in this intervention system to prevent violence.

### **2. Basic elements of the Vienna Anti-Violence Programme**

In its present structure the programme has been operating since 1999. The organisations responsible for the programme are the Intervention Centre Against Violence in the Family (IST) and the Men's Counselling Service Vienna (MÄB), who provide counselling after an eviction. Both organisations are non-profit associations whose work in the prevention of violence is funded by the Federal Ministry of the Interior. Funding is effected via project applications which have to be filed and approved annually. Efforts to secure longer-term financing have been unsuccessful so far.

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\* In the case of domestic violence, most of the victims are women (and children), and most of the abusers are male family members. Our following remarks are based on this pattern, but also apply to cases where the gender situation is opposite.

The objectives of the Anti-Violence Programme are:

- changing the behaviour of the male perpetrator with the aim of removing all physical and non-physical forms of violence from his behavioural repertoire
- men should learn violence-free modes of behaviour on an equal footing with their immediate environment
- support and empowerment for the partners affected by violent behaviour and for their children
- improving the quality of living for all the persons included in the violence system

Therefore, the target group is men who have committed violent acts in their relationships, as well as their partners and children.

From the start the Vienna Anti-Violence Programme was oriented at international standards of work with perpetrators. The concepts of the CHANGE Programme in Scotland (Wilson & Morran, 1995), of D.A.I.P. in the US (Pence & Paymar, 1993) and the standards of British Columbia, Canada were adapted to the Austrian intervention system.

Structurally, the programme consists of three elements:

- training for offenders (organised by MÄB)
- support programme for their partners (organised by IST)
- cooperation of both organisations and networking with other actors in the intervention system

The preferred setting in the training of offenders are open, structured groups with a woman and a man as trainers. Corresponding to the great variety of personalities of potential abusers a broad range of methods are used, such as cognitive behaviour therapy and role-play, psychodynamic approaches to the offence, training of social skills as well as physical therapy techniques.

At present (that is, in 2006) two groups with 8–10 participants each are organised within the framework of the anti-violence training. Group sessions take place once a week and each participant has to be present at 30 group meetings.

Individual training is offered in exceptional cases, if for some reason the participant cannot take part in the group meetings (e.g., because of the time schedule, or because they do not know enough German, as for financial reasons the programme at present can only be held in German).

### **3. Procedure of the Vienna Anti-Violence Programme**

The detailed procedure of the training as well as work focuses and contents of the two cooperating organisations MÄB and IST are depicted in Annex 1 (flow chart, p. 15) and explained below.

#### **3.1 Referral and first contact**

All potential participants must contact the MÄB themselves and make an appointment for a first meeting. Usually the first contact is made via telephone.

Violent men come to the MÄB from a variety of referring sources. The main distinction is whether they are

- obligatory or
- voluntary<sup>1</sup>.

Obligatory referral to training is carried out by the Youth Office and by the criminal justice authorities. The latter can oblige the violent partner to participate in the anti-violence programme within the framework of a suspended sentence with a probationary period and liability to take part, release from prison on probation, or by means of an out-of-court settlement for the offence (diversion programme) with a probationary period and liability to take part. Also the youth welfare authority, represented by the Youth and Family Offices, can oblige a father to take part in the programme under the assumption that his acts of violence are dangerous to the child's welfare.

Voluntary referral comes from the most diverse sources. In many cases the Vienna Intervention Centre after an eviction passes on information about this programme to the woman concerned, who then makes her partner's participation in the programme a prerequisite for continuing the relationship. Also, many men hope that their participation in the training will be taken as a proof of their sincere efforts to change, after which the relationship will continue.

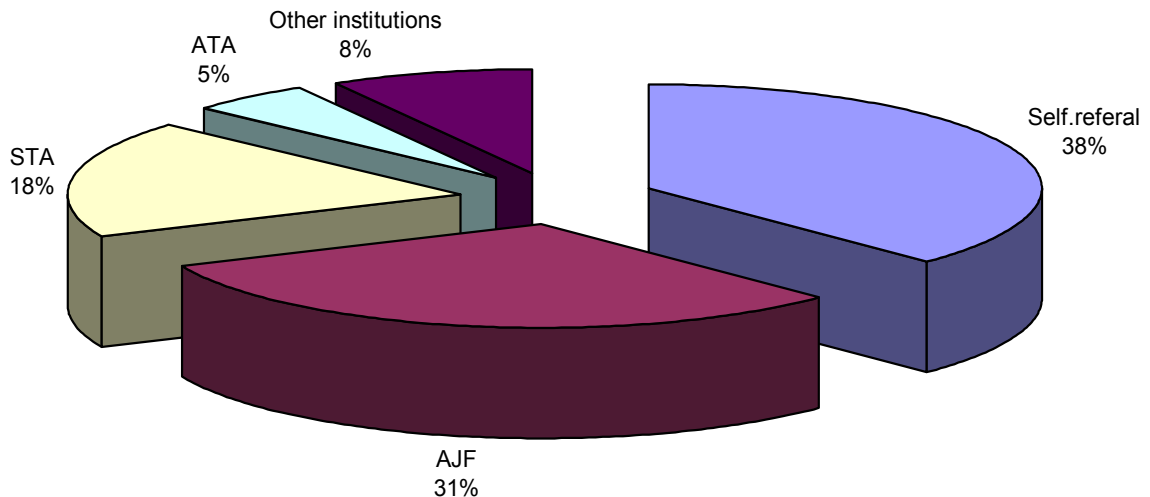
In the years since it was founded (in 1999) the Vienna Anti-Violence Programme has become renowned far beyond the city limits of Vienna. This is reflected in the growing numbers of referrals from the provinces of Lower Austria and Burgenland and underlines the need for a nationwide implementation of training programmes for violent men in pair relationships.

The following diagram shows the distribution of types of referral among 279 abusive persons in 1999 – 2006.

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<sup>1</sup> Voluntary here refers to the participants who are not bound by law to take part in the Anti-Violence Programme; however, this term is not quite correct in that the motivation to join the Anti-Violence Programme often comes from outside, i.e., the partner against whom they committed violent acts, or specific organisations, rather than the participants themselves.

## Referral



AJF = Youth and Family Offices, STA = Public Prosecutor's Office, ATA = settlement out of court

The various Youth and Family Offices (AJF) are responsible for a substantial share of referrals, namely 86 participants (31%). Whether directly or indirectly, children are always affected by violent acts of their fathers against their mothers (Kavemann/Kreyssig 2005), and according to the Youth Welfare Bill the Youth Officers have the possibility to oblige abusive fathers to take part in an anti-violence training.

In this diagram the differentiation between self-referrals (38%) and referrals by other organisations (8%) is rather arbitrary, as it often could not be determined very clearly by whom the interested parties had been informed about the training programme.

65 abusers (23%) were referred by the judicial system. This number includes the indirect referral by the Public Prosecutor's Office by means of a settlement out of court (ATA), a method of probation which was applied especially at the beginning of the programme. It has become evident that an extension of the cooperation with the judiciary system and an increased number of referrals are desirable. Therefore in individual cases which they consider suitable, the Vienna Intervention Centre and the Men's Counselling Service suggest to the criminal justice authorities that the offenders in question should take part in the anti-violence training. Under criminal law there are various possibilities of referral, from diversion programmes (settlement out of court) to obligations in the case of suspended sentences or releases from prison on probation.

During the initial interview, first the problem situation is clarified, as there are also referrals to the MÄB in the case of sexual violence, violence against children but not against the partner, or violence exerted in public space, which are all dealt with in different projects. The potential

participant who committed violent acts against his wife/partner is then handed a leaflet which sums up the core data of the training programme (see Annex). Next any open questions are answered. If the offender in question agrees to take part in the training and to its conditions, the percentage share to be paid by the participant per session is fixed between EUR 3 and EUR 10. Having filled in the amount of the percentage share and his signature in the document of consent, the client binds himself to fulfil the required conditions and can now be admitted to the clearing phase.

After the client has filled in the document of consent, a case file is started which, apart from the demographic data on the participant and his partner, contains a first assessment of the violence record, the degree of dangerousness and potential addiction problems. This file is immediately transmitted to the Intervention Centre. From this moment on, both organisations (MÄB and IST) are responsible for the case.

### **3.2 Clearing phase**

The clearing phase was introduced in order to examine the suitability of candidates to take part in the programme.

For instance, referrals on the part of the Public Prosecutor's Office are often carried out on the sole basis of the records, without personal contact to the offender. Therefore it is the purpose of the clearing phase to find out whether admitting the offender to the anti-violence training makes sense. Continued violent acts (including psychological violence, stalking) or ongoing consequences of the violence incidents (e.g., the victim has fled to a women's shelter with her children), increased danger caused by the person or a total lack of problem awareness are obstacles to the admittance to the programme.

#### **3.2.1. Clearing phase MÄB**

On the part of the MÄB, the clearing phase of the anti-violence training consists in collecting diagnostic data in order to gain a picture of the batterer and his situation that is as complete as possible. For this purpose, during a session of approximately 1.5 hours length various questionnaire surveys and a structured interview are carried out. The data thus obtained facilitate a first assessment of the man's personality, the frequency, forms and degree of seriousness of his violent acts, how he deals with anger and rage, a prognosis on the degree of dangerousness and his social situation.

#### **3.2.2. Clearing phase IST**

Having studied the case file, the IST counsellor contacts the partner affected by violent acts and invites her to an interview. Unless the woman in question has been a client of IST before (which is the case if her partner has been evicted from the house by the police before) the purpose of this first meeting is to get to know each other and build a relationship. After a basis of trust has been created, the next step is to determine the frequency and the extent of the violent acts of the male partner. For this the IST counsellor uses a parallel version of the questionnaires for abusers. The result is a basis for assessing his dangerousness. Next, safety planning is the key issue. It is also vitally important to convey information on the objectives and the contents of the training for offenders in order to avoid that the violent partner gives false information on the training so as to further manipulate his partner. Furthermore it is necessary to tell the woman concerned that the participation of her partner in the anti-violence training does not mean that she is sufficiently safe from repeated violent acts and that it is important for her to continue being counselled and

supported and watching her safety. Lastly, an agreement on the type of practical support is reached.

### **3.2.3. Cooperation and decision on admittance to the programme**

As mentioned before, the anti-violence training is carried out jointly by the Men's Counselling Service and the Intervention Centre, and the decision on admittance to the Anti-Violence Programme is also taken jointly and on equal terms. During monthly team sessions all relevant information that is available on each participant is exchanged. Data from the referring organisations, from police reports (in the case of an eviction) and data on court proceedings complement this information.

The collected data are the basis for the prognosis of dangerousness of the batterer and the assessment of his suitability for group training. It has already been mentioned that there is no admittance in cases of ongoing violence. With their violent behaviour repeat offenders demonstrate that they do not adhere to agreements, which means that they violate the framework conditions of the programme. This also applies to cases of continued stalking.

In some cases participants are admitted to the programme on the condition that they fulfil additional obligations. This may happen if the participant is addicted to alcohol, for instance. In such cases the alcohol problem must be monitored by a different organisation which specialises in this problem.

In cases where the participant and the partner affected by his violent acts continue to live together, following the separate interviews an interview with the two team-members and the couple is held. This gives the IST counsellor and her colleague from MÄB an opportunity to get to know the client as well as his partner interacting with each other. On the other hand this joint interview demonstrates the close cooperation of the two organisation and the importance of protection and support for the victim.

By far the largest share of the participants in the clearing phase who are not admitted to the training programme fail because of their lacking motivation and do not manage to show up on the appointed dates.

Because only a limited number of participants can be accepted, priority criteria were set up. Participants who have been referred within the framework of criminal justice proceedings and those referred by the Youth and Family Offices are preferably accepted, as they usually have a lower drop-out rate than "voluntary" participants.

The referring institutions are informed in writing about the decision in favour or against admittance to the programme, negative decisions are accounted for. Counselling by IST for the wife or partner is continued regardless of a negative decision.

## **4. Training phase**

The duration of the training phase is 8 months minimum, which may be prolonged due to holidays, phases of illness or work requirements. In any case 30 group or individual sessions grouped in several modules are mandatory.

The anti-violence training is an open, structure group training which is grouped in modules according to content. Participants can join at any time. Therefore, the individual group members are in different training phases and can support each other in and outside the group during difficult times. Each participant goes through all the modules during his 30 group sessions, independent of when he has entered the group. As disadvantages of such an open group, a group spirit will not develop as readily and work in the group will be more on the surface than in a closed group setting. However, experience has showed that closed groups do not work in this area, as the existence of the group will more easily be endangered due to the high drop-out rates.

Sessions take place once a week and last two hours. For each group there is a team of two trainers, a woman and a man. That both genders are represented in the trainer team serves as a role model for a respectful interaction between genders.

#### **4.1 Contents and structure of the training for offenders**

When a new participant attends the group for the first time, he is asked to introduce himself by answering a few questions before the initial round.

A core module is to find a joint definition of violence. As a concept of action, violence is juxtaposed to feelings of anger, rage and fury, and is introduced as intentional behaviour with the aim of exerting power and control. In addition to physical violence, all forms of violence are discussed that are included in the Power and Control Wheel (Pence & Paymar, 1995). Each group member has to assess his behaviour according to various lists of violence-specific behaviour in order to reach his own target definition of behavioural changes. In an exercise on the advantages and disadvantages of relationships, participants tend to become aware of the high price paid and the damage done through violence for the victims, but also for the perpetrator himself.

The following sessions deal with the roots of violence. Images of maleness and their socio-cultural and societal communication of such images are questioned. Special attention is paid to the feelings of the participant and their consequences for his relationship to women and their identity. From this point on the process of becoming aware and the non-violent expression of feelings are actively developed, as these skills are a prerequisite for further modules and their successful implementation. Also, sexist statements and opinions which promote violence are continually registered and discussed.

One module is dedicated especially to strategies of justification of one's own violent behaviour, reflection and overcoming these strategies as well as taking over responsibility for one's own actions. This remains a key issue throughout the training programme. Taking over responsibility is an essential prerequisite for changing violent behaviour. It is based on the critical examination of the perpetrator's strategies (denial, playing it down, blaming someone else and losing control) as well as the development and intensification of an empathic understanding of the consequences of violence for the victims.

Working through the specific act of violence (to cope with the crime) is given ample space. In a special group session, each participant talks about his most violent episode which is then re-enacted. Also here, the aim is to take over responsibility, to become conscious of the effects and consequences of violent acts for the victims and to develop an awareness of wrongdoing.

One of the tools used to develop empathy for the victims is the video film *Auswege* (Ways Out), produced with the aid and support of the Austrian Women's Shelter Network, the Intervention

Centre and the Men's Counselling Service. The viewing of this film always transforms the energy in the group towards shock and shame. The film offers a good opportunity to discuss not only the experience of women, but also that of children. Therefore the issue of violence against children is taken up. Also here, violence-prone attitudes are questioned and denial is revealed, e.g., the identification with the aggressor ("*A good spanking once in a while didn't do me no harm, either*"). Short lectures on the psychological consequences of violence round off the module dedicated to empathy with the victims.

The focus of other modules is also on psychological forms of violence, as they are part of the pattern of violent acts often used during the escalation process that precedes physical violence and increase the risk of physical violence. Victims experience psychological violence to be quite as harmful as physical violence, except when the latter is continuous and severe.

One group session each is dedicated to the issues of psychological/verbal violence, intimidation and threats, isolation and control, economic violence, sexual violence, and the assumption of male privileges, which are introduced as a group theme and explained in detail. After the non-physical forms of violence have been established, each of the participants chooses one that he wants to pay special attention to. The advantage of this procedure is that themes and experiences can be brought up which one part of the group is already familiar with or will most probably encounter. For example, the theme of isolation and control presents an opportunity to deal with the issue of jealousy or to animate the participants to face scenarios of separation. Stalking is also an issue that can be raised in this context.

After having dealt with the issues of non-physical forms of violence, the focus is still on improving the social competence of the training participants, but now more on presenting and training communication skills and violence-free handling of conflicts. First, there is special emphasis on the direct communication of one's own feelings and needs in the sense of Rosenberg (1995). I-messages and paraphrasing are introduced and systematically trained. De-escalating behaviour in conflict situations is explained and systematically learned by means of enacting such situations.

The training also includes a module on preventing repeat offences, in which risks and strengths are worked out. Because of the open group setting, in fact no more than two men will complete the training at the same time, so that their situation can be addressed individually. In the meeting before the last one, the participants are given the task to write a letter to their partner that should start: "*Dear ....., now that I have completed the training I would like to tell you ...*". The last 15 minutes of their final session are reserved for their reading out the letter and for a group reflection on its author. At the end, an appointment for the final diagnosis is made with the participant.

According to the needs of the group, additional modules can be fitted into this sequence of modules. If for several group members alcohol is a significant factor in the context of their violent acts, this circumstance is taken into account throughout the training not only for individual interventions, but also in a specific module.

Because of a tendency of many group members to over-estimate themselves it may be useful from time to time to carry out an intermediate assessment for all group members. Each participant has to judge himself according to various criteria and is then given feedback from all the other group members including the trainers.



While the sequence of modules is fixed in an overall structure, it may always be necessary to repeat things that have already been discussed or to put the current issue in a broader context. Going back to past modules is quite common in practice.

As no two abusers are alike, in addition to the modules aimed at all participants there are also interventions designed for individual participants and their specific situation. It is essential to continually evaluate the potential of the participants to endanger their partner and children, but also themselves, in order to take appropriate measures should the need arise.

#### **4.2 Support services for the partners**

Naturally, there is no obligation for the partners of violent men to accept support services. However, great importance is attributed to building a relationship with the woman concerned and finding a basis of trust. This is the only way to ensure protection and safety for the victims, which is the top priority objective of this programme. Violence may reoccur especially in the initial phase or if the man in question drops out of the programme. Particularly in these phases it is very important to support his partner.

Another motive for closely cooperating with the women partners lies in the fact that some violent men are very skilful in manipulating their partners and also use the training for this purpose. For example, they may tell their partner that during the training it was mentioned that she was to blame at least to some extent for the violence, her behaviour would have to change, she should have sex with him more often, etc. Therefore it is vitally important that the partner knows that this is far from the truth. She must be informed about the current contents of the offender training and should know she can rely on the trainers. For this purpose an interview with the two partners and the trainer team is scheduled, provided that there is no safety risk and the woman partner agrees.

Furthermore the women are continually supported and encouraged to watch their safety. Ongoing safety planning is a standard in the support of women; it has already been said that the participation of their partners in the training is no guarantee that they will not become violent again. The support services for the women partners are organised throughout the programme and continued if the partner has dropped out or been excluded from the training.

At present, the services include:

- assessing the current situation and the history behind the violent acts
- assessing the risks and drawing up a safety plan
- ongoing safety planning
- alerting the woman partner in the case of crises in the course of training
- counselling and support in social and legal matters
- empowerment
- reflection on the effects of training
- assistance in case the woman wants to separate from her partner

Support is given individually, via telephone or in personal talks. Group interviews at IST are also organised, in 6- to 8-week intervals. However, experience has shown that most women prefer individual counselling.

#### **4.3 Cooperation between IST and MÄB in the training phase**

Close cooperation between the two organisations in their joint programme is necessary to ensure the safety and protection of the partner and the children in the most effective way.

Therefore, every week a report is given to IST about the group and individual sessions. These reports are transmitted via e-mail and contain the following:

- presence or absence of the client
- if the client has dropped out of the training, the referring authority has to be informed immediately
- any incidents of violence
- major changes in the life situation of the client
- any threats or safety risks for the partner and/or the children
- content of the session
- information about the upcoming completion of the training.

Weekly telephone conversations have turned out to be necessary for case management.

Once a month IST and MÄB meet in a team session, where the cases of all participants in the clearing phase and the training phase are extensively discussed. Here, also the assessment of the situation by the men is compared to the feedback from their partners.

In situations of acute crisis emergency talks are held instantly to discuss measures for the protection and safety of the woman partner and the children.

One characteristic feature of this programme is its high degree of networking with other institutions. If the need arises, case conferences are organised for the purpose of halting developments of crisis.

## **5. Final phase of training**

After 30 individual or group sessions a final diagnosis is carried out for the participant.

Following an assessment of the questionnaires with the two partners, there is a joint final interview (if possible), during which the results of the assessment are presented and correlated with the personal impressions during the training. The objective is a reflection of the status quo and the awareness of possible safety risks in the future. In the case of ongoing problems, solution strategies are developed.

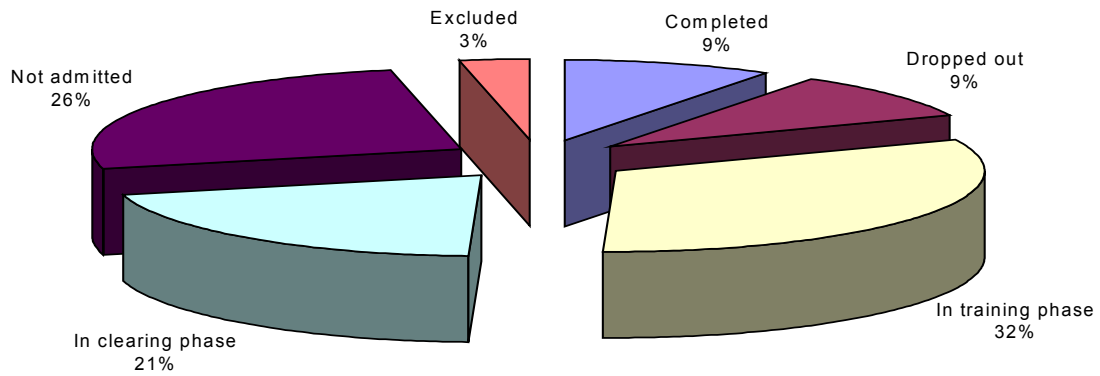
For participants who are obliged to participate in training under the criminal justice system or by a Youth Office, the authority in question is sent a written report about the completion of the training.

3, 6 and 12 months after completion of the training the client is contacted and invited to an individual interview in the sense of aftercare. Support for the partner by IST also continues for approximately one year after the training has been completed.

## **6. Statistical data for the year 2006**

Because of new referrals, completed training, drop-outs and newly admitted participants, the number of clients in training is constantly changing. On the reference date 15 December 2006, 97 men were in one of the various phases of the anti-violence training.

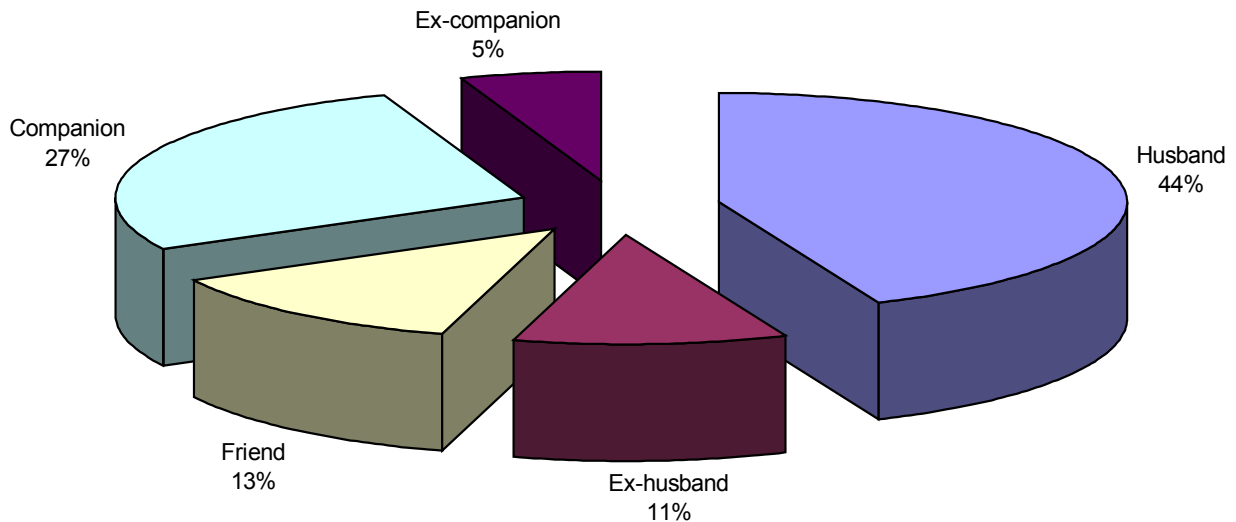
### Training status



#### Diagram: Training status

9 participants (9%) completed the programme in 2006, another 9 (9%) dropped out of the programme. 31 participants (32%) were in the training phase on the reference date, and 20 men (21%) were in the clearing phase. 3 participants (3%) had to be excluded from the programme, and 25 (26%) were not admitted.

### Relationship to victim



#### Diagram: Relationship to the victim

Of 55 participants for which data on the relationship to the victim were collected, 24 (44%) responded they were married to and living together with the victim. 15 (27%) defined themselves as companions and 7 (13%) as friends of the women affected by their violent acts. 6 participants (11%) were divorced from their partners, and 3 (5%) said they were former companions. The data show the great number of cases in which a violent situation continues even after the relationship has ended.

#### 7. Results and challenges

The data collected in the questionnaires are used for internal evaluation. The results of the evaluation give impulses for the continual further development of the programme, which should be regarded as dynamic rather than static and will continue to grow as experience is gathered.

It should have become evident from the above that the procedure used in the anti-violence training requires a lot of logistics and time. These efforts are necessary if we want to come

anywhere near achieving the highest aim of the programme, to not only ensure, but increase the protection and safety of the victims.

The amount of work and time spent on the anti-violence training is justifiable only if the women and children concerned feel better, if they can live more freely and with less fear. According to our experience so far this aim has been reached for the majority of the women concerned at least for the duration of the programme and one year after. The programme has helped some of the women affected by violence to feel more safe when separating from their endangering partner, which is also an important function of the programme, as violence in the family and in relationships tends to escalate precisely at the moment when the victims try to exit the violent relationship.

As yet there has been no external, scientific evaluation of the effects of the programme because of lacking funds, but it would be very positive to get more evidence for the short-term and long-term effects of the programme. Therefore, no statements on long-term effects can be made at present. The only external evaluation was carried out in the early days of the programme and was mainly qualitative in nature (Haller et al. 2002).

A risk factor for the programme is its insecure financial basis. Therefore the responsible political actors are called upon to grant sufficient funds for several years (regular funding). Furthermore, it is necessary to extend the programme, as only a very small share of all offenders reported to the police for violence against their partners currently complete an anti-violence training (approximately 2%). What is also required is regional expansion (as the programme at present only exists in Vienna), the development of further measures for preventing repeat offences, such as probationary obligations, multi-organisation approaches for extremely at-risk victims, etc.

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**Annex (next page)**

**Flow chart of the anti-violence training**

