Importance of Safety Issues during long distance counselling and other lessons learned


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Needs Assessment methodology and main results
Queen’s University Belfast-
School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work

Erasmus+ KA2 Cooperation for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practises Agreement Number: 2017-1-EL01-KA202-036170
Summary

OUTPUT 1 (needs assessment output) of the DISCO project. “OUTPUT 1” explored issues surrounding women who have experienced abuse (intimate partner violence/domestic violence or sexual violence and their online and other help seeking behaviour and the online provision of counselling with the aim to inform the training of at distance counsellors. The premise of this needs assessment is that women recipients or potential recipients of counselling are the experts. It is their experiences and their needs for online help seeking behaviour that should inform the training of at distance counsellors.

Queen’s University Belfast (QUB) led the Needs Assessment activities with the contribution from the other academic partners (University of Tartu, University of Crete, Frederick University), and from the service provider partners (NEXUS-NI, Organisations Union of Women Associations of Heraklion Prefecture – Greece, MTU NAISTE TUGI- JA TEABEKESKUS- Estonia.

QUB’s main activities were: Planning, developing and implementing the needs assessment, undertaking a literature review, developing instruments, collaborating with partners in the development of the instruments, developing ethical guidelines, getting ethical approval from relevant ethics committee, preparing, managing and co-ordinating the dissemination of needs assessment instruments and guidelines to partners, collection and processing of results, co-ordinating the activities of O1.

All the partners participated through an exchange of knowledge. The needs assessment methodology was developed by QUB and was then presented and discussed with the partners during the first meeting in Heraklion, Crete. The partners had the opportunity to make suggestions and contribute both at this stage and at later stages. Furthermore, once a draft of the data collection instruments had been developed, they were sent to all the partners for comments before they were finalized.

In addition, each partner participated in the activities as follows:
University of Tartu: contributed to data submission.
University of Crete: contributed to data collection through the online survey
Frederick University: contributed to data collection through the online survey

NEXUS-NI contributed to data collection from the service users of the agency
Organisations Union of Women Associations of Heraklion Prefecture: Contributed to data collection from participants of the agency and in translating the instruments to Greek
MTU NAISTE TUGI- JA TEABEKESKUS: Contributed to data collection from participants of the agency and in translating the instruments in Estonian

Needs assessment description

The needs assessment output included the collection of both secondary and primary data. Thus, it entailed literature review and research. The research aimed to collect data through an online version survey (OVS) and paper version survey (PVS). Despite the limitations of online data collection, such as difficulties in obtaining a representative sample and a low response rate (Granello, & Wheaton, 2004). The OVS was conducted with the university population of the academic partners as it brought the additional benefit of access to
populations that may not have yet accessed the system for counselling (e.g., potential service users/clients with experiences of domestic violence). Also, the student population is generally younger and has higher IT skills. These reasons were considered as making online data collection particularly advantageous for needs assessment /counselling research. The decision to conduct the survey online was based on the benefits of internet surveys in accessing the different population. These benefits were thought to outweigh the lower response rates associate with this type of survey.

The PVS was conducted with service users of victim support services (service users who had already accessed service support services). The service users’ experiences, needs and expectations were considered important to draw on and understand.

The research did not utilize a representative sample, as this was not possible due to resource limitations and constraints. The research involved sampling service users or university students on a sensitive subject area, which could reasonably led to heightened concerns surrounding anonymity; therefore, the amount of identifying information collected was purposely limited to reduce the potential risk and stress for the participants. Furthermore, time constraints and gateway access limited the sampling to users from the participating partner groups particularly due to the sensitive nature of the study. Moreover, it would be difficult to establish the characteristics of the full population of users across all victim support services within a country. However, it was able to draw participants from both the general student population and the service user population in the majority of the participating countries and provide some useful insights which informed the later stages of the project.

Participants

The survey covered the four participating partner countries. The total number of respondents was 266. Of the respondents 48% were from Northern Ireland, 27% from Greece, 17% from Cyprus, and 8% from Estonia. The respondents were from the general student population and the service user population of the participant partners in all the countries except Estonia, where the only participants were service users as due to last minute complications the university partner from Estonia was unable to get ethical approval in time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Frequency by Type</th>
<th>Excluded</th>
<th>In Sample</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NI organisation service users (PVS)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NI university students (OVS)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia organisation service users (OVS)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia organisation service users (PVS)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus university students (OVS)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece university students (OVS)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece organisation service users (OVS)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Greece organisation service users
(PVS)  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Excluded from the university sample if not in a relationship 16 years or older, or if did not report afraid of current or previous partner, or no reports of DV incident in last year.
Note: PVS refers to those who completed a paper version survey.
Note: OVS refers to those who completed an online version survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Country of respondents

Time and Ethics

The questionnaires were completed between mid-April and mid-June 2018. All relevant ethical procedures such as informed consent, ensuring participants were able to choose to participate in a study, free of coercion or other factors, anonymity, confidentiality, reducing any possible distress caused, etc. were followed. Ethical approval was granted by the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work of Queen’s University Belfast. There was a delay due to a strike action in the UK university sector that QUB participated.

Questionnaire and Measures

There were questionnaire versions that operationalised the concepts included in the bid. However, the differences between the questionnaires were minor in content to be country and sample specific (such as only having screening question on if they had been a victim only for the university population and not the service user sample). The questionnaires were written in English and translated into Greek and Estonian by native speakers within the partner countries as appropriate. There was an online survey questionnaire and paper survey questionnaire.

Online survey
OVS invitations to participate were first distributed to the heads of each university department. After the approval of the heads access were given to the email of the student population. The online questionnaire was circulated to students by the administrator of each department. Several reminders were sent. The decision to conduct the survey online was based on the benefits of Internet surveys of accessing a different population. These benefits thought to outweigh the lower response rates associated with this form of survey.

Paper survey

A representative from each agency was responsible to hand out paper questionnaires to services users during a set time. Each questionnaire was completed by a service user and anonymously placed in a box that was made available by the partner organization.

Data analysis

The data from the service and university questionnaires were imported into excel then imported into SPSS for analysis. The minority of responses that were open ended were translated into English by the country partners. Descriptive statistics were used to examine percent distribution of respondent characteristics across the samples. To examine if statistical differences emerged across characteristics such as country or education attainment, chi-square tests were executed. Although the sample size and non-representative sampling limit the generalisability of interpreting the statistical significance differences, it does provide indication of differences.

Difficulties during the process

There has been a small delay in the delivery O1, this was due to a strike dispute, delay in ethical clearance and attempts to augment the low response. Part of the delivery of this output coincided with the pension dispute that resulted in a strike action in which staff from UK Universities participated, which resulted in an extension of the timetable. A delay to the delivery was also due to the sensitivity of the data collected which necessitated ethical clearance by Queen’s University Belfast relevant ethic committee and which took time. An extension of the deadline was also necessary due to the small response rate and due to the exam period at QUB which coincided with the data collection process. The O1 report was submitted in the middle of July. This was agreed in collaboration with the Project Coordinator.

Main goal

The main goal was to inform the training of professionals and the outputs of the project.

The main questions the needs assessment aimed to answer as described in the bid approved were the following:

- Are women in abusive relationships/situations reaching Victim Support Organisations through online means (including Helplines)? What is the trend and what can we do to facilitate victims' online access?
- Is there a difference in using alternative types of counselling and help between different sections of the population?
- Are women in abusive situations searching the web for online advise, and if they do, how do they search (what keywords they use)? If they are not searching, why not?

**Summary of selective important results**

- Women/ survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse mostly engage online in order to locate services.
- Not all women search the web for online advice. There is a small group of women who have not searched the internet for help or information. The reasons for non-use by age groups among those that had not searched the internet for help or information are: The oldest age group 45 and older had the highest percentage in relation to barriers to access, over 35% said the reason was not having access to a smartphone or computer, almost 20% stated the reason was because they did not know how to use the internet, and 14% was because they were not confident using the internet. Among 18-24 year olds the highest percent stated they were worried about who can view my information. The findings suggest that there might be an age and class digital divide. Furthermore, they suggest that safety issues as a primary concern for women survivors.
- Women who use the internet use a variety of key words when searching for advise, ranging from nouns, such as domestic violence, sexual assault etc. to questions such as “How to leave the abuser”? “How abuse can affect my relationship”? “Who to turn up to” ?“What to do”? “How to cope with symptoms (related to sexual assault)” etc. So when agencies implement long distance counselling they need to take this into account in their recruitment approaches..

- A detailed analysis can be found at the full report at: https://discoprojectcom.files.wordpress.com/2019/08/final_reporto1.pdf
Implications of important results - Lessons learned

1. Online services complementing existing face to face services

Technological online means should be used to complement existing services rather than replace them. This is based on the needs assessment findings that not all respondents have used internet (see Figure 4 of the main report). The findings seem to suggest that there is an age and class digital divide.

This recommendation is also supported by the data provided in the Figures 15 and 17, (see Figures 15 and 17) which present the likelihood of using online support by type, country, and sample type. According to these findings, women respondents were more likely to use the internet to locate services rather than use online services. However, there is still a substantial percentage who will use distant provided services. The most likely distant provided service to be used is Help Lines. Thus, the training provided should consider focusing on that. Furthermore, it should avoid presenting the provision of distant counselling as a one size fits all approach.

2. Safety concerns

The main facilitator of women’s use of online resources is the guarantee that one’s information is safe (see figure 5 of the main report). Issues of safety are paramount and as relevant literature documents, this might be due to technology-facilitated abuse in intimate partner violence/domestic violence cases (Woodlock et al 2017; Burke et al 2011; Reed et al 2015; Stonard et al 2017; Stonard et al 2014). Similar concerns exist in cases of technology-facilitated sexual violence (TFSV) (Henry, Powel, 2018). Thus, professionals working with abuse need to be trained to recognize and prevent this type of abuse and service providers need to develop technology safety resources for victims. Thus, the professionals participating need to be aware of how to ensure the safety of the survivors and also need to inform the survivors in terms of what they can do to ensure their safety. The training program highlighted issues of safety (encryption of data). The training the trainers program which took place in Spain also highlighted the different ways in which women may be under electronic surveillance of the perpetrator and how important it is for professionals and agencies delivering distant counselling to know that in order to safeguard the safety of the women survivors. Professionals also need to engage in appropriate safety planning taking into account the possibility of tech abuse. This was accounted in the development of a safety planning application.

More specifically, this finding informed the following project outputs:

Output 4: Training material was developed (see appendix of Output 4, pages 44 -54 at https://discoprojectcom.files.wordpress.com/2019/08/io4_course-on-counselling-at-a-distance-en.pdf’. Check also page 34.
Output 5 Please check the web site at: https://discoprojectcom.wordpress.com/online-course/. Please scroll down and click on “Some considerations when using online/distant technology for service provision”
Output 6 Safety Planning. Part of the safety planning deals with technological abuse, please check the link https://discoprojectcom.wordpress.com/online-safety-planning-application/. Training activity C1. The main issues identified around safety planning and technological abuse informed the training activity.

Bibliography –


The Safety Net Project of the National Network to End Domestic Violence (USA), develops resources and information on the use of technology for agencies and survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and trafficking. On their web page they have toolkits that contain a variety of information that can be helpful for victim service agencies as well as survivors. https://www.techsafety.org/resources/ Please, visit these resources in order to be fully informed.

Additional resources can be found at:

https://hackblossom.org/domestic-violence/ This is an excellent comprehensive website which provides technical support to survivors of domestic violence.

https://hackblossom.org/cybersecurity/ They offer an excellent DIY guide on feminist cybersecurity which has concrete advise on how to protect digital spaces.

Accessnow.org They run a helpline on digital security.