

## **The importance of networking and data linkage in enhancing women shelters efficacy in contrasting VAW: the Danish nationwide registration of contacts with women's shelters**

Denmark 1990 - ongoing

### **In brief**

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Interior is responsible for the collection of data on all contacts with the shelters for women exposed to partner violence. At present, 48 shelters situated in all regions of Denmark offer counselling and shelter for women and their children. In cooperation, the ministry and the National Organisation of Shelters (LOKK) publish statistics on contacts with the shelters, based on data collected by the personnel at the shelters. In principle, these data are registered by the woman/victim's personal identification number and by the Danish regulations on national registers. Data on shelter contacts can be linked to data in Denmark Statistics' various population registers. However, a majority of the women do not advise their ID number, or the personnel in the shelters do not request the information; thus, in 70 per cent of shelter contacts the ID number is not registered.

### **Common data collection at shelters**

Since the establishment of national and regional shelters for victims of gender-based violence by the feminist movement in the late 1970s, shelters in Denmark have collected various data concerning the reason for contact and personal information about women and their children contacting the shelters.

While at the beginning, the shelters only collected this information on a voluntary basis for internal monitoring purposes, procedures started to change from 1990, when the legislation on social services and welfare began to regulate and finance the shelters.

The Service Act of 1998, later amended in 2007, regulates social welfare and that includes housing for adults in need, among which are victims of violence in close partnerships (Service Act, section 109). The National Organisation of Shelters (LOKK) covers the major part of the shelters. Access to housing requires visitation by the head of the individual shelter. There are regulations for the municipalities' reimbursements of fees for housing, for psychological counselling and for other victim support.

Hence, local administrations providing budgets need information on the users of the shelters including key information about their former residence, children and other information useful for providing economic support and other benefits. By legislation, in Denmark all victims of violence have the right to a certain number of state benefits, including support for housing, depending on economic situation of the victim, education when needed, psychological counselling and more specified allowances.

To this end, shelters started to collect common data and information on women and their children. Those data are collected by interviews carried out at the woman/victim's first contact with the shelter and by a follow-up when women leave the centre. Data includes a substantial amount of information about the individual woman, the cause of her contact with the shelter (forms of violence), possible injuries caused by physical violence, her former contact with shelters, her age, socio-economic status, ethnicity, housing

conditions, children – and it includes some data about the perpetrator. At the first encounter at the shelter, the woman/victim fills in a short questionnaire. An additional longer questionnaire is filled out if the woman chooses to stay at the shelter. Data comprises information about the form of violence that the woman has suffered, e.g. specified types of physical violence, threats, other repressions, the frequency of exposure to violence, the latest occurrence, the relationship to the perpetrator – and information about children (minors) in the home and their witnessing the violence. Information about possible former contact with shelters are part of the interview. The data collection includes information about country of origin, housing before contact with the shelter and other sociodemographic data such as level of education and involvement in the labour market. Specific topics may be illuminated by the questionnaire; these topics change from year to year.

### **Privacy provisions**

At present, the shelters tend to register these data by the woman's personal identification number <sup>(1)</sup> assigned to all persons with a permanent residence in Denmark. However, there is a certain resistance to register personnel data and to give permission to data linkage. Thus, only about 30 per cent of shelter statistic data are registered by the ID of the victim, and can be linked to other administrative data sources, such as the national patient register or criminal statistics – and other nationwide population registers in Denmark Statistics.

In the case of data linkage, all analyses are performed using encrypted data that do not allow identification of the individual woman/victim. The Danish Act on Processing of Personal Data <sup>(2)</sup> regulates the access to data for statistical and scientific purposes and guarantees full anonymity for the data subjects. Databases established by linkage of registers are stored at Statistics Denmark, and researchers are permitted online access to encrypted, anonymous datasets that do not enable identification of individuals <sup>(3)</sup>.

The Danish database on violence against women was established by linkage of survey and register data, based on a specific permission <sup>(4)</sup>. Statistics Denmark gives researchers access to anonymised microdata, e.g. data on person, family, household, workplace or at company level. Data access is provided as a secure remote access to servers at Statistics Denmark from the researcher's own computer through the internet. This arrangement gives researchers a unique opportunity to use microdata in their research. According to the rules, access to microdata can only be granted to researchers in Danish research environments after approval from Statistics Denmark. Foreign researchers affiliated to a Danish authorised environment are also given access to Danish microdata.

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<sup>1</sup> Denmark introduced the personal identification number (CPR) in 1968 and it was used in a census for the first time at the Population and Housing Census in 1970. Accordingly, this became the first Danish register using the personal identification number as an identification key.

<sup>2</sup><http://www.dst.dk/en/TilSalg/Forskningsservice.aspx>

<http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/dataprotection/National%20laws/DANEMARKThe%20Act%20on%20Processing%20of%20Personal%20Data.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Danish population-based registers for public health and health-related welfare research – a description of Danish registers and results from their application in research, *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health* 2001, Vol 39, suppl. 7.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.si-folkesundhed.dk> Violence in close relationships. Karin Helweg-Larsen, Copenhagen, 2012.

The personnel at the shelter inform the woman about the purpose of data collection and the possibility of anonymous data linkage in Denmark Statistics to illuminate different aspects of gender-based violence. The professional staff at the shelters acknowledge the need for comprehensive data on the shelter contacts – not least in order to provide the most efficient and targeted support for the victims. Possibly, due to previous traditions in the feministic movement, a number of shelter personnel are reluctant to register personal data. However, the number of shelters that do not collect data linked to the personal identification number of the individual women have decreased over the years. At present, about 40 per cent of the women housed in shelters do not notify staff of their personal identification number, and in some cases, the shelter questionnaire is not compiled at the entry of the woman. At present, data linkage between shelter statistics and other population based registers are, thus, only possible for about 30 per cent of the shelter population <sup>(5)</sup>.

### **Networking and data linkage**

LOKK (the National Organisation of Shelters for Battered Women and their Children) <sup>(6)</sup>, in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Interior publish shelter statistics annually using data on contacts with the 41 shelters in Denmark that are organised by LOKK, and also include data about 6 centres not organised by LOKK. The *National action plan to combat violence against women* sets aside a specific budget for data collection and analyses.

Main success factors of data collection on shelter contacts relate to the fact that these data potentially can be linked to other data, primarily administrative data, and, thus, can provide a wide range of information on victims of gender-based violence who contact shelters. Furthermore, the Danish regulations enable concrete follow-up studies that measure the outcome of stay, counselling and support in the shelters for example. By data linkage in the various Danish registers in Denmark Statistics, e.g. criminal statistics, national patient register, housing register, comprehensive data for analyses of different aspects related to violence exposure and contact with shelters can be retrieved.

An obstacle to full register-based analyses of the profile of victims, the outcomes of contacts to shelters and of other topics, is the relatively low coverage of identification number among the shelter contacts. A large number of women do not want to disclose their personal identification number, or the shelter personnel do not request the ID number when compiling the questionnaire at the woman's contact to the shelter. At present, this amounts to about 60 – 70 per cent of the shelter contacts. Experiences show, however, that careful information on the purpose of data collection and of the respect to personal integrity through the Danish regulations of access to register data result in a larger part of the women not refraining from providing their personal identification number linked to questionnaire data.

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<sup>5</sup> Rambøll, *Evaluation of offers at shelters*, October 2015, <http://socialstyrelsen.dk/filer/voksne/vold-i-naere-relationer/evaluering-af-kvindekrisecentre.pdf> (In Danish).

<sup>6</sup> LOKK was established in 1987 as union of 42 women's shelters and counselling centres in Denmark. LOKK's mission is to support the shelters in their effort to prevent, combat and create awareness of physical and physiological violence against women and their children.

**Contact details**

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**Links to audio-visual materials and websites with additional information/context (if available)**

<http://www.lokk.dk/Info/In-English/About-LOKK/>

The Ministry of Social Affairs publishes annual statistics: <http://socialstyrelsen.dk/udgivelser/arsstatistik-2014-kvinder-og-born-pa-krisecenter>