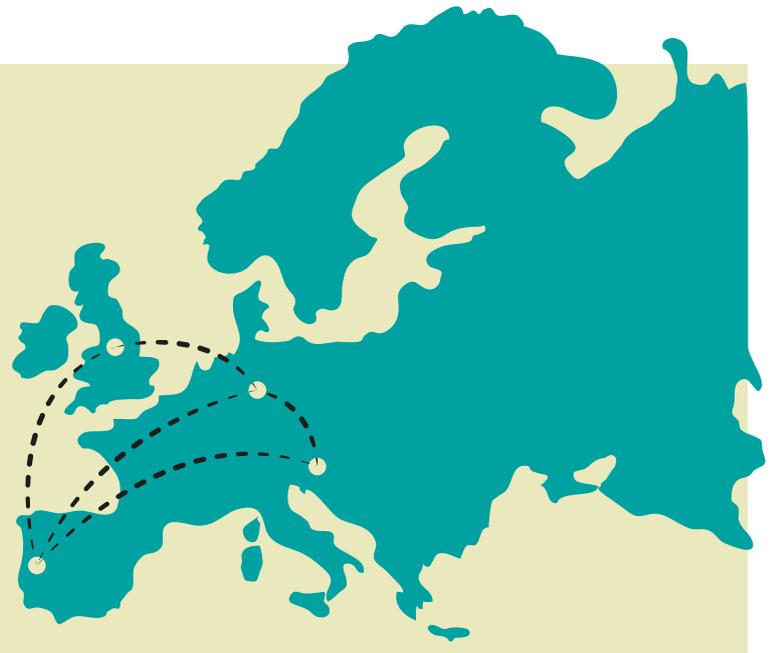




# Interventions against gender violence and child abuse



Seeking to understand the impact of violence interventions for women and children across Europe, **Professor Dr Carol Hagemann-White** and **Professor Maria José Magalhães** outline their joint project and respective research aims as well as the benefits of forming international partnerships

## Can you begin by explaining what inspired you to dedicate your research to gender violence? What are the key objectives of your work?

**CHW:** After working in the first shelter for battered women in Berlin for three years in the 1970s, I realised that we can never understand – much less change – gender inequality in society without a long and close look at how it is intertwined with violence. My interest shifted more and more to studying how intervention approaches – from the first shelter projects right up to a European Convention – try to prevent or stop violence, often without recognising that the strategies chosen can reinforce gender roles and thus have the opposite impact to what was intended.

The challenge is to recognise the specific ways in which women are vulnerable without falling back on ideas of women as less than equal, lacking the ability to exercise fundamental rights. Our research is seeking strategies that increase the space for women's agency through an ethic of intervention.

## Why have you chosen cultural encounters and their role in ethics, justice and citizenship as a focus for your research on violence against women and children?

**CHW:** In the course of monitoring the implementation of European-level recommendations since 2002, I began to see how the measures chosen and the way they work depend on historical and cultural

traditions, so I have looked for opportunities to do collaborative research in more depth. My idea is that 'setting standards' will fail if this is understood as a cookie-cutter approach to the 'right' laws and procedures, but that we can move closer to effective practices by developing an ethical foundation that permits tailoring intervention methods to the cultural context. For this, a cross-cutting look at different forms of violence helps.

## Another key focus of your work is gender violence in the context of domestic violence. Can you outline the Love, Fear and Power project?

**MJM:** The Love, Fear and Power: Pathways to a Non-Violent Life project was designed to deepen the understanding of gender violence both at a theoretical level and in a real-world context through the assessment of support services for women victims and survivors of domestic violence. Hence, the research team focused on the national network of institutions and NGOs that provide domestic violence services. Most research conducted in this area in Portugal had been quantitative assessments of the services.

However, the institutions' rationale and the staff's and survivors' perspectives had not been studied. Thus, the researchers designed a qualitative study that included in-depth interviews with three professionals from each institution/NGO to understand when, why and how services were provided; and the

co-construction of life stories with survivors to hear their voices and understand how they feel about the services they encountered when they decided to seek help.

## Finally, is there anything you would like to add regarding your move away from standardised intervention?

**CHW:** The reason why standardised intervention can't be effective is not just because of the cultural differences between countries and within the population – women and children can have widely differing needs and ideas surrounding what constitutes a good life. Intervention, after all, aims to stop the perpetrators from using violence and they, too, are not of one standard type.

**MJM:** I would like to add that there is an artistic dimension to the research in the Cultural Encounters in Interventions Against Violence (CEINAV) project. Each national team included an artist-researcher who made a valuable contribution to the findings of the project. Giving women and young people the opportunity to produce artistic works to express how they feel about the intervention – and using other ways to communicate their feelings and perspectives – were very important to access the survivors' subjectivities and experiences. Moreover, we were able to understand other dimensions of their perspectives that we could have not achieved through interviews alone.

# Fundamental rights for women and children



The **Cultural Encounters in Interventions Against Violence** project is a collaborative effort from researchers around Europe seeking to understand how cultural differences can affect the success of violence interventions for women and children. The findings could form the basis of future strategies in various European nations

**IRRESPECTIVE OF THE** cultural differences between nations, women and children are victims of violence around the world. Additionally, despite reaching a consensus regarding the need for effective interventions, countries within Europe implement different strategies to prevent violence and support survivors. Given this disparity, it is of little surprise that some approaches seem to be more effective than others. While it is easy to assume that one method of intervention will always be more successful than another, there are national and cultural factors to consider that render such an assumption irresponsible.

With this in mind, researchers from across Europe have worked together to establish the Cultural Encounters in Interventions Against Violence (CEINAV) project. As societies become more multicultural, questions of ethics, justice and citizenship become less simple. The project thus aims to understand how cultural differences within and between countries can influence the extent to which an intervention strategy is successful.

While it is easy to assume that one method of intervention will always be more successful than another, there are national and cultural factors to consider that render such an assumption irresponsible

**FIVE RESEARCHERS, FOUR COUNTRIES** A network of five European researcher teams is studying the specific legal and institutional cultures of four EU countries – Germany, Portugal, Slovenia and the UK. Within each country, there is a particular focus on their traditions regarding law, policing and social welfare intervention, especially in the context of the history of colonialism, democracy, migration and diversity.

The project focuses on three specific forms of violence that the state is responsible for dealing with: intimate partner violence, child abuse and neglect, and trafficking for sexual exploitation. Despite the obvious differences in context between one country and the next, the team felt it important to implement a structured path. This culminated in the development of detailed guidelines, regular communications and coordinated methods of collecting data.

**CULTURES OF INTERVENTION** Cultural diversity is an important focus of the project, where each team produces papers on various contexts of the four countries, a

process that enables better understanding of the differences and similarities between each country's interventions systems. CEINAV's Project Leader, Professor Dr Carol Hagemann-White, became aware of the extent of cultural nuances during the course of the project. "In countries such as the UK and Slovenia, there is a widespread belief that domestic violence or child abuse is primarily a crime," explains Hagemann-White. "However, in others, such as Germany and Portugal, we find more doubts about whether involving the police or the courts will achieve a positive outcome."

Other findings regarding the different rationales between countries include how, in Germany, all professionals believe that winning the trust of victims is vital to successful intervention, whereas in other countries, this is mostly the concern of specialised services. Acknowledging such differences is essential to developing intervention strategies that move away from the mentality that what works for one works for all.

**GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN REGIONS** As the representative for Portugal, the University of Porto's Professor Maria José Magalhães is exploring violence in different generations in three Portuguese regions. The fact that Portugal was under the control of a fascist regime until 1974 means it only recently went through a process of democratisation.

This uniquely positioned the country as an effective subject for studying whether the

## The CEINAV collaboration

A brief insight into the opportunities afforded by this international partnership

**Professor Dr Carol Hagemann-White from the University of Osnabrück in Germany researches cultural encounters and their role in ethics, justice and citizenship for violence against women and children.**

"Because all partners have developed their ideas in different intellectual traditions – and through engaging with the legal and social context of practice in their country – with the CEINAV project, we were able to draw on a much wider range of background knowledge and methodological experience than would otherwise have been possible. This shaped our research design from the beginning."

**Professor Maria José Magalhães from the University of Porto in Portugal researches gender violence in the context of domestic violence.**

"Our international partnership also allowed us to deepen the understanding of the challenges that less empowered women face, in a context of unequal power distribution. Gender violence is grounded in structural power relations and the international cooperation highlights the degree of effectiveness of the system of support provided in each country's cultural and social context."



Back row: Janna Beckmann (CEINAV), Ute Zillig (associate partner), Vlasta Jalušić (CEINAV), Eva Küblbeck (associate partner). Front row: Bianca Grafe, Carol Hagemann-White, Maria José Magalhães (all CEINAV).

problem of violence in intimate relationships varied according to age. "Our assumptions were that older women would have to overcome more obstacles to seek help, because they

**Dr Thomas Meysen from the German Institute for Youth Human Services and Family Law researches child abuse and neglect.**

"As an expert in child protection, the crossover reflection on interventions against intimate partner violence, or trafficking for sexual exploitation, enabled extremely enriching learning experiences. By trying to get to the bottom of unexpected commonalities – and by calling differences into question – we achieved deeper understanding. We managed to visualise unintended effects of infantilisation by victimised women and unquestioned paternalism with the aim to protect children. We hope that we can give good practice a sounder base. Ultimately, our findings have opened our eyes to new horizons."

**Associate Professor Vlasta Jalušić based at the Peace Institute in Slovenia researches gender violence.**

"Before participating in the CEINAV project, I was exploring theories of violence and empirically researching the topic of collective violence and intersectional discrimination – mainly from a macro perspective. This cooperation has given me the chance to broaden my theoretical knowledge and do empirical research in the field of interpersonal violence (from micro and mezzo perspectives) related to cultural frameworks in interventions and how they appear in various European surroundings."

lived for decades in a regime that emphasised female obedience," explains Magalhães. "The main results were that in big cities, such as Lisbon and Porto, survivors had a choice of avenues for help and, especially in Lisbon, most needs of the victims were met."

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES FOR THE FUTURE

The outcomes of the project will include a multilingual anthology of the stories told to the researchers, in which women and young people describe how and when intervention strategies helped or failed them, and publications that can be read by practitioners and policy makers. In addition to features on how participatory art work can be used in training for culturally sensitive intervention practices, there will be a final report on the research, as well as considerations and principles that could guide frameworks for future interventions.

## CEINAV: CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS IN INTERVENTIONS AGAINST VIOLENCE

### OBJECTIVE

To understand how professionals frame intervention and how it is experienced by diverse victims of violence in order to develop a transnational ethical foundation for respectful and responsible intervention.

### KEY COLLABORATORS

**Dr Thomas Meysen**, German Institute for Youth Human Services and Family Law, Germany • **Associate Professor Vlasta Jalušić**, Peace Institute in Slovenia, Slovenia • **Professor Liz Kelly**, London Metropolitan University, UK

### PARTNERS

CEINAV has twelve associate partners, three per country, who represent networks of practitioners working to support survivors of the different forms of violence studied; meetings are held regularly to discuss the research.

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**CAROL HAGEMANN-WHITE** is a professor of women's studies at the University of Osnabrück and has degrees in history, philosophy and sociology from Harvard University and the Free University of Berlin. She has published widely on gender theory and socialisation, has directed influential studies on interventions against violence, and works as an expert for European institutions. In 1998, she was awarded the German-Swedish prize for outstanding research.



**MARIA JOSÉ MAGALHÃES** is a professor at FPCEUP in Portugal, and a research member of CIEG and CIEE. In 1990, she received the Carolina Michaelis de Vasconcelos Award – Research on Women's Studies. Her research interests lie at the intersection between women's studies and the sciences of education, with specific emphasis on gender violence, social movements, feminist agenda, women's arts and women's agency.

