

Cultural Barriers to the Protection of Women and Children against Domestic Violence: *Professionals' Discourses in Portugal*

CEINAV | Cultural Encounters in Interventions Against Violence
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Overview

1. Framing culture
2. Portuguese legal, social and historical context
3. Focus groups with professionals conducted in Portugal
4. Professionals' discourses regarding domestic violence (DV) and child abuse and neglect (CAN)
5. Professionals' discourses regarding cultural minorities
6. Summary and future steps
7. References

1. Framing Culture

- “[C]ulture is thus what allows us to perceive the world as meaningful and coherent and at the same time it operates as a constraint on our understandings and activities” (Säljö, 1991: 180)
- Culture as **social practice** (Thompson, 1968)
- Culture as **everyday life** (De Certeau, 1984)
- Culture as **dialogue** (Tedlock & Manheim, 1995)
- Everyday life as a **cultural arena** (Smith, 1987)
- **Refusing essentialism** and cultural **relativism** (Narayan, 1998)

2. Portuguese legal, social and historical context

- Portuguese laws: abundant and transitional.
- Definition of DV includes violence during dating, marriage and divorce both in heterosexual and in same-sex relationships.
- DV complaint warrants “DV victim status” (including to immigrant victims).
- Although DV is a public crime and the victims may not be heard before a report is made to the authorities, the criminal pathway depends almost entirely on the victims.
- Legacy of the fascist regime and the ambivalence about the police intervention.

2. Portuguese legal, social and historical context

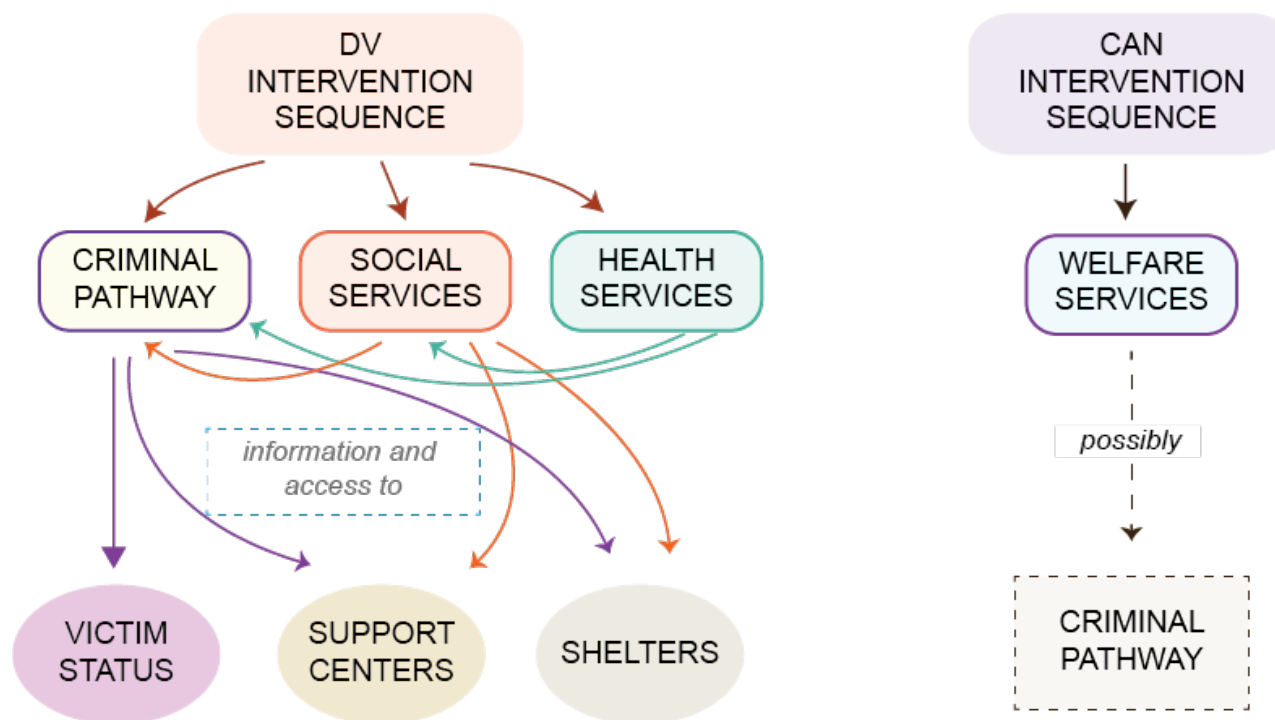
Domestic Violence

- Very recent history of intervention
- Increasing network of services and resources
- Based on social services
- Intervention sequence less clear. Professionals disagree about which services should be the first line of intervention.

Child Abuse and Neglect

- Long tradition of intervention
- Decreasing network of services and resources
- Intervention has a communitary basis
- Intervention sequence: social intervention may be followed by criminal intervention

2. Portuguese legal, social and historical context



3. Focus groups with professionals conducted in Portugal

Domestic Violence

3 groups, 27 professionals:

- 21 women and 6 men
- 12 cities across the country
- Police officers
- Magistrates (judges and prosecutors)
- Teachers
- Physicians
- Representatives of specialized NGO and IPSS
- Representative of the Gender Equality Commission
- Representative of a municipality
- Nurses

Child Abuse and Neglect

3 groups, 26 professionals:

- 18 women and 8 men
- 9 cities across the country
- Police officers
- Magistrates (judges and prosecutors)
- Teachers
- Physicians
- Representative of specialized NGO and IPSS
- Representatives of Child and Youth Protection Commissions
- Representatives of forensic medicine
- Representative of Social Security

4. Professionals' discourses regarding DV and CAN

Domestic Violence

- Role of civil society in flagging victims and situations of violence.
- Family harmony shall prevail in spite of violence
- It is acceptable for anyone to question victims directly about violence

Child Abuse and Neglect

- Role of civil society in flagging victims and situations of violence.
- Faster immediate response but very lengthy process thereafter.
- Poverty at times confused with neglect
- Generational transmission of violence

The intervention against the two types of violence is largely disconnected, as if these two areas were two different “planets” (Hester, 2011).

5. Professionals' discourses regarding cultural minorities

- National culture viewed as homogenous and not diversified
- Process of “othering”
- Reluctance to acknowledge the existence of minorities and also racism
- Minorities is not a legal concept in Portugal
- Legacy of the colonialism and the fascist regime
- Focus on Romani culture(s).
- “Immigrants have to comply with Portuguese Law”
- People from other cultures seen as more tolerant/unaware of violence against women and children.

6. Summary and Future Steps

- Although more recent, the DV intervention system is more present in the public agenda and has increasing resources, when compared to CAN intervention system.
- Better communication and collaboration between the CAN and DV intervention systems is needed.
- Invisibility of cultural minorities in the portuguese society.
- Future Steps:
 - Analyzing victims' voices, which are often overlooked.

7. References

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