

# Domestic violence in Flanders

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ARTESIS PLANTIJN  
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# Welcome to Belgium: women's rights paradise?

- 2014: Oeso: Social institutions and gender index (SIGI):
  - Belgium respects women's rights best
  - Equal rights in family and public space, protection against violence, equal civil and political rights, equal access to economic means

# Curb your enthusiasm ...

- 4 % of all complaints about sexual assaults ends with conviction
- 44 % women working part-time, 10 % men
- Maternity leave 15 wks, fathers 10 days
- Women still earn 10 % less than men, pension is 23 % lower for women
- 1 out of 5 single mothers doesn't have access to affordable day-care
- Only 1 out of 3 managers is a woman

# #metoo?

- 2015: suicide Steve Stevaert after being sewed for sexual harrassment → university dean has to resign after facebook comments blaming the woman who put it to court
- 2017: one of the most popular TV actors and producers is fired by national broadcasting coorporation after complaints about sexual harrassment
- Polarisation: paranoia vs blaming the victim, minimalization

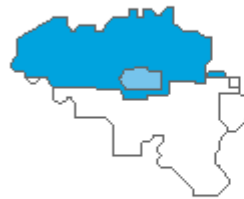
# Definition

- Domestic violence:
- “We define domestic violence as a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone.”
- In Dutch: “huiselijk geweld”: not only referring to violence between intimate partners, but also towards anyone with whom one is living together (e.g. elderly, children) or has had an intimate relationship with (ex-partners).

# Split responsibilities concerning prevention, detection, therapy, legal aspects: welcome to Belgium!

## THE COMMUNITIES

 THE FLEMISH COMMUNITY



 THE FRENCH COMMUNITY



 THE GERMAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY



## THE REGIONS

 THE FLEMISH REGION



 THE BRUSSELS-CAPITAL REGION



 THE WALLOON REGION



# The post Dutroux era (1996 - ...)



# Changing policies after Dutroux

- More awareness
- Programs to increase resilience and assertivity in children and adolescents
- Focus on early detection:
  - Vertrouwenscentrum kindermishandeling
  - Child Focus
  - Campaigns raising awareness



Marie-Françoise BOTTE • Pascal LEMAITRE

# Kaatje Cactusbloem en haar egel



Wie mij aanraakt, krijgt een prik

Standaard Uitgeverij

van Reemst uitgeverij bv

# Detection and assistance

- Vertrouwenscentrum Kindermishandeling
  - Multidisciplinary team in every Flemish province
  - Examines suspicions of child abuse or neglect & violence against children
  - Free service
  - Low threshold
  - Outreach towards other organisations in health care and education: sensibilisation and information
  - Contacts the family & confronts them with suspicions
  - Target: acknowledgement of the child abuse, parents taking responsibility and starting further help for the entire family

# Child Focus

- Center for missing and sexually abused children
- Founded by parents of child abuse victims in post-Dutroux times
- Campaigns to retrieve missing children
- Prevention campaigns, e.g. safety on the internet

**MISSING**

<b>Geortye</b> CANAS Missing : 06/02/1985 Age: 5	<b>Today: 30</b>	<b>Ilse</b> STORMANS Missing : 17/02/1997 Age: 18	<b>Today: 41</b>
<b>Conrad</b> BOSMANS Missing : 06/10/1988 Age: 16	<b>Today: 41</b>	<b>Nathalie</b> GELSBREIGTS Missing : 26/02/1991 Age: 19	<b>Today: 28</b>
<b>Liam</b> VANDEN IRANDEN Missing : 03/05/1996 Age: 2	<b>Today: 15</b>	<b>LANGDURIG VERMISTEN</b> <b>DISPARITIONS DE LONGUE DURÉE</b> <b>LANGZEIT-VERMISST</b>	

**child focus**  
**116000**

Photos de enfants enlevés ou disparus de longue durée  
Langzeit-Vermissen / Disparitions de longue durée

www.childfocus.be

# Stereotypes concerning domestic violence

- Victims are usually women
- mainly physical aggression
- perpetrator vs victim
- it ends with the relationship
- associated with lower SES
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ\\_03eFGL3s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ_03eFGL3s)

# #ookmannenmakenhetmee (it happens to men as well ...)

- 1 man out of 10 is a victim of abuse (verbal, physical, sexual) by (ex-)partner (cfr. 1 woman out of 7)
- 92% is about psychological abuse
- 56% never talks about it
- Men are less satisfied than women about the psychological assistance they get

# Domestic Violence: initiatives in Flanders

- Free number 1712: for victims, perpetrators, witnesses
- Centrum algemeen welzijnswerk (Center for general social work): legal, social, psychological support, refuges for victims
- Justitiehuizen (house of justice): support and legal follow-up towards victims, perpetrators, families (strongly cooperating with courts)

# ... All quiet on the legal front?!

- Europe: 2012: European (binding!) agreement concerning measures for prevention of violence against women, protecting victims and prosecute perpetrators
- Belgium: 2012: temporary domestic exclusion order act → 10 days of exclusion
- Reality:
  - 100 complaints / day
  - Only 94 exclusion orders last year
  - 2 out of 3 complaints not prosecuted
- Advantages:
  - 10 days to work with both partners
  - less “honeymoon effects”
  - Pilot project Limburg (>Netherlands): 10 days of intensive support to victims & perpetrator

# Local initiatives

- Family justice centers: multi-agency, multi-disciplinary centers where victims of domestic violence and their families find different types of assistance together
- Chain approach: coordinated approach between legal, social and political actors: systemic, committed, empowering, using force measures when necessary, sharing information within confidentiality
- Time-out project (Antwerpen): group training (& individual therapy) for perpetrators, couple support and crisis counseling



# AP Hogeschool: Sensibilisation towards our own students

- Human rights are the bottom line of our mission statement
- Course “diversity”
- Training in observing and calling attention to signals of potential domestic violence
- Course “conflict”: learning to observe the spiral of violence occurring in domestic violence:
  - Building tension
  - Eruption of violence
  - Honeymoon phase
- Non-violent and de-escalating communication techniques

# Interventions based on Signs of Safety

- Solution-focused approach for families with child abuse
- Building a partnership with the family
- Looking for strengths, departing from “exceptions”
- Developing a “safety plan”
  - Worries
  - Signs of safety: exceptions, support, strengths
  - Goals for intervention (SMART)
  - Involving social network

# “Rock and water” program

- Part of our curriculum
- Enhancing resiliency for professionals and clients
- Psychophysical approach: setting limits, prevention of problematic behavior and bullying, enhanced self-esteem, improved social skills, ...
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dWH\\_Pz-blo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dWH_Pz-blo)
- In our curriculum: combined with Krav Maga & bodily expression → non-verbal techniques!

Thank you very much for your attention!



