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A Mediation Program to Prevent Domestic Violence against University Women

1 Introduction

On March 22nd 2014 a workshop on domestic violence against educated women took place at the University of Paderborn. The international project “Domestic violence met by educated women” (DVMEW) aims to minimize or even eradicate violence against academic women. German project partners are the Deutsche Akademikerinnenbund (DAB) and the Zentrum für Konstruktive Erziehungswissenschaft (ZKE) at the University of Kiel. The project tries to learn more about the phenomenon ‘violence’ against educated women. How does it occur? Which forms does it have? In which occasion does it take place? In the following a mediation program will be described, which was discussed at the workshop and aims to help violated women.

This article outlines a program of mediation called MK-mediation program (MKMP), which is a program against violent behavior. It is a program originally drafted to diminish violence amongst students. The ZKE research team sees the possibility to transfer the MK-mediation program to a different group, the group of university women. The ZKE sees the possibility, that the program can also be used to diminish or eradicate violence against university women.

At first the article describes the history and origin of the MK-mediation program. Secondly it illustrates experiences with the MK-mediation program. And at the end it demonstrates how the MK-mediation program can be transferred on violence against university women.

2 Background

In 1989 and 1990 the world recognized a peaceful changing of the borders in Europe known as “German unification”. The fall of the walls was a unique chance for the social sciences. Between 1989 and 1993 the ZKE conducted an empirical study (KROPE & LORENZ 1993). By comparing the consequences of different pedagogical systems in the former FRG and GDR

the team had the opportunity to reflect nationwide activities in the field of education. The ZKE tested the abilities of 1300 educators in the cognitive domain. The group analyzed their dogmatic and authoritarian behavior, part of which is violent behavior. And the ZKE-team conducted 4 experiments with pretest and posttest and test groups and control groups. The main result says: Violence has many sources. In addition to other preconditions education can be a possibility to eliminate violence.

3 The MK-mediation program

This result was the basis for the MK-mediation program. The program was drafted in a practical intervention, which took place in different schools for handicapped students. Over 10 years ago a school leader asked the ZKE research team, if they could help him. He was worried about his students, because frequently students reported him, that they were feeling uncomfortable. His students complained about teachers, the school cafeteria and foremost about other students and their behavior. After all he said, he just could tell and repeat stories he himself heard or received by hearsay. His interest (and why he came to the ZKE research team) was to collect data on how the status quo in his school and other schools really was. He asked the ZKE to examine in detail the contentment of his students.

The ZKE achieved this task by drafting a new questionnaire. In a representative study (KROPE et al. 2002) they could show in which areas the students felt content and in which areas of daily life they had mostly a feeling of unhappiness. The results demonstrate that mainly interactions between students and students were difficult. Students' contentment depends in the majority of cases on the behavior of their classmates. The research team discovered in interviews and group discussions that violence between students was common practice. And on top of this result most of the students reported, that they felt powerless in many situations and had to suffer in many occasions.

The students felt unhappy in many situations, in which they were confronted with aggressive classmates. Through the research progress students often used the term violence or violent behavior in interviews. They described how other classmates misbehaved and how little their action radius was, to hinder others to harm them. For example one student described following situation: She and her classmate, Paul, were sitting next to each other in a room to do their homework. Paul suddenly switched on the radio and turned up the volume. The interviewer of the ZKE-team, Sara, asked Paul to switch off the radio so that she could concentrate on her



homework. Paul ignored her and kept on humming to the music. Sara was frustrated. After a while she tried again, without success. It actually got worse. Paul was getting more aggressive and threatened her by showing his fist. Sara felt defenseless and left the room.

With a group of students the ZKE discussed this story and assessed if this case could be called violent. The students brought forward argument after argument some of them strengthening the case that Pauls' behavior could never be termed violent, whereas others strengthened the case that Pauls' behavior was definitely violent. When time ran out the students still disagreed about Pauls' behavior.

To help these students, who felt helpless and unhappy as well as to support peaceful behavior between classmates the ZKE research team offered to teach a program against violent actions. Upon approval by the school leader they drafted this program on the basis of the Methodical Constructivism (Methodischer Konstruktivismus; for an overview see JANICH 1992) and instructed among 30 students. In the following years the MK-mediation program was annually repeated. A replication study showed that with MKMP the contentment among students increased (KROPE et al. 2002).

The ZKE made positive experiences with MKMP. MKMP is a program that aims to empower its participants to handle situations in which disagreements, conflicts and fights appear. Participants learn to identify arguments, conflicts and fights; they learn to discuss wishes and desires and they learn to know their own boundaries, when they should call for help.

MKMP is based on the 'Constructivist Paradigm' and follows the idea that everything is connected to the social life world (Lebenswelt). In practice this means that every MKMP starts with stories, perceptions and judgments of the participants. After a warming up session participants tell in a mutual dialogue their own stories and their own experiences with violence. Through the warming up session participants develop a feeling of safety and security so that the setting invites for talking.

3.1 Step One

Step ONE in the program is that participants explicate their own experiences with violence. MKMPs from the past few years showed us that some participants expressed their experience for the first time. For example in this case: 'Martha told in a MKMP that she was bullied over a whole school year. It started slowly with one classmate which frequently called her slow-worm. After a while a whole group of classmates took part and shouted swearwords at her.



Martha didn't know what to do and talked to a teacher. The situation turned worse. After her classmates noticed what she had done they started to tell malicious gossip about her and so on...' Martha told her story with a broken voice and often searching for words. To explicate her experience was difficult, because she was at loss for words.

To broaden the ability to speak about violent behavior, the MKMP instructs its participants to reflect, phrase and express their stories from different points of view. The purpose of these exercises is to broaden their habitual language use and to unfold their different emotions connected to their stories. Participants of the MKMP lay out stories and emotions with violent behavior.

After this session the participants concentrate on dialogues and on structures, how to speak with somebody. The main question is: What is a fight?

3.2 Step Two

Step TWO of the program discusses communication forms and teaches the participants how to interrupt a violent situation as well as how to communicate peacefully. One exercise for example demonstrates the stages of escalation in a conflict (GLASL 1982). The following outlines a very short version of it, concentrating on interpersonal relationships.

STAGE 1: HARDENING

Stage one of conflict escalation is called 'Hardening'. Stage one can appear when two persons have a disagreement and attempts to overcome this issue fail. Both parties develop specific speech patterns, which are repeatedly used. This speech patterns are not able to solve the disagreement. The disagreement defines the relationship between those parties. Communication in this stage is still mutual.

STAGE 2: DEBATES AND POLEMICS

The actions inside 'debates and polemics' are tactical and shaped by rivalry. The parties express explicit their different standpoints. Discussions become heated arguments. The parties use strategic and logical constructions, assertions and provocations to pressurize each other. In stage 2 of conflict escalations the counterparts still pursue a common goal.

STAGE 3: ACTIONS, NOT WORDS

The conflict develops in this stage from mutual interactions to unilateral actions. Parties start to disobey their common goal. In this stage they stand up to their counterpart and accomplish



their own goal. By moving forward different actions and non-verbal behavior, the parties interrupt the dialogue. Every party tries to push through its own interests.

STAGE 4: IMAGES AND COALITIONS

A new behavior occurs in this stage. The counterparts try to build coalitions with outsiders to demonstrate that their standpoint is right. Both parties justify their position and hold the other party responsible for all tensions and aggression. Malicious gossip and diatribes occur. The protagonists describe their counterparts in stereotypical forms.

STAGE 5: LOSS OF FACE

The conflict evolves into a moral turning point. The quarrel is no longer about disagreements but about the moral behavior of the counterpart. By claiming moral misbehavior and labeling the counterpart an evil enemy, the parties try to put their counterparts down. Purpose of actions is in this stage to harm the counterpart with a loss of face.

Important for the MKMP is, that stage 5 is a turning point of behavior. Conflicts in stage 1 to 5 can be solved with verbal techniques and personal empowerment, which are taught in the MKMP. The Methodical Constructivism identifies the stages 6 to 9 as violent behavior. The program instructs its participants to distinguish the different behavioral strategies so that they can react appropriately.

One girl from the program told the instruction team one day that she handled a violent situation yesterday. When they asked her what happened, she said that she called the police, because one friend of her threatened her. He bashed her by shouting swearwords. After a while he summoned his friends and planned to beat her. Because the girl learned in the MKMP that coalition building with strategic threatening and diatribes are beyond stage 5 and so she decided to avoid being physically hurt and called the police for help. On request she characterized her feelings in this situation as powerful and she described herself as empowered.

Stage 6 to 9 are called ‘Strategies of Threats’, ‘Limited destructive Blows’, ‘Fragment of the Enemy’ and ‘Together into the Abyss’. In this stages a common figure are ultimata. They are used to threaten the enemy in a way so that he or she backs down and concedes that his own opinion was wrong. From stage to stage the conflict escalates from verbal threatening into physical punishment. In the last stage ‘Together into the Abyss’ actions are performed to destruct and extinct the enemy without preventing losses.



The MKMP covers different conditions of empowered actions. By dividing the program in several key aspects, the participants can improve different aspects of their interactional behavior. Key aspects of the program are enhancing the self esteem of the participants, the ability for various interactions and the use of the rational dialog.

What is a conflict and how does a conflict appear, are core points of Step One and Two of the MKMP. The participants extend their knowledge on conflicts and learn new techniques how to interact in different ways. They also explore their own standpoint in everyday conflicts and learn to accept their initial position from where they depart in the following training sessions.

3.3 Step Three

Step THREE of the MKMP practices communication forms. In this session participants re-hear dialogue structures and learn to behave differently inside different group settings. Through role play and active exchange of views the participants practice violent and non-violent interactions so that they can discriminate these two forms and furthermore learn how to communicate peacefully.

The ZKE experienced the MKMP as an appropriate tool to teach non-violent behavior. From the last years we could excerpt some conditions which have to be in state so that the program can be successful. Because the MKMP starts with knowledge transfer we recommend an educational background which guarantees the connectivity. Furthermore we discovered behavioral dispositions, which block the learning process. At this stage of experience we can roughly describe them with some manifest attributes. Persons who are (after familiarization) not able to change their behavior in a play role, cannot learn with the MKMP. Furthermore persons who are not able to understand different emotional states of other participants are also hindered to learn.

4 Transfer

Violence against university women is a multifaceted subject. The website “University women of Europe” (<http://uweboard.wordpress.com/european-project-domestic-violence-met-by-educated-women/>) shows how complex violent against women is. It occurs in different forms (for example verbal and non-verbal violence) and it appears in different settings (for example at home or at the work place). A violent act always includes somebody who is acting violently and somebody who doesn't want the act but endures involuntarily in this unbalanced procedure. The training is based on following definition of violence (based on PETERSEN 2001):



“An interactional action is predicated as violent, if the acting interaction partner (the proponent) tries to assert his interest against an opponent, without wanting to justify this interest towards the opponent, although a justification of the action is provided on the basis of a normative system”.

There are many ways to reduce violence against women. Rapid police forces, consolidations of women rights’, support hotlines, active changes of traditional behavior are for example different leads to minimize violence against women. And every lead emphasizes different foci to secure and empower women in our society. The ZKE research group adds the MKMP for help, so that further support for women can be prepared.

The MKMP can support women to empower themselves in incidental interactions and in long term relationships. Women learn two core points in this training. They learn how valuable they are and how to recognize violent behavior from the beginning. By learning principles of undogmatic communication, women are enabled to recognize, avoid and to report violent communication. Because violent verbal communication is often a starting point for non-verbal, violent behavior, this program can empower women to absent violent situations.

Experiences with the MKMP show that it possibly can be transferred to help university women against violent behavior. This training can be an adequate program for university women because it is mainly based on enhancing cognitive perceptions. University women are in the cognitive sphere so well grounded that it will be easy for them to join the program’s learning strategies. Further on it seems that most university women have a great ability to extend their communication patterns. Both aspects substantiate the possibility to run the MKMP with university women.

5 References

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