

**Researching Domestic Violence:
Findings from a European project on domestic violence and mental health
and project on media representations of domestic violence**

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Background

This presentation outlines an EU funded Daphne III project entitled 'Empowering Women and Providers: Domestic Violence and Mental Health'. It describes the key findings from this project and how they provided the stimulus for a second project examining media representations of domestic violence in the UK. Findings from this latter project then follow.

EU Daphne III Project

The University of Hertfordshire led the project (2011-2013) with universities and practice organisations in England, Greece, Italy, Poland and Slovenia examining the interconnections of domestic violence and mental health (n=151). Our UK partners were Welwyn Hatfield Women's Refuge, in collaboration with Hertfordshire Partnership Foundation Trust.

We designed, delivered and evaluated three free training programmes across partner countries for:

- 1. Women who had experienced domestic violence and mental health difficulties*
- 2. Mental health providers (men & women)*
- 3. Women wishing to become co-facilitators of support groups for women*

Programme Evaluations

Evaluations eliciting quantitative and qualitative data were administered at the pre-programme, immediate post-programme and 6-month post-programme stages to establish whether the training was effective and to observe any longer term effects. In addition, focus group discussions were led by site researchers on the last training session for mental health providers and trainee co-facilitators.

Addressing Domestic Violence

In relation to addressing domestic violence, participants spoke about the need for increased knowledge and understanding among the public, indicating that societal attitudes towards domestic violence remain problematic. Linked to this, women across the partner sites spoke of their experiences of externally and/or internally imposed blame, guilt and shame. These findings prompted us to consider where these feelings of blame and shame come from; and what the reasons are for the enduring lack of public awareness and problematic social attitudes towards domestic violence. Given the influential role played by the media in both shaping and reflecting public opinion on issues such as domestic violence, a second project examining media representations of domestic violence was undertaken. Key findings from this project examining the *Sun* and *Guardian* newspapers will be presented.