https://www.eeagender.org/the-synergy-network/news/the-need-for-a-research-centre-on-gender-based-violence-in-the-czech-republic/

The need for a research centre on gender-based violence in the Czech Republic

“During our COVID-19 research, it became evident that there is a lack of national data, misleading analyses and a general resistance to actively combatting and even recognising the existence of gender-based violence,” says researcher Blanka Nyklová.

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The project Research centre for domestic and gender-based violence (ReCeGe) will contribute to improving the protection and enforcement of human rights in the Czech Republic (CZ), namely the right to a life free from domestic and gender-based violence. (Illustration photo: iStockphoto)

“There's no reason to expect that anything is going to change and violence will not increase during the pandemic.” This was the official stance of the Czech Republic authorities at the beginning of the pandemic.

Blanka Nyklová, researcher at Institute of sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences (ISAS) and Dana Moree, assistant professor at Charles University in Prague, learned, and NGOs in the Czech Republic confirmed, that no research was planned on the impact of the pandemic on gender-based violence, specifically against women.



"The research centre can help other researchers from our respective institutions to apply for funding, and motivate them to engage in this thematic focus, i.e. research on violence," says Blanka Nyklová, researcher at ISAS. (Photo: Tomas Princ)

"If you know anything about this issue – it's counterintuitive to say the least, it actually goes against findings from long-term international research on gender-based violence in social crises,"

says Nyklová.

Nyklová took part in research on sexualised violence in the Czech Republic several years ago, while Dana Moree's research on "The theatre of the Oppressed" led to the two of them deciding to collaborate on this issue.

During spring 2020, they conducted a qualitative study with analyses of concrete cases from the first pandemic lockdown in the Czech Republic (see fact box). This led to the launch of the EEA project ReCeGe to establish a research centre for domestic and gender-based violence in the Czech Republic in January 2022.

"We just don't have data and that's a problem"

"We thought it was important to have a place where it would be possible to conduct research on gender-based violence, and use the term gender-based violence – in analysis as well, and a place where this could be the focus of the research," says Nyklová.

They see the EEA project as the first step in that direction, but its future development depends on its ability to secure funding for research.



Dana Moree, assistant professor at Charles University in Prague and team member in the EEA project Research centre for domestic and gender-based violence.

"However, even without an immediate follow-up project, we believe the very establishment of a website containing a searchable database of research on gender-based violence, the quantitative survey to be completed in the first half of 2023, and a database of quality research conducted on the topic at the local level will be valuable," Nyklová explains.

"This can help other researchers from our respective institutions to apply for funding, and motivate them to engage in this thematic focus, i.e. research on violence," she adds.

See also: Covid pandemic may have caused more violence toward women

During the COVID-19 research process, it became evident to the researchers that there was a lack of data on gender-based violence:

“We just don't have data and that's a problem,” says Nyklová.

They realised that there was no systematic scientific collection of data in the Czech Republic. A lot of different agencies collect different types of data, but Nyklová finds that they are not centralised or systematised in any way.

“We knew at the time that the Czech Republic would not be taking part in the Eurostat survey, and we saw the opportunity to actually fill this gap by collecting data as part of the project.”

Misleading analysis and data collection

In addition to a lack of data, another problem was how the available data were collected and analysed. This seems to be very misleading in some instances, according to Nyklová.

“The interpretation sometimes went directly against what you saw in the data, even as it was presented,” she says.

Nyklová explains that although she's not a statistician, she could spot the mistakes.

“I would call it an irregular use of statistics, to put it politely.”

At present, under the framework of ReCeGe, the team is carrying out quantitative research on the prevalence of gender-based violence and its possible links to the pandemic. After substantially amending the Eurostat questionnaire, an unexpected issue arose.

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> It was really shocking at times to see how people from different academic, state-level and intervention institutions have a real problem with the concept of gender-based violence.

“One of the problems that we did not foresee was that very few people, from the general public, students or volunteers, are willing to go out and collect the data,” says Nyklová and explains why:

“This is at least partly because the information you need to ask complete strangers about is very personal. Training potential interviewers to prepare them for the situations they may find themselves in a given household is ethically imperative,” says Nyklová.

The training was provided by psychologist Naďa Gubová from the ProFem NGO, explains Nyklová.

“She focused on what interviewers should do if they were talking to someone who suddenly broke down or when somebody was there in the household – a child or even the perpetrator – while you were interviewing the victim,” explains Nyklová.

“Out of the fifteen people who took part in the training, only three decided to go ahead and collect the data. We now have more interviewers but we are still trying to find more participants to collect the data,” adds Nyklová, saying this will understandably impact the finalisation of the research report that will have to be postponed until May 2023.

“Shocking to see the reactions to the concept”

In the Czech Republic, as in other European countries, there has been resistance to the adoption of the Istanbul Convention as it is claimed that the document contains elements of “gender ideology” and threatens the concept of traditional family or that is unnecessary because everything it addresses has already been dealt with in national legislation, which is usually not the case however (see fact box).

Nyklová’s motivation for establishing the research centre was bolstered by the open resistance to the term gender-based violence.

“It was really shocking at times to see how people from different academic, state-level and intervention institutions have a real problem with the concept of gender-based violence.”

“Why is that and how is it expressed?”

“It is partly due to a lack of awareness, many people simply don't know what it is. This is understandable and we need to acknowledge that not all knowledge produced in the gender studies discipline is readily accessible. However, it became evident that even people like researchers who've been dealing with ‘domestic violence’ for the past 20 years are not familiar with the concept. So, it's not just the uninitiated, and the resistance is in part open – they don't support it and don’t want to address it.”

“The process in which this is legitimised always seems to be the same. Things in the data and in the analysis are ignored that shouldn't be,” Nyklová explains.

“This is also being used by some researchers and seems to be motivated by ideology.”

“Can you give a concrete example?”

“While collecting local research on gender-based violence conducted over the past five years, our colleague Lenka Slívová who is in charge of the database was puzzled by the amount of

research on violence against men, compared to violence against women. Again, this is, let's say, rather counter-intuitive," she says and adds:

"In my own experience, once violence specifically against women is raised as an issue, even if we point out the murders it leads to annually, the immediate response is that there is also domestic violence against men – as if this was being disputed. However what, in effect, is being disputed is the seriousness of violence against women motivated by and contingent on persistent gender inequalities."

The importance of network alliances

"If you were to start over again, what would you do differently and what success criteria would you highlight for other researchers who want to establish a research centre in a European country?"

"If we were going to apply for similar funding, I don't think we would change anything in terms of the content of the project. However, if more funds were available, we would definitely try to build a stronger alliance across all the parties concerned, and especially focus on the victims and their needs and perspectives," says Nyklová and adds:

"In institutional terms, we would also try to involve more actors in an application, but only if they were explicitly willing to back the concept of gender-based violence. Perhaps surprisingly, even in social sciences and humanities, it's not uncommon to face fairly substantial resistance to the concept, which may lead to insufficient backing of similar projects."

To ensure they have a place to disseminate results from the project, they have published a preliminary website, but a new one is under construction and will soon be published.

"What is the main aim of the website and what will it present?"

"Its key feature is to be a searchable database of original local research on gender-based violence. We start with a review of the past five years and intend to gradually delve further into the past," she says

"The goal here is to systematise research in a simple manner using categories that help navigate this rather diverse set of texts. Other than that, the website provides basic information about the project, our team and events we organise or recommend," Nyklová explains.

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