

AN INTER-ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE - THE PIVOTAL ROLE OF POLICE IN PORTO, PORTUGAL

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Abstract

When studying the current Portuguese domestic violence landscape, some police professionals highlighted the case of Porto as a different approach to domestic violence occurrences. We discovered an organisational experience involving a broad partnership and an evident interest in the media. Corresponding to the IMPRODOVA² Conceptual framework, the Porto experience merges both an organisational arrangement from the Public Security Police, which involves intra-organisational cooperation and inter-organisational cooperation between the police, several NGOs, health services, and public prosecutor services. Altogether, they aim to clarify the problem at hand, goals and stakes, resources and actors involved. In this article, the case study of the Porto experience is presented and discussed within broad critical thinking about social changes in contemporary societies.

Keywords: domestic violence; IMPRODOVA project; police work; social change.

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A FRESH APPROACH TO LEGAL AND EMPIRICAL ISSUES ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN PORTUGAL

One of the Portuguese constitutional principles is the Principle of the Equality of all citizens (Article 13 of the Portuguese Constitution³). Also, the Portuguese Constitution (firstly approved in 1976) protects the right to life (Article 24) and physical integrity (Article 25). However, during the '90s, domestic violence (DV) rose from the shadows and started to be tackled as a significant societal problem. The coming decades would be the period that revealed the very nature of domestic violence as a wicked problem, showing the complexity of the domestic violence phenomenon.

Since the middle '90s, Portugal has a political orientation regarding the attention devoted to domestic violence victims. National political guidelines were translated, during the decade of the '90s and the early '2000s into the implementation of proximity policing programmes, led mainly by the Central Government, with the creation of teams with some degree of specialisation in the security forces (PSP⁴ GNR⁵ and a considerable mobilisation of resources.

Domestic violence is a public crime since 2000 (Law no. 7/2000, 27 May, related to adjustments to the Penal Code). It means that knowing that a domestic violence crime is being committed is sufficient for the authorities to intervene, open a criminal procedure, and take protective measures.

In 2007, the Portuguese Penal Code (PPC; Law no. 59/2007, 4 September) finally made the crime of domestic violence autonomous from other felonies against women, children, elders or other people living with the aggressor⁶

Law no. 26/2010, 30 August, changed the scope of domestic violence crime, assuming its classification within the violent criminality. The Public Prosecutor is now obliged to inform the victims about compensations and immediate financial support and the supporting net that the crime victims can apply for assistance.

The changes mentioned above revealed that the legislative power is the driving force to face the complexity of the domestic violence phenomenon. Within society, changes seem to occur slowly with relevant signals of resistance to eliminate such violent behaviour, mostly in intimate partner relationships.

3 <https://www.parlamento.pt/Legislacao/Paginas/ConstituicaoRepublicaPortuguesa.aspx>

4 Polícia de Segurança Pública (Portuguese Public Security Police),

5 Guarda Nacional Republicana (Portuguese National Republican Guard)

6 <https://dre.pt/pesquisa/-/search/640142/details/maximized>

Nevertheless, this gave domestic violence the attention needed to promote and implement the necessary policies, resulting in increased complaints. Data from the Domestic Violence's National Monitoring Report carried out by the Ministry of the Interior show:

- In 2018 there were in Portugal a total of 1088 staff in the Security Forces with specific responsibilities within the scope of domestic violence;
- There were more than 120 specialised teams and 800 officers assigned to the investigation of domestic violence all over the country;
- About 63% of the police stations for security forces with territorial competence had a room for victim's assistance. Some 38 more rooms can be found in other subunits/units, totalling 457 rooms for victims of domestic violence;
- In 2018, the Security Forces carried out 26107 risk assessments and 19723 reassessments (Ministry of Interior, 2019).

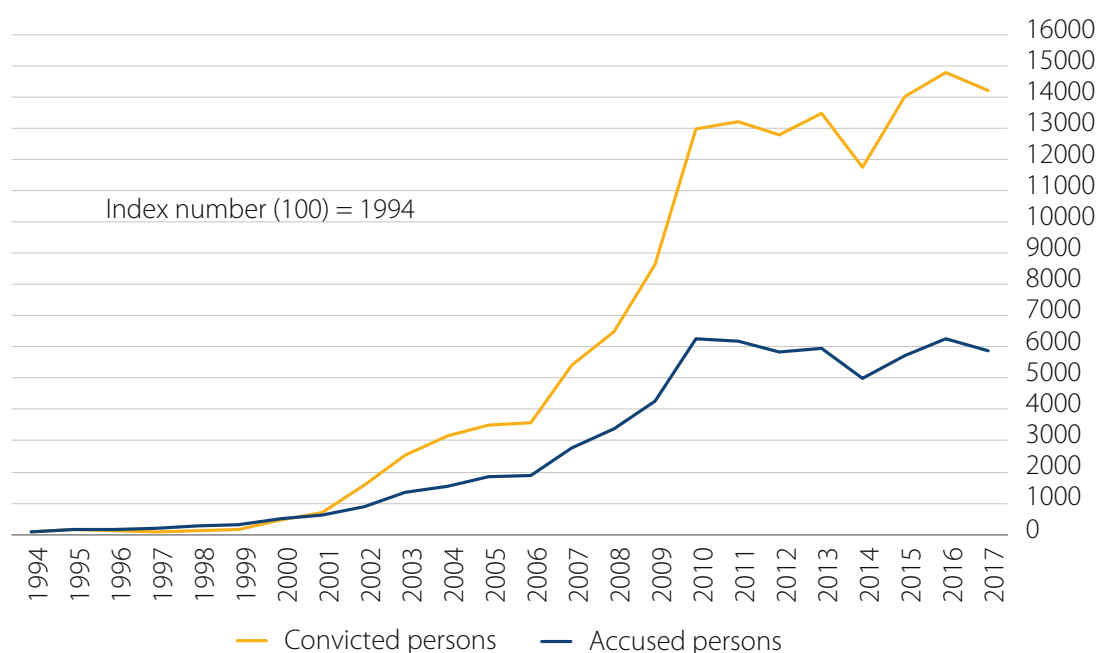
These numbers are notable for a country with a structural lack of resources. The change would not have been possible without the reformist political impulse of the mid-90s. This impulse was partly triggered by domestic violence crimes resulting in deaths, the penal reforms between 2000 and 2013, and the civic shock related to cases of domestic violence experienced during the past fifteen years.

There are still many unexplored areas concerning the scope of domestic violence in Portugal. For instance, economic costs of domestic violence are barely known since a large part of costs relates to the services provided by the State to victims of domestic violence, which are currently not accounted for. In addition to domestic violence's immediate physical and psychological consequences, the broader economic ones must also be considered. Domestic violence binds economic development (Day, McKenna & Bowlus, 2005). However, these costs of domestic violence are estimated to be massive in Portugal (Moura, Torres & Morgado, 2016), and these authors acknowledge that they have been increasing. First, domestic violence induces costs to law enforcement and judicial agencies. Domestic violence also increases the demand for various social, health and welfare services. Direct tangible costs, such as hospitalisation costs, and indirect tangible costs, such as absence from work and loss of potential, are measured by the fall in the victim's labour productivity. There are also direct intangible costs, such as sick leave for coping with the loss of a loved one, and indirect intangible costs, such as adverse psychological effects on children who witness violence (Day *et al.*, 2005). All these factors contribute inevitably to massive public and private costs that reinforce the idea of domestic violence as a wicked problem.

Two indicators point to the social change concerning domestic violence, even in such a conservative organisation as the justice system. On the one hand, the number of people convicted of domestic violence crime in Portugal has increased 140-fold since 1994,

and the growth in convictions was linear. On the other hand, the evolution of the number of accused was also accentuated, although less expressively (see Figure 1). The growth differential between these two trends reveals the increased capacity of the prosecution system (accusation) in recent decades and, even more, the courts' tendencies to convict. The effect of convictions and the ability to control the conduct of offenders explain the difference between the two trends.

Figure 1. Convicted - cases ended - and accused in domestic violence criminal cases. Index number (1994 = 100).



In the last six years, the total number of reported crimes decreased almost four times as much as the crimes related to domestic violence. However, simultaneously and for the same period, the number of accused and convicted persons increased, meaning that the system became much more effective. The ratio between domestic violence crimes and total crimes increased slightly, from 7.3% in 2013 to 7.9% in 2018.

Additionally, in the very same period, the city of Porto registered a very different development. The prevalence rate and the figures of domestic violence in the last few years suggest that Porto is part of a cluster illustrated by some statistical stability (low coefficient of variation) regarding the number of known victims. The years before denoted a steady growth of accounted domestic violence occurrence in Porto (and also in the country). One reason was that domestic violence-related crimes became subject to public prosecution, with no need for the victim to formalise his/her complaint.

Despite all these figures, the public response is still a matter of intense debate. This debate is mainly because some victims are not adequately protected (lack of resources, victims without legal status, short, medium- and long-term support). Rates of convictions also seem to be short. Furthermore, there is a malfunction in terms of partnerships resulting in the increased number of lethal domestic violence victims.

Basing on the above-described Portuguese domestic violence landscape, our research questions are: What factors are blocking an optimised domestic violence response? What are the reasons for having different results in Porto? Is it possible to envisage an inter-organisational response to domestic violence? We conducted a case study in Porto, which will be presented in the following, in order to answer these questions.

METHOD AND PROCEDURES

The Porto experience was selected because some police professionals highlighted it as a different and promising approach to domestic violence occurrences. We discovered a pilot experiment involving a broad partnership and with an evident interest by the media. We investigated the case by interviewing domestic violence-relevant stakeholders and by analysing data referring to the Porto case.

Study participants

Interviewees come from diverse domains of intervention: police (4), health (3), social work/NGOs (2), and justice (1). They were selected by convenience. We applied an *in situ* research strategy that had the advantage of meeting the professionals at their workplace. However, the specific panorama in Portugal is facing a currently high number of deaths resulting from domestic violence. This uncomfortable situation seems to have inhibited some social actors from participating in this study, thus diminishing the number of interviewees and the sample representativeness.

Instruments

The interviews were conducted by using the IMPRODOVA semi-structured interview template. The template tackles issues like information about the interviewee organisation and professional career; understanding and conceptualising domestic violence; the specific work with domestic violence; goals and priorities while working with domestic violence; cooperation, learning and training; guidelines and assessment tools for domestic violence; and evaluation of specific practices, initiatives or programmes.

The authors conducted a thematic content analysis (e.g. Ghiglione & Matalon, 1993).

Further materials

In addition to the interviews, we included statistical material in our study to gain a comprehensive view of our case by examining the following material:

- Data from Porto Metropolitan Command (COMETPOR) of Public Security Police (PSP);
- General data from the evolution of domestic violence in the city (long term time series);
- Characterisation data;
- Data from in-depth interviews (10);
- Domestic violence Monitoring Reports data from General Secretariat of the Ministry of Interior;
- Domestic violence data from the Directorate General of Policies of Justice database.

Procedure

Formal authorisations were asked for by providing all the information about the research project's (IMPRODOVA⁷) goals and methods, an invitation to participate, the interview guide, an informed consent form, and the IMPRODOVA project data protection/ethics notification, including anonymisation procedures. All participants were also provided with these elements, and they signed an informed consent form.

The interviews were conducted during the interviewees' working time. The average duration of the interviews was 66 minutes, and they were all tape-recorded and transcribed *verbatim*.

CASE PRESENTATION

As mentioned above, Porto is perhaps part of a cluster illustrated by some statistical stability in terms of the number of known victims. However, Porto's results are not random, and they have a history.

In 2013, the programme "Um Passo Mais" ("One step further") was initially promoted by the Porto Public Prosecutor's Office. The programme sought to establish procedures that would speed up the public response to domestic violence in Porto. The goal was to identify better high-risk situations that require immediate intervention by the police, social services and judiciary.

To the police, the response to this need was the conception of a desk and operational squad, also in 2013. The desk, the PSP-Porto Victims' Support and Information Cabinet

7 See www.improdova.eu

(Gabinete de Atendimento e Informação a Vítimas da PSP-Porto; GAIV), manages all the domestic violence related calls in the city. GAIV has become the domestic violence pivotal front-line responder in the city. In the backstage, PSP creates the Crime Investigation Special Teams for Domestic Violence (Equipas Especiais de Violência Doméstica; EEIV), which specialised in the criminal investigation of these crimes. This new arrangement allowed the PSP to obtain a high level of public awareness regarding domestic violence. This reputation has been leveraged by last year's visit of the President of Portugal, which had significant media coverage.

As we can see in Table 1, the total number of reported crimes increased, on average, by 0.3% per year, but the number of domestic violence crimes decreased, on average, by 4.3% per year, and the ratio of domestic violence crimes to total crimes also decreased, from 7.3% to 5.3%: domestic violence crimes decreased much more than in the country. Let us say, for now, that this 'picture' overlaps the period of activity of GAIV.

Table 1. Criminology Figures in Porto

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Average annual growth rate (%)
Total reported crimes	15638	15212	16056	14461	15406	15948	0,3%
domestic violence crimes	1138	1091	996	971	939	844	-4,3%
domestic violence crimes/ total crimes	7,3%	7,2%	6,2%	6,7%	6,1%	5,3%	-4,5%

Consider that the number of domestic violence crimes has been decreasing in Porto since 2011 (see Figure 2). This period was preceded by a strong, irregular growth, which dates back to the beginning of the 21st century. Therefore, the downward trend began before the procedural changes resulting from the GAIV procedures, though it may have helped consolidate that trend.

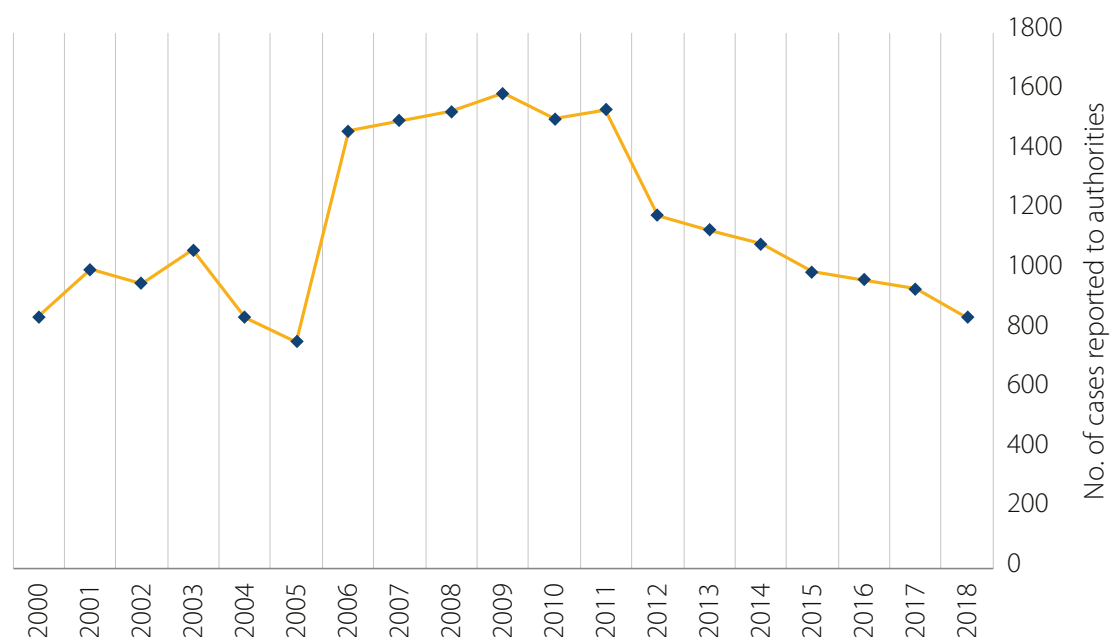
Figure 2. City of Porto domestic violence crimes (long term observation).

Figure 3 summarises the performance of GAIV over these five years of activity:

- Increase in the awareness of this PSP service (by the increase in the number of victims referred by other care structures);
- Growth and stabilisation of the number of consultations;
- Stabilisation of the number of identified victims (in a context where the total number of victims in the City of Porto allegedly decreased).

Between 2013 and 2018, 197 victims were sent to the '144' Social Emergency Helpline (Social Security), and 183 referred to Casas Abrigo (anonymous shelters) resulting from the registration and monitoring of victims by the PSP. There were also 159 teleassistance devices implemented and almost 1700 emergency responses requiring police cars (just in time policing procedures). The total number of police actions (including administrative procedures) was approximately 7,000 during the last five years.

Figure 3. GAIV performance indicators.

Equally important is the analysis of the activities carried out by The Crime Investigation Special Teams (EEIV) in the criminal investigation of domestic violence crimes. EEIV is responsible for investigating criminal cases delegated by the Public Prosecutor's Office. EEIV manages crimes related to domestic violence in a centralised manner in the Porto PSP's Division of Criminal Investigation.

Table 2 and Figure 4 summarise EEIV's activity since its creation. It may be perceived by the data that there is no accumulation of processes to solve.

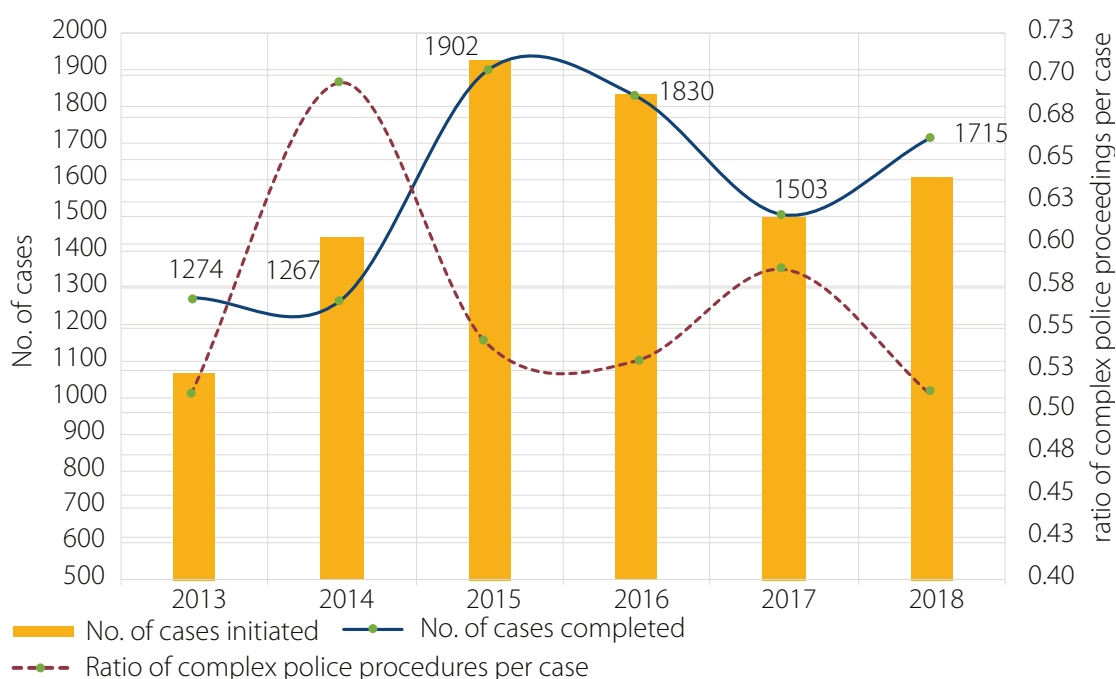
The total number of complex police procedures, visible in the last row of Table 2, is equally impressive. Strict police measures require a prior judicial decision or are particularly challenging (sophistication) to perform because they may conflict with human and constitutional rights. They differ from administrative Police measures, the application of which derives from ordinary regulations.

We create a ratio of strict police procedures for each case (see note in Table 2). The results are exciting: although with some annual variations, during the six years, in every two cases that come to the knowledge of the EEIV, one of them gave rise to at least one police procedure of strict nature, almost always requiring judicial intervention.

Table 2. Data on the Activity of Criminal Investigation Team – Porto

Indicators	column	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	total
No. of cases initiated	1	1068	1440	1927	1834	1496	1604	9369
No. of cases completed	2	1274	1267	1902	1830	1503	1715	9491
Home search warrants	3	62	45	60	43	43	62	315
Number of suspects questioned	4	458	539	761	729	613	541	3641
Arrest warrants requested from the judicial authority	5	64	147	105	100	112	137	665
Enforcement measures applied to suspects	6	8	35	17	20	19	24	123
Safety and security measures applied to victims	7	63	113	90	84	94	116	560
Ratio of strict police proceedings per case	8	0,46	0,60	0,50	0,49	0,52	0,45	0,50

Note. Ratio of strict police proceedings = (SUM columns 3+4+5+6) ÷ column 2.

Figure 4. EEIV performance indicators.

The reasons mentioned above led us to target GAIV for deeper analysis as we consider GAIV an **operational practice** worth presenting to a broader audience. Aligning with the IMPRODOVA conceptual framework, the Porto experience merges an **organisation-**

al arrangement from the part of PSP, involving intra-organisational cooperation (GAIV, EEIV, CCC⁸, and other police units), with **inter-organisational cooperation** between the police, several NGOs, health services, public prosecutor services. These arrangements aim to clarify the limits of the problem at hand, goals and stakes, resources and actors involved.

As mentioned, GAIV emerged as a focal service to attend domestic violence victims and follow-up their cases, control the use of the teleassistance devices (if triggered, police officers are deployed to attend to the victim), and react promptly in emergency cases. In principle, all domestic violence cases in Porto would be dealt with in GAIV. For that purpose, PSP chooses a new police facility – Esquadra do Bom Pastor, Bom Pastor Police Station. This squad was built considering modern technical recommendations, such as a friendly interior, among other physical and functional attributes supporting the specific work with victims (e.g. attendance rooms, learning and training rooms, spaces for children, a separation between victims and offenders when inside the station). Also, GAIV had the chance to gather specialised personnel working exclusively with domestic violence matters.

Therefore, this new response was able to remove pressure from the system and increase service quality regarding domestic violence victims.

"It started from zero. We had nothing before. There was the necessity, here, to implement certain dynamics of police work and intervention systems within the community" (603AIV); "If I do not have an answer, I will not see the problem" (609BIV).

GAIV embraced the commitment to respond to a policy of the city of Porto oriented towards domestic violence called "One step further". In this non-written agreement, PSP takes compromise to specialise police officers in domestic violence that led to the instalment of GAIV and the EEIV.

PSP governs (so to speak) the network, mainly because of its central position within. Criminal investigation (EEIV) must be kept discreet; the Department for Criminal and Penal Action (DIAP) is not a service open to the public. Therefore, the management of the relation with the community must be performed by professionals having relevant competencies, such as the police (PSP).

Nowadays, GAIV seems to be moving even more towards intra- and inter-collaborative work, piloting the community resources towards the victims' protection and support, and performing locally led policing. For instance, GAIV is responsible for the execution/

8

CCC means *Police Control and Command Center*.

implementation of the court's orders (e.g. accompanying victims, collecting the victims' goods from its home).

PSP's top management has always supported the initiative, which seems to be the centrepiece of GAIV performance and maintenance.

"We always had the support from the command structure. Many commanders have been through here, and all of them saw this service as a quality service, having the support of whom is in charge, and we know that this makes all the difference, we are in a job that is recognised and seen as a good police service" (603AIV).

Since the mid-90s, Portugal has had such policies regarding creating specific programmes in the law enforcement authorities, new facilities adapted to the domestic violence victims' attendance, new assessment tools, and specialised teams.

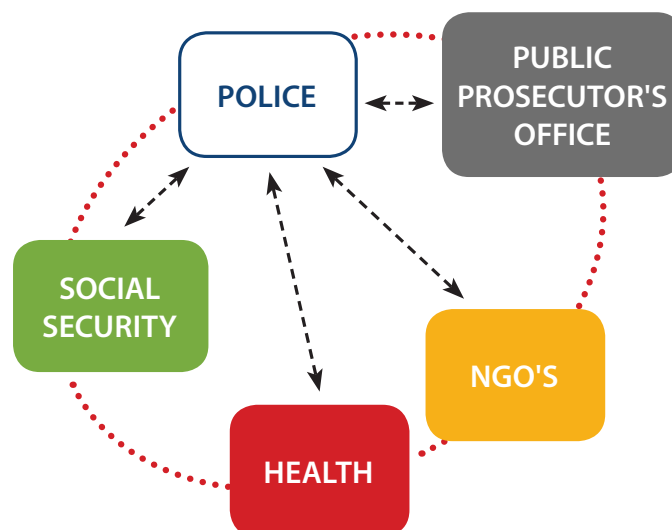
However, there is hardly a single national organisational model, and even less that, there is a specific organisational solution to address this type of crime. In this sense, GAIV and EEIV are also interesting organisational approaches because they are *atypical* in police activity to prevent and fight against domestic violence crime. This non-typicality results from the PSP's organisational model and, perhaps strongly, from the model of cooperation with other partners in the public sector (health, justice) and civil society (NGOs). This aspect has to do with what can be called inter-organisational learning and practice.

"What works are the partnerships, which was the innovative approach that the police have given to the cabinet; opening the doors to other entities, and that makes all the difference. This kind of crime compels us and the police to have these real partnerships, not those front partnerships, but the ones by which we all help each other" (601AIV).

We found in the Porto experience some evidence about collaborative dynamics, which is different from what seems to be the national reality, globally understood (which can be a dangerous generalisation, nevertheless).

"There is an acknowledgement of competencies from both parts" (609BIV).

The PSP seems to be an empowered and empowering organisation. It has a central role in the whole victim support process, but above all, with functional proximity to the Public Prosecutor's Office (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. A conceptual presentation of Porto experience.

Conceptually, all public sub-systems (health, justice, and social security) and civil society organisations establish direct functional relationships with the PSP (arrows in black). However, the PSP, especially the GAIV, still has a supplementary field of intervention, either because it is in charge of developing such powerful victim support instruments as the Individual Security Plan; or because of the specific task of monitoring (in person or by telephone) the victim for a reasonable period.

The red dotted circle (see Figure 5) represents an intervention space that responds to a ring of social cohesion led by the police. Social cohesion is understood here as a construct that identifies the objectives and actions of a community aiming at creating conditions where people have the opportunity to live together with all their differences, and, on the other hand, the way to approach unity and diversity within a framework of legality and guarantee of human rights. The police (i.e. GAIV service) is very close to the victim and act as an interpreter of their needs near the institutions. They are transducers converting victims' needs in the language understood by society.

In other words, the fact that domestic violence became a public crime was not enough to change the picture. Using a functionalist logic, one would expect that the norm would prevail. However, Porto experience shows that if there is no involvement of the different organisations at the local level, the State's guidelines do not work. The benefit of GAIV and EEIV's responses seems to result from the maximisation of the interactions between all partners.

"The most important thing is to know the faces, and that is why I think the most important thing is to know each other and what each one does. I have no reason to complain because there is openness to make some learning sessions, give speeches; we go there or come here, which serves to know each other and know what they do. Moreover, there where we can ask for clarifications and have a closer relationship" (601AIV).

Therefore, the importance of familiarity between the parties and close and open relations appears to be crucial.

The statement given by an interviewee from the Health sector illustrates the need for a naturalistic approach (Thomas, 1979):

"This network is only possible if we leave the desk" (609BIV).

The configuration of the responses and organisations in a particular area requires dedicated fieldwork, close to the inhabitants of specific neighbourhoods, outside regular working hours. If the goal is to prevent domestic violence and promote well-being rather than reacting to a particular situation, the Porto experience can be regarded as a model of good practice. Because we are dealing with a wicked problem (Rittel, 1973), it is necessary to change the paradigm. It is necessary to learn different ways of seeing to identify the problem better and resolve it.

The report from the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO, 2019) on Portugal stresses that the National Support Network for Domestic Violence Victims 'has yet to fulfil its mission of enabling truly effective cooperation between all relevant stakeholders. (...) Good examples exist where partial coordination is practised, but (...) they appear to rely on the individual initiative of the agencies concerned' (p. 37). GAIV seems to fulfil this promise.

Proximity seems to be the key to police empowerment. However, the "One step further" programme is a non-written protocol of institutional cooperation. It means that there is no disfigurement of the competencies and attributions of each entity, but merely the declaration of common interest (common objectives) and the nominal responsibility of those responsible for the different entities at each moment. Commitment is its strength in a society where the *word given* is synonymous of *an honoured* word. However, it is also its weakness when that condition, say, pre-bureaucratic, typical of societies where mechanical solidarity based on old social values (Durkheim, 1960) prevails or changes the primary social conditions. In other words, if other combinations of partners or specific persons emerge, GAIV may lose its centrality.

In this Porto experience – recalling the motivation to develop the “One step further” programme – it was about a collective (the city) notion and its social problems, implying that everyone has to help in its solution. This type of effective solutions can be found in contexts strongly influenced by the interrelationship between social individuals, in which social ties and bonds are anchored in the notion of community. In general terms, a national policy to prevent and fight against domestic violence cannot be based on these elements of social life. At a local level, such social values can perform a fundamental role.

The interrelationship is also critical for understanding the capacity of civil society’s (NGO’s) resource mobilisation. We have been told of cases where a phone call to someone you know personally works better than a formal request to, for example, find a place in a shelter or request support for something that is needed.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The analysis of the case has opened new horizons for discussion. The data collected and its analytic interpretation calls for a deeper understanding of the domestic violence phenomenon. Not in the sense of rejecting the already known but instead adding some new dimensions, putting together the micro, meso and macro systems. As seen above, several significant changes took place at each system level, creating a new brand scenario for domestic violence. Preventive actions and understanding new forms of violence, for instance, psychological violence, symbolic violence, gender-based violence, should not be based on what we did in the past but what we should do in the face of the new present.

At the macro-level system, the visibility of and public exposure to domestic violence in Portugal is a highly relevant social fact and should be understood as a significant cultural transformation that has enabled a whole range of other transformations. The transformations touch legal and criminal proceedings, law enforcement and bringing the theme of violence to the central stage of public action.

“Adapting to the new challenges, we do not work as we did five years ago” (609BIV).

These slow and gradual transformations, sometimes speeded up by necessary legal reforms and driven by international conventions, have simultaneously brought new challenges. This is the field explored by Inglehart and Welzel (2005) when they describe the organisation of the relation between social structure, political culture, and political system, saying that economic development, the rise of mass communication, and other macroscopic transformations reflect on the individual values. The question is whether the influence of the political culture on the individual values change is stronger than the opposite one. The world politicians envision (high rationality and self-expression values)

is quite different from the world we live in (medium income; still linked with traditional values concerning gender inequality; in the middle of the transition from survival to self-expression values), thus creating tension. One of the challenges directly posed to law enforcement authorities is increasing operational procedures (more sophisticated administrative proceedings, victim status attribution, risk assessments, individual security plans). But not only in the law enforcement area. Here testimony from the health sector:

"I think it is training among technicians, specific, concrete cases, almost like a workshop. The situations are very complex, and we are dealing with people, and there is no medicine to give to the aggressor and the victim to make them feel good" (609BIV).

This complexity has not ended and dragged on other changes in intern police organisation and other public systems. The Porto experience is an example of changes on a macroscopic scale reflected on a local scale. Often, the problem of elites provoking social change on a superlative level, almost a meta social goal, is to forget that the adoption of new social models is not achieved by decree but through social influence and social structure transformation processes takes time. The key variable seems to be training.

Moreover, civil society responded to the new challenges by multiplying the available resources, which forced it to redesign the map of institutional actors that move around domestic violence. This change is still under consolidation, and mutual distrust is still widespread. However, the case of Porto is an excellent example that this mistrust can be overcome. At the same time, relevant to understand some weaknesses. Perhaps the most evident of the weaknesses is the thirst for protagonism, possibly considered dysfunctional in a model of collaborative work but quite natural.

Furthermore, it should be stressed that a modification suggested by the macro-level system is reflected in the changing from traditional values to secular, rational ones and the changing from survival to self-expression values (Inglehart, 2018). The tension thus created ends up showing who is who is always unfinished in the process of social change. GAIV's procedures inevitably reflect the adherence of the police (as an institution) to the macro-level system changes but also takes into account the novelties that could be recognised at the meso and micro levels systems (this means the social transformations expressed through the social relationships and the ones between individuals, their peers, and the State's organisations).

The Porto experience, from a more police point of view, has brought several shifts that can be systematised:

- new police responses;
- more specialisation;
- more public scrutiny of police work.

The public scrutiny, as well as the mechanisms of formal control (e.g., via the General Inspectorate of Internal Affairs), could be relevant to understand the general mindset:

"so that our work could be carried out with the quality that has always been the great bet of the Metropolitan Command of Porto. We want to do good, we are not interested in doing too much and too little, we want to do good and well if possible, because effectively this service cannot be evaluated quantitatively, it is inevitable because much of the service is done invisibly and is not quantified in numbers" (603AIV).

As written above, GAIV and EEIV are *atypical* organisational solutions considering the framework of police activity to prevent and fight against domestic violence. Despite the downward trend in the number of domestic violence crimes in the city of Porto since 2011, we cannot make a direct link with the emergence of GAIV for methodological reasons, although, as said before, it may have helped to consolidate that trend.

Meanwhile, we want to highlight the seemingly fruitful configuration possible to observe and be told about (resulting in the three changes mentioned above). GAIV's and EEIV's approach to domestic violence seems to be organised around five leading indicators: increased collaborative work with the Attorney's Office Public Prosecutor; immediate action protocols; more expertise; enlarged local partnerships; and mutual trust and respect. Probably the following statement would not have been possible ten years ago:

"If the victim is afraid of the report, then we resort to GAIV" (609BIV).

Those changes can be translated into the possibility of following the normative approach (i.e., by the book) in terms of the reaction to domestic violence while maintaining a sense of creativity in terms of anticipating domestic violence occurrences by using experts' intuitive and ground-based knowledge. It enables to address domestic violence occurrences immediately and simultaneously develop a particular (local) approach to some of the domestic violence roots. Let us not forget that some domestic violence situations are considered part of the "normal" repertoire of behaviours of some (more or less) vulnerable groups. So, acting and fighting domestic violence demands a continuous effort by all involved professionals; because

"usually, our end-users [victims] are here several months, sometimes one or two years, because there is a whole process of rebuilding their life project that takes some time, and most of the times for them to find some stability in their lives, it takes three years on average" (605DIV).

The Portuguese view of the domestic violence problem has changed in the last few years, increasing awareness in the public sphere. The Porto experience shows a (some-

how) different approach to the phenomenon, combining different actors from various organisations, showing the merits of a local arrangement. Since compromises, trade-offs, organisational interactions are workable and adjust to value an empowerment process, ongoing analyses are critical to assess the problem and adopt an action-driven approach.

The results of this research focused on an experience evaluated as very positive, should not make us forget two essential aspects of the social problem of domestic violence:

- The first has to do with the legal transformations that impose an increasing demand on organisations dealing with domestic violence on the ground. These changes are societal in scope and can be better interpreted in specific social contexts than in others;
- The second essential aspect is that domestic violence is a complex social phenomenon (a truly wicked social problem) with local expression, a product of violent and unbalanced social interactions that express themselves in a (somehow) unique *milieu*, and therefore require responses adapted to those contexts and for those concrete individuals. The traditional positive value that we attach to good practices should not be underestimated but should be relativised and adaptable. There is no such thing as a general social theory about domestic violence.

The experience of Porto shows that a problem-oriented approach is all the more potent as it results from the interpretation of the weaknesses and opportunities that the social contexts themselves provide.

This vision has epistemological and methodological consequences, especially at the level of intervention on domestic violence, implying a more ideographic and less nomothetic approach.

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