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CARE4TRAUMA

IMPROVING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE VICTIMS SUPPORT SERVICES AND
THE ACCESS TO JUSTICE THROUGH TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



Women's Support and
Information Center
There is a way out of violence!



Care4Trauma Policy Brief Spain



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1. Overview

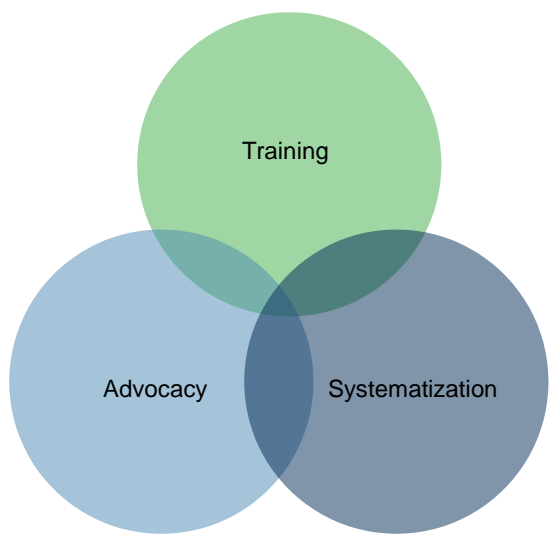
Facilitating the access of victims of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) to the Justice system and to specialized psychosocial services from a Trauma informed care perspective (TIC) constitutes the main priority of the current project and is transversal to all the research actions developed so far. Therefore, the current report expects to provide a summary of the main findings and recommendation developed in Spain in order to understand the ways in which this topic is addressed and the ways it can be improved.

The long-lasting effects of GBV are well known and affect not only the main victim but also her children and other family members. The sequels in women’s mental health are long-lasting and often aggravated by the often traumatic judicial processes which are not always successful.

On the other hand, professionals from all backgrounds find themselves exposed also to the victims’ traumatic experience with professional limitations to handle such experience such as lack of mediators to work with immigrant women, lack of training in TIC principles, lack of knowledge about this topic from the part of non-specialized services, poor working conditions, etc.

Spain - key findings (from national report)

1. Lack of formalization and recognition of the trauma-informed care principles in the policies, procedures and protocols;
2. Professional’s training prioritizes Gender perspective to TIC principles
3. Professionals are particularly worried about secondary trauma.



Key strategies to implement the recommendations in Spain:

1. **Awareness raising**
2. **Standardization**
3. **Specialized training**
4. **Amplify resources**
5. **Fight secondary trauma**

Figure 1: Key recommendations to implement TIC in Spain



2. What is Trauma-Informed-Care?

Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) is an approach which recognizes the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role trauma may play in an individual's life. On an organizational level, TIC aims at changing organizational culture to improve the response to the effects of trauma at all levels. TIC has been used to combat the effects of unaddressed trauma and secondary victimization within organizations. TIC can be applied in a wide range of healthcare and social service settings, including mental health care, substance abuse treatment, primary care, and social services for marginalized populations such as survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. By adopting a Trauma-Informed Care approach, service providers can promote healing, reduce stigma, and empower individuals to take control of their own recovery.

TIC principles applied to Gender-Based-Violence

1. Recognition
2. Establishing emotional safety
3. Restoring decision-making capacity and control over one's life
4. Facilitating relational connections
5. Cultural competence
6. Avoiding re-traumatization
7. Secondary trauma

3. What factors impact implementation in Spain?

In Spain there are several factors which may condition the implementation of measures to ensure TIC principles in the judicial system and in the psychosocial care to victims of GBV. On the one hand, the geopolitical configuration of Spain can complicate the implementation of large-scale measures. The kingdom of Spain is made of 17 autonomous communities and 2 autonomous cities, with their own Government and Parliament and, therefore, their own freedom to pass laws relating to all kinds of issues, including GBV. Although at the state level there is a clear legal definition of GBV, at the level of each Autonomous Community the concept -and even the way of calling it- is different.

This leads us to the second challenge encountered: although in Spain there is a comprehensive law to address GBV that establishes its definition and the legal measures and procedures to address it, each Autonomous Community can develop its own laws on this matter, establishing specific rights for victims and social, legal and psychological care circuits, among others. These laws can never provide fewer rights than state law, but they can set different definitions, approaches, priorities, and even identify different forms of GBV, which is challenging for service delivery.



Taking this into account, the bureaucratic, political and even theoretical difficulties in the implementation of the TIC perspective at the national level are evident and the recommendations that have emerged from the interviews, surveys and groups refer mainly to measures at the local level.

As for the barriers to access to justice detected, these are mainly related to the lack of training in gender perspective of judicial operators, to the lack of information on the part of women about the procedures and difficulty in understanding the procedural aspects, and to the complexity, delays and economic costs associated to these. Professionals realize that most of the women they serve are afraid to go through a judicial process because of the high social and emotional cost, and re-traumatization is a common outcome.

To overcome these barriers of access there is an explicit need detected to provide training in gender perspective, but not only, to operators across all the judicial system. Fostering empathy and active listening of the operators and, at the end, humanizing the judicial process, are key elements highlighted. As stated by the professionals, this must be accompanied by an improvement in public resources and an increase in economic and human resources.

Regarding the health and social care system, trauma informed care principles are not formally present in the policies, procedures and protocols in the services and organizations. There is, nonetheless, interest from the part of professionals and from policy makers to improve the whole system in terms of theoretical approaches in order to better assist victims of GBV.

We can detail the main conclusions from the research methods used: mapping, survey and semi-structured interviews.

3.1. Mapping

The desk research and mapping of the main legislation, recommendations and best-practices analysed throughout the research show that, formally, TIC is not present in any of these documents in a structured manner and, in most documents, trauma is not even mentioned. Although some principles are included in some of these documents, in isolation, these do not translate into a structured approach from this perspective. The principles most often founded were recognition and establishing emotional safety. On the other hand, cultural competence and prevention of secondary trauma were the less mentioned during the mapping process and the most challenging to attain.

It became clear, on the positive side, that Spain has strong legislation regarding GBV which aims at protecting the victims and their children. Still, the fact that each of the Spanish autonomous regions has their own legislation regarding the protection of the victims and the definition itself of GBV, works against a unified methodology and approach to GBV, which, clearly, keeps even further away the relevance given to TIC principles as a whole.

Figure 2. Insights into Spanish legislation and policy documents. Is TIC considered?

| Legislation | Policy / best-practices | Take home messages |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No mention to the word trauma • No structured approach to TIC principles • Strongly developed legislation and resources regarding GBV but less recognition of trauma effects • Strong focus on procedure and less focus on the victims emotional and mental state | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some references to some of the TIC principles, although not systematized • More focus on TIC principles than legislation, but unevenly across documents • Recognition as the principle mostly found in legislation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislation and best-practices identified clearly have a victim’s rights approach, with a particular concern for the detection, intervention, and recuperation of victims in a formal way • The existing legislation in Spain provides a framework that is applied differently on each Autonomous Community, leading to overlapping of the definitions and of the forms of violence recognized • This is considered to be a weakness for the protection of the victims since it makes it very difficult to establish a national level model of intervention with GBV victims that considers all the necessary perspectives such as TIC |

3.2. Survey

Considering the ultimate objective of the Care4Trauma project, i.e. to favour the access to justice for women victims of gender-based violence and the improvement of the services dedicated to them through the innovative application of a trauma-informed approach, the project carried out a second phase of research with the following objectives:

- to explore what are the perceptions of the institutional figures that contribute to the definition of gender policies in the field of counteracting violence and access to justice from a trauma-informed perspective,



- to examine what are their perceptions regarding the adoption of the trauma-informed approach in their agencies, services, institutions.

With this aim, national data reports were elaborated in each country with inputs from:

- I. an online survey in two different versions (one for the health and social system and one for the judicial system), sent to the staff of organizations and professionals who support and provide care to women victims of violence and their children;
- II. a series of semi-structured interviews addressed to managers and professionals of anti-violence centres and to political decision makers/policy makers.

In Spain, 64 professionals in total answered the online survey (55 from the health and social system and 8 from the judicial system) and 8 professionals were interviewed.

Regarding the online surveys the main result that stands out is the lack of formalization and recognition of the trauma-informed care principles in the policies, procedures and protocols in the surveyed professionals' services and organizations. This is a trend detected both in the health and social care system, and in the judicial system. Nevertheless, the practitioners surveyed clearly incorporate and deploy TIC approaches in their daily work practices, especially when it comes to considering the voices, experiences and needs raised by survivors and their children, and treating them from a respectful, victim-centered point of view.

Health and social care professionals agree that providing training, ensuring staff supervision from a TIC perspective, and reviewing internal and external organizational procedures so that these are in line with the principles of trauma-informed care are key actions to take for ensuring a proper implementation of this approach. Judicial system professionals also detect a lack of training among judicial services and institutions, especially in terms of gender perspective and understanding gender-based violence, which hinders the survivors' access to justice. This, added to the complexity of judicial processes, results in a high exposure of women to re-traumatization and revictimization, to which the professionals refer.

3.3. *Semi-structured interviews*

Concerning the qualitative interviews, the results seem to indicate conclusions along the same lines as the desk research regarding Spain: there is a moderate concern on the topic of the effects of GBV on the victim/survivor but TIC is still not a methodology being used in full terms, especially in the judicial field, although there is some awareness regarding its relevance.



It became evident that some of its principles are present in most services interventions, especially recognition and establishing emotional safety. Nevertheless, restoring decision making capacity and facilitating connections still seems to be out of reach for some services, which professionals attribute to time shortage, insufficient resources given the number of victims/survivors and the workload and also a constant focus on the emergency and less on the long run. The fact that GBV does not seem to be reducing in Spain, in any of its forms, seems to keep professionals and public services fully occupied with urgent intervention which leaves little room for long term improvements. This also seems to be one of the reasons why the development of policies which contemplate the service users' perspective seems to constitute a challenge, associated with the fact that most public services are designed from a top-down perspective which hinders a more horizontal approach.

Cultural competence is also a principle that is just starting to appear in some methodologies and training and constitutes a concern for professionals who, in many cases, understand they need more training and tools to interact with women from diverse backgrounds.

There is also a relevant focus on secondary trauma, mainly addressed through team supervision but, according to interviewees, still lacking in the judicial system and only slightly more common in the psychosocial system.

4. Ensuring a woman-centred access to justice in Spain

As for the barriers to access to justice identified in Spain through the several research methods applied, and as previously mentioned, these can be broken down into the following:

- **Lack of training in gender perspective and TIC principles of judicial operators**, especially police forces who have the first contact with victims, free lawyers who do not have a specialization in GBV and judges who do not undergo mandatory trainings in such areas;
- **Lack of information available for women victims of GBV about the legal procedures**, their timings and what a legal procedure implies. The existing information makes it difficult to understand the procedural aspects, their complexity delays and economic costs associated. Professionals realize that most of the women they serve are afraid to go through a judicial process because of the high social and emotional cost, and re-traumatization is a common outcome.
- **Lack of mediators available to support victims of GBV from minority cultures** in order to explain the different notions of GBV in Spain, the legal procedures, the cultural meanings, the legislation, the rights of victims of GBV and other doubts that immigrant women can express.

Bellow, some of these strengths and development points regarding the access to the justice system in Spain.

Figure 3. Strengths and development points of access to justice for women victims of violence in Spain

| | Strengths points | Development points |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | Free lawyers available 24h for any victim of a crime | Need to develop training to free lawyers as they are not specialized in GBV nor in TIC principles |
| 2 | Specialized lawyers available at public services and third sector organizations who focus only on GBV | Need to develop manuals, infographics, brochures or other forms of communication to make available for the victims the expected development of a judicial process so they are aware regarding what to expect since there is discredit on the judicial system and many acts of violence remains under-denounced. |
| 3 | Presence of mediators on some of the interactions between women victims of GBV from minority cultural backgrounds and the justice system | Need to increase the number of mediators, their availability and their training in GBV and TIC principles |

5. Types of strategies that can incentivize the dissemination and adoption of TIC services and institutions working with women victims of violence

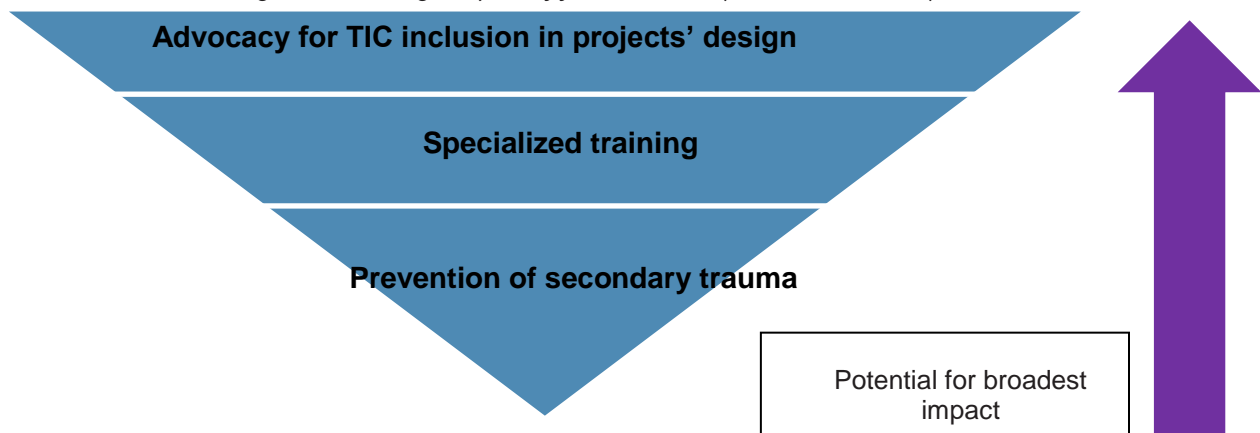
5.1. Health and social care services

In the case of the health and social care services, the following strategies can be implemented, from broader to more specific:

- **Project design taking TIC principles into consideration**, ensuring that, from the start, these principles are universal for all public services and followed by all professionals. For that, professionals need access to policy makers and a more horizontal co-construction of public services in order to directly respond to the victim’s needs;
- **Universalizing procedures and internal policies that can guarantee the inclusion of TIC principles** at all levels of the organisation and that professionals objectively know how to act according to each situation they may encounter;
- **Increase resources**, mainly human resources and physical space available, in order to avoid an overload on the victim/professional ratio and ensure quality services and assistance;

- **Specialized training to professionals:** providing specialized trauma training to professionals is essential in order to guarantee that the concepts used and the trauma principles are shared and understood by all in the same objective manner;
- **Prevention of secondary trauma:** ensuring internal and external supervision of personnel from a TIC approach, understanding the constant exposure of professionals to trauma and its effect on their well-being, motivation, productivity and mental health. Some measures include more time to dedicate to internal procedures, more possibilities to work remotely, better working material working conditions, better work-life balance, psychological support for professionals, etc.;

Figure 4. Strategic layers of further TIC implementation in Spain



5.2. Judicial System

The strategies addressing the judicial system were already developed in chapter 3, reason why they are merely enumerated here:

- Develop training for judicial professionals
- Improve the access of women victims of GBV to information regarding the judicial system and procedures;
- Increase the number of mediators and their availability and training



Figure 5. Example of TIC implementation in Social/Healthcare sectors and in the Judicial System

| Health and social care sectors | Judicial system |
|--|---|
| Initiative description | |
| Improve working conditions to prevent secondary trauma | Provide training for all professionals in the judiciary system |
| Team supervision specialising in gender-based violence cases with a trauma-informed approach. | Public information campaigns that reinforce the credibility of the legal system and clarify the steps in the judicial process |
| Health and social care | |
| <i>Foreseen policy and system changes if the aforementioned initiatives could be implemented</i> | |
| Improved quality of services Better care of professionals | Improved understanding of trauma effects Improved quality of services |

6. What actions may have the largest impact in Spain?

Considering all the information extracted from the workshops developed, and pointing out that the recommendations developed followed the results of the interviews and survey and not necessarily the order of the TIC principles, we suggest the following restructuring of the next table in order to coincide with the results.

| Judicial system | | |
|---|--|------------------------------------|
| Recommendation | TIC principle | Feasible timing for implementation |
| Mandatory specialised training for lawyers, judges and police in trauma-informed victim care. | Recognition Establishing emotional safety Avoiding re-traumatization | Next 5 years |
| Trauma-informed training for free public defenders operating in emergencies in gender-based violence victimisation | Recognition Establishing emotional safety Avoiding re-traumatization | Next 5 years |
| Raise to the political level the importance of introducing mandatory training in the judicial system that includes ICT principles | Recognition | Next 5 years |
| Development of a manual of concrete good practices to prevent the re-victimisation of victims of gender-based violence and their children, carried out from a trauma-informed perspective, available to all professionals involved in the legal care of victims | Avoiding re-traumatization | By the end of the project |
| Spaces for supervision with professionals from the judicial system in which to reflect on the effects of trauma on the victim and, consequently, on the judicial process. | Secondary trauma | By the end of the project |
| Spaces for inter-institutional monitoring that integrates the legal perspective and the psychosocial perspective from a trauma-informed perspective. | Recognition | By the end of the project |
| Public information campaigns that reinforce the credibility of the legal system and clarify the steps in the judicial process. | Restoring choice and control | Next 5 years |
| Mandatory presence of translators/mediators throughout the legal system, from the moment of the complaint to the moment of trial | Cultural competence | Next 5 years |

| | | |
|--|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Creation of a legal process manual for victims of gender-based violence, with a focus on trauma and an intersectional perspective. | Restoring choice and control | By the end of the project |
|--|------------------------------|---------------------------|

| Health and social system | | |
|--|--|------------------------------------|
| Recommendation | TIC principle | Feasible timing for implementation |
| Cross-training of psychosocial professionals (psychology, social work, social education, social integration, etc.) in trauma-informed intervention principles. | Recognition Avoiding re-traumatization | By the end of the project |
| Creation of a theoretical and practical manual on trauma-informed psychosocial intervention. | Recognition Establishing emotional safety Avoiding re-traumatization | Next 5 years |
| Advocacy with the political sphere that designs gender-based violence services so that they include the trauma-informed perspective in their design. | Recognition Establishing emotional safety Avoiding re-traumatization | Next 5 years |
| Team supervision specialising in gender-based violence cases with a trauma-informed approach. | Avoiding re-traumatization Recognition | By the end of the project |
| Trauma-informed self-care supervision of individuals and teams to prevent secondary trauma. | Secondary trauma | By the end of the project |
| Online and face-to-face forum of professionals to exchange trauma-informed psychosocial care practices. | Recognition Cultural competence Secondary trauma | By the end of the project |
| Generate specific and common entity-wide intervention protocol on trauma | Recognition | Next 5 years |
| Guarantee time for organizations to dedicate to the improvement of professional practices from a trauma-informed point of view. | Secondary trauma Recognition | Next 5 years |

7. Conclusions

By implementing a trauma-informed approach, service providers can ensure that they are providing care that is sensitive to the unique needs and experiences of women who have experienced violence, and that promotes healing and recovery.

Not only direct victims of GBV and their children are exposed to the long-lasting effects of trauma but, as it became clear throughout this research, also professionals express feelings of burnout with consequences on their mental health and on their ability to better assist victims of GBV.

The judicial system, which constitutes the gateway to a larger process of recovery, reveals to be essential to apply TIC principles from the first moment of arrival of the victims, reason why it became clear that transversal training to such professionals is clearly a must.

On the other hand, unifying the understanding of the effects of Trauma throughout all professionals from the health and psychosocial background – through the development of training, supervision and procedures, also reveals to be highly important in order to provide the best unity service possible.

For this, programs and projects need a bottom-up perspective in their design and implementation, tailoring the specific response to the needs of each of the victims assisted.

Besides the previous, it is paramount to bear in mind that women who experience violence often face significant barriers to accessing justice. These can include fear of retaliation, lack of knowledge about legal processes, and financial constraints, among others. By facilitating a better pathway to justice, service providers can help to address these barriers and ensure that women have access to the support and resources they need to seek justice and hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. This can also help to promote a culture of accountability and respect for women's rights, and send a strong message that violence against women will not be tolerated. Overall, implementing a trauma-informed approach and facilitating a better pathway to justice for women victims of violence is essential for promoting the health, safety, and well-being of women and creating a more just and equitable society.



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