

Parallel report to the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (examination of Denmark's 8th periodic report)

1. Preface

This parallel report to the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women is submitted by the Danish humanitarian organization, Mothers Aid. In this parallel report Mothers Aid suggests an expansion of one of the questions on violence against women in the list of issues which the committee has prepared for the examination of Denmark's 8th periodic report in February 2015.

The parallel report consists of the following sections:

- 1) Background on Mothers Aid
- 2) Article 12, Health – suggestion for an expansion of question on violence against women in the list of issues

1. Background on Mothers Aid

Mothers Aid is a private humanitarian organization that has existed in Denmark for almost 100 years and has provided a profound contribution to the development of the social policy in the 20th century in Denmark. Mothers Aid provides counselling and support for families in difficult situations. Mothers Aid has profound knowledge about difficulties for battered women and their children, and the organization has been running a specialised counselling and psychological treatment programme for battered women and their children for several years. The programmes remarkable effects for the women have recently been documented by psychological scientists from University of Southern Denmark in European Journal of Psychotraumatology¹.

For the last couple of years Mothers Aid has established an association with several Danish organizations with the aim of convincing the Danish Government to adopt specific laws on the rights for battered women and their children to counselling and psychological treatment. The cooperation consists besides Mothers Aid of the following organizations: Danish Red Cross, LOKK (National

¹ Nina B. Hansen, Sara B. Eriksen and Ask Elklit (2014). *Effects of an intervention program for female victims of intimate partner violence on psychological symptoms and perceived social support*, European Journal of Psychotraumatology

organization of women's shelters in Denmark), Children's Welfare and Dialogue against Violence (a treatment organization for perpetrators).

2. Article 12, Health

– *Suggestion for an expansion of question on violence against women in the list of issues*

The Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, article 12, paragraph 1, oblige each State party to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care and among other things that women are ensured access to health care services. In list of issues and questions (CEDAW/C/DNK/Q/8) in relation to violence against women, the committee ask the Danish Government inter alia to: *"....indicate whether measures have been taken to provide free access to long-term psychological treatment for women victims of violence whether or not they are in contact with a shelter"*².

Mothers Aid fully support that the committee asks the Danish Government to clarify on this subject. But Mothers Aid would like to stress that it's important to ask the Danish Government whether measures have been taken to adopt specific legal rights for battered women and their children to long-term psychological treatment. This aspect will be elaborated below.

The situation in Denmark is that there are annually 29.000 (1,5 %) women exposed to violence from a former or present partner and 28.000 (3 %) children witnessing this violence. The violence has huge consequences for both women and children in terms of increased stress and anxiety which threaten their well-being and ability to maintain employment and performance in school. It's very important that the women receive sufficient counselling and psychological treatment with the aim of increasing their well-being and ability to perform as parents and breadwinners for their children. The women's improved abilities to act as parents for their children and psychological treatment for the children are important conditions for improved well-being of the children which prevent the imminent risk that they end up being victims of violence or perpetrators themselves.

In Denmark's 8th periodic report, the Danish Government states, that battered women has rights and opportunities for social, juridical and psychological support. The reality is that battered women and their children only are secured a right to a stay in a women's shelter according to article 109 in the Act on Social Services (and long-term professional psychological treatment is not offered in the shelters).

There are no other specific laws on violence against women and children in Denmark and the responsible authorities' obligations to offer more than just a stay in a shelter only can be found in general articles in Danish legislation (legislation on health, the Act on Social Services etc.). For a long time it has been obvious that these general juridical obligations do not serve as a sufficient basis to oblige and help responsible authorities (the municipalities) to provide sufficient support and psychological treatment for battered women and their children. The municipalities do not prioritize to: Collect and develop specific knowledge about violence in the family thus being able to identify battered women and their children, how to help them and refer them to psychological treatment.

This means that only a very small portion of all battered women and their children receive help as only approximately 2000 women and 2000 children take a stay in a shelter each year. The vast majority of battered women and children (approximately 27.000 women and 26.000 children) for

² Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination of Violence against Women, *CEDAW/C/DNK/Q/8, Violence against women, paragraph 8*, page 2.

whom a stay in a shelter is not suitable or preferable³ have very few support alternatives and many of them do not receive any kind of support at all.

It is therefore imperative that the Danish Government adopt specific legislation on the rights for battered women and their children both outside and inside the shelters to receive long-term psychological treatment. Only in this way the responsible authorities are obliged to develop adequate skills and knowledge to help the women and the children.

Mothers Aid recommends the following expansion to question on violence against in the examination of Denmark's 8th periodic report:

- Please indicate whether measures have been taken to adopt specific legislation on the rights of battered women and their children in and outside shelters to receive adequate counselling and long-term psychological treatment.

³ For many battered women and their children a stay in a shelter is not preferable or suitable as they temporarily or on a long-term basis will lose their jobs and contact with school or day-care institution and contact with local communities, families, friends etc.