



Carol Hagemann-White
Liz Kelly
Thomas Meysen (eds.)

Interventions Against Child Abuse and Violence Against Women

Ethics and culture in practice and policy

Cultural Encounters in
Intervention Against Violence, Vol I

Verlag Barbara Budrich



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Chapter 15

Reading ethics into interventions against violence

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Identifying ethical issues and dilemmas in practice was a core component in the original vision of the research project Cultural Encounters in Interventions Against Violence (CEIN-AV), with establishing ethical foundations for intervention the outcome set for the project. These were reached through lengthy discussions among the five partners, in preparing our funding bid, as offering the only way in which we could accommodate our different histories with respect to colonialism and migration and the variations in intervention cultures which we were already aware of (see chapters 3, 8 and 12). From the outset, therefore, this was the approach we imagined could be a basis for common standards within a human rights framing: principles which could work across the fields of violence, across variations between countries and the diversity of communities within them.

As Chapter 4 reveals, traditional ethical theory has had relatively little to say about interpersonal violence, requiring us to explore what the harms of violence were, not only to bodily integrity but also to the sense of self and connections to others. Our early analysis of legal-organisational frameworks and socio-cultural backgrounds of the national protection systems in our four countries helped us to deconstruct practice and begin to map professionals' frames, their perceptions of ethical dilemmas. But it needed the experience of the victim-survivors to build a sufficient basis for thinking about and building a foundation how these harms can be compounded or mitigated through intervention.

Over the three years of researching and thinking together CEINAV also brought to light how practice is influenced both by national policy and by organisational decisions at the local level. Through our discussions we concluded that so called "best practice" or "standard-setting" is, in its application, likely to produce illusions of compliance, with practice dealing with the challenges going "under the radar". We also reflected on the importance for policy makers and those who produce guidelines to give consideration to the constraints and opportunities within specific local contexts. Our task, then, was to find the framing and the level of concreteness that could speak to the diversity of contexts in Europe and address all levels from in person practice, organisational responsibilities up to regional and national policy.

We took ethics as the lens through which we developed guidance for interventions against violence. The challenge was that intervention models should not drift into arbitrariness such as "Do what you think is right in your context" whilst recognising the tensions that unavoidably arise in the course of interventions. This was precisely what our empirical findings and the art work revealed. This led us to describe what ethical practice in interventions needs to take into account, should reflect on or achieve, rather than what

or how this should be done. In relation to the issues of minority and majority backgrounds we drew on histories of under and over intervention within certain minority/migrant communities, on uncertainties among practitioners as to whether they should work with cases involving women/children/families from minority/migrant backgrounds in the same way, and, for some victim-survivors, on encounters with explicit and implicit racism. Connecting everything we had learnt was the basis for a first draft of the ethical foundations written by two of the team: one with expertise in violence against women and one in child abuse, and from countries with different foundations for intervention. Feedback from other team members lent more clarity and clarification.

Thinking through the lens of cultural encounters and the diversity of origins and cultures that are present in Europe in the 21st century led us to conclude that it is not possible for any professional to know what the meanings or consequences of intervention might be for each minority community, let alone all individuals within any community: What is termed 'cultural competence' is not achievable through training or other accepted forms of professional knowledge creation. Rather we invite professionals to be curious about what they do not and cannot know in advance, to engage with women, young people and families as knowers, to learn what their situations are like and what differences or belongings play a role in their lives. This offers a route to respectful engagement, ways of crafting interventions that can accommodate difference whilst ensuring equality of protection and support.

Our transnational foundations for ethical practice in interventions, as published in 2016, are a balancing act. Whilst we welcome the emergence of support 'by and for' those who have been harmed by violence, have been marginalised or minoritised, we simultaneously want all professionals to have firmer ground on which to think and work, to be reflexive, open to knowing more and differently.