

Violence Against Women Does Not Stop After the Victim Escapes

At the beginning of this week, we had a special day. Most of us have probably not realized it. But November the 25th was the [International Day for the elimination of Violence against women](#). I figured this was a good opportunity to once again deliberate on the issue.



Photo by MART PRODUCTION via [Pexels](#)

It was some time last year when I first wrote about Carla and her [lonely battle to win back her son](#).

Not much has changed since then. Germany still does not give a flying f*ck about the Istanbul convention.

Carla has managed to move to another city. She now lives a bit closer to her son. But this has also raised the potential threat from her violent ex exponentially.

So far, her hopes of spending more time with her child have not materialized. It has now been three months since she saw him the last time. Every time she does get to spend time with him, she struggles. Because the father of the child does everything he can to keep a cloud over the true life story of her child. And there is nobody, who wants to fight for the right of the child to see his mother.

So, Carla soldiers on. Alone.

When It Comes to Violence Against Women, We Ask the Wrong Questions

Whenever we talk about violence against women, one question always pops up. "Why didn't the victim leave sooner?" Nearly every woman, who fled from a violent ex has received this question.

The urge to ask this question is understandable. But that does not mean that it is the right question. It is the wrong question for many reasons. First, it is very telling, that we confront the victim with questions. We could, after all, also choose to ask the men, who perpetrate violence against women, why they do it.

Yet, it is still worthwhile to shed some light on this question. Carla's story can give us some decent answers.

We often assume that the victims can start over with life when they leave a violent ex-partner. In movies and TV shows, the story usually ends when the woman goes to a shelter or moves to a new city.

In practice, however, this is seldom the reality. Especially, when there are children in the mix. Escaping to a women's shelter is only the beginning.

Women who go to a shelter together with their children are often accused of kidnapping. The victims receive no credibility. Instead, they are met with doubts about whether any violence has taken place at all. Family courts often argue that the father was only violent against the woman, and not the child. There is plenty of research on how children get traumatized by violence. Even, when they merely witness it.

The Perpetrators Rarely Give Up

There is a good reason, why women's shelters are anonymous. In most cases, the violence against women does not end when the victims escape. The men, who commit the violence do not just give up. They stalk their victims. And they do everything they can to find and trace their victims, so they can continue to control them.

Carla had to stay in multiple shelters. Her ex-partner kept finding her. Sometimes he hired others to spy on her. Other times he hid surveillance devices in toys that he would pass on to the child. Men like these do not stop at anything. They even use their own children as an instrument to control and stalk their victims.

Even today, Carla is living in fear about what her violent ex-partner might do to her if he finds her. The few times she sees her son, she witnesses the lies that the father tells the child. How he keeps her son in the dark about what really happened.

Violence Against Women Leaves Deep Psychological Scars in Its Victims

Even when the threat has passed, the fight is not over. Most victims struggle with building relationships, even platonic ones. Their trust in others has been broken. And even small external stimuli can cause severe anxiety attacks.

This is not only a struggle for the victims themselves. Also, their loved ones have to bear a huge psychological burden. Dealing with this takes years of therapy, introspection and patience. From everyone involved. Even friends and family members of the victims. Every trip, every party, and every date can become a huge stress test.

Also in Carla's case, her journey did not end in the shelter. Instead, it was the first step of a much longer odyssey with an unknown destination.

Carla's story is not unique. Most women, who flee from violent relationships experience similar struggles. They know deep down inside what awaits them, if they try to leave. That is why many wait so long to make the jump.

The Victims of Violence Against Women Often Experience Distrust

Even authorities and family courts perpetuate the violence against women. They do not believe their victims. They assign bogus diagnoses like PAS to the victims. Especially when they mention the violence during the trial.

They blatantly ignore security concerns. Public servants pass on the victim's hidden addresses to the perpetrators.

Child protective services reframe cases where violence is involved as "high conflict". By doing so, they blame the victim for the violence that they encountered.

There is outrageous ignorance and incompetence among authorities and courts about this issue. There is no knowledge or understanding of the dynamics of violent relationships. The case workers believe every lie of the perpetrators and blame the victims. They attempt to protect the children. Instead, they become willing henchmen of the perpetrators.

I have experienced quite a bit during my work with children and youngsters. This includes social workers who never heard about the Children's Rights Convention. Let alone that the state they serve has ratified it.

We are very far away from eradicating violence against women. We need to keep focusing on the issue. And we should stop asking the wrong questions. How about we stop asking the victims why they didn't leave? How about we start asking the perpetrators, why they commit violence against women?