

ICSP – Conference Strasbourg Workshop «Shared Parenting and Family violence»

Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen, my Name is Oliver Hunziker, I am from Switzerland.

I have been working in the field of Shared Parenting for almost 15 years now. In this time, I have been involved in several major changes in the Swiss Family Law, as a member of Civil Society but also as an expert in the field.

As you can see, I am involved in several institutions.

I would like to talk to you about the other side of the story. As founder and president of the first shelter for male victims of domestic violence, I do this very often, actually this is the second time this week already.

*****Let me state clearly, that I support all efforts to protect women from violence. My only point is, to claim this protection for all victims, no matter what gender they have. Our organizations have supported the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in Switzerland, ever since it came up.

***Is the Istanbul-Convention about violence against women?**

Yes – and yet no. Let me show you a few points to start with.

Already in the title, it is written, that this convention is about violence against women, AND domestic violence. As you can see, in this second part, there is no gender mentioned. This is because the Council has clearly realized, that everybody can become a victim of domestic violence, this is not related to gender.

*****Here are a few more extracts from the convention. On page six, men as victims are even mentioned.

And – very important: Children are always victims of domestic violence, no matter whether they're involved directly or not. And well-understood – children of both sex obviously.

On page 7, the convention states, that it should be applied to ALL VICTIMS of domestic violence, and on page 8, it clarifies again, that “victims” shall mean ANY natural person.

***This clarification is very important. When we talk about family violence, we should never forget, that violence can be initiated by any of the parents.**

***You might wonder, why I am explaining this, and what it has to do with Shared Parenting.**

The link is very simple – I am sure, we all agree, that a violent parent should not be allowed to have the kids – true? Now what would that mean in a case of a violent mother? Just think about it, and try to imagine, how authorities would deal with such a situation in your country. You will most likely find the mistake immediately.

Shared Parenting is the basic principle of parenthood. Every child has two parents, hopefully the child knows them both. This concept is meant as a four-eyes-construct, if one parent fails, the other can correct.

So, it makes a lot of sense, to continue that concept after separation and divorce. If both parents are capable and willing to care for their children, this should be the solution, I am absolutely convinced.

But what means “capable”? Would someone who has been violent in the past be considered to be capable? You might answer NO, and I would mostly agree with you. When we talk about domestic violence, we all have pictures of beaten women in our head. We tend to forget, that there are all sorts of domestic violence. And very important – there might be violence because of the separation and not the other way around.

You might say, that this is not important, and that these are singular cases. We have dealt with this for years and meanwhile, official figures support our point of view. In Switzerland, we can clearly say that at least every 5th victim of domestic violence is male.

*Let's have a look at some figures. There are several studies worldwide, claiming that the share of domestic violence by gender could be almost equal. Obviously based on field studies. From another point of view, it seems to be obvious, that humans can be violent, or using violence to gaing their goals, and this is clearly independent from the respective sex.

All these figures are available at the federal office of statistics in Switzerland. They're based on police-reports. Unfortunately, the original statistics are all in german, so I have modified the titles, but not the figures.

This first table is a list of different forms of violence, all from domestic violence.

As you can see, the share of male victims can be very different, according to different forms of violence.

*The next table shows the different figures of victims by gender. As you can see, for almost 10 years now, the share of male victims is very stable around 20%. Remember, these are proven figures from the police. Now, you have to remember what I asked you before. Can you imagine, how often, the police will really confirm a man to be the victim? Traditional role models, as well as alleged inherent necessities often lead to so called "pragmatical" decisions when it comes to police operations in domestic violence. The same story is happening when men are claiming to be victims towards public consulting places. Therefore, the so-called Dunkelfeld could be rather high, which suspects that the 20% are probably way to low and the 50% reported by international studies could be quite realistic.

*And here one more last table, to show the relation of violence against children, showed by gender and age of the accused parent. As you can see, in the most involved groups (from 18 – 49) there is a relevant share of female accused parents, up to 42%.

Shouldn't we consider these figures when deciding about where kids should live?

So, to decide about Shared Parenting, in cases of domestic violence, a distinct clarification has to be taken, to find out, what level of violence was raised by whom.

Based on that clarification, decisions about whether or not to allow shared parenting can be taken.

But that subject will be discussed in the speech of Mr. Edward Kruk later on I believe.

Just think about what it would mean, if in a case of domestic violence, kids would have to remain with her mother although she was the aggressor. These kids would lose any four-eyes-protection from their father, a real tragedy but not unlikely today.

*So – I am coming back on my conclusions:

Violence is not all-male but human!

We need strategies to cope with domestic violence, no matter of gender.

We need to have solutions for victims of domestic violence, no matter of gender.

Fighting against violence on women is not enough!

*In Switzerland – we founded the shelter for male victims of domestic violence back in 2009.

Today we run three houses in different regions.

Basically the shelter is working like a women-shelter – men can come and live there for a certain time. And they can take their children with them, if they have custody.

The name of the Shelter is ZwüscheHalt – it means “stopover” – a place where men can calm down and figure out, how to carry on.

*Just a few figures about something that “officially” does not really exist – male victims of domestic violence. As you can see, there are quite a few of those inexistent humans.

*Coming back to the beginning – the Istanbul Convention.

Violence should be fought at in all forms. We need to develop forms, that allow us, to protect all victims of violence.

Especially in the area of domestic violence, we should never forget about the involved children and we need to be able to find wise decisions, based on evidence, not on role models.

Only once we accept, that violence can occur from both sexes, we will be able to find valid conclusions and methods to really fight all kind of domestic violence - together and substantially.

Thank you.