

Victimology and Domestic Violence

Seven dimensions of high conflict divorce as stepping stones for a model on de-escalation. Reflection and international discussion

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High conflict divorce and breaking up families is a growing and costly problem in the western world, especially since the norm- of co-parenting after divorce is operant in several countries (Dijkstra, 2014; Jeppesen-De Boer, 2014). Judges in family courts see ex-partners again and again in juridical procedures on custody. Sometimes the struggle after the marriage continues longer than the relationship between the former couple. Sometimes the relationship between the partners is broken, but the violence continues. Some cases even lead to fatal abuse (Dijkstra en Verhoeven, 2014). How to deal with these complex cases? In the Netherlands in May 2014 the authors cooperated in a governmental supported working conference, www.uitdehoudgreep.nl to find interdisciplinary dialogue in this multifaceted subject and reframe the problem. High conflict divorce, so we argued, is not one single phenomenon but exists of different patterns which need to be analyzed in-depth. There is no one size fits all approach possible. De-escalation needs to be the focal point in treating these complex cases. Key to this issue is the question when and how a high conflict divorce case can return into a divorce case again in which relationships are normalized and what creates a high conflict case, with a special focus on (sexual) child abuse and partner violence prior to the divorce (Lünemann, Hermens & Roeleveld, 2012).

In this presentation we continue our discussion on an international basis and address questions like: What role can restorative justice (Wolthuis, 2012) play in this particular field and what are limitations? How could a combination judge be helpful? When is single parent custody indicated? How can we support youngsters and children? We will show that a high conflict divorce case is easily framed one-sided which can easily lead to professional bias, repeated mistakes and angry ex-partners. To get a more balanced framework we present seven interrelated dimensions of high conflict divorce are explored based on: time, conflict, relationships, violence and (sexual) abuse, systems, expertise, cooperation and communication. These dimensions are related to critical questions, key-issues and addressed to different professional contexts. Together with the audience and based on a concrete case we discuss the possibilities of developing interagency cooperation, shared values and mind

sets on the dimensions, the language used and the tools needed. This with the aim to turn escalation into a de-escalating professional repertoire and to learn together. Therefore we need to stimulate awareness on the goal of dealing with the complex issue in a differentiating way. With a more profound analysis we can study alleys for solutions on an international basis. We prevent swing doors and costly procedures when we apply tailored interventions. One of them is certainly the expertise to deal with divorce cases in which prior and continuous violence took place.

References

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