

## **Raising awareness of domestic violence in the medical sector: Kick-off of the European-wide project VIPROM in Muenster in Germany**



Group picture of the consortium of the EU project VIPROM: 23 participants participated at the kick-off meeting on protection of victims of domestic violence in medicine at the University of Muenster in Germany. (Photo: WWU / Erk Wibberg)

Most people have one thing in common: they visit a primary care physician, a dentist and many also see a gynecologist/obstetrician. Those working in the medical sector therefore often meet victims of domestic violence - but many do not feel competent enough to ask about domestic violence or do not have enough knowledge to identify victims and do not know how to help victims in a targeted way. The three-year project "Victim Protection in Medicine" (VIPROM) aims to change this: Funded by the European Union with 1.6 million euros, partners from Sweden, Austria, Italy, Greece and Germany are jointly developing approaches to strengthen the topic in the medical curricula in the long term. The project is coordinated by Bettina Pfleiderer, Professor at the Medical Faculty of the University of Münster in Germany. She was organising the kick-off meeting of the international project at the beginning of March.

Domestic violence includes both, physical and psychological abuse of power in a relationship in a close personal environment. It can affect all social groups, whether women, men, children or disabled persons. Professionals know: only few victims turn to the police due to fear - and many do not seek help elsewhere. "This is where we, the medical sector, come into play," says Bettina Pfleiderer, "Statistically, we, in the medical sector, see victims at least once a day - often we are the only first line responders. If we fail to recognise the symptoms of violence, we leave victims alone."

Medical professionals need to be prepared better for this important, yet challenging task by training. In developing new teaching strategies and formats as well as teaching materials, VIPROM follows two approaches: "On the one hand, we want to develop innovative training simulations for the different groups of first line responders, and on the other hand, initiate programmes for teachers who lead the training sessions," says Bettina Pfleiderer. In addition to general information on domestic violence, communication strategies and risk factors, the project focuses exemplarily on the fields of surgery, gynecology and psychiatry/psychosomatics. While professionals working in surgery are confronted with serious physical injuries, for example in the emergency room, pregnancies are a risk factor for victims of domestic violence that can escalate the abuse. Many victims who experience psychological domestic violence have no external injuries, but they are no less traumatised and can develop for example depression. After three years of development, evaluation and

optimisation under the umbrella of VIPROM, the concepts should result to a compulsory curriculum in the long term.

The partners will use and expand materials on domestic violence provided by the training platform of the previous EU project IMPROVDA ([www.training.improvoa.eu](http://www.training.improvoa.eu)) to tailor the trainings to the different stakeholder groups of VIPROM (midwives, nurses, physicians, dentists, medical and dental students) and adapt them to the national context, too. "Each partner can enrich the range of results through its particular strengths," Bettina Pfleiderer emphasises. "We in Münster, for example, have a lot of experience with the use of simulation patients in the teaching of medical students."