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Title

Embedded social workers within police organizations in France and Finland

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Abstract

This article examines police-social work partnerships in addressing domestic violence through the embedded social worker type of arrangement in France and Finland. Using comparative analysis, we explore how organizational and institutional factors promote effective collaboration, focusing on trust-building and information exchange. Our findings from qualitative interviews and document analysis indicate that successful collaboration hinges on formal organizational structures that support operations while ensuring professional autonomy. Such conditions foster mutual trust, crucial for sharing sensitive information without breaching confidentiality or ethical norms. We find that excessive oversight leads to mistrust and information withholding. Additionally, our analysis reveals that the effectiveness of these collaborations varies by national context due to differing public pressures and policy priorities. In France, increased attention to domestic violence has paradoxically weakened partnerships by curtailing social workers' autonomy.

In Finland, with less emphasis on domestic violence, these issues have become a lower priority, altering the focus of collaboration.

Introduction

Police-social work partnership has increasingly become a pivotal aspect of the strategies deployed to enhance the support extended to victims of domestic violence (DV). This form of cooperative engagement traces its origins to the 1920s, mirroring a burgeoning recognition of the challenges police officers routinely encounter in managing individuals, including DV victims, who could benefit from the interventions offered by social services (Linhorst et al., 2022; Patterson and Swan, 2019). It has long been acknowledged that referring such individuals to pertinent social services constitutes an integral component of the police's response to DV incidents (Patterson, 2022).

Police personnel are often ill-equipped in terms of time, resources, and expertise to deliver the necessary support services to DV victims with multifaceted needs. The occupational culture within police departments tends to lead officers to view tasks associated with social work as outside their purview, consequently preferring to transfer such responsibilities to social workers (Bar-On, 1995).

The development of police-social work collaborations gained substantial momentum in the United States during the 1970s, and from the 2000s onwards in Europe. These collaborations have encompassed a broad spectrum of organizational structures, roles, and practices, raising questions about effective organizational models for such partnerships.

This article aims to broaden the examination of police-social work collaboration in addressing domestic violence beyond the Anglophone sphere. We explore the formal structures and everyday operations of a specific model of collaboration that was developed in France and Finland—the “embedded social worker”—and assess its impact on fostering trust and enabling information sharing between police officers and social workers.

Through semi-structured interviews with participants from both countries, our empirical case studies seek to demonstrate how structured organizational frameworks, combined with adequate levels of professional autonomy, can strengthen collaboration, facilitate adaptable information sharing, and cultivate trust between the police and social work sectors, while balancing professional confidentiality and the interests of the clients. In addition to organizational frameworks, the larger societal and political context shapes the trajectory of professional collaboration. Divergences in the patterns of collaboration between the police and social work in France and Finland are attributable to distinctive public pressures and agenda setting for the two professions. Our

research uses a comparative approach to underscore the critical role of national context in influencing the framework and success of collaborative efforts.

State of the art

Background on police-social work relations

Today, it has become commonplace for police and social agencies to collaborate on DV issues (Patterson, 2022; Patterson and Swan, 2019). Forming police-social work partnerships is considered advantageous for multiple reasons: victims benefit from better protection and guidance (Messing et al., 2015), they receive a more comprehensive range of support services, with reduced access times (Corcoran et al., 2001, p. 397; Lane et al., 2004); information and knowledge are better shared between professionals, so that they take more applicable, appropriate and proportionate decisions (Humphreys et al., 2018, p.169; Shorrocks et al., 2020, p.16), which facilitates the achievement of professional goals for both entities.

To make sense of the diversity of police-social work arrangements, we propose a typology based on Linhorst et al. (2022)'s systematic review of 164 studies. We classify types of collaborations based on whether the social worker is employed by the police, or by another entity, and whether the social worker works in the police station, or not (table 1).

	Social worker employed by the police	Social worker employed by another entity
Social worker at the police station (“direct service team” in Linhorst et al. [2022]’s typology)	“Police social worker” (Patterson, 2022)	“Embedded social worker” (our case studies)
Social worker operating from outside the police station	N/A	“Task forces, planning boards or council” and “referrals” (in Linhorst et al. [2022]’s typology)

Table 1. Typology of police-social work arrangements (authors’ elaboration)

Alamo and Ornelas (2021) qualify as “police social workers” all social workers who take part in a police-social work partnership, regardless of their employer or workplace. But, in line with Patterson (2022), we prefer to restrict the use of this term to social workers employed by a police agency. To refer to the social workers examined in this study, we use the term “embedded social workers.” These personnel work at the police station, in direct contact with police officers, but they are not employed by the law enforcement agency. Their position is funded by a social service agency or by local government. As a consequence, the division of labor between social workers and police officers may be more problematic than in other types of arrangements. In France and Finland, there are other kinds of police-social work partnerships than embedded social workers, such as inter-agency committees for

coordinating DV policies or inter-professional taskforces to assess the risk faced by victims or the threat posed by perpetrators. We are not examining these other forms of partnership in this article.

Police-social work partnerships, like any inter-agency collaboration, inevitably entail a number of difficulties, in particular tensions caused by divergent professional cultures among the participants. As a matter of fact, functional goals, occupational cultures and professional perspectives of police officers and social workers are often at odds (Bar-On, 1995; Holdaway, 1986; Johnson et al., 1994), especially regarding their notions of quality of communication, openness and time scale of information sharing, and discussion needed to prepare decisions (Lardner, 1992, p.220-221). They generally don't have the same attitudes towards victims of domestic violence, police officers focusing more on public safety and law enforcement, while social workers giving greater importance to victims' care, wellbeing, autonomy and consent (Slaght and Hamilton, 2005, p.58).

Nevertheless, several studies show that police and social workers generally manage to cooperate in a way that avoids confusion of roles, preserves their professional integrity, and provides quality services for victims (Dutton et al., 2019; Filstad, Jakobsen and Filstad, 2020).

A key lesson from the US-based literature is that police officers seem overall more satisfied with police-social work collaborations than social workers (Curtis and Lutkus, 1985, p. 359; Giacomazzi and Smithey, 2001, p. 114; Sudderth, 2006, p. 343), for whom ethical and deontological challenges in working with the police are more salient. Social workers are often concerned that working with police officers carries the risk of giving priority to punitive and security-oriented responses over more preventive and therapeutic ones. A key area in which these concerns play out is the exchange of information.

Information sharing in professional collaboration

Social workers' reluctance to share information with police officers is one of the main problems in cooperation (Cole, 2018, p. 2696; Michaels and Treger, 1973, p. 68-69), and also one that is perhaps under-researched, as Patterson (2022, p.76-78) points out. Embedded social workers often act as information broker between victims, police officers and various support services in the social and health sectors. Consequently, information sharing that is sufficiently sustained, consistent and smooth is the most critical dimension to achieving successful collaboration (Cooper et al., 2008; p. 300-301). As shown by Buchbinder and Eisikovits, professional partnerships can involve different levels of information sharing, from formally exchanging the minimum information needed to achieve basic coordination of separate interventions, to an ongoing, extensive and largely informal communication that feeds into shared decision-making in the course of joint activities. The lack of information sharing and communication gaps are major barriers to meaningful collaboration, as it results in limited understandings of respective roles,

unrealistic mutual expectations, which in turn lead to friction, reciprocal distrust, and overall disenchantment (Buchbinder and Eisikovits, 2008, p.5-7).

A key limitation to information sharing comes from legal, professional and organizational regulations to protect confidentiality and privacy that are different for both social workers and police officers (Sudderth, 2006, p.343). In fact, Cole's qualitative study of 79 professionals involved in Sexual Assault Response Teams revealed that social workers face greater challenges – and dissatisfaction – than police officers in circulating information due to stricter confidentiality requirements. This results in social workers being less likely to share information with police, leading to perceptions of non-reciprocity and frustration among officers. Social workers recognize this frustration, but see it as a misunderstanding or disrespect of their professional obligations by the police. The study suggests that formal measures like conflict resolution procedures and regular inter-professional meetings are necessary to address these tensions (Cole, 2011, p.370; Cole, 2018, p.2696-2697; see also Sudderth, 2006, p. 347).

Interestingly, social workers who have extensive experience of collaborating with the police, who are well integrated into the police setting, and who work in teams are more likely to unofficially disclose confidential information to police officers, especially when they feel it is necessary to provide an efficient intervention (Curtis and Lutkus, 1985, p.358). This suggests that information sharing may be facilitated or hindered by the organizational framework in which the collaboration takes place.

Enabling collaboration by organizing and formalizing it

Research shows that the lack of formalized framework is an obstacle to sustainable collaboration. Some limited and short term cooperation can be established on an informal, interpersonal and ad hoc basis, but in the absence of detailed procedural directives defining the relationship between police officers and social workers, these arrangements are unstable, dependent on individuals, continually called into question, fraught with tensions, prone to legal transgressions, ineffective, and tend to falter quickly (Buchbinder and Eisikovits, 2008, p. 8-9). Diemer et al.'s study of 29 partnerships point out that the main inhibitors of collaboration are the lack of understanding of legitimate information sharing protocols, the lack of formal agreements and the lack of tightly responsive processes between involved professionals and agencies (Diemer et al., 2015, p.17). As Sudderth suggests, a main cause of conflict within partnerships lies in incompatible legal constraints that prevent the various professionals from harmonizing their respective operating standards, leading to “clash of protocols” (2006, p.342).

Research also shows that the establishment of an effective partnership depends upon formalizing a variety of practices and processes, such as establishing a clear division of roles and responsibilities, integrated management and information systems, shared and centralized leadership, jointly agreed procedures, predetermined referral pathways and feedback loops, regular

review of professionals' working practices to ensure their adherence to formalized standards (Allen et al., 2008, p. 69-70; Allen et al., 2013, p. 10; Cole, 2018, p.2696; Diemer et al., 2015; Greeson and Campbell, 2015, p.2480; Humphreys et al., 2018, p.171; Shorrocks et al., 2020). One of the main advantages of formalization is that it supports the systematization of enhanced professional practices and tools (Hatten and Moore, 2010, p.22-23). Another benefit is that formalization provides stability into working practices in partnerships characterized by a high turnover of the professionals involved (Sudderth, 2006, p.348). Humphreys et al. have recognized the importance of "involvement and support of managers at different tiers in the organization as a critical element of the collaborative process" (2018, p.170).

Our article aims to deepen our understanding of how organizing and formalizing police-social work partnerships, especially regarding information sharing, contributes to building relationships between police officers and embedded social workers. We show that the interplay between these variables depends on factors that have received little attention in the literature, such as the autonomy allowed to participants and wider political demands for prioritizing victim safety (over their wellbeing) coming from outside the partnerships. We pursue this objective through qualitative interviews with police commanders, frontline officers and social workers, as well as magistrates and personnel from victim-support NGOs.

Methods and study sites

Our paper draws on research carried out in the European Research and Innovation Horizon projects IMPRODOVA (2018-2022) (<https://improdova.eu/>) and IMPROVE (2023-2025) (<https://www.improve-horizon.eu/>) examining the frontline response to domestic violence in eight countries. One of the objectives of these projects was to assess inter-agency collaboration. This article compares France and Finland, which are two relatively understudied countries in the Anglophone literature on police-social worker relations.

A qualitative study

Given the exploratory aspect of studying interprofessional collaborations in two distinct national contexts, qualitative methods enable the identification and analysis of emergent themes and patterns that may not be apparent through quantitative surveys. Qualitative approaches allow for understanding the institutional and organizational contexts within which these collaborations occur, which is essential when comparing practices and the implementation of policies across different countries. Qualitative data also capture the perspectives and experiences of the individuals involved – police officers, social workers, and other stakeholders – providing insights into their perceptions, challenges, and motivations.

The purposive sampling strategy and the interview guide were designed with a comparison in mind. Because IMPRODOVA and IMPROVE projects include

law enforcement agencies as project partners in each country, access to police personnel and social workers working with police officers was facilitated. The limitation in access concerns health professionals in France, which is why we focus the analysis on police-social worker relations. Our research protocol was approved by the ethical boards of our respective universities, and participants in the research provided informed consent.

In Finland, the interviews were conducted in two different locations during 2019: in one medium-sized city surrounded by a large rural area, and in one large city, with a total of 24 interviews with 19 police officers and 2 social workers and 2 healthcare professionals working in multi-professional teams. In France, the interviews were carried out in a single area, the overseas region of Reunion Island – one of the French territories most affected by domestic violence, and one where the public response is most developed – but at two different times: 2019 (53 interviews) and 2023 (34 interviews, with different respondents, except for 4 social workers who were re-interviewed). There are 29 police officers and 9 embedded social workers among the respondents, the others being various stakeholders with whom embedded social workers interact on a regular basis (7 members of the prosecutor's office, 26 victim support NGOs, 6 healthcare professionals, 10 local government officials). The sampling strategy enabled an analysis of the local consequences of policy change.

In both cases, the interviews were semi-structured, with questions about individual and organizational work practices on domestic violence, collaboration (or not) with other professions, and evaluation of the frontline response to DV. Data was thematically coded. Data analysis occurred in three steps. First, each country team analyzed their own findings with broad thematic directions (what seemed to work and what didn't, interagency collaboration) and inductively. Second, the teams met to discuss their findings, and elaborated a template for the analysis of each country, based on emergent findings, that would allow for systematic comparison. Third, the French and Finnish teams reanalyzed their data and conducted additional documentary research to answer the research questions which had emerged from the comparative analysis.

Study sites: The similar rise of partnerships in France and Finland

The development of embedded social workers is remarkably similar in France and Finland. In both countries, the first initiatives of this kind were launched as local experiments. In Finland, in 1977, a social worker was assigned at the sobering facility for intoxicated clients in the police station of Lahti, a medium-sized city about 100 km from Helsinki. During the 1980s, other Finnish police departments followed the Lahti example (Heino et al., 2005). In France, the first attempt at integrating social services to a police station was carried out in Chartres (also about 100 km from the capital) between 1986 and 1989. The experiment failed because many social workers in the area refused to cooperate with the police. Another experiment began in Limoges in 1991, which proved more successful. This success was achieved through better

organization and governance of the partnership provided by an inter-agency coordinating committee and better adaptation of the collaborative arrangement to social workers' ethical constraints (Biezanek et al., 2008, p. 13). These early local initiatives set the groundwork for the formulation of national policies in both countries during the 2000s.

In France, the model of embedded social workers gained momentum as the national DV policy was intensified following widespread public outcry over a notorious fatal domestic violence case in 2003 (the death of a famous actress at the hands of her partner, a famous singer). This increased awareness about the issue of lethal violence, along with a surge in initiatives and recommendations at the European level, catalyzed the launch of the first comprehensive, inter-sectoral national strategy to tackle gender-based violence in 2005. The model was gradually defined through a series of talks from 2002 to 2006 which involved law enforcement agencies, the state authorities, NGOs and the national representatives of embedded social workers. It led to the formalization of a typical partnership: a social worker embedded in a police station and funded by a local government or a local NGO (Biezanek et al., 2008, p. 56). This formalization became enshrined in a law in 2007. Since then, every new national plan to combat violence against women and to prevent delinquency emphasizes the importance of embedded social workers, the number of which increased from 11 in 2005, to 164 in 2012, 261 in 2018 and 450 in 2023. 94% of embedded social workers are female and 80% have an undergraduate degree in social work (IGA, 2021).

In Finland, the “Anchor model” of embedded social workers was pioneered in 2004 by local authorities in Hämeenlinna. The initial Anchor team was formed within a police station, receiving financial support from the local government (Kaakinen et al., 2022; Ministry of the Interior, 2023). This model expanded from 2009 to 2012 in the Tavastia Proper region through a project managed by a private social sector company. The program aimed to establish a multidisciplinary team in each municipality, comprised of a police officer, a social worker, a youth service worker, and a psychiatric nurse (Kinnunen et al., 2012; Ministry of the Interior, 2013, p. 12). Similar to the French approach, this system was standardized through a national policy, under the Internal Security Program named ‘Safer Tomorrow’ (Ministry of the Interior, 2012). However, unlike the French focus on domestic violence, the Finnish initiative prioritized the prevention of juvenile violence as the impetus for adopting and spreading the model.

In 2013, the significance of the Anchor model was underscored by the Finnish Government’s Resolution on the Strategy to Combat Organized Crime, which aimed to curtail the influence of serious organized crime groups. A major goal of this strategy was to prevent youths from entering these groups, with the Anchor teams playing a crucial role in preventing young people from becoming marginalized and succumbing to criminal paths (Ministry of the Interior, 2013).

Currently, there are 40 Anchor Teams across Finland. Their primary function is to facilitate information exchange among these diverse frontline responders (Bradley et al., 2020). The local police department pays the costs for the police in the Anchor team. The Wellbeing service county pays the costs of a social worker and the nurse. These different professionals work together on the premises of the police department.

This overview of the development of the cooperation between the police and social work around the issue of domestic violence in France and Finland tells a comparable story of local experiments from the 1980s which were progressively formalized into a national policy during the 2000s. There is a long period of local experimentation and consultation between stakeholders that enabled them to identify common objectives, forms of organization and suitable operating methods. This *bottom-up* co-construction process gives rise to a doctrine for implementing the system. In both countries, formal rules and guidelines leave considerable scope for local adaptations and building informal norms and practices among the professionals involved.

Embedded social workers at work in France and Finland

In terms of the services they provide, French and Finnish social workers are very similar. Police refer domestic violence victims to the embedded social worker, who then proceeds to connect the victims with relevant support services. In both countries, social workers also spend a substantial amount of time in building and maintaining networks with internal and external stakeholders. The main difference between France and Finland is that Finnish social workers work in teams with police officers (the “teams” model), going on calls together, while French social workers have a separate office within the police station (the “coordinated” model).

In France, a typical embedded social worker handles around 400 cases per year. Once referred a victim, they explain the legal process to the victim, and encourage her to file a complaint. They may also physically accompany the victim to a police interview (Biezanek et al., 2008, p. 21), and help with various legal issues, such as applying for legal aid and initiating divorce proceedings. They also help the victim with applying for social benefits and finding an accommodation, and refer the victim to specialized agencies. In principle, embedded social workers are not directly involved in assessing the seriousness of the violence and the danger to the victim (IGA, 2021, p. 29). However, they play an important role in assessing the situation of children. Their ability to detect new victims in need of support depends on how integrated they are into the host police department.

The task of Finnish Anchor teams is not solely focused on domestic violence; in fact, taking care of DV victims represents only about 30% of Anchor teams’ workload (Bradley et al., 2020). Most clients are reported to the Anchor teams through a child welfare notification. Some are referred by a police officer, often because the threshold for recording a criminal report has not been exceeded, but the police have concerns for the client. In some police

departments, the Anchor teams are proactive in trying to identify potential DV victims by searching through the records of emergency calls. Anchor teams' social workers have other tasks and duties outside the Anchor work, such as working with the young and emergency social services during the police house calls (Liimatainen and Rantaeskola, 2022). However, when the security and wellbeing of a minor is at risk, Anchor teams have more latitude to coerce the clients in the children's best interest (Bradley et al., 2020). When they work with clients, their task is to support victims, assess their needs and refer them to relevant social services, such as child protection, family assistance, support to the elderly, and socio-psychological care. Several meetings can be arranged with the victim and with members of her family. Anchor teams have difficulties managing uncooperative childless adults, because their participation with Anchor teams is voluntary.

Findings

France and Finland share remarkably similar trajectories in the development of police-social worker partnerships, making the two cases highly comparable. They have similar issues regarding information sharing. They differ in terms of how the collaboration is organized, and, as we will see, whether domestic violence becomes a top policy priority. We leverage these differences to ascertain the effect of specific organizational and institutional factors in facilitating collaboration.

Problem of information sharing: the need for personal relations and trust

In both countries, information sharing is a sensitive topic because of confidentiality regulations, especially in the context of domestic violence. Social workers have strict professional rules preventing them from sharing information about their clients, and police officers have similar duties towards confidentiality within the legal framework of criminal investigation.

In France, duties towards confidentiality are made more complex by the existence of exceptions. For instance, social workers are required by law to inform the prosecutor of situations of immediate physical danger, and disclosing information may be justified if done in the "best interest" of children. In the case of adults, social workers need the victim's consent (Biezanek et al., 2008). Of course, the definition of what constitutes a serious threat to the victim or the best interest of children is often open to interpretation, which gives to the social worker a feeling of legal uncertainty and room for discretion.

In Finland, sharing information is also a sensitive issue for the social workers, for the same reasons as in France. Officially, the exchange of information between professionals is justified only when legally authorized. However, adults can give their consent for the police and social workers to exchange personal data. If the DV case involves under-age children, the exchange of information is legitimate when it is necessary for the promotion of the best interest of a child. Indeed, all authorities have to make a child welfare

notification to social services if they are concerned about the minor. If the incident involves a suspected crime, authorities must report the case also to the police (Ministry of the Interior, 2023, pp. 16–19).

Thus, in both countries, the regulations around confidentiality are similar, and result in the same problem. Interviewees understand that information exchange between different agencies and professionals belong to a moral and legal gray zone.

In France, embedded social workers often possess case specific information that can be relevant for crime investigators or magistrates. Such information may concern, for instance, the situation of the children or vulnerable adults, and the existence of addiction or mental problems. Police officers sometimes appreciate an opportunity to discuss informally with the social worker about a complex situation and to compare different viewpoints on the case (Biezanek et al., 2008, p. 23).

“The information I share with the police concerns the victim’s family and social environment, the elements of danger I have identified, and the presence of children affected by domestic violence. I give them my opinion on the victim’s ability to preserve her own safety, and not return to live with the perpetrator of the violence. If the family is being monitored by social services and child welfare, I inform the police of that.” (IS-COM-974-2023-1, social worker, France)

The embedded social worker can also warn the police if she has spotted signs of danger missed by the police. Because of the ambiguities surrounding the obligation of professional confidentiality, social workers may prefer informal interaction when passing on this kind of information. Moreover, they prefer to share such information only with those police officers whom they can trust. This may bring social workers in a gray zone, where rights to disclose and receive information cannot be defined exactly.

“Sometimes, the victim doesn’t bring certain important information to the attention of the police, even though it’s to his or her detriment. I then try to ensure that the police have the missing information, without harming the victim. There’s a part of what victims tell me that I’m not allowed to share with the police, as it’s a matter of confidentiality. I must be careful what I say to the police, even when we have informal exchanges. On occasion, police officers have used information in their procedures that I had given them, but that I didn’t want to appear. I’ve had to tell them to be careful. Now they ask me whether or not they can mention in their reports the information I’ve passed on to them.” (IS-COM-974-2023-1, social worker, France)

The same happens in Finland. Professionals consider data protection legislation difficult to apply, and are often uncertain about what is allowed and what is forbidden. Moreover, information sharing is regarded as difficult

because the current information systems do not support self-initiated and prompt disclosure of information as every agency is using their own data system to record information (Kurvinen et al., 2023). These observations imply that ambiguous formal framework and insufficient technology can impede collaboration and information exchange. A social worker with long work experience in an Anchor team emphasized that for good cooperation it is essential that both the social workers and the police officers understand that the sharing of information must also be beneficial for the client's well-being, which undoubtedly takes precedence over strict interpretation of confidentiality regulations.

“[...] we have a lot of information about the client and there are many situations where it is in the client's interest that the police know certain things, so we share information on a case-by-case basis after having negotiated with the police. The police quite often ask us for background information. And then, if we consider it necessary to solve the client's situation, we share that background information.” (200CIV, social worker, Finland)

To navigate the gray zones of sharing information among professions bound by confidentiality regulations, there must be informal relations and trust, whether in France or Finland. Social workers must be sure that the information they will share with police officers will not eventually harm their clients, and police officers need to trust that social workers will not misuse sensitive police data. In France, embedded social workers get most of the useful information they need through privileged personal contacts in the police department. They cultivate personal relationships to keep abreast of recent events. In Finland, social workers are more prepared to disclose information about a client to a trusted police officer of the Anchor team than to an unfamiliar police officer. The social worker knows that the information will not be recorded or passed on to a third party by the Anchor police. Correspondingly, in the case of the police officers outside the Anchor team, the social workers must think more carefully about the possibilities and consequences of sharing information.

“When you've worked closely within a team and have established trust with your colleagues from the police, you're more inclined to share information, trusting that it will remain confidential, be used appropriately, and not be logged in the police's own records. However, when requests come from detectives I'm less familiar with, I must consider carefully what I disclose and how I influence their actions. The best interests of the child can justify quite a lot. That's why it's important to discern which information should be shared with the police and which should not.” (215CV, social worker, Finland)

For police officers, sharing information with social workers also comes with difficulties (Kurvinen et al., 2023). In some cases, information provided by the police or a request for information has been stored in the information system of the social services, and from there it may have ended up in the knowledge

of the target person, i.e., the subject of the threat assessment. This may have endangered the safety of the protected person and jeopardized the measures planned by the police. Such information leak undermines the trust between the police and social workers.

The comparison between France and Finland thus highlights the importance of trust and informal relations to facilitate information sharing.

Condition for interpersonal trust relationships: the presence of a formal organizational framework preserving social worker's autonomy

Our research suggests that a key condition for the emergence of personal ties and informal relations that promotes trust (and thus information sharing) is the presence of a formal organizational framework that defines the roles and tasks of the police and social workers.

While the Anchor teams enjoy a clearly defined framework, both Finnish social workers and police officers experience little oversight from their own managers. For the daily functioning of collaboration, such autonomy is considered important because it gives an opportunity to explore and develop working methods. Our respondents, both social workers and police officers, appreciate this sort of autonomy that enables them to customize services more closely to the victim's needs. A senior crime detective in an Anchor team describes the group's degree of freedom for action:

We are to a great extent a self-guiding unit. We define many aspects and limits of our intervention by ourselves. Certainly, there are statutory limitations, but we do the fine-tuning ourselves. (203AIV, police officer, Finland)

In France, the collaboration is organized along the coordinated model, where the typical social worker does not spend most of her days with police officers. French social workers usually have a separate office. They work under the authority of a separate employer, which most of the time is a local government social service or a victim support association — not the police. Consequently, police managers have no hierarchical authority on embedded social workers, who can thus maintain autonomy and confidentiality.

"I make my own professional decisions, in complete autonomy. I assess each situation on my own and decide on the direction to take. There's no interference from the hierarchy. Being left to your own devices is what makes the embedded social worker job so special. On the other hand, you must be available all the time and not count the hours." (IS-COM-974-2023-1, social worker, France)

The French coordinated model is not intrinsically less conducive to personal relations and information sharing than the Finnish team model. In fact, the situation in France is diverse. Embedded social workers with the gendarmerie (the rural police) typically have more contacts with police managers, and are

more satisfied with the formal organization, than embedded social workers with the urban (national) police (ANISCG, 2012). Gendarme supervisors typically have more time and more resources to allocate to managing the relationship between the social worker and the rest of the department, including setting up an official steering committee with stakeholders where problems can be identified and resolved. The support of the police department's top management is crucial to the smooth integration of the embedded social worker. This support can take various forms, such as memos and invitations to certain department meetings (ANISCG, 2012).

When all this happens, when police managers create a formal framework for the cooperation of social workers with police personnel, and depending on the personal qualities of the social worker, an environment exists where personal relations and trust can arise. In these cases, the social worker feels like she is part of a team, even if she is not formally part of an inter-professional team in the Finnish sense.

In the absence of formal structures and managerial support, embedded social workers have limited access to police information systems enabling it to identify victims. This is typically the case in urban departments where police managers are overworked and cannot dedicate resources to managing the embedded social worker. In addition, some police departments do not provide social workers with the means to work properly (unsuitable premises, lack of equipment, etc.). In this context, social workers need to constantly reassert their role and to continuously negotiate their presence within the police station. The absence of an official steering committee prevents problems to be solved (Ministère des Outre-Mer, 2020). Social workers facing such working conditions eventually quit, sometimes suffering from burnout, leading to high turnover, continuous estrangement of the social worker from police personnel, the absence of informal ties, and heightened difficulties for information sharing.

In a nutshell, in Finland, the team model provides a framework where personal ties can flourish, while in France, the coordinated model can work if a formal framework is organized. Absent this framework, there is no supportive space for informal relations to emerge, which leads to poor information sharing, and ultimately perfunctory collaboration, apathy or conflict.

Bringing the wider institutional context back in

As argued above, formal structures support collaboration between the police and social work by enabling the emergence of interpersonal trust through the repeated day-to-day collaboration. Additionally, we have suggested that some autonomy may be beneficial to collaboration. In this section, we provide further evidence of the importance of autonomy, based on a change of policy priorities in France; and this policy change also shows the importance of the wider institutional context.

In France, violence against women has become in the late 2010s an increasingly salient issue. In 2018 and 2019, violence against women was the “Great national cause”, and in 2019, the government organized an extraordinary national convention on domestic violence. Intimate partner homicides have become highly publicized in the media, with special emphasis on identifying cases where the police had failed in their mission to protect the victim. The consequences of this changing context have been twofold. On one hand, there is continued support for the policy of increasing funding and the number of embedding social workers in police stations. On the other hand, the policy has an unintended consequence of shattering trust and undermining information sharing between police and social workers.

Before the late 2010s, when the protection of the victims was not as major a concern, police chiefs were generally content with ensuring that the information about the victims was forwarded by the police and received by embedded social workers. Since the increased salience of DV in the media and public debate, victim protection has become a policy priority, and police managers now demand to know how embedded social workers respond to a given situation, and what the results of her intervention are. In other words, the public demands for more oversight of how the police handle DV cases prompt police managers to increase control over the actions of embedded social workers (ANISCG, 2021). Insofar as the embedded social worker is not considered a full member of the police department, police managers may be tempted to deflect blame from the police onto social workers in case of a spousal homicide-related scandal (on blame avoidance, see Weaver, 1986).

Efforts to control their work are a source of growing concern for embedded social workers. From the social workers’ perspective, their primary task is to look after their clients’ well-being and interests, which requires an obligation to maintain professional confidentiality rather than preserve the reputation of either the sending or the receiving organization (ANISCG, 2021). In fact, the national association of embedded social workers explicitly advises its members, if asked for accountability by police managers, to not say more than “contact has been established and support is underway” (ANISCG, 2021, p. 7). Embedded social workers do not want to assume their share of responsibility for victim’s safety, claiming that this is not part of their social support mission. They see co-responsibility as a source of role confusion. They consider that victim safety is a police matter (ANISCG, 2021).

In other words, the attempts by police managers to exert more control and oversight on their embedded social worker results in inter-professional conflict, which leads to information retention, which is detrimental to collaboration.

In Finland, the wider institutional context moves in another direction, with different consequences. The new edition of the Manual on multi-professional Anchor work (Ministry of the Interior, 2023) shifts the emphasis of Anchor work from domestic and family violence to the intervention in juvenile delinquency and the prevention of violent political radicalization. National

guidelines are not mechanically implemented, however, and most local Anchor teams continue to process cases of domestic violence whenever they have resources. Yet, social workers are concerned that the work done in preventing domestic violence could be sidelined by new tasks.

“Previously we had a much greater role in domestic violence cases. Now, Anchor teams, although still handling domestic violence cases, now limit their interventions to families with younger children... The police have defined Anchor work this way ... Certainly the prevention of domestic violence continues to be part of our work... I am concerned that this Anchor team's narrow focus on young people limits the police's understanding of the role of social workers at the police station. We are here to serve the entire range of the police's clientele, not just a specific group.” (200CIV, social worker, Finland)

In short, DV's increased salience in France has resulted in the unintended consequence of weakening police-social worker collaborations, by way of police attempts to reduce the social workers' autonomy. In Finland, DV is not as salient an issue (media scandals are more likely to be focused on murdered children), and domestic security policy is increasingly concerned with a different issue altogether — the prevention of radicalization. This shows how the wider policy environment matters to make sense of interprofessional dynamics.

Discussion and conclusion

The evolution of the partnership between police officers and social workers in both France and Finland exemplifies the trajectory from localized initiatives to national policy imperatives. The collaboration journey, which started with grassroots experiments in both countries during the 1980s, progressively consolidated into national frameworks by the 2000s. These frameworks, designed to address domestic violence, showcase the ability of countries to adapt and refine inter-agency collaborations in response to societal priorities.

According to our French-Finnish comparison, information sharing is a critical aspect of a meaningful collaboration. Because of confidentiality regulations, personal relations and trust are key determinants of information sharing. In turn, personal relations and trust are enabled by the presence of a formal organizational framework, on condition that the formal framework allows for some professional autonomy. In the absence of a formal framework, or if the formal framework is excessively oriented towards control and blame shifting, the environment is not conducive to personal relations and trust, and thus leads to information retention.

Our study highlights that as much as organizational determinants matter in the quality of police-social work collaboration, the question of whether DV is an institutional priority in the first place is paramount, with unintended consequences for collaboration in France because of the increased salience of DV, and with the shift of priorities for Anchor teams from DV to

radicalization. Our findings have shown the importance of taking into account the wider institutional context to understand the dynamics of collaboration, and how agenda-setting remains a key issue in the study of public policy.

An emergent research finding is that recent evolutions of police-social work partnerships necessitate increased teamwork. This shift towards more joint-work efforts introduces a greater level of complexity and challenge compared to previous practices, which were characterized by a more distinct division of roles and clearer demarcation of responsibilities. The policy implications of this research is that police organizations should seek to provide formal frameworks which allow for autonomy, in order to maximize the quality of information sharing between the police and social workers.

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