

SUMMARY

Introduction

There are indications that the Dutch victim support organisation Slachtofferhulp Nederland does not always refer victims to specialist services, which is sometimes against the wishes of victims themselves. RegioPlan Policy Research has conducted an exploratory study into the referral patterns from Slachtofferhulp Nederland to other service and aid organisations. In this study, the referral procedure has been mapped and a number of points of special interest are revealed.

Method

In order to collect the necessary information, we have organised group conversations with volunteers, team leaders, a number of trainers and representatives of the management of Slachtofferhulp Nederland. In this study victims have not been interviewed.

Results

The conversations with team leaders, volunteers and management do not provide grounds to assume that victims are not referred to specialised services often enough.

However, with regard to a number of points volunteers and team leaders depart from the policy. In addition to this, the referral procedure has a number of points of special interest that influence both the referral process and the registration of referrals.

Departures from policy

Definition differences referring

Opinions vary on the exact definition of referring. According to the management of Slachtofferhulp Nederland referring includes both supported and unsupported referrals of clients. This implies that advising a client to look for professional help also falls under referring. However, the information in the different policy documents is ambiguous on this subject. Furthermore, different terms are used for similar concepts. In practice we have also come across these indistinctnesses with regard to the definition of referring. Some volunteers use a narrower definition of referring than others.

Ambiguous registration

These different perceptions have an influence of the way referrals are registered: what is registered as a referral by one volunteer, may not be registered as such by another volunteer. Due to the fact that not every team leader checks every registration (and that mistakes are not always corrected), the registration is not suitable for making statements on the number of referrals.

Consultation team leader

The policy of Slachtofferhulp Nederland requires that in case of an (imminent) referral, the team leader should be consulted at all times. However, in practice usually this does not happen.

Expectation management Another departure from the policy concerns the moment at which clients are informed of the bounds of the service. According to the policy, this information should be given at the earliest stage possible, preferably in the first conversation. In practice this often happens later, because volunteers first want to establish a relationship of trust with the client. However, the question must be asked whether this is desirable in severe cases, because in such cases particularly a quick referral is very important.

Check afterwards The termination process does not always pass off according to the policy either. According to the policy, the client should always be contacted afterwards in order to check whether he has ended up with the organisation in question. Even though most volunteers say they do this, part of the volunteers never do this or only in certain situations.

Causes of departures from policy

Unfamiliarity with the policy is among the reasons that volunteers depart from the policy. The Handbook Services (Handboek Diensten) which describes the most current policy, has not been implemented in all regions, and is therefore not used by all volunteers. In addition, departures from the policy occur due to the fact that volunteers and team leaders have different, individual interpretations of the policy. Furthermore, some volunteers indicate that they rather consult their colleague volunteers or they are of the opinion that they are experienced enough to make their own choices.

Points of special interest

Hampering factors In practice, certain circumstances may occur which hamper the referral process: some clients may have a negative attitude towards the referral, or volunteers may find it hard to let go of certain clients. In the trainings special attention is paid to these circumstances, however, in practice they remain difficult.

Knowledge social services In a number of regions volunteers do not possess sufficient knowledge of social services and voluntary organisations. Even though in practice this does not lead to problematic situations (e.g. because in case of doubt it is always possible to consult with a team leader), this is a point of special interest.

Judgements on aid organisations In addition, the referral procedure is influenced by the individual judgements of the volunteer or client on specific aid organisations. Team leaders try to reduce this influence as much as possible, however, they cannot always supervise this, because they are not familiar with all the files.

Conclusion

The immediate cause of this study was formed by data from previous studies, which showed that against the wishes of part of the victims themselves, they had not been referred to specialised services. This idea was not recognised by the discussion partners in this study; they do not think desired referrals fail to occur. What causes this discrepancy does not become clear in this study, however, a number of possible causes can be mentioned. The victim may not have experienced an actual referral as such, e.g. when he himself took the

initiative, or because he doesn't remember having been referred. Furthermore, in some cases victims may wish to be referred, when this is not necessary on the basis of their complaints.

The conversations with team leaders, volunteers and management do not provide grounds to assume that victims are not referred to specialists often enough. A comment should be made here: with regard to a number of issues departures from the policy occur, and it is the question whether these departures are desirable. Furthermore, there are a number of situations which deserve attention for other reasons (e.g. because they hamper a proper referral). An example of this is when volunteers possess insufficient knowledge of social services and voluntary organisations.

