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A Thorn in Our Side: An Introduction to Post-Separation Domestic Violence and Co-Parenting in Poland and Norway

Abstract: Family reunification is complex and perilous in the context of post-separation domestic violence (PSDV), and the safety and well-being of victims, who are predominantly women and children, are at significant risk. The presumption of contact between fathers and children post-divorce/separation, despite the documented risks of PSDV, raises concerns about the legal, institutional, and societal understanding. However, the topic is practically not discussed in Poland and Norway. The two states are at opposite ends of the spectrum when it comes to gender equality, including the organization of family life, but both have gender-neutral DV laws and provisions. In this paper, the authors wish to challenge the prioritization of maintaining or rebuilding a relationship between a father and a child over reconstructing a mother-child dyad that has been actively undermined by an abusive father, and to suggest ways to address this problem in praxis.

Keywords: family, Poland, Norway, post-separation domestic violence, co-parenting

Introduction

Family reunification is a challenging endeavor whatever the circumstances, however, in the context of domestic violence (DV) it is fraught with profound challenges and contentiousness, and can be dangerous, even deadly, especially for victims, who are overwhelmingly women and children (Hay et al. 2023; IC; WHO 2021; Lancet 2022; Stark 2023). In particular, victims are at danger just before and after they leave the abuser (Femicide Census 2020). Importantly, there is growing evidence that, contrary to popular beliefs and institutional framing, DV does not stop once partners/spouses separate or divorce and is likely to continue if they have had children together (Hay et al. 2023; Holt 2015, 2020; Katz et al. 2020; Dragiewicz et al. 2022; Spearman et al. 2022). Therefore, it is paramount that the safety and well-being of the mother and the child (children) are ensured when *any* family reunification is considered. By “family reunification” we mean a relationship between a child and their father involving a supervised or unsupervised contact arrangement, such as (co)parenting, shared care, or visitations after the parents

separate/divorce. Drawing on Katz's (2022) work, we also wish to advance the idea that family reunification can mean rebuilding a mother-child dyad that was actively undermined (or continues to be undermined) by an abusive father.

Despite well-documented risks of post-separation domestic violence (PSDV)—understood as violence against women and children involving a persistent pattern of intimidation by a former male partner and encompassing legal abuse, economic exploitation, threats, child endangerment, isolation, discrediting, harassment, stalking, and coercive control (Knezevic et al. 2022: 100; Spearman et al. 2022: 1)—a presumption of contact after divorce/separation seems to dominate family laws in many jurisdictions (James-Hanman and Holt 2021; Hunter et al. 2018; Bailey-Harris et al. 1999; Hunt and MacLeod 2008). That this is the case is perhaps not surprising, as DV is profoundly misunderstood, even by professionals and institutions dealing with it on a daily basis (Stark 2007; Katz 2022). They often misconstrue DV as a one-off episode in a high-conflict couple, rather than as deliberate, continuous and constant abuse and/or control (Stark 2007; Johnson 2008; Lapierre & Côté 2016). As Katz notes after others, (2022: 1) DV is in general “about one partner seeking to coercively control, dominate, and assert power over another” and is underpinned, as well as enabled, by patriarchy (Dobash & Dobash 1979; DeKeseredy 2021; Zielińska-Poćwiardowska & Sosnowska-Buxton 2023; IC).

Importantly, as Stark (2023) argues, children are often weaponized by the father as a tool or means to entrap and further abuse the mother, but mothers might also be forced to abuse their children to protect them from a more severe form of abuse by the father or to shield themselves. Thus, throughout this paper, we use either DV or PSDV rather than other terminology to emphasize that DV in this context involves and impacts both the mother and the child, and because both Poland and Norway recognize a child who has witnessed DV as a victim of said violence.

Moreover, it is increasingly apparent that DV perpetrators use the legal system and social and institutional actors such as courts and social workers to continue the abuse, and the institutions seem to be unable or unwilling to address legal abuse (James-Hanman & Holt 2021; Hunter et al. 2018; Barnett et al. 2021). Therefore, to assume that DV will stop once parents separate/divorce while having to co-parent together is perplexing. It is equally perplexing that rebuilding or maintaining a relationship between a father and a child takes priority over rebuilding the relationship between the mother and the child.

The concept of “parental alienation” is crucial for this discussion. The GREVIO Report (2021: 46), which was—issued by a group of independent experts who analyzed the implementation of the Istanbul Convention by its signatory states, unequivocally states that there is a significant connection between DV and “parental alienation” in family court processes. The concept is often used to discredit children who are reluctant to engage with abusive parents, and claims of parental alienation are increasingly weaponized to dismiss or challenge allegations of DV (Mercer & Drew 2021). Additionally, accusations of abuse can be turned against mothers who are victims of DV, by labelling them “alienators” (Sielberg et al. 2013). This misuse has been documented across various European countries. The WHO did not include parental alienation in its latest classification of diseases in 2020, because parental alienation is not a disease or injury but a legal term, which is not evidence based and thus should not be included in health statistics (WHO, n.d.).

Rates of PSDV in Norway and Poland are unknown, but international statistics suggest they could be as high as 90% (Spearman et al. 2022; Mitchell et al. 2021). The number of parental-alienation accusations deployed against a mother making a DV allegation is also not known. Meier (2020: 92) found that in the USA,

“mothers’ claims of abuse, especially child physical or sexual abuse, increase their risk of losing custody, and that fathers’ crossclaims of alienation virtually double that risk.”

In both Norway and Poland, PSDV is uncharted territory, which has been addressed in only a handful of publications (Sosnowska-Buxton 2023; Tomczyk 2024; Studsrød & Sosnowska-Buxton, under review; Bredal and Stefansen 2022; Bjørnholt 2021), but what is known is alarming. This is disappointing as GREVIO in 2020 and 2022 noted the lack of understanding of PSDV in both states. It is worth mentioning that this form of DV is considered important by the European Union, the European Council, and the European Commission (EP Committee 2021). Thus, this paper is a necessary intervention and an introduction to the topic.

Poland and Norway have comprehensive laws governing family life (including in regard to separation/divorce, parenting, and so on), and for the prosecution and prevention of DV, as well as for the protection of the human rights of all people, which are supposedly gender-neutral. Each state is a signatory of international treaties (to be discussed later), which shape their national laws, and thus they are bound by them. However, the two states are marked by stark differences in gender equality, and their understanding of, and approaches to the category of child and co-parenting. Whereas Poland is considered a deeply Catholic country with “traditional family” values, Norway is noted for its gender equality in all aspects of life, its expansive welfare, and its prioritization of the needs of the child. Thus, it is somewhat contradictory that rates of DV appear to be greater in Norway than in Poland (although we do not take these statistics at face value, as the picture is far more complicated than this).

We begin our discussion by briefly presenting key international legislative instruments that govern the national application of DV and human rights legislation. Next, we examine co-parenting in the context of PSDV in Poland and then Norway, looking specifically at the national family and DV laws, and societal understandings of the phenomena. We then discuss the implications for PSDV praxis. We ask whether, given the status quo, it is possible to reconcile family reunification with protecting the child and the mother, and we highlight potential areas for change in policy and practice.

As feminist scholars, our research practice is grounded in a commitment to gender equality and foregrounds the role of gender/sex as a fundamental analytical category (Letherby 2003; Bjørnholt 2021). Situated within the framework of engaged sociology, our methodological thinking is rooted in standpoint theory (Smith 1990, 1992, 2004), which advocates for a sociology rooted in women’s lived experiences. Additionally, we draw on a feminist sociological imagination (Mills 1959 [2000]; Zielińska-Poćwiardowska & Sosnowska-Buxton 2023; Jackson 2017; Letherby 2018; Sosnowska-Buxton, forthcoming) to consider the interplay of history, biographies, and gender in Polish and Norwegian societies, which collectively serve as guiding beacons illuminating our scholarly endeavors.

International Legal Instruments

Three key international legal frameworks are relevant in regard to PSDV and co-parenting in Europe, although they are not the only ones applicable. The Istanbul Convention (IC), established in 2011, focuses on domestic and gender-based violence (DGBV) and views gender inequality as a core issue. It calls for gender equality to help prevent violence and treats such violence as a violation of human rights, necessitating systemic responses. It mandates that the safety of victims, particularly women and children, be a priority in decisions about parental authority/responsibility (PA/R) and visitation, and stresses protective and supportive measures tailored to the gendered nature of DV. The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) protects the fundamental rights to life, freedom, and security, and prohibits torture, inhumane treatment, and discrimination. Lastly, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) addresses specific child rights, including residency, parental authority, and the maintenance of personal identity and family relations. It emphasizes the importance of respecting children's opinions, protecting them from abuse and exploitation, and safeguarding their privacy.

Poland

In Poland, the Family and Guardianship Code and the Civil Code (*Kodeks rodzinny i opiekuńczy* and *Kodeks cywilny*, respectively) establish rights and obligations for each family member. The law prioritizes the well-being of the child and the protection of the family. After a separation, PA is typically shared by both parents and the child's right to be raised by both parents is assumed. However, there are situations where the court can limit or remove PA, especially when there is a genuine threat to the child's well-being. When making decisions about PA, the court considers factors such as:

1. The child's opinion and behavior on living with either parent and their behavior at home and in their environment are considered. If the child's behavior raises concerns (e.g., aggression, truancy, or academic difficulties), it may indicate issues with shared care.
2. Other family members' rights; even if one parent loses PA, their family members retain the right to maintain a relationship with the child.

Furthermore, as long as both parties agree and provide the court with a written parental agreement stipulating their PA and contact/residency/visits or co-parenting arrangement, but co-parenting, or alternating care/residency, lack clear legal interpretation. The Family and Guardianship Codes do not define or establish what the term means and thus it is a concept without a legal basis. While the term appears in the Act on State Aid in Raising Children and indirectly in the Family Benefits Act, these documents lack definitional criteria or the legal norms of co-parenting. Paradoxically, despite the absence of explicit legal provisions, courts order alternating care/residency using the Family and Guardianship Code, specifically articles 58 and 107.

Because the legal lacunae was causing inconsistencies, the now former Child's Rights Ombudsman, Mikolaj Pawlak, urged the former Minister of Justice, Zbigniew Ziobro, to define and incorporate alternating care/residency into the legal system (RPD 2021).

However, the Human Rights Ombudsman stressed that alternating care/residency should not be an automatic solution, and the family should be thoroughly assessed before ordering co-parenting. The suggestion is that, in prioritizing the best interests of the child, courts may grant full PA to one parent. If a parent poses a threat, legal measures should be taken to protect the child, but uncertainties persist, especially in the context of PSDV.

Poland has robust and gender-neutral legal provisions ensuring equal treatment and protection from DV. The Constitution emphasizes equal rights for women and men in various aspects of life. The state is obligated to protect children's rights, and citizens can demand the authorities safeguard a child from violence. Moreover, Poland is the sole Visegrád Group (V4) state in which the IC is in force. Despite controversy in the V4 regarding "gender ideology" and threats to "traditional families" supposedly arising from the IC, the narrative remains that the group's national laws adequately protect women from DV, but such a view is not reflected in the data (Sosnowska-Buxton & Studsrød 2023; Graff & Korolczuk 2021).

Nevertheless, DV is a gendered phenomenon. Using the police data from 2022, Zielińska-Poćwiardowska and Sosnowska-Buxton (2023) point out that approximately 73% of DV victims were women and approximately 90% of DV perpetrators were men—but there are no reliable DV statistics. According to the Center for Women's Rights (*Centrum Praw Kobiet*), every 40 seconds a woman experiences violence: in most cases, children are co-victims. More than 400 women die each year in Poland as a result of violence: not only at the hands of their perpetrators but also due to suicide because of abuse (CPK). Despite such shocking statistics, stereotypes about DV remain in society and public institutions (Herudzińska 2019; Nowakowska 2016: 36–80). According to public opinion surveys, most Poles do not agree with harmful DV stereotypes (CBOS 2023; cf. Kampania 16 dni 2023; TNS OBOP 2008). Still, many believe that DV victims accept their situation and hold them responsible for the violence—this is victim-blaming par excellence, which also seems to be reflected in sentencing (Grzyb 2018, 2020a, 2020b).

The Norwegian Context

The Children Act 1981 (*Barneloven*) governs family life in Norway by outlining the rights and responsibilities of parents and children. It grants automatic PR to both married parents at the child's birth, while unmarried fathers can acquire these responsibilities and rights but do not receive them automatically (Children Act 2019). Norwegian parenting is influenced by laws emphasizing parental equality, both pre- and post-familial separation (Bjørnholt 2021). This approach is reinforced by family policies supporting dual careers, parental leave, and legal childcare rights (Bjørnholt 2019; Rønsen & Kitterød 2015). Even in cases of DV, the egalitarian and gender-neutral stance persists, allowing fathers to retain PR and access to their children (Mohaupt et al. 2019), especially if the DV is not considered to be of a serious nature (Mohaupt 2020).

There is no automatic assumption of shared child residency. If parents disagree, the court may grant it to one parent, considering factors such as emotional attachment, the child's opinion, and which parent is better suited. The child's best interest, guided by

the CRC, is the paramount consideration. Joint residency requires a considerable time commitment from both parents and is influenced by the relationship between them, which should be marked by low conflict, effective communication, and a solution-oriented approach. Notably, even when both parents have PR, the non-residential parent's decision-making is restricted under the Children Act. In terms of statistics, 39% of children live in a legal shared residency (although residency is far more complex than this) (Morbech et al. 2023), but only 7% of children live with their father (Wiik 2022). We know very little about what this looks like for mothers and children living with PSDV.

Norwegian family law strongly prioritizes the best interest of the child, reflecting a child-centric society where children are viewed as bearers of individual rights and professionals are expected to enforce this (Hennum 2014). The Children Act and the Marriage Act mandate free mediation, known as *mekling*, for parents with a child under 16 who are separating. This process, which is required for married couples seeking divorce, aims to facilitate parental cooperation on co-parenting, child residency, and PR. Children are typically excluded from the process (Nylund 2018).

Like Poland, Norway has comprehensive and inclusive DV laws as well as strong gender-equality principles (GREVIO Norway 2022). Norway ratified the IC in 2017 and over the years it has implemented many expansive national DV prevention policies and plans. Terms such as “men’s violence against women” and “abuse of women” were changed to the more neutral-seeming “violence in close relationships,” in order to embrace larger groups of victims, among them, men, and to include violence in other close relations (Skjørten et al. 2024; Bjørnholt 2019, 2020). This resulted in a dilution of the DV provisions and a misunderstanding of DV as not gendered and only added to the problem rather than alleviated it (Bjørnholt 2020; GREVIO Norway 2022).

In stark contrast, the statistics clearly show that the majority of victims of DV are women, especially women in heterosexual relations, and men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators of said violence (Bjørnholt 2021; Bjørnholt & Hjemdal 2018). The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs Report (2021) shows that 9 out of 10 victims seeking help at crisis centers reported violence by a male perpetrator and 8 out of 10 children at crisis centers had experienced violence at the hands of their father. However, Norway does not have sufficient sex-disaggregated DV data and data showing the relationships between the perpetrator and the victim (GREVIO Norway 2022), and thus the picture lacks details.

Implications for Praxis

Researchers almost in unison argue that mothers and children are frequently co-victims and co-survivors of DV, yet they are rarely treated as such, which leads to distortions of what is expected of whom, whose rights and needs are prioritized, and a profound misunderstanding of what PS/DV is (Katz 2022; McDonald-Harker 2016). In this section we discuss what needs to be done for the safety and well-being of the victims and survivors of PSDV, focusing on selected issues. We wish to stress that this is an introductory discussion, not an in-depth analysis.

Jenney (2002) argues that in child protection there is a need to shift the perspective from considering the mother or the child as the subject of intervention to supporting the mother-child relationship. There is ample empirical evidence showing that mothers and children benefit from specialized and long-term support that strengthens their relationship as a means of DV prevention (Katz 2022; Smith et al. 2020). This shift is vital because it encourages institutions (courts, social workers, teachers, psychologists, etc.) to restore maternal integrity, respond empathetically, acknowledge the interconnected suffering of mother and child, and work collaboratively to rebuild what has been deliberately dismantled through DV.

Furthermore, as Stark (2023) argues, mothers who engage in coercive control as a protection tactic or form of DV must not be punished but recognized as victims and supported in their recovery. But both countries adopt punitive approaches toward mothers who are DV victims, threatening child removal if they do not leave the abuser, then forcing children into contact with their abusive fathers, and fining the mothers if they do not do family “reunification” (Eurydyka 2023). These conditions affect the mental and physical health of the mother and child and hinder the healing process and the rebuilding of the mother-child relationship (Katz 2022). Thus, we would suggest that in the context of PSDV, no such punitive action should be taken against the mother or the child, and that a child’s refusal to see their father should warrant psychological help—both states stipulate that such remedies should be deployed.

Moreover, women need to be supported when facing their abusers in the family court, because such women are often exploited through legal means (Elizabeth 2017; Laing 2017), especially when their ex-partners are financially advantaged, and men tend to earn more in both states (Dyvik 2023; Statista Research Department 2024). Family law often disadvantages women due to their limited resources, and consequently, the women are likely to lose in court and to be revictimized, including by institutions unskilled in DV practice, and to be exposed to further violence. There is international literature that shows how family courts should be reformed, for example, Barnett (2015, 2020).

Additionally, PSDV co-parenting in Poland and Norway raises substantial concerns. Instead of promoting meaningful shared parental care, it is increasingly another means by which fathers are able to perpetrate PSDV (Tomczyk 2024). Historically, Polish courts have seldom favored co-parenting, because single parenting was considered adequate for a child’s well-being (op. cit.), and also perhaps as a realistic reflection of the unequal burden of care, both material and emotional, done by mothers (Gotby 2023; Thwaites 2017; Holt 2017), although gendered parenting ideas are prevalent in these decisions. The current narrative depicts single mothers as unfit to raise children both psychologically and financially, which perpetuates mother-blame, especially in a PSDV context (Tomczyk 2024; Lapierre 2010, 2021). Contradictorily, co-parenting is viewed as more egalitarian and as a challenge to binary and traditional family ideals, particularly within circles associated with the Catholic Church and right-wing groups, while reinforcing gendered stereotypes.

Despite an emphasis on child well-being and shared parenting, the ultimate goal often appears to be the preservation of a traditional family facade and fathers’ rights at the cost of the children’s (and mothers’) wishes and safety, which conceals and enables PSDV. This is indicative of “male entitlement,” which has been widely documented in abusive/violent

fathers (Coy et al. 2012; Heward-Belle 2016; Monckton Smith 2020a, b). The problem does not have a quick fix, but societal changes in how to “do” the family in Poland are apparent (Tomczyk 2024; Sikorska 2020). Therefore, we urge policymakers to be cautious in implementing changes, because as the evidence stands, co-parenting in a PSDV context remains unsafe and should not be the default position in all separation/divorce cases.

In Norway, co-parenting is legally defined and enforced through *mekling*, which provides another platform for abusive fathers to continue PSDV under the guise of collaboration on a parenting plan, according to findings prevalent in international literature (Spearman et al. 2022; Katz 2022; Feresin et al. 2019). The GREVIO Norway Report (2022: 7) states that

“[t]he decision-making process which is based on mandatory mediation does not allow for sufficient assessment of the risk of domestic violence nor does it sufficiently recognize the power imbalance in abusive relationships which may impair the ability to negotiate fairly.”

Therefore, if *mekling* were to happen, it should be led by an experienced DV specialist, but a prior assessment should be made as to whether co-parenting can be done safely for both victims, or whether other measures need to be considered, such as supervised limited contact. However, these ideas need scientific verification as to date there is no research on it in Norway. Interestingly, the UK government has shelved its plans to make pre-separation mediation compulsory in England and Wales because of mounting criticism by the UK DV and family-dispute sector (Summers 2024).

Additionally, the states’ laws and policies, which are seemingly based on the principle of the child’s best interests, do not seem to be applied in practice findings echoed in international research. Both states recognize children who have witnessed DV as victims, yet unless the violence was severe, these children may be compelled to maintain contact with their abusive fathers. Again, we challenge the misconception that DV must be severe to justify cessation or supervised contact, as it lacks evidence-based support. GREVIO is clear that the safety of the nonviolent parent must be prioritized in any family reunification decisions and the child’s right to maintain relationships with both parents, as outlined in Article 9, paragraph 3 of the CRC, is secondary to the child’s safety. Norway lost several cases at the European Court of Human Rights pertaining to breaches of Article 8 of the ECHR, and consequently there must be a holistic assessment of competing rights when deciding on family reunification in a PSDV context.

Importantly, DV provisions must address abusive/violent fathers. Mohaupt (2020) argues that minimizing contact with violent fathers may be the only viable choice in cases of chronic and severe abuse. Again, we wish to caution against this misunderstanding of DV and that interventions focusing on ending the use of violence and preserving the father-child relationship can be beneficial when fathers genuinely seek change. This “*seek change*” is a key term here and as much as we would like for the interventions to work, research on their effectiveness remains wanting (Morgan et al. 2023 are currently running a trial to check their effectiveness). The myth that “children need a father,” despite the father’s violence and abuse, is alive and well in both states. It pressures women, and children, to stay in toxic or dangerous relationships, reinforces traditional family ideals, and enables PSDV (Tomczyk 2024). Whether PSDV victims live in V4 or Nordic patriarchal states, their experiences are

quite comparable. Professional and societal expectations are low when it comes to fathers but very high when it comes to mothers. Thus, we must ask whether a father who abuses his wife (partner), the mother of his child, either in the presence of the child or not, can be considered a *good-enough* father? This conceptual change requires a desire on the part of researchers and professionals to challenge the dominant narrative with evidence, and societal and institutional education, including through popular science and mass media. These tools have already been highlighted in the IC as a means to combat DV. Why are they not more widely used?

Furthermore, any professional involved in DV, including judges, social workers, and psychologists, must undergo continuous specialist training on the subject matter. International research and a handful of studies on Norway and Poland show that such training is necessary and long overdue. Importantly, the Council of Europe offers a wide range of courses for professionals working with DV and the EEA and Norway Grants provide education for judges on parental alienation (COE). Worryingly, Norway is witnessing a growing interest in the concept (Meland et al. 2023), and some scholars seem to be unaware of the credibility of the sources they cite. For example, the UN Special Rapporteur (2023: 15–16) points out that academics and other professionals who are proponents of parental alienation make money from serving as experts in family proceedings, thus they have vested interests in supporting this notion as scientific. Furthermore,

“reputable academic journals in the field of psychology are publishing articles that promote the notion of ‘alienating behaviors’ without applying the usual standards of scientific rigor in peer review or not allowing a right of response to authors whose studies are the subject of such criticism.”

Significantly, the Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality rejects this pseudoscientific concept and has cautioned against any party in child-residency court cases applying it. This advice is provided in the information booklet for judges, lawyers, and experts (Torsteinson, Weele, Steinsvåg 2008).

However, we are extremely concerned with the continued use of the idea of parental alienation by multiple Polish public institutions, such as family courts and Opiniodawczy Zespół Specjalistów Sądowych (the equivalent of court-appointed experts). The GREVIO Poland Report (2021) strongly criticized application of the idea of parental alienation in legal proceedings related to child residency and visitation rights. The report notes that mothers who are hesitant to allow contact due to the father’s history of DV are labelled as “uncooperative” and as contributing to a negative father-child relationship. Moreover, this pseudo-scientific term disregards the wishes of the child by centering the needs of the abusive father, which seems contrary to a child-centric approach and first and foremost to the child’s best interests (for which both states so strongly advocate). Addressing this issue requires training for judges, prosecutors, and court-appointed experts in evidence-based DV research. We commend the former ultra-conservative Justice Minister of Poland for having suggested that such training be added to the statutory training of judges and prosecutors (Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości 2022).

Another significant issue in Poland is that many fathers avoid paying child maintenance, and such a failure to provide impacts the child’s well-being. The refusal of a father to fulfil

his financial duties is often premeditated and is classed as economic PSDV; it forces women to seek additional sources of income and may push women and their children into poverty (Moore et al. 2022; Malgesini et al. 2019; EDVAW Platform 2024). Mothers and children might then be forced into family reunification with the abuser as the mothers simply do not have the financial means to provide adequately for themselves and their children (op. cit.). Notably, Poland has robust child maintenance laws, but they are poorly enforced (Sosnowska-Buxton 2022) and perhaps could be remodeled on the UK Child Maintenance Service.

Conclusion

In this paper, we asked two fundamental questions regarding family unification in the context of PSDV:

1. Should a child who has witnessed and continues to witness abuse/violence by their father have un/supervised contact with him?
2. Should the focus be on rebuilding the relationship between the mother and the child?

Looking at the available data, including the emerging data on Poland and Norway, it is clear that it is not safe for fathers committing PSDV to merit unsupervised contact with their children even when the abuse/violence is “not severe.” In accordance with international findings, we strongly advocate for DV professionals to focus on supporting the rebuilding of the relationship between the mother and the child in order to help the victims of DV heal and *also* as a means of stopping PSDV from continuing. Although the two states are at the opposite ends of the scale in regard to gender equality and both take the so-called gender-neutral approach to DV legislation and provisions, in doing so they have “(re)produc[e] a whole range of problematic norms” (Martisson et al. 2017: 1) and are potentially in breach of international treaties, the IC, ECHR, and CRC. The continuous emphasis on the rights of the father to have a relationship with his child or children and the (re)victimization of the mother and the child by the abuser and the public institutions that are supposed to protect them urgently need to be addressed in national policy.

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