The Analysis of Main Stakeholders of Domestic Abuse in Scotland

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Abstract

In recent years, Scotland has witnessed a concerning surge in domestic violence, marking it as a prominent issue within the realm of violent crime. Responding to this alarming trend, the Scottish Parliament has undertaken significant initiatives to combat domestic violence, acknowledging that gender inequality and power dynamics are pivotal factors contributing to both the causation and aftermath of such incidents. This article aims to delve into the intricate web of stakeholders involved in addressing domestic violence in Scotland. Through a comprehensive stakeholder analysis, we will categorize the diverse groups involved. Following this, each stakeholder's background will be elucidated using a stakeholder model, shedding light on their roles and positions in decision-making processes. Ultimately, we will explore the interconnected policy network that binds these stakeholders together, unraveling the complex relationships and collaborations that shape the landscape of domestic violence prevention and intervention in Scotland.

Keywords

Domestic violence, stakeholder, Scotland

1. Introduction

In Scotland, nearly a quarter of all violent crime is domestic abuse, and the same rate of women would experience domestic abuse in their lifetime. Domestic abuse often affects women and children, but sometimes men can be abused by their partners as well (Aleixandre Brian Duche-Pérez et al., 2023). Domestic abuse refers to different types, not only containing physical. The behavior that allows a person to feel control and power over another person can also become abuse. And if people find that they are changing their original act behavior because they are threatened by their partner’s action and that is abuse.

Realizing it was a severe problem and trying to solve it, different stakeholders in Scotland had done a lot. Since 2000, Scotland has been analyzing domestic abuse in accordance with human rights and gender equality. According to the analysis, the Scottish government realized that domestic abuse is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality and power dynamics. Local groups like Scottish Women's Aid also campaigned for domestic abuse. It had a positive impact and there have been many interventions in legal, social, and public policies and services on domestic abuse (Daniel Kaplin, 2019). However, the situation did not improve a lot. Circumstances of domestic abuse recorded by the police in Scotland have remained relatively stable since 2011-12, with around 58,000 to 60,000 incidents a year. The police recorded 59,541 incidents of domestic abuse in 2017-18, an increase of 1% compared to the previous year. This is because it is very difficult to formulate and implement a policy that involves various stakeholders and interests. Before policy-making, people should consider how a 'problem' or issue is represented. In the debate about how to describe the problem, some groups or individual's voices can be heard, but others can be ignored. These processes are full of explanations that can show the inequalities in power and resources. The 'what's the problem'
approach proposes an analysis of discourses as practices, to include not just what is said or practiced but who is silenced, and what is not considered.

This report starts with a discussion of the main stakeholders about domestic abuse. In this section of the report, we will classify a variety of stakeholders. Subsequently, we will introduce the context of each stakeholder by the stakeholder model to explain their positions in policymaking. Finally, we will consider the policy network that contains the relationship between each stakeholder.

2. Analysis of Stakeholders

One of the most important tasks in policymaking is identifying and knowing the demands of one policy's different stakeholders that can be affected by the policy. The AEA (2018) defines 'stakeholders' as 'individuals, groups, or organizations served by, or with a legitimate interest in, and evaluation including those who might be affected by an evaluation' and suggests that evaluators should communicate with stakeholders about all aspects of the evaluation. There are also a number of useful frameworks that exist to identify stakeholders. Some consider a particular angle (pluralism, corporatism, and professions), and some explore the transactional process (from input to output) (Women’s Aid, 2021). Nevertheless, other researchers find that the stakeholders are more diverse in terms of the different political, social, and technological environments (Cummings, J.L. & March, J.G., 2000). The issues in government do not appear automatically, nor are they caused by the government actions; they are highly related to the success and failure of organizations in every domain. Focusing on and managing a group of stakeholders may help the policymakers achieve their long-term goals. However, the list of stakeholders can be extensive and changed, the policymakers must decide which stakeholders they should consider first when making policies. This will lead to other theme-stakeholders dynamics-their influence may change. It requires the policymakers to have a deep understanding of the stakeholders and according to the importance of the stakeholders to make the appropriate move. Furthermore, policymakers tend to examine the existing literature on stakeholder theory through practice. The common theory is pointed out by Freeman (Freeman, R.E. & McVea, J., 2001), and he thought that the dimensions of power and interests were significant. He also suggested using the 'Power-Interest Grid' to help the policymakers identify the broad definitions of stakeholders while controlling the numbers.

The four parts of the grid explain the four categories of stakeholders and the four parts together make sense to the policymakers. Stakeholders in the top two parts are the organizations with the most interests but with different degrees of power. The right side has more power to influence the policymaking process. However, they may not put certain policies on their top consideration priorities. Therefore, 'players' are those stakeholders with interests and a high degree of power to support. For example, the Scottish government and parliament have more power in making domestic abuse policies in Scotland. The UK parliament also can be recognized as a ‘players’, because it can influence the resource allocation in Scotland which means it can give more support or not for the policies in Scotland.

The related stakeholders with low influence are ‘subjects’, like survivors of domestic abuse. The survivors usually are separate individuals with limited political power, but if they can gather together to become a coalition or some organizations can represent their interests, then they can become more powerful. Women’s Aid is an NGO that aims to help the victims to solve the domestic abuse, so it has more influence than the individual victims and can be regarded as the ‘players.’

The other parts of the grid are potential stakeholders that do not show many interests in this policy area. 'Context Settings' can have the ability to influence future policymaking. For instance, when the media focus on one specific policy area, it can converge the public’s attention on it and put the pressure on the policymakers. 'Crowd' can have infinite content because of low interests and influence.

Then this report will introduce each main stakeholder in detail. Since 'players' play an important role in policymaking and Women's Aid represents the victims, so it will be analyzed first.

2.1 ‘Players’

2.1.1 Scottish Women’s Aid

Scottish Women’s Aid, the primary NGO combating domestic abuse in Scotland, aims to eradicate such abuse, fostering an environment where women, youth, and children enjoy human rights and equal opportunities. Playing a crucial role in coordination, influence, and advocacy for effective responses to domestic abuse, it collaborates with 36 local Women's Aid groups. Established in 1976, it has been instrumental in shaping Scotland's responses to
domestic abuse and actively engages in policymaking, seeking increased political influence through campaigns. The groundbreaking Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018, published in April 2019, reflects its impactful advocacy. With a focus on coercive control as a form of psychological abuse, the organization emphasizes public awareness through initiatives in schools and communities (Scottish Women’s Aid, 2017). While representing every victim is impractical, Scottish Women’s Aid leverages its status and influence to affect positive changes in government policy regarding domestic abuse in Scotland.

2.1.2 Scottish Parliament
In the Scotland policy-making area, the most powerful stakeholder is the Scottish Parliament. Since 1998, the Scottish Act enabled the Scottish parliament to pass primary issues on education, health, agriculture, and justice, the Scottish parliament was given huge power to address the social issues in Scotland. Fortunately, the Scottish Parliament put gender equality as the top priority for a long period of time. They established ‘The Men's Violence Against Women and Children cross-party group’ in 1999 to discuss the policy about gender equality, domestic abuse, and violence against women. The group involves Members of the Scottish Parliament, civil servants, NGOs, academics, and other interested individuals. The first minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, has been constantly contributing to domestic abuse/VAW legislation and service provision. One main mission of the Scottish Parliament is to establish a strong and flourishing Scotland where all individuals are equally safe and respected. Therefore, they consider a lot about how to keep women and kids away from all forms of violence and abuse (Scottish Parliament, 2017). Every published policy and bill for the Domestic Abuse Act are inseparable from the negotiation among parliament, and Scotland's achievements in gender equality can prove both the high interests and power of Parliament.

2.1.3 The UK government
The UK government as Great Britain’s highest administrative agency can devolve domestic abuse to the Scottish government, but if the UK government does not express support for specific policy areas, it will be harder for the Scottish government to publish similar policies. For example, international conventions like the Istanbul Convention still need to be approved by the UK government. The news from the Scottish government said the Convention was signed by the UK government in 2012 but has not yet been ratified. Scottish government thought the UK government was dragging its feet on that Convention and they wanted to get a positive response from the UK government to ensure a focus on the further work necessary to seek to end violence against women and girls. Besides, there also are distinct differences in domestic abuse in the UK government and the Scottish government (Scottish Government, 2016). For instance, they even have different definitions of domestic abuse. In England, the perpetrators are defined as family members who are above 16. In contrast, Scotland does not restrict the age but just focuses on victims' partners and ex-partners. Therefore, they can have different statistical results. Overall, it seems that the Scottish government is more engaged in domestic abuse policy than the UK government. The UK government as an important ‘player’ does not pay much attention to this policy area.

2.2 ‘Subject’
The victims are usually regarded as the ‘subjects’, because they are affected by domestic abuse directly, but they can't effectively use resources to protect themselves. Especially vulnerable groups (disabled people, children, and minorities) cannot protect themselves. People with disabilities need to be taken care of in their daily lives, but carers can use this opportunity to make various forms of insults and it is difficult for the disabled to seek help. For minorities like Asian women in Scotland, they feel shame to share the domestic abuse that they have experienced because of culture. Children are in the developmental stage both physically and mentally, and domestic violence has a high probability of negatively affecting these two aspects. Therefore, the Scottish government should give more support to vulnerable groups to encourage them to protect their rights. We will explore the needs of those sub-groups in other sections of this report later on.

2.3 ‘Context setters’
The ‘context setters’ can be the media in Scotland, because media is the expression channel for the interests of the public. The media can encourage public participation in political decision-making through the information and opinions provided by the media, so the originally scattered public advice can be transformed into clear and centralized decision-making requirements, and then the media can openly and transparently transfer public decision-making
information to the government departments. Finally, the will and suggestions of the public will be fed back to decision-makers, so that the decision-makers can fully understand the opinions of the society and can continuously make appropriate adjustments to decision-making, which is conducive policy to the legalization, democratization, and scientific form. At the same time, policymakers can use the media to monitor and correct deviations in the policymaking process to improve administrative decisions. However, it is hard to keep the media interested. Media cannot continue focusing on domestic abuse, so it just is the ‘context setters’.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

A range of stakeholders can generate dynamic responses because of one stakeholder’s actions. Therefore, policymakers need to recognize the multiple and interdependent interactions which can be formal or informal between stakeholders. The recognition is important when seeking to extract insights and knowledge about net relationships. For the formal relationships are usually like reporting relationships- the agency to the government, and the local government to the Scottish Parliament. Informal relationships are more like social links. The Scottish Women's Aid as an NGO is not a department of the Scottish government, but the Scottish government funds almost 60% budget of Scottish Women's Aid every year. This relationship between them can provide the opportunity to gather considerable amounts of information that can enhance the potential power. For the bigger coalition, some researchers also found that in Scottish domestic abuse policy changes required engagement and compromise, and in this process, the government, academia, and interest groups formed a collaborative ‘velvet triangle’. Since the 1999 constitutional reform, political reform has been helpful to conduct the velvet triangle. The Scottish Parliament produced four principles: 'power-sharing', 'accountability', 'equal opportunities', and 'openness and participation'. It created an opportunity for women to get engaged in the work of public institutions.

Women secured 37% of 129 Scottish Parliament which can make sure women's voices can be heard in Scotland. Increased representation of women in other parts of the triangle also makes efforts to improve domestic abuse and gender equality policies.

The formulation and improvement of one policy area is not completed by a single organization or institution, but it is composed of the involvement of many stakeholders. Even though many organizations and agencies in Scotland made huge efforts to prevent domestic abuse, the process of policymaking was still slow and tough, because the policy can hurt some stakeholders' interests and they want to suspend the policymaking. Domestic abuse is not just about violence, it also relates to culture. Domestic abuse often takes place within households, which are traditionally regarded as the private sector, so people think the public sector tries to eliminate domestic abuse as one way to violate their personal rights. Therefore, domestic abuse transferred to the controversial debate about the scope of public jurisdiction. Another factor that can influence policymaking is the dynamic of interests and power. The policy shift can change the status of the 'crowd', so it can make policymaking more complex. Facing such a sophisticated situation, the policymakers can consider the grid to analyze essential stakeholders’ interests, power, and any kind of relationship to make the proper amendment. When the next windows of opportunity come, they can make the policy move forward. There are many organizations that are trying to improve domestic abuse policies in Scotland. Their efforts need to be commended, however, more needs to be done.

References


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