Achievements Against the Grain: Self-Defence Training for Women and Girls in Europe

Corinna Seith
Liz Kelly

Supported by the European Commission Daphne programme
Mrs. Garrud, a well-known Suffragette, demonstrates the methods of jujitsu she has taught the W.S.P.U. "bodyguard."
1 Introduction

Self-defence training for women emerged, alongside shelters, telephone helplines and self-help groups, in the early 1970s as one of many innovative feminist responses to violence against women. Most references suggest origins in North America, but there is no doubt that some of the earliest classes also took place in Europe (Zijdel, 1999). Women’s self-defence (from here referred to as WSD) now has a 30-year history; and although relatively little research has studied the development and evolution of feminist responses to gender violence, WSD is amongst the least documented. This relative neglect became even more apparent when we discovered that there is no research that focuses on the development of self-defence for women and girls across Europe.

This first, exploratory study, therefore, represents a foundation for giving WSD in Europe a history, locating it within the wider activism of the women's movement on violence against women and girls, gender equality politics and gender/women's studies. In contrast to crisis responses to violence against women, the approach of WSD concentrates more on prevention, but as this study will show persisting misconceptions of WSD limit recognition of it as a key prevention resource for women and girls.

The aim of this one-year Daphne funded study is to analyse the development of WSD, give an overview of the current levels of provision and explore the cultural and structural barriers that frame WSD across Europe. It draws on: a survey of 155 self-defence teachers; a survey of government ministries; expert interviews and country reports from project partners in seven EU countries. We encourage readers to also consult a study funded by the German government (Hermes, 2001) and Lydia Zijdel's (1999) previous Daphne project, both of which focus on WSD for women and girls with disabilities.

In some European countries a market for self-defence provision has developed with police, martial arts, fitness centres and feminist WSD teachers being the main competitors. This study does not claim to cover all self-defence training, our focus is on approaches in WSD which locate violence against women and girls within a feminist framework/gender analysis. WSD is not, therefore, safety advice plus a few 'tricks', but a more profound concept that seeks to expand individual agency, whilst presenting a framework for understanding violence against women as the outcome of social structures. Moreover, it is also not a study of the various 'schools' within WSD, nor is it an evaluation of the outcomes of taking a self-defence course.

During the 1990s there was a growth in literature on WSD, but with very few exceptions (McCaughey, 1997; Ozer and Bandura, 1990; Searles and Berger, 1987) the majority of publications in the field are populist manuals and advice books, promoting particular approaches (for example, Benjamin, 1993; Danylewich, 2001; Gulliver, 1994; Lindquist, 2000; Quinn, 1994). During this period several longstanding European WSD practitioners published detailed manuals and descriptions of their teacher training programmes (see for example Graff, 1997, 2000 and Refleks, 2000).

There is a dearth of research, not just on WSD itself, but also on resistance strategies. The exceptions here are a small number of studies that focus on rape and sexual assault. The most well known by Pauline Bart and Patricia O'Brien was published in 1985. Drawing on interviews with 94 women who were attacked,
the research findings reveal avoiding rape was linked to active resistance and using a combination of strategies. Similar conclusions were reached in two European studies, one conducted by a German police officer Susanne Paul\(^1\) and one examining court files of rape cases in Austria (Breiter, 1995). An overview of several North American 'rape avoidance' studies (Ullman, 1997) also confirms these basic findings: that resistance can limit and/or stop sexual violence, and that active strategies are the most effective. Another influential book, *Her Wits About Her: Self-defence Success Stories by Women* (Caignon & Groves, 1987), draws on the experience of working in rape crisis, where the authors notice that a significant proportion of women calling talked about having successfully avoided rape. Both studies were influential in Europe – with Caignon and Groves being published in German in 1991. These studies and publications, although limited, offered the possibility of a paradigm shift in how to think, talk and deal with the threat and reality of gender violence. Unfortunately, however, this critical knowledge continues to be marginalised, and safety advice to women, often provided by official agencies like the police, continues to suggest that 'fighting back' is dangerous (Stanko, 1996). It is only in WSD that we find a practice willing to challenge this dominant discourse of doomed victimhood.

In the early years, however, there was no research to underpin the basis of WSD, rather it grew out of a strong belief that women’s sense of vulnerability and powerlessness was, in part, connected to a lack of access to basic self-defence skills. Some of the founders of WSD had already entered the male dominated field of martial arts, and began linking what they were learning there with the emerging evidence about gender violence which feminist activism was generating. It was the integration of these elements, alongside a desire to produce something effective and relevant that marked the origins of WSD, and remains what distinguishes it from self-defence courses that are based in martial arts or sports.

*Generally the men that were teaching, their heart was good, but they had no idea of what they were talking about, they only knew physical stuff, and they basically went from their own particular values... I remember in the early days a woman wrote to me and said “Somebody tried to rape me, I kicked him in the nuts, he fell down, I ran to the police, the police came and picked him up, he went to jail, I decided to get some self-defence training, I went to self-defence class, the guy asked us if we had any experience, I told him mine and he started screaming at me, he said I should never have kicked him in the nuts, that was the stupidest thing I could have done.” And I thought “That’s a really handy way to tell somebody that there might be a better way”. I mean how could it be better? She stopped him, and he’s arrested, he’s convicted and he’s in jail. What better way could there possibly be? Technically, there might be better things you could teach as primary defence tactics, but you don’t tell somebody who’s just been completely successful that what they did was stupid. Those kind of stories started us thinking we need a new perspective on how we teach self-defence.* (Expert interview, Netherlands)

Today, WSD is an innovative integration of physical defence strategies, assertiveness training, feminist research and practice and women’s experiential knowledge. The starting point derives from two aspects of feminist analysis. Firstly, the threat and reality of male violence means that women and girl's lives are often circumscribed, either through attempts to avoid abuse, or because of

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\(^1\) Frankfurter Rundschau, 24.11.1993
the impacts of experiences they have already suffered. Secondly, the construction of traditional femininity discourages activities and perceptions of the self for girls/women that require physical competence, assertiveness. The combination of these factors, and the cultural norms that they result in, means many women and girls do not have a strong sense of entitlement to personal and bodily integrity. As a practice, WSD sets out to challenge these realities and assumptions. But the physical strategies which are commonly viewed as the core of WSD, are only one aspect, since skills alone do not protect, as this example illustrates.

*I know black belt women who have been attacked and who were not able to - I mean they stayed alive, but that’s about it... they were really ill-prepared to defend themselves, because what they knew was sport. Practising not getting hit by a controlled technique is a whole different thing... physically and psychologically, than having to deal with unexpected attacks and rape.* (Expert interview, Netherlands)

WSD treats gender violence “as scripted interactions that women are capable of interrupting” (McCaughey, 1997, p10). In contrast to safety advice which restricts behaviour, as if there were nothing else women might do, and takes men’s presumed physical superiority for granted, WSD seeks to expand women’s space for action and challenge men’s power. Teachers use a range of strategies to enable women to move women beyond hesitancy and disbelief in their own abilities. Part of the task of WSD is to encourage in women and girls a belief in their own citizenship - that they are worth defending. In the quote below our Irish partner, director of a Women’s Studies department, summarises her understanding of what is specific about WSD. She points to the fact that it functions on both the personal and political levels simultaneously, and describes what it means to choose to take a course, as a student or a teacher.

*I think that feminist self-defence will inevitably work within a context which is socially and politically aware, which will be saying self-defence is not a luxury, self-defence is not just an evening class that you take because you’ve nothing particular to do on Monday evenings. It will be making a very specific statement about women and girls status and vulnerability in the kinds of cultures and societies that we live in.*

… By being offered as self-defence by women for women, that’s a political statement itself. And the woman who offers it, and the woman who also goes along to that class, participates and joins with other women, is recognising her vulnerability and also her autonomy and her ability to look after herself. So she is saying “I as a woman or I as a girl, can occupy an adult space which no longer just means male, it also means female: I am both entitled to and able to look after myself”... There are two things there, it’s: “I need to do this”, but also the very much more positive and affirming statement “I am capable of it”. So it is about one’s need and it is about one’s right, and it is about rethinking one’s perception of violence and the place of violence in our society... I do feel that when there is no provision, as is the case here in Ireland, that that in itself is a statement - of a kind of acceptance, almost a resignation. It is not that nothing can be done, but that things can only be done through the law, or things can only be done through policy. That there is no perception that one can change one’s role, place and perception of oneself as a woman, as a girl. (Expert interview, Ireland)

In the chapters that follow we explain how the study was conducted (Chapter 2), and provide an overview of the current levels of provision across Europe, the
approaches used and discuss the benefits of WSD – especially for survivors (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 explores the professional context of self-defence work, looking at the motivations and qualifications of self-defence teachers, their working conditions, recruitment and renewal, and the question of quality standards. The extent to which WSD is recognised and supported by government ministries, including whether it features in national Plans of Action, is addressed in Chapter 5. Common misconceptions about WSD and current debates are addressed in Chapter 6. We also explore why there is such uneven development in provision across Europe (Chapter 7). In the final chapter we offer suggestions for how the achievements and potentials of WSD could be more widely understood and supported.
2 Methodology

This research project has been designed to fill a gap in the knowledge we have about self-defence training for women and girls across Europe. It has the following aims:

- to map the extent and forms of WSD across Europe;
- to document provision for marginalised groups such as disabled women and women in the sex industry;
- to analyse debates around WSD, and the factors that enable and inhibit good provision;
- to investigate the extent to which self-defence is included in national Plans of Action and prevention policies on violence against women and girls;
- to explore the significance of self-defence in both preventing assaults and the process of coping with previous abuse;
- to document current national and European networks.

It is not the intention of this study to evaluate various models of self-defence, but rather to explore the specific practice of WSD, which locates the training in the wider context of gender violence using research, experience and role play in an integrated format.

A multi-methodological approach has been used, drawing on qualitative and quantitative methods. The main strands of the project were:

- a literature review of previous research on self-defence;
- a survey of self-defence teachers in the EU;
- a survey of government ministries in the EU;
- expert interviews with project partners;
- country reports on the history and current state of provision;
- a partner/practitioner meeting;
- briefing meetings in partner countries.

There were seven project partners across Europe from Austria, England, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway and Scotland, who were selected to reflect varied developments in the provision of WSD (see Appendix 1 for full details). In five cases the partners are long standing WSD providers and most had trained new teachers (Austria, England, Germany, the Netherlands, Scotland). In two cases (Ireland and Norway) whilst there are strong histories of work on violence against women in these countries, WSD provision is weak; partners were, therefore, selected for their knowledge about responses to violence against women. In addition, a Polish NGO interested in developing WSD participated in the project from the outset. The project partners had a number of functions throughout the project including: providing contextual knowledge about WSD in their country; compiling addresses of WSD-teachers; and ensuring the findings of the research reached the relevant people in their country. Their input and expertise has been of considerable benefit. In the following sections the different elements of the methodology are described in more detail.
Survey of WSD teachers

Assessing current provision of WSD across Europe, how it is organised, who receives it, and how the field has developed necessitated contacting self-defence teachers. There was no comprehensive list or database, and one of the tasks for our partners was to provide as extensive a list as possible of teachers in their country. The confidentiality policies of some national and regional networks meant that complex mechanisms for consent had to be negotiated, and in three instances organisations or individuals were commissioned to send out the questionnaires to their membership. In countries where we had no project partner, addresses for teachers were sought using contacts held by CWASU, emailing the national violence against women focal points on the WAVE database, Internet research and snowballing. A total of 567 questionnaires were sent out, with 155 returned from 12 countries: a response rate of 27 per cent. If, however, the 50 returned envelopes (due to out of date addresses) are excluded the response rate rises to 36 per cent (see Table 2.1 for full details).

Table 2.1: Return of questionnaires from self-defence teachers by country and sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Sent out</th>
<th>Returns Total</th>
<th>Returns by sex of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England/Wales</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>567</td>
<td><strong>155</strong></td>
<td><strong>146</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questionnaire was designed in consultation with partners. It is extensive: it comprises seven sections and a total of 165 open and closed questions, not all of which any individual would have to complete, as sections relate to different kinds of work. The questionnaire was produced in English, German and French. Areas covered include:

- basic data on the individual and their involvement in WSD;
- approaches, frameworks and concepts within WSD;
- current work - for individual teachers, those who train new teachers, and for organisations that co-ordinate courses;

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2 Teachers responding to the questionnaire were asked to provide addresses of other teachers, especially in the countries where we had little if any current leads.
Other self-defence providers locally and nationally;

an assessment of the field of WSD as a whole;

research and evaluation;

networking.

All data was coded and entered onto SPSS for quantitative analysis, responses to open ended questions were extracted and grouped around themes. This data forms the backbone of the report.

Survey of ministries

Drawing on experience in previous EU projects - where questionnaires to government ministries appeared to get lost, or never to reach the appropriate person - we also asked our project partners to identify the person responsible for violence against women in the gender equality, justice, education and sports ministries. Where we had no contacts more generic addresses had to be used. The questionnaire design kept the number of questions to a minimum in the hope that this would prompt more responses, they focused on whether self-defence was included in policies. Whilst this questionnaire was in English the accompanying letter made clear it could be completed in English, French or German. By August 2002 responses had been received from nine countries; project partners and attendees at the practitioner meeting who lived in countries where no responses had been received were asked to chase their ministries: three additional countries responded as a result. At least one response was received from 12 of the 17 countries surveyed (a response rate of 71%). Respondents were also asked to send copies of the Plans of Action, or provide an Internet address for them. The improved response rate compared to previous studies, which also surveyed ministries, suggests that there may be lessons to be learned. The following factors probably increased returns: keeping the length as brief as possible; ease of completion, most questions required tick box responses; the focus was on policy, meaning there was no need to find/collect data.

Expert Interviews

Each of our project partners was interviewed at an early point, in either English or German, and all interviews were transcribed. These expert interviews were used as a guide for developing the two questionnaires and to develop the agenda for the partner/practitioner meeting. The topics covered in the interviews included: involvement in/knowledge of WSD; the philosophy of WSD and its connections to action against violence against women and the women’s movement; past and current tensions and debates; current provision; what WSD offers women, girls and survivors; developments in the field over time; approaches; mainstreaming; and key issues for the future.

3 In the English version of the report all quotes used from German and French speaking countries have been translated, in the German version all other quotes have been translated, along with the original text.
Country Reports

All project partners were required to write a country report, documenting the history of WSD, the current state of provision, discussing former and current debates and highlighting issues special for their context. These reports were delivered before the meeting in May 2002. They range from short two-page summaries to 20 pages that reflected consultation with other providers and networks.

Partner/Practitioner Meeting

The partner/practitioner meeting had a dual function - a networking event, to act as a ‘think tank’ with respect to emerging ideas as the research went along. Attendees were all seven partners and self-defence practitioners who had been identified in another five countries: Belgium, Finland, Greece, Portugal and Sweden. Despite extensive efforts, attempts to find participants from France, Spain and Italy proved unsuccessful. The projected attendance was 19 individuals from 13 countries, although an air traffic control strike in the UK on the day of travel meant two participants did not arrive.

Following consultation before the meeting an agreed agenda covered two days, with the first focusing on providing an overview on each country context and the second addressing common issues including: how to define WSD; the uneven development of WSD across Europe; and current challenges to the field. The meeting was universally considered to be: informative; "creative and inspirational". Detailed notes were kept of the proceedings, written up and sent with a contact list to all participants.

Briefing meetings

Briefing meetings were organised at the end of the project. Each partner country arranged the briefing with reference to their local context, inviting WSD practitioners, politicians and policy makers. A later meeting was organised in Brussels for policy makers and politicians.
3 WSD - Provision, Approaches and Benefits

Drawing on the questionnaire responses and country reports, this chapter explores current provision of WSD, including a discussion of courses aimed at specific groups of women and who supports these activities locally and nationally. It also explores the overall approaches, frameworks and methods within WSD, and how these have developed since the 1970s. The chapter concludes with a discussion of what self-defence training offers women and girls - both in terms of prevention of violence and for those who have already suffered attacks. A categorisation from Jane Lewis’ analysis of the development of gender and welfare regimes, distinguishing between strong, moderate and weak breadwinner states (Lewis, 1992; and see Seith, 2001 where it is applied to institutional responses to domestic violence), is adapted to describe the uneven provision of WSD across European countries (see Chapter 7 for more detailed analysis).

3.1 Provision of WSD across Europe

The data in this section draws on the questionnaire responses from 155 self-defence teachers. They are certainly not the majority of providers across Europe, but some are the only teachers in their countries, and others are major providers in their city/region. The figures we present should not, however, be taken as an accurate measure, since they are undoubtedly an underestimate. Rather, they represent a preliminary mapping of the extent of provision and wider patterns and contrasts.

The 155 self-defence teachers provided 1,918 courses for 23,908 women and girls in 2001. Most taught classes for women (81%) as well as for girls (72%). In general more courses for girls were taught than for women (see Table 3.1), with average participation rates per course of 12 for women and 13 for girls.

Table 3.1: Provision for women and girls in 2001 across Europe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target group</th>
<th>No of courses</th>
<th>No of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>849</td>
<td>9788</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>1069</td>
<td>14120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1918</strong></td>
<td><strong>23908</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The duration of the courses for both groups ranged between eight and 16 hours, with an average of 12 hours. Whereas there is a clear preponderance of weekend/two-day courses for adult women, weekly sessions are equally likely to be the format for girls. The majority of self-defence courses involve some form of financial subsidy, with some being entirely free of charge. Where individuals have to pay themselves, women pay an average of 100 Euros for a course, with fees for girls being slightly less.

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4 As noted in Chapter 2 the majority of respondents are female (94%). Distinctions between male and female respondents will only be made if relevant to the data.
WSD courses are primarily undertaken by individual teachers, although two-thirds are linked to a network or organisation that provides self-defence courses. Looking at the 44 organisations that co-ordinate self-defence in more detail, we see that these organisations tend to be quite small, with most comprising less than five teachers. A minority have between 10-15 teachers, and one in Austria has about 70. The research data make clear that such organisations are major providers: in 2001 they provided 693 courses for 9911 participants. It is not just a centre that matters, but acting as a co-ordination point, since the majority of courses taking place in other locations (see Table 3.2). Activities undertaken also extend beyond classes to include talks, writing articles and networking; all of which are considered important areas of activity in the promotion of WSD. Almost a third of centres are also involved in offering training for new WSD teachers, a similar proportion have a website and a quarter provide supervision for new trainers. Despite this range of provision only 17 per cent receive funding to run the centre, mostly from the city or local government and/or from the county/Land5.

Table 3.2: Courses organised through centres in 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target group</th>
<th>No of courses</th>
<th>No of participants</th>
<th>No of courses</th>
<th>No of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult women</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>2273</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>1835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>4143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed-sex</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>3500</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>6411</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whilst most of the centres agree that demand for self-defence classes has changed, there is no consensus about what has changed: half report a general increase; 13 per cent a decrease in courses for adult women offset by an increase in provision for girls; and 13 per cent note an overall decrease in demand.

An attempt was also made to explore provision at local, regional and national levels. Although these data are more impressionistic, since participants were clearly more confident in their knowledge about their local area compared to regional or national levels, they nonetheless provide an indication of how widespread WSD has become. Findings are mixed, with between a third and a half rating provision at all levels poorly developed. Interestingly the most well developed assessments were at national levels, although less than half responded to this question. Good provision appears to be connected with urban areas and the presence of committed self-defence teachers. The expansion of courses for girls was a common theme, especially in strong provider countries.

As WSD is located in the intersections between feminist practice, crime prevention and sports, meaning that there are different actors in the field, the

5 These, also referred to as Länder, are regions in Germany's federal structure, which have considerable self-government.
questionnaire also asked what percentage of self-defence classes in each country drew on these three perspectives. Teachers estimate that a third of provision draws on a feminist perspective; a quarter is provided by the police; with the largest percentage working from a martial arts/sports base. There are few links between these providers, due to their different approaches and competition within a limited market.

3.1.1 Provision of WSD for adult women

This section will look in more detail at the provision for adult women: i.e., those aged over 18. Self-defence classes tend to be divided into beginners and advanced courses: of the 155 teachers, 117 had taught 699 beginners classes and 42 teachers taught 150 advanced courses in 2001; the total attendance was 9788. The majority taught between one and seven beginners and/or advanced courses, with a small minority (6) teaching between 20 and 50 courses.

Most of the courses offered were open to all women. A proportion also taught courses that targeted particular groups: most commonly women with disabilities and staff at workplaces. Other commonly targeted groups were university/college students and migrant women, with some provision targeting shelter residents, women in the sex industry, drug users and older women (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3: Which groups of women are courses targeted at?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open - any woman</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled women (including mental health)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff at workplaces</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University/college students</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant women</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelter residents/survivors</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in prostitution</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug users, women in prison</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older women</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=128, multiple responses

This targeted provision reflects a key issue in contemporary feminist theory and practice: how to address differences between women whilst not reifying them or neglecting commonalities (Walby, 2002). The practice of developing courses for marginalised and disadvantaged women reflects an understanding that social discrimination can create both forms of vulnerability and exclusion from services. Specialist courses ensure access, and that the content is relevant to the experiences and needs of these groups. Classes organised within institutions, most often workplaces and universities/colleges, suggests awareness that sexism and sexual harassment still characterise these contexts. Despite strong EU policy stressing the importance of prevention, action on sexual harassment
seems to have become a low priority, and certainly in England and Scotland such courses are now conducted under the more neutral concept of ‘personal safety’, with the focus shifting to the danger of assaults from service users rather than gender dynamics within the workforce. Employment and education are social worlds within which hierarchies and power structures are negotiated, where equality legislation and policies are in process. In such contexts the relevance of self-defence for women remains.

Most courses are organised through partnerships with other organisations. Where it is not self-defence teachers themselves who organise courses, the other most significant actors are: adult education, colleges and universities, equal opportunity offices, and women’s services (see Table 3.4).

Table 3.4: Who organises self-defence classes for women?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-defence teachers</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult education</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleges/universities</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal opportunity offices</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist violence against women services</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s groups</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local government</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability organisations</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various social institutions/hospitals</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=123, multiple responses

3.1.2 Provision of WSD for girls

The study findings make clear that WSD provision for girls has become increasingly important, especially in Germany and Austria, indeed almost three-quarters of our teachers provided courses for girls. As Table 3.5 demonstrates, younger girls are more than twice as likely to attend a self-defence course than their slightly older counterparts.

In some countries an extension to ever younger age groups was clear, with the youngest age mentioned being 5-year-olds: one German teacher taught 170 girls aged between 5 and 8 and another 120 girls between 7 and 10. One ironic outcome of this inclusion of younger girls appears to be an accompanying narrowing of provision for young women (the 13-17-year-olds), with this shift most evident in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands. In most other countries there is little, if any work, done with primary school girls.

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6 Whilst some of these courses are provided by WSD teachers, most are undertaken by commercial companies which do not use a gender analysis.
Table 3.5: Provision of self-defence for girls in 2001 by age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>No of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age 9-12</td>
<td>9042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 13-17</td>
<td>4378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with adult women, the organisation of courses for girls is mainly done through partnerships, although here unsurprisingly the main institutions involved are schools (including kindergartens/nurseries) and youth centres (see Table 3.6).

Table 3.6 Who organises classes for girls?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth centre</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self/own organisation</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local government</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult education</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers/parents</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls centre</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s centre</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability organisations</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal opportunity office</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=114, multiple responses

The initiators are often mothers/parents' associations, reflecting an increased awareness of, and concern about, child sexual abuse, as well as more openness about gender issues and the need for gender sensitive preventative work in school and in youth work.

The majority of teachers provided classes inside as well as outside school time. In some cases this involved coming in as an external expert, in others female youth workers or teachers with a self-defence qualification provided courses as part of their overall responsibilities (10 per cent of our respondents were able to do this). There were also strong links in some areas (especially in Germany) between specialist violence against women services, schools and kindergartens, in order to develop prevention.

This workplace offers space for the provision of Wendo classes for girls and women as well as other violence prevention work. We have a 16-year-old tradition of providing structured feminist girls’ work, in which self-defence is integrated. The aim is to provide space for girls in which they can experience themselves. (Q 615, Germany)

Whereas most provision for girls depends on the engagement of individuals or specific organisations, there are some examples of mainstreaming in schools...
backed by national or regional policies. In Germany, Nordrhein Westphalen passed a law that promotes gender-specific violence prevention work for girls and boys in primary schools, whereby any school wanting to organise self-defence classes can get funding. Another example is the Marietje Kesselsproject in the Netherlands. It too is a violence prevention programme for girls and boys in primary school. Both approaches are based on single-sex provision and represent examples of state acknowledgement of the preventative potential of self-defence training (see also Chapter 5).

3.1.3 WSD for disabled women and girls

Developing the concept of WSD for disabled women and girls has been a specific contribution of WSD, to increase agency for those who have been seen and treated as less able, and are frequently excluded from services. Not only is there a movement within WSD to include women and girls with disabilities, but there are also specialised training for trainers programmes. Lydia Zijdel from the Netherlands, who is physically disabled herself, has developed a concept that focuses on those who have a physical disability, especially those who use wheelchairs and Maloush Köhler, also living in the Netherlands, has adapted self-defence for deaf women. The work with disabled women in Scotland grew out of a training course Lydia Zijdel gave there over a decade ago. The strongest provider of WSD for disabled women and girls is again Germany, followed, at a much lower level by the Netherlands and Austria. Provision in the other countries this study includes can be described as marginal, with the low figures for the English speaking countries especially noteworthy, given the strength of other policies with respect to disability. The comparatively low provision in the Netherlands is also surprising for three reasons: a strong tradition of mainstreaming with respect to disability; a high level of institutionalisation of WSD; and the fact that several of the specialists in this field come from/are located in the Netherlands.

Provision of specialist courses is one strategy, as important has been making facilities accessible so that integrated WSD courses, where able bodied and disabled women take classes together, can be organised. There is undoubtedly both an increasing awareness of the needs of disabled women, and a growing specialisation amongst self-defence teachers. In Germany the Federal Office for the Family, Elderly People, Women and Youth funds an NGO that represents the interests of disabled women and has published a study about the provision of self-defence for disabled women/girls (Hermes, 2001). One outcome of this study is a database of courses, trainers and training for trainers that can be accessed via the homepage of this NGO.

3.1.4 Work with boys and mixed-sex groups

Special classes for boys were reported from Austria, Germany and the Netherlands as part of violence prevention work, and in some areas provision takes place in mixed-sex groups. The Association Defendo, for example, in Austria offered 43 classes for younger boys with 540 taking part in 2001. Most of

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7 The data may be slightly misleading, since there was a not a high return rate from teachers in the Netherlands (see Chapter 2).
8 www.behindertefrauen.org
the classes were taught in school time. Whilst the issues of violence, sexual harassment and awareness of boundaries are dealt with, and role plays are a core method, physical techniques are not used in work with boys. Defendo think male teachers should work with the older boys, but there is a lack of qualified men. Frauen in Bewegung in Frankfurt/Main, Germany run “a very popular violence prevention programme in the schools for boys and girls aged 6-10 and there is an increase in demand for courses for boys” (Graff, 2002). The Mariëtte Kesselsproject provided 42 classes for girls and boys in single-sex groups in 2001. The decision to work with boys can be part of a wider commitment to promoting anti-violence, but it may also be a pragmatic decision since access to girls in schools may only be possible where programmes also include boys, as the experience of this Austrian teacher demonstrates.

We have integrated boys work in our primary school concept, because we couldn't reach the girls as a separate group. [We were told] "When girls learn self-defence, boys should learn something too.” (Q 465, Austria)

Within this aspect of WSD sits the question of whether single-sex work is accepted, and if so on what grounds. Ideology tends to predominate in questioning single-sex provision, and is often essentially a rejection of the feminist approach that underpins WSD; the most common argument being that single-sex provision is 'old fashioned' and contravenes equality principles (see also Chapter 6). In Germany theories of socialisation are an important reference. From this perspective both violent behaviour and powerlessness are learned, which, in turn, mean that they can be changed. The discussion, therefore, revolves around whether boys should have self-defence classes at all and whether work with them should address gender violence in a different way. The question of whether teachers should be men or women is also a live one.

3.1.5 WSD - an expanding field

The findings on the provision of women's self-defence within Europe reflect both a need for, and the success of, an approach developed by autonomous individuals and groups in response to gender violence. The extension of provision to diverse groups of women shows that WSD is both adaptable and relevant to a broad range of women. Whilst WSD is clearly sought out by those who attend classes, it has also been the subject of resistance and scepticism. Its continuity from its origin in the 1970s through to increased acknowledgement in some countries is a tribute to the persistence of teachers, the quality of their work and the power of the argument. In the best contexts a variety of partnerships have developed, with schools, youth services, universities/colleges and workplaces viewing it as a key prevention strategy. Increased demand for work with girls reflects not only a growing awareness of the risks of child sexual abuse, but also a preference for interventions that stress empowerment and agency rather than vulnerability. That said, however, provision is not consistent across Europe, with some countries having very few trained teachers and others a large pool. Why development should be so uneven is explored in more detail in Chapter 7.

Two noticeable shifts deserve further comment: a move away from courses for women to provision for girls in strong provider contexts, and within this demand for work with even younger girls. Some teachers explained the decrease in women's courses through references to a changed economic situation and
women having less money, although this does not chime with official statistics that show that - at least in Western Europe - women have more disposable income than ever before. It does, however, raise the issue of funding for provision, whether access to free and subsidised courses makes taking self-defence more possible, not just for poor women, but for all women. Another explanation offered by some teachers was that the shift in public attention to child sexual abuse may have been at the cost of violence against women (see also Kelly and Regan, 2001).

_In the last ten years there has been a clear shift in the demand for Wendo classes from women's to girls classes. More and more women think it is more important to send their daughters to a course than coming themselves. I have the sense that this is not to do with women feeling so much safer in our society, but that violence against women has become less visible than in the 70s or 80s. (Q 605, Germany)_

If this perception is correct it raises the possibility that women with daughters prioritise their safety needs, rather than their own. Perhaps a hierarchy of 'need' is established within which investment in children is more justifiable than women investing in themselves. Whilst concerns about personal safety are undoubtedly more accepted and recognised, it is possible that, on a latent level, adult women choosing a WSD course is still regarded as a 'man-hating' enterprise (see also, McCaughey, 1997).

Another factor may be that providing classes for girls and children has opened up a new market. Several respondents who train new teachers and co-ordinate provision observed that women, and especially men, became interested in training as self-defence teachers for children precisely because it is more financially rewarding (see also Chapter 4). It is also worth noting that several providers in countries where provision is at the moderate or weak level for adult women, and work with girls is not well developed, commented that they could not currently meet the demand for courses for women due to a lack of teachers. This suggests that shifts away from courses for adult women in strong provider countries reflect market mechanisms, including funding politics.

Within provision for girls, the involvement of 5-9-year-olds is also interesting. This tells us something about the increasing sophistication of the knowledge and skills teachers bring to their work, responding to the challenge of what preventative work might mean and how it can be realised. At the same time a dynamic between an increased awareness, demand and provision for younger girls has been accompanied, worryingly, by a relative decrease in provision for the 13-17-year-old group. Whether this reflects funding politics, or is connected to the declining awareness of rape (as opposed to child sexual abuse) needs exploration. For example, are secondary schools less willing to invest in preventative programmes that focus on gender? And if so, are there strategies that might be used to increase awareness and provision? One argument which could be used to support provision for young women are findings from two recent research studies with young people in England, Scotland and Ireland (Kitzinger and Burton, 1998; Regan and Kelly, 2001). Both studies found that whilst young people had 'got the message' about domestic violence, they were far less clear about sexual violence, especially where the boundaries between consent, pressure, coercion and force lay. It was also revealing that almost two thirds of young women and a third of young men knew someone who had been victimised; a significant proportion of these people were peers.
Whatever combination of factors accounts for shifts in provision, it seems to be the case that increases for one sector currently takes place at the expense of others, which is not a desirable outcome.

3.2 Approaches and frameworks within WSD

We have already noted that many people's perception of WSD is limited to learning physical techniques in order to fight off an attack by a stranger. Not only has WSD adapted in order to work with specific groups, it has expanded its framework to include the continuum of violence against women (Kelly, 1987). From early origins, where the focus was primarily on strategies to prevent rape and stranger attacks, WSD now addresses a wide range of subtle and direct forms of intrusion, harassment, abuse and assault. Whereas teaching women and girls quick and effective physical strategies remains an important element, the focus has shifted to preventing and stopping harassment and abuse at the earliest point, since most gender violence is not a sudden unexpected attack, but takes place within the everyday contexts and routines of women and girls' lives (Stanko, 1985), and is most likely to be committed by someone they know. More emphasis, therefore, is placed on verbal strategies and confidence as means of setting boundaries and taking control of situations. In this way the theoretical insights from feminist analysis and research on violence have been directly reflected in the practice of self-defence. It is this, more than anything, which distinguishes WSD from both martial arts and competitive/health-based sports activities. At its most basic, WSD is a practice of active resistance to gender violence, from low-level sexual harassment through to attacks involving weapons. WSD is a complex approach (as the quotes below illustrate) which aims to provide women and girls with confidence in their right to challenge, confront and, hopefully, stop latent and direct forms of gender violence in a range of contexts.

It's not for sports or to develop competitive skills. It's about women having more choices - knowing their strengths and building on them, sharing ideas and being strong and finding out what works for them. Also discussions, role plays etc. do not happen in martial arts set-up. (Q 11, England)

Martial arts is sports. Feminist self-defence means: stand up for yourself, be in contact with yourself/your needs/making yourself strong enough to get in life what you think is important. Get out of the role of the victim. (Q 88, Netherlands)

Self-defence for women and girls builds on women's inner strengths and is open to women of any age and ability. When organising a class all these needs must be recognised. Martial arts classes are unlikely to have any input on violence towards women or put this in context of an abuse of power. (Q 131, Scotland)

The development of WSD is intertwined with emerging feminist analysis of, and research on gender violence, whilst holding its own special concept that focuses on autonomy and resistance. Indeed, as Martha McCaughey (1997) notes, WSD prefigured subsequent interests in feminist theory with respect to the body, embodiment and women's agency, but these links are seldom acknowledged in academia, or recognised by practitioners. Her definition of WSD as 'physical feminism' is an attempt to make these connections explicit.

Feminist analysis has theorised the threat and reality of men's violence as a form of social control that limits women's freedom and agency, undermines confidence and self-esteem (Dupuis et al, 2000; Hanmer and Maynard, 1987; Stanko 1985).
Violence is one constituent of "the gender regime" (Walby, 2002), by which is meant the social structures and relations that reproduce gender inequality. In representing violence against women as a continuum, Liz Kelly drew attention to the range of forms it takes, and their prevalence over the life course (Kelly, 1987). The analysis of gender violence as one means of generating, reinforcing and maintaining gender inequality alongside detailed deconstructions of victim-perpetrator interactions provides the knowledge base for contemporary WSD (see Table 3.7). It seeks to provide a framework within which women and girls can explore how to deal with these situations in an active way. At the same time teachers also integrate other knowledge, including that from martial arts, in their practice.

Table 3.7: What is specific about WSD?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feminist analysis</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on assertiveness and survival</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on women's experience</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapted to women's process/abilities/resources</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective, but easy to learn techniques</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe and empowering setting</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covers a range of intrusion/abuse/violence</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=141, multiple responses

This is further illustrated in the responses to a question about the most important goals of WSD (see Table 3.8), where increasing women's confidence, agency and knowledge about gender violence emerged as shared goals amongst teachers.

The goal of self-defence is that women develop an understanding that women are not to blame for men's violence; of where women are most likely to experience violence and from whom; that self-defence is about survival and that women are survivors and many of them/us have already got skills; to share knowledge. (Q 131, Scotland)

Self-defence is about understanding power games of men and how to influence that by using strong (body)language and physical techniques, to feel safer. (Q 90, Netherlands)

The goals are very similar for girls (see Table 3.8). The main differences are a stronger emphasis on establishing a rights-based framework – that girls and women have the right to say no, a right to their own sexuality – and an even stronger focus on preventative strategies rather than physical techniques.
Table 3.8: Goals of self-defence for women and girls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increasing confidence</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing women's agency</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and awareness to assess situations</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right to say no/ right to own sexuality</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect to own strength and explore fear</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect on own lives/get support/solidarity</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn quick and effective physical techniques</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for self and others/respect diversity</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=144, multiple responses

3.2.1 Elements and methods

Achieving these goals has resulted in a concept and practice that integrates cognitive, emotional, physical and social dimensions. The questionnaire did ask what 'school', if any, within WSD the teachers identified with, data analysis, however, revealed far stronger commonalities than differences in ideology and approach. In this section, therefore, we present the data in this way, highlighting the shared perspectives and practices within the field.

The main elements in contemporary WSD training are: providing accurate information about gender violence; assertiveness training (mainly using role plays); physical techniques; and creating a context for discussions and reflections. Some teachers also integrate a mental training. Whilst the relative weight given to each of the four elements will depend partly on the target group, and partly on the curriculum each teacher works with, most teachers integrate all of them into their courses. Each of these elements is described in more detail below, with reference to courses for women, working with girls requires adjustments, with more emphasis on role-play and fun.

"Knowledge makes strong" - The significance of evidence based practice

The slogan "knowledge makes strong" (in German "Wissen macht stark") reflects the shared perspective that providing accurate information about violence against women and children is a critical component of WSD. On average, teachers spend about 16 per cent of the course time on this element (ranging from 10-30%). The information most often included was to discuss the most likely contexts in which women and girls encounter gender violence, the various forms it can take, who the perpetrators are most likely to be, victim-perpetrator dynamics and discussing victim blame. The majority of teachers in this study use current research extensively, including prevalence studies and the few studies that look at successful resistance strategies.

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9 It is worth noting that many studies of violence against women and child sexual abuse fail to ask questions about resistance. Where this issue is addressed, considerable evidence of strategies being used emerges, as well as accounts of the actions of women and girls interrupting or limiting assaults. It is also relevant that in cases of ongoing violence, it is often the actions of the woman or child that account for the point at which it ends (see, for example Kelly, 1987; Kelly et al, 1991).
The most cited study is still that undertaken by Bart and O'Brien in the USA, published in 1985, which analysed the strategies used by women who were sexually assaulted, and which proved to be the most successful in preventing rape. One of the strong recommendations from teachers was for more European research, especially a study that evaluates the impacts of WSD.

A quarter of teachers explicitly locate their courses within a more general analysis of women's status and equality between women and men, with the intention of making clear links between violence against women and persistent direct and indirect discrimination. Information on legal and human rights, including the legal definition of the right to defend oneself, how sexual assault, rape and rape in marriage are defined in statute law, alongside information about legal procedures is another important area. Other information often provided includes contact for local support agencies like shelters, rape crisis and other victim support services, as well as written material about domestic violence or sexual harassment in the workplace. This is one way in which WSD teachers act as a bridge to other services.

Assertiveness training

Assertiveness or confrontation training is another key element of WSD, drawing extensively on the use of role-play, alongside exercises that focus on body awareness, body language, using the voice and analysing communication patterns. Whether the perpetrator is a stranger, acquaintance or well known, men often test whether their target will resist or challenge them. Acting out scenarios, either set by the teacher or based on students' own experiences, enable the class to undertake detailed analysis of these interactions. Through discussion new possibilities for intervening emerge that can be immediately tested and assessed whether they might work. The kinds of scenarios used range from being touched by a stranger in the public sphere (for example, on public transport, in swimming pools, spas), through regular low-level harassment at work, to sexual approaches by relatives and friends, and ongoing abuse in a relationship. The aim of assertiveness training is to prepare women and girls in a systematic way for different situations and contexts in order to increase their confidence and ability to disrupt and confront sexist and violent behaviour at an early point. Depending on the situation and contextual factors, a successful strategy can be to run away, to confront with non-verbal strategies, to use language, or to get other people to help. Teachers devoted an average of 20 percent (between 10-30%) of the course time to this activity. Research concludes that early intervention, acting in a strong and clear way and using a combination of strategies are the most successful methods of dealing with sexual assaults (see Bart and O'Brien, 1985; Breiter, 1995). But as research, experience from women and legal cases show some men ignore women and girls' protests and resistance. In this situation, as a last resort, WSD suggests the use of physical techniques.

Physical techniques

Most of the techniques taught in WSD are adapted from various martial arts. They are selected because they are both easy to learn and likely to be effective. In beginner courses participants learn first of all to change their idea of themselves as weak facing an all-powerful man. The aim is to make women
aware of men's vulnerable points and how they can use their fingers, hands, feet and knees to fight back. For many women this change in self-perception is, initially, a psychological process.

In a course for beginners the focus is on easy techniques that can be used if attacked from the front or the rear, taking into account how close the perpetrator is – the exact circumstances mean some techniques are more appropriate than others. In advanced courses, situations like strangling (from the front or from behind) are addressed, and liberation techniques practiced. As with assertiveness training, different contexts are systematically explored, so that appropriate strategies for fighting back and freeing oneself if attacked when standing, sitting or lying down, or grabbed by the feet, and even when trapped on the ground (often called 'ground survival') are practiced. Obviously these contexts are examples of more serious assaults, but WSD demonstrates that even in these situations there are possibilities for successful resistance. A higher proportion of time is spent on this activity - between 20-50 per cent - because many participants are not comfortable and familiar with these actions, they need to practice and repeat them to gain confidence and skill.

The combination of assertiveness and physical skills often results in women feeling they have a new persona, as a female who can be active and successful. Martha McCaughey calls this a new 'habitus': a changed way of living and being in one's body.

Students mention that the emotional [mental] part of self-defence is so much more than the physical, not only because they realise how often men assert their privilege in everyday situations... but also because they develop a new habitus, with a new set of values... The consequence is a new way of being in the world... Women learn a new set of assertive responses to the various forms of intimidation, threat and harassment that fall along the continuum of sexual violence. (McCaughey, 1997, p116-7)

Mental training

Some WSD courses bolster these elements through a form of mental training. Mental training is a way of reinforcing what has already been practiced, and involves listening to detailed stories of successful resistance, whilst concentrating on imagining oneself in the situation and taking the actions described. The intention is to inscript, on a mental level, the new persona/habitus. Mental training is another method of challenging an internalised perception of passivity and inability to fight back. Instead of reacting with fear and being frozen, the successful and active imagining self is emphasised. In the late 1980s it was often referred to as challenging 'learned helplessness' (for a more detailed description see Graff, 1997).

Space for reflection and discussion

Space for reflection on new knowledge, alongside making sense of one's own experiences, exchange useful strategies and being able to voice fears and needs is the other vital component. The issues that come up are different - some students find out that they can be very clear about setting boundaries using non-verbal strategies, but find it hard to respond verbally. Others feel unconfident with physical techniques, but can use their voices in strong and powerful ways. Still others find the knowledge of physical techniques is a relief. A common feature of
WSD courses is that at the beginning students come with the stereotypical stranger attack in their mind, but by the end are more concerned about harassment and violence from acquaintances, colleagues and (ex) partners. The many shifts in understanding and perception give women and girls a lot to think about. Providing time and space for dialogue and exchange about perceptions and interpretations in the group enables participants to question taken for granted masculine and feminine behaviour, in a safe and supportive context. Teachers allocate an average of 16 per cent of the time to discussions.

### 3.2.2 Adaptive and flexible

According to our sample the overall conceptual approach of WSD has changed little since the late 1980s, and the few who reported changing their approach more markedly tended to be the pioneers. Those who trained to be WSD teachers in the 1990s are confident that they have a strong basis for their practice. Where changes have occurred it is a matter of detail and emphasis, such as increasing the input on assertiveness and confidence building, using more research findings, spending less time on physical techniques and using easier ones. Teachers of WSD describe themselves as flexible, and able to adapt to the needs of the groups they teach. These similarities are much more significant than the different 'schools' which specialise in women's self-defence.

### 3.3 "There is no need for repetition!"

In this section the benefit of self-defence will be explored from the perspective of the self-defence teachers, in response to questions on what WSD offers women, girls and survivors. Regardless of whether we look at the findings with respect to women or girls, WSD teachers agree that confidence, strength and agency are the most important things self-defence training offers, followed by enhanced self-respect/self-esteem (see Table 3.9).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.9: The most important things self-defence gives women and girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Most important things</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength and courage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency/setting boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and framework to understand gender violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self respect/self esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to say no/awareness of rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety/awareness of situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive valuing of body and loudness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe disclosure/sharing experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun and new friendship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=150 (women), N=140 (girls), multiple responses
An enhanced awareness about situations of harassment; a better understanding of interactions; positive valuing of the body and of using the voice (being able to shout) are especially stressed. These can be understood as differentiations of, and conditions for, the trinity of confidence, strength and agency that characterises the goals of WSD.

Knowledge about violence against women, and a framework within which to understand it, was considered especially important for adult women, whereas positive valuing of one’s body, the ability to say no and awareness of one’s rights were emphasised for girls. The possibility for safe disclosure and sharing experiences is perceived as relevant for women and girls, and in contrast to the notion that dealing with violence against women is a sad and isolating experience, fun and new friendships are other important elements WSD offers.

One of the many stereotypes surrounding WSD is that it is only relevant to those who have yet to encounter violence and abuse. In fact, many survivors of past, and even current, abuse join classes. Some are motivated by a determination to avoid further abuse, others seek a route to move beyond the fear and anxiety which places limits on their lives, and still others want some form of intervention which involves the body.

I have known women to leave violent partners, but for some it validates their own experience, provides them with a chance to acknowledge their own courage and to help other women by sharing their experiences. Self-defence can give them a chance to express something for the first time, as violence may have been much earlier in their lives. (Q 131, Scotland)

Self-defence gives women and girls a lot: it strengthens self-confidence and self esteem, liberates from inhibiting feelings of self-blame, provides knowledge about how to react and how to actively challenge harassment as well as more targeted strategies to physically fight back. (Q 699, Germany)

Teachers are aware of the probability that women and girls will bring their own histories, and the legacies of them, to the classes and pay close attention to the needs and responses of survivors. Table 3.10 summarises what self-defence teachers think the practice of WSD offers survivors, and whilst increased agency is again the major benefit, having a framework to make sense of the experience in a collective context and maybe speak for the first time about it also feature strongly.

Table 3.10: What offers WSD to survivors?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What WSD offers</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased options/agency</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging fear/powerlessness/barriers to action</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to reflect/understand violence</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact with other survivors/support/solidarity</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not blaming self /placing responsibility on the perpetrator</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self worth/confidence</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing own survival strategies</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on trauma/overcoming experience/healing</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=146, multiple responses
WSD offers new and active ways for dealing with the past and the present, alternatives to the avoidance and/or coping strategies many women use (Kelly, 1987). The discovery of these possibilities can have a ‘releasing effect’, shifting a sense of fear and inevitability to a perspective which recognises that "there is no need for repetition" (Q 63, Netherlands) and "that it might not happen again, as they might be able to prevent/fight back/escape" (Q 102, England)

Self-defence teachers are clear that although WSD provides a context where speaking out and expressing emotions is possible, healing from the trauma is not the aim of self-defence. Nonetheless, many survivors, including a number of the teachers in this study, experience a ‘releasing effect’ through expressing anger, being validated and developing skills (see also, Brison, 2002; McCaughey, 1997).

Self-defence is a possibility to live better with the trauma. (Q 764, Germany)

It gives survivors the joy, that they don’t have to endure this anymore, the determination to refuse to be a victim, for some maybe working through the bad experience, for others maybe pain, sadness, memories. (Q 854, Germany)

WSD and women’s support services complement each. Both put violence at the centre, but whereas support services stress work on trauma, mainly in an individual face–to-face setting, self-defence focuses on developing more agency – on both on a practical and symbolic level – in a collective setting. Or as one of the self-defence teachers put it:

Self-defence ends personal isolation and the silence, gives the message that the violence is not their fault. [WSD] creates a safe place for reflection and to begin to work through the experiences. [WSD] also empowers women as individuals and provides solidarity between women. (Q 615, Germany)

In this sense it contributes to the task of re-integrating survivors into the community, one key aspect of overcoming the legacies of trauma (Herman, 1987). Much work on dealing with victimisation works primarily from a psychological perspective. Victimisation is a social event, and has a range of impacts on relationships with others. Philosophy professor Susan Brison (2002), reflecting on her own experience of stranger rape, argues for a more social understanding of the self\(^\text{10}\), and the role WSD can play in overcoming the negative impacts of violence.

I develop and defend a view of the self as fundamentally relational – capable of being undone by violence. But also of being remade in connection to others... Learning to fight back is a crucial part of this process, not only because it enables us to experience justified, healing rage... the confidence I gained from learning to fight back not only enabled me to walk down the street again, it gave me back my life... a changed life, a paradoxical life. (pxi, p14-15)

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\(^\text{10}\) In fact it is through reflecting on her own experience that Susan Brison comes to challenge perspectives in philosophy that are based on an isolated view of the self.
3.4 WSD – a way to gain confidence, agency and strength

Contemporary WSD has retained its core perspective, whilst evolving in many ways, and is located in the intersection of feminist approaches to work with women and children, crime prevention and sports. The aim of WSD is to empower women and girls, teach them useful and life-relevant knowledge and to increase their agency/space for action, using an integrated approach that combines cognitive, behavioural, psychological, physical and political dimensions. One of the main premises is that ‘every woman and every girl is able to defend herself’. Women and girls are not positioned as powerless victims, but rather as having strength, resources and possibilities. WSD can also claim to be ‘evidence based’ drawing heavily on research and women’s experience; the concept has also proved adaptable in practice, adjusting to women’s needs, abilities and resources. Unlike self-defence courses provided by martial arts or the police, WSD recognises that many participants will already have had encounters with gender violence. Women-only settings provide the safety and security, especially for survivors, necessary for exploration of fears, realities and future potentials. This chapter reveals that WSD has moved beyond stereotypes, and as currently practiced has much to offer women and girls, including those who experience additional forms of discrimination and exclusion. Awareness raising and information campaigns could help to challenge the misrepresentations of WSD, since they act as a barrier to both funding for provision and widening access for women and girls to important and useful knowledge. Both self-defence providers and organisations that understand its contribution should join together to promote the approach, stressing the positive contributions it makes in holistic responses to violence against women.
4 WSD – A Developing Professional Field

In the previous chapter the evolution of the concept of WSD, and the extent of provision across Europe were outlined. In this chapter we look in more detail at the professional field itself: the routes women take to becoming teachers; their qualifications and working conditions; teacher training programmes; and current debates on quality standards. We explore these issues in detail in order to highlight the contradictions between the expertise and knowledge within WSD and the poor working conditions, with the result that the field continues to be sustained by the dedication of WSD-teachers. This material also forms part of the basis for discussions in Chapter 6 on current tensions and debates.

4.1 Routes and motivations to becoming a WSD teacher

There has been a marked change in the routes to becoming a self-defence teacher over the last two decades. The pioneers responding to the survey, most of whom were already linked to the women's movement, found routes through martial arts and gathered additional skills and knowledge through occasional workshops. For them the limited involvement of other women in martial arts meant finding a woman teacher was extremely rare.

The martial arts world was almost exclusively male until the last decade and women have had to fight for a place in traditional schools. (Graff, 2002)

In 1971, I was in a women's group at the university I was attending, and we got a special offer for a self-defence class from the local martial arts school, that was run by a woman. (Expert interview, Netherlands)

Teachers who began in a context where there was an established WSD movement have been able to access specialised teacher training programmes, run by women for women. Both routes exist in the current context, with teachers in countries where provision is weak still having to rely on a martial arts foundation, often travelling abroad to improve their knowledge and skills. However, in some weak provider countries efforts have been made to 'import' specialist training, drawing on WSD expertise from European countries with a strong tradition. An example of this in our study is the link between German WSD trainers and NGOs in Poland11.

As evidence of the extent and range of gendered violence grew within the women's movement, teaching WSD was a route to involvement in what has been one of the most dynamic arenas of feminist activism (Kelly, 2001). This is reflected in the motivations of teachers who entered WSD after taking a course themselves: half said they wanted to empower women, with more than a third viewing WSD as a tool to combat violence against women. For these women WSD is "a positive approach to addressing issues of women's safety and violence within society" (Q 32, England), that "brings together political work against violence against women and physical activity to create a fulfilling and

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11 Germany's tradition as the strongest provider of WSD in Europe is reflected in the fact that many German teachers have conducted training in other countries, especially during the last decade in Central and Eastern Europe.
meaningful job" (Q 21, England). Over a quarter of teachers (27%) were also involved in work on violence against women, and this connection was stronger for women who have been involved for the longest periods of times.

In fact, most of us were not only teaching self-defence and probably martial arts, we were also working in rape crisis centres, and then a little bit later, in battered women’s shelters. (Expert Interview, Netherlands)

Other situational factors influencing women’s decisions included: demand for classes; the availability of training; and personal experience of violence. Experiences for some continue to be fraught with ambivalence, especially where there are few women involved and awareness about gender violence remains low. This continuing tendency is illustrated by the following example from Eastern Germany: "In search of a course for me and my daughters we had a couple of frustrating experiences with male trainers" (Q 661, Germany). The lack of specialised provision, including there being no women-only classes, remains an incentive for becoming a self-defence teacher.

Some of the pioneers report that martial arts had enabled them "to become stronger as a woman and survivor of sexual abuse" (Q 121, Netherlands), and some survivors who found WSD a transformative experience were motivated to share this with others, "because I was able to prevent an armed attempted rape" (Q 502, Germany). Many of the teachers in this study thought WSD offered something unique, through its focus on empowerment, confidence building and expansion of agency, making distinctions with crisis and support services where one has to confront the negative impacts and consequences of abuse much more directly. The potential of WSD to be intrinsically enjoyable was also mentioned by some: "Self-defence has given me a lot of fun. My association was looking for new trainers and I wanted to share my knowledge with other women" (Q 724, Belgium). Such motivations were even stronger amongst the teachers who were working with girls: "I wanted to provide something really useful for girls in school" (Q 516, Germany) and a social worker describes having "a big interest in prevention of child sexual abuse and violence, liking prevention work and working with children, especially girls" (Q 417, Austria).
4.2 The professional background of self-defence teachers

WSD teachers are well qualified, with 87% of the respondents having a professional qualification in self-defence. More than half also have an academic degree; most commonly in education, social science and health (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Professional qualifications of self-defence teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of qualification</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University degree - education/social work</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other university degrees</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma in youth/community work</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching certificate/degree</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate/degree in health</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration/business</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>118</td>
<td>99*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not 100%, due to rounding

For women who became WSD teachers in the last decade, the inclusion of feminist perspectives on violence against women in pedagogy, social work and psychology combined with the development of teacher training within WSD, created a possibility of an integrated specialisation, connecting existing work/studies with a practical application that broadened their knowledge and professional skills.

*I am a social worker and am working with women and girls. Self-defence was a way to extend my vision and also I like working with women and girls in all sorts of ways. (Q 700, Germany)*

Most of the teachers have undertaken an intense and rigorous curriculum on WSD; the majority (80%) following programmes that last between one and a half and three years. The hours of training required range from 20 to 1250, with the average being 275. These requirements involve not only a considerable investment of time, but also of money, since most WSD teacher training programmes are not financially subsidised. Moreover, less than half were able to train close to home, the majority having to travel to another city, and some to another region or even country. One can say, therefore, that most WSD teachers invest a considerable amount, and need to be strongly committed, in order to gain their qualifications. This commitment is also evident in the findings on how teachers remain up to date: again the majority (80%) continue to update their knowledge and skills through participation in national and/or regional groups/classes, a tenth attend/ed international training camps12. Almost a third (28%) reported reading specialist literature and gathering new information using

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12 The most well known camps in Europe being: FIST (Feminist International Summer Training), which ran for most of the 1990s with between 150-200 women attending; those organised by Wendi Dragonfire in the Netherlands; and the Wendo Summer Camp in France.
the Internet, and a quarter are still involved in martial arts. Other ways of
enhancing practice include supervision and attending courses, including training
on how to work with disabled women. The variation in requirements and
standards in initial teacher training is, however, a concern for many long-standing
practitioners. They take considerable pride in the achievements of the movement
in establishing WSD as a professional field, in which quality standards are taken
seriously (see also section 4.5).

Overall, although there are variations, WSD teachers can claim to be well trained,
highly committed, and reflexive in their practice. They are one of the most
qualified and professional grouping within the violence against women field as a
whole. But this is not reflected in the working conditions for teachers, as the next
section will show.

4.3 Working conditions of WSD teachers

The majority of WSD teachers have areas of primary employment outside the
field (see Table 4.2), with only a third able to devote more than 50 per cent of
their paid employment to self-defence. Reflecting their additional qualifications,
most undertake primary employment in the fields of welfare, health and
education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of employment</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social/youth/community work</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology/health</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager/public relations</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's services</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research/academia</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching – general and special education</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult education</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martial Arts</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>123</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why, when WSD teachers are so well qualified and committed, is there such a
high level of part-time work? The consistent description of teaching WSD is that
whilst it is rewarding, the working conditions are precarious and limiting. It is
simply not possible for most teachers to rely on irregular contracts when the work
itself is so poorly rewarded; the absence of mainstreamed provision reinforces
these conditions.

*It is only possible to live on self-defence if you can cope with uncertainty and if
you don’t mind a quite modest living standard.* (Q 699, Germany)

*For me it would be too uncertain. I couldn't do that kind of work all the time, it is
too draining.* (Q 516, Germany)
The unreliability of income is confirmed by the fact that less than half of the teachers in this survey had secure, recurring contracts, and even those who did had a small number of them - between one and five. The fragility of contracts is also significant, since most WSD teachers have to rely on partner organisations to undertake publicity and recruitment. Where these fail to reach a required number the course may be cancelled and normally there is no compensation. Almost half of the teachers also comment on the low rates of pay: less than a third earn 400 Euros or more for ten-hour courses, which involve considerable preparation. Finding funding for development work is even harder, meaning that few have the time or resources to devote to activities such as developing the profile of self-defence and promoting it on a policy level, which are essential in building secure work.

Another recurring theme in the questionnaires, and in the expert interviews, is that teaching self-defence is very demanding, since it involves being confronted with violence against women as a social fact and with the impact it has on individual women. The energy and concentration needed to teach classes is also considerable, not to mention that courses - especially for adult women – take place primarily in the evenings and at weekends. In the long run a high workload and unsocial hours disrupts social contacts. When combined with the lack of recognition and poor working conditions, the risks of de-motivation and burn-out increase.

You have to pay quite a lot of tax and for insurance. And if you are fully booked with courses you get a burn-out rather quickly because of being in close contact with violence all the time. (Q 585, Germany)

I don’t teach anymore, because I have burn-out. The circumstances, the payment, the loneliness has got worse (it was never great). Teaching itself is fun. (Q 147, Netherlands)

After ten years I want to spend my weekends in another way. (Q 557, Germany)

What becomes clear is the level of dedication needed to maintain work in WSD\textsuperscript{13}; that so many women do so, in such uncongenial circumstances, reinforces that the activity itself must be rewarding. Poor working conditions, however, take their toll, as the quotes above illustrate, making the need for recruitment and renewal all the more critical.

4.4 Recruitment and renewal

A condition for the development of any professional field is retention of those who have qualified, and recruitment and training to renew and expand. During the 1970s and 1980s self-defence was discussed, and practiced, in many European countries but there were few teachers, and even fewer who could train new teachers. Many of the earliest teacher training courses in Europe involved trainers who were invited from abroad, usually the US and Canada. Two of these

\textsuperscript{13} Another example of the difficulty of maintaining work in WSD was provided in the country report from England. Here a decision was made to prioritise women who were unemployed and had few economic resources for the training for trainers programme. Few, however, taught after qualifying, since they could not make a living from the fees, and if they worked part-time their welfare benefits were reduced, which often meant they ended up with less financial resources overall.
'founders' of WSD moved to Europe, and now have their own centres: Sunny Graff in Germany, and Wendi Dragonfire in the Netherlands. The WSD movements in Austria, England, Germany and the Netherlands have the strongest claims to having ensured continued recruitment and renewal: new teacher training programmes start at least every two years in these countries. Analysing when the questionnaire respondents undertook initial training reveals a peak of new entrants in the late 1980s, with a falling off by the mid-1990s (see Diagram 4.1 below).

Diagram 4.1: Year questionnaire respondents began WSD training

The average length of teacher trainings run in 2001 was 270 hours, with a wide range between 60 and 450 hours. The countries with relatively short programmes are Belgium and England (between 60 and 150 hours). In Austria and Germany the minimum is 270 hours, with a 450-hour maximum. The picture of Netherlands is less consistent, with a 150-hour and a 370-hour programme. This inconsistency within, and between, countries has caused some to call for discussions about establishing European minimum standards (see section 4.5). Current programmes are seldom subsidised: exceptions here being in England, where the Workers Education Association, health promotion and local government has at times provided funding, and Germany, where support sometimes comes from the Länder and a foundation. Teaching skills that might prevent gender violence continues in most European countries to be a private matter, left to personal motivation and commitment.
The content and the philosophy of contemporary teacher training programmes seem to share a number of common characteristics:

- a gender-based/feminist framework;
- a strong preventative approach;
- inclusivity – access for disabled women;
- a combination of confidence building/assertiveness training, providing knowledge about violence against women and easy physical techniques;
- a dynamic and reflexive learning process;
- an emphasis on networking and solidarity.

The organisations or individuals that provide training for trainers programmes are often part of networks and have additional functions. Three-quarters also provide ongoing training to already qualified teachers and more than two-thirds have coordination (often of self-defence classes in the local area) and networking functions. Half give presentations and talks, write articles/reports about violence against women and self-defence and almost all have a website.

4.4.1 Variations in teacher training across Europe

The structure and organisation of teacher training programmes across Europe varies considerably in terms of whether the programme is provided nationally or regionally, and whether it is mainstreamed or provided by organisations and individuals closely linked to the WSD movement. To illustrate this diversity we present several case studies, focusing on Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Scotland.

**Austria**

In Austria the women’s movement, supported by several women politicians, has successfully raised awareness about violence against women and children. As a consequence, many of the specialised support projects were funded by the state. WSD has been part of these wider processes, with well-known individual trainers, such as Raina Ruschmann and Marion Breiter and four large associations.

Two associations, "Frau in Bewegung" and "Drehungen"\(^{14}\), have 38 teachers all over Austria and are very similar. The "Drehungen" technique was developed by Hanja Dimbacher about 20 years ago. Both associations provide teacher training programmes on a regular basis.

The "Wendo" association has 19 teachers in regional groups: Vienna, Linz, and Innsbruck. Teacher training programmes are organised whenever there is sufficient demand.

The "Defendo" association has 15 teachers.\(^{15}\) Founded by Ms. Matiasek, who was trained in the "Drehungen" technique, the main target group is girls. They mainly teach in rural areas.

\(^{14}\) [www.drehungen.at](http://www.drehungen.at)
\(^{15}\) [www.defendo.at](http://www.defendo.at)
The women's group "Seito Boei" has 10 teachers in the area of Vienna. Seito Boei was developed 25 years ago by a man and a woman; since then the technique has primarily been passed on by women. One teacher, who moved to Brussels, has founded an association there and provides training for trainers.16

Training of new teachers in Austria, therefore, takes place through established associations, all of which would see themselves as part of the WSD movement.

**Germany**

Teacher training in Germany is still provided within the WSD movement, with courses that have evolved over almost two decades.17 There are two main 'schools' providing regular courses, Wendo18, and Sunny Graff, Frauen in Bewegung e.V. in Frankfurt/Main19. From its origins in Canada Wendo has been practiced and continuously developed in Germany from 1979. In the early 80s:

*the name [Wendo was] mostly attached to any and all women's self-defence … Although the course content and the participation of men in any way shape or form was rejected, the name found great acceptance because of it's meaning 'women's way'.* (Graff, 2002)

Many of the early Wendo training groups were self-organised and self-taught. It has not been possible to get an accurate number of how many new Wendo teachers have been trained in recent years, the only indicator is that the national network currently has 170 members.20 There was no formal teacher training in Germany until Sunny Graff began the first two-year course in Frankfurt/Main in 1984 under the name 'Jede Frau kann sich wehren!' – 'Every woman can defend herself!' Since that time, more than 150 women have completed the course. In 1998 Regina Speulta in Karlsruhe took over the programme.21 The curriculum was published in German in 1997 (Graff, 1997) and in 2000 a book discussing gender violence and self-defence was issued by a mainstream children's book publisher (Graff and Rieger, 2000).

German teacher training courses are amongst the most intensive in Europe, lasting between two and three years. Barbara Scholand's Wendo teacher training with disabled women, for example, involves 368 hours of teaching and 320 hours of practice over three years. The requirements of both Wendo and Sunny Graff's teacher trainings are interest, and a strong commitment to dealing with the issue of violence against women. A background in self-defence and/or martial arts is desirable, but not a precondition. Attempts are made to recruit women from all sections of the community. Both Sunny Graff and Barbara Scholand stress that a teacher training course cannot function as a therapy group for survivors, and although there is space for discussion, survivors wishing to enrol are required to have done some work on their own experience and be able to deal with intense discussions about violence against women.

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16 [www.garanceasbl.be](http://www.garanceasbl.be)
17 In addition to the research data we draw here on two additional reports supplied by Renate Bergmann and Barbara Scholand on current work within Wendo.
18 [www.wendo.de](http://www.wendo.de)
19 [www.fib-ev.com](http://www.fib-ev.com)
20 There are regional and national networks of Wendo. To be included on the national mailing list women need to be in a regional network and pay a yearly fee of about 70 Euros.
21 [www.innae.de](http://www.innae.de)
Mainstreaming attempts in Germany have been limited to sports organisations, and a variety of efforts to train physical education and primary school teachers to deliver programmes in schools. WSD teachers are ambivalent about these moves:

... especially since the self-defence that is desired is devoid of political (read feminist) content... On the other hand, it is a real dilemma because we cannot provide enough quality teachers to take on the number of courses the schools require. (Graff, 2002)

A professional organisation for feminist self-defence teachers has been recently established to work on issues like quality standards more consistently.22

The Netherlands

The Netherlands has a long history of both WSD and women in martial arts. Networks were developed in the early 1980s and a self-defence union with about 250 members was founded in the early 1990s. It is the EU country where the most mainstreaming can be observed, including the training of new teachers. After years of lobbying, a government supported school for training WSD teachers was founded, which meant that the existing providers in the WSD movement had to merge with the new organisation, located in the National Institute for Sports and Movement (NISB)23. NISB has offered teacher training programmes in various Dutch cities between 1986-1999, with a total of 90 women qualifying over this period, and receiving an officially recognised diploma. The programme was cut after low recruitment and replaced in 2000 with a new pilot programme 'weerbarheid'24, and 12 women qualified. Following this, in 2001 the training was renamed 'weerbarheid in het basissonderwijs' and opened to men. Thirty-four people have, so far, completed this training. In 2001 NISB also organised the teacher training for 17 women and men within a violence prevention programme for children (Marietje Kesselsproject).

NISB itself notes a number of shifts in the mainstreaming process which has characterised provision in the Netherlands: from training to work with women to training for work with children; and a lowering of the requirements and standards of the qualifications. The original NISB course took place for over two years with 20 days (142 hours) of teaching, and 90 hours practice in four courses for women or girls, each of which comprised 15 lessons. Entry requirements to the training were that the applicant was female, aged at least 21, had completed a self-defence course taught by a teacher with a diploma and to have practiced a 'kick and punch' martial art for at least two years. The new 'weerbaarheid' course for women was considerably shorter (one year, 96 hours teaching and 40 hours practice), no physical skills were required and the certification 'teacher weerbaarheid' is not a recognised diploma. The three regional teacher trainings for the Marietje Kesselsprojecten reduced the entry requirements, and the taught and practice hours, even further, but those completing received certification nonetheless.

22 Contact Regina Speulta, Innae e.V., Karlsruhe
23 Pyrrha Singerling from NISB provided a report about the development of teacher training, which is drawn on here.
24 ‘Weerbaarheid’ translates as ‘stand up for yourself’. See also www.weerbaarheid.nisb.nl
Mainstreaming in the Netherlands seems to have resulted in a considerable dilution of standards, alongside the virtual disappearance of training to work with women. Economic motivations have not been irrelevant in these shifts.

Less women want to be a self-defence teacher for women, more and more people – women and men – want to teach children, because of better payment. (Q 227, Netherlands)

A number of the Dutch WSD teachers in the survey were extremely critical of the national mainstreaming of teacher training. One noted that it has meant: "that the feminist perspective is gone and the fire is out" (Q 71, Netherlands). The question of what will happen to provision of WSD for women over the next few years, if there is no recruitment and renewal, remains unanswered.

Scotland

The history of WSD in Scotland is an interesting example of a process of institutionalisation, strongly influenced by funding politics and a national policy context where a 'law and order' focus on crime, and concerns about social exclusion have provided opportunities for expansion. In the early 1980s a teacher training programme was organised through the Workers Education Association (WEA) by Cathy Curry and 14 women completed the course. At this point WEA promoted WSD strongly, and in 1983 designated provision as an 'area of priority treatment'. The demand for courses was so strong that, even with the new teachers, it proved difficult to meet the demand. By the late 1980s, however, the WEA ceased to provide the same support to either teacher training or provision of classes. The gap was filled by a partnership between WEA and Glasgow Women’s Support Project (GWSP), which had been providing WSD classes in areas of high economic and social deprivation. A new course was created, which 32 new teachers completed. GWSP knew that if WSD was to have a secure future in Scotland, money was needed for development and coordination, and made an application to fund a Women’s Safety Centre (WSC), which would also have responsibility for organising teacher training. The project was eventually funded in 1995, and in 1996 trained 15 new teachers. Although extremely successful, the core funding for WSC was cut in 1999.

There was a lack of political support at a local level, and a lack of understanding amongst politicians and funding bodies as to the extent and effects of violence within communities, and of the value of the service offered by WSC. (Macleod and Monaghan, 2002)

WSC had to transform into a not for profit company, called WISE Women, selling its services to other organisations, and was able to work through newly established Community Safety Partnerships. In 2001 three-year core funding was secured through the Social Inclusion Budget. One of the losses during this uncertain period was being able to ensure regular teacher training courses.

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25 This is one of the major adult education organisations in the UK, whose early origins in the 19th century was the trade union/workers movement.
4.5 Quality standards

As the field of WSD has grown, and especially since the emergence of formal teacher training courses and qualifications, the question of quality standards has increasingly become a matter of debate and concern. Within WSD the key matters for debate include: the length of initial training for teachers; the extent of input on physical techniques; maintenance of skills and knowledge for qualified teachers; and whether there should be a minimum core course content. The issue has become even more urgent with the emergence of a market in which other providers, whose training qualifications may be minimal, are offering courses in self-defence for women. The context and relevance of these concerns varies across strong, moderate and weak provider countries, although not in consistent ways.

WSD in strong and moderate provider countries faces competition from martial arts and the police who offer a considerable number of courses. The extent to which this is the case varies, and can change as issues become more or less popular. For example, the police provided many short courses in England in the 1980s and early 1990s, but are seldom involved today.

A few police self-defence instructors still teach but there does seem to be some confusion about whether or who should - their insurance to teach self-defence was withdrawn in 1997 and no new police trainers are being qualified. (Expert interview, England)

The concerns of feminist WSD-teachers about competitors centre on how the concept has been co-opted, the content being far too narrow, courses being less reflective of women’s needs and on price undercutting. Our partner from Germany, who is an internationally recognised expert in both martial arts and WSD, and our partner from Scotland both commented on the quality of such courses.

Sport and police based courses see self-defence as defending one’s SELF and preventing individual crimes…Male and sport based courses accuse feminists of being anti-male and giving women an inflated sense of their own abilities to ward off an attacker. They are convinced that only years of physical practice will insure women’s safety… Feminists accuse the police and male oriented courses as completely missing the reality of women’s lives, being insensitive and instead of empowering women, only shoring up victim mentality.

An Example: The neighbourhood Verein\(^\text{26}\) wanted to offer a self-defence course for women and asked me. I gave a price of DM 100 per hour. They rejected it and offered the course to two Modern Arnis (Philippine Stick-fighting) training partners of mine, who know NOTHING about self-defence. They were willing to work for DM 30 an hour. They then ordered equipment for the course for over DM 2,500, which the Verein paid for. The result was, that the boys got a padded attacker suit THEY could play with and the women got a lousy course. The Verein spent more than they would have, had they contracted with my school and since the course was lousy, there was no interest in repeating it! (Graff, 2002)

Some mainstream organisations offer women’s safety courses from time to time. However it is our understanding that these are located within the community safety agenda, and are mainly based on advice to women on what to do or not

\(^{26}\) This is the German term for a neighbourhood/community association.
do, e.g. "park your car under a street light at night". Strathclyde Police, for example, offer women's safety workshops, and have a video available, which is very much in this vein. These courses tend to be delivered with the assumption that women will not already have experienced violence. (Macleod and Monaghan, 2002)

In a diverse field, where there have been limited resources for development and regular networking, quite how agreed standards could be established at a national, let alone a European level, is hard to envisage. For example, whilst there is consensus on the feminist framework within WSD (see Chapter 3), there is considerable variation in implementation. WSD teachers draw on a range of martial arts practice, and place greater or lesser emphasis on physical skills27. That said, however, discussions are underway, at least in Germany to explore this key issue. This process will be complex and demanding, and requires resources for development at regional, national and European level. The need for WSD to agree minimum standards, however, cannot be denied, and if it is not prioritised other actors will assume leadership, as this ironic example from Germany illustrates.

I was really angry, when the police invited us to a round table meeting on self-defence. Everyone who wanted to participate was asked to sign a piece of paper committing themselves to police best practice standards for women's self-defence. These standards clearly drew on feminist work... But instead of the police declaring that they approved of the standards developed by feminist self-defence teachers over 20-30 years of work, suddenly they were setting the standards! (Q 606, Germany)

Similar stories can be found in reflections on inter-agency initiatives about domestic violence (Harwin et al, 1999) and the lesson to be learned is that feminist initiatives need to not just claim, but establish their status as experts through setting the agenda.

4.6 At the crossroads

The data presented in this chapter clearly demonstrate that to become and stay a WSD teacher requires considerable investment and dedication. Hardly any of the teachers in the study were able to make a living solely through teaching WSD, and the precarious and difficult working conditions mean that many are discouraged and leave the field. The ability to recruit and train new teachers has been limited in most countries, and the standards of teacher training vary considerably. Interestingly, in the case of most of the strong and moderate providers of WSD for women, teacher training remains in the hands of the WSD movement. The mainstreaming example from the Netherlands cannot be recommended as an example of good practice, since it has not only resulted in a dilution of standards, but also the loss of any prospect of renewal in the creation of teachers able to work with adult women. The new challenge facing the WSD

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27 One example of the diversity is that the London Centre for Personal Safety Centre (LCPS) uses a method developed in the US called Impact (also referred to as 'Model Mugging'), which involves practicing techniques with a male teacher, who wears a padded suit. LCPS has strong feminist leadership, and claims to have integrated the principles of WSD in its implementation of the Impact model, but undoubtedly some would see the involvement of men as teachers as undermining the women-only principle of WSD.
movement, in each country, and across Europe, is to find a way to reflect its diversity, whilst agreeing some common minimum standards. The future of WSD, therefore, cannot be said to be secure, and as the next chapter will show, there is little evidence of potential governmental support in the immediate future.
5 State Policy on WSD

Over the past decade European policy on violence against women has developed, and many EU countries now have national Plans of Action (PoA) on the issue. Within this story of progress and increased recognition, however, are a number of questions about which areas are placed at the centre (primarily domestic violence and trafficking) and which remain at the margins. A previous Daphne project (Kelly and Regan, 2001) documented the limited attention given to rape and sexual assault in recent years. One element of the present project involved investigating the extent to which WSD is recognised by governments as an intervention which both contributes to preventing violence against women and offers a source of empowerment for all women and girls, including survivors of male violence.

5.1 Integration of WSD in Plans of Action

The content of questionnaires to ministries and how this element of the methodology was conducted has already been described in Chapter 2. A total of 25 questionnaires were returned, full details are presented in Table 5.1. At least one response was received from 12 countries; but only in Austria, England and Wales, Poland and Sweden did three or more Ministries respond. No responses were forthcoming from: France, Norway, Portugal, Scotland and Spain. In three of the non-responding countries there were partners for the project, who supplied addresses and followed up non-returns. One of the key questions for all ministries was whether self-defence training featured in national PoAs on both violence against women and child sexual abuse. The results are presented in Table 5.2 below.

The results are rather depressing with the Netherlands the only country to mainstream self-defence within both PoAs, and even here the violence against women document is limited to domestic violence. It is also interesting to note that twice as many countries have PoAs on violence against women than on child sexual abuse. Whilst the former is encouraged by both the UN (through the Beijing Platform for Action) and European institutions, especially the Council of Europe, the latter has only been proposed with respect to sexual exploitation of children through the two World Congresses (Stockholm in 1996 and Yokohama in 2001). PoAs are not, however, the only way in which self-defence training can be acknowledged, therefore specific sections in the questionnaire for each ministry explored other possible routes whereby self-defence might be recognised and supported. The sub-sections below explore these potentials and the extent to which each national ministry (presented in alphabetic order) has taken them up.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Ministry of Education</th>
<th>Ministry of Employment</th>
<th>Ministry of Equality</th>
<th>Ministry of Justice</th>
<th>Ministry of Sport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England/Wales</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>✓*</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>✓**</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Ministry of Education and Sport combined

** Employment and Gender Equality a single ministry
### Table 5.2: Is self-defence part of Plans of Action on VAW and CSA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>PoA on VAW</th>
<th>WSD included</th>
<th>PoA on CSA</th>
<th>WSD included</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>(Yes)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England and Wales</td>
<td>(Yes)²[^28]</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>(Yes)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>(Yes)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>(Yes)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>In preparation</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>2001*</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N=17</strong></td>
<td><strong>11 PoA</strong></td>
<td><strong>1 Yes</strong></td>
<td><strong>6 PoA</strong></td>
<td><strong>1 Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>10 No</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>5 No</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes on table**

(Yes) = Plan of Action referred to, but no date given for its publication, or any access to it.

*Netherlands PoA is specific to domestic violence

x = no questionnaire returned

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²[^28] This response is not accurate. One of the authors is a UK citizen and there is no Plan of Action for England and Wales, or the UK as a whole. There are policies in Scotland and Northern Ireland, but these relate primarily to domestic violence.
5.2 Is WSD recognised in other ways?

5.2.1 Education ministries

Education ministries have a role in setting the curricula for primary and secondary schools, and could, therefore, encourage or even mandate WSD for girls. Education ministries should also be centrally involved in any PoA on child sexual abuse. Other possibilities exist in relation to responsibilities for further and adult education, both in terms of supporting classes for women and training for trainers. Specific questions canvassed all the possibilities, and the responses from the four education ministries that replied are summarised below.

**Austria**

Does not see itself as having any responsibility for self-defence for children and young people, provision is up to each individual school or teacher. Has no involvement in the training of self-defence teachers.

**Belgium**

Minimal responses, sees itself having no responsibilities for self-defence classes.

**England/Wales**

Has no policy on self-defence in schools, but does have an anti-bullying ['mobbing'] policy

*Our anti-bullying pack for schools advocates assertive action behaviour to avoid bullying by other pupils, but it does not advocate self-defence strategies. The key message is to report bullying.*

The Ministry does promote safety awareness training for school staff as a strategy to diffuse violence, and has quite well-developed polices on the child protection responsibilities of teachers.

The Ministry for Sport submitted a separate questionnaire response in which it stated that it had no responsibilities with respect to violence against women, and no policy on self-defence classes.

**Poland**

Self-defence is not part of the core curriculum, although reference is made to the prevention of violence. Schools can organise courses on their premises out of hours, on a fee-paying basis. The government also supports NGOs that provide prevention programmes to children in school.

Had the Ministry for Education in the Netherlands responded, we would have had a contrasting example, since self-defence classes are increasingly part of the national curriculum for both primary and secondary schools. The overall conclusion, however, has to be that Education ministries do not see self-defence as either a strategy that might contribute to prevention for children and young people, or an element in adult education. It is also clear from the response from England and Wales that a very narrow view of WSD, as limited to physical ‘fighting back’, was held.
5.2.2 Employment ministries

In many countries this ministry is key in the gender equality machinery. However, only the Italian employment ministry responded separately, the other responses were integrated within the gender equality ministries.

Italy

Whilst Italy has no national PoAs, it does have a general gender equality policy in which violence against women is mentioned.

Italian plans are designed on the basis of a global approach to children and women problems. For this reason, a strong emphasis is put on their protection by the state, more than on individual-centred strategies such as self-defence.

The view that WSD is an 'individual-centred strategy' recurs with respect to several Scandinavian countries and is discussed in more detail below.

5.2.3 Gender Equality ministries

Ministries for Gender Equality were considered the most likely to have responsibility for developing PoAs and prevention policies on violence against women. Seven responded, and most were located within other ministries, and the variation in the locations was considerable: Employment, Education, the Ministry of the Interior, or the ministry with responsibilities for the family, children and the elderly. A minority are specific Equalities ministries. One of the questions for this ministry was whether violence against women was considered a major, important or small part of their brief.

Austria

VAW is considered an important area of work. WSD is not integrated in either PoA. The ministry has occasionally provided funding for courses for girls.

Belgium

VAW is an important area of work, but WSD is not included in the recent PoA. Some local authorities fund NGOs providing self-defence.

Denmark

VAW is a major area of work. Self-defence does not appear in the PoA.

The prevention of violence and sexual abuse is seen as a responsibility of the state. You can take classes in self-defence as a private person, but this does not mean that the state is no longer responsible for the security of all citizens.

England/Wales

VAW is seen as a major area of work, but self-defence is not integrated into this.

Germany

VAW is a major area of work, but self-defence is not addressed in the PoA which is seen as setting an overall guideline; provision of self-defence is viewed as a responsibility of the Länder, rather than the national government.
For all seven ministries violence against women is either a major, or important aspect of their work, and most had a prevention strategy in place. However, none sees self-defence as a component in implementation, and only the Polish ministry considers that there might be a future role for them with respect to the provision of self-defence. There is probably no single reason why self-defence remains marginal in national gender equality policy. For example, in Germany, where self-defence is the most developed, the responsibility of the Länder may be an important factor – although this in turn means that access for women and girls will be inconsistent. The two Scandinavian countries (Denmark and Sweden) represent a perspective that, in stressing the responsibility of state and men, implies that self-defence makes women responsible for protecting themselves. This seems to suggest that it is impossible for some governments to think about protection and prevention as operating at several levels: the social, political and individual. Nor does it recognise the value that survivors themselves attribute to self-defence training. Whatever the reasons for the exclusion of self-defence, it is regrettable that a significant prevention strategy developed by women, with and for women and girls is not recognised or promoted by ministries for Gender Equality.

5.2.4 Justice ministries

Justice ministries were the most consistent in responding - a total of nine questionnaires were returned. This is probably because they are responsible for policy on crime, including crime prevention. They are also increasingly responsible for developing policies with respect to victims of crime, which strengthen their position in the judicial process. A number of European countries now have some form of ‘victim/victim support law’ that mandates some combination of the following: legal representation; advice and advocacy; and access to a range of forms of support and compensation. Each of these layers offers a possible route to recognising and supporting self-defence training.
England/Wales
The Home Office does not see itself as having any responsibility for self-defence, and it does not feature in overall crime prevention policies. The reasons given are the cost and that there has been no research demonstrating that self-defence ‘works’. There is no victim/victim support law, just a set of guidelines in The Victims Charter.

Denmark
The Ministry defines its role as setting the limits for the ways in which self-defence – i.e. defending oneself using violence - can be legal. There is a victim/victim support law but access to self-defence classes is not part of it.

Violence against women is regarded as a matter for the state and not a matter/responsibility for private individuals.

Finland
There is no specific ‘victim/victim support law’, although there is a legal framework for victims’ rights, self-defence is not included.

Germany
Has a victim/victim support law but there are no provisions in it about access to self-defence, and nor is self-defence included in crime prevention.

Ireland
The national PoA is based on recommendations from a task force, self-defence was ‘not considered’ in these.

There is no victim/victim support law.

Italy
Has a victim/victim support law, but it contains no reference to self-defence.

Netherlands
Self-defence is referred to explicitly in PoAs on child sexual abuse and domestic violence. Self-defence is also included in crime prevention policy, and provision of courses for children is one of five key actions on prevention. AWARE courses have been developed in relation to domestic violence and stalking. Has a victim/victim support law, but self-defence does not feature there.

Poland
Has a victim/victim support law, but self-defence is not included.

Sweden
Has a victim/victim support law, but self-defence is not included.

The Netherlands are an exception to the rule of Justice ministries not seeing themselves as having either responsibility for, or interest in, self-defence. Only the Polish ministry considered there might be additional ways it could be involved in developing policy and provision, suggesting that it was open to the idea of co-financing and linking with NGOs. Given the increased emphasis on crime prevention in recent years this neglect is especially notable, since WSD is precisely this. One of the reasons offered for not promoting self-defence by some of the Justice ministries was that there was no research demonstrating its effectiveness. Whilst research is limited, it does, in fact, exist, and there is consensus across the existing knowledge base that verbal, assertive and physical resistance can be effective in preventing, limiting and/or stopping assaults. A number of teachers made the point that WSD, as it is currently practiced, enables some women to leave violent relationships (see Chapter 3).

Seven countries have legislation on the rights of victims within the legal system, which often mandate support and advocacy services, but none included self-defence within the options available. The point of such laws is that individuals who have been victimised should be accorded certain rights, including access to
services, which are designed to redress some of the harm sustained. In this sense self-defence training surely has a place.

We also sought information about whether countries had applied for funding under the EU Development Plan for Gender Equality. Of the three countries that had, only one allocated any of the budget to violence against women and none of this concerned provision of self-defence training.

5.3 Still on the margins

It is abundantly clear that, apart from the Netherlands, WSD is not integrated into government policies on violence against women, child sexual abuse, crime prevention or victims’ rights. Even in the Netherlands the mainstreaming of self-defence is limited to children, meaning that nowhere in Europe is access for adult women to WSD considered seriously by national governments. There is a role here for the wider violence against women sector, to include WSD in their recommendations for holistic responses.

Two recurring themes appear in the explanations offered by ministries for the exclusion of WSD: firstly, that there is no evidence of its efficacy; secondly, that it is an ‘individualistic’ response. The fact that there is some evidence supporting WSD as a successful prevention strategy was discussed earlier in this chapter. The relative absence of European research is undoubtedly an issue that needs to be redressed. The charge that WSD is an ‘individualistic’ response is discussed in more detail in the next chapter, but it is worth noting that all services offering counselling, support and advocacy, whether provided by NGOs or through statutory services, work with individuals, and often in case-based way. In contrast WSD is always taught in groups and encourages a social, rather than individual, explanation for violence.

Although WSD is not highlighted in UN and EU policy documents on gender violence, all of these make strong recommendations that states have responsibilities to both develop prevention strategies and ensure that ‘rehabilitation’ and support services are available for victims/survivors. WSD is explicitly referred to, in the Council of Europe PoA on Combating Violence Against Women (COE, 1997), within the range of resources states should consider developing. If European governments are to begin to move towards the goal set by the UN, and reiterated by the EU, of eliminating violence against women and girls, considerably more thought and resources need to be devoted to prevention, and WSD should be seen as one element within a comprehensive prevention strategy.
6 WSD - Current Tensions and Debates

One sign that an occupational field is dynamic is that there continue to be internal and external debates, since they are essential to processes of change. Such processes, however, are inevitably time-consuming and they can become draining, where dialogue gets stuck, or when there are no apparent routes to resolution. In this chapter we explore current debates within WSD as well as tensions with external actors, including funders and partner agencies. How developed each of these discussions is currently varies between countries, according to the level of development of WSD.

The expert interviews and partner/practitioner meeting confirmed that content and tone of debates within WSD have changed considerably from the early years. The origins of WSD are rooted in the emergence of the contemporary women's movement, within which the principles of democracy and equality were fundamental. In most feminist groups any form of hierarchy was rejected, and a 'can do' philosophy emphasised that every woman was capable of learning new skills. These principles benefited many women at the time, and many of the practices which were created out of them are now commonplace in business and other organisations - flat structures, an emphasis on training and participation, as well as concepts such as 'life long learning'. Adhering to these principles as a set of inflexible rules, however, has been a source of tension in many women's organisations, with particular resonance in the field of WSD as the quotes from two longstanding teachers attest.

The early movement was extremely dogmatic and there was a lot of controversy about who was more feminist than the other... There was also a difference of opinion about whether self-defence for women should be portrayed in the media or in public, or whether the techniques which women learned needed to be kept 'secret'... At the beginning there was much discussion and controversy about the teacher trainings, the instructors, the content. Women who emerged as leaders in the field often faced harsh critique and accusations of supporting hierarchical/patriarchal structure, of setting themselves up as gurus, of trying to make money off the backs of victims of sexualised violence. But eventually the controversies died down and the idea of teacher trainings has gained more acceptance. (Graff, 2002)

Some of the skills taught in WSD are intended in a real life situation to hurt, placing a specific responsibility on teachers to prevent unintentional harm when practicing physical techniques. This in turn means that rules have to be clear and adhered to, which, in the early years of WSD, led to accusations of authoritarianism.

... in the groups I was teaching, women said “I’m allergic to authority, and I don’t want anyone telling me what to do.” I said “Forget the authority part, you are in a classroom situation, the teacher always has, by virtue of knowledge, a certain authority position. And, you know, I don’t need to run your life, but I do need to make sure it stays safe in the class, that you listen when I say ‘Stop’ and that you take on the information I give you, when we’re practising"... That’s changed a lot, but in the beginning it was really hard. (Expert interview, Netherlands)

As Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate WSD has developed considerably in the intervening years, with current concerns focusing far more on professionalisation, quality standards and mainstreaming (see Table 6.1). More significant for the
teachers are debates with external bodies in which the key principles of WSD have to be defended, where many teachers still have to contend with stereotypes, misconceptions, and discomfort with the feminist framework that WSD relies upon. In the sections that follow we explore in more detail the patterns of resistance to the feminist/gender framework, whether the charge that WSD is an individualistic approach is justified and the debates surrounding mainstreaming of WSD.

### Table 6.1 Current debates and tensions about WSD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Debates and tensions</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women only classes</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist/gender analysis</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision for boys</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstreaming</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality standards of courses</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The role of martial arts/technique within WSD</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=93, multiple responses

### 6.1 Refusing to neutralise the endangering gender

One of the challenges of WSD has been its gender analysis and practice. Not only in the sense that it begins from knowledge about gender violence and prioritises the needs of women and girls, but also that it refuses to take the current constructions of masculinity and femininity for granted. By viewing women and girls as strong and capable, human beings whose space for action in the world can be expanded through new knowledge and skills, WSD challenges a social reality which positions women as the victims. In other words WSD represents a shift away from thinking and practices that begin from viewing women/girls in terms of deficits towards a perspective which stresses their resources and potential. It is tempting to ask whether it is this that marks it out for criticism and marginalisation within responses to violence against women.

Moreover, a simplistic equality discourse appears to create ambivalence, or even an antipathy, to special programmes. This resistance to positive action is not specific to self-defence, it has, for example, also been noted in research on gender segregation in higher education and the labour market (see, for example, Nadai and Seith, 2001). Resistance to positive action implies that claims to be treated equally, alongside policies that set targets for equality of opportunity, should be sufficient to redress inequalities. Both research and experiential evidence, however, demonstrate that this is not the case. For example, in countries where quotas have been introduced to increase the representation of women in politics the ratio of male and female politicians has moved closer. Where no such policies exist change has been slow and halting, with some estimates suggesting that it will take 100 years for them to reach anywhere near equal numbers at the current rates of change.
6.1.1 Women-only – widely accepted, but still questioned

Whilst three-quarters of the teachers in this study report that the principle of women-only classes is broadly accepted, nonetheless the issue can re-surface, albeit in slightly different forms, and as Table 6.1 records it is still the most common debate with external bodies. In the 1970s any form of women-only provision was regarded with ambivalence. Although, the notion that women might choose to create spaces where men were not allowed was seen by some as an offence, and by others as merely odd, women-only events gained increasing acceptance.

Today, the argument against women-only provision tends to be voiced in terms of simplistic notions of equality - that gender equality involves treating women and men the same, and, therefore, gender should not play a role in teaching contexts. For those working where provision is weak, establishing the importance of women-only classes may be an ongoing task, or it might be that since there is so little WSD this has not yet become an issue. In the strong and moderate provider countries, whilst the principle is more widely accepted, this does not prevent it being contested by new potential partners, or when personnel change, as the experience of two self-defence teachers in England and Scotland demonstrate.

*I know when NWS\textsuperscript{29} applied for accreditation [for its training for trainers course] one college would not endorse it because of being women only and called it ‘sexist’. (Q 31, England)*

*Funders and council members [local politicians] sometimes say: “What about men? Aren't you sexist?” (Q 126, Scotland)*

Arguments which teachers have found successful in making the case fall into two main categories: using knowledge about the extent of gendered violence, and references to the impact of gender socialisation.\textsuperscript{30} The first implies a need for a setting in which it is safe to reveal and discuss such experiences, and where the fact that men, and especially known men, are perpetrators can be explored. The second involves recognition of the importance of female role models - for participants, experiencing a WSD teacher as a strong woman is one element in promoting belief in their own strength and potential. Both of these arguments begin from a recognition that the reality of gendered violence and traditional notions of femininity continue to limit women’s lives, thus reproducing inequality. WSD can, therefore be understood as a positive action strategy, which seeks to challenge and interrupt the status quo. Positive action is included within the gender mainstreaming frameworks of both the European Union and the UN (see also section 6.3).

6.1.2 No provision for boys - Isn't it sexist?

Whilst, with a very few exceptions, single-sex provision for adult women has remained a principle within WSD, work with girls has raised the more complex question about provision for boys. The questions raised in these kinds of debates are two-fold: firstly, whether provision for girls is ‘sexist’ if boys are excluded; this

\textsuperscript{29} The WSD network in England.

\textsuperscript{30} Where teachers have evaluated their courses, this information has also been used to demonstrate that the women-only context is highly valued by participants.
argument returns to the equality debate discussed above. Secondly, a discussion about children, in which the vulnerability of boys to sexual abuse is the key issue. Jan Macleod and Frances Monaghan describe these issues in detail in their country report.

WISE Women have delivered a number of courses, including a course in a school for pupils with mild to moderate learning difficulties. A number of problems arise when the possibility of regular provision of self-defence for girls is raised. Firstly the WISE Women course is designed for women and girls and is not offered to boys or mixed classes. Some staff within education take the view that this is discriminatory, and that courses cannot be offered on a single-sex basis. Some take the view that they will run safety courses, if one is developed for the boys as well. On a more practical level there have been occasions when the school is happy to deliver a single-sex course, but does not have the resources, in terms of staffing and space, to keep the boys separate. (MacLeod and Monaghan, 2002)

It is undoubtedly the case that boys are subjected to sexual violence. Nevertheless, prevalence research shows this to be at a lower level than abuse of girls, and that boys are much less vulnerable to abuse by family members (see, for example, Finkelhor, 1994; Kelly et al, 1998). The reality of sexual victimisation for boys can be raised in a number of ways, including making a case for the kinds of education programmes, which provide children with accurate information. In relation to self-defence explicitly, however, the discussion tends to play out either through a negative questioning of provision for girls or a positive argument for provision for boys. WSD teachers have acknowledged the positive argument, whilst pointing out that it does not follow that the response should either be mixed classes or simply providing the girls programme content in groups for boys. There are three reasons why neither of these responses is appropriate.

- The content of WSD has been honed over several decades to reflect what we know about gendered violence. Adaptations are needed to make this relevant to the contexts and relationships where boys are most likely to encounter abuse.
- The socialisation of boys is different, and as a direct consequence they have more space for action than girls, as well as more physical confidence.
- Work with boys needs to include work that addresses the fact that as males they are also potential perpetrators of gender violence (as much as 25% of sexual abuse in childhood is committed by peers).

As highlighted in Chapter 3 and 4, a number of WSD teachers are involved in developing work with boys, but in single-sex groups, both to ensure that what boys receive is relevant to their experiences and to maintain the provision of work with girls.

To conclude, the contention that single sex provision for women or girls is 'sexist' is tantamount to arguing that, in the face of evidence demonstrating clear inequality and discrimination between men and women, both should, nonetheless, be treated in the same way. In feminist theory this is referred to as the 'sameness' model of equality, which is contrasted to one that begins from the recognition of difference and diversity. The 'sameness' model ends up re-defining...
positive action - a means of redressing such inequities - as discrimination against those who currently occupy positions of social advantage.

The growing acceptance of women-only provision reflects what writers in the Habermasian tradition have argued: "... power and norms are not sufficient to explain changes in a political processes, but (that) processes of argumentation can be significant in some circumstances" (Risse, 1999, cited in Walby 2002). The increasing acceptance, therefore, has to be seen as the outcome of the persuasive power of the arguments WSD teachers make. At the same time the argument is never entirely 'won', and practitioners need to ensure that they continue to make strong arguments, backed up by research, evaluation and current thinking on gender inequality.

6.2 Is WSD an individualistic approach to a social problem?

Another issue that sometimes re-emerges is the understanding of WSD as an individualistic approach. This was most explicit in responses from Scandinavia, where self-defence was viewed as shifting the focus away from men's responsibility for gender violence, and removing the responsibility of the state to ensure protection. A slight variation of this argument - that WSD makes women individually responsible for stopping violence - was also common in certain sections of the women's movement in the 1970s and 1980s, and is still heard today, especially in English speaking countries. These positions are reflected in statements such as, "Self-defence creates a false sense of security" or "If women are not successful, or do not fight back, then self-defence implies the violence is their fault".

What the notion of 'false sense of security' means in a context where few women and girls live their lives without encountering aspects of the continuum of violence against women is unclear. On one level it may be a reference to the notion that 'fighting back' in the context of an armed attacker is to risk more serious injury. But this denies the fact that some women - with and without self-defence training - do manage to resist and escape potentially lethal assaults. Doing nothing, hoping one will 'get out alive', is also taking a risk. Research on sexual assault clearly demonstrates that doing something active is more effective than being passive (Bart and O'Brien, 1985; Breiter, 1995). Most crucially, however, the notion that WSD gives women 'a false sense of security' is based on stereotypes of both gendered violence and WSD. An armed stranger attack is the least likely scenario in which women and girls will face gendered violence (WHO, 2002). It is for precisely this reason that current practice in WSD focuses much more on the everyday encounters most women and girls have with harassment and assaults by known men (see Chapter 3). If our point of departure is the everyday harassment, flashing and teasing that women and girls routinely face, it is hard to see how having more systematic knowledge about successful strategies could create a false sense of safety. Indeed, part of WSD courses involves encouraging women and girls to make explicit the strategies they already use, and to reflect on what works and why; this is one of the ways in which women's agency is expanded. In fact, the long-standing practices of WSD are slowly entering other services in the violence against women field; the increasing use of safety planning in relation to domestic violence is one clear example (Burton et al, 1998).
With respect to the notion that WSD makes women individually responsible for stopping violence, Chapter 3 made clear that one of the focuses within WSD is actually to shift victim-blame and to place responsibility on the perpetrators. However, shifting is not easy or simple: both victim-blame and self-blame are particularly virulent in relation to gender violence. Part of the reason is undoubtedly the combination of centuries of cultural beliefs which have justified male violence, which in turn provide individual perpetrators with ways to deflect responsibility onto those they victimise. But self-blame can have a function for those who have been victimised. A number of research studies in psychology (see Kelly, 1987 for an overview) have shown that blaming oneself provides a route to not feeling at the mercy of an unfair and unsafe world. It provides a coping strategy through which one can have some form of control, regain some agency, although at a cost – often including limiting one’s freedom. Precisely because WSD offers new and additional strategies to enable women to deal actively and strategically with the threat and reality of harassment and violence, it can directly address the psychological process of self-blame.

The argument that WSD is an individualistic approach has another variation. In this critique providing individual women with skills and knowledge that might enable them to prevent assaults is thought to undermine a social/structural analysis of violence against women and/or the responsibility of states and institutions to prevent it. This view has been expressed by some feminists, and also, as noted in Chapter 5, by state officials. A number of the WSD teachers and project partners in this study were acutely aware of this issue, and agree with respect to those self-defence courses on offer that do indeed run this danger, precisely because they eschewed a feminist perspective.

With respect to direct violence against women services (shelters, rape crisis, consultation centres) it is worth pointing out that such services are seldom charged with being ‘individualistic’, although some do undertake this kind of support work without a structural analysis, especially when the focus shifts to more psychologically based counselling/therapy (Kelly and Regan, 2001). We would argue that in several respects WSD is less ‘individualistic’ than individual support work, since the teaching of it always takes place in groups, and as Chapter 3 illustrates one of its benefits for women and girls is that it reduces isolation and makes solidarity between them possible. In addition, as earlier chapters made clear, most WSD teachers responding to the survey work from a structural analysis, and see providing women and girls with a framework in which to locate their individual experiences as an important component of WSD.

The notion that WSD is an individualistic approach can, therefore, be seriously challenged; the extent to which women are made responsible for preventing violence depends upon the content and perspective of the teacher. Those working within what we have defined as WSD seek to do precisely the opposite: offering women and girls routes to empowerment and resistance, whilst seeing themselves as part of wider movement that seeks to end violence against women.

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31 Interestingly, much woman/victim-blaming echoes the things perpetrators say to justify their behaviour.
6.3 Mainstreaming - gains and losses

The origins of WSD lie in the autonomous women's movement, and many providers still operate in contexts that can be described as independent. However, most are engaged in partnerships with other bodies, many of which are linked to local and regional government. By mainstreaming we mean moving the provision of WSD from being a marginal and optional activity, to something that is regarded as a key and necessary element in responses to violence against women. We locate WSD within the concept of 'gender mainstreaming', which was clearly established as a global strategy for promoting gender equality in the Platform for Action adopted at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing (China) in 1995. The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) offers the following definition.

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality. (ECOSOC, July, 1997)

Mainstreaming is seen to include gender-specific activities and positive action which can target women exclusively, men and women together, or only men, where such activities are focused on moving towards equality. In terms of UN and EU policies, such activities are viewed as necessary temporary measures designed to combat the direct and indirect consequences of past and current discrimination. Clearly WSD can be located as one such transitional strategy, designed specifically to support the process of overcoming inequality and discrimination, and within this framework the fact that classes are single-sex is entirely justifiable.

WSD teachers responding to the questionnaire were asked whether there had been attempts to mainstream WSD in their locality, and how successful they had been. Half the teachers were aware of such attempts, and primary schools turn out to be the most dynamic locus, followed by secondary schools. Only a couple of examples of mainstreaming in colleges and universities were reported. Mainstreaming of training for trainers has taken place in the Netherlands (see Chapter 4). The only examples of mainstreaming of WSD provision for adult women came from England and Scotland, where funding for two local organisations (The London Personal Safety Centre in England and WISE Women in Glasgow, Scotland) to provide self-defence courses has been made possible through moving into mainstream policy streams, especially the Community Safety (crime prevention) and Social Exclusion budgets. One element in this strategy has been to re-cast WSD as Personal Safety.

Self-defence became increasingly presented as a bag of physical tricks of dubious value, whereas 'personal safety' was being promoted as a valuable and 'safe' preventative. Personal safety agencies such as the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, become increasingly influential in official circles... To revive and restore the provision in London, LCPS... pioneered promoting and delivering WSD under the label of 'Community Safety Programmes'. These were, and continue to be, schemes for large numbers of women residents and workers in various local populations. Delivery on this scale had not been done before and was achieved
with funding from various Government urban regeneration initiatives. [These] programmes, which have varied from three months to five years, run in a range of London boroughs, training hundreds of people at a time, have all been delivered free to users. LCPS has always focused its provision on those most vulnerable and for many of students any charge at all would be a barrier to attending classes. (Da Silva, 2002)

The story of WISE Women in Scotland is both similar and different. In 1994 the national administration in Scotland funded what was then the Women's Safety Centre, to the extent that they could employ three staff, and deliver hundreds of courses for no fee. These were both open courses and ones targeting particular groups, such as disabled women, ethnic minority women and women in the sex industry. This funding was withdrawn in 1999, and the organisation decided to become a business, selling its services to other organisations (depending on the amount of time for development and support is needed the charge is between 1800 and 5700 Euros for a 20 hour course). WISE Women were strategic, successfully establishing what WSD could offer to the health, social work, crime prevention and social exclusion sectors. This was partly facilitated by the public sector reforms in the UK, which amongst other things encouraged public services to enter into purchaser/provider partnerships with the non-government sector. They have also forged strong local networks with the other groups working on violence against women in Glasgow and those they provide courses for. As a result of sustaining themselves, and this strong support, their core funding was restored in 2001 through the social inclusion budget.

In general, therefore, one can conclude that mainstreaming of WSD is weak, which has a direct consequence in terms of the sustainability of the work. Mainstreaming would not only ensure continued access to WSD, but also offer more security in terms of employment. As highlighted in Chapter 4, the fragility of contracts and the intermittent nature of work makes sustaining a ‘career’ in WSD difficult, if not impossible. As a consequence not only is much expertise lost, but access to WSD becomes less a question of demand and more of whether there is a local provider.

If the state, at the local, regional and or national levels mainstreamed the provision of WSD this would amount to a clear statement that prevention is not an individual matter, and that one’s ability to protect oneself is not a question of class or individual attitude. That said, however, mainstreaming also involves potential losses/costs to a field that has been dynamic and self-governing. Many of the mainstreaming strategies documented in this study involved having to adapt to mainstream concepts and demands. For example, whilst changing the name from self-defence to personal safety (England and Scotland) may appear a matter of semantics to some, it has deep symbolic significance for others. An extremely serious loss in the minds of a number of our partners has been in terms of content and quality where the mainstreaming strategy has required establishing an inflexible curricula, that cannot be changed without going through a new accreditation process. Mainstreaming processes also appear to decrease standards in teacher training, and to ensure that in the course provision there is less focus on analysing and understanding gendered violence.

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32 One of the Belgian participants at the practitioner meeting report that her organisation, *Refleks*, was closing, having been a key provider of WSD, including in schools, for more than 15 years.
The question of whether self-defence should be mainstreamed remains an open one, since the risks of dilution and de-politicisation are real. At the same time, without stronger institutionalisation of WSD, without more support from policymakers and without more funding, access for women and girls will continue to be something of a lottery - dependent on whether you live in a city/region/country where consistent provision is maintained.
7 Uneven Development - WSD Across Europe

One of the key findings of this project is that provision of WSD varies markedly across Europe. As has already been noted, these disparities have been conceptualised into the categories of strong, moderate and weak provider countries. Various possible explanations for these patterns are explored in this chapter, and we conclude outlining the necessary components for strengthening provision where it is currently weak, and securing and extending it where it is relatively strong.

7.1 Self-defence provision across Europe

To introduce this discussion the data on the number of participants in 2001 attending self-defence courses provided by the 155 teachers, are presented in a different format, analysed by country. Diagram 7.1 shows the marked disparities in participation and provision, Tables 7.1 and 7.2 present the data more fully, organising the findings around the strong, moderate and weak provider concept.

Diagram 7.1: Participation in self-defence for women and girls in 2001 by country

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33 As this is an exploratory study looking for the first time at the provision of women's self-defence within and across countries, the data is not extensive enough to construct measures that would allow more sophisticated comparisons.
We are aware that, within this exploratory study, the data on the number of
providers of, and participants in, WSD is incomplete because not all identified
teachers returned questionnaires and not all teachers were identified. With more
complete data the findings on the extent of the provision would increase, but
there is no reason to suggest that the strong trends identified in terms of uneven
development would not be replicated. In our view, based on the totality of data
collected in this project, the overall distribution of EU countries into the strong,
moderate and weak categories would be relatively unaffected. Germany is
undoubtedly the strongest provider of WSD for both women (54%) and girls
(72%). The moderate providers for women are Austria, England and the
Netherlands, and only Austria can be designated a moderate provider for girls,
with every other country falling into the weak category. Weak providers with
respect to WSD for both women and girls are: Belgium, Denmark, Finland,
France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Scotland,
Sweden, and Spain. For a number of these countries whilst WSD teachers were
located, in several cases they were a single person or project. In other cases,
despite using several routes no WSD provider could be identified. In only two
cases (Portugal and Spain) was a teacher/organisation identified where no
questionnaire return was made.

Despite these significant differences, none of the responding teachers regarded
their context as entirely positive; from a comparative perspective, however, those
working in strong and moderate provider contexts undoubtedly have advantages
compared to the isolated practitioners in some countries. Several were, to their
knowledge, the only women providing WSD courses for populations of between
five to twenty million people. An NGO from Poland (population 39 million)
reported on how difficult it was to get funders34 to see that WSD had anything at
all to do with violence against women, despite the fact that self-defence appears
as a recommendation in the Council of Europe Plan of Action For Combating
Violence Against Women (COE, 1997, section 13.23). In such contexts one has
to be even more dedicated and determined to continue over the longer term.

What factors can account for the disparities in provision across Europe? One of
the first, and obvious, questions must be whether the uneven provision is simply
a question of the relative size of the population. If this were the case then
countries with the highest population should appear in either the strong or
moderate provider categories, but Tables 7.1 and 7.2 do not support this
explanation. Whilst the hypothesis holds true for Germany and England/Wales,
other countries with large populations like France, Italy and Spain are in the weak
category. This suggests that factors other than size of population have influenced
the development of WSD across Europe.

34 In many Central and Eastern European countries women's organisations are dependent on
international donors for basic running costs and support for new initiatives.
Diagram 7.2: Strong, moderate and weak provision of WSD for women in 2001 by country

Table 7.1: Strong, moderate and weak provision of WSD for women in 2001 by country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of provision</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>No of inhabitants in millions</th>
<th>No of women attending SD class N=9788</th>
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<tr>
<td>Strong provider</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>5209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate provider</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>England/Wales</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1216</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1198</td>
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<td>Weak provider</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
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<td>250</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Sweden</td>
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<td>218</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Scotland</td>
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<td>126</td>
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<td>Denmark</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Finland</td>
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<td>80</td>
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<td></td>
<td>France</td>
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<td>Greece</td>
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<td>Norway</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Italy</td>
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<td>Luxembourg</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Portugal</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>39</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Figures rounded to the nearest million
Diagram 7.3: Strong, moderate and weak provision of WSD for girls in 2001 by country

Table 7.2: Strong, moderate and weak provision of WSD for girls in 2001 by country

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<tr>
<th>Type of provision</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>No of inhabitants in millions*</th>
<th>No of girls attending a SD class N=14120</th>
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<tr>
<td>Moderate provider</td>
<td>Austria</td>
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<td>2969</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weak provider</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>England/Wales</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>France</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Scotland</td>
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<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Belgium</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Denmark</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Finland</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greece</td>
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*Figures rounded to the nearest million
Given the origins of WSD in the women's movement, and in particular feminist work on gender violence, it is reasonable to assume that the existence and strength of a women's movement, the relationship between feminism and the state, concepts of gender politics (equality, difference) and institutionalised equal opportunity politics (including mainstreaming of violence against women) might play a role. Another relevant factor is the renewal of the field and the institutionalisation of WSD, ensuring that a base for provision continues, through the training of new teachers, networks and ongoing support for existing teachers.

**Strength and orientation of the women's movement**

Austria, England/Wales, Germany and the Netherlands (the strong and moderate providers of WSD) are all countries with relatively strong women's movements, in which violence against women has been an important focus. Here, WSD was one of a number of innovative responses to the threat and reality of gender violence at an individual and political level. However, when the weak provider groups are examined a number of conundrums emerge. One might argue that the fact that Greece, Spain and Portugal belong to this group is not surprising, since they do not have long traditions of strong women's movements and equality politics, or developed responses to violence against women. But the fact that WSD hardly exists in Scandinavia, France and Ireland cannot, however, be explained this way. The relative absence across Scandinavia is especially striking, since these countries have both strong women's movements and strong equality politics. At a global level, Sweden is often represented as having achieved formal gender equality. There is no doubt that, at the state level, Sweden is in the forefront of challenging men's behaviour in order to achieve women's equality: one obvious example being the recent criminalisation of the purchase of sexual services. This emphasis on men's behaviour seems to have become an argument against self-defence within both civil society and in government (see also Chapter 5), since WSD can be interpreted as placing responsibility on women and girls to deal with male violence. These kinds of reservations were also evident in the country report from Norway.

> We look more in Norway at the police, the situation, and the structures, not at the individuals. There are many sides to this, but we do not want the focus to be on girls, violence is not their responsibility. The same argument applies to whether the government should take responsibility for organising self-defence courses. At the same time this could also be an expression of apoliticisation: that schools do not want to be seen as political or feminist. The current climate is sceptical of anything that 'smells' of feminism. Another problem is that a prominent woman in the right wing progressive party has advocated self-defence; she said she had taken classes, and when she was attacked she was able to throw him off. This is seen as an expression of individual liberalism. (Paul, 2002)

Few feminists, and no WSD teacher, would disagree with the argument that the state should make perpetrators responsible, this principle has always been at the centre of feminist responses to violence against women. In the case of self-defence, however, this argument seems, in some contexts, to justify a lack of provision for women and girls which would not be made in the same way if the service in question were shelters, or other crisis responses. An either/or

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35 Considerably more work has emerged in these countries during the 1990s.
approach - making men accountable or providing women and girls with additional options - creates a gap for individual woman and girl between the vision of gender equality and their abilities to deal strategically with real life in the here and now.

One further issue emerges here, which deserves more detailed exploration, and that is the relationship of feminist movements with the state. The extent to which feminists have engaged with the state varies considerably over the last thirty years. At least three broad patterns can be seen, with women's movements in Scandinavia having the strongest engagement, expecting the state to provide funding for services, and address violence against women within a political project of creating gender equality. On the other hand women's movements in German speaking countries persisted with a notion of autonomy, and have only recently begun to engage consistently with state institutions such as the police about gender violence. The English speaking countries can be seen as taking a more pragmatic and opportunity led approach to policy development. If this analysis has explanatory value, the relative strength of WSD in German speaking countries would be partly accounted for by a feminist tradition that limited engagement with the state at the same time as emphasising feminist action and practice which enhanced women's autonomy. Similarly, the relative weakness of WSD across Scandinavia would be linked to a feminist orientation that has exerted considerable efforts to make the state take its responsibilities seriously.

Renewal and expansion

It is clear from the research data that the presence of individuals who have committed themselves to the field of WSD - in terms of developing the concepts, training new teachers and facilitating networks - is a feature of all the strong and moderate providers. Indeed, the combination of all three elements seems to characterise Germany, with one or more of them being present to greater or lesser degrees in Austria, England/Wales and the Netherlands. In each country there have also been auspicious periods where the provision of self-defence classes for women was better supported. The committed foresight of WSD practitioners meant that these opportunities were used to ensure renewal in the field and expansion of the approach. None of the strong and moderate provider countries report such a positive context at the current time, with the possible exception of Germany and the Netherlands in terms of provision for girls. The investment of energy and commitment in renewal and expansion appears to be what was missing in Ireland (see quote below), where there is a strong women's movement which has, during the 1990s, been extremely successful in mainstreaming violence against women (especially domestic violence) at the national level. It is also the explanation offered by a Belgian delegate to the practitioner meeting for weak development in France and Belgium.

Certainly my own memory is that there was not a single-issue group which focused exclusively and consistently on self-defence, and I really can't quite explain why that is so. I do know from various things that I was involved in during the 1980s that when we would run workshops we did occasionally do a self-defence workshop, and women simply flocked to them. And it was the same subsequently in the 1990s when we did it within the context of Lesbian Lives in the early 1990s. The reason women flocked to these workshop moments is that there really wasn't a culture of self-defence that had been developed and firmly established. I mean there was a person who has most consistently, at least in the Dublin area, done self-defence, but she was the only person I knew who provided
self-defence on a weekly basis. Other people would come in and do workshops, either because they had learnt something in the States, or because they had just come over from Germany. It was very hit and miss, touch and go, and hand to mouth, and there wasn’t a structure there. The other interesting thing, the locally-based or community-based women’s movement here is very strong… women’s locally-based groups have been very active here since the 1980s, through education and through lobbying and through working on local issues, in an often extremely politicised way, and in some a relatively feminist way. But self-defence has never really been part of that culture, has never been part of that ethos. That really only struck me when I started to think about this project. I thought, ‘Well, how interesting’, there have been lots of classes, a lot of them very definitely skills-based in different kinds of respects, but self-defence has not been part of that. I think that’s something that we need to look at here and try and work out why this has not been so. (Expert Interview, Ireland)

The first self-defence classes for Belgian women were taught in 1978, when women from the Wendo movement came from Quebec to Europe for the first time. Belgium became indeed the starting point for Wendo in Europe and quickly spread to France and other European countries. However, the French-speaking Wendo movement always remained isolated... The Quebec women trained several women, in particular in Belgium and France, to become self-defence teachers. These teachers gave (and some still give) classes to women but never trained new teachers. This seems to be the reason why Wendo is nearly a ‘lost’ technique in European French-speaking countries. The first European trainers have mostly withdrawn from training activities, and there are no new trainers to replace them. (Zellinger, 2002)

The uneven development of self-defence across Europe raises many questions and undoubtedly deserves more detailed consideration to better explain the contradictions. What is clear is that there is no straightforward connection between strong women’s movements or equal opportunity politics to the provision of self-defence, since ‘state feminism’ appears to provide the least conducive context. The factors that do seem to offer some purchase on these patterns include the extent to which within WSD growth and renewal is ensured, and the different relationships of women’s movements to the state. Having explored the uneven development of WSD from a comparative perspective, in the next section we discuss the factors which self-defence teachers view as critical in either encouraging or discouraging good provision.

7.2 What makes good provision possible?

From the perspective of self-defence teachers a strong women’s movement, and committed and qualified teachers are the critical factors that made good self-defence provision possible (see Table 7.3).

Strong women allying together – sticking at it. With good strength of belief in what they are doing. (Q 32, England)

In Wendo we have developed a good network, there is a lot of commitment, and we get good feedback from the courses. We are flexible and adapt our work to new insights. (Q 651, Germany)

Good training for trainers, good organisation, funding from the government, very qualified teachers. (Q 223, Netherlands)
The emergence of gender equality policies, and especially the establishment of Gender equality offices at local government\textsuperscript{36} or institutional levels were acknowledged by a number of teachers as sources of support and recognition. This is more likely where gender violence is seen as important area of work, and in these cases WSD courses may be funded, promoted and advertised by the gender equality machinery. As Chapter 5 made clear, however, this localised action has not translated into structural support at the national policy level.

Interestingly, with respect to good provision, the availability of funding is not the primary requirement, undoubtedly reflecting the fact that it was, and remains, the transformative impact of the women’s movement that sustains the WSD movement, including its ability to renew itself.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Table 7.3: Factors that made a good provision possible</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Factors</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong women’s movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Committed self-defence teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualified teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of gender issues and support from</td>
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<tr>
<td>equal opportunity offices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wider knowledge about violence against women and</td>
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<td>self-defence</td>
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<td>Financial support</td>
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N=79, multiple responses

When asked to specify the barriers that have prevented the development of good provision, WSD teachers emphasised structural issues, with the low profile/recognition of WSD and limited funding the most commonly cited (see Table 7.4). A social context in which women’s rights are not prioritised, and where feminist perspectives are under attack, were also seen as impediments to progress.

*The low payment and low prices are making it very difficult to grow.* (Q 147, Netherlands)

*Living as a trainer on the countryside, without feminist structures, is very difficult. I am often like a pioneer. There is little awareness in the population of violence against women and self-defence. The structures here are very conservative.* (Q 493, Germany)

Another complicating factor is the cooption of self-defence by other providers such as martial arts schools and the police. In some countries WSD has to compete with others who offer courses for free or at a very low cost, whilst failing to provide the same content and quality as WSD have developed (see also Chapter 3).

\textsuperscript{36} In English speaking contexts these were often called ‘Women’s Units’.
Table 7.4: Factors that limited the development of self-defence

<table>
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<th>Barriers</th>
<th>N</th>
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<tr>
<td>Low profile/recognition</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of funding/poorly paid</td>
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<td>47</td>
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<td>Low priority of women's rights/gender analysis/</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>feminism</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Co-option by other providers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Backlash against feminism</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
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</table>

N=68, multiple responses

For WSD to thrive a combination of factors are clearly necessary. At the structural level recognition of WSD, as an effective form of prevention of gender violence, at national, regional and local levels, and the allocation of resources are both essential. The extent to which these supports can be translated into enhanced service delivery depends critically on the health of the WSD sector itself, especially its ability to recruit, train and retain teachers.
8 Achievements Against the Grain

The women’s movement sees self-defence as one strategy to ending all women’s vulnerability to violence and securing women’s rights by increasing women’s strength, mobility and building solidarity among women. Violence against women is a political issue, which impinges on women’s freedom and damages all women’s lives, regardless of whether or not they are victims of individual crimes. (Graff, 2002)

For some trauma survivors, talk therapy must be supplemented by action, for example self-defence training - a kind of embodied narrative itself... While learning self-defence does not guarantee that they will never be victimised again, it greatly increases their options for fending off an assault, and enables them to feel in control of their lives without having to blame themselves or to restrict their behaviour in ways never expected of men. (Brison, 2002, p68, p76)

During the 1990s violence against women has been increasingly recognised, at national, European and international levels, as not only a serious policy issue, but also as a fundamental violation of women’s human rights, and serious barrier to achieving equality between women and men. This recognition has invariably involved acknowledgment of the contribution of the women’s movement and women’s organisations. The influence of such respect has been variable, in terms of funding and endorsing the practice models developed within the NGO sector, but there is no doubt that in the domestic violence field, partnerships and multi-agency approaches are increasing (Kelly and Regan, 2001; Seith, forthcoming). But despite being ‘evidence based’, having established itself as a professional field, WSD continues to be poorly supported and marginalised within wider policy developments across Europe.37 This exclusion of WSD was one of the strongest findings of this study, and it is this context that leads us to argue the achievements of WSD across Europe have been against the grain. They are the outcome of the commitment of teachers and organisers of WSD, and their belief - born out frequently in the responses of participants - that WSD works. This is not a claim that WSD will, if more widely practiced, end violence against women and girls, but a smaller claim that it offers women a different and positive option in coping with the threat and reality of harassment and abuse.

From the perspective of self-defence teachers the main achievements of WSD are not the difference it makes for individuals, but the ways it has changed perceptions of women and men’s violence, and has, even if only to a limited extent, established itself as a form of prevention. WSD challenges the stereotype of women and girls being passive victims, who do not and cannot resist harassment and physical assaults. It both recognises and validates women’s active resistance, expands their options for action whilst reinforcing a sense of entitlement, that women have the right to defend themselves. It is these shifts in women’s perception of themselves, and how women are perceived and represented by others, which teachers see as the most significant achievements. The empowerment and expanded agency that women and girls, as individuals and groups, develop in WSD has a wider transformative impact when they put them into practice in private and in public. The new choices women and girls

37 It appears this pattern is echoed in the USA, where whilst the Violence Against Women Act stresses support for prevention, WSD is not referred to.
make are numerous, and include: setting (new) standards about what is and is not acceptable behaviour; preventing harassment and abuse; supporting other women to also challenge; leaving an abusive relationship; making violence public and pressing charges or making a formal complaint against their attacker. That WSD has transformed itself to encompass the continuum of male violence, developed effective methods and includes disadvantaged groups are all considerable achievements. The motor for these evolutions has been internal to the WSD movement, in its commitment to improving the quality of women and girls’ lives.

There was some evidence in a few countries – most notably Germany and the Netherlands – of WSD being increasingly recognised, especially for girls, as a form of prevention. But this was not the case in most countries, and nor is it reflected at European policy levels. There is very little evidence of WSD being seriously discussed at a political level, and nor have there been sufficient efforts by policy makers and politicians to move beyond the stereotypical notions they currently hold about what WSD actually is. The absence, with one exception, of WSD from all Plans of Action and prevention policies on violence against women and child sexual abuse is disappointing. What is even more depressing are the negative responses of ministries to future potentials for including WSD in crime prevention strategies or any other wider policy context in which it might be relevant. The perception of WSD teachers that the most significant barrier to recognition is the negative attitudes of policy makers was born out by these findings. Some teachers offered suggestions for how this situation could be turned around, including finding supportive politicians who would make the case that empowerment of women and girls, and preventing gender violence are priority issues and the WSD movement itself devoting more time and resources to challenging the stereotypes, and raising the profile, of WSD.

8.1 Recommendations

This exploratory research project is a beginning in an ongoing process that seeks to move WSD in from the margins, to locate it within the range of innovative strategies that the women’s movement has developed to respond to and challenge harassment, abuse and violence. We end with nine recommendations, which if implemented, would go a considerable way to achieving this.

- Increased recognition of the contribution of WSD to the goal of eliminating/preventing gender violence, at EU level, both within the European Commission and the European Women’s Lobby.
- Inclusion of WSD within national Plans of Action, or where more relevant prevention strategies, on violence against women and child sexual abuse.
- Allocation of resources to WSD, not only to ensure provision of classes for women and girls, but also support renewal, networking and future developments.
- Enhanced awareness of WSD within the violence against women sector, as one element in a holistic response.
- Recognition that single-sex provision is a positive action strategy that fits within EU frameworks for gender mainstreaming.
- Determination within WSD, and its partners to ensure that expansion of provision (both courses and teacher training) for girls is not at the expense of women.
- Better promotion of WSD within the field itself, and by partners who fund and organise provision.
- Support for a trans-European dialogue within WSD to explore the issues of quality standards and mainstreaming.
- A cross-European evaluation study to analyse the impacts and outcomes of WSD for individual women and girls.
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Seith, C, 1994, “*Auch wenn es der grösste Fehler meines Lebens ist, ich muss es tun*”, sprach der Professor zur Studentin und versuchte sie zu küssen – zur sexuellen Belästigung in der höheren Bildung, Vortrag an der Universität Freiburg (CH), November.


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Contact details of project partners and WSD Teachers who agreed to have information published for networking purposes.
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<td><a href="mailto:anytown@company7.com">anytown@company7.com</a></td>
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**Notes:**
- All companies are located in Anytown, Anytown State.
- Phone numbers are in the format 555-123-4567.
- Email addresses are in the format anytown@company.com.
- Websites are www.anytowncompany.com.
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