RAN offers practice owners throughout Europe the opportunity to receive advice on how to improve the quality and impact of his/her project/tool/method from an expert of the RAN expert pool. This advice is only meant for the practice owner, on a voluntary basis, and will not be published online.

Name of practice: Aggredi

Date of review: November 26th 2020

Review author / expert:

1. What is the theoretical basis / implication of the practice? What theoretical aspects could be specified?

The program is based on the experience of former gang members, on street violence. It is based on theories on labelling and social constructionism from a perspective of desistance.

The workers practice consists of peer mentoring in individual dialogue, therapeutically oriented, using traditions of cognitive behavioural therapy and Social constructivism developed by Berger and Luckmann in *The social construction of reality* (1967). However, social constructionism is mostly used as a viewpoint in that workers respect the persons own truth and the ways in which they tell it. This theory mostly serves as an inspiration rather than firm guidelines. The theory is applied by giving space for the client's own perceptions, needs and narratives during discussion attaching them to the program, and secondly, by transferring that attachment to society.

Aggredi's workers take the roles of pro-social peer mentors supporting them in their anger management and issues of daily life. The working methods aim to provide both analytical and solution-focused rehabilitation. Aggredi distinguishes between four types of approach strategies for their client work: motivating discussions, treatment-based discussions, crisis management- based discussions and organization of daily life.

Despite all workers having a long background of social work with marginalized client groups, they emphasize their positions as ordinary people with ordinary advice (paternity, job, others types of problems). The method of practical aid strives to transfer the reflective dialog to concrete actions. In practice, it is a more future-oriented approach generally resembled solution-based therapy (SFBT). SFBT applies a future- and goal-oriented emphasis by working with the client's own resources in managing their issues., the clients use scales for continuous measurement of their progress. Assessing a solutions-based approach served as a goal in Aggredi's official handbook. The working method emphasizes working in the moment and the objective for the future rather than focusing on the client's background.

2. Is there a clear understanding what this practice should contribute to/which problem is being tackled?

Yes, this program helps reduce street violence and projects of mass violence in Finland.
It tackles the problem of recidivism offenders in communities who tend to reoffend.
The program contributes to:

- Decrease recidivism
- Reduce violence, and particularly street violence
- Help in reinsertion of offenders: Aggredi aim to give the client a sense of agency and purpose regardless of their history and with time, construct a new identity that is not connected to their violent offenses

3. To what extent are the practice owners able to explain the mechanism at work: how are the particular activities leading to achieving the desired objective? (i.e. theory of change)

Agrgredi is a loose and flexible program in which the content of the program can change depending on the client. Thus, it is not so much the specific activities that lead to achieving the objective, but the approach and principles of the framework. The following key elements have been identified:

- **Listening:** The foundation of Aggredi's work lies in listening. Aggredi offers a space for dialogue where the worker accompanies the client according to what the client says and wants. This listening allows for customized work to be carried out.
- **Non-judgment:** Clients can talk openly about any topic they want without fear of the team's judgment. It is a non-judgmental space that they are not used to outside the program. The absence of surveillance or of formal authority, is also particularly appreciated by the clients.
- **Availability:** Workers appear to be highly available to their clients (a worker said that he always has the phone open).
- **re-creating the network:** The program makes it possible to recreate a network around the client who is often alone when he wants to get out of violence
- **the voluntary basis:** Clients who participate in the program do so without any kind of compensation; Aggredi doesn't provide money, food or housing). Duration of the sessions and participation in the program are based on the client's terms, they can leave and reenter the program when they choose.

- **Independence:** Being an independent NGO makes the work is freer and open compared with prison, for instance. Working methods is open and constantly adaptable according to the client's needs, with no fixated duration time for the clients nor a zero-tolerance policy on violence and substance use.
- **The program doesn't tackle ideology or religion.** The work focuses on the future and not on the background of the clients. Workers do not question their history but ask them what they want to do next. Their posture does not allow them to express their opinion on what is true, false, the values to adopt... Workers say they respect everything in the client: his own truth, what he thinks, etc.
- **Confidentiality** (once again, compared to public institution): The confidentiality of exchanges offers security to the client who feels free to speak without fear of punishment.
- **Motivation.** It is maybe the main factor, it is very important at the beginning of the process. The individual must desire to change in order to starting the program. Not wanting to go back to jail is the most common and effective motivation at the beginning but after a while, it is not enough.
- **Posture of social workers:** the social worker is there to accompany the client and remind him of his initial goal: to get out of violence. When the client is disappointed and may relapse, the social worker is there to listen and be benevolent and to remind him of his commitments and goal. Social workers do not judge, they only listen and give ordinary advice, like any person without formation. This is probably one of the key points in understanding the success of the program.

4. Are there clearly defined quality standards to ensure the quality of the practice? What other resources or mechanisms should be elaborated on in order to improve the practice?

Aggredi's working methods are gathered in the official handbook of the program, elaborated in 2012. It needs to be updated. A new one will be published in January 2021

Quality standards:
- Handbook (2012 et 2021)
- Training of the workers
- Regular evaluation during the sessions (after the 3rd, the 8th...)
- Collaboration with prison workers: Aggredi inquires about the profiles of its clients and provides feedback to keep them informed about their work.
- Recruitment of workers is done according to the personality of the person who is then trained.
- Consistency of practices regardless of the work place (Helsinki, Kuopio and Oulu)

To improve their practice and evaluation it may be useful to:

- Make a long-term evaluation
- Reinforce the training and monitoring of workers
- Use the hand-book that will be published in 2021 as a basis for new recruits. This will allow to train new social workers on a written basis and to actively apply the 4 defined strategies - they are not sufficiently applied for the moment.
- Use an outside person to supervise workers. Social workers seem to discuss professional practices. Many have been working with Aggredi for a long time and face difficult situations, that they share only with their colleagues. External supervision could be useful especially regarding the impact of their work, or on the banalization of violence.
- Develop more regular meetings between teams from different cities to discuss situations, practices, audiences and solutions.
- Connect with prisons for evaluation

6. To what extent has there been either an evaluation on process and/or effect to better understand the quality and impact of the practice? What recommendations can you give in order to increase success factors of the practice?

Evaluation method needs to be updated, are too informal and difficult to conduct in long term.

Aggredi uses four impact criteria:
- the client's level of commitment to the program, (treatment duration and the amount of participated sessions)
- changes in the client's narratives regarding their violent behavior
- changes in clients' use of language.
- transformations of words into actions.

An evaluation from 2019 stated that the criteria are not evaluated in a static, structured manner and not applied actively

It has been difficult to find recurring statistics on the completion of the program.

Data found are either incomplete or they are not all on the same base. It seems that around half of the client go to the end of the program. But this number needs to be verified. Those who stop are often redirected (usually in case of addiction relapse, mental health, reincarceration or end of probation)

The program primarily assessed outcomes based on the profiles of the people it mentored. However, a section on the evaluation of the professionals and methods used is missing.

Recommendations

- **Motivation:** in order to trigger more motivation among the clients, share information upstream (e.g. Go to prisons to present the program, suggest to former or current participants to testify about what it has brought them.)
- **Conduct satisfaction and evaluation tests** with past participants to find out what worked and what did not work. Systematize the practice of a questionnaire for those who drop out as soon as they discontinued (one or 2 months after the last interview, for example) to understand the causes of the dropout and how to deal with them for the next clients.
- **Invest more the question of the follow-up,** adapted to the different profiles: more systematic questionnaires, phone/oral interviews can be useful esperially: when clients drop out, at the end of the program or many years after the program (to see if the program has been beneficial in the long term). Introducing this at the beginning may make the follow-up easier. if there is no follow-up it should be interpreted as a good sign for the client because he no longer needs Aggredi to leave the violence. Perhaps it would also be beneficial for the workers in terms of attachment and letting a participant go? Long term follow is difficult because the program helps clients build a new life and, in this regard, Aggredi can be part of the "old life". So client change address, phone number and don't always reach or want to be reached by Aggredi which must be seen as a positive sign of reintegration.
- **Establish standard documents** for conducting workers' assessments of client progress and by the customers themselves. The workers own evaluation of client progress mentioned in the handbook was assessed verbally rather than through standardized documentation. Additionally, Aggredi's statistical inquiries on their clients had changed over the years, and may lack coherency. The lack of an updated and common working method handbook and evaluation methods partly resulted from a long time of sharing the same working group.
- **Explore punctual collective actions:** Aggredi's method is focused on the individual. We think it could be interesting to explore some punctual collective exchanges: on parenting, or between clients at the end of the program with clients just beginning for example.
- **Work on the clients' ideology:** Ideology may justify the use of violence, working on it when it contributes to an individual's violence may increase the effectiveness of the program.
- **Raise awareness** of the issues at stake in this program. Many clients feel rejected by society, they have very negative feelings, perhaps talking about it in various circles (politics, schools, banks...) could reduce this feeling and increase the probability to getting out of the violence.
- **Tighten the target group** with individuals mainly coming out of prison. It is the public identified by Aggredi as being the most responsive to the program, so the proportion of individuals coming out of prison must be increased.

7. To what extent does this practice introduce new working methods or tools, or a new perspective to preventing radicalisation?

This method can be used to work on tertiary prevention of radicalisation.

As it aims to fight against recidivism, this method can be transferred to radicalization to prevent a relapse into violent extremism through the prospects of reintegration into society that it offers.

Experience from street violence and gang members is not recent, but is not very frequent.

According to Agreddi, mechanisms of street violence are completely transposable to jihadism and foreign fighters.

Today, the program also deals with violent islamists extremist although there are few cases of foreign fighters or jihadists at Agreddi (because there are few in Finland), and social workers deal with them like the others because Agreddi considers that ideology is not the cause of violence but a pretext. According to Agreddi, violence is a symptom and the causes are the same, extreme right-wing or gang violence is based on the same mechanisms and is not based on ideology perceived as an excuse to justify violent behavior. That is why exactly the same methods are used for jihadists and other clients. The workers start from the client's background, from his history. If they want to talk about religion the workers discuss it with them, they can ask questions. When foreign fighters come back to Finland, a new objective must be defined with them: if it is for example to reunite their family and to go back to school, the team looks for the means and works on the violence to show that it is an obstacle to reach this objective.

Limits and advantages:

To effectively apply the program to individuals who return from Syria or who adhere to the jihadist ideology, we suggest that Aggredi pay special attention to two elements: motivation and ideology.

The client's motivation is critical to entering the Aggredi program. It is also a key criterion for abandoning extreme violence. Applying it to jihadist individuals is a strength for the Aggredi program and could be reinforced.

Ideology is not questioned with the Aggredi program. However, in order to emerge from violent extremism in a sustainable way, one must also take in account the ideology. Whether they work on it or not, it has implications. For example, workers at Agreddi often talk about anger management or drug abuse as a trigger of violence whereas regarding violent extremist these elements can be totally absent.

Aggredi can work on the disengagement from physical violence but if the individual remains radicalized in his way of thinking there may be a risk of relapse.

It is a very important element that Agreddi does not work on ideology, and we do not recommend to change it, but we think that maybe trainings for the workers might be useful to better understand the specificities of violence when triggered by ideology.

Summary of the review (max. 200 words):

Positive elements of the program are multiple: the program can be carried out over long term, the follow-ups are adapted to the clients, the meetings evolve according to the person, the program is stable in terms of funding and operates within a solid organization. The development of the program in 3 new cities is indicative of Aggredi's solidity and efficiency. Nevertheless, some points show that the program and its evaluation need to be improved.

The program takes time, results are not directly palpable, and those who drop out of the program appear to be even more likely to reoffend than average. The program would benefit from:

- an even better structuring (training of workers, evaluation of workers ..)
- Working on motivation (how to trigger it)
- Taking ideology in account regarding violent extremist (not work directly on it, but maybe trainings for the workers)
- External supervision of the workers
- Focusing on prison leavers
- Cooperation among mental health workers within health care or educational institutions.
- Systematizing the use of the handbook and its regular reissue
- Lobbying and feedback in several environments to raise awareness (politics, banks, schools...) and reduce stigmatization of violent offenders in society.