

Implementation of Jeg Vet and Snakkemedbarn.no in the municipalities.

Sub-report no. 4

Society is responsible for protecting its citizens, especially children and adolescents, against violence and abuse. Violence and abuse constitute a serious social problem with grave consequences. Its causes can be complex, and dealing with this challenge requires a consistent effort by a broad range of professions. This places great demands on the coordination of different levels and sectors among institutions engaging with children and young people.

The two digital learning resources Snakkemedbarn.no and Jeg Vet ('I Know') are intended to facilitate appropriate conversations with children about violence and abuse. In 2019–2023, Fafo undertook a process evaluation of the implementation of these two tools. We have previously published three interim reports that describe the planning, implementation and use of these two learning tools (Weiss & Strand, 2021, Weiss et al., 2022, Flatø et al., 2022).

This is the fourth and final interim report from the summative evaluation of the two digital learning resources snakkemedbarn.no and Jeg Vet. Here, we focus on efforts to prevent violence at the municipal level, more specifically in schools and daycare centres. In other words, we see the implementation of these tools in a municipal perspective and present findings from a qualitative study of three selected municipalities that have started using Jeg Vet and Snakkemedbarn.no.

The tools are intended to have a universal design and reach out to all children and adolescents, irrespective of their age, ethnicity and functional ability. In this report we examine challenges encountered in reaching out to all children with these measures to prevent violence. How is the implementation of these tools undertaken in the municipalities? Does it reach all children? What conditions are conducive to a positive implementation? We also investigate the experiences of school and kindergarten staff, i.e. those on the municipal frontline, in using Jeg Vet and Snakkemedbarn.no.

In Chapter 2 we give an account of the theory of change that provides the analytical framework for the summative evaluation. A theory of change is both a suitable evaluation method to elucidate the connection between the causes and effects of a specific action, and a tool for reflection that can help raise awareness of our own and others' assumptions regarding the kind of change that we seek to achieve by a specific measure and how this change can be achieved. Based on this report and our previous research, we draw up a theory of change for each of the two learning tools and outline short-term and long-term goals for their effects, as well as how the developers of these tools planned to achieve them. This setup will enable an exploration of whether any deficiencies in goal achievement can be ascribed to the design of the tools, flawed thinking or deficiencies in the use the tools, i.e. implementation errors.

Chapters 3–6 are based on the qualitative fieldwork. In Chapter 3 we describe three different approaches to implementation that are commonly used in Norwegian municipalities: top-down, bottom-up and implementation through economic incentives. We find that all three approaches have advantages as well as disadvantages.

A top-down approach makes for strong management commitment, which we regard as essential for a successful implementation. Mandatory use of the tool by frontline staff, such as teachers, sends a strong signal regarding municipal priorities in the efforts to prevent violence against children. However, even in a top-down-type implementation it is essential to obtain endorsement by frontline staff to ensure a sense of ownership of the tools they are about to use.

We find that a bottom-up approach can be well suited to start implementation in small municipalities. The combination of small scale and less stability in the management provides latitude for enthusiasts to introduce desired changes. This approach presupposes, and depends on, committed individuals. This dependency on individuals, which is the strength of this approach, may also render the implementation and use of the tools vulnerable.

The third approach is based on external funding through grants from the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (so-called BTI grants), and combines elements from the top-down and bottom-up approaches. It is embedded in the municipal management, but the work has been delegated to a project coordinator who oversees the implementation. The advantages of this approach are that individuals will have violence prevention as part of their job description and that time is allocated to establish procedures and coordinate interaction across enterprises and levels in the municipality. The disadvantage is that such projects tend to be limited in time, and for implementation through external funding from the directorate to succeed, permanent collaborative structures need to be established before the project period expires.

The process evaluation has shown that it has been challenging to persuade the municipalities, especially daycare centres and schools, to use the two learning tools Snakkemedbarn.no and Jeg Vet. In Chapter 4 we describe some conditions that are conducive to successful implementation. We find that the size of the municipality has an impact; it is far easier to introduce this type of tool in small municipalities. Coordination is strengthened through close personal relationships with staff in other institutions and sectors.

Management commitment is yet another factor that positively affects local implementation. Endorsement by the municipal management and heads of schools and daycare centres should be obtained from the start, and the process should be continuously followed up. Jeg Vet and Snakkemedbarn.no differ from other municipal efforts to combat violence in being directly designed for school and daycare staff. The municipalities must therefore ensure that the heads of schools and daycare centres are involved in the municipality's general efforts to combat violence.

As we have shown in previous reports, successful implementation requires good coordination and collaboration across enterprises. Organising local networks is therefore essential.

Sufficient time and continuity are further factors that contribute to successful implementation. Topics related to violence and abuse have been in focus for many years, but they tend to receive more attention when individuals encounter situations where these problems are manifest. Maintaining commitment over time is a challenge, especially in schools. It is thus necessary to establish procedures and continuity through annual cycles, binding agreements and frequent meetings. Moreover, it is essential that the enterprises allocate sufficient time to training and knowledge exchange. Quality in efforts to prevent violence is all about developing a culture where addressing this topic comes naturally, and where there is knowledge of how it should be dealt with.

In previous interim reports we have shown most of the users of Jeg Vet and Snakkemedbarn.no are satisfied with these tools, even though few municipalities so far are making systematic use of them (Flatø et al., 2022). In Chapter 5 we describe how teachers, daycare staff and other staff in the three selected municipalities have perceived the efforts undertaken in their workplaces to prevent abuse and violence against children. The findings in this chapter supplement and expand on the findings from a survey among school and daycare centre leaders and staff, described in the third interim report. The objective is to describe conditions and prerequisites that are closely related to the use of the tools, and which therefore will affect whether and how teachers and daycare staff have the opportunity and ability to use the tools, and thus help combat abuse and violence against children.

Staff members confirm that (perceived) lack of competence in violence prevention is a key reason why adults feel uncertain and uncomfortable in teaching about violence and abuse and in speaking with children whom they suspect have been exposed to violence or abuse. To address this uncertainty and discomfort, it is essential to establish a community of peers that can support each other. Stability in the staff groups and a shared understanding of how to deal with the topic of violence and abuse are crucial.

Close cooperation with parents is highlighted as a further key prerequisite for succeeding in violence prevention. There has been little inclusion or consideration of parents in the development of the two learning tools. However, teachers and daycare staff underscore that close cooperation with the parents is essential. Such cooperation needs to be established in 'peacetime', i.e. before cases involving violence or abuse are discovered. Staff members highlighted the importance of providing appropriate information to parents about the efforts to prevent violence and abuse, as well as about responsibilities and procedures when these are suspected.

Snakkemedbarn.no and Jeg Vet have been developed as universal learning tools that should reach all children, irrespective of their age, ethnicity and functional ability. Chapter 6 describes three groups of children and adolescents that in our opinion have been insufficiently considered. These are children who for various reasons do not participate in regular schooling, children whom adults erroneously assume to be exposed to violence and abuse, and Sámi children.

Although the developers of Jeg Vet collaborated with Statped (the national service for special needs education) to ensure universal design of the tool, at the implementation stage we find a lack of awareness in schools and daycare centres regarding universal design and how Jeg Vet can be used in relation to children who do not participate in regular schooling. The second group includes children who are erroneously assumed to be exposed to violence and abuse. This is a challenge that could have been better addressed by Snakkemedbarn.no, which is a tool designed to help adults identify and support children and adolescents who are exposed to violence. However, this evaluation revealed a very low or absent awareness of the risk of erroneously assuming children as exposed to violence, both in the gaming technology and in the training courses for instructors. In the case of Sámi children, we see a substantial potential for improvement, not only of the two learning tools, but also of the efforts to prevent violence against Sámi children in general. The evaluation has revealed limitations in Sámi children's vocabulary on violence and abuse, lack of adaptation of the learning tools to culturally specific ways to handle violence, and a lack of cultural competence in the support services. To establish effective measures to combat violence against Sámi children and adolescents, a considerable effort is required beyond translation of the tools, with an emphasis on understanding and adapting to the Sámi context and culture.

The recommendations in this report encompass design and implementation of the resources, as well as adaptation of the resources to Sámi children and adolescents.

- Prepare advice and guidance that can raise awareness among adult users of Jeg Vet and Snakkemedbarn.no of the risks involved in not distinguishing exposure to violence from other difficulties that children have, for example neurological diagnoses, ME or traumas. This could be achieved by, for example:
 - Developing an avatar in Snakkemedbarn.no intended to conclude that the child displays behaviour consistent with exposure to violence, but where another cause can explain the child's behaviour, such as poor facilitation in school or a neurological diagnosis.
 - Information in training courses for instructors and resource pages for the learning tools.
- Ensure that Jeg Vet in particular can reach children who do not participate in regular schooling, by way of advice, guidance and collaboration with relevant actors.
- Further work on implementation of the two learning resources should concentrate on how their use should be endorsed by frontline staff in the municipalities, i.e. enterprise heads and staff.
- In collaboration with the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs, the municipalities should establish robust structures to ensure that the municipal enterprises continuously allocate time to the efforts to prevent violence.
- In collaboration with the municipalities and the county administrations, the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs should upgrade the efforts and ensure procedures for parental participation.
- The implementation of the two learning tools has failed to reach adolescents. Further implementation should therefore emphasise the age group from 13 to 18 years. This focus applies to the entire implementation chain and will involve the Norwegian

Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs, the regional centres for violence and traumatic stress, the county governors, municipalities and county administrations. Plans should be drawn up regarding how the county administrations and upper secondary schools can become involved in efforts to prevent violence.

- The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs should obtain more knowledge regarding how the implementation of the resources can be undertaken in large municipalities and cities.
- The implementation of Jeg Vet and Snakkemedbarn.no should proceed as part of wider efforts to prevent violence in cooperation with the Sámi population. This should include:
 - Measures to improve children's vocabulary and understanding of violence and abuse, for example by providing literature for children and young people in the Sámi languages.
 - Developing measures that can help enhance the cultural competence among adults who engage with Sámi children and adolescents.
- Investigations should be undertaken to ascertain whether the learning tools and the efforts to prevent violence in general are able to reach out to children and adolescents in other minority and indigenous populations.