

Loverboyproject Nederland-Limburg

Speaker : Theo Hendrickx

Slide 2. Shadows of the night

The year is 1977 on a dark and rainy night in Heerlen. I am working my nightshift as a young police officer in this city in the South of the Netherlands. The city centre had some streets where young girls wandered around, hoping to score drugs. To pay for the drugs, they tried to earn money by stealing or prostitution. They were usually accompanied by a man, mostly of Antillean origin. These girls live their lives in the dark of the evening and night, sometimes by streetlights and shop windows, hoping to enhance their young femininity. Every night I would see them again, these shadows of the night.

It is striking that no one wondered what had caused these very young girls to show this kind of behaviour. Which 12, 13 year old girl stops going to school and chooses a life of prostitution and drugs on the street? Why do these teenagers allow a grown man to hit them while they still choose to stay with him? Was the urge of drugs use really the only reason to steal or prostitute themselves every day? Back in those days we knew for sure: these girls were unstable and had grown up in bad conditions at unstable families. How could there be any other reason?

Slide 3: The First time, 1977

It was that night in 1977 that I started to question this because of one particular girl. She was walking in one of the streets that were part of the illegal prostitution area. She had a short, slender figure, 1.50 m tall, long black hair, 16 years old but she looked much younger. In spite of the drug use, her personal beauty clearly showed. I had seen her get into cars or leave with men before. A little while later she was walking down the same street again, soliciting to men, hoping one of them would go with her. She was in an area where prostitution was illegal. She called herself "Angel" when I approached her. She stated she was having a walk. When I told her I had seen her working she denied it, trying to avoid being penalised. I tried to reassure her, telling her she would not be reported. During our talk I asked her why she went out to work every night. Was it drugs? Did she have debts? Why couldn't she live at home with her family? Her answer was: "Because I love my boyfriend!" She immediately reacted furiously that I should not try and change that. Apparently full of confidence she walked away, convinced that she had made the right decision. This was the start, the beginning of my battle against *loverboys* and trying to help victims. That battle would continue for many years.

Slide 4.

My name is Theo Hendrickx. For the first 22 year of my career as a police officer, the streets were my office. I was always accompanied by one of our service dogs. My work area was mainly the city centre of Heerlen and the adjoining illegal prostitution area. During these years I have seen a lot of

misery, for instance what I just told you about *loverboys*. I just didn't realize what the real problem was.

The same process kept repeating itself: young girls meeting Antillean and, later on, Moroccan men, falling in love, becoming addicted and going into prostitution. After 22 years I was transferred to the smaller city of Geleen. During the 5 years I spent working there as a police officer, I came into contact with the phenomenon again in a peculiar way: prostitution by schoolgirls. Until then I had never heard of *loverboys*.

Slide 4. A Police

During my work in Geleen, I came into contact with a social worker who worked in the area of "street work for girls." She noticed a number of schoolgirls who hung out with the "wrong boys." These girls would fall in love with older boys or men that forced them to commit crimes like drug trafficking and underage sex. Some girls became pregnant and would be forced to have abortions, usually in secret. I immediately recognized the situations from Heerlen, but could not give it a name or label it until 1989. I was invited to the organisation 'Scarlet Cord' (Scharlaken koord) in Amsterdam, to attend a symposium on *loverboys*. I had not heard of the terminology until then. After the presentation I knew for sure ... in the province Limburg, next to our doorstep, this phenomenon also exists. Nobody believed me, in the rural province because it was thought that this happened only in Amsterdam! For many years, a long and painful time followed to get these unworthy and destroying issues on the political agenda.

Slide 4.B Foundation Manna

In the meantime I had become a professed Christian and I had established a Christian pastoral Centre called: *Foundation Manna*. Because of my activities as a police officer and pastor of a Christian congregation, I encountered a lot of problems and I wanted to help people from a Christian point of view. Until this moment I am working in this centre as an unpaid, professional coordinator, a pastoral care giver, a marriage counsellor, a sexologist, a schedule therapist and suicide preventer. Thereby I develop projects, courses, instructions and give trainings on a weekly basis.

You will not be surprised that *loverboy* problems also belong to the topics in which our centre provides help. I developed an information packet "Infernal Love" (Helse Liefde) and together with an experience expert and social worker I went to all schools that invited us to talk about this subject, which at that time was an unknown theme. For 18 years we worked very hard to convince everybody (even our own colleagues) that *loverboys* made victims in Limburg. There was a lot of resistance, within the police force, political and social work personnel. They could not believe that these problems were so close to their doorstep.

In 2008, we (Manna and Infernal Love) had the opportunity to demonstrate to politicians that there were *loverboys* active in my working area of Sittard-Geleen.

The reason for this chance was that I had said in a newspaper article that there were about 60 potential victims of *loverboys* in Limburg. To this bold allegation a lot of resistance arose, it brought me into all sorts of trouble. They wanted me to say publicly that I had been wrong, I had to take back the figures and evidence, I was even threatened. In 2009, the indisputable truth came out..

It was not in the whole province of Limburg that 60 potential victims were found, but only in a small working area like Sittard-Geleen where 76 potential victims were identified by our special developed screening tool. Additionally 6 human trafficking cases were identified as well as several sexual offence cases.

Slide 4.C. Foundation Infernal Love (Stichting Helse Liefde)

Based on our results our province of Limburg provided us a three-year grant. Foundation Manna started a new specialized foundation, "Foundation Infernal Love, ' named after the information pack we developed. This foundation focuses entirely on the subject of *loverboys* and their victims. Up until today we provide a wide range of products, including: professional training, prevention packages, parental guidance, advice and consultations, buddies and supporting projects.

In this foundation I am the content expert, consultant and lecturer. The foundation has many contacts in the fight against *loverboys* both on a national and international level.

Slide 5. Vision Foundation Manna

The vision and mission of Foundation Manna, based on the Holy Scripture, is to support victims and their families. The name was chosen to reflect Exodus 16, when God provides the people of Israel with food and drink during their wilderness journey of 40 years. He gives them "manna" as food so they can survive the difficult journey and ordeal. The support that foundation Manna offers is symbolically compared to the "manna"; help people with what is necessary to be able to continue during the 'desert period' of their lives. Hereby God will provide what is needed for that. What we provide for our clients is based on the way Jesus Christ dealt with people and the mission He gave to each of his disciples: *love one another as I have loved you*.

In the statutes of the foundation it is made clear that every person should have the right of Christian aid, regardless of origin, religion or gender. According to our view, Jesus Christ can only be followed in word and deed in this practical manner.

Slide 6. Vision of Foundation Infernal Love

Foundation Infernal love is based on the same principals as Foundation Manna but it focuses completely on the topic of *loverboys*. The foundation offers assistance and support on a basis equality to victims, parents & families and professionals who are affected by human trafficking; especially by *loverboys* and the criminal systems that surround this topic. This assistance is always in cooperation with other designated or specialized agencies.

Slide 7. How we work

Both Foundation Manna and Foundation Infernal Love work in a holistic way. The work with our clients must be seen as part of a larger picture. Manna and Infernal Love work separately based on their own goals but use many of each other's capabilities. Foundation Manna has the necessary therapists and financial opportunities for outdoor patient support and the development of expertise and projects.

Foundation Infernal Love consists of a core team working directly under the authority of Manna. We work in collaboration with several other organizations and professionals that support the foundation. For other assistance and referral, the foundation has direct "back door" contacts with other professionals. In this way the foundation can continue to provide efficient assistance and develop the working methods in spite of the limited financial resources.

Foundation Infernal Love aims to erase *loverboy* problems and is financed by a subsidy of the Province of Limburg. The organization is made up of a board, contractors and consultants.

Both foundations support each other in a direct way in order to provide the full package on *loverboy* problems. This method in practice proves to work very efficiently because the best skills and specialised knowledge is at the service of each other and also to the person who is seeking help.

Slide 8. The difficulties of a new program

From the beginning it was clear to us that we could never tackle on our own all problems surrounding *loverboys*. A new integrated system had to be developed that had to have transparency as a base principle.

Out of experience we know that the big concerns in tackling *loverboy* problems are very diverse:

- unreliable funding,
- private interest of workers,
- private interest of organisations,
- unclear legislation (or non-existing legislation),
- difficulties with witness testimony/evidence ,
- insufficient security for victims,
- limited collaboration on all parts of the chain,
- inadequate privacy legislation

Slide 9. How does the project work

To explain the effect of the project, I want to take you briefly through the main problems and how we deal with them.

1. Prevention:

Besides the self-developed prevention project for high schools there was no clear prevention toolkit on *loverboys* and their methods of working. This left the subject in schools, media, with parents and professionals underexposed and even unknown. In the last few years we have written special programs that address the whole spectrum of schools: from 8th grade

primary school (11-12 years old) ('Wolf in sheep's clothing'), High School and a specialised program for schools that educate youth with special needs.

The programs are different for girls and boys, specified to their age and gender. Parents and teachers can participate in their own customized educational program. They learn to respond timely to signals of *loverboys*, or learn how to find help for possible problems with *loverboys* in good time to prevent problems.

2. **Training professionals:**

A big problem was that there was hardly any knowledge on the subject of *loverboys* and their victims. Also the impact in the social system (school, family) was hardly known. In our program professionals receive a two-day training about victimization, *loverboy*-systems and *loverboy*-practices. In addition, they can get acquainted with accompanying parents & families, because they require a different approach. The training proved so successful that it has been developed into a follow-up parent-family counselling. We are the only organisation offering this very important counselling.

Both foundations together have developed a new working method: The Three-Phase Model, in which all aspects of counselling are present. The method is extremely easy to implement in organizations and is widely applicable.

Research shows that the method is successful when parents & families feel supported. Currently, because of the many requests, a three-day training in 'honour-related violence' is developed which will be starting at the end of 2016. The reason for this is that more and more migrant girls come under the influence of men who try to abuse them because of their vulnerability. The consequences for the victims are often of an honour-related nature.

3. **Hotline:**

Another big problem of *loverboy* issues is:

-identifying – is he a *loverboy* or an unsympathetic boyfriend?

-locating,

-analysing,

-housing

-support.

=The willingness of victims to report this crime is extremely low;

=Both the public and the professionals are not alert to this problem.

In our integrated approach we have established a Hotline-website where professionals can register signals.

Parents can fill in a questionnaire in the support system and this website refers the signals to the hotline. We receive hundreds of reports per year this way, while only a few were reported before 2009.

There is a unique collaboration between the police and the support system/website. Both contribute to the screening of the signals and information and distribute it into useful information for the investigation or support system. Without bragging (boasting) it can be

stated that there has been a significant improvement in the fight against *loverboys* and helping their victims. The statistics support this improvement. (I will give a short example: the hotline/website is permanently reviewed by a social worker or police officer, the questionnaire asks information from the teacher or parent and gives a code green, orange or red. The result is linked to the police system.)

4. **The support system:**

Before we started this project in the province of Limburg or in any other part of the country, there was no cooperation, between the different professionals and others that claim to work with *loverboys* and their victims. Because of our project a clear improvement has shown. Social workers and police now see the added value of cooperation and the expansion of knowledge. , The exchange of knowledge and opportunities creates more and better cooperation. Currently we are working on a provincial shelter where victims - minors – can be placed, if necessary in a closed institution.

5. **Nationwide and Provincial political policy**

Due to some very severe cases and constant media attention on the topic of *loverboys*, we have seen a significant change of attention for this problem at the political level.

At the national level:

- legislation has been adjusted at some points;
 - sexual abuse of young people is explicitly addressed as a severe crime,
 - there has been an increase in research
 - an increase in national and international cooperation to identify and look at this topic.
- Customers/Johns are committing a crime when they have paid sex with a minor(16-18 years). It is their responsibility to know a girl is not a minor. Therefore a Bill has been developed.

More *loverboy* cases are brought to court or are taken up by the police in the past few years.

At the provincial level in Limburg:

- the topic was constantly kept on the political agenda. Only five years ago, the topic did not receive any attention, now it is getting more and more the recognition it deserves. Due to our years of struggle and setbacks, the topic is increasingly taken seriously, which can be noticed in several ways.

Slide 10. Actual results

Years of hard work have led to the results achieved. In addition to the results mentioned already, I would like to mention some special results, which ~~certainly have or will have their meaning~~ are important within the *loverboy* topic.

1. **Liability of customers:** Customers/Johns are held legally responsible if they have sex with a minor. They are required to verify the age of a prostitute by checking their ID card. Lately we have had several court cases in Limburg. Perpetrators were jailed, punished, some even committed suicide before going to court.

2. **Honour-related violence:** there are an increasing number of honour-related potential violence cases. Because of the increasing number of migrants and refugees from cultures where honour-related violence occurs, it is expected that the number of cases will rise. Many young people, minors, especially girls have been in situations that increase their vulnerability. They can have a trauma because of a war or another reason that has led to a 'damaged chastity [virginity?].' This often creates a dangerous situation for them because - despite (in our eyes) reasonable explanations- they become victims of honour-related violence: confinement, forced marriage, abandonment or even killed ('honour' killing).

Dutch girls from different cultural backgrounds - like Turkish, Yazidi, Somali or Moroccan - run greater risk of honour-related violence as a result of sexually related violations. In that respect too little is known. It is difficult to intervene. This will need more attention in the future. Exploitation of this particularly vulnerable group can easily occur.

3. **Sexting:** The Internet brings us many good things but can also be very damaging. Sexting is a common phenomenon that is used in the Netherlands and in many other countries as a means of exerting pressure to exploit another person.

Sexting is spreading or sharing sexually explicit photos or messages via mobile phones or other devices. The term is derived from sex (referring to the sexual content) and texting (SMS/MMS). The term was first used a few years ago.

The word 'sexting' originated in the time that the sending of text messages began. Nowadays it is also used when people post messages on Twitter or Facebook. It still involves messages with suggestive texts, photos in sexy poses, pornography, etc.

The current generation of young people often use their smart phones to rapidly take a picture of someone and forward it, without thinking about possible consequences. Research has shown that 1 in 5 youths receive erotic pictures on their cell phone.

Minors can make themselves punishable of child pornography through this sexual behaviour; sometimes it is tolerated by the court because of the young age of the defender: sometimes, both victim and perpetrator are minors.

Placing texts, photos, etc., is seen by honour-related cultures as a violation of the honour, on which purification of the honour has to take place. *Loverboys* use this situation as pressure to exploit girls or boys. There is a clear trend of this phenomenon.

4. **Special parent support (Three phase model).**

Unique in the Netherlands is our special approach to support parents, families and organisations for youth with a special model of parental guidance. Many parents and families feel they are not taken seriously and feel they have for many years lacked the necessary support. *Foundation Manna* in contrary has some very positive results in working with families. Through these long and the positive experiences with parents and families we are have carried out a study on the causes of these positive experiences in 2011.

This study clearly showed the benefits of the three-stage model that was used, tailored to the situation of the victim and the necessary factors to support parents and family.

In short this 3-phase model works as follows:

- a. The first phase: the period from first encounter with the *loverboy* to the child leaving home.
- b. The second stage: the victim is no longer coming home, contact with the family hardly exists.
- c. The third phase is the period in which the victim totally or partially comes back to the parents or the family.

Each phase needs its own attention and support. The model clearly has an added value.

The model can coexist perfectly well within other existing methods and organizational structures. Currently we work on a pilot project. It is expected that in this way young people who are difficult to approach, can get better care.

5. **Screening Instrument = risk assessment instrument.**

The screening tool that we developed has ensured that from 2009 victims of *loverboys* as well as *loverboys* themselves could be identified and adequate assistance could take place in an early stage.

This approach clearly bears fruit over the years.

In 2016, a start has been made to re-examine this instrument and to improve the efficiency on several points. It is expected that this improved instrument will be ready in 2017. It will bring an improvement in detecting victims of *loverboys*.

At the moment another tool is often used by Dutch institutions. This tool is heavily criticised. There are serious doubts about the detection of victims. This is because in institutions victims show different behaviour than victims in the street or at home. Our new screening model seems more significant and useful. Both practice and the subsequent statistics have shown this indisputable.

Slide 11. My struggle and wishes

Despite the fact that a lot of work has been done and a lot has been improved, there are still many struggles and wishes. In the preparation of this presentation I was asked if I had struggles and desires. I can only answer this question with a heartfelt YES.

We are grateful for the many goals that have been achieved. Here I recognize the silent hand of God who watches over us as a shepherd. Psalm 23 is regularly applicable to situations.

But I also see resistance around me, often by stubbornness, ignorance or incompetence. (give an example in Professional organisations, politics,)

To fight this, a lot of energy has been wasted. If this attitude had not been there a lot more could have been done, far more quickly and more efficiently. Who knows how many girls and boys we could have helped or even saved?

Therefore my personal wishes are:

- That the *loverboy* project will be implemented in a good way, fully into the provincial (or even national) policy. This means that the approach to this problem will be secured in the broadest manner.
- Recognition for the big - often hidden - problems of the parents and the families.
- Structural support and opportunities for victims and their surroundings. Currently this is only secured in grants and by the often limited financial resources of municipalities. This must change. Only structural support can powerfully address this problem. This can be done not only by words, but actions have to follow.
- An open heart for victims and their social environment. Many victims, parents and families are stigmatized, live under prejudices and often their problems are insufficiently recognized. The feeling of not being taken seriously is often heard.
- The suffering - often hidden because of shame or fear - is not sufficiently seen. Only with the words of Jesus: 'love one another as I have loved you', one can help them because the heart motivates what can be translated into action.

Slide 12.

Thank you for your attention.

This afternoon there will be a workshop where I will give more explanation on victimization and the *loverboy* system. I will also tell more about the counselling of parents.

I wish you Gods great blessing in all your activities.