

Violence in Partnership and Persisting Problems of Assistance

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Abstract

The paper focuses on an attempt to answer questions concerning domestic violence in accordance with the epistemology in contemporary scientific research. The phenomenology of violence is defined with respect to the superficial as well as the essential side of the phenomena. The problems are covered with respect to interdisciplinary relations. We endeavor to open a broader view. The underlying research represents an alternative approach, attempting to reach a cumulative view based on the data acquired from various contexts. In social science research, it is important to look at the social reality not only through the numbers of quantitative research, because social reality is constructed in various ways. The issues of elimination of violence against women in Slovakia are entrenched in the program of various institutions. Based on the performed analysis, inconsistencies in the approach to providing assistance are identified as the most important problem. The paper deals with the institutional issues persisting in dealing with situations and identifies the fundamental failures of social intervention that still exist, among other reasons, due to the stereotypical, discriminatory perceptions of the issues by the competency.

Keywords

Gender-Based violence, abuse, competencies, legislation, reporting

The paper has a theoretical-empirical nature. Violence within the family did not meet with much attention in the second half of the twentieth century. Family life took place behind carefully closed doors, according to the traditions and rules of society. Domestic violence belonged to the intimate sphere of the family. Violence against women is a very sensitive social issue. This problem is often trivialized and regarded as a problem of individuals or specific families.

At the beginning, the problem appeared to be “the abused woman”, theoretically and empirically. After many years of work, we have penetrated deeper into the issue and it appears to us that isolating the abuse of women from the problems of violence (even if they are clearly almost the exclusive victims of physical violence) would be erroneous. It is

impossible to be a participant of an act of violence and yet remain innocent. The victims learn from the offenders. The initial understanding of the issues by Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) has not changed, namely that violence (against women, men, children, and seniors), taken out of the context of the family, will never help to understand the phenomenon. Violence in the family involves each family member and influences their future life, and the effective elimination of conflicts is possible only in cooperation among family members.

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The aim of this paper is to bring forward these issues through a particular case and to familiarize the readers with the problems these families, and especially women, face. In the multimethodic processing of the case study, a variety of processing techniques will be used, such as qualitative data collection, direct observation, participant observation, interviews of all types, interpretative analysis of texts, as well as hypothetical-deductive methods of quantitative research.

THE CURRENT STATE OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE EXAMINED AREA

The basic objectives of this paper include carrying out retrospective research, critical analysis of various materials, and theoretical and practical realization of the comparative, empirical research on a representative sample of respondents. In the search for answers to the question as to whether case reporting or qualitative research has a complementary nature, or can replace the empirical part of the work in its entirety, it was necessary to study the latest theories.

In such a social-scientific and behavioral discipline, as social work, research is oriented on the human and cannot completely rely on scientific information, because some decisions depend on moral and ethical values that can be hardly determined by scientific research. Within the qualitative research method, a case study was selected. Quantitative and qualitative research has both positive and negative aspects. The positive aspects of one approach complement the weaknesses of another. Both are important in social science disciplines. The new epistemological (concerning the theory of knowledge) situation requires replacing the traditional model of social sciences, which isolates the human as a social and cognitive being from nature. Thus, the new alliance model represents the rehabilitation of the natural world, including nature (Ondrejko 2004: 172).

The objectives of the empirical part of the

paper include:

- (1) Qualitative and quantitative analysis, and evaluation of the results of the research, processing the results of the analysis into an appropriate text and graphical form;
- (2) Analysis of a specific case of violence by different methodologies;
- (3) Looking for potential applications of the research results in social work;
- (4) Publication of the research results in Slovak as well as foreign professional journals and organizing a seminar on the subject or both, or another form of presentation.

The Aim and Tasks of Qualitative Research

In the context of applied research, with case method, an answer to narrow a practical problem is sought, as well as an explanation for the optimality of the used means and methods of correction, therapy, and remedy. These are subsequently compared with quantitative research.

Due to the low number of respondents, the qualitative method could not set hypotheses suitable for quantitative processing and subsequent verification through exploration.

The Aim and Tasks of Quantitative Research

The aim of the research was to determine the public awareness of the possibilities of assistance in the event of violence. We focused on the level of information on legal aspects of the protection of victims and the knowledge of competence of the authorities concerned. Among other objectives were the following: detection of the main sources of public awareness of the violence issue, detection of the rate of interest of the respondents in improving the awareness in this area, a survey of the current state of knowledge of the respondents in the area of legal competence of the competent authorities, and possibilities of assistance to victims of violence.

THE SELECTED PROCESSING METHOD

Research Part 1

The goal of the qualitative research was to understand people in social situations. The researcher's task was to find significant structures in the set of all variables that the respondents considered relevant. This was the greatest strength of the qualitative research.

The importance of the subject and the wide range of issues in violence against women, as already indicated, was a highly sensitive issue and reliable data which could only be obtained with difficulty.

Within the qualitative method, a case study was chosen by monographic processing. One important prerequisite of success in the qualitative research was successful communication with the client. The basis of successful communication was the art of listening. Attentive, empathic listening was also important for the client to reconstruct the elapsed time in the client's life. Questions were prepared, solely as a guide, in a basic program, so as to meet the intention, i.e., to obtain an overview of violence in a particular case within a non-standardized interview. Responses were processed and listed chronologically in a table. The case study was a comprehensive qualitative method that primarily involved data collection, direct observation, participant observation, interviews of different types, interpretative document analysis, as well as other methods of qualitative research.

Selection of the case for qualitative research. For the purpose of the qualitative research, the case study involved an abused woman, who had been observed for several years. The case took place during a time of legislative changes; it involved a family that were affected by the changing laws. In this case, qualitative research was combined with results of quantitative research. Despite a small sample limiting the robust comparison, a solid basis was formed in terms of generalizations from parts concerning the provision of assistance and recommendations. We used an

analytical model, which assumed that generalizability is possible on the basis of any existing case (Silverman 2003), in that a "comparative approach tackles the question of generalizability in such a way that it points at the similarities and differences in a number of environments" (Silverman 2003: 116).

Research Part 2

For mapping the data in the second part of the research, we chose a questionnaire as an exploratory method of empirical research. The survey covered 200 female participants at a three-day conference at the Congress Center of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Smolenice, in January 2016. The basic characteristic of the respondents was their female gender. The range of options was formed by sociodemographic characteristics of the set, such as age, education, marital status, and number of children.

Research Part 3

This component compared the results of Research 1 and Research 2 from different perspectives, especially in view of the persistent institutional problems in the addressed area.

HYPOTHESES

Based on theoretical and practical experience, the following hypotheses were extrapolated:

(1) Hypothesis 1

Women, if they were abused by their life partners, would turn to a psychologist for advice.

(2) Hypothesis 2

Most women have sufficient information on the powers of the police after police intervention.

(3) Hypothesis 3

Most women do not know of a facility providing emergency accommodation in case of violence.

(4) Hypothesis 4

The mass media are the main source of information on violence.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Research Part 1

In the qualitative research, the cycle of violence was observed in a particular case of an abused woman. In terms of the incidence of violence in the family, the contact of the abused woman with experts and the level of assistance granted were examined. During the handling of the case, a change in the Criminal Code occurred. An interpretative analysis of contact with experts took place as follows:

- (1) Medical treatment;
- (2) Visit a psychologist;
- (3) Interview with a helpline worker;
- (4) Meeting with social workers;
- (5) Visit a lawyer;
- (6) Marriage counseling.

Research Part 2

The studied sample consisted of 200 respondents, who were participants of a three-day conference. This method was chosen to create a more intimate environment, to avoid external influence upon the respondents. The completed questionnaires were deposited into a closed box. For the respondents' age and educational composition, see Tables 1 and 2.

Interpretation of results—Analysis. The following chart (see Figure 1) shows answers to the question as to what the respondents would do after abuse. Out of all the respondents, 27% would contact the police, 22% did not know, 16% would leave the abuser, 13% would seek medical treatment, 7% would return the attack, 5% would start a dialogue with the abuser, 4% would seek help from another close person, 3% would visit a psychologist, and 3% would blame themselves for what had happened.

Based on the answers received from our respondents, we conclude that hypothesis 1 has not been confirmed. That is, women who were abused by their life partners did not turn to a psychologist for advice.

The questions asked were the following:

(1) Question 1: Do you think that the police are required to intervene repeatedly upon receiving a report of physical violence of the man against the female partner in the household?

(2) Question 2: Do you think that the police are authorized to open the door and enter the dwelling against the man's will?

Based on the answers obtained from our respondents, we concluded that hypothesis 2 was confirmed (see Figure 2).

Hypothesis 3, in which we assumed that most women do not know of any facility in their neighborhood, providing emergency or temporary accommodation for victims in necessity, was also confirmed (see Figure 3).

Based on the answers received from our respondents, we concluded that hypothesis 4 was confirmed (see Figure 4).

Research Part 3

For a long period of time, human civilization had been dependent on the family, which had represented the only place for survival and reproduction, and ensured the safe raising of the offspring. Such communities were very strong, with clear-cut rules, where every individual strived to cooperate. These fixed rules inevitably resulted in a suppression of personal interests. The family was the basic unit of existence. The social status of the individual in the group determined their tasks and opportunities. Equivalence and equal opportunities were out of the question, since the group members performed different tasks. Fulfillment of these obligations was regarded as normal in society. The individual's priority in life was to fulfill group interests at the expense of their individual interests.

The paradigm, based primarily on biological dependence, with firm set rules of behavior, has changed. Instead of the member loyal to his family, the autonomous individual has appeared, pursuing

Table 1. Age Composition of the Respondents to the Questionnaire

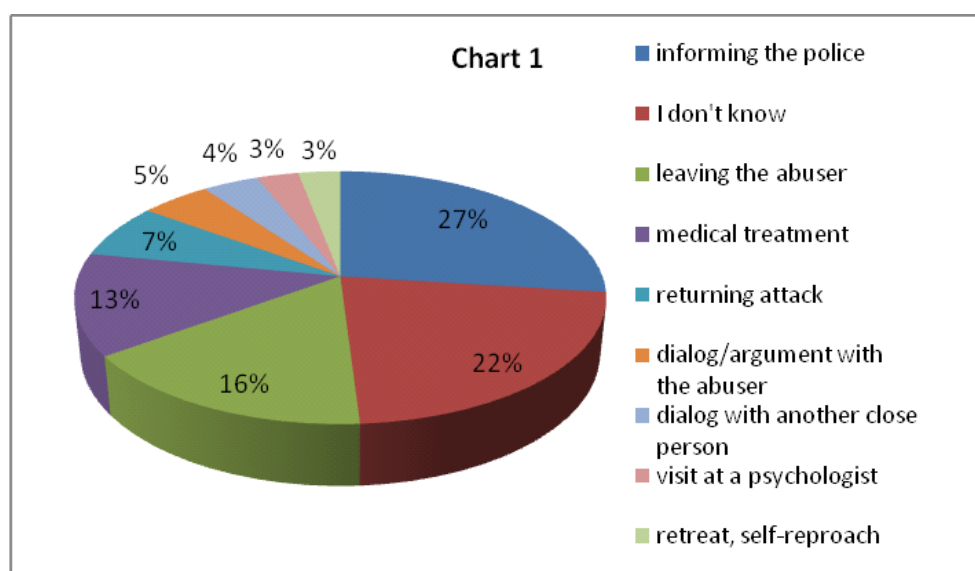
Age range	Number	Percentage
18-25 years	52	26
25-50 years	120	60
50 years and over	28	14

Note: Source: Author.

Table 2. Educational Composition of the Respondents to the Questionnaire

Highest level of education	Number	Percentage
Elementary	42	21
Apprenticeship or another secondary school	30	15
Upper secondary school	84	42
Higher education	44	22

Note: Source: Author.

**Figure 1.** Reactions After Attack, Assumed by the Respondents. Source: Author.

their own plans. This is the time—in the second half of the twentieth century—where we can observe the process of change of social paradigms.

Within this change, the value systems and traditional control systems became pluralistic. This has destabilized the social control, resulting in a massive increase in crime. Violence and crime have become commonplace. The individual has become capable of independent existence.

The 60's witnessed a process of changing of macro-sociological, cultural, and cultural-sociological paradigms (Szabó 1997). This change is reflected in society as, e.g.:

- (1) A drastic reduction in the number of marriages;
- (2) A significant increase in the number of children born outside marriage;
- (3) A massive increase in the number of women in the labor market;

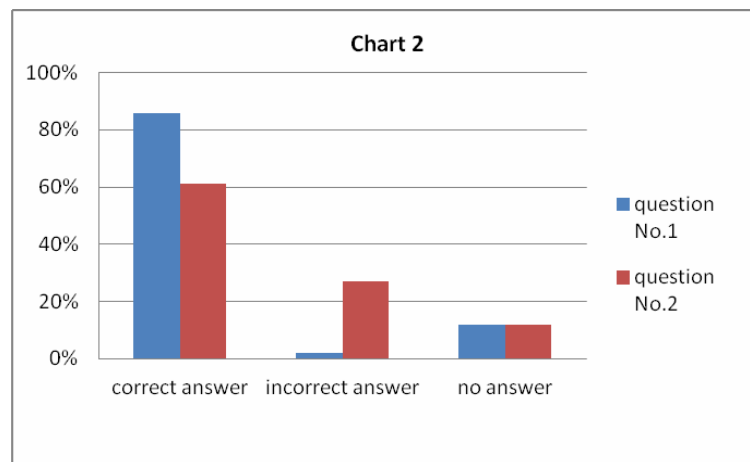


Figure 2. Awareness of the Respondents of the Competence of the Police. Source: Author.

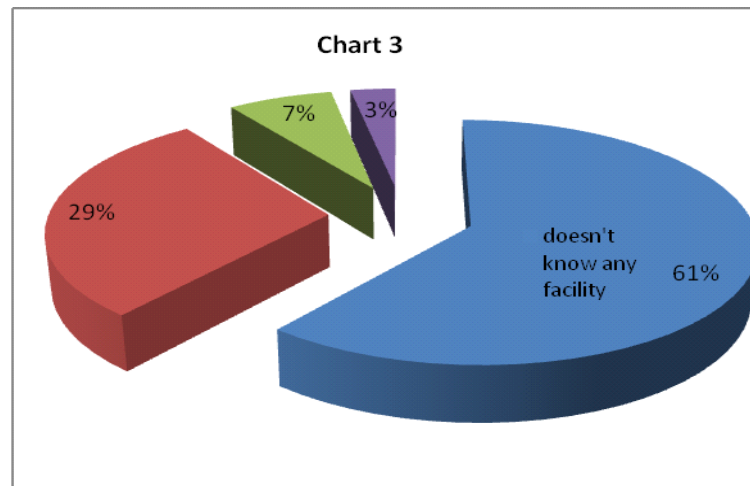


Figure 3. Awareness of the Respondents of Accommodation Facilities in Critical Situations. Source: Author.

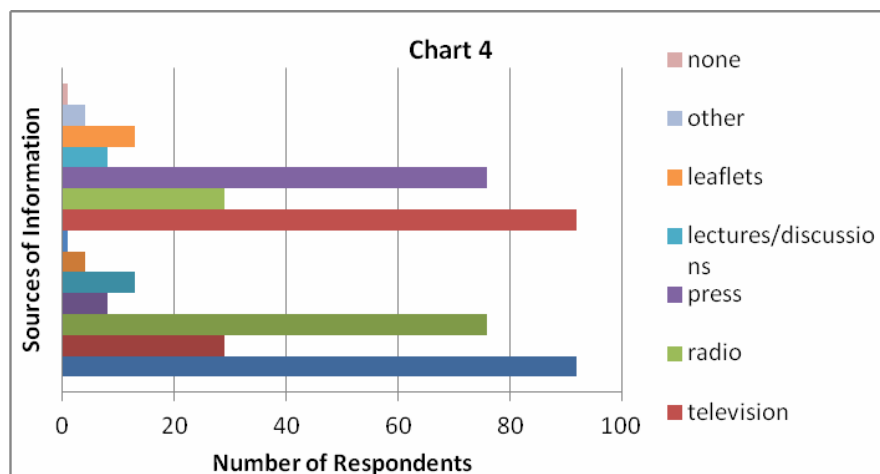


Figure 4. Sources of Information of the Respondents on the Issues of Domestic Violence. Source: Author.

(4) An increase in deviance and violence in child age;

(5) Increase in organized crime;

(6) Collapse of authority in the family;

(7) Change of mentality.

These changes have resulted in a further deterioration of the status of women in society. The idea of the man as the breadwinner is firmly established in Slovakia and is regarded as the most typical characteristic of masculinity (Možný 1999). This fact is all the more interesting, because, according to Bútorová, the model of double income households has been prevalent for decades. At the same time, the idea of the man as the breadwinner of the Slovak family is regarded as natural as the fact that the woman has to take care of the household and the upbringing of her offspring (Bútorová 1996).

The change of paradigms has resulted in a massive increase of women in the labor market. The changes have not facilitated the situation of women. On the contrary, the position of women in the labor market has become even more difficult.

A job is hard to find for the young woman, who is regarded as a potential mother. The woman has thus become multiply discriminated. During childcare, her male colleagues surpass her professionally. After the maternity leave, she does not have enough opportunities for a promotion. By becoming a mother, the woman becomes devoted to her child for the rest of her life. At the same time, the Slovak society seems to completely exclude men from this care. The prevailing idea is that the mother is always the better parent, and the father's presence in the children's room is seen as something extraordinary. The gender stereotype that every woman is a good mother is common in divorce courts.

Further interpretation of data in the context of various theoretical interpretations allowed comparisons of Research 1 and 2 from different perspectives.

In our long-term observed case, the woman turned first to her family and then sought assistance from a helpline. She visited a physician only after five years of abuse. Since she had been raised in a traditional Christian family, it was only at the second treatment that she told the doctor about abuse. Although this cannot be completely substantiated, it seems to confirm, in theory, a change of cultural and social paradigms.

On the opposite pole are our respondents, who have been largely subject to the paradigm changes observed since the 1960's, when a preference for one's own ideas of family, partnership, and cohabitation has already become evident.

We processed the distinct and the consistent data into Table 3. The table shows a clear shift in the understanding of abuse by the public.

PERSISTING INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES IN DEALING WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

If we had to list the social problems faced by developed societies, the problem of growing violence would be prominent. The issue of domestic violence in society is often discussed. Nonetheless, the solution to the situation of these families, especially women and children, depends on several active individuals. Moreover, there is no conceptual solution. Instead of being provided help, the victim is often blamed. Choices are limited and the feminization of poverty is often the reason for the failure to start a new life.

Institutional issues in the struggle against violence in the home can be divided into the following groups:

- (1) Social issues;
- (2) Criminological issues;
- (3) Legislative issues;
- (4) Economic issues;
- (5) Issues in providing assistance.

Social Issues

For centuries, the development of humanity, family,

Table 3. Analysis of the Results of Both Methods

Legend 1. column	Respondents	Case study
1st reaction after attack	Police	Physician
2nd reaction after attack	Departure	Family
Help sought	Police	Helpline
Expected form of help from RA for soc. matters	Information on emergency housing Soc. Law Center	RA—summons
Form of help expected from soc. worker	Representation Crisis intervention	None
Police awareness	86% correct answers	None
Awareness of facilities for abused women	39%	None
Main sources of information	Media	Helpline

Note: Source: Author.

and marriage was characterized by a superior position of the male and his exclusive power and dominance in the management of public and family affairs. The concept of gender power was used to emphasize the differences between the manifestations of the man and the woman. Biologically, gender provides specific possibilities; it generally gives more power to men and some men especially benefit from this. For centuries, it was normal for the man to control and punish his wife, even with the use of physical force. This right of men to humiliate and punish their wives was supported and maintained by legal, religious, and cultural norms of the given society. For example, the traditional Christian understanding of the relationship between the woman and the man was influenced by Genesis 2-3 in the Old Testament.

Legal norms have disappeared, but the behavior persists as a result of gender power structures, the division of power in the form of gender power, or gender structures. The reproductive role of the woman has resulted in her dependence, lack of power, vulnerability in relation to the man, the family, the group, and main society. Women in post-communist Europe have less legal protection and fewer opportunities to control their lives.

The era of an increased emphasis on individuality and paradigm shifts (since the 1960's) has opened

endless opportunities of personal development, seemingly for everyone. While men in the Slovak Republic could benefit from these openings, in practice, in the case of women, it remains only in theory, mainly because the division of labor in families had not changed. The vast majority of care about children or other household members remains in the responsibility of women. Even the care of seniors is primarily undertaken by women. Concerning violence in partnership, Slovakia has declared zero tolerance. This issue has been also incorporated into the Slovak legislation. However, without proper reactions of law enforcement agencies, the problems remain without adequate response concerning the criminal liability. There is a whole world of difference between daily practice and the institutional assessment of abused women. The competences of relevant institutions, the social sector, health care, education, and justice are not normatively established. Cooperation between institutions is problematic.

Criminological Issues

The most important competences in dealing with violence against women are those of the police. Police officers are in direct contact with the victims and the attackers. Their professional approach would be a

highly effective contribution to solving individual cases. In solving the cases, there can be huge differences between regions in relation to the police officer's level of socialization. According to Šebestová (2013), all socio-pathological phenomena, and therefore also gender-based violence, have a negative impact on society. Thus, it is necessary to consider these impacts, mainly through prevention. The prevention of socio-pathological phenomena is not merely an internal affair of Slovakia. It is potentially a global problem.

Socio-pathological phenomena, including their consequences, belong to the sphere of criminology that deals with the status, structure, and evolution of crime as well as its causes and the methods of its investigation and suppression. Crime is considered a conduct that is a criminal offense. Other antisocial activities constitute an offense or other administrative misconduct. These also include such conduct that is not an offense or other administrative misconduct, but nevertheless has a negative impact on society. The Slovak Government has established a body called the Slovak Government Council for Crime Prevention. The Council is a permanent advisory, initiative, coordinative, and expert body of the Government in the area of crime prevention. Its President is the Minister of Interior, while its Vice-Chairman is the Minister of Justice. Other members of the Council are appointed and dismissed by the Government upon the proposal of the Minister of Interior. Activities of the Council in the sphere of crime prevention include in particular:

(1) Submitting to the Government a draft of the crime prevention strategy for approval;

(2) Submitting to the Government the evaluation report on the implementation of the tasks arising from the crime prevention strategy in the previous calendar year for their approval;

(3) Coordinating the activities of regional coordinators of crime prevention at the District Offices in regional headquarters;

(4) Cooperating with international organizations and other foreign institutions.

The Council is the contact point within the European Crime Prevention Network.

The Ministry of Interior, which has its scope of authority in the field of crime prevention that is stipulated by special regulations, develops the crime prevention strategy by identifying the causes of crime and other antisocial activities, analyzing these and then implementing measures to eliminate the causes. Further, it gathers data on human trafficking and carries out the typology of perpetrators and victims of crime.

The Ministry of Interior has set up an Information Center as its institution without a legal dignitary for combating human trafficking and preventing crime.

Legislative Issues

Criminal law, as a primary instrument to deal with domestic violence, is ineffective in isolation. The Slovak Republic supports all relevant international documents regulating human rights. The nation ratified many of these in 1993, and within the National Strategy for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence, developed the basic principles of the action plan (*National Action Plan for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence Against Women for the Years 2009-2012*), and established that:

(1) All forms of violence against women and in the family are a violation of fundamental human rights;

(2) Violence against women and in the family is a structural phenomenon that is a direct result of inequalities and imbalances of power among individuals, family, and society;

(3) Violence against women and in the family is not just an individual problem, but a problem of society;

(4) Any form of violence is unacceptable; violence against women and in the family should not be tolerated (zero tolerance of violence);

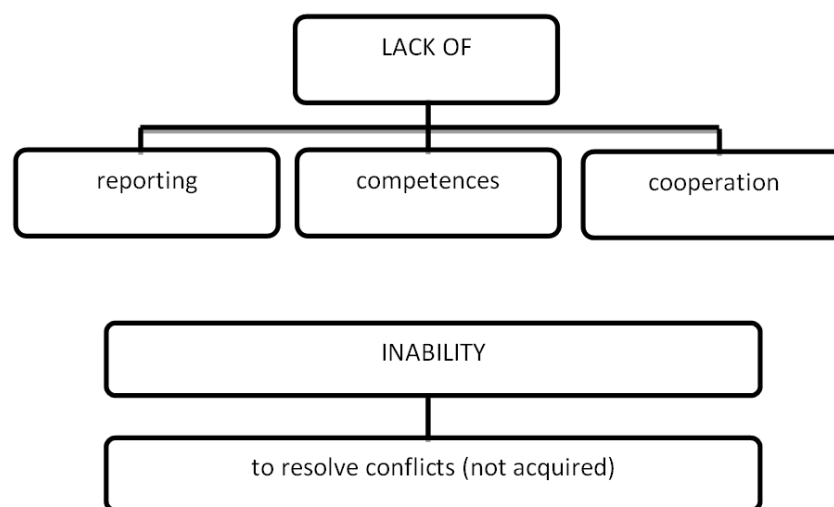


Figure 5. Issues in Providing Assistance. Source: Author.

(5) Responsibility for violence is the abuser's; assisting professions cannot disparage the victims and accuse them of causing the abuse;

(6) In their attitude to the perpetrators of violence, the helping professions must express and confirm the perpetrator's responsibility for their actions.

Economic Issues

Dealing with cases of domestic violence brings positive economic results, for example, a reduction in expenditure on medical treatment, return to the labor market, and a harmonious upbringing of the next generation in families without violence. Nonetheless, a detailed recording of these cases is a cause for incurring costs, and initially, it creates an additional load for the various investigative and judicial authorities, which are already overloaded.

Issues in Providing Assistance

The surviving stereotypes in society, the established rules, written and unwritten norms, values, and value orientations can easily become discriminatory against certain groups of people. It is this condition that would be eliminated with precisely defined

competencies of all the involved parties and precisely determined responsibilities in cases of family violence, in order to prevent discrimination and blaming the victims due to said surviving stereotypes.

Reporting individual cases. The most problematic case is the absence of prompt reporting; people often learn about the abuse too late or just randomly, for the well-known reasons that are deep-rooted traditions. People do not like to intervene in private affairs.

First and foremost, it is necessary to strengthen the reporting system to capture each case at an earlier stage, so that every affected person receives assistance in a timely and adequate manner.

Competences. People lack accurate, standardized, and elaborated competencies for all the concerned and clearly defined duties that entail.

Cooperation. People are better at solving problems individually than within a team. However, people need to learn to solve problems together.

Inability to resolve conflicts—Not learned. Within primary prevention, it would be useful to include in pre-school and grade school curricula a training in conflict management with emphasis on the basic

human rights, i.e., the right to live free of violence and without discrimination (see Figure 5).

CONCLUSIONS

Violence in the family is a highly complicated issue and its analysis cannot be reduced to a single phenomenon. Domestic violence is destructive not only because of how often it is repeated, but mainly because of the “victim’s” dependence and their inability to change their situation. The trauma suffered by the victims of violence can affect their lives for a long period of time. Abused women meet with a lack of understanding of the police and courts, as well as a trivialization of their problem. Poorly organized social work, lack of cooperation of the institutions concerned, and various technical problems at the court threaten the life and health of the wife and the children. Despite the developed operational objectives, we believe that progress in this field is very slow. Our Slovakian society still fails to ensure a rapid and efficient assistance to all victims. It is imperative that this problem should be approached comprehensively, because without simultaneous activity in all areas, it is impossible to achieve a long-term and substantial effect. Violence against women is a process that requires a flexible and coordinated approach of people of various professional groups and communities. This was the reason why this study aimed to develop a sufficient knowledge base in the area of domestic violence, i.e., the violence against women and in families, in such a manner as to help change the perspective of society and to enforce zero tolerance for any violence.

John Stuart Mill wrote the following in 1861:

The principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong in itself, and one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other. (Mill 2003: 9)

At the present time, on the social and political plane, people would like to live in prosperity, have good interpersonal relations, and more freedom, equality, and tolerance. People would like to change their situation to have all of those aspirations, though without changing their attitudes, beliefs, and common stereotypes. A well-known Slovak author and pataphysicist, Marenčin (1997), who was conferred knighthood by the French Minister of Culture for the spread of mutual understanding between nations, described this as:

Our desires and dreams are flying at a rocket speed to the 21st century, while our minds are still bumping along a dirt road on a wagon of centuries-old tradition. Adhering to traditional views is regarded as a virtue, while their rejection as a vice and sin, as turning the coat and almost as a betrayal of national traditions. (Marenčin 1997: 34)

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