

FEAR – A REASON FOR NOT REPORTING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TO THE POLICE

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Abstract

Domestic violence is a social issue which is present in our society for centuries; it is often hidden between partners and the family itself that makes documenting its existence and prevalence difficult. Even though in recent decades there was an attempt to move the issue from the private to the public sphere, it still encounters difficulties. This is due to the fact that women, victims of violence, face various barriers to report domestic violence to the police. The main purpose of this study is revealing the most predisposed categories to domestic violence, with a special emphasis on women as domestic violence victims; the reasons influencing women to continue staying with abusive partners and not report domestic violence to the competent authorities and the society's trust in these authorities. The theoretical analysis and statistical methods are used in this paper, the latter is used to statistically present the results obtained by the online questionnaire used in the survey, enabling the presentation of results through tables and graphs.

By analyzing the obtained results in this study, we conclude that women are the most predisposed category to violence. The reasons impeding violence reporting are many, but we will mention the most important: not knowing where to seek assistance; thinking they will not be taken seriously or trusted by others; fear of divorce or relationship termination; fear of smearing their family name; fear of further violence and fear of losing the children. Lack of trust in competent state authorities to prevent, deter and protect domestic violence victims is another reason, whereas the findings show that respondents have little trust in these authorities.

Keywords: family, domestic violence, victims, women, report, policy

1. Introduction

In most cultures, gender inequalities exist within families dominated by men, or else known as patriarchal families. Such families are often burdened by different prejudice stemming from the social circle itself. The woman is often impeded to lead a normal life which leads to her victimization. These situations may lead to various conflicts within the family, resulting in violence that is mainly perpetrated by men against women, which indirectly affects other family members as well, especially children.

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993, is the first international act which in Article 1 defines violence against women as: "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life".

The purposes of this study are to: (a) to determine which is the most affected category by domestic violence; (b) to identify the factors that stop women from reporting violence to the competent state authorities and (c) to reveal the society's trust in the competent state authorities

related to prevention, deterrence and protection of domestic violence victims, as factors which also affect the (non) reporting of domestic violence cases to these authorities.

2. Domestic violence

Domestic violence is a social issue which is present in our society constantly. Considering the fact that it usually occurs “within the four walls of the house” and is often a hidden issue between partners and the family itself, it is really difficult to document it; we don’t have enough data and facts to analyze its frequency. Even though in recent decades there was an attempt to move this delicate issue from the private to the public sphere, it still encounters difficulties and this is due to the fact that women, as victims of violence, face various barriers in reporting domestic violence to the police, thus accepting that their human rights are being violated and sanctioned under the guise of cultural practices and norms. Although compared to the past, there is significant progress regarding domestic violence report.

The term “domestic violence” includes physical, sexual, economic and psychological violence that may occur between family members, such as violence against women, violence against children, between spouses/partners or ex-spouses, as well as violence against the elderly. The perpetrator is part of the victim’s home setting: husband, intimate partner, family member (Jovanović et al., 2020). It is rooted in the detrimental effects of traditional practices or customs, thus making women subject to violence, while men are given complete dominance over them (Augustine & Idowu, 2016).

The causes of domestic violence may be diverse, starting from patriarchal family relationships; drug and alcohol addiction; poverty, misbehavior; (Acus, Aciene & Puidokiene, 2017), unemployment; dissatisfaction by marriage; difficult childhood; (Medarić, 2011), men exposed to abuse and negligence during their childhood, watching movies and series with violent content (Kocacik & Dogan, 2006), marriage at young age; fragmented family type; the age of spouses and low level of education (Basar & Demirci, 2018).

The author Gracia (2004) reports that by focusing on the seriousness and spread of this issue, the reported cases (which represent a slight part of the cases) less attention is paid to the other issues, which he calls otherwise the domestic violence “iceberg”: the dark number of domestic violence cases, due to the fact that many violence cases are not reported and the victims are treated as invisible by the surrounding social environment.

If we go back in time, we will notice that no earlier than a decade ago, domestic violence in our country was considered a private matter and a taboo, but it lost the private matter character with the changes of the national legislation. The legal system of the RNM regulates domestic violence in accordance with international standards, on both sides: as civil legal protection under the Family Law, and criminal legal protection under the Criminal Code (ESE, 2010).

According to the Law on Prevention, Combating and Protection against Domestic Violence (2014), domestic violence means, “harassment, insult, endangerment of safety, bodily harm, sexual or other psychological, physical or economic violence by which feelings of insecurity, endangerment or fear are caused, including threats of such acts against a spouse, parents or children or other persons who live in a marital or extramarital union or shared household, as well as against a current or former spouse, extramarital partner or persons who have a common child or are in a close personal relationship, regardless if the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim or not”.

Domestic violence will be considered if the perpetrator of the violence and the victim are in a gender relationship, be that by blood, civil or by marriage or any other personal relationship before or at the time of violence acts. The perpetrator of violence through the exercised physical, sexual, psychological violence aims to put and keep the victim under full control

through exercising power, dominating, humiliating, isolating, threatening, intimidating, denying and blaming (Mamuti, 2019).

Various categories appear as violence victims ranging from children to the elderly and can belong to any gender, race, education, culture, social status, while this paper's focus are women as the most predisposed victims of domestic violence.

Women and children are the most victimized categories in the world by domestic violence, due to the fact that they are often powerless, (Almiş, Gümüştas & Kütük, 2020), weak; vulnerable and exploitable, (Augustine & Idowu, 2016), thus putting them in high risk precisely at the setting they should be most secure: within their families.

3. Women – the most predisposed category to domestic violence

Violence against women is an expression of the centuries-old unequal position between men and women, namely an expression of the unequal distribution of power and is present at all stages of the development of society.

The idea that marriage is an institution of honor, respect, love, understanding and trust between couples by showing love and care for each other is well-accepted. However, these principles are not always reflected as such, since contrary to our expectations, there are various abuses between couples such as gender-based violence, while the main victims are women (Augustine & Idowu, 2016). Compared to men, women experience abusive behavior quite more often, committed by a person they know, is those family members or their intimate partner. For this reason, precisely, most of these acts are treated as private sphere matters (Medariç, 2011).

Violence against women clearly violates women's rights to be free from violence. Until women are free from the threat of violence, they will not be able to exercise their rights (Burton et al, 2000). Affected women have been denied their needs, impeded to exercise their rights, rules and orders have been given by men, with an authority they have acquired from cultural norms and religious indoctrination allowing the man and husband to be the person which enjoy the absolute power of control and submission against the spouse (Augustine & Idowu, 2016).

Some historians believe that the history of violence against women is related to the time when women are seen as property and in a certain gender role submissive to men and other women (Harvey & Gow, 1994). In Albanian society, men have been dominant and considered authoritarian figures, while women, as the 'weaker sex', have been expected to obey men and accept the role of the submissive. The *Kanun* is just one of many factors that affected the inferior position of women in Albanian society, followed by other factors such as low level of economic and social development, high level of poverty, low level of education and lack of democratic culture (Gjipali & Ruci, 1994).

Various studies show that violence occurs in different forms, and is not always committed as a form of physical violence, but can also be psychological, verbal (Pourreza et al., 2004), sexual or economic (Almiş, Gümüştas & Kütük, 2020). It is important to emphasize that, within the family, women may be exposed to one or more forms of violence, be that physical, sexual, psychological or economical, but it happens that they are sometimes exposed to all forms of violence (Zorrilla et al., 2009).

3.1 Consequences of domestic violence against women

The consequences of violence are different in nature. Despite suffering physical harm, domestic violence also results in emotional harm to victims, their children, other family members, friends, and neighbors. Victims and their children experience the burden of psychological trauma of abuse, suffering anxiety, stress, insomnia, loss of confidence, social

isolation; fear (Carrington & Phillips, 2003); depression, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder (Almiş, Gümüştas & Kütük, 2020).

The consequences of violence may be different, and we encounter them combined in most cases, such as:

Health consequences: Women victims of violence, compared to women who have never experienced violence from intimate partners, are more likely to report pain, difficulties walking or daily activities, memory loss, dizziness, vision issues, gastrointestinal disorders, high blood cholesterol, heart diseases, heart attack, stroke, gynecological problems and other health consequences (Jovanovich et al., 2020).

Physical effects – bruises, broken bones, scratches and internal bleeding are some of the acute effects of a violent incident requiring medical attention and hospitalization. Pregnant victims experiencing violence are at greater risk of miscarriage, injury to or death of the fetus. (Jones, 1997).

Psychological effects - amid the victims continuing to live with the perpetrators, usually cases of high levels of stress, fear, loss of confidence, low self-esteem, guilt or shame, panic attack, anxiety, anger, self-blame or self-hatred, hopelessness or worthlessness and depression are reported. It has been reported that 60% of victims meet the diagnostic criteria for depression, either during or after the termination of the relationship and have an increased risk of suicidal tendencies (Barnett, 2001). The most common psychological effect related to violence is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. According to Vedanta, Vogel and Marshall (1995) post-traumatic stress disorder (experienced by victims) is characterized by flashbacks, anxiety, and avoidance of causes associated with the abuse.

Social and economic costs - due to abuse and isolation, female victims suffer isolation, inability to work, loss of wages, lack of participation in regular activities and limited ability to take care of themselves and their children (Kadam & Chaudhari, 2011).

Death – violence against women includes killings (revengeful actions resulting in death, committed by a male family member against a female family member since the victim has embarrassed or dishonored the family or community), suicides and maternal death from unsafe abortion (Kadam&Chaudhari, 2011).

3.2 The barriers women face in reporting domestic violence to the police

Victims of domestic violence make a number of decisions in themselves on how to manage violent relationships, including numerous factors that encourage or discourage them from seeking help for their safety. In case of perceiving that the abuse is very serious, dangerous and threatening even to the safety or well-being of the victim's own children, they are encouraged to report the violence to the police, however there are a number of factors that represent barriers to reporting (Voce & Boxall, 2018).

Although in recent decades, domestic violence against women has ever more become known as a public issue, even so the belief that domestic violence belongs to the private domain without considering it as a social issue still persists (Medarić, 2011). In Serbia, 78.2% of women exposed to violence have never sought help from the competent state authorities related to physical and sexual violence, this happens since due to fear from perpetrators, women also deny even the violence against them (Jovanović et al., 2020). They can endure abuse for a long time before seeking help, while others will suffer in silence throughout entire lives, without sharing the fact that they are being abused with anyone (UNODC, 2011).

The dark number of domestic violence cases, as a result of non-reporting by women to the competent authorities, shows that we cannot accurately assess how many women are victims.

This is exactly the purpose why we need to identify the reasons why abused women do not report or seek help.

There are numerous reasons why women are reluctant to report violence to the authorities, from personal to social reasons (unbalanced power relations for women and men in society, family intimacy) (Gracia, 2004). The author Medariç (2011) reports that the results of the undertaken research show that most respondents think that domestic violence is not discussed or reported and that far fewer cases of violence have been revealed compared to how many actually occur. One of the main reasons of non-reporting abuse to the police is fear from retaliation or fear of provoking further violence by the perpetrator (Felson et al., 2002). The victims' dissatisfaction by the justice system is another reason which discouraged the victims (300 victims which have followed the domestic violence services) due to the disbelief that the police and criminal justice system involvement would stop the abuse and would help and protect them (Birdsey & Snowball, 2013).

Another factor that has made the victim's decision to report violence more difficult is that they have felt very discomforting and ashamed; police or local authorities have not taken them seriously; failed to take into account the nature and dynamics of violence in an intimate relationship; believing myths by police officers in relation to violence which has implications on the way they take statements, case management and interaction with the victim (UNODC, 2011); have thought the incident was very small or insignificant; the police were not willing to do anything; they did not want the perpetrator to be charged; fear of losing their children; reporting to the police takes time and is very annoying and other reasons (Birdsey & Snowball, 2013).

Some Victims of domestic violence which have not reported violence face a number of barriers to escaping the abuser and accessing assistance, (UNODC, 2011), one of them is that the police does not understand all types of domestic violence; when incidents are not perceived as sufficiently serious; lack of encouragement from family and friends; lack of education on what domestic violence is and the available help services (Birdsey & Snowball, 2013). On the other hand, the emotional relationship with the abusive partner, the desire to keep their relationship or family together, living in an isolated area and isolated from others, they may not want the abuser to be removed from the home, go to jail, or have a criminal record (UNODC, 2011); embarrassment or fear others will not believe that partners have exercised violence against them; fear of damaging their reputation (Voce & Boxall, 2018), they did not want to embarrass the family; fear of divorce or relationship termination; fear of losing their children; they did not know where to seek assistance; they believed that the assistance would not help them (Haarr, 2019), are some other reasons for not seeking assistance.

The economic dependence is another probable predictor of why women suffer silently and do not report violence to the police (UNODC, 2011), since if the victim has limited financial resources, namely, if the victim shares a common bank account with her abuser, it is difficult for her to separate.

They may feel guilty for 'inciting' violence (Eckstein, 2011) - a tactic used by ordinary abusers is listing the reasons why the victim's behavior provoked them and that they could have prevented the partner's violent behavior. Nevertheless, in the survey conducted by Medariç (2011), more than half of the respondents (61.2%), of a total of 491 respondents, did not agree with the statement that the woman is sometimes responsible for the violence caused to her, while the rest agreed with the statement. Other research shows that 63.2% of respondents who did not report their abuse to the police were happy with their decision not to report violence against them, since the victim thought she had avoided further violence, many have preferred to handle the situation themselves by avoiding difficulties with the police by invading their

privacy, while also avoiding the stress associated with reporting the incident (Birdsey & Snowball, 2013).

Educating women on gender equality and recognizing their rights is the best way to reduce the number of abusive relationships before they become victims of violence (Dare, Guadagno & Muscanell, 2013).

4. Methodology

This chapter explains the methodology used to achieve the objectives of the study. Based on the literature review in the previous chapters, a questionnaire is designed, aiming to determine which the most affected category is by domestic violence; who is the most frequent perpetrators of violence by gender; to identify the factors which impede women to report violence to the competent state authorities and reveal the society's trust in the competent state authorities.

The online questionnaire technique was used to analyze the objectives of this research. The research sample is 301 respondents. The questionnaire design included closed questions while the answers given by the subjects were analyzed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The statistical methods used in this research served to obtain the findings presented through various graphs and tables.

4.1 Findings

The findings presented in this research show that (a) women are the most vulnerable category by domestic violence; (b) the reasons impeding women to report violence are: they don't know where to seek assistance; they fear they won't be taken seriously or trusted by others; fear of divorce or relationship termination; fear the fact that they may smear the family name; fear that they will be abused even more and fear of losing their children, and (c) the respondents have little trust in the competent state authorities for the prevention, deterrence and protection of victims of domestic violence.

Objective 1 - To examine which of the categories of victims of violence is most prevalent in the Republic of North Macedonia and in the region.

Table 1 data, regarding the most predisposed categories to violence, results that the average of women (M-2.95 and DS-0.819) is higher than the average of other categories. The results show that men have the lowest average (M-1.70 and DS-0.562).

Table 1. The most predisposed categories to violence					
Categories of persons presented as the most affected victims of domestic violence are:	N	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Standard deviation
Men	301	1	4	1.70	.562
People with disabilities	301	1	4	1.97	.850
The elderly	301	1	4	2.20	.747
Children	301	1	4	2.69	.816
Women	301	1	4	2.95	.819

Objective 2 - To identify reasons which obstruct domestic violence reporting to the police?

Table 2 results show that all following circumstances impede women to report violence to the competent authorities, but the *'Fear of losing her children'* has the highest score, with an average of 3.24 and a standard deviation of 0.708, while the *'The opinion that they will not be*

taken seriously or will not be trusted by others’ has the lowest score, with an average of 2.71 and standard deviation of 0.823.

Table 2. Fear as one of the reasons that impedes reporting violence by women					
Do you agree that the following factors prevent women from reporting violence to the competent state authorities?	N	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Standard deviation
They think they will not be taken seriously or trusted by others.	301	1	4	2.71	.823
They don’t know where to ask for assistance.	301	1	4	2.72	.780
Fear of divorce or relationship termination.	301	1	4	2.90	.748
Fear the fact that they may smear their family name.	301	1	4	3.04	.747
Fear of repeated violence.	301	1	4	3.06	.783
Fear of losing her children.	301	1	4	3.24	.708

Objective 3–To reveal the society’s trust in the competent state authorities the Republic of North Macedonia in preventing, deterring and protecting domestic violence victims.

In Table 3, regarding the question *‘Do you trust competent RNM authorities regarding prevention, deterrence and protection of domestic violence victims?’*, 244 respondents or 81.1% stated they have little or no trust in state authorities, while the remaining 57 respondents or 18.9% stated that they trust the competent authorities to a greater extent or completely.

Table 3. Society’s trust toward the RNM competent authorities					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Not at all	129	42.9	42.9	42.9
	Somewhat	115	38.2	38.2	81.1
	To a great extent	51	16.9	16.9	98.0
	Completely	6	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	301	100.0	100.0	

5. Conclusion

This study confirms that domestic violence is one of the most prevailing forms of violence exercised mostly against women and children in our country; this tendency is similar all around the world. By conducting this research, we can conclude that the most vulnerable categories to violence are women, when it comes to children the average is also high, followed by the elderly and people with disabilities, while men are the category with the lowest average. The high number of domestic violence cases, especially exercised against women, is as a result of the lack of courage of women to report violence in front of the competent authorities. This is the

reason why the purpose of this research was to reveal the reasons which impede making a decision to report domestic violence to the police, and according to the results, the most common reasons are: fear of losing the children, fear of repeated violence, fear of smearing their family name, fear of divorce or relationship termination, not knowing where to seek assistance and the lowest average was that they think they will not be taken seriously or trusted by others. Trust in competent authorities by the society is very important. From the research findings, the largest percentage of the society does not trust these authorities and an upsetting percentage considering the fact that with this level of distrust in the competent authorities, the number of violence reporting will automatically decrease. This will undoubtedly affect the increase of violence and their treatment as private matters.

The study offers numerous recommendations such as: taking preventive measures to prevent domestic violence, conducting various awareness campaigns on discrimination against women, zero tolerance for violence against women, information on all forms of violence against women, education on and promotion of gender equality and women's rights; raising awareness of social responsibility for society members to report domestic violence; encourage women to eliminate fear and break silence by reporting cases of domestic violence, which will help punishing domestic violence perpetrators, which will consequently reduce the dark number of victims.

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