

SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE PROBLEM OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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Abstract. *The socio-psychological consequences of domestic violence can manifest in the destruction of interpersonal relationships, isolation from society, lack of social support, loss of trust in others, and the ability to develop deep interpersonal relationships. Women who have suffered from domestic violence often feel marginalized; shame and fear of their family's and society's reaction prevent them from seeking the support they need to end abusive relationships. Gender inequality, expressed through sociocultural notions of honor and shame, can influence the decision to remain in an abusive relationship. All of this may hinder the ability to make choices and build healthy relationships in the future. For survivors of domestic violence, the most important motivations for entering new relationships are spiritual motives related to the search for closeness: mutual love, understanding, esteem, the desire to show care, common interests, and friendship. The vast majority of women who have experienced domestic violence tend to develop codependency in close relationships. Survivors emphasize the importance of social support in escaping abusive relationships. Support from family and friends, as well as professional psychological assistance, is highly valuable. A positive factor in recovery includes expanding social contacts and relations, mastering new social roles, and participating in support groups.*

Keywords: *domestic violence, women, survivor, marital choice, motives for marital choice, codependency, resilience.*

Domestic violence is one of the most widespread violations of human rights in today's world. Although both men and women can suffer from domestic violence, this issue predominantly affects women. The consequences of experiencing domestic violence are profoundly destructive to the victims' mental health (leading to depression, anxiety, and PTSD) and their social support and communication circles. The socio-psychological consequences of domestic violence can manifest in the destruction of interpersonal relationships, isolation from society, loss of trust in others, and the ability to develop deep interpersonal relationships. This not only negatively affects emotional stability but also hinders the ability to choose and build healthy relationships in the future.

Empirical research on the consequences of experiencing domestic violence confirms the existence of socio-psychological problems. A semi-structured interview with women who experienced violence from their partners (n=32) revealed that these women faced both psychological problems (fear, anxiety, and suicide attempts) and socio-psychological issues (termination of relationships with others, lack of social support, and an informal prohibition on discussing their experience of domestic violence) [1]. Women who have experienced domestic violence often feel marginalized; stigma, shame, and fear of society's reaction prevent them from seeking necessary support. The influence of customary social norms and fear of social reactions may condition a woman's decision to continue abusive relationships. Notably, that victims

emphasize the importance of social support in leaving abusive relationships [2, 3].

In this context, an interesting study examined the experiences of South Asian women (n=15) and the difficulties they faced when ending abusive relationships formed outside of official or arranged marriages. Regardless of whether their parents supported the relationship, all the women in this category endured abusive relationships to try to prove to their families the correctness of their independent choice of partner. All the women stayed in abusive relationships longer than they wanted because leaving meant admitting to their families and society that they had made a wrong choice, and that society had been "right" all along. There was also a fear of being judged by the community (fear of further ostracism, shame, and stigma within the family and community). Women feared disgrace both within and outside the family [4]. Indeed, breaking out of abusive relationships (resisting domestic violence from an intimate partner) in many cases led to further isolation and abuse from parents, siblings, extended family, and the intimate partner. Gender inequality, which is expressed through cultural ideas of honor and shame, can have a major impact on the decision to stay in a abusive relationship. Additionally, it was found that abusers used the woman's vulnerability and separation from her closest relatives to strengthen their control over her. Isolation from family contributes to making a woman more vulnerable to partner abuse. Thus, gender norms and social expectations can be an obstacle to leaving abusive relationships [5].

A particular field of research concerns the process of recovery after violence. Women with experiences of domestic violence seek to recover in different ways after the end of abusive relationships. A positive path of recovery includes work or education. However, empirical research (n=8) confirms the importance of accepting and valuing one's maternal role. Survivors strive to do their best for their children; they recognize the dangerous impact of domestic violence and seek help and support to protect themselves and their children. Recovery resources also include meetings with others who had similar experiences and the opportunity to help others in similar situations. Consequently, survivors can use resources that enhance their resilience. They prioritize their role as mothers and try to reconstruct their identity by adopting new roles [6].

Polish researchers conducted a 2018 study on the resilience of women who experienced domestic violence (n=52). The subjects demonstrated a relatively low level of resilience. The resilience of women who experienced domestic violence was lower than that of individuals who had not experienced such violence. The lowest scores on the "Ego Resiliency Scale (ER89)" (ERS) by Block and Kremen were recorded among women who had experienced violence from their father, while the highest scores were among women who had experienced violence from an intimate partner. Numerous comparisons showed that violence from the father most significantly weakened or damaged women's resilience. Violence from the mother did not have as strong an impact on the psychological resources of the women studied.

The highest level of resilience was found in women who had experienced intimate partner violence. That is, intimate partner violence may weaken resilience to a lesser extent than violence from a father or an official husband. The reason for this may be the religiosity of the respondents, their belief in the sacrament of marriage, and significant difficulties in obtaining permission for divorce from the Church. These factors may create a sense of inevitability in relationships, a lack of escape regardless of their will, which can lead to a feeling of

helplessness—highly unfavorable for maintaining resilience. Researchers also make a well-founded conclusion about the necessity of providing psychosocial support to affected women [7].

British researchers conducted a qualitative study (n=37) consisting of six focus groups and four in-depth interviews conducted in 2018. The researchers described the phenomenon of the recovery process after violence, defining it as a transition from survival to thriving—“thrivership”—after domestic violence. This process represents a fluid journey of self-discovery, encompassing three “stages”: victim, survivor, and thriver. Recovery from domestic violence is characterized by a positive outlook, a forward-looking perspective, improved health and well-being, self-restoration, and the creation of a new social circle of relationships and communication. The researchers also described the “Thrivership Model”, which consists of three key components underpinned by education and awareness-building at different levels: Provision of Safety, Sharing the Story and Social Response [8].

An empirical study aimed at examining the consequences of women's experiences of domestic violence was conducted on a Ukrainian sample (n=80). The results confirmed that there are no statistically significant differences in levels of depression, anxiety, and PTSD between two groups of affected women: those who had experienced domestic violence with physical aggression and those who had suffered domestic violence without physical manifestations (only psychological abuse). However, it was found that the presence of physical violence has a moderate correlation with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) [9].

In order to compare the consequences, the reflections of victims of psychological violence and victims of physical violence in relationships were studied. Results from semi-structured interviews indicated that most women who had experienced domestic violence made between three and four attempts to leave the abusive relationship before finally ending it. The six reasons that women most often mentioned as decisive in their choice to stay in a situation of domestic violence and continue the relationship with the perpetrator were: psycho-emotional dependence (often linked to fear of loneliness); financial dependence; low self-esteem, insecurity, and indecision; feelings of guilt and obligation, pity for the abuser; expectations of changes in the partner's behavior, and the lack of awareness of domestic violence.

For the group of women who had experienced psychological domestic violence, psycho-emotional dependence was identified as the most significant reason for staying in the relationship. Other cited reasons included low self-esteem, insecurity, indecision, guilt, obligation, and pity for the perpetrator. For the group of women who had experienced physical violence, financial dependence was the most crucial factor in maintaining the relationship with the perpetrator. A significant number of women who had suffered physical violence reported having no contact with the perpetrator, whereas among those who had experienced psychological domestic violence, this percentage was lower.

The proportion of respondents who maintain limited contact with the perpetrator after separation for personally significant matters was higher among those affected by non-physical violence. The majority of respondents categorically rejected the possibility of rekindling a relationship with the perpetrator. All respondents reported that they received the most support from family and friends, and one-third of them stated that they sought and received psychological help. Becoming informed about the nature of domestic violence was found to be an important resource for recovery, highlighting the significance of awareness and education in the healing process of survivors [10].

Changes in a woman's psycho-emotional state caused by the experience of domestic violence directly impact the motives for entering into a subsequent marriage. These motives can generally be divided into four main categories: biological, economic, social, and spiritual. The biological motive is linked to the natural desire for reproduction and the instinct for species preservation. The economic motive involves the pursuit of financial stability and material support. The social motive relates to the desire to meet societal expectations and maintain social status, while the spiritual motive is associated with emotional closeness and personal growth through a partnership [11].

The experience of domestic violence reshapes the priorities of these motives. Women who have survived violence often seek to restore their social status. In such cases, marriage is not primarily a means of achieving emotional closeness or partnership support but rather a way to regain social recognition and external validation, helping to restore a lost sense of self-worth.

Our study, conducted together with A. Stiahailo [12], found that a significant proportion of women affected by domestic violence ($n=32$) also had experiences of domestic violence before the age of 18. 50% of the participants had a significant history of domestic violence before reaching adulthood, as determined using the International Questionnaire for Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE). A substantial proportion (53%) of the participants had lived with a dangerous or neglectful adult. 47% of the participants had grown up in a dysfunctional family. 22% reported experiencing unwanted touching, and 11% had been victims of rape before the age of 18.

As adults, 60% of the same study participants reported experiencing psychological violence, 35% experienced physical violence, 13% experienced sexual violence, and 7% experienced economic violence. These results indicate a high prevalence of domestic violence in various forms and highlight the necessity of providing comprehensive support to survivors, including psychological and legal assistance, as well as developing effective mechanisms for protection against violence in partnership.

The study on motivation for marriage revealed the following findings. Biological motives generally do not play a leading role in the motivation of domestic violence survivors to enter marriage. The desire to legalize sexual relations or quickly have children is not a significant factor for most respondents when deciding to get married. Sexual compatibility is an important motive for 50% of respondents. The external attractiveness of a partner is significant for 31% of respondents.

Material and socio-economic motives play varying roles in respondents' decisions to marry. The most important factors among them are the partner's promising or prestigious job (44%) and financial stability (42%). Meanwhile, aspects such as car ownership (31%), housing availability (36%), promises of support from relatives (6%), business relationships (8%), or the partner's social status hold less importance or are insignificant for the majority of respondents.

Socio-cultural motives, except for the desire for security and stability in the future (42%), have low significance for most respondents.

Spiritual motives, such as mutual love (86%), mutual understanding (85%), esteem (92%), the desire to show care (78%), moral qualities (92%), shared interests (92%), and friendship (86%), are key factors for respondents. The desire to have children, while still important, holds less significance compared to other motives (41.6%).

A high level of codependency in relationships was found in 22% of participants, indicating significant difficulties in building autonomous and healthy relationships. This may

include sacrificing one's own needs for others, low self-esteem, dependence on external validation, and fear of losing a relationship, which drives self-sacrifice or concessions that are detrimental to well-being. Such a level of codependency is often the result of early traumatic experiences or deep internal conflicts related to emotional or physical instability in childhood, lack of support, or close relationships. Overall, 89% of respondents exhibit a tendency toward codependency in interpersonal relationships.

Fifty-eight percent of the study participants have a medium or high level of resilience, indicating a sufficient potential for overcoming stress and adapting to change. However, nearly half (42%) demonstrate resilience levels below average, which requires attention and the development of measures to enhance their psychological stability.

Correlation analysis did not reveal a statistically significant relationship between marriage motives and experiences of domestic violence. However, a statistically significant correlation was found between experiencing domestic violence and a tendency toward codependency in relationships ($r = 0.37$, $p \leq 0.05$). This suggests that individuals in abusive relationships are more likely to be codependent. No correlation was found between experiencing domestic violence and personality resilience, as the correlation coefficient was 0.22032 and statistically insignificant.

Overall, our study did not find a link between the experience of domestic violence and a person's motivation for marriage. However, a significant correlation was established between experiencing domestic violence and a tendency toward codependency in relationships ($r = 0.37$, $p \leq 0.05$). Thus, the greater the experience of domestic violence (especially before the age of eighteen), the higher the likelihood of a survivor entering codependent relationships.

In conclusion, it is important to note that the socio-psychological consequences of domestic violence can manifest in various forms and lead to a loss of trust in others and the ability to build close interpersonal relationships. For survivors of domestic violence, the most important motives for entering new relationships are spiritual motives related to seeking closeness: mutual love, understanding, esteem, the desire to show care, common interests, and friendship. The vast majority of survivors have a tendency toward codependency in interpersonal relationships, indicating significant challenges in building autonomous and healthy relationships. A significant link was found between the experience of domestic violence and the tendency toward codependency in relationships. The greater the experience of domestic violence (particularly before the age of eighteen), the higher the likelihood that the survivor will enter codependent relationships in adulthood.

Survivors emphasize the importance of social support in leaving abusive relationships. Support from family and friends, as well as professional psychological assistance, is valuable. A positive factor in recovery includes expanding social contacts and relations, adopting new social roles, and participating in support groups.

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