

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: A DETERMINING FACTOR IN THE SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN

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Abstract: *Domestic violence is a major problem of contemporary society. The number of abused women is constantly increasing, and this is due to several factors: the lack of involvement of the authorities in order to adopt laws, to protect the victims of domestic violence, the lack of counseling programs for abused women in order to overcome experiences. traumatizing and social reintegration, excessive jealousy, alcohol, the inferiority position of the woman, etc. Violence in the family environment has repercussions, both on the woman and on the children, because in the absence of behavioral models worthy to be followed, they can see the violence as a normality, which they then apply in their own families. The effects of domestic violence are devastating for children who have been victims of witnessing violent scenes within the family. Child abuse has long-term effects, adolescence, and later adult life is marked by this phenomenon, behavioral patterns and family climate can be real milestones in setting up their own families. This study involves extensive bibliographic documentation and extensive analysis of the effects of domestic violence on children. The quantitative research consisted in applying an questionnaire to 20 people from Reșița Municipality, Caraș-Severin county, who were witnesses or victims of domestic violence during their childhood.*

Key words: *domestic violence; children; socio-emotional development; emotional abuse.*

Introduction

The social context in which children grow and develop is represented by the neighbourhood and the community. Growing up in an environment with a high degree of violence and delinquency is a major risk factor for children's development. Exposing children to violence generates behavioural problems, sensitivity, and anxiety. When children's exposure to violent episodes is indirect, they experience an intense, negative emotional state of fear caused by the traumatic violence and a secondary trauma, through the relationship they have with the friend or family member who is the victim. Thus, this indirect experience is more intensely traumatic, with far more complex consequences than direct victimization (Ceballo et al., 2001).

1. Children, vulnerable witnesses to domestic violence

Intra-family violence is one of the major problems nowadays, as "often enough the very parents who have the responsibility to protect their children resort to violence" (Georgevici., 2014: 35). Violent manifestations have different values and consequences for the aggressor and the victim, although they functionally modify and influence them both. The effects are not only here and now, but can have a transgenerational extension. Through the concept of 'phenomenon in the child's room', Fraiberg reveals the mechanism by which the suffering of victimised parents passes to the being of their child. A child who suffers, depending on the intensity of the suffering, the age at which it was provoked, its duration, but especially the chance or misfortune in terms of support, in the absence of a person to listen to and understand their suffering, to love and to protect them, will find ways of development more or less beneficial for them and for society, for the social groups they belong to (Killen, 2003; Shapiro, 2009).

"Child abuse and neglect have long-term, clearly proven effects on adult mental illness. There is growing evidence that child abuse and neglect also have significant consequences on the physiological disorders of the adult, such as: ischemic coronary disease, liver disease and lung cancer, which are likely due to the patient's health risk behaviours" (Kessler et al., 2008: 625).

As regards the emotional experiences there is a continuum from suffering to happiness. Intense emotions are usually generated by the relationships that the human being has with others. In the case of children, the most important people with whom they have a vital and decisive relationship are the parents. Current research demonstrates 'the biological effects of failed relationships, insecure attachment and multiple traumatic breaks' (Rubin, Nonan, 2010). If suffering impedes development, it deviates from genotyping into phenotype; on the other hand, the state of happiness and mental comfort ensures the development of the person's abilities, creates the possibility of a quality life, and at the same time the possibility of being valuable to others (Muntean, 2011: 109).

2. Children - victims of domestic violence

Different forms of violence or abuse are exercised throughout a life cycle, having devastating effects on the lives of victims. Lori L. Heise, after examining the long-term consequences of violence acts, underlines the idea that “an approach based on the life cycle of the woman victim shows that violence experienced at a certain stage of life can have long-term repercussions, which predispose the victim to increased risks in terms of physical or mental health, or in the acquisition of deviant behaviour”. Over time, the notion of child abuse has been defined from several perspectives:

- *Psychological abuse*: “it implies a continuous terrorization and blackmailing of the child with various things, nicknaming, and child debasement. Any form of abuse, neglect or failed attachment is reflected in the psycho-cognitive and social aspects of the child’s life” (www.revistacalitățiivieții.ro).
- *Sexual abuse*: “it is materialised by subjecting children to practices of oral, genital intercourse, sexual molestation with direct sexual contact, their seduction or corruption, involving children in sexual practices not compliant with their age, obligating, forcing them to watch unwanted erotic materials, requesting the victims to wear various clothes that stimulate the sexual "appetite" of the aggressor, obligating the same victims to satisfy erotic fantasies, forcing children to attend or take part in sexual activities per se, their exploitation for pornography or prostitution purposes (Rădulescu. and Pătrioară., 2003: 21).
- *Physical abuse*: “it is unfortunately the most common form of abuse, it is the deliberate action or inaction by a parent or the person caring for the child (lack of interest, carelessness), it leads to physical injury. Kept in inhuman conditions, in the cold, left unattended, stuck for hours in the same spot, threatened, beaten, burned with cigarettes, children may be burnt, hit, get sick. All this is topped by the fear of parenting, excessive submission, diminished self-esteem, anxiety, bipolarity. All these factors render victims extremely vulnerable in the period of adolescence and later in adulthood to the usual challenges of life.” (www.revistadesociologie.ro)

3. Risk factors associated with children from violent environments

Social factors. From a sociological perspective, the organisation of the family life predisposes towards a rate of violence, determined by the differences of age, gender, interests, which trigger tensions in the family environment. The sociological approach is the one that considers the causes of domestic violence as residing in the process of distinct socialisation of men and women, of family type differences (customs, different traditions), the stereotypes conveyed, the "social scenarios" contributing to the description of the problem. (Irimescu, 2006: 106).

Abuse can be considered the result of parent-child interaction within a culture that provides poor alternative models for conflict resolution or which does not provide for child abuse restrictions. The authors Erchak and Rosenfeld, in 1994 analysed how the rate of abuse varies in different countries according to different characteristics, such as norms related to violence and patterns of violence in society. The two authors claim that where domestic violence is not sanctioned; the deviations from the norms of the society, deviations appear, generated by rationalization and neutralization techniques. Children who grow up in environments where reproaches and anger are transferred into aggressive behaviour will be at risk of becoming aggressive when they become adults. Analysing the aggressive behaviour of the parents, the plots, the insults are considered as causes of the abuse on the life partner and on the child. Abuse is considered as acquired behaviour and determined by the action of certain factors, such as: observed and experienced reward, consequences of behaviour, observer's characteristics and individual behaviour modelling, associated patterns (the exposure to aggressive behaviours depends on the individuals with whom a person comes into contact). (Irimescu, 2006: 109)

Emotional factors. Emotional abuse is the result of children's repeated exposure to situations with strong emotional impact. The abuse comes from an adult who is in a relationship of trust, responsibility or power over the child, preceding and accompanying the other forms of abuse or violence, but can also manifest itself in isolation: threats, insults, verbal and nonverbal humiliations, unfair accusations, denigrations, ridicule, hostile or rejecting attitudes towards the child (<https://ibn.idsi>).

Children who are emotionally abused feel they are not wanted, loved and accepted, they are living in denial, aggression and terror. They face serious emotional problems and survive by internalising the image offered by the abusive parent. The category of emotional abuse includes various modalities, which are easy to identify in children: inhibition, adaptation and communication difficulties, inability to play or express themselves through play, isolation, aggressive manifestations. All these are reached by subjecting children to humiliation, refusing their affective gestures, obvious preference for the other siblings, refusing to congratulate and reward the children for their results, forbidding their attending recreational activities with other children, cultivating a feeling of distrust toward the persons outside the family, forcing children to participate in activities that displease them and which they fear, threats and destructive actions towards their personal objects. (<http://www.revistadesociologie.ro>)

4. Research methodology

The quantitative research consisted in applying an questionnaire to 20 people from Reșița Municipality, Caraș-Severin county, who were witnesses or victims of domestic violence during their childhood.

Research purpose: Identifying the effects of domestic violence on children.

The objectives aimed by the study: analysing the effects of domestic violence on children; the extent to which domestic violence affects the socio-emotional development of children; the perception of the victims of domestic violence regarding the repercussions of this phenomenon on the socio-emotional development of the person.

5. Interpretation of research results

Questions of the quantitative research:	Answers of the questioned persons
Q1. How important is family to a person's socio-emotional development?	12 of the 20 said that the family plays an essential role in the socio-emotional development of a person; the other 8 people considered that family does not influence individual development.
Q2. In your opinion, what are the main causes of domestic violence?	14 respondents stated that violence is caused by lack of education, alcohol and other substances abuse, and 6 of them underlined that violence is determined by the behavioural patterns in the family of origin.
Q3. In your opinion, what are the main effects of domestic violence on children?	8 subjects highlighted that violence is the result of violence; children abused in childhood will become aggressors at maturity. 12 subjects concluded that abused children become introverted, isolated, and aggressive.
Q4. How important are the behavioural models for the harmonious development of a child?	The 20 questioned stated that behavioural models play a decisive role in the development of a child.
Q5. To what extent has the violence in your family affected your subsequent socio-emotional development?	18 respondents considered that violence in their family environment has had repercussions on socio-emotional development, and two respondents claimed that violence in the family environment had no long-term effects.
Q6. How did you perceive the aggressive father?	20 people said that the father was perceived as the man who strikes for no reason, screams, breaks things.
Q7. Do you think that the violent scenes you witnessed in your childhood have affected your social relationships?	13 people concluded their social relationships were affected by domestic violence, because they had difficulty expressing and integrating into social groups, 7 people stated that the social relationships they developed were not affected by the emotional baggage

	that resulted from the violent episodes in the family environment.
Q8. Are children from an abusive environment more prone to depressive episodes, anxiety or suicide?	16 persons pointed out that children from abusive backgrounds are isolated, fail to express their feelings and may even have suicide attempts, out of their desire to escape violence from their own family, 4 people saying that abused children are not prone to depression or anxiety.
Q9. How can children from abusive backgrounds be helped to overcome crisis situations?	12 people said that affectivity and emotional support are particularly important for children to overcome crisis situations, and 8 people declared that children who are victims of domestic violence need the intervention of specialists (psychologist, social worker).
Q10. Did you feel defenceless in the family environment?	9 people said they felt vulnerable because they could not defend themselves, and 11 people said they did not feel defenceless in the family environment.

Conclusions

Domestic violence is a relatively new field of investigation, this form of violence having been considered a taboo subject for a long time, as family is the intimate setting in which each member should be free to express his or her personality. The emotional development of children from abusive backgrounds suffers, because in the families of origin the children are humiliated, mistreated, mocked, and this generates a low self-esteem, difficulties of adaptation, anxiety, depressive episodes, isolation, even suicide attempts. The lack of affection, the absence of behavioural models worth following causes the children to see violence as a normality, as a natural thing which they then apply at school, in the group of friends, in the communities to which they belong. Emotional abuse of children causes existential changes, all the more severe as they occur at very young ages and are maintained for a long time. In the case of young people who were victims of domestic violence in childhood, they can apply abusive behaviour in their own families, dominated by restrictions, insults, punishments, unconsciously repeating violent episodes from their own childhood. In order to avoid the hindering of the emotional development of children who are witnesses or victims of domestic violence, emotional and moral support is needed to overcome crisis situations, community intervention by reporting the situations of abuse they identify in their communities, as well as the help of a team of specialists, meant to provide children with support in discovering and strengthening the internal resources assisting them to integrate and evolve from a social, spiritual and educational viewpoint.

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