

FAMILY AND VIOLENCE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE CONSTRUCTIVIST SOCIOLOGY

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Abstract

The phenomenon of violence in the couple was kept long in silence. Today, it is widely present in multimedia, in the literature of specialty where we find articles on topics such as: the problems of the couple, factors predictability of conflicts, predisposing factors of closer partners, the vicious circle of violence, how to prevent and combat domestic violence, appropriate specific interventions. The World Conference in Beijing (1995) asked for more scientific research on domestic violence. The National Survey on Violence against Women (France) is one of the research on which we stop (we present the methodology and some results). Then we present a definition of domestic violence from the perspective of the constructivist sociology and distinguish violent facts, signs, symptoms, types, stages of violence and its effects. Because domestic violence is not a new phenomenon, there are many explanatory models especially causalists (which locates the causes of violence in the person who behaves violently or outside). These theoretical models reflect the complexity of the phenomenon. In a constructivist perspective, we can not evaluate as true or false, but in terms of utility (therapeutic) basic criteria. In the last part of the article we stop on what the professionals of domestic violence with those involved.

Keywords: married couple, domestic violence, explanatory models of violence, constructivist sociology, social services.

Résumé

Le phénomène de la violence dans le couple a été maintenu longtemps sous silence. Aujourd'hui, il est largement présent dans multimedia, dans la littérature de spécialité où nous trouvons des articles sur des sujets tels que: les problèmes du couple, les facteurs de prévisibilité des conflits, facteurs favorisant le rapprochement des partenaires, le cercle vicieux de la violence, comment prévenir et combattre la violence domestique, des interventions spécifiques appropriées. La Conférence mondiale de Beijing (1995) a demandé plus de recherches scientifiques sur la violence domestique. L'Enquête nationale sur les violences envers les femmes (France) est l'une des recherches sur laquelle nous nous arrêtons (nous présentons la méthodologie et quelques résultats). Ensuite, nous présentons une définition de la violence domestique dans la perspective de la sociologie constructiviste et distinguons les faits violents, les signes, les symptômes, les types, les stades de la violence et les effets. Parce que la violence domestique n'est pas un phénomène nouveau, on retrouve de nombreux modèles explicatifs surtout causalistes (qui localise les causes de la violence dans la personne qui se comporte violemment ou à l'extérieur). Ces modèles théoriques reflètent la complexité du phénomène, mais dans une perspective constructiviste, nous ne pouvons pas les évaluer comme vrais ou faux, mais en termes d'utilité

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(thérapeutique) en base de critères de sélection. Dans la dernière partie de l'article nous nous arrêtons sur ce que font les professionnels de la violence domestique avec ceux impliqués.

Mots-clés: couple conjugal, violence domestique, modèles explicatifs de la violence, sociologies constructivistes, services sociaux.

Rezumat

Violența în cadrul familiei, indiferent de categoria socioprofesională de apartenență, a fost un fenomen ținut sub tăcere. În zilele noastre este mediatizat, recunoscut. În literatura de specialitate sunt în atenție teme precum: problemele cuplului, factori de predictibilitate a conflictelor, a separării, factori favorizanți ai apropierii partenerilor, ai reconstrucției relației lor conjugale, cum poate fi rupt cercul vicios al violenței în familie, care sunt cele mai nimerite intervenții specifice, terapeutice, cum poate fi prevenită violența din familia cu copii. Conferința mondială de la Beijing (1995) cerea mai multe statistici, mai multe cercetări asupra violenței conjugale. Plină de învățăminte în acest sens este *L'enquête nationale sur les violences envers les femmes* (Franța) realizată în 2000, asupra căreia ne oprim pentru a-i prezenta metodologia și câteva concluzii. Optăm apoi pentru o analiză din perspectiva sociologiilor constructiviste și distingem manifestări, semne, simptome. Distingem tipuri ale violenței în familie, ciclul acesteia, cu faze și efecte. Deoarece fenomenul nu este nou, de-a lungul timpului au fost propuse mai multe modele explicative, de obicei cauzaliste, pozitiviste (de la cele care localizează cauze în persoana care se comportă violent, la cele care le localizează în exteriorul ei). Aceste modele pline de învățăminte reflectă complexitatea fenomenului, dar, din perspectivă constructivistă, considerăm mai curând utilă identificarea a ceea ce împiedică rezolvarea problemelor, decât proveniența lor. Explicațiile date fenomenului nu le evaluăm ca adevărate sau false, ci în termeni de utilitate terapeutică (identificăm și criteriile de selecție a lor în funcție de context, de caz). În ultima parte ne oprim asupra a ceea ce se face și ceea ce se poate face pentru cei implicați de acest fenomen (în special asupra unor programe ce privesc pe autorii violenței, având în vedere că asupra sprijinirii femeilor și copiilor victime sunt mai multe informații).

Cuvinte cheie: violență conjugală, cuplu conjugal, modele explicative ale violenței, constructivism, servicii sociale.

1. Introduction

In Europe, *victims of violence* are mostly the women, regardless of social class they belong to¹. The domestic violence was kept silent for a very long time. Today it is present in media and recognized. Women, multimedia, social workers, doctors, different categories therapists and audiences seem more sensitive than before to such a *social problem*. In general, the domestic violence is perceived as a “reflection of the desire” of a partner to dominate the other, and starts to insult, with “harsh words” often reaching to curses and kicks. The family may also be the

¹ *Un fléau qui n'épargne aucun pays, aucun milieu, aucune classe sociale*. Available online at: http://www.eurowrc.org/06.contributions/2.contrib_fr/ (studied on the 10th of December 2015).

place of violence of one of the members, kept secret because of shame and/or guilt. The *perpetrator* seeks to justify the act, to associate it with some kind of internal “predisposition” or external favoring factors (stress, alcohol, unemployment), seeks to minimize it, to blame the *victim*².

An average of the research results identified by a researcher (Séverac 2001), however, show that six of nine women idealize the couple, imagining, at the age of 19-20, they will have a loving husband, beautiful and obedient children and that they will remain happy “at their home “ for the rest of their life ... Things are not any different in our country either³.

“I believe that a family composed of a man and a woman who love each other, are open, tell each other everything, share good and bad (...); the woman is not only good in the kitchen, to take care of children and always be available to her man; she has rights and responsibilities, as well as her partner “ (M., 34 years old, Is).

Many women find then that their aspirations are not similar to those of their consort.

“I wanted, like everyone else, a great love, a man with whom to share everything, to be happy and lucky (...) I have not found the person I wanted” (A., 41 years old, housewife, Nt).

The world we live in imposes models on us, affects our identity and our behaviors. “If the community organization is patriarchal, it relies on the dominant / dominated report where each of them have specific tasks, young people being prepared for the roles of man and woman, both in their family and in school or community.” (Manseur, 2004)

As a result, the domestic violence can be seen as a translation at family level, individually, of power ratio between sexes at societal level (which they say it is in man’s advantage...). “Marriage is for many women a nest that seems to protect the happiness in two, but which often hides the condition of victim (...) It often means accepting the culture of obedience to the husband, a tributary position to the postulation of this status.” (CNAF 2010)

If communication problems appear in a couple, walls of silence rise gradually between the two. In our society no one dares to say, based on the research of course, if family structures, the current social norms, if the laws and the rules established to describe-make intelligible-explain the family functioning and have an impact on Romanian migrants, are changed by them through their ways of

² The are women, victims of violence, who do not leave their couple, and to understand their behavior we reach “the delicate matter of love” that puts the two in the impossibility to cohabit together and at the same time not to be able to live without each other.

³ Interviews taken between 2010-2015 by students at the master Family and family resource management (Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences, “Al. I. Cuza” University of Iasi) in the North-East of Romania.

thinking, feeling, acting, thanks to their contacts, resources, status and role rebuilding in the communities and society of origin, in the host communities and societies. No one dares to assume the responsibility to say – based on research, of course – that such changes might spread – as if through a domino effect – in the Romanian society as a whole.

2. Topics of interest and studies on domestic violence

Is violence in married couple of interest? Who and what threatens its functioning? What are the triggers of violence in married couple? How can we break “the vicious circle of violence”? Who can help the couple to face the trials and come outwell from them?

If we follow the literature in the field, we can identify issues such as: problems of the couple, predictability factors of misunderstandings or of the couple separation, causes of divorce (Schwebel, Houel , Lhomond, Maillochonnet al 2002),but also factors favoring the closeness between husband and wife, factors favoring their partnership or the rebuilding of the damaged conjugal relations, how can the entering into the “infernal spiral” of domestic violence be avoided, which are the appropriate interventions in the case of the members involved in the domestic violence.

Thus, some authors have identified “critical periods” in couples lives (for example, the first seven years of marriage, or after about 16 years) (Jaspard, 2005). Early divorces are related to the frequency and intensity of conflicts and late divorces seem to be linked with the gradual breaking of the affective ties of the couple. In the works of some authors we find types of “violent men” (according to their socio-demographic origin and the characteristics of their personality, etc.), variables and characteristics that differentiate harmonious couples, couples in conflict but nonviolent, couples marked by violence⁴.

World Conference on the situation of women (Beijing, 1995) asked for more research to be done, to draw up several databases on violence (against women). One of these researches in France was *L'Enquête nationale sur les violences contre les femmes*⁵.

⁴ It is considered that two categories of persons are potentially violent: those that are in constant physiological excitement and those that do not show any such signs ...

⁵ The survey was commissioned by Service des Droits des femmes et le Secrétariat d'État aux Droits des femmes, coordinated by Institut de démographie de l'Université Paris I, and conducted by a multidisciplinary team composed of researchers from CNRS, INED, INSERM and from several universities. The survey was conducted by telephone in March-July 2000 on a sample of 6970 women aged between 20 and 59, living in cities, who live or lived in a couple (52%), carry or carried a professional activity the last 12 months. The authors found that the sample was representative for studying the correlations between the violence in the marital sphere and at the “employment” place.

The questionnaire constructed with the purpose of collecting available information, the questions concerning the violent acts or behaviors would come after those related to family, its economic, socio-cultural, residential situation, after the biographical information or those regarding the health of the spouses⁶.

A first conclusion was that the group of women most affected by the violence was composed of women in special shelters, emergency centers, the “homeless” (about 14 000-15 000 in metropolitan France). Another conclusion was that physical and sexual assaults seriously affect the victim, and the insults, denigration, disdain, control of the other, and the repeated psychological pressures seem to have entered among the harmless everyday facts ...

Table 1. Women who said they had been subjected to violence in the past 12 months (%)

Type of violence \ Age	20-24 years old	25-34 years old	35-44 years old	45-59 years old	Both
<i>In the public space</i>	n=717	n=1 934	n=2 122	n=2 197	n=6 970
<i>Insults and verbal threats</i>	24,9	15,2	11,7	8,6	13,2
Physical aggression	2,8	1,6	1,2	1,7	1,7
Chase and harassment	12,4	5,8	4	2,8	5,2
Approches and sexual assaults	6,5	2,6	0,9	0,5	1,9
Sexual harassment	21,9	9,9	5,9	3,9	8,3

⁶ Within the family: During the last 12 months: did your partner prevent you to meet or talk with friends, with other family members? Did he/she prevent you to meet or talk to other people? Criticized or devalued what you did? He/she made unpleasant remarks concerning your physical appearance? Did he/she impose on you what to dress, how to arrange your hair, how to behave in public? Disregarded or despised your views? Did he/she insist that you explain what you were thinking about him/her? Did he/she insist that you explain him/her in front of the children? Did he/she insist that you explain what you were thinking before other people? Did he/she demand to know who you were with, whom you talked to? Did he/she finish speaking with you, refuse to discuss with you? Did he/she stop you to spend money for the current needs of the household? Did he/she threaten to kill himself/herself? Did he/she utter death threats? At work: During the last 12 months were there any pressures on you? Were you imposed on a special schedule, tasks or services that others did not do? Have you ever been criticized repeatedly and unfair for the work you carried on? Were you denigrated in front of colleagues or superiors? Have you ever been made to feel ashamed before them? Have you ever been kept, put aside? The questionnaire did not use words like “violent,” “assailant,” “victim”, it only asked the evocation of facts relating to verbal, psychological, sexual or physical violence during the last twelve months, in public, at work, at home.

Three quarters of the perpetrators of violence were men. Verbal aggression are more prevalent in big cities, directly related to collective spaces and public transport. 9% of the married women have experienced domestic violence situations, but the term “battered women” does not reflect the reality of the phenomenon. In a social context in which the physical violence against women is prohibited, the other types of violence may occur as “postmodern” forms of domination of one sex over the other. The degree of severity increases with the repeated violent acts and behaviors, with the simultaneous presence of several types of violence within the couple⁷.

Table 2. Married women who said they were subjected to violence at work in the last 12 months (%)

Type of violence	Married and with job (% out of a total of 4061)
Verbal aggression	8,5
Psychological pressures	15,9
Harassment	3,3
Physical aggression	0,6
Harassment and sexual assault	1,7

The marital status of women working is being correlated with the violence at work. Thus, married women are less affected by violence at work, but the image of “free woman” is deformed/deforming without a partner (known man), because she is supposed to be more receptive to sexual advances (De Singly 2003), as with the assumption that “housewives” are more exposed to violence due to the economic dependence of their partner and given the isolation.

The survey results show a high rate (19% serious acts of violence and 7% very serious acts of violence) in women with precarious employment status. Also, unemployed women and those who have never worked support more violence than those with jobs. Another conclusion of the researchers was that the current societal organization maintains a contradictory structuring of the paid work and domestic labor (the work of women in their households is not considered paid work) (Delphy 1998).

In the case of married women, articulating the private-professional-public spaces is a “major social and political issue” (Junter-Loiseau 1999).

⁷ “Serious” corresponds especially to repeated insults or psychological harassment and, in rare cases, to physical or sexual assaults; “Very serious” corresponds to a plurality of violent acts: repeated physical and sexual assaults, associated with verbal violence, psychological and sexual harassment etc.

Table 3. *Women who reported living in situations of domestic violence (by socio-professional category) (%)*

Women of 20-59 years old who live or have lived in a couple the last 12 months				
Socio-professional status	Effectively	Overall rate	Violence:	
			Serious	Very serious
<i>Work in:</i>				
Agriculture, crafts, commerce	131	7,7	6,6	1,1
Intellectual professions	437	9,4	6,6	2,8
Intermediate professions	1223	8,6	7,1	1,5
Administration officials	1753	8,5	6,4	2,1
Working in industry	313	8,1	4,8	3,3
<i>Are:</i>				
Unemployed	254	12,8	9,9	2,9
Unpaid unemployed	187	15,0	10,4	4,6
Students	191	12,2	10,6	1,6
Retired	116	15,5	4,7	0,8
On a long lasting leave	946	10,7	6,8	3,9
Never worked	345	8,2	5,9	2,3
Total	5908	9,5	7,0	2,5

Another finding of the above mentioned survey was that there is a “lag” between practices and representations regarding the roles of husband and wife in family and professional life (some men get caught in the nets of the “virility codes” and some women try to – establish and embed their independence). The “tensions” within families do not affect very much the strength of feelings, show the data of the inquiry.

“Love” as the foundation of the couple is perpetuated. In the present investigation, 18% of the women who suffer physical violence remain “very in love” and 47% “enamored” of the men who mistreated them. Love is an impediment for the breakup of the couple, and lack of love can lead to breakup. One of the partners’ infidelity (especially the woman)⁸ seems to be an aggravating factor of domestic violence (Jaspard *et al.* 2001)

Domestic violence affects children and is linked to all forms of vulnerability: economic (lack of money), social (unemployment, precariousness of job), psychological (isolation, anxiety, depression).

⁸ In case of adultery, the rate of violences triples ... Woman's adultery triggers a maximum aggression: one in five husbands serious brutalize their spouse, even if she is doing what he is doing ... This is how they reach separation (about 40% of cases). Adultery is one of the main causes of crimes.

3. Manifestations, signs, symptoms of domestic violence

The current context is favorable to “sustainable development” of violence. “Behind the closed doors”, the essential is played between family members. In this “small world”, the sense of togetherness is always at stake, each defining it according to the other one. Who is unable to give sense to conjugal reality and to find a place in a family, means he/she is detached (detaches) from social reality (Bouchat-Trezzini 2009).

The repeated interior monologue of the wife-victim of violence can make her a fragile character, weakened (*Was I really guilty? It's my fault! I should have been more understanding ... I am guilty! What was in my head ? I do not know how it happened ... He loved me ...*). On the other hand, if you generalize the statements about “the man aggressor” and the “woman-victim”, in the absence of data gathered in the field, things get simplified, we do not take into account the situations in which men can be victims or the situations that don't just resume to “relations of strength” between the two.

If, viewed from outside, the situation of a couple seems to put it to question, from inside things may be seen differently. The fragility of a couple, hidden in public space, can express unhindered behind closed doors, but also there the two can understand and support each other. Often, in a couple, women seem more solid than men, they are able to help them. If women chose to remain in a couple or to leave it, the choice belongs to them, according to the self-esteem, respect to others. Man and woman can justify domestic violence, but its recurrence and progression can lead to the weakening of love, to abandon the life in two. Men and women are the only ones who can (re) build the couple.

Domestic violence can be defined as the use of power to impose on the other one's own vision of life (in two) to compel him/her to give up his/her own vision, to give up one's own ideas, to prevent him/her to think otherwise. (CVFE, 2010)

Those in charge with the knowledge of domestic violence (in order to reduce its dimensions) distinguish the following symptoms, signs, manifestations:

- Bruises, burns, wounds, fractures etc. ;
- Sleep disturbances, gastrointestinal problems, loss of appetite, headaches, etc.;
- Psychiatric disorders: loss of self-esteem, depression, anxiety, panic attacks, suicide attempts;
- Posttraumatic symptoms: irritability, avoidance of others, hypervigilance, helplessness, fear, nightmares;
- Refuge in alcohol, medicines, drugs;
- Social isolation etc.

In children exposed to violence occur the following signs:

- Emotional, attitudinal, behavioral problems;
- Language disorders, learning, school failure;
- Aggression, hyperactivity, difficulty in concentrating;

- Running away, delinquency;
- The risk of assault, injury;
- Isolation, irritability, depression;
- Fear, explosions of anger, nightmares, avoidance of situations that remind of the violence experienced, suicidal thoughts;
- The risk of reproducing the behaviors of the victims or aggressors when they become adults.

Community and society may face:

- Absences from work, low efficiency, dismissals;
- Costs related to the intervention of police, justice, social services etc.

4. Types, stages and effects of domestic violence

Conjugal violence can be: verbal, psychological, physical, sexual, etc. The violent person attempts to intimidate the other by raising the tone, snapping at him/her or shouting violently. In this way he/she expresses prohibitions, blackmailing, addresses words that hurt, gives orders, proffers insults. Psychological violence occurs when one of the couple hinders the psychiatric or mental integrity of the other, his/her self-esteem, identity. The two members of the couple can define their values, can assert their tastes, desires and options through communication, through permanent coordination with the other, but they may also seek to impose through degrading reproaches, insisting on the weaknesses of the other, through control and enforcement of their tastes, desires, values. These two forms of violence lead to increased family tensions, create and maintain a climate of unbearable fear and insecurity. From the studies of some North American researchers it results that continuous verbal and psychological violence may have even more devastating effects than the physical one (Kuenzli-Monard and Kuenzli 2000). *Sexual violence* means imposing one's sexual desires to the other partner of the couple, by threat, humiliation, force and brutality during intercourse. There are women who refuse sex with their partner in order to punish him, to control him, but mostly they are victims of such violence and feel dispossessed of their bodies. *Physical violence* means brutality, coercion, strikes with the palm, fists, feet and with different objects. The *threatwith death* or *suicide* urging are the extreme forms of domestic violence.

Those specialized in the study of domestic violence speak of a *vicious cycle* of domestic violence, of a cyclical process with several phases: tension, abuse, violence, justification, remorse, "honeymoon".

In couples accustomed to violence, the cycle repeats increasingly faster and the "honeymoon" almostdisappears... With each cycle of domestic violence, the victims lose confidence in themselves and their self esteem. Children may be caught in the middle trying to separatethe violent parents, to take the side of one or the other, being often the instruments that the couplesuse to enhance or ease tensions.

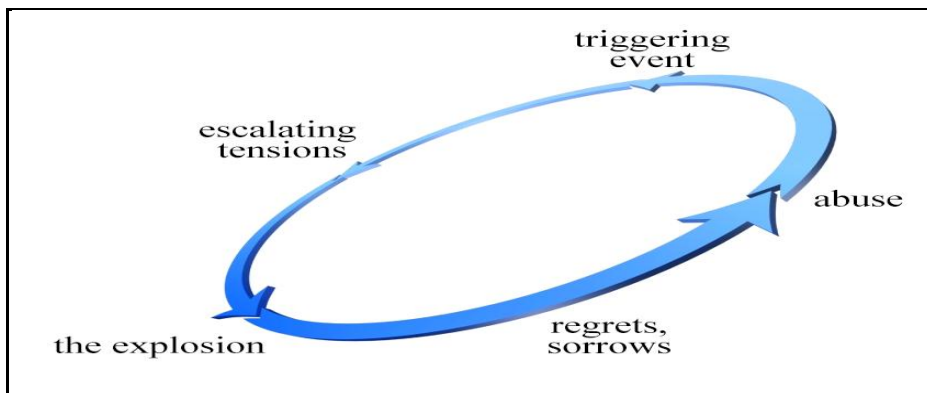


Fig. 1

Leonore Walker (1979) distinguished the following phases of domestic violence:

- *Accumulating tension* (which is not perceived by all members), when the violent individual is agitated, unable to sit still, is ready to “explode”; in some, such states follow a certain fact, an external trigger event, but in others everything is happening in their mind;
- Explosion (usually women describe their partner shouting, very angry, disproportionate to a possible trigger⁹ as if their identity, life were threatened); in this “phase of personality alteration” (Kaczmareck 1990), the aggressive spirit apparently separates from the body, its consciousness seems to alter; in its turn, the victim seems to react as if it would be in vain to flee or withdraw;
- *Post-aggression*, when the reactions of those involved appear to be similar to those after a natural disaster: psychic collapse for several days, depression, feelings of helplessness, trends of isolation until wound healing, post-traumatic anxiety, shame to show up disfigured etc.;
- *Remorse* occurs after violence, tensions diminish and occur the trends of denying what happened, promises that “it will not happen again,” vows (“life without you has no point”); often those directly involved pressure the entourage to intervene (including children) to advocate for one or another.

The last phase will not last forever and it is followed by another cycle of domestic violence. Leonore Walker described these phases after interviewing thousands of women victims of domestic violence. It is important to identify how violence establishes and intensifies, how is formed the “infernal spiral” of domestic violence.

⁹ Factors associated with violence, possible “triggers”: violence in the family history, alcohol, drugs etc.

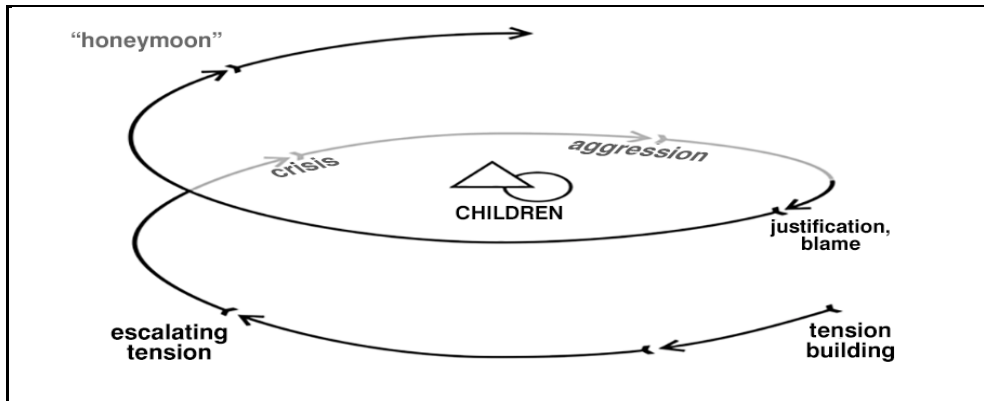


Fig. 2

Tensions reappear insidiously, the negative aspects of the relations in a couple not being considered in time. As they multiply, they can become habits, can get trivialized and intensified, the couple perceiving them as current facts, daily routines.

“I thought... I knew such moments are normal in a household... People fight, make up... That's life!” (V., aged 33, housewife, Bc).

Some do not even realize they live in a violent climate. Others refuse to acknowledge that “it happens to them,” that the one they got married to forever, for better or for worse “ceased to love him/her, and this happens much more as” the battered wife” is not seen in the community, in the society (in fact, many wives victims give up to attend entourage, meet friends, they limit social contact, get isolated and isolation makes them even more dependent of their aggressive spouses...

Domestic violence has immediate *effects*, on medium and long term, on all family members, physically, mentally, socially. In general, it is accompanied by feelings of guilt, fear, shame. The word *fear* is commonly used in the testimonies of victims. Some victims are afraid of the outbreak, the explosion of violence at any time, of escalating it starting from any pretext and hide the fact that they are victims, ashamed that they live in such a couple... The one who adopts the violent behavior is penalized in various ways (he/she is afraid that the family can fall apart, is afraid of being judged by the entourage, of isolation, of problems with the police, with the justice authorities, fears of losing the job etc.

The victim is likely to have physical and mental health problems. Physical violence can mark the victims for a long time, may be throughout their whole life. Violence unbalances them, isolates them, leading them to despair and anguish. Children experience negatively the climate of insecurity in the family, they can lose confidence in themselves and their self-esteem. Those who witness domestic

violence enter into conflicts with other children, have problems at school and make absents.

Seeing how the aggressor father and the victim mother, children can *learn violence* (if they hear and see that “woman should be beaten,” that “violence is a normal way of settling conflicts” etc.): the boy can internalize the destructive attitudes and behaviors of the violent father, and the girls – the resigned attitude and behavior of the mother. *Children* who do not attend directly to the scenes of violence are also affected, especially when they need support and they are looking for models with which to identify.

5. Explanatory models of domestic violence. A constructivist perspective

Each view is influenced by the past and present ideas, by the theoretical assumptions through which reality is explained and understood. The sociologist who examines the phenomenon of domestic violence, the social worker who intervenes in such cases are part of the society that influences them and which they influence in some way. Nowadays they question and de-naturalize the theories on domestic violence. Moreover, some even feel ashamed to see the dichotomy between the “expert” in psychosocial sciences and the “profane” member of the conjugal couple ...

Others take into account the generating power of knowledge and language (the language creates realities and has changing potential) and therefore, do not use immediately and without hesitation terms such as “violent man” and “woman victim” but possibly “man who resorts to violence” or “woman victim of violence.” More specifically, the husband may resort to violence, “does not lie in his nature” to be violent and the woman is not just a victim ... Associating automatically man with “violent” and woman with “victim” means to think in fixed terms, definitive and create social realities with violent men and women victims.

Typically, domestic violence is causally explained by a linear causality of the type ... *If A.... then B (if A was angry, cursed B; if he were stressed, insulted; if he lost his job, was hit etc.)*. All explanations of domestic violence are *constructions* of the researcher, of the intervener in relation with the members involved in violence in different ethno-socio-cultural contexts. Some explanations “go” in certain contexts and are useful to the social interveners, others are not. The causal explanation is reductive and sterilizing for the understanding of the phenomenon.

Instead of a causal explanation like “violence occurred because an inner strength, an impulse, an external factor drove the individual to act in a certain way”¹⁰, we would rather propose one in which an event occurs in a way because at some point, it was prevented to happen otherwise, they opted for a different path (Ionescu 2014).

¹⁰ “A hit B because he/she was violent since childhood, because he/she was very angry, because was under stress etc.”

In this way we become curious to find out, to investigate why, how, when, etc., to find alternative inappropriate behaviors, of violent interactions, to get to the responsibility of those involved in domestic violence¹¹.

From the perspective of constructivist sociology the explanations are oriented rather on the *responsibility* of the persons involved in conjugal violence and on the consequences of their behavior.

Because conjugal violence is nothing “new under the sun”, over time there have been proposed numerous explanations (Kuenzli-Monard 2001) (from those that identify the causes of violent behavior within the person, to those that identify them outside it). Such explanatory models are fruitful and instructive, they should be known and understood.

5.1. Theoretical models that find the causes of violence inside the individual

- *The model that postulates mental health problems* (Levin and Stava 1987) – “he's crazy, that is why he behaved this way” – provides a causal explanation of man's violence, often used by women who bear their aggression and accuse them of psychiatric problems of mental “disorders”¹²; such an explanation is attractive because it is simple: If A (mental disorder,) then B (violence), but from such an explanation would result that it is the doctor's responsibility for violence, of the psychologist, social worker, psychotherapist who were supposed to diagnose and treat the violent persons.

- *The lack of self-control, of impulsiveness* postulates that the person who acts violently has no control over his acts. But if a man has no control over his acts, how did he assume the responsibility for a family?

5.2. Models that locate violence in the history and trajectory of the individual

- The model of social learning explains violence as a repetition of (pathogenic) behaviors inherited in the family: “A is violent because his father was a violent man”; in other words, people repeat parenting roles, violent behaviors ... It is true that many teachers say that children imitate their parents that “the apple does not fall far from the tree”, it is true that the results of many researches show a high proportion of violent people who were themselves abused (Gelles 1985).

- This model is of interest, but can the violent person think of violent attitudes and behaviors as being a fatality (I was abused, so that is why I am violent)? Is he

¹¹ A really dangerous explanation is the one which posits “A strikes because B challenged”, because it locates cause the violent behavior in the other, rather than the relationship between them (it is possible that the person that supports aggression to have provoked it but this does not justify violence against it).

¹² They even made portraits of personality for the person who “abuses”, but these do not predict a possible aggressor. The identified characteristics describe a personality type, but do not explain why this personality reaches violence, why he does so only in certain contexts and do not provide an alternative to violence either.

entitled to use this explanation as a justification for the violent behavior? An explanation for a certain behavior is not an excuse ...

- *The model of the psycho-sexual deadlock* (Finkelhor and Araji 1986) explains violence through the fact that the violent person remained “locked” in a specific “development stage” or even declined at an earlier stage; the supporters of this model suggest that this type of violent people should learn the social skills they are missing. It is a useful model, but in this case there is the risk that the person who used violence to not see and not realize his own responsibility.

5.3. Models which identify violence within social interrelations

- *Model of the accumulation of frustrations* (Storr 1970) postulates that men absorb a certain amount of frustration, dissatisfaction and become like pressure vessels; when exceeding a certain threshold, they release tensions through a violent act (the metaphor of the pressure vessel or of the drop that fills the cup are widely used in such cases). Such an explanation may be interpreted that he is not guilty if he cannot control his tension, if he can not restrain himself, that he is not responsible for the “filling” of the cup (Dechner 1984) – if I am frustrated, I become aggressive – and the appropriate intervention would be the “emptying” of the glass, ie reducing tensions through sports, recreation etc.

- The families within which violence installed are often labeled as closed, the representations regarding the roles and social statuses, the relations between sexes are rigid, obsolete. Such a model considers violence as one of the ways to maintain the relationships between members, the family balance, being justified as a correction (out of the care for the family, the partner’s bad behavior should be punished, corrected¹³).

5.4. Models which identify violence within the communication blockages

- Such models argue that people who behave violently do not communicate normally, do not know how interact with others, find it difficult to establish relationships with partners of the opposite sex or to have intimate relationships, they haven't developed inter-relational qualities (Russel 1988), show difficulty in expressing their feelings etc. These models are interesting and useful, but do not insist on the alternatives the violent people have.

¹³ “He beats me, so he loves me,” says the popular “wisdom”; another proverb “says” that “the woman should be beaten as the scythe” Tradition requires in some villages that the bride’s dowry should be beaten at the wedding to demonstrate that she must obey her husband; a “traditional custom” asks the woman to remove her spouse’s shoes and receive in exchange ritual painless blows, just to show her the place in the family ... Many other “interesting” proverbs can be found: “The unbeaten woman is as the unswept house (“ as the unploughed furrow “,” like the ungreased mill”); “Instead of golden woman better a straw man” etc.

5.5. Models violence as dependent on “substances”

- The model of disinhibition (Kantor and Straus 1987) explains the use of violence by the consumption of substances (alcohol, drugs) that alter the conscious states: I was drunk ... I do not know what's wrong with me ... I would have never done this if I was sober. The explanation is often used, for the dependence on alcohol and drugs often coexists with violence, but it is more correct to speak of alcohol and violence, not of alcohol – as cause of violence, because there are people who use alcohol or drugs without resorting to violence, as there are those who resort to violence without being under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Even in a state of drunkenness, it is rare for a normal person to assault a representative of the law, a police officer or a priest, which shows that he discerns when choosing the victim.

5.6. Models proposed by culturalist, feminist organisations

- The source violence is in the social structures, say the proponents of such models. Traditions, norms, ideologies from our socio-cultures underline and maintain violence. The family in modern society can not be understood independently of the social determinants, of poverty, prostitution, migration, of the social vacuum etc. that “predispose” to violence. Aggressive behavior is fostered, encouraged by the functioning of the society. Many feminist theories suggest that man's status and privileges in nowadays society are the causes of “male violence” (Dobash and Dobash 1979), that the man can not have individual responsibility because the influence of the society is stronger and “sets” him violent.

From the point of view of the constructivist sociology, the explanatory models of conjugal violence can not be judged as true or false, but in terms of usefulness: some explanations are more useful to social workers, to the interveners than the others, in certain contexts. We should notice if an explanation or another support the persons involved in domestic violence to get decisional autonomy, responsibility, in order not to be violent, to avoid challenges, to find alternatives to violence, to change their behaviors, to find ways out of the vicious circle of violence. These useful explanations help people involved in domestic violence to reflect on the situations they are going through while they live them.

6. To what extent are helped those involved in domestic violence?

Those who study the phenomenon of domestic violence, being concerned with finding the best intervention practices for reducing it, say it is necessary that the people involved in domestic violence speak, know their rights, acknowledge their responsibilities, strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities. They can break the vicious circle of violence if they “break the silence”. The violence manifests itself better in silence. In order to be reduced, eliminated, it must be presented “in the spotlight”. The victims should talk about the violence they were subjected.

They can talk about violence involving family members, colleagues, friends and neighbors. They can address those who have the ability to listen without judging, the professionals in reception centers specialized in domestic violence, everyone who can propose administrative support, social, legal, psychological, which can accommodate the victims and their children. There are also centers to help the women who need psychological support, counseling, family planning centers (offering psychological support, care) doctors who certify a certain physical and mental condition of the victim and provide medical aid. The victims can contact the police and make a complaint¹⁴.

What about leaving the marital home, is this a solution? The victims of domestic violence have this right, however, the decision to leave the family is not easy to take, it requires serious reflection on the consequences. Domestic violence is unacceptable, nothing can justify abusive and aggressive behavior of the consort, but ending a marriage, breaking up a family is not a simple fact, easy to be done. Therefore many involved in domestic violence live in this situation for years, perhaps for life. Is it better to stay in a climate of violence? Is it possible to return to the situation before the first manifestations of violence? The answer is not easy to find and it requires a thorough thinking, a serious training on psychosociological plan. The one who chooses the path of separation, of divorce should have a strong will, but also the consciousness of the visible effects of violence, of its escalation, of its consequences on children.

How can the victims of violence be helped by the social professionals? Usually, the people involved in domestic violence are embarrassed, ashamed. They need confidence and should be supported, not necessarily harshly judged from the outside. If they left their home, they should be provided with shelter. If they are injured should be taken to a doctor. If they are affected psychologically, they should be taken to a psychologist. If they want to make a complaint, the social worker can accompany them to the specialized institutions. The people involved in domestic violence should be helped to take themselves the best decisions for them, not to be imposed on “what to do”. They should be informed about the facts, documents, effects, alternatives, solutions, and aid they can benefit. The persons involved must understand that they have many options, that it is in their power to choose, assuming responsibilities each time. In domestic violence cases are involved individual psychological factors, but the violence is the result of the construction of masculinity and femininity in society, it is socioculturally and economically determined. Violence manifests itself in the society, community,

¹⁴ The one that makes a complaint must know the consequences: the perpetrator will be summoned by the police, will be detained etc.; he will be released only under certain conditions, the magistrates will decide the commitments (i.e. not to approach the home, children, etc.); He will be made available to the prosecutor to explain what is required by law in case of violence and what is the punishment; depending on his reaction, he will be released, sent to a social service (mediation) or will receive arrest warrant.

family, relationships and social relationships, and the solutions to ameliorate them should be sought in this context, together with all those involved.

The violent and abused partners of the couples can resort to social workers. Collective or individual, the specialized intervention envisages women, men, the couple, the couple's children¹⁵. There are numerous programs that concern the victims and fewer those targeting abusers. There is a lot of information about helping the assaulted women and children, but less about helping people who commit the assault, that is why we will present some good practices adopted in these cases.

In Canada, the *OPTION* service receives requests from the men who resorted to violence in the family¹⁶. Within the service, they aim to identify the characteristics of violent behavior, its recognition by the perpetrator, his accountability being at the center of the intervention. The social worker and the interdisciplinary team identifies and analyzes perceptions, values and beliefs that support the use of violence within the community context, groups, families. Their goal is the accountability, the stopping of the violent behaviors and the increasing of the aggressor's capacity not to relapse. Interveners take into account all the factors (listed above) who say that violent attitudes and behavior are related to the personality of the aggressive, but can be authorized and supported also by the (sub) culture of belonging¹⁷.

There are some community contexts with high-risk (where we find dysfunctional families who abandon their children, send them to beg or they sell them, etc.), where there are precipitating factors (excessive consumption of alcohol, drugs, unemployment, bankruptcy, accidents, diseases¹⁸) etc.

The social services providing support to the aggressor in those families can develop information activities, construct training modules can accompany, conduct

¹⁵ Since 1996, in France there is Fédération nationale des associations et des centres de prise en charge de violences conjugales with specialized reception structures.

¹⁶ It was identified a typology of those who come into such a center: the visitor who comes at the request of the consort, a close person or entity, not from his/her own initiative or will to change; the customer visitor who comes to the social worker or psychotherapist to receive information on the nature of the problem, behaving like an innocent bystander; the buyer who knows he has a problem, feels it, doesn't realize if it is up only to him, wants to see if the information, the social worker's opinions coincide with his; the subject who is conscious of his acts, which connects them, his history, family, background, is open, wants to talk about all of them in order to treat himself etc.

¹⁷ In our country has become notorious "the case of Vaslui rapists" (2014), when most of the inhabitants of the village took the part of the rapists and not of the girl-victim (<http://www.cancan.ro/actualitate/ultima-ora-declaratii-scandaloase-in-cazul-violului-din-vaslui-a-distrus-sapte-familii-si.html>, consulted on December 19th, 2015).

¹⁸ After Statistick Canada, in 40% of the cases of violence, the abuser had consumed alcohol; Santé Québec survey emphasized the devastating effects of combining alcohol with drugs.

group activities. Some of the clients of these services reach them by coercion (judicial, social), others come willingly, aware that they need help¹⁹. These services may be carried out in “open groups “ or in “closed groups”, composed of a certain number of participants (up to nine), animated by professionals in intervention. Their objectives are:

- the identification and change of preconceptions, ideas, beliefs authorizing and supporting the use of violence,
- the recognition of violent attitudes and behaviors by those involved and their impact,
- the diminishing of the violent forms, their intensity and frequency, the ending of conjugal violence.

Before entering such a group, the service recipient must be present in at least two individual conversations that aim to create a minimal binder and get a commitment to participate in the subsequent meetings. The social workers assess the situation of the families, the trajectories of the members of the couple involved, the types of violent behaviors, the risk of entry into the spiral of violence etc. Participants are presented the type of intervention, the interdisciplinary team, the timetable, the rules to be followed during the meetings. The instruments used during the meetings are: the story of the latest violent acts in the family, the “accountability journal”, the use of group attitudes and behaviors etc.

The partnerships with other services that support family members where there is violence are important, as well as the collaborations, exchanges (based on knowledge, best practices, expertise, integrated approach) with similar associations from other cities and countries. Beyond the “repressive arsenal”, such services are focused on accompanying the persons who aggress. They go to group sessions, individual therapies, specific actions to prevent, control and treat²⁰.

In France, thanks to the mobilization of feminist associations over the recent decades, they focused especially on accompanying the women victims. There was “some” restraint on the opportunity to deal with bullies men. They were proposed for “citizenship programmes” to relearn the civilized behavior etc., after individual

¹⁹ For those sent by the judge, the costs are taken over by SPF Justice; others pay 15 euro per session (21 meetings).

²⁰ The group is a place of confrontation, of support and experimentation, which facilitates exchanges on violence. The diversity of the present members allows taking distances from the beliefs, ideas that justify recourse to violence. The group allows the differentiation and identification (In what ways do I resemble the other? How do I differ from him? Through what my violent behavior differs from the others? etc.). The group is a place of learning, enabling the experimentation of egalitarian relationships, of communication. The group may also play the role of “super-ego” in everyday life. The group work has an impact on many levels: the personal dynamics (on the person itself), on the interpersonal relations, on the balance of power, of control of the other, on family relationships, on their interactions, roles, on the positions of the family members.

talks designed to assess their ability to (re)integrate. In Marseille, in such an internship took part workers, bankers, traders, ITsts, etc., all with the consciousness of their own responsibility for acting violently, but also the willingness to change (Conseil de l'Europe 1997).

In Paris, numerous men – to the demand, desire of their wives – calls to SOS Violences familiales.

At Ackerman Institute in New York, the couples who come voluntarily are included in a program of “systemic and contextual intervention”. (<http://www.goldener.net>) The intervention techniques used aim the comprehension of the psychosocial changes of the couple, the phases of violence, the moral and ethical behaviors of those involved. The social workers working in these services seek to determine people to accept the responsibility, to narrate, “to put themselves in the place” of the others etc. Listening to the explanations of those involved is essential to engage in cooperation, to avoid “resistance”, the rigid positions. Both the theoretical explanations of domestic violence proposed by the social worker are useful, and the history of the life, the trajectory of each involved, the stories of their lives. Often women victims of domestic violence suffer because they can not talk, there is nobody to whom they can tell, to whom they can address, because they are not listened to, understood, recognized, helped, loved (Kuenzli-Monard and Kuenzli 2000).

Currently it is widely used the multisystemic family therapy. This gave the best results in young people sexually abused (Coastworth *et al.* 1997), in cross-cultural families, families reluctant to the intervention of the “social workers”, in African-American or South-American families (Russel 2010).

In order to know customers involved in domestic violence and the values to which they relate it is necessary to familiarize with the ethno-socio-cultural environment of belonging, the constant reflection on the changes within families, their relations with other institutions, but also on the adaptation of the research techniques, of the therapeutic intervention (short therapies centered on solutions, on different issues, on narrative therapies, etc.). The supporters of such an intervention suggest to integrate the guidelines of the constructivist theory, elements of Buddhism, yoga (Boyes 1996) in the social workers training curriculum etc.

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