

Poster 23 – Personality traits and help strategies of women who are victims of domestic violence

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Background

Interpersonal violence occurs in enormous range of contexts and is ranked among the leading causes of death and disability¹. Despite current awareness of its causes and consequences, we are still lacking data on violence prevalence and occurrence. Particularly the domestic violence against women is often hidden and women are still at high risk of being injured or killed in courses of domestic violence, among them intimate partner violence being most common³. This significant public health problem does not result only in immediate injury, but also leaves health, social and economic consequences³. Therefore there is a strong need of some state-based interventions. However, to obtain establishment of necessary preventive programs the capacity for collecting data on violence should be increased¹. Moreover, following recommendations of World Health Organization¹ health ministry and medical services should take an active part in implementing successful preventive and intervention strategy. In our research we studied some basic information on prevalence of domestic violence, help strategies of its victims and their personality characteristics, aiming to support further researches providing preventive and intervention programs in Slovenia.

Aim

In the applied study we analysed the personality traits of women who were victims of domestic violence. Furthermore, the core aim of our study was to establish what sources of help the victims addressed.

Methods

Data were collected on sample of 81 women, aged between 20 and 78 years. The participants completed a General Domestic Violence Questionnaire for violence exposure and help seeking screening and two personality traits tests (Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire; 1992 and Plutchick's Inventory of Emotions; 1974). Using SPSS 13.0 tool we calculated descriptive statistics and t-tests.

Results

Frequency of domestic violence: On the basis of collected data we divided participants in two groups, regarding their answer to question "whether they had ever taken part or witnessed at least one of the following behaviour patterns that could be regarded as violent": battering, slapping, pushing, grabbing, shouting, insulting, swearing, threatening, not speaking, forcing into sexual intercourse, rape, forcing to watch intimate parts of a body or erotic pictures, suicidal or auto-aggressive behaviour by family members. Those who confirmed the question were further analysed regarding on answers to question "who was the victim of violent actions". The results showed that 25,9% of women stated that they were victims of domestic violence themselves. Surprisingly, 46,9% participants reported taking part or witnessing in violent situations mentioned above but they did not recognize themselves or others as victims of domestic violence. Women that declared themselves as victims estimated domestic violence to be more frequent then non-victims imagined. Difference in their views was significantly important ($t = -2,8$; $p < 0,05$). Victims felt that domestic violence against women was "unacceptable in all circumstances but not always punishable by law" whereas non-victims agreed with unacceptability of violence but tended to think that it is "always punishable by law".

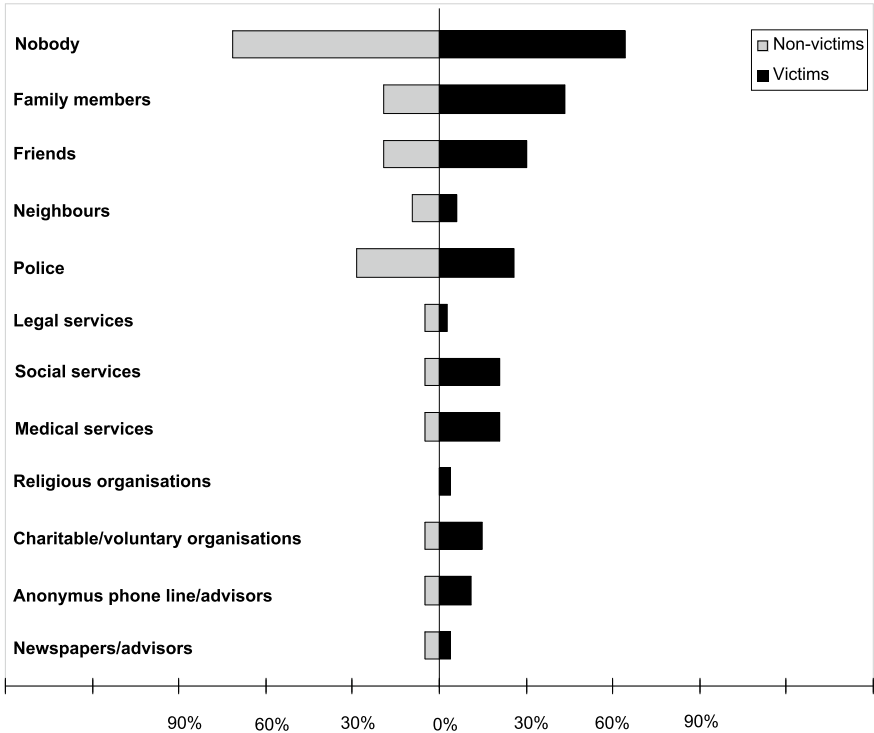
Participants also estimated different behaviour patterns as violent. The only significant difference appeared in consideration of abusive sexual behaviour since victims have reported this behavior pattern as violent more often then non-victims ($t = 2,6$; $p < 0,05$).

Help strategies of victims: In our study we were particularly interested in attitudes towards help services and help-seeking strategies of victims. Respondents were asked: “Whether family and friends, social services, medical services, the police, the state, charitable and voluntary organizations, religious organizations and the media could help women who are victims of domestic violence?” There were no significant differences between groups of victims and non-victims in their view on abovementioned entities as having a legitimate interest in the problem of domestic violence, family members, social services and friends scored highest, whereas the media and religious organizations were estimated with lowest scores. However, a weak tendency was revealed when victims reported that these entities could help more often comparing to responses of non-victims.

Furthermore, the participants were asked: “Whether each of instruments proposed (free phone number, tougher laws, tougher enforcement of existing laws, teaching young people about mutual respect, campaigns to raise public awareness, punishing perpetrators and rehabilitating perpetrators) was useful in combating domestic violence against women?” The answers showed the opposite tendency, non-victims scored usefulness of all the instruments higher than victims with significant difference in case of teaching young people ($t = -1,1$; $p < 0,05$), raising public awareness ($t = -1,9$; $p < 0,05$) and punishing perpetrators ($t = -3,1$; $p < 0,05$). Regarding help-seeking strategies, only 28,6% of women who described themselves as victims tried seek for help either by themselves or someone else did that. Results showed that in most cases the police (28,6%), family (19%), friends (19%) and neighbours (9,5%) helped victims of domestic violence. Other sources of help: social services, medical services, solicitors, barristers, charitable or voluntary organisations, religious organisations were named in minority.

In the hypothetical case being victim of domestic violence 35,8% of all participants answered that they would seek for help, preferably within the family (43,2%), at the police (25,9%), at friends (21%) or in humanitarian organizations (14, 8%).

Picture 1: Comparison between used help services in the group of victims (N=21) and potentially used help services in the group of non-victims (N=60) if they were victims of domestic violence.



Personality traits of victims: Women who reported being victim of domestic violence scored significantly higher on dimension hostility of Buss/Perry Aggression Questionnaire ($t = 3,0$; $p < 0,05$) but significantly lower on dimension aggression of Plutchick's Inventory of Emotions ($t = -2,1$; $p < 0,05$) comparing to women that had not experienced or witnessed domestic violence. Results on other dimensions of applied personality tests did not show significant differences. We also examined if these two groups of women differ in their estimations of relationships with their relatives. Victims estimated relationships with their parent's significantly worse then non-victims ($t = -5,3$; $p < 0,05$), but there were insignificant differences in estimation of relationship with partner, children and partners parents.

Discussion

Our estimate of victimization among women is comparable with studies that used the similar survey methodology⁴. Our results revealed the significant gap in the group of women who experiences or witnesses domestic violence and

who recognise these behaviour patterns as violent and those who do not address them so. Despite of all the efforts to raise awareness of this insidious and frequently deadly social problem, it still remains unrecognized and therefore uncovered in many cases, particularly concerning abusive sexual behaviour. It seems that general public tends to think that domestic violence is less wide spread and moreover, it is always recognized and punished. These data suggest the necessity of implementing public awareness campaigns, teaching people to recognize and deal with violent behaviour. Furthermore, special awareness should be addressed to families as our results show that quality of relationships within the family plays an important role, especially relationship with parents. Regarding help services in support to victims of domestic violence we should be concerned of the very low score of both, those who think they would seek for help when being victim of domestic violence and those who really do so. Moreover, there is a gap between these two groups, suggesting that not only that there is very small share of women who would intend to report domestic violence, in real-life situation there is a great possibility that they would remain silent. These data again supports the idea of taking necessary steps in designing of effective preventive approach to problem of domestic violence.

Conclusions

This study, based on self-report data, provides some baseline estimates to prospective evaluation of prevention programs. However, for enhanced understanding of domestic violence information from different data sources should be combined.

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