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REVIEW ARTICLE

RETENTION OF OUTDATED THEORIES ABOUT VIOLENCE IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS IN PRACTICE

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Abstract
Women experiencing violence in intimate relationships, when seeking to solve the problem of violence in the framework of the help and support system, are faced with the stereotypical image of a "real" battered woman or an "ideal victim". Only a woman who is passive, helpless, does not defend herself or her children, does not argue, physically fight back, who speaks to no one about the violence and who does not leave a violent partner conforms to this image. No woman experiencing violence and abuse can permanently "fit" the concept of an ideal and real victim. In the case that women do not conform to this "ideal" and the concept created by society, they do not receive social recognition and adequate help and protection. This paper deals with the concept of the Battered Woman Syndrome, according to which women in violent intimate relationships have learned to be passive and helpless. The paper also presents knowledge on the contradictory theory "The Survivor Hypothesis", which sees women as active, competent and resilient. It delivers insight into the wide range of strategies that women use to stop or reduce violence, as well as about their two main strategies – private and public. Research to date agrees in the finding that the solution women most often use when seeking to resolve the situation is that of leaving the relationship, and that a very large proportion of women do physically resist attacks. This paper presents the links between and impacts of the findings in the context of social work and interventions in cases of violence in intimate relationships.

Keywords: *Intimate relationships; Intervention; Violence; Stereotypical image; Women's strategies*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the media in Slovakia have increasingly reported on cases of violence in intimate relationships and have given space for experts to explain the context of this issue. The image of the problem of violence has gradually been changing amongst the lay public, too. Training and education programmes are being developed for various professions, the level of education in this field has been increased at some universities, while preventive programmes are running at schools. However, the country still noticeably lags behind in sufficiently reflecting the latest scientific knowledge concerning the nature of violence against women, and violence in intimate relationships, its dynamics and women's strategies for stopping or mitigating violence.

The aim of this paper is to describe the issue of the solution to the problem of violence in intimate relationships in connec-

tion with the presence and maintenance of the stereotypical image of a "real" battered woman and outdated theories on intimate partner violence in practice, and to offer a realistic view of women with experience of violence.

Stereotypical image of women experiencing violence

The problem of violence and abuse in intimate relationships has been accompanied by several waves of raising social awareness. The women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s drew modern society's attention to this often ignored and misunderstood problem (Gordon, 1988). Growing social awareness of the extent of violence experienced by women led to the realisation that women have been victimised not just by their intimate partners, but also by society and its judicial system (Gordon, 1988).

In 1994, Renee A. Callahan published the article *"Will the 'Real' Battered Woman Please Stand Up? In Search of a Realistic Legal Definition of Battered Woman Syndrome"*. The article focuses on the widespread use of the battered woman syndrome, though its main message consists of drawing attention to the risks connected with a narrow concept of the problem of violence and abuse in intimate relationships, which results in a stereotypical image of the "real" battered woman. Only a woman who is passive, helpless, does not defend herself or her children, and who does not leave an abusive partner conforms to this image. No woman experiencing abuse can meet this "ideal".

In 2003, Goodman et al., based on their three-year research, presented a comprehensive list of strategies women use when trying to tackle violence in their lives. Research findings confirmed that women are extremely active in addressing and trying to stop violence. In the framework of 39 strategies listed in the study, it was not just found that strategies almost exclusively from the category of "defence/defiance" occupied first place, but also that women most often used leaving the relationship (86.9% of the sample of women) as a solution to the situation. A very large proportion of women in the study by Goodman et al. (2003) physically defended themselves against attacks (82%). The findings of this research were later confirmed by a number of other studies.

In 2004, Goodkind et al. (2004) examined the use of safety planning strategies on a sample of 160 women. Women who participated in their research used a large number of diverse strategies to keep themselves and the children safe. Contrary to the traditional view of a woman in an abusive relationship as a "passive victim", almost half (48%) of women used or warned a partner that she would use a weapon; 73% of women in the sample spoke about the abuse with family or friends; 67% of women stayed with family or friends in order that they and their children could escape violence; and 56% of women obtained a court order for protection against abusive partners.

The results from these and many other research studies are in direct contradiction with the stereotypical image of a helpless and "real" battered woman. Despite these and many other research findings, today's reality in Slovakia and abroad points to the timelessness of the topic described by Callahan (1994) 25 years ago, and this is the stereotypical image of women in abusive relationships and their responses to violence. Experts on the issue also quite frequently rely on theories and knowledge dating from four decades ago, such as the Battered Woman Syndrome, learned helplessness and cycle of violence, which were later amended or challenged by later research, or even completely refuted and replaced by new theories and explanations.

In the past there were the beliefs that women experiencing violence concealed a conscious or unconscious need for pain and desire for punishment, and women were accused of "provoking" violence. A wide range of theories was created, such as the female masochism theory, which used Freudian terms to explain why women stay with abusive partners (Shainess, 1979; Snell et al., 1964; Young and Gerson, 1991).

Feminist activists and social scientists challenged the "psychodynamic views and helped to construct a new image of abused women, one that emphasised gender role conditioning, institutionalised sexism, and external constraints on women's ability to leave" (Anderson and Saunders, 2003, p. 164). In the 1970s and 1980s, explanations as to the reasons why an abused woman left or did not leave were more appropriate (Anderson and Saunders, 2003; Dobash and Dobash, 1992).

Emphasis was placed on internal and external explanatory factors, which differed markedly, and many theories "combined psychological dynamics with external factors. Most of these studies have tried to account both for structural constraints on a woman's decision to leave or stay as well as psychological factors" (Anderson and Saunders, 2003, p. 165).

Battered Woman Syndrome, a concept of learned helplessness and cycle of violence

Two competing theories attempted to explain women's responses to violence. Walker (1979) developed the *"Battered Woman Syndrome"*, in which she used Martin Seligman's (1975) concept of *learned helplessness*. Walker used this concept as an explanation of why a woman in a "constant state of fear" doesn't simply leave an abusive relationship. The theory of learned helplessness assumed that motivational, cognitive and affective deficits in motivation, cognition and emotions are a result of abused women having repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, attempted to get the help they need (Walker, 2009). Walker (2009) assumed that women will not leave violent relationships because over time they realise that none of their efforts leads to a change in the batterer's behaviour, and they begin to perceive their own actions as useless. Learned helplessness was then generalised to other situations that can lead to depression and anxiety. Society's messages that women are responsible for abuse can further worsen their sense of helplessness. Many advisers and researchers (including Walker herself), criticised the later broad use of the concept, as well as the concept itself, for its impact on the conclusion that women are passive in their response to violence (e.g. Bowker, 1993; Faigman and Wright, 1997; Peterson et al., 1993). Evidence on the Battered Woman Syndrome has, for example, been interpreted by many courts as an indication that women experiencing violence suffer from mental deficiencies. The notion of learned helplessness likewise contributes to this perception of women. The Battered Woman Syndrome flipped violence in intimate relationships over to become a pathology of the woman. As a consequence of its application, courts have been increasingly ordering women to undergo expert psychiatric assessment (Faigman and Wright, 1997).

Walker (1979) is also the author of the Cycle of Violence, which in the past was the primary theoretical model used for describing the dynamics of violence in a relationship. According to Walker, the dynamics of violence take place in a cycle, in which there alternates a phase of tension build-up, followed by an acute violent incident, which culminates in a honeymoon period. Without intervention, the cycle and violence constantly repeat and increase over the course of time (Kantor and Jasinski, 1998; Walker, 1979). This theory is in line with the still prevailing view of women as passive: cycles are inevitable, a person becomes an unintentional part of them and cannot simply escape. The cycle, like the power of nature, is stronger than the individual stuck in it (Goodmark, 2009; Kohn, 2008).

Consequently, over the following decades the legal system often required the identification of the characteristic phases of the cycle of violence as described by Walker, the presence of which was to signal violence and abuse in a relationship (Goodmark, 2009; Kohn, 2008). If this cycle was absent in a woman's relationship, this was taken to mean that there was no violence occurring in the relationship. Walker herself never used this argument, but everywhere the presence of the cycle of violence theory stifled further discussion within the legal and other systems on how to identify violence in intimate relationships. The cycle of violence was cemented as a reference point against which women's allegations of violence have been tested (Goodmark, 2009).

Despite the fact that research over the past decade has yielded findings on three dominant models of the dynamics of violence and abuse in intimate relationships – periodic, chaotic and random – the cycle of violence paradigm has been used in education and training on violence in intimate relationships since 1979. Katerndahl et al. (2014) investigated the degree of nonlinearity in everyday violence between partners, identified their specific dynamic patterns and determined the interconnection between the severity and dynamics of violence. From a sample of 200 women, the majority (59%) indicated a random dynamic, 30% chaotic, and 12% of women reported a regular dynamic. The lowest frequencies of violence were seen in the case of the chaotic dynamic, while the frequencies

escalated in the case of the random dynamic. Based on their findings, Katerndahl et al. (2014) stated that intimate partner violence is rarely a predictable periodic phenomenon and that no behavioural model describes violent dynamics for all violent relationships. Further research (Burge et al., 2016; Katerndahl, et al. 2017) reported similar findings. Despite the theory (Battered Woman Syndrome and Cycle of Violence) having originally been designed as sympathising with feminist ideals, today it still feeds some of the oldest and destructive stereotypes that are historically associated with women (Faigman and Wright, 1997).

The Survivor Hypothesis

At the opposite end of the continuum there lies the theory that perceives women as active, competent and resilient "survivors". According to *The Survivor Hypothesis* of Gondolf and Fisher (1988), women in abusive relationships are perceived as "active help seekers". Based on their own research, they confirmed that women in fact become more persistent in their attempts to stop violence when it becomes more frequent or severe. Gondolf and Fisher (1988) examined data from more than 6,612 women, who over an 18 month period had used the services of 50 shelters in Texas, USA. Most of the Texas women in their study (71%) had left their homes before they became shelter residents. In 63% of cases, the women had contacted shelters or a lawyer, and more than half (53%) had called the police at least once. These statistics are at odds with the stereotypical image of women who have learned to be helpless.

It appeared that the women included in their study were not just more likely to seek help when violence worsened, but at the same time were also more likely to seek various categories of help (Bowker, 1998; Gondolf and Fisher, 1988). According to whose hypothesis, a woman in a violent intimate partner relationship initially blames the violence on herself and tries to accommodate the batterer in everything. When, though, the violence escalates and the situation reaches a breaking point, she starts to fight for her own safety, actively learns, works on external resources and alternatives, and develops optimal strategies for surviving and stopping violence (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988). Gondolf and Fischer reached the conclusion that the responsibility for women's inability and unwillingness to break away from a violent intimate partner relationship is borne largely by society, not learned helplessness. Many women try to leave the batterer, but they often run up against incompetent action of those who should help and protect them, and against a lack of formal and informal sources of help and support. Support for the findings that women in abusive relationships are very active and persistent in their attempts to stop violence has since been reported by a number of other studies – qualitative and quantitative (Coker et al., 2012; Goodkind et al., 2004; Goodman et al., 2003; Messing et al., 2016; Parker et al., 2016).

In the past decades, a number of potential barriers to women escaping abusive relationships have been described and studied. As a result of research carried out since the 1970s, battered women are less likely to be described as culpable participants in a "troubled relationship than victims facing many obstacles that restrict their alternatives to leaving an abusive relationship" (Anderson and Saunders, 2003, p. 165).

One of the most recent major studies – the Spanish national study (Domenech del Rio et al., 2016), reported the finding that 81.4% of women included in the study had told someone about the violence in their intimate relationship. This result is consistent with the prevalence found in other studies (e.g. Fanslow and Robinson, 2010; Goodkind et al., 2004) and suggests that women speak about the violence and abuse they experience more often than they did in the past. However, despite the growing amount of research, very little is known about the challenges women face in leaving an abusive partner, and what strategies they use over time in the process of ending the violent relationship.

Women's strategies for stopping and reducing violence in intimate relationships

The topic of strategies that women use when trying to stop or reduce the violence to which they and their children are subjected is closely related to the feminist view of violence in intimate relationships and with the survivor hypothesis. We perceive women who have experienced abuse as active, competent, resilient and using a wide range of strategies

in the period when they remain in an abusive relationship, in the period of leaving the relationship, as well as in the period after leaving their partner. From the above it is clear what long-term and demanding challenges women face when seeking a life free of violence for themselves and their children. Depending on the woman's circumstances, intervention focuses on strategies for managing escalating violence, for managing safety and survival, and strategies for maintaining safety.

Wemmers and Cousineau (2005) explored the paradoxical nature of research into violence against women. They found that women in these surveys are considered either as victims who need to be rescued, or are perceived as active, competent and capable of leaving the perpetrator. Much professional literature focuses narrowly on the view of how women respond to violence and what strategies they use in trying to halt it, creating the assumption that the solution to the problem of violence in intimate relationships is simply one of whether to stay or leave. Such a simplified reaction does not recognise the complexity of intimate relationships and creates a number of contradictions and dilemmas that women experience as they endeavour to make their relationships safer (Mahoney, 1994).

When social workers and other professionals try to understand women's responses to violence, it is necessary to also consider the strategies violent men use in response to women's actions through which they seek to achieve safety for themselves and their children. From academic and practical literature on perpetrators of violence, it is obvious that many men downplay violence, deny its existence and try to avert accusations (Cavanagh et al., 2001). All interactive processes must be placed in the social context in which we interpret each action.

Lempert (1996) conducted a qualitative study of 32 testimonies of women experiencing abuse. She described the initial phase of a change among women holding oppositional beliefs. However, as the violence began to worsen and the women lost their hope of being able to stop it, they started to add to their strategies and sought help from outside, such as from family members or providers of services. According to Lempert (1996), women's disclosure of the problem of violence and the involvement of other people can help women in redefining the problem and may result in recognising the need to leave the relationship. Conversations with other people also change "domestic violence" into a public affair that requires outside intervention and increased tangible and emotional support for involvement in new safety-promoting strategies (Brown, 1997).

Whereas many studies point to interactive processes that characterise violent relationships and women's subsequent responses to violence (Campbell et al., 1998), only a few studies assess how abusive men's strategies and women's responses to violence are interlinked. There is also little research that focuses on exploring the use patterns of women's strategies, or on the factors that influence their choice of the strategies, for example the nature of the violence they face, their economic situation and the availability of support from society and community (Goodman et al., 2003). When describing the strategies used by women experiencing abuse, it is important to stress that "studying the choice of women's strategies in response to violence cannot replace any direct and ongoing attempts to stop men from using violence" (Goodman et al., 2003, p. 164). However, it is also important to learn more—not just about what women do to maximise their safety – but in particular about how and why women take these steps and what influences them. As Davies et al. (1998) summarised in their study, we gain a clearer picture of the myriad ways by which women cope with violence in their lives.

Based on a long-term three-year research study with a sample of 406 women, Goodman et al. (2003) developed a list of strategies used by women in abusive relationships: *"The Intimate Partner Violence Strategies Index: Development and Application"*. The strategies index contains a total of 39 items grouped according to common features into six categories. These categories differ in terms of application in the environment and the degree of focus on solving the problem. Two categories of strategy are of a private nature, four public categories include strategies aimed at involving the surrounding environment in solving the problem and at seeking help. A great benefit of this research is, among others, that it was probably the first one to not only very thoroughly summarise the strategies, but also to categorise them by their purpose

for which women use them. Another important contribution is the dimension of the level of involvement of the surrounding environment through formal and informal networks. The index is thus a categorisation of women's strategies that combines purpose, means and level of involvement of others.

Goodman et al. (2003) summarised and ranked women's strategies as follows:

Private strategies:

1. *Placating/mitigating strategies* – include strategies aimed at changing violent behaviour without defiance or protest, possibly even promoting a sense of control over the violent partner. These strategies are applied in privacy and do not alter the balance of power in the relationship.
2. *Resisting/defying strategies* – strategies aimed at changing the violent partner's behaviour and possibly balancing the power in the relationship. They take place in privacy.

Public strategies:

1. *Safety planning strategies* – strategies aimed at increasing means and possibilities for escape or protection against further violence. This is an act made in private, though often it is constructed and communicated in collaboration with specialised services for women.
2. *Legal strategies category* – strategies aimed at changing the batterer's behaviour with the help of external agencies – legal system options.
3. *Formal network category* – strategies aimed at changing a violent partner's behaviour or increasing resources or possibilities for escape through use of the help and support of specialised services for women, or various institutions.
4. *Informal networks category* – strategies aimed at increasing resources or possibilities for escape from or protection against future violence. They are aimed at using external sources of support, for example from the side of family, friends, etc.

Differences between strategies carried out in isolation (private strategies), those involving family and friends (informal network strategies), and those involving the engagement of public agencies (public strategies) are critical to understanding women's coping with violence in intimate relationships, as well as to developing responsive programmes and policies (Goodman et al., 2003). The research by Goodman et al. (2003) included self-evaluations by women as to which strategies were beneficial for them in ending abuse. The research findings showed that private strategies, such as defence/defiance or placating the partner, are most frequently used by women; these were also found to be the least useful. Conversely, all of the informal network strategies, as well as safety planning strategies and legal strategies were useful for most women. All in all, the usefulness of the research participants' assessment showed that seeking external help as opposed to private attempts to manage violence is critical for women's ability to end violence and abuse in their lives. Strategies that involve family and friends have proven to be particularly useful. Another result of the Goodman et al. (2003) research was that more severe violence was associated with increased use of strategies in each category. These findings are consistent with the Gondolf and Fisher's (1988) Survivors Theory, which suggests that as women experience escalating levels of violence they become more active and persistent. It seems that the more violence women endure, the more broadly they cast their strategic net, intensifying their efforts within a broad range of arenas (Goodman et al., 2003).

Partners of violent men use a huge range of strategies to stop or reduce violence and try to achieve a change in their partner's behaviour. In situations of a threat of violence, women are not passive. Women can usually guess well which strategies can protect them effectively and prevent further violence.

Studies focused on the effectiveness of strategies used by women for ending violence have shown that these "survivors" have enormous courage, activity and creativity (Coker et al., 2012; Hayes, 2013; Messing et al., 2016; Parker et al., 2016).

However, the findings from these research studies were also crucial in clearly separating their two main lines – the private and public nature of strategies. In general, the outcome of these studies is the finding that, despite the dozens of dynamic and comprehensive strategies that women use over the long term for eliminating violence, private strategies are,

even after their persistent use, insufficiently effective in terms of the ultimate goal of stopping the abuse.

The categories of least helpful and effective strategies for victims of violence include in particular private strategies, such as placation, reconciliation with the batterer, resistance, i.e. strategies that do not involve a change in the balance of power in the relationship (Goodman et al., 2003). A common feature of these private strategies is that they are used by women in private "behind closed doors" (which satisfies the intention of women's partners that the abuse stay secret), they do not affect the balance of power in the relationship, and do not transfer responsibility for the violence and responsibility for changing it onto the perpetrator. Conversely, the most effective strategies seem to be not just those of involving the surrounding environment in the problem – informal or formal networks, but also strategies that concurrently mean punishment for the batterer and consequences for his violent behaviour.

On the other hand, it should be noted that private strategies (without intervention from the surrounding environment) – passive or active, are often very effective in situations of acute violence. These private strategies are, therefore, effective from the short-term aspect.

Practise shows that it is also necessary to appreciate private strategies due to the fact, that it allows women to manage individual incidents of violence and reduce the degree of danger at the time when they are not ready to reveal the abuse or leave the relationship.

Wood (2004) followed up study of Goodman et al. (2003), however, she did not use a sample of urban woman, as it was in the previous study, but examined the strategies of 60 women living in a rural environment.

The aim of the Wood (2004) research was to determine whether women's strategies and the evaluation of their usefulness differed in a rural environment with cultural and demographic variables in comparison with women from an urban environment. The findings of Wood (2004) were consistent with the results of the Goodman et al. (2003) study; when women from a rural environment used similar strategies to deal with abuse in relationships and concurrently evaluated similarly their helpfulness in ending violence in their lives. Both groups cited ending the relationship as the most often used category – by 92% of rural women and 87% of urban women. With the exception of the legal category, which was used more often by women in the urban sample, both groups used strategies (to a similar degree) from the category of placating and defence/defiance more often than strategies from the category of formal networks, safety planning and informal networks. Like Goodman et al. (2003), Wood (2004) also found that strategies of placating and defence/defiance are used by women most frequently, and also evaluated them as the least useful in ending violence. Large differences between urban and rural women were seen within the following strategies: urban women were more likely than rural women to physically defend themselves or to return a partner's blow (82% versus 68%), more likely to apply for a protection order (73% versus 56%) and develop a code for danger (36% versus 20%).

The activity of abused women who use a number of strategies to keep themselves and their children safe from violence throughout the relationship (including leaving abusive relationships) has been documented by further research studies (Coker et al., 2012; Goodkind et al., 2004; Messing et al., 2016; Parker et al., 2016). In contrast to early theories on battered woman syndrome and learned helplessness, this research shows that women who experience abuse are usually active and highly motivated to end the violence and are intensively engaged in seeking help and in their efforts to end abuse in their relationships and to survive violence (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988).

These studies have not just deepened the understanding of women's reactions to violence, but also confirmed the "Stage Model" (Liang et al., 2005), in which women move from private attempts to control violence toward seeking help from the side of the public. The findings from these research studies have brought knowledge that escalation of abuse from the side of a partner led to a significantly greater degree of seeking formal support among women, such as medical care, mental health care, social services, legal assistance, or reporting violence to the police.

In line with the *Stage Model* (Liang et al., 2005), women experiencing intimate partner violence progress from multiple private attempts to deal with abuse to informal sup-

port-seeking and, as violence worsens, to more public support-seeking. This shift in women indicates the existence of their threshold value for abuse, meaning that beyond a certain point either the injuries are sufficiently serious, or their situation is becoming threatening enough that they seek formal interventions (Fugate et al., 2005). Thus conclusions from these studies are consistent with the *Common Sense Hypothesis*, in which Gelles (1976) described women's responses to violence. In it she notes that when violence and abuse increase in severity and frequency, women are likely to leave the relationship.

Context of social work and interventions in cases of violence in intimate relationships

Specialised services for women experiencing violence include counselling and emotional support, legal defence, information, recommendations and temporary housing (Sullivan, 2018). Workers providing services to women try to better understand what actually helps women and what they can improve to ensure that their services meet individual needs. The objectives and principles of services for women and intervention should be in line with the aims and needs of the women themselves. Each woman may, at different stages of an abusive relationship, have a different aim and needs, and may use their own combination of strategies. The main aim of all interventions for women and their children is to prevent or reduce their exposure to abuse. It is clear that this process will not be fully under the control of women, as their abusive partners can react to and try to prevent their attempts to leave the relationship. The aim of some women is to leave a relationship and stay safe, some though decide to stay in the relationship and their aim is for the violence to end. The women themselves perceive some of their aims as short-term or long-term.

The primary objectives that women chose and which correspond to their needs in various situations, are the following (Reisenhofer and Taft, 2013, 2016):

a) leaving the abusive intimate relationship in an attempt to escape abuse;
b) staying in the relationship, if the abuser stops committing intimate partner violence, and the woman and her family are safe;
c) remaining in the relationship, realising that the abuse will continue, but to minimise harm and promote their personal/family well-being.

The complex nature of women's exposure to intimate partner violence and their different histories and values indicate the need for individualised interventions defined by women, which require an understanding of the solutions and strategies women use (Hegarty et al., 2010; Liang et al., 2005).

Women in violent and abusive relationships pass through a complicated and lengthy process of change. At the start of a relationship, many women correspond to the image of a "victim" which has been constructed for them, for example, by the Battered Woman Syndrome. This means that in an early stage of an abusive relationship the woman may downplay the problem of violence, deny it, take responsibility for the violence she is experiencing, and may be helpless and passive. This, however, is a phase that a large number of women go through, and an equally large number of women move away from this phase after they perceive themselves, their partner and their relationship from a different perspective, they start to be active and to advocate their rights, i.e. move to a phase, in which they become "survivors".

CONCLUSIONS

At present, the system of help and support in dealing with the problem of violence in intimate relationships is becoming increasingly professionalised. An unwanted side effect of this situation is the fact that these active survivors and their rights are assessed only as "victims", instead of being perceived as competent partners in the framework of cooperation, treated only as "clients". As human beings, we identify them according to the problem they are currently dealing with, whereby we create superior and inferior relationships in the process of support and help. A similar problem of professionalisation and the result of low awareness is the creation of simplified understandings and offered solutions to a complex problem. Many of the helping professions or experts who com into contact with abused women still often fail to

understand the complexity of decision-making involved in reaching a solution and the broad range of strategies that women employ. This problem is manifested at the level of specialised intervention, in the framework of social services provided by the state, in the framework of the legal system and, lastly, also in the public's perception.

This situation primarily affects women seeking help at various agencies, where they meet with a lack of understanding of their problem, with their rights being, in many cases, seriously harmed. Secondly, this concerns counsellors and people working with women experiencing violence and abuse. It contributes to their frustration when part of the system does not work in favour of women and does not lead to stopping the abuse or punishing the batterer. Instead, the system often works "in the best interests of the abuser" – and many women, in the framework of this experience, suffer secondary victimisation.

Conflict of interest

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

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