

Violence in a family setting

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Summary

Violent behaviour, from an evolutionary biological perspective, has a specific role in survival, making it a recognisable behaviour across many species. In humans, violent behaviour can cause problems when it is directed towards others with the aim to harm them. On a social level, violent behaviour and criminality associated with the behaviour, constitute major problems in social cohesion and public health.

Social and cultural factors play an important role in the development of violent behaviour. Similarly, environmental factors can also effect the development of violent behaviour, but can have varying effects on different people. Consequently, the interaction of neurobiological and environmental factors result in the development of violent behaviour.

Inter-family violence is the most silenced crime in the world and affects men, women and children, regardless of age, environment and social status. Physical violence can be described as physical injury. Verbal abuse on the other hand may involve shouting, swearing, threats and verbal humiliation or terrorising. This type of violence is also closely related to psychological/emotional violence. Depriving the victim of basic human rights is also considered to be in the context of inter-family violence. Within a family, incest may also take place. This is often mistakenly regarded as a purely sexual act. Incest is a complex phenomenon which also includes aggression, dependency and fear of abandonment. In the case of incest, sexual activity against a child, is often a means by which family disturbance is expressed. The nature of the act, the degree of affinity and the age of those in-

involved are factors which should be taken into account in cases of incest.

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Violence and aggression- introductory remarks

With the term 'violence' we mean the use of force to impose will, coercion. According to the National Institute of Professional Safety and Health, violence is defined as physical assault, threatening behaviour or verbal abuse while working or while completing a compulsory activity.

Aggressiveness on the other hand regards the behaviour that follows an individual's intention to cause pain, trauma or general fault to another individual or item. Therefore, aggressiveness has a specific target. It should be noted that there are still many issues that remain controversial when defining aggression. A common basis for when defining aggression could be violent behaviour and cause- or at least threaten to cause- Κοινή βάση ενός ορισμού μπορεί να αποτελέσουν η βία και η βλάβη – harm to others. Although in such a definition violence directed against oneself is not included, the research to date shows that the neurobiological mechanisms underlying the violent behavior and suicidal behavior is -at least partially- shared.

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lent behaviour.

A variety of mental disorders may be implicated in aggressive behaviour, for example, personality disorders, substance abuse, psychotic disorders and disorders caused by brain damage. However, aggression is not specifically related to any of these disorders. A distinction that seems important in order to investigate the neurobiological mechanisms of aggression, is the one between impulsive and premeditated violent acts. In general, the mentally ill can carry out both impulsive and planned violent acts.

Violence within the family: definition-forms

Violence against women and children is a widespread phenomenon in all societies. Inter-family violence is the most silenced crime in the world and affects men, women and children, regardless of age, environment and social status. This phenomenon requires special attention the scale of its effects and the difficulty in identifying and eradicating violent behaviour. Many people, in many countries, underestimate the problems associated with familial violence, or even consider it a personal issue that cannot be integrated into the jurisdiction of the legal system, despite the shocking statistics. According to UNICEF, marital violence causes more injuries and deaths of women aged between 45 and 65 years than cancer. In the European Union, at least 1 in 5 women have experienced violent behavior from her husband-partner, while 95% of all violence incidents against women occurs at home. In order for someone to talk about familial violence, a key requirement is to have already conceptually clarified and defined the terms from which it is composed. In this chapter when using the term violence we mean to include physical, verbal, sexual, psychological / emotional injury or damage to a person's health, neglect and coercion. When referring to the family it is meant not only nuclear but extensive, including cohabiting partners, without being married.

With the most recent re-evaluation of the law against interfamilial violence (Law. 3500/24-10-2006), it is clearly stated that «Interfamilial violence is considered to be acts against a family member [...] which includes spouses or parents and relatives of first and second degree by blood or by marriage and through the adoption of children [...] similarly, relatives by blood or marriage up to the fourth degree and persons whose guardian, legal supporter or sponsor parent designated family member, and any minor person cohabit in the family may also be considered a family member in the event of cohabitation [...] the provisions of the above Act also apply in the case of permanent companionship of a man

or a woman and children, whether they be common biological children or stepchildren from either side, provided they cohabit, even with former spouses. [...] The victim of domestic violence is any person against whom a harmful act is committed or the under age individual who is a witness to any of the above mentioned acts

Physical violence can be defined as causing physical injury or causing health issues to another person and ranges from a slap to the face to intentional homicide. Verbal violence on the other hand may include shouting, swearing, threats ridicule or terrorising, which is directly linked with psychological/ emotional violence. This type of violence can be described as slight or severe cause of psychological harm towards the victim consistently, which in turn may result in reducing functionality of the victim on a psychological and social level. Depriving the victim of their basic rights (freedom, medical care, emotional care, education and self-determination) is also considered to be within the context of domestic violence. Furthermore, sexual violence is described as , coercion by physical force or by threatening of the victim, to copulation, lewd act or tolerance and the insult of sexual dignity.

Explanatory approaches

Lately, many different theories have been proposed that attempt to explain interfamilial violence. Here we present a brief overview of the main theories:

1. **Psychological - Psychoanalytic Theories:** Abuse and violence against family members may be as a result of the pathological characteristics of the perpetrator's and the victim's personality arising from defects and fixations during their psycho-emotional development. High rates of psychopathological disorders (according to the DSM or ICD diagnostic systems) have been observed amongst perpetrators and / or victims of domestic violence.

2. **Cognitive Theories:** Domestic violence is interpreted as a product to resolve the cognitive dissonance of the offender with respect to the self-image and / or as a way of effecting (enactment) fantasy scenes of physical aggression and sexual supremacy. Fantasies are deemed to be reinforced from the modern lifestyle and the standards presented in the media.

3. **Behavioural Theories:** According to these theories, people's behavior is aimed at either receiving rewards and / or avoiding penalties. Thus, the perpetrator is rewarded in a behavioral, emotional or social manner when acting in a violent way and punished accordingly when they refrain from such acts. Therefore, in this way the perpetrator learns to chose violent behaviour in order to be rewarded and satisfied.

4. Social Learning Theory: Abuse is a learnt response. The perpetrator has learnt to behave violently as a result of their previous experiences (as a witness or victim of domestic abuse from their family) with such behavior, which is also considered ethically and socially justifiable. This theory satisfactorily explains the existence of abuse of different actors within the same family.

5. Theory of Social Interaction: based on a behavioural approach, as it also refers to the concepts of rewards and punishments for certain behaviours. The point that differentiates it from purely behavioral is that it evaluates the offender as carrying out violent acts from an authority enforcing power over the victims, and the victims weak to protect themselves, and to also meet the offender's needs in a different way than becoming abused.

6. Emotional Bonds Theory: it is a theory that takes into account social and psychological parameters for the interpretation of the phenomenon of domestic violence. The theory developed by Bowlby professes that between a child and a parent emotional ties develop from the time of birth. Inadequate or inappropriate links will create difficulties in relationships with parents during childhood, which in turn will cause problems in interpersonal relationships in adulthood. On this basis, domestic violence is interpreted as a result of the inability to form healthy relationships and develop strong bonds of love in the family context.

7. Theory of Family Systems: in each family system specific relations and dynamics are formed which depend on the personality of members, social variables, the regulatory framework governing it and other factors. According to the theory of family systems, abuse is the result of imbalance in the dynamics of relationships and lasting existence of abusive conduct which in specific circumstances, becomes abuse.

8. Theory of the Subculture of Violence: a social based theory that maintains that every social group accepts different levels of violence. In specific subculture environments unfair or abusive behaviour becomes easier to accept, and is sometimes encouraged by the value framework that governs them. This theory is supported by research that has shown that in certain geographical areas violent acts are more likely to occur.

9. Theory of resources: according to this theory, the notion of violence exists in every social system. Abuse is the result of the possibility of imposition of power due to a surplus economic, social, psychological resources of their abusers. It is argued that the violent and abusive behavior is motivated by acquisition, enforcement or preservation of power.

10. Class sequence theory: within the brackets of the theory of Resources there is the theory of class se-

quence. This theory interprets abuse as a result of lacking (social, psychological, economic) resources and the stress it creates as a consequence. The theory focuses on the unequal distribution of resources in different social classes, causing tremors in the value-dominant and authoritarian systems.

11. Theory of social gender roles: This theory focuses on the socialization process of the sexes that encourage men to be more aggressive than women and to express their feelings and their masculinity with violence and / or sexual aggression. Violence and abusive behaviour are therefore linked with the characteristics of each gender (male= aggressive, perpetrator / female=passive, victim) as they have been shaped socially.

12. Feminist Theories: feminist approaches interpret abuse as an epiphenomenon of a patriarchal social structure that encourages violence against women, who are considered inferior and weaker. These approaches are based on the recognition of the timelessness of the subordination of women to men, from the beginning of socially organised world to this day. In these approaches, domestic violence is identified with violence against women, and is supported by research data.

Myths about the domestic violence

As it has been mentioned above, the phenomenon of domestic violence is very complex and involves many different factors. Moreover, the heterogeneous and multiple interpretative approaches proposed and the disregard of the extent and seriousness of the phenomenon have formed a fertile ground for the emergence and consolidation of stereotypes regarding the nature and characteristics of violence. The absence, due to the difficulty inherent in the recording of incidents of abuse ("dark number of violence") and the questioning of the findings of scientific research make a realistic and free of stereotypes reading phenomenon even more difficult. However, scientific findings arising from existing surveys provide the opportunity to overturn the myths that accompany domestic violence:

**
* The victims of abuse are held responsible as a result of their behaviour.

**
* Victims can stop the abuse by correcting their behaviour.

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* Alcohol and drug abuse causes abusive behaviour

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* Abusers are not only men, but also women.

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* Abusive behaviour often resolves itself without intervention (simply stops happening)

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* Psychotherapy of perpetrators is a more effective method than incarceration.

** Victims who remain in abusive relationships suffer mentally («they are masochists»)

** Interfamilial violence only exists within disfunctional families.

** Abuse only arises in families with low economic and educational level.

** Victim of abuse exaggerate the violent acts conducted against them («overreact»)

** Perpetrators have common personal and social characteristics.

** Abusers cannot control their actions

** Children that have witnessed or have suffered abusive behaviour, will become perpetrators during adulthood.

** Abuse is a phenomenon that concerns mentally ill people.

** Abuse is a personal, family issue and must be solved withing the family circle.

Risk factors for the appearance of domestic violence

The review of scientific research regarding domestic violence shows some factors that appear to be associated with the occurrence of abuse. These factors are:

1) Lack of available support system due to geographical and social isolation.

2) Excessive dependence, both emotional and financial, on spouse.

3) «Important» life events, such as pregnancy, death, infidelity, change of career, chronic medical problems of wife or children.

4) Abuse of addictive substances, as a factor of economic and emotional burden for the family.

5) Age range between 18-35 years.

6) Conflict of parental and/or spousal role.

7) Educational and professional inequality between spouses.

The report of the above factors can not be generalized: there are more stressors that interact in the appearance abusive episodes, but under no circumstances is it thought that they have a causal relationship.

Prevention-therapy

The phenomenon of domestic violence can be addressed to some extent, within the framework of a project aimed at eliminating abuse. For this approach, a multi-layered approach and system that takes into account all parameters and factors associated with it is

needed. This means that preventive action or interventions should be consistent and not fragmented, and be part of a broader, with long term objectives, design. At this point, it is important to remember that before the intervention in any of the following levels of prevention and / or care, it is necessary to record the size of the phenomenon, in a well-structured and organized service system (Ministry of Health, Public Order and Justice, NGOs, support structures etc.).

1. **Primary Prevention:** Awareness of the general population, through information (media campaigns, lectures in schools and institutions, such as the police, the Church, etc.). At this level of prevention, the action of non-governmental organizations, always with the assistance of state bodies is important.

2. **Secondary prevention:** Targeted interventions, after the registration of families who exhibit abusive behavior, aiming to understand the traumatic event, counselling in crisis and encouraging them to seek help (home visits, telephone help line, legal advice, financial support and provision of information).

3. **Tertiary Prevention:** Dealing with the traumatic event in a context that will reduce the direct damage, both emotional and physical, and support the victim in all ways so that in the future they can make important decisions for their future (immediate hospitalization, reception hostels, legal support and individual and / or group psychotherapy).

In terms of treatment, the ideal is to provide individual counselling and group psychotherapy, bringing victims of domestic violence in contact with others who have experienced similar events. In Greece however, the usual practice is for the victim to be treated primarily with consultative and not psychotherapeutic methods. However, psychotherapy can help a person who has suffered from violence within the family regain his lost confidence and autonomy and to make a positive change in his life, recovering his mental balance. The kinds of psychotherapy vary, but the goals remain the same: focus on current behavior and understand the ways in which the environment affects the appearance and consolidation of the phenomenon.

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