



EXTENT, FREQUENCY, NATURE AND CONSEQUENCES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN CYPRUS

National Research carried out by:

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**For the
Advisory Committee
for the Prevention & Combating of Family Violence**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

For the purposes of this study, domestic violence against women is defined as “any act of violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty and is inflicted upon women by their husband/ex husband spouse /ex spouse.” The term “women” is used to cover females above the age of 18.

International research has shown that almost all domestic violence (DV) is based on gender power relations and is directed by men against women.

On July 22, 1997, UNICEF released *The Progress of Nations*, which reported that a quarter to half of women around the world have suffered violence from an intimate partner. DV has consequences for every aspect of life, including justice, education and workplace arenas. Domestic violence is virtually impossible to measure with absolute precision due to numerous complications, including the societal stigma that inhibits victims from disclosing their abuse and the varying definitions of abuse used from study to study (United Nations, 2006).

Aim of the Study

The present study is the first national research that aimed to investigate the extent, frequency, types and consequences of domestic violence against women in Cyprus.

An attempt to analyse the existing statistical data, highlighted the difficulties in providing a clear picture of the prevalence of domestic violence against women in Cyprus. This is, mainly, due to the fact that there is not a unified central data bank for reported cases of domestic violence since different services and departments keep their own statistical data on the matter. (<http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/sws/sws.nsf/All>)

In 2006, the Secretary-General of the United Nations launched his in-depth study on all forms of violence against women. In response to the Secretary-General's study, the General Assembly adopted the resolution 61/143 of 19th of December 2006, calling upon Member States and the United Nations to intensify their efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women.

Considering that up to the present moment violence against women by their husband/ ex husband, spouse/ ex spouse has not been investigated on a national basis, this research study is considered necessary in view of the fact that its findings will form the basis for strategic planning in the area of violence against women.

Methodology

The sample of the study was selected to represent the Female, Greek-speaking over 18 years of age population of Cyprus on a national basis (urban and rural areas). A representative proportionate stratified sample of 3,973 households was randomly selected from each district (urban and rural areas) on the basis of the 2011 population census.

Method

The study was carried out with the use of a **questionnaire** that was specifically developed for the purposes of the present research, was pilot tested and adjusted.

The questionnaire is composed of closed and open ended questions. It investigates the participants' perceptions and attitudes as regards to the different types of violent acts and behaviours. In addition, it seeks to capture the extent, the types and consequences of such violent acts and behaviours against women by their husband /ex husband or spouse/ ex spouse, their knowledge on available services and people they refer to when violence is inflicted upon them.

The questionnaire also included questions that aimed to collect information related to:

- a) characteristics of victims and perpetrators,
- b) reporting of violence and
- c) ways getting help after violent incidents.

Questionnaires were distributed to 3,973 households together with

- a) a letter explaining the purpose of the research and
- b) instructions for the questionnaire to be completed anonymously by a woman, over 18 years of age from the household and to be posted, using the stamped addressed envelope provided.

The aim was to collect at least 1,000 questionnaires. In total, 1,162 questionnaires were returned by post, of which after cleaning, 1,107 were valid.

Duration of the Study

Dates were collected between April 6th and May 31st 2012.

Main Findings

Existing statistical data cannot provide an adequate picture of the prevalence of violence against women in the Cypriot family. In many cases, abused women report the incident to more than one services (i.e.: crisis line, police, social services) and each service keeps its own statistical data. The absence of a unified central data bank for reported cases of domestic violence or a coordinating body, where all statistical information can be collected and evaluated, makes things more difficult.

Given the fact that the extent, kinds and effects of violence against women are closely related to people's perceptions and attitudes on violence as well as to how sensitive people are on the subject (see Apostolidou et.al., 2008· Krug et al., 2002), the findings of the present should be examined in the light of the sample's perceptions and attitudes as to what they consider to be a violent act or behaviour.

The research findings which are summarised below show that:

1. Some forms of violence, such as psychological and social violence appear to be more acceptable for the women of the sample than physical violence. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that 7% of the sample perceives forced sexual encounter within marriage or within a relationship as an acceptable behaviour.
2. At least 28% of the women of the sample reported some kind of violence. The mean percentage of the various kinds of violence inflicted upon women (from rarely to every day) is as follows:
 - **Economic violence: 19,4%**
 - **Emotional /psychological violence:19,3%**
 - **Sexual violence: 15,5%**
 - **Social violence: 14,8% and**
 - **Physical violence: 13,4%.**
3. Different types of violence usually coexist, therefore it is not easy to figure out the exact prevalence.
4. All types of physical and sexual violence include psychological and emotional abuse.

- 5. Age, family status, place of residence, financial situation, and management of family income** appear to be related with the existence of domestic violence against women, whilst, education of both victim and perpetrator are not related to domestic violence.
- 5.1** Women of the sample that belong to the age group **45-64** reported more violence (35.9%) followed by age groups **25-34** and **35- 44** (25.9% and 28% respectively).
- 5.2** Regarding **marital status, divorced** (71.2 %) form the biggest percentage of women who reported that they have been victims of domestic violence, followed by those who are **separated** (65%). Only 23% of married women reported that they have been victims of domestic violence.
- 5.3** Violence decreases when family **financial status** improves.
- 5.4** There is less violence when the couple makes decisions on financial issues together.
- 5.5** Limassol is the district where more cases of domestic violence are reported (40%) whilst Larnaca district has the lowest reported cases (27%).
- 6.** Implications to health reported by the women of the sample after violent incidents against them include injuries (12%), health problems (11%), haemorrhage (6%), fractures (5%), termination of pregnancy (3%).
Reported possible implications include conditions such as stress, depression, insomnia, nightmares (με ποσοστά που κυμαίνονται από 11%-39%).
- 7.** Most women of the sample reported that anger is the main reason for their husband's/ ex husband's, spouse's / ex spouse's violent behaviour.
- 8.** A considerable percentage (57%) of those who reported having been victims of violence did not tell anybody about their abuse.
- 9.** The most important reasons for not disclosing the incident are:
- the thought that they are to be blamed for their abuse,
 - the thought of their children,
 - the fear for the perpetrator's reaction and
 - the feeling of shame (social stigma).
- 10.** Only 1/3 of the women of the sample who reported that they have been abused, asked for help.
- 11.** Only 9% of those who have been injured after a violent behaviour against them received medical care.

12. Forty three per cent of those who reported abuse had no support from anybody, while 3,6 % of those abused said that they were supported by their children. This should be further investigated in view of the fact that Cyprus Law considers under age children who witness family violence as victims of violence.
13. Both the victim's and perpetrator's level of education were found to be independent of the presence of family violence.
14. Sixteen percent of the women who reported having been abused (28% of the sample) said that there were implications to their work.
15. One third of the women of the sample said that they were little or no informed as regards to the services available for victims of family violence. Only 57% of the women of the sample are aware of the existence of the hotline for victims of domestic abuse, while only 50% know about the shelter and the support provided by the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Family Violence.
16. About 5% of the women of the sample reported that they experience some violent behaviours, like swearing at them, neglect of their psychological needs, use of bad language, avoidance of communication, bullying and arbitrary deprivation of liberty on a daily basis.
17. Of those who reported their abuse, only 5% ring the hotline 1440 (Association for the Prevention and Handling of Family Violence) for psychological support and only 2% report the incident to the Police.

Conclusions

In general, it appears that the extent, kinds and consequences of domestic violence against women by their husband / ex husband, spouse/ ex spouse in the Cypriot family do not differ significantly from international research findings. The present findings should alarm relevant services and the community as a whole and should contribute to the adoption of measures that will combat this severe social problem.

Considering that there are significant differences among the sample as to the perceptions and the understanding of domestic violence against women, further and more specific research in the area could provide more detailed and more accurate data on the extent, kinds and effects of domestic violence against women by their husband / ex husband, spouse/ ex spouse in the Cypriot family.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Paragraph 124(d), adopted by the 4th World Conference of Women, held in Beijing in 1995, identifies violence against women as one of the 12 most critical areas of concern and calls upon governments to take measures in order to protect women subjected to violence.

Furthermore, Cyprus has ratified the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which was adopted in 1979 by the General Assembly of the United Nations. Article 1 of the Convention recognises that violence against women is a form of discrimination against women, it prevents the development of women, contributing to the perpetuation of inequalities and calls upon member states to adopt measures that combat violence against women.

The multifaceted problem of violence against women in the family needs the involvement of, and the cooperation among all relevant state services and Non Governmental Organisations, at all levels.

The Council of the European Commission, under the Danish Presidency, adopted Conclusions (CE 11447/11) reviewing the work in this area and establishing a set of seven indicators concerning domestic violence against women. Along the same lines, Cyprus Presidency continues to support all initiatives that relate to measures that combat violence against women and protect women subjected to violence.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Implementation of National Action Plans

Ensure adequate funding to enable the implementation of both the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family and the National Action Plan for Gender Equality.

Recommendation 2: Establishment of a National Coordinating Body

Establish an independent National Coordinating Body that will be responsible for:

- a) keeping a register for all reported cases,
- b) creating a comprehensive, central, coordinated, regularly updated and easily searchable database on violence against women inflicted by husband /ex husband, spouse/ ex spouse.

(This role may be undertaken by the Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family).

Recommendation 3: Awareness-raising campaign on violence against women

Develop, implement and evaluate long-term, awareness-raising campaigns on violence against women, focusing on combating sexist attitudes and stereotypes that perpetuate this kind of violence and targeting various groups, such as men, school children (especially boys) disadvantaged women groups (i.e. non Greek speaking women).

Men should be encouraged to take an active role in these campaigns

Recommendation 4: Primary Prevention

Promote primary prevention of violence against women:

a) through the educational system, recognising its role as:

- a basic source of socialisation of children from a very early age
- a transmitter of values (i.e.: human rights, respect, gender equality, cooperation etc.), that will contribute towards equality and combating gender stereotyping.

b) through cooperation between State Agencies and NGOs that work in the area of domestic violence against women.

Recommendation 5: Anger Management Programmes

Offer free Anger Management Programmes for perpetrators of violence against women.

Recommendation 6: Encourage and Support Research in the area of domestic violence against women

Research in the area of domestic violence against women should be supported and repeated at regular intervals so as to follow up the prevalence of the problem and to adjust relevant services accordingly.

Furthermore, in view of the fact that there are significant differences as to how violence is perceived and understood by the women of the sample, more specific research in the area will possibly provide more representative findings as regards to the extent, types and consequences of domestic violence against women in Cyprus.

For full Report see www.familyviolence.gov.cy