

**ORIGINAL PAPER****An Outline of Domestic Violence Against Women in the Republic of Cyprus: A Presentation and Critical Analysis of the Magnitude of the Problem and the Profile of Abused Women****Antri Andronikou, SW, PhD ( c )**Special Teaching Staff, Department of Social Work, Frederick University, Nicosia, Cyprus  
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Email: antriandronikou@yahoo.gr**Abstract**

This article presents the magnitudes and patterns of domestic violence against women in Cyprus and attempts to describe the psychological, social and cultural profiles of abused women, as these are presented in a series of data collected by the Cyprus Police, the Social Welfare Services and the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family, as well as through studies carried out by the Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family and the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies.

**Keywords:** Domestic violence against women, profile of abused women, Cyprus abused women**Background**

The problem of domestic violence is a common, and at the same time complex social problem that has attracted the attention of numerous researchers. Everyday life indicates that violence in non-marital relationships reaches unmanageable proportions and constitutes the violation of fundamental rights, mainly against women. This is attributed to the discrimination they are submitted to, because of stereotyped perceptions about their social gender and role in society (Abbot et al., 1995; Langhinrichsen et al., 1995; Dobash et al., 1979).

The expression of violence is a behaviour that is characterised by one's control and abuse of power, usually a man, over another, usually a woman, within the context of an intimate sexual

relationship. The pattern of abusive behaviour takes various forms including the physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse, social exclusion, as well as through a combination of the aforesaid elements (World Health Organization, 2002; Krantz et al., 2005; Heise & Garcia, 2002).

In non-marital relationships, violence mostly impacts women, many of whom continue to remain captured in an unbearable situation of pain, guilt, ignorance and fear, with terrifying consequences on all levels of their life (Argyle, 1972).

Violent behaviour against women by their husbands/partners is a stereotype expression of the unequal distribution of power between the two genders and the result of the broader social

perceptions with regard to their position, as inferior to men (Osmond & Thorne, 1993; Walker, 1993; Dutton & Golant, 1995).

According to the Cyprus Law on Violence in the Family n<sup>o</sup> 119(1)/2000, article 3, Violence in the Family is defined as: *“Any act, omission or behaviour which causes physical, sexual or mental injury to any member of the family by another member of the family and includes violence used for the purpose of having sexual intercourse without the consent of the victim, as well as of restricting its freedom”*.

Therefore, it was found that the aforesaid definition gives important answers to the following questions:

- a) Within which context does this happen and by whom,
- b) What is it?
- c) What are its causes?
- d) To whom may this happen?
- e) In which forms does it appear and which are its consequences?

The aim of the present study the magnitude of the domestic violence and the profile of abused women in the Republic of Cyprus.

**Methodology:** The methodology was based on the bibliographic review and the data collection from the Cyprus Police, the Social Welfare Services, the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family, as well as studies that were carried out by competent institutions like the Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family and the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies.

In Cyprus, there are limited statistical data that describe the magnitude and the various parameters related to domestic violence. These data are scarce and dispersed in many different sources and there are no shared databases, nor compatibility or harmonisation of the relevant information, as at present no coordinated procedures are in place by the various institutions involved for recording acts of violence (Lesta, 2010).

## Results:

According to statistical data provided by the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family, from the year 2000 to 2011, the Association's helpline has received 10,076 calls, among which 8,095 were related to a woman victim of domestic violence. Among all complaints, 8,604 people reported that they were psychologically abused, 5,537 people claimed to have been physically abused and 334 people to have been sexually abused (APHVF, 2011).

Statistical data that were provided by the Shelter show that from 1998 to 2011, 570 abused women and 553 children of abused women were hosted. In 2011, 33 women and 45 children were hosted. On average, we could say that 40 women and 40 children are hosted per year. It must be noted that in the months of November and December, the Shelter was closed due to relocation (APHVF, 1998-2011)

In 2012, the Emergency call centre responded to 1,735 domestic violence cases, among which 1,315 were related to a woman victim, 259 to a child victim and 178 to a man victim. As shown by the reports, 634 cases were related to psychological violence, 889 to psychological and physical violence and 147 to sexual violence, psychological and physical violence. 60 cases were related to neglect (APHVF, 2012).

In 2011, the Emergency call centre responded to 1,320 domestic violence cases, among which 989 were related to a woman victim, 221 to a child victim and 113 to a man victim. As shown by the reports, 1,226 cases were related to psychological violence, 762 to physical violence and 71 to sexual violence (APHVF 2011).

In 2010, a detailed presentation and analysis of domestic violence incidents was carried out, through the Annual Report of the Association for 2010. It presents the reports that were recorded in the emergency helpline. For 2010, the report contains 1,013 calls for help by abused women. Among these calls, 92.5% were repeated calls and a percentage of 3.5% called for the first time. For the largest percentage of the sample (66.4%), the people that reported the incidents were the victims themselves. At the same time,

for the largest percentage of the sample (77.5%), the victims were women of all adult age groups, from 18 to 70 years of age. The main form of violence that was reported was psychological violence, with a percentage of 96.1%, followed by physical violence with a percentage of 57.7% and sexual violence with a lower percentage (2.19%) (APHVF, 2010).

Data show that out of the sample, 78.7% of the victims were Greek-Cypriots, whereas foreign women reported the incident of violence at a lower percentage of 19.8%. Foreign women who reported to have been abused came mostly from Romania, Russia, Ukraine, the UK, South Africa, Moldavia, the Philippines, whereas a large percentage did not mention their origin (APHVF, 2010).

With regard to the victims' marital status, the largest percentage (54.3%) has reported that they were married, 11.9% of women were separated and 7.6% were divorced. The largest percentage of the sample (67.7%) of abused women had children. Violence that was used against women who reported to have been abused was in 58.3% of cases by their husband, whereas in 5.5% of cases, women have named their ex-husband or present partner as the offender. The majority of women (76.6%) did not provide any information on their educational level, whereas the second largest percentage (9%) reported to have completed secondary education. A large percentage of the victims who answered the question (44.1%) reported that they were not employed (APHVF, 2010).

A shocking outcome of the study is the relationship of women-victims with the use of alcohol and illegal substances, gambling, extramarital affairs, suicidal tendencies, mental illnesses and the use of antidepressants. With regard to all these cases, the overwhelming majority of the sample was not proved to have had any involvement. With regard to the help that the victims asked for, it appears that the large percentage did not turn to doctors, lawyers, psychiatrists, psychologists-consultants, the church or any public institution for help or any kind of financial support. At the same time, the majority of abused women (50.4%) did not

submit a complaint about the abuse (APHVF, 2010).

Among the victims that called the only helpline (1440) that operates in Cyprus for Emergency help, the largest percentage (60.6%) sought psychological support, 18.2% sought information and only 13.5% wanted to submit a complaint about their abuse. The detailed data of the report make an extensive reference to the abusers, although the information that was recorded was provided by the victims and a large number of questions remained unanswered by the majority of victims. However, it is important to present the information provided by the victims about the abusers.

As shown, the largest percentage of the sample (80.3%) reported that the offender was a Greek-Cypriot and 13% reported that the offender was a foreigner, coming mainly from countries like Syria, Romania or Poland. With regard to the age of the offender, answers show that it varies from 18 to over 70 years old. According to the victims, the education level of the offenders is secondary, though 91.7% of the sample did not give any relevant information. It was reported that 35.8% of the offenders were employed (APHVF, 2010).

With regard to the connection of the offenders with the use of alcohol and illegal substances, gambling, mental illnesses and suicidal tendencies, the largest percentage of the victims that have given an answer, reported that the offender was not involved with any of the above. With regard to extramarital affairs, the largest percentage of the victims (13.6%) reported that the offender had an extramarital affair (APHVF, 2010).

According to information provided by the only Shelter in Cyprus, in 2010, the Shelter hosted 21 women and 21 children. The average age of abused women was 30 years old and the youngest abused woman was 21 years old. The largest percentages of abused women that were hosted in the Shelter came from Bulgaria (28.6%) and Ukraine (19%). Other abused women that were hosted in the Shelter came from Romania, the Philippines, Morocco and Iraq.

The lowest percentages of abused women were those of women coming from Russia, the Czech Republic, and Greek women from Pontus. Among the women who were hosted, 71.4% were married and 33.3% were Tertiary Education graduates. As shown, the majority of abused women who were hosted in the Shelter (76.2%) were not employed. These women (76.2%) reported that their children witnessed violence. The frequency of stay in the Shelter for the largest percentage of abused women (95.2%) was the first time, whereas for the total number of women (100%), violence was repeated

The abused women who were hosted in the Shelter reported that the victimizer was in most cases (42.9%) between 31 and 40 years old, Cypriot (66.7%) and faced alcohol problems (57.1%). For the year 2011, the Shelter hosted 33 abused women and 45 minors.

With regard to the prosecution of the cases of domestic violence, according to the report of the Mapping of the Support Services for Domestic Violence Victims that was carried out by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies in 2010, we arrive at the conclusion that for the largest percentage (50%-60%) of the incidents reported to the Police, no criminal investigation was carried out, whereas for 40%-45% of the incidents for which a complaint was taken to the Court, the criminal proceedings were never completed

The percentage of domestic violence offenders who are convicted is limited to 38%, of which 74% was a financial penalty, 21% detention and 5% surveillance. Out of the 38% of the cases for which criminal proceedings were completed, 34% of the offenders were acquitted (APHVF, 2010).

Another important institution for the collection of information on domestic violence is the Cyprus Police, which operates the Domestic Violence and Child Abuse Office as part of the Criminal Investigation Office. As shown by the statistical data that this particular office maintains, from 2005 to 2011, 6,367 domestic violence incidents were reported. Among these incidents, there are 4,738 cases (69.43%) in which the victim was a woman, 877 cases (12.85%) in which the victim was a child under

18 years old and 1,209 cases (17.72%) in which the victim was a man. The forms of violence that were reported correspond to 4,976 incidents (78.15%) of physical abuse, 1,210 incidents (19%) of psychological abuse and 181 incidents (2.84%) of sexual abuse

The incidents of abuse that have been reported to the Police indicate an alarmingly upward trend. The incidents relate mostly to women from 20 to 47 years of age, from all social classes and educational and professional levels, and particularly immigrants (they submit a complaint about the incident more often than Cypriot women) and the offenders are usually men (Veis, 2007).

In a study conducted in 1999 by the Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family, with the title "Violence in the Cyprus Family" which was published in 2000, it is shown that a percentage of 11% answered that they have been or are being victims of violence and in 53.1% of the cases, the victim was a woman and the main form of violence was, in a descending order, psychological, physical and sexual violence (Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family in [http://www.familyviolence.gov.cy/upload/research/erevna\\_2000.pdf](http://www.familyviolence.gov.cy/upload/research/erevna_2000.pdf)).

At the same time, the Social Welfare Services, through the Service for Families and Children, report that from 1999 to 2010, they handled 11,183 cases of domestic violence, which corresponds to 931 incidents per year, 77 incidents per month and averagely 3 incidents per day (Social Welfare Services of Cyprus in <http://www.familyviolence.gov.cy/upload/20120127/1327678491-24110.pdf>).

At this point, it is important to mention that the statistical data of the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family and the Cyprus Police may include the same cases, as a woman may be addressed to both services, which leads to the duplication of the recording of the incident. However, it is seen that domestic violence is usually against women, follows an upward trend and takes all forms of violence. With regard to the Police, it is shown that the majority of women who end up to the

police stations to report their abuse are the ones who have been physically abused .

### Discussion

The above information shows that there is an upward trend of complaints received from the victims themselves, who identify and report mostly psychological and physical abuse. Within the family, sexual abuse is reported and identified to be the least frequent. Considering the total number of complaints, the number of victims who are hosted in the Shelter is clearly much lower and this may be due to shortage of infrastructure, as well as social prejudice experienced by the victims. However, although most of the victims who report their abuse are Cypriots, the Shelter usually hosts foreign women who are married to Cypriot men. This shows the absence of a supportive environment for foreign women in Cyprus, in comparison to Cypriot women, as well as the prejudices of Cypriot women with regard to society and their social image

The fact that phone calls by women who want to make an abuse complaint usually correspond to repeated violence incidents demonstrates the cycle of abuse, as well as the large period of time during which women are subjected to violence exerted by their husband. At the same time, it shows the women's tolerance towards violence, their hope that the abuser would change and at the same time the potential inefficiency of the support offered by the community services

Additionally, with regard to the abuse complaints, the percentage of complaints about violence, or the aid offered by the competent services is very low, possibly because women are fearful about the increased risk of abuse by their partner, in case they complain about the incident, as well as the recognition of their abuse by the competent people

The information that is presented refutes important myths regarding violence against women. One of the conclusions is that violence is exerted and occurs regardless of one's ethnicity, age and educational level. It is also shown that neither the victims, nor the abusers are necessarily connected with the consumption of alcohol, illegal addictive substances,

psychoactive drugs, psychiatric hospitalisation or gambling, whereas most abusers appear to have extramarital affairs.

Nevertheless, most victims appear to be out of employment, which may highlight financial violence against women, through their deprivation of employment and the impact of violence through the victims' financial dependence on the victimizers.

An important outcome of the statistical data is the fact that most victims are married women, estranged women, or separated women with children. It is therefore shown that abusers have a close relationship with the victim as he can be their partner, ex-partner or husband, while it also shows that women who are victims of violence continue to be abused by the offender even when they decide to stay away from him. Furthermore, violence that women are submitted to by their partners generally appears to have an impact on the whole family, through witnessing and experiencing violent behaviour, given that most women-victims reported that they had children who witnessed their abuse.

However, there are some important factors that contribute in appearance and tolerance of domestic violence.

Women who appear to have low self-esteem face an increased risk to be abused in a marital relationship, as they underestimate and question their capabilities and their success, and appraise themselves according to the abilities attributed through the stereotyped role of their gender which is related to their household and family, such as the role of wife, mother and housewife, disregarding their own professional success (Walker, 1989; Plichta, 2004; Franzway & Lowe, 1978; Banks, 1981).

Another important parameter arises from this variable, and it is related to stereotyped perceptions. The traditional perspective with regard to a household, family and the role of women is a predefined stereotype. Women perceive that the place of a woman is at home, regardless of the importance that a professional career has for them. They end up resigning in order to please their husband (Connell, 1991). On the other hand, women who consider their

professional career to be their right believe that it creates at the same time a conflict point and other difficulties in their relationship with their husband and their family in general. Women who envisage remaining professionally active feel guilty, as their partner provokes the feeling of guilt to them.

At the same time, another stereotyped perception is how women understand the role of their husband at home. They view their husband as the leader – the head of the family – and their actions tend to reaffirm this role, as they try to make their partners feel as such (Johnson, 1996).

Another important variable is the feeling of responsibility for the violent behaviour of their husbands. The sentiment of self-reproach dominates, as they think that the fact of being abused is a consequence of their own actions and behaviour. The consequences of self-reproach lead to remorse and guilt in women whilst trying to adapt their behaviour to the demands of their husband, by denying the fear and anger they are experiencing (Walker, 1993; Mignos, et al., 2002).

At the same time, their effort to mitigate the reactions of their social milieu aims to restrain the negative feelings of their husband, in order to protect themselves against any potential anger outbursts and exacerbation of violence by their husband. Their effort extends to restraining all the factors that might cause the anger of their partner.

Additionally, the experience of women who have been abused in childhood is another contributing factor. Women who have been victims or witnesses of the abuse of their mother by their father are faced with an increased risk to become tolerant towards abuse by their husbands as adults, and therefore be revictimised (Petersen, 1980).

Their inability to react and change their attitude and behaviour is described as learned helplessness, i.e. a condition in which a person does not attempt to escape from a painful or harmful situation, as a previous similar situation has taught them that escape is impossible. Women feel disappointed, sad and weak, unable to overcome the difficulties of their everyday

life. Their reaction is gradually limited, which leads them to passivity.

The theory of learned helplessness also explains how a person can lose the ability to predefine whether their physical reactions will protect them, when experiencing unavoidable pain under unplanned and volatile conditions, and how this person adopts a passive attitude. The process of learned helplessness leads to a problematic situation, as it has an impact on the abused woman's thinking, feelings and behaviour. People who suffer from learned helplessness – in this specific case, abused women – limit the number of their reactions to those most likely to deliver successful results (Yllö, 1993).

Many of these women, who act according to these characteristics, end up to intense reactions due to built-up stress. These reactions are mostly related to psychosomatic symptoms and self-destructive behaviour. To deal with their abuse, they resort to the consumption of psychoactive drugs, alcohol, drug substances, whereas in some cases, women even make suicide attempts (Stark et al., 1979). Another important element is the fact that abused women feel helpless and that no one can help them solve their problems, but themselves.

As shown by the abovementioned information, the internalisation of the socio-cultural and political myths with regard to the role of the two genders, as well as the impact of abuse on women-victims are directly related to the behaviour and attitude of women towards their abuse (Wileman & Wileman, 1995).

With a thorough investigation of the data, we arrive at the conclusion that there is a significant lack of research data. The comparison of findings does not allow for a clear definition of the magnitude, gravity and consequences of the problem in Cyprus. However, despite the limited amount of research data on violence against women, the gravity and magnitude of the problem is much greater and more acute than what the existing data show, as a large number of abused women do not submit a complaint about their abuse.

On the other hand, the majority of studies that are presented in Cyprus are related to the

presentation of research data from other countries, as retrospective studies on population groups or violence victims. This kind of presentation raises some ethical issues, as this information is related to societies that are substantially different from the Cyprus society and the south-eastern European and Mediterranean societies, in terms of social structures, traditions, cultural characteristics and family roles. This is true even though in general those societies are also affected by the phenomenon of women abuse in a similar way.

Another difficulty that arises is related to the interpretation of the results, taking into account that the sample of the studies is very limited and specific, as a larger sample would be difficult to obtain (Clancy et al., 2000).

With regard to the studies on domestic violence victims, it must be said that they have contributed in a decisive way to the clarification of the various characteristics of the conditions under which a violent behaviour is expressed, or the way it is defined. However, they are not completely capable of shedding light on the exact conditions in which this behaviour is expressed. This is due to the fact that the population of the victims who are declared as such by the services often differ from the general population of abused women who are subject to different forms of violence. This dimension, which corresponds to the relevant deviation between the apparent and the actual frequency of the abuse of women, varies according to the specific form of violence under examination. The hypothesis that abused women who report their abuse differ to a certain extent from abused women in terms of a series of factors has often led the international scientific community to various controversies which are based on ideological, moral and scientific assumptions (Dallam et al., 2001; Ondersma et al., 2001; Rind et al., 2001).

Therefore, through these findings, it is evident that there is a necessity for the recording, investigation and collection of primary data by epidemiological and social studies in the field. Such actions will help expose the magnitude of the problem of domestic violence against women, the evaluation of the special

characteristics of the victims and the abusers, the design of the appropriate services, the relevant decisions and the preparation of policies to prevent and address the problem, and the establishment of processes for functional interventions (Maynard & Chalmers, 1997; Drummond, 1994).

### Conclusions

It is difficult to describe the psychological, social and cultural profile of abused women, as there are no data in the literature or the studies that have been carried out, which proves that specific attributes of one's personality or the socio-cultural characteristics of women increase their possibility to become victims of abuse by their partner. At the same time, studies that have been carried out on abused women are limited to specific small samples that are contested, both in terms of the sampling selection method, as well as the control means that are used (Ferraro & Johnson, 1983).

For the better understanding of those factors that increase the likelihood of women to be victimised in an abusive relationship, we have to take into consideration some specific variables, and not elements that relate to the personality of women. These variables relate to the dynamic of the two genders. They are also based on the dependence of women on their husbands, the fear provoked by their husband, their own expectation that the abusive husband will change his behaviour, the feeling of embarrassment that they have because of the abuse they are submitted to, as well as the disclosure of the abuse and their efforts to avoid any potential negative reaction by their husband (Walker, 1989).

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