

The role of social services in the reintegration of domestic violence victims

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Abstract

Violence manifested in the family environment is one of the major problems of Romanian society. Over time, significant steps have been taken in terms of social services provided to victims of domestic violence, but there are still many impediments to their proper functioning, such as the lack of response from civil society, which has placed domestic violence strictly inside the family, without considering the devastating effects of this phenomenon. The social-applicative investigation carried out on this topic includes a complex analysis regarding the role of social services in the reintegration of domestic violence victims. The quantitative research consisted in applying a questionnaire to a number of 100 women from Caraş - Severin County. Providing social services to abused women in the family environment is essential, because the functions they perform simplify the intervention process and facilitate the social reintegration of the victims of this phenomenon.

Keywords: *Social reintegration; domestic violence; family; social services; welfare intervention; repercussions.*

1. Introduction

Domestic violence is a phenomenon with a poignant history dating back to the Roman Empire, but it has really become a social issue in recent decades, as the number of victims of domestic violence has alarmingly increased, and this has generated increased attention from the part of the authorities, the media and the social service providers. Intra-family violence not only affects the direct victims, but also has repercussions on society as a whole. In order for persons to develop harmoniously from a social, psychological and emotional point of view, they need a favourable environment, both in the society in which they carry out his activity and within the family. (Bogeanu 2013: p.221 in Rujoiu (coord.)). Specialists now devote more time to the study of this phenomenon to lay the groundwork for intervention strategies and protection systems meant to support of domestic violence victims (according to Edleson 2000). In order for the involvement of specialists to demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness, skills and competences (general but also specific), appropriate policies and procedures, appropriate legislation and supervisory systems are needed.

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2. The concept of domestic violence

Domestic violence is a very complex phenomenon that has developed in the context of a society generating dissatisfaction, frustrations that produce all the premises for the occurrence of violent behaviours. Even though domestic violence has always existed, its recognition as a social problem took place five decades ago. The late awareness as a social problem of domestic violence was due to the fact that, at least in the Western world, the family was perceived as a "sanctuary" detached from the constraints of public space, as a private space with a "taboo" character, in which no outside intervention is allowed. In the former socialist countries, the family was the "basic cell of society", and for this reason it had to bear all the consequences of an authoritarian regime, in which any social institution had to be "integrated" into the public space and subject to external demands. On the other hand, under the communist regime, domestic violence was not officially recognized as a social problem (Rădulescu 2011: p.16).

The specialists in sociology define the social problem as a condition harmful for society, which causes concern to the population and captures public attention, causing controversy and concerns that may ultimately lead to collective action. Starting from this idea, any social problem has two fundamental elements:

- **an objective condition**, which consists of the real, measurable content of the issue in question, and which is more or less highlighted in official statistics;
- **a subjective condition**, consisting of the legitimate concerns that the issue in question raises for a significant number of people.

As domestic violence is characterized by these two elements, it remains a major problem of contemporary society both because the appropriate solutions have not been identified and because there is no concordance between the opinions of specialists and the public on the definition of domestic violence as such (Hogaş 2010: p.39).

"Violence in the couple relationship means those attitudes and behaviors with a hetero-aggressive character that occur between family members, in the context of a severe conflict climate that indicates a significant deterioration of family functionality" (Mitrofan 1989: p.90).

According to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian language, "the term violence is associated with the following actions: to force, to coerce, to constrain.

The same dictionary defines the violent person as follows: a person characterized by impulsivity, uncontrollability, aggression and brutality ". The heterosexual couple (either in a de facto relationship or as married couple) from the "structural and functional viewpoint, is the manner in which two persons of opposite genders inter-shape them creatively, developing and complementing each other, through interaction and fusion that are at the same time biological, psychological and social" (Mitrofan 1989: p.60).

"Violence means the rational, deliberate use of physical force, in order to obtain something or to determine the victim to commit a deed. From a legal perspective, violence involves "harming a person's integrity" (Rădulescu 2010: p.437).

3. The consequences of domestic violence, their role in the victim's decision to end the abusive relationship

Domestic violence has many negative, serious, both long-term and short-term effects, direct (on the victim) and indirect (on the persons who witness those acts of violence) (Institutul Național de Sănătate Publică 2015).

From the of physical health perspective, victims of domestic violence can suffer minor body injuries, but in some cases the abuse can even lead to death. The World Health Organization conducted a study in 2005 that showed that people who have been victims of physical and sexual violence at any time after the age of 15 are more prone to poor health, chronic pain, memory loss and difficulties in carrying out daily activities (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005 according to WHO 2012). Also, women who are sexually abused in a relationship can experience gynecological problems such as bleeding, infections, ruptured vagina, ulcers, chronic pelvic pain (apud OMS 2012). One of the worst consequences of sexual abuse is an unwanted pregnancy. In an abusive relationship, the risks of an unwanted pregnancy are very high, because most of the time the aggressor rejects the idea of the use of a condom or of birth control pills. Women who face such situations may resort to reckless gestures such as provoking an abortion by administering a prohibited medication during pregnancy or appealing to persons without medical qualifications for this purpose. In the case of women who take the pregnancy to term, but still do not want their child, there is a risk of their failure to love their child, because the child reminds them of the abuses suffered in the relationship. In such conditions, the whole life of the child suffers, and once they reach maturity, they perceive the domestic violence as a normality and apply them in their own family (Bogeanu 2013 in Rujoiu).

As regards the mental health of domestic violence victims, it can suffer because we witness the occurrence of stress disorders, emotional disorders, cognitive problems including dissociation, memory loss, panic attacks, fear, shame, low self-esteem, guilt and suicidal tendencies (WHO 2012; Popa 2009; Rujoiu and Rujoiu 2010; Sînzianu 2016; Walker 1988). All these effects are part of the post-traumatic stress syndrome and are found in most victims of domestic violence, characterized by the fact that it occurs voluntarily and causes suffering (Elklit and Christiansen 2010). It has been observed that people who show symptoms of post-traumatic stress have an increased risk of morbidity and mortality, an increased prevalence of cardiac, respiratory and gastrointestinal disorders (according to Woods 2005).

The psychological effects of domestic violence influence the victim's decision to end the abusive relation. She develops a self-defense mechanism and acquires a behavior that helps her survive in the relationship with the aggressor. The victim focuses her attention on actions that please the abusive partner to prevent new episodes of violence. When the partner manifests a violent behavior dominated by insults and dissatisfaction, the victim tends to blame herself, looking for excuses for the abuser and ending up devaluing herself and considering that she deserves to be abused (Oprea 2013: p.198 in Rujoiu).

4. The role of social services in the context of the reintegration of domestic violence victims

The specialized intervention in the case of domestic violence is on the one hand very delicate, given the nature of the problem, and on the other hand it is extremely complex as the consequences of this phenomenon are multiple, affecting the victim at different levels of her life. Specialists working with victims of domestic violence need to know and understand the importance of teamwork and collaboration with a number of institutions and courts designed to address the issue from a holistic perspective. It is obvious that victims of domestic violence can have a lot of needs such as the need to have a source of income, the need for housing, and if there are children, the need for child education and protection (Cojocaru and Cojocaru 2008: p.28).

From a legislative perspective, social services are defined as "the complex set of measures and actions taken to meet social needs of individuals, families or groups, in order to prevent and overcome situations of difficulty, vulnerability or dependence and to preserve autonomy and protection of the individual, for the elimination of marginalization and social exclusion, meant to the promotion of social inclusion in order to increase life quality " (Ordinance no. 86 of 19 August 2004 amending and supplementing Government Ordinance No. 68/2003 on social services).

"Support services are support networks that have the role of supporting victims of domestic violence during the recovery / rehabilitation process. They aim at a long-term intervention and represent a component of social services" (Rujoiu 2010: p.260 in Buzducea). Support services for domestic violence victims can perform several functions such as an emotional function, a cognitive or informational function and a material, instrumental support function. The emotional function is the most important form of social support, as it provides people who face problematic situations with psychological stability and self-esteem, aiming at activities based on empathic communication, assistance through psychological and care counselling, which is achieved by demonstrating confidence and unconditional support.

Social services are particularly important for the reintegration of victims subjected to domestic violence. Social service providers can assist victims in finding a job, if after the separation from the aggressors they are left without financial support, the members of the multidisciplinary team, social workers, psychologists can provide them with information about local vacancies, teach them how to write a CV or a letter of intent and the job-related rules to follow (Manea 2007/2008: p. 60). Also, within the institutions providing social services, victims of domestic violence can find support in discovering internal resources and acquire new skills to help them overcome thorny situations and social reintegration through their own efforts (Oprea 2013: p.198 in Rujoiu).

5. The opinion of the population on the role of social services in the reintegration of victims of domestic violence.

Quantitative research

5.1 Research presentation

The purpose of quantitative research is to identify the perception of the population regarding the role of social services in the reintegration of domestic violence victims.

In the research process, an individual survey was applied to a group of 100 women from the Reșița Municipality aged between 28 and 60 years. The data collection method used to prove the hypotheses was the individual survey, and the tool used was the questionnaire.

The purpose of the approach contains objectives, including quantifiable criteria related to the success of the research, and its limits indicate what is included and excluded from the project. The operationalization of the objectives proposed in the results is achieved by the people from the target group and represents what is done to reach the established goal and objectives.

The operationalization of the objectives in the results helps to prevent the risks and threats that appear during the research and to determine the analysis indicators.

5.2 Applied research objectives

The objectives aim at sizing the social perception regarding the role of social services in the reintegration of victims of domestic violence, increasing their social cohesion by activating a new social support network; analysing the causes, which determine the abused women not to seek the help of a specialist, the problems being complex, conditioned by factors generating consequences (in the family, society, community); detecting the interference of internal, external, psychological, social or environmental factors, which determine the victims of domestic violence to remain in a relationship with the abusive man.

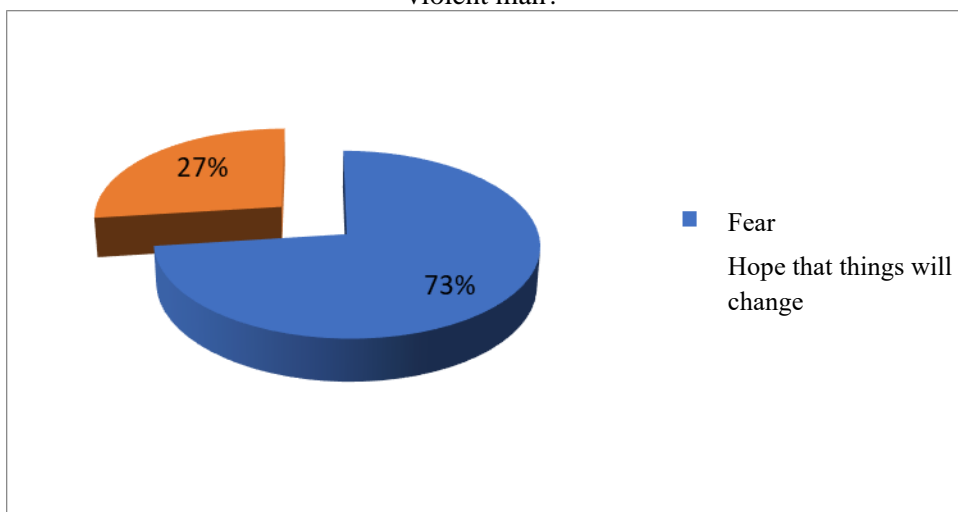
5.3 Data analysis and interpretation

The individual survey was conducted using the sociological questionnaire applied to a number of 100 women subjected to domestic violence in Caras-Severin County.

- The reasons that lead women to remain in the abusive relationship;
- Opinion of respondents on the role of social services in the social reintegration of domestic violence victims;
- The importance of specialists' intervention.

Fig. no. 1 Complacency in the abusive relation

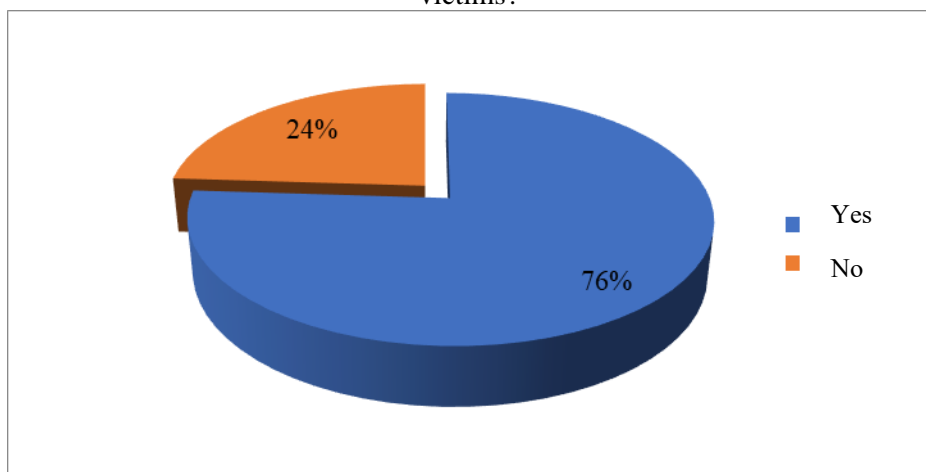
1. What are the main reasons why many women do not end a relationship with a violent man?



To this question, 73% of respondents answered that fear is what makes most women not to end their relationship with a violent partner, and 27% said that the hope that things will change for the better causes them to stay with the violent man, many of them have children and for their sake they preserve the hope that the episodes of violence will disappear.

Fig. no. 2 The usefulness of social services

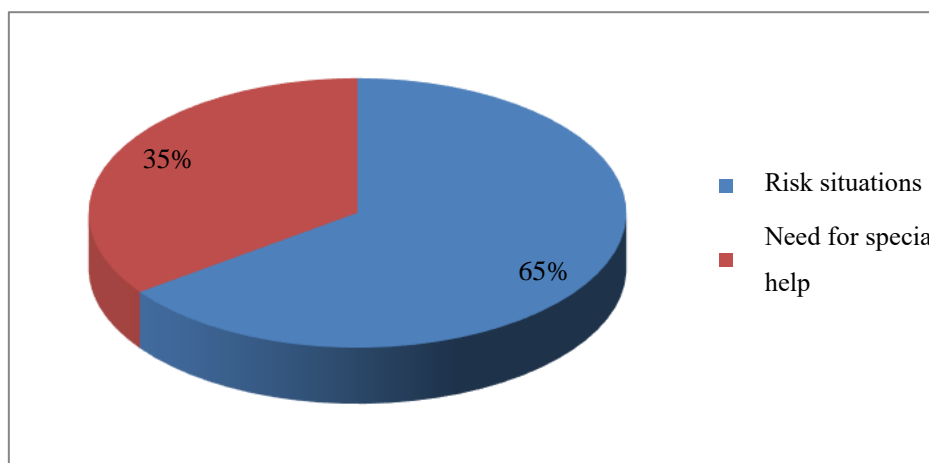
2. Do social services contribute to the social reintegration of domestic violence victims?



76% of respondents chose Yes because they consider that social services contribute to the reintegration of victims of intra-family violence, and 24% of subjects chose No because they do not consider that social services are useful to facilitate the social reintegration of the people abused within their family.

Figure no. 3. Intervention of specialists

3. Is the intervention of specialists important for the social reintegration of domestic violence victims?



When asked this question, 65% of the women surveyed consider the intervention of specialists to be important for the social reintegration of the people abused in the family environment, and 35% consider that the intervention of specialists is not necessary.

The diversity of family, educational, economic factors and the pressure of the entourage leave their mark on the behaviour of women who are subjected to domestic

violence, these factors influencing their social behavior. Domestic violence in Caraș-Severin is not so closely linked to economic deficits, lack of work alternatives for beneficiaries or poverty. In some cases, the precarious material and financial situation and the climate lead to psychological imbalances, generating major abuses. Despite the solutions offered by local specialized services, women subjected to domestic violence refuse this help out of fear of their partners or because they do not trust them.

6. Conclusions

The violence manifested in the family environment has traumatic effects on the victims of this phenomenon. In everyday life, the woman plays an important role in the aggression of her life partner, due to her physical inferiority and her psycho-behavioral characteristics. Fear and helplessness are the feelings that dominate the women victims, and the psychological abuse they are constantly subjected to has devastating consequences on self-esteem, emotional balance and they are severely affected. Most of the time, women choose to remain in the abusive relationship in the hope that their life partner will change, for the sake of the children, for the sake of the years spent together, but unfortunately in most cases the change never occurs, the episodes of aggression become more and more frequent, and their effects are more and more profound.

In order to have the courage to end the relationship with the aggressive man and to get socially reintegrated, the victims of domestic violence need specialized help, they need the social services to come with solutions to their problems.

The role of social services in domestic violence is essential, as the functions they perform simplify the intervention process and help resolve cases. Social services have the role of intervening when a person is facing a problematic situation and does not have the necessary resources to overcome it alone. The multidisciplinary team intervenes to provide people in difficulty with specialized support and all the information they need about the problems they are facing.

The intervention of a multidisciplinary team, made of a social worker, a psychologist and a social mediator is essential, because with their help abused women can understand the seriousness of the situation and the repercussions of violence, both on themselves and on their children. In the case of women, violence has the following effects: social isolation, apathy, depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts. The abused children who witness the scenes of violence between parents have problems integrating into the school environment, communication problems, isolation, often adopting elements from their parents' behaviour.

Therefore, the phenomenon of domestic violence is generated by a multitude of factors, which can be financial, social, psychological or emotional. In order to prevent this phenomenon, the intervention of the authorities is also needed, as they have to pass effective laws meant to protect both women and their families.

In order to prevent and overcome the "isolation" of women subjected to domestic violence, various measures must be taken: change of attitude vis-à-vis the roles and stereotypes that make violence against women accepted, creation of specialized support services, etc.

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