DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES ON HEALTH

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Domestic violence can be defined as a threat or production of a physical injury, in the past or in the present, of a couple living together. Violence in family is at the origin of numerous physical and mental illness, frequent consultations, hospitalizations and a temporary inability to work, and a high consumption of medicines and other health services [8].

The family, the place where the law is less involved and where we find the highest frequency of violence directed against more vulnerable human beings, “more fragile physically and mentally” whether this violence is directed against women, children, the elderly or men. There are four types of violence against women: emotional, physical, sexual and social [12].

1. Emotional violence: it is the most widely encountered and is found as a component of all forms of domestic violence. Although precede and accompany other forms of abuse, it can occur in isolated words and language, threats, intimidation.

2. Physical violence: the harm or physical painful contact targeting the victim or victim's loved ones: children, parents, brothers, sisters, and physical intimidation. Violence starts with physical gestures and strikes targeting the victim and can lead to murder.

3. Sexual Violence: degrading begins with comments about woman and the continuing attacks and other unpleasant abuse from the victim during or in connection with the sexual act. Rape is a form of violence which often bear a woman suffering in silence, paying tribute to social norms they believe intimate relations are primarily a right of man, a territory where he is master to decide.

4. Social violence: a condition that is worsening the situation of a woman victim. It includes rigid sexual role expectations outlined the social side of man and woman which limits the resources in the community to help the woman victim or even to condemn it for the violence which they live. Social violence is also a barrier in woman’s valorisation outside the family and a setting facilitator for her aggression in private and intimate life [2].

Manifestation and consequences of domestic violence

Treating with violence of the partner and violent relations within the family are learned behaviours. If no steps to stop domestic violence, from one event to another, the severity of aggression is emphasized. With increased risk, decreases the ability of victims to protect themselves.

Consequences of domestic violence on family homeostasis

Consequences of domestic violence does not only reflect on the victim but also targeted the whole family, especially children, and are felt as a loss and suffering of the society in general. As a victim of partner violence, woman suffers on the physical, mental and reproductive health [4] (Table 1).

Consequences on physical health are: destructive behaviour of health (smoking, unprotected sex), consumption of alcohol or drugs, disorders of intestinal irritation, asthma, headaches and migraine, body injury, partial or permanent disability, death.

Consequences on mental health are: depression, fear, anxiety, low self-respect, sexual dysfunction, obsessive-compulsive disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide.

Consequences on reproductive health are: unwanted pregnancies, gynaecological problems, premature births, low birth weight, pelvic inflammatory diseases, pelvic chronic pain, maternal mortality and morbidity.

Multiple studies have put into evidence, on all continents, the various forms of physical trauma suffered by women and caused by domestic violence. World Report (WHO) on violence and health (2002) revealed thus in different countries all of these complex consequences on women’s health [8].

The deaths are caused by AIDS mortality, maternal mortality, homicide [13], suicide.
The effects of violence against woman are both immediate and lasting. An investigation carried out on a population of about 400 Swedish adults women showed that health problems were 11 times more frequent in a group of women who suffered violence during their childhood than in the control group, and 7 times more common in a group of women who have suffered violence in adolescence, compared with the control group [7].

Also, in some studies in the United States, E.M. Valera and H. Berenbaum studied 99 women beaten by their partners and have concluded that more than three quarters of them have suffered at least one brain lesion caused by a partner and about half of them suffered from multiple brain lesions [15].

Sexual relations by force (with penetration) may bring about various gynaecological complications, including bleeding and vaginal infections, fibromatosis, lower libido, genital irritation, painful sex, pelvic chronic pain, chronic urinary infections (Table 2).

HIV/SIDA
The main forms of serious diseases as consequences of domestic violence are represented by sexually transmitted diseases.

This contamination by human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is one of the most serious, but there are no research on the link between rape and transmission of this virus. Level of transmission of HIV following a single unprotected and non-violent sexual intercourse was estimated at approximately 0.03% and 0.56% (what means 3-56 cases of sero-conversions to 10000 sexual intercourse). It is also clear that the risk of contamination is higher for women in countries where HIV prevalence and sexual violence levels are high [1].

Violence between partners is a factor which increase the transmission of human immunodeficiency virus HIV (after correction for variables related to the behaviour of certain high-risk women, behaviour that, itself, may result from male violence). For example, in a recent study conducted on a number of 1400 women who came in for medical exams in the prenatal 4 dispensaries of Soweto (South Africa) sexuality are represented by sexually transmitted diseases.

Women victims of sexual violence (rape) are vulnerable to bacterial infections (syphilis, gonorrhoea, chlamydia infections), viral infections (hepatitis B virus, herpes simplex-genital herpes, papilloma virus) and infections caused by protozoa (unicellular organisms - trichomonas). There are not rare the problems due scabies.

Unwanted pregnancies
Unwanted pregnancy is a consequence of sexual violence but also a factor to be taken into account in studies aimed to domestic violence awareness.

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Unwanted pregnancies
Unwanted pregnancy is a consequence of sexual violence but also a factor to be taken into account in studies aimed to domestic violence awareness.
The frequency of births caused by rape is difficult to assess from multiple reasons, but mainly, because the majority of rapes, and particularly those within the family are not declared. Real figures are certainly higher than number of reported rapes. There are few data available for that purpose. Available data shows that the frequency of complications and deaths is higher in illegal abortions in comparison with legal abortions carried out in a medical centre.

Studies conducted in the United States showed that about 11% of pregnant women have been victims of physical violence [5]. By comparison with the control group (women with comparable characteristics but not victims of violence) it was found that the % of women who said they were victims of violence had higher level in caesarean births and hospitalizations due to complications of birth (especially, kidney infections, triggering premature contractions, injuries due to falls or blows abdominal).

A summary of several studies on violence against pregnant women in developing countries, concluded that the prevalence of such violence vary between 4% and 29%. Among the main risk factors were identified: low income, low education of both partners and the fact that the birth has not been scheduled. Also, one of the main consequences of this type of violence was child’s low birth weight.

Consequences of violence on mental health
Violence has the effect of destroying the sense of personal security of the woman. In addition, sexual violence adds an attack to intimacy which will have consequences at subconscious/unconscious level very deeply.

Psychological and behavioural consequences are multiple and can be seen, inter alia, by: restlessness, fear, depression, sense of shame, guilt, sleep and eating disorders, low/lack of personal esteem, post-traumatic stress disorder, self-mutilation, excessive alcohol, drugs consumption, suicidal thoughts, sexual risk behaviours.

Post-traumatic stress reactions
Women and men who have suffered violence that put their lives in danger or sexual aggression may have different reactions, meaning a post-traumatic stress reaction [3]. Beside the acute stress reaction, which is the most commonly remarked to victims of such traumatic events, caused by duration and severity, the post-traumatic stress syndrome is also encountered. Even if there was some dispute regarding this syndrome, it corresponds to a set of reactions studied violence on victims and, in particular on victims of a rape.

Woman beaten Syndrome
Definition of this syndrome has been made in recent years by studying the phenomenon of violence in the vision of trauma theory. Syndrome is the worst of marital aggression and is defined as a deliberate harm, arising from a partner and demonstrated clinically.

According to police’s statistics in different countries, it has a frequency of 75%.

Woman beaten syndrome is a complex physical and psychosocial problems arising from the relationship with a partner with violent behaviour in relation with inappropriate interventions and institutional neglect.

Post-traumatic stress syndrome
Post-traumatic stress syndrome (trauma syndrome) was first defined in 1980 with respect to survivors of catastrophic situations: the survivors of war, in concentration camps, natural disasters, rape (3.14).

Victims of domestic violence suffer from this syndrome. Herman (1992) identified three major characteristics of this syndrome:
- chronic state of alert;
- intrusion of previous dramatic experience in the present time;
- psychic “constriction” status in which person has a detached calm amid the events that take place continues to record in memory but are disconnected from their normal meaning and significance.
Numerous events in the two syndromes are similar, and the function that satisfies the process of adapting the individual is the same.

WHO (World Health Organization) - International Classification of mental disorders and behavioural disorders, *Clinical descriptions and guidelines for diagnosis* - and APA (American Psychiatry Association) have summarized all the elements that allows diagnosis of post-traumatic stress syndrome (Table no. 3).

### Disability

Physical violence against women can cause various physical disabilities. Sexual violence, particularly rape may have social consequences, so, due to vesical or rectal fistulas, the victim may submit incontinence, which will lead to her social isolation and exclusion from collectivity.

Also, psychological problems caused by violence can constitute a disability, preventing the woman to have a normal behaviour.

### Death

The deaths are caused by AIDS mortality, maternal mortality, homicides, suicide. Risk of being killed is greater among women than men victims of domestic violence.

In some countries such as South Africa, women are threatened with death in the name of cultural practices, and in countries such as Turkey, Pakistan and other Arab countries, women in all age groups are killed for reasons related to concept of "honour".

### Repercussions on the health of children of victimised women

When the violence is normality in a family, children may be victims themselves and to suffer a direct physical, psychological and sexual violence. However, they suffer from violence against their mother.

Children which assist to the brutal behaviour of their parents suffer more frequently from restlessness, depressions, lack of self respect, the nightmares, poor school results and other issues such as behavioural disorders, permanent aggression compared with children not presenting such family problems [10,11].

Frequently, the victim becomes aggressor and thus, children become victims of violence in their assailant [9]. It is shown that a significant proportion of adults who commit acts of sexual violence were themselves exposed to such acts or other forms of violence during their childhood.

### Conclusions

Consequences of violence are deep and can influence more than health status and individual well, namely the "health" of the entire community. A woman who lives in a violent relationship loses confidence in itself and in its vices.

The violence is even more serious, the impact on physical and mental health is more profound.

### References


### Table nr. 3. Post-traumatic stress syndrome. WHO diagnostic criteria

- The person has experienced a traumatic event, a particular dangerous situation or a disaster.
- Person continues to recall or "live again" this event.
- A person seeking to avoid situations that are similar or related event.
- A person suffering from one or both of the following disorders:
  1. Inability to remember certain important aspects of the traumatic event.
  2. Persistence of no present symptoms before the event (at least two): sleep disorders, insomnia, sleep difficulty, irritability, violent/blustering crises, problems of concentration, hyper vigilance, sudden jerk reflex exaggerated.
- Criteria B, C and D occur in the first 6 months after the traumatic event or the end of stress period.