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TÍTULO: El abuso a personas mayores en el entorno familiar. Implicaciones para la educación y la práctica.

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RESUMEN: El objetivo principal del estudio fue obtener conocimiento sobre la escala y las expresiones de las víctimas y los delincuentes. El método utilizado es el análisis documental (informes policiales). Los datos obtenidos presentan casos de abuso registrados durante un año calendario. Los resultados muestran que la violencia doméstica contra personas mayores constituye el 15% de los casos denunciados, en su mayoría abuso emocional, físico y económico. Sobre la base de los datos recopilados, se hicieron las características de víctimas y delincuentes. La prevención del maltrato a personas mayores se basa principalmente en cambiar las actitudes sociales y superar los estereotipos, tarea a largo plazo que debe llevarse a cabo educando a toda la sociedad, a partir de la generación más joven.

PALABRAS CLAVES: maltrato a personas mayores, violencia doméstica, violencia familiar.

TITLE: Elder Abuse in the Family Environment. Implications for Education and Practice.

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ABSTRACT: The main objective of the study was to obtain knowledge about the scale and expressions of victims and offenders. The method used is document analysis (police reports). The obtained data presents cases of abuse recorded during one calendar year. The results show that domestic violence against older people constituted 15% of all the reported cases, mostly emotional, physical and economic abuse. Based on collected data, the characteristics of victims and offenders were made. The prevention of elder abuse is based largely on changing the social attitudes and overcoming the stereotypes. This is a long-term task which should be carried out by educating the whole society, starting from the youngest generation.

KEY WORDS: elder abuse, domestic violence, family violence.

INTRODUCTION.

Elder abuse becomes even more relevant as the society ages. Addressing the problem of abuse against older people by the leading world organizations (World Health Organization, United Nations, European Commission, 2007) undoubtedly proves this is a serious social issue recognized and faced globally.

Violation of the rights of older people in the world is emphasized in the report *State of the World's Older People* (2002) published by the HelpAge *International*. It implies that seniors live in poverty, face social exclusion and are deprived of their rights. International research (conducted in 32 countries) into the life situation of the elderly show that people aged 60+ have more restricted access to education and health care and are victims of different types of abuse. Among the latter, family violence occurs frequently.

According to the World Health Organization (2011), every year at least 4 million seniors in Europe become victims of physical abuse, 29 billion experience emotional abuse and 2.5 thousand die as the consequence of violence. Older people are beaten, kicked, injured or locked out. The most vulnerable

are people with disabilities, individuals suffering from Alzheimer and dementia, and seniors in poor families. As noticed by Małgorzata Halicka: "elder abuse is a unique problem due to the health, economic, family and social circumstances present in this phase of life" (Halicka at al., 2010, p.103). Victims may experience more than one type of abuse at the same time. The data recalled are terrifying and clearly show that protection of human rights, protection against violence in particular, is the educational and social challenge worldwide. Family violence, including elder abuse, has serious, long lasting consequences, not only for the abused individual but for the whole family and the society.

DEVELOPMENT.

Theoretical framework.

It is difficult to explain the complex phenomenon of family violence with a single theory, especially in reference to domestic violence against seniors. This issue is a relatively new to scholarly research and has been explained using the reversed models explaining children abuse. The subject matter literature presents different approaches which have evolved during the years, pointing out to some factors and interactions between them.

To explain the phenomenon of elder abuse in this paper, I use the theoretical model designed by Burnight and Mosqueda (2011). Before this model was developed, the authors reviewed the theoretical approaches to the etiology of the phenomenon (resources from the years 1995-2009), analyzed the empirical data and interviews with experts dealing professionally with the issue of family violence.

The presented model groups the theoretical stands into four categories:

Intrapersonal theories.

Social learning by Bandura (1978) assumes that violence is a learned behavior, passed on between generations. Intergenerational transmission is the process where values, attitudes and behavioral patterns are passed on from one generation to another and internalized. The research conducted

worldwide indicate that conflict resolution methods are transmitted through generations (Baptist 2012, p.57; Kwong at al., 2003). They show that 4 out of 5 abusers were victims of or/and witnessed violence used by their fathers on mothers (Buchanan,1996). Individual story of abuse connected with the generational transmission results in copying the patterns of behavior in adult life, both towards own children and old parents (Lawson, 2015). We do not know if using violence is the result of negative mental consequences1 of abuse or if it is socially learned behavior.

Interpersonal theories.

Interpersonal theories view violence as a dysfunction of interactions between the victim and the abuser. When we explore elder abuse in this perspective, we point out to the theories of social exchange, caregiver stress and dyadic discord.

In the Social Exchange theory, every interaction in terms of interpersonal relations is a transaction, an exchange of material and intangible goods. Family members exchange emotions, services and different resources on daily basis. When a conflict arises, they may punish one another by denying this exchange. As long as the profit and loss account satisfies all members, the family functions without greater disruptions (Sztompka, 2004). When some party feels ill-treated, there is the probability of using violence to control the situation (Browne, Herbert, 1997). In the light of the exchange theory, violence gives the abuser the sense of control over the victim. Offenders use violence as the tool to achieve their personal goals (benefits).

The Caregiver Stress theory is considered quite controversial as it shifts the blame for abuse onto the victim, thus legitimizes the abuser. This theory focuses on the difficulties connected with providing care to an older person who is not able to function on their own and therefore is completely dependent on the caregiver. The latter loses control over their own lives, not being able to manage it as it is totally submitted to the growing needs of the person cared for. Such state of constant alert brings frustration and lack of hope the situation would change. This "stalemate" may be subjective or objective. In both cases, there is the danger of abuse from the caregiver¹.

According to the Dyadic Discord theory, abusive behaviors are the consequence of arguments and conflicts in the caregiver-senior relationship. The seniors blame the caregivers for their worsening health condition which they see as the result of insufficient care (Szukalski, 2008), and the relationship can be characterized by mutual negative attitude. If such "negative cooperation" with the cared for person is long-term, it may lead to the erosion of the relationship in the senior-caregiver dyad. The deficit of support for the elderly (mainly family members) in the light of their demanding attitude often leads to accumulation of frustration on both sides of the dyad and explosion of negative emotions. Aggressive attitude of the elderly often causes fear and frustration in the caregiver who can also become aggressive and a vicious circle appears, driving the behaviors of both parties.

Sociocultural theories.

Power and Control theory is rooted in social factors interpersonal factors, with particular focus on power attributed to gender and the age criterion.

In the first case, the cause of domestic violence is the power assigned to men in the family. Many of them use violence to exercise and maintain full control. "Abuse results not from anger but from the belief system according to which men think they have the right to dominate and control (Mullender, 1996, p.34).

As for the age criterion, there is a difference between older and younger adults. This was pointed out, at the end of the 1960s, by Robert Butler who introduced the term ageism as discrimination due to age and various biases and stereotypes associated with it. In the power and control theory, abusers

¹ The intraindividual theories also assume that abusers and their pathologic personality are responsible for the abuse, and that such behaviors originate from personality disorders and mental diseases caused also by traumatic experiences. See more: R. Izdebski, M. de Bárbaro, W. Szaszkiewicz, See. more: R. Izdebski, M. de Bárbaro, W. Szaszkiewicz, Family violence. Physical and sexual abuse against children and adolescents. IN. Psychiatry of children and adolescents edited by I. Namysłowska, Warszawa 2007.

often claim they are entitled to mistreat and/or neglect older adults and their beliefs are mainly grounded on ageism (Burnight & Mosqueda, 2011; Martínez-Alcalá et al, 2018). According to this approach, cases of elder abuse are related to the traits and thinking patterns of abusers.

Multisystemic theories.

In the group of multisystemic theories, the phenomenon of elder abuse is explained using the ecological theory and the socio-cultural context.

The Ecological theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) assumes that the environment creates diverse systems of factors (less and more familiar to an individual) which

interact with one another and influence the person's behavior, thus increasing the risk of violence. The environmental components correspond to the factors at microsystem, ecosystem and macrosystem level.

The sociocultural context considers the situation of both, victim and abuser, including the network of support given by the closest environment and individual factors (for the senior and the abuser) which affect the state of imbalance and the type of relationship, which in turn affects the strength and dynamic of the exchange. Thus, based on this model, we should consider the "risk factors of experiencing such situation, as well as relationships between the senior and the caregivers" (Halicka & Halicki 2010, p.29).

Methodological assumptions.

The object of my research was elder abuse in family environment. The main objective was to obtain knowledge about the scale and expressions of the phenomenon and socio-demographic characteristics of the victims and offenders.

The following research questions were formulated:

1. What is the revealed scale of elder abuse?

2. With what types and forms of behaviors was the abuse expressed?

3. What are the characteristics of victim and abuser, and what is the type of family relations?

The method used was document analysis. Police records, the so-called Blue Cards created during a whole calendar year were analyzed. Out of all the reported cases only those where victims were at least 60 years old were selected. The age criterion — 60 years minimum, was adopted after the WHO. The Blue Card procedure has been conducted in Poland since 1998 by Police officers² in cases of domestic violence interventions. The document is only filled when the intervening officer decides the incident is or might be the case of domestic violence (the stronger person used their strength or power to harm others in the family). The intervention takes place because the victim or the witness reported it, and initiation of the Blue Card procedure does not require the consent of the abused person. Once initiated, the procedure ensures providing organized help from the proper institutions, and when the victim refuses to accept it — monitoring the situation in the family by Police officers (Mackowicz, Majerek, 2013; Nakhaee & Nasrabadi, 2019; Kozhabergenova et al, 2018). The area of the research were all police stations in Cracow city and district.

The study involved the analysis of 217 cases of older people who were victims of domestic violence. The data from the Blue Card documents include basic metrics of the violence victims. In order to explore the subject more thoroughly, the sample was divided into three groups. In the first one, the abused seniors, women are the majority (83.8%). Most of them are between 60 and 69 years old (45.1%). One in every three victims is maximum 79 (30.4%) whereas almost every fifth is minimum 80 years old (19.8%). Most of the victims live in the city (54.84%). In most cases, the victims are the

² Since 2004, according to the Act of social assistance, the Blue Card procedure became obligatory for social workers, whereas now, under the updated Act on combating domestic violence, the procedure is implemented by representatives of social assistance, municipal commissions for solving alcohol problems, Police, education and health care sectors. See more: Mackowicz, Majerek (2013), Combating domestic violence...

abuser's parents; the most often they are mothers (47%), almost one third of the victims are wives/partners of the abusers.

The next group (cases with two victims) are 15 people living in villages, most of them men less than 60 years old. In the situations where there were two victims, if the violence was exercised by adult children the other victim was usually the other parent, while with wife/partner abuse the other victim was the child.

The third selected group were abusers, the vast majority of them men (84.7%). Most of them live in the city (74.6%), together with the victims (70.9%). In this group most of the respondents are between 41 and 55 years old (27.6%) and one in five offenders (21.6%) is aged 56-70. The least percentage of abusers were those aged 40 and less (17%) and 70 and more (12.4%). In terms of the degree of relatedness, the majority of the offenders are victim's children. The most often (almost every other case), the abuser was the adult son (47.9%), whereas almost 10% of the offenders were daughters. Almost every third abuser was victim's husband or partner (27.62%). In one in four cases, the abuser was under the influence of alcohol.

The scale of elder abuse.

The analysis of the intervention documents shows that during one calendar year elder abuse constituted 15.3% of the total reported domestic violence cases in Cracow region. This means that almost every sixth senior has suffered harm in the family environment, and we need to remember these are only the revealed data.

The data confirm that elder abuse is not incidental and point to some analogies regardless of the place where the case was reported. During the narrative interviews, the victims emphasized that police intervention and initiation of the Blue Card procedure make abusers stop feeling impune, and helps seniors regain partial sense of security (Mackowicz, 2017; Jabbari et al, 2019). In addition, the conspiracy of silence which usually occurs in such situations, automatically ceases to apply.

Types and forms of elder abuse.

Elder abuse can have very different faces. The most frequent type of the revealed domestic violence towards older people was the **mental violence** (97.2%). In the context of this form of abuse, older people faced insults (as much as 90.1%), humiliation (78.5%), criticizing (77.9%), threats (77.3%) and ridiculing (68.7%).

Physical violence was present in 76% of the reported cases. Many times, seniors were also subjects to many forms of physical violence at the same time — 77.5% experienced beating and pushing, and 66.7% were pushed and slapped in the face. The Blue Cards data indicate that in the domestic violence cases psychological violence very often occurs together with the physical abuse, for example, as much as 92.4% of victims experienced slapping and threatening, and 84.9% of seniors suffered from slapping and ridiculing or ridiculing and twisting their arms (79.4%).

Economical violence was present in 46.5% of the cases, which means almost every other senior has faced this type of abuse. Unfortunately, financial abuse of older people has become the norm and an integral part of everyday life, not only in Poland. In the UK, for one year, there were 471 financial abuses reported, where the offenders were adult children aged 41-60 (Gotfryd 2009). The least frequent form of abuse was sexual abuse – 2.8%. The data also revealed other forms of abuse like threats, experienced in 151 out of 217 cases, which is 69.6%.

The most often physical injuries in victims were bruises (33.2%), scratches (27.6%) and bleedings (19.3%), but there were also burns and cut wounds. The above-mentioned data show that the risk of becoming a crime or abuse victim increases in this age group, and the potential victims are prone to dangerous and often long-term injuries.

The analyzed documents indicate that in almost every other case (48.6%) the abuse was continuous as there were previous acts of violence reported. The analysis of the previous incidents revealed that

9

as much as 84.3% cases involved psychological violence, 68.9% physical violence and 6.9% sexual abuse.

We need to remember that elder abuse in the family may prevent the victims from disclosure and that hiding it by the domestic violence victims is rather more common than reporting, especially among older people. For this reason alone, the results regarding reporting the previous incidents may not be fully reliable. This is confirmed also by the results of the research conducted all over the world, which show that elder abuse is present in many societies regardless of their degree of economic, cultural or moral development.

The profile of victim.

Seniors are particularly vulnerable to domestic violence, mainly due to the fact that they are in the situation of dependence on the offender and imbalance of power. Family relations are often a great barrier that prevents from reporting abuse. There might be many reasons for silence, like shame, fear, guilt, social myths or fear of being sent to a care home (Mackowicz, 2014). All these factors do not make it easier to report abuse. The data analysis shows that most frequently, the victims were parents (57.1%). In the narrative interviews (Mackowicz, 2017) seniors-victims admitted that the most difficult step in overcoming the barrier of silence war the emotional dependence on the offender and the sense of guilt for reporting abuse and looking for help. The respondents remember this stage³: "I had been fighting with myself for 4-5 years before I reported it, the worse thing is to break – how can I stand against my own child…? I'm a mother and every mother protects her kid" (abused mother, age: 75); "Before, I couldn't imagine I would go to Police to report mu own child" (abused mother, 86); "I had been struggling with it for about 2 years before I decided to report it… you know, this is my son… even the worse but still my son!" (abused father, 63).Women who experienced abuse from

³ See more: J. Mackowicz (2017). Osoby starsze jako ofiary przemocy domowej. Ujęcie wiktymologiczne [Older people as victims of domestic violence. Victimological approach].

their husbands also felt guilty and ashamed: "*I have always thought this is my husband and I'm his wife and what would people say, what would the family say* (abused wife, 63); "*How could I inform against my own husband… I loved him*!" (abused wife, 83). The study conducted by Lau & Kosberg (1979) suggest that every third senior diagnosed as abuse victim denies it happened.

Out of all the registered cases, the most often the victims were mothers (47%), then abuser's wife/partner (29.5%). Every tenth victim was a father, much less frequently father-in-law, grandmother and grandfather, uncle and siblings. Police data regarding victims' and offenders' gender is also very important. The analysis of the material in terms of gender indicates that most often the victims are women abused by men (87.4%) The analyses of the Police documents confirm that in the group of seniors women more frequently experienced psychological violence of being separated from the world (isolation, limited interactions, control) by their husbands. Often, the relationship between a woman-victim and a husband-abuser is specific — it involves enslavement and control the purpose of which is to dominate the woman and maintain the patriarchate (Stark 2007; Razavi et al, 2015; Aziz & Abdolghader, 2018; Balamurugan & Nagarajan, 2017). In such relationship, woman's contacts get limited, what leads to total isolation and control. As a domestic violence victim, woman submits to the demands and needs of her abuser as the almighty and ever-present one. The attempts to oppose lead to even more advanced strategies, for example, the invisible cage. As a result, the victim becomes trapped and with time, any attempts to break out of control cause increased physical or psychological violence from the abuser.

The profile of abuser.

Definitely most often the perpetrators of elder abuse were men. Half of the abusers are adult sons and one in three offenders is the victim's husband/partner. Daughters, sons-/daughters-in-law and grandchildren are much less frequently using violence against older people. The research into elder abuse indicate that adult children more often abuse seniors economically than other offenders (for example, husbands). The similar image emerged from the analysis of the Police data in another region of Poland (Białystok). According to it, the statistical victim was female facing violence from her partner or adult child, and the perpetrator was most often a male family member: husband, life partner or son (Petelski & Cichon 2010; Eslami & Ahmadi, 2019; Khorrami et al, 2015; Jain et al, 2018). In the light of some research, factors that can differentiate men (in case of abusers) are: less assertiveness, lower self-esteem, tendency to engage in conflicts, poor anger control and propensity to violence.

For the purpose of this study, the place of residence turned out to be also of importance. The victims who lived with their abusers much more often experienced harm – out of 217 interventions, 154 were cases where the victim and the abuser lived together. Of course, such situation may lead to conflicts or misunderstandings resulting in abuse. Occasionally, rare interactions between the offenders and the victims decreased the number of abuses. The similar results were obtained by Johnson (1986). In the light of their research, in most of the elder abuse cases female victims lived with their abusers. The research and the literature confirm that the most frequently, elder abusers in the family are adult sons and husbands/partners. It is a fact that most often violence against the elderly is used mainly by the closest family.

CONCLUSIONS.

The purpose of the analyses was to determine the scale of elder abuse and the forms of elder abuse. The scale of domestic violence towards seniors is a very important, yet still hidden social problem. The analyzed Police documents (Blue Cards) indicate that during the whole calendar year, 1419 cases of domestic violence were reported in Cracow (the city and the district), out of which 217 were on elder abuse. This is 15.3% of all the reported abuse cases, and most often seniors experienced mental, physical and economic abuse. It is worth to mention that the above data may be much higher, mainly because there are many factors which negatively affect the disclosure of violence incidents, especially those addressed to seniors. Fear, shame, fear for one's own life, uncertainty regarding financial situation, fear of retaliation forms the abuser may successfully discourage victims from reporting to the police. Thus, older people may hide domestic violence much more often that other people. Therefore, we need to remember that the scale of the phenomenon may exceed the presented data even several times.

Studying elder abuse, collection of reliable information about the scale of it is very problematic and difficult. The reasons for these difficulties are, for example, lack of proper research tools and, first of all, limited possibility to reach the respondents. This area of relationships is often intentionally hidden by the abused seniors. Violence, especially in family relations, always evokes shame, humiliation and guilt, therefore victims who report it struggle with resistance and shame.

Due to many factors that may affect the data, the results of the evaluation of the phenomenon may be underestimated and undervalued. This task is additionally hindered due to a great number of undisclosed incidents. Save for negative emotions, the victims are often convinced prosecuting the offenders is futile. Therefore, as elder abuse is increasing, it is very important to further explore and analyze this area. These studies may help to design preventive programs and in consequence, prevent the violence. It is also important to promote social support networks and intensify activities towards improving the relations in families.

Implications for education and practice.

The prevention of elder abuse is based largely on changing the social attitudes and overcoming the stereotypes. This is a long-term task which should be implemented by educating the whole society, starting from the youngest generation. The main responsibility belongs to school educators who in the didactic-educational process have the opportunity to influence not only children's attitudes but

also their parents and potential caregivers. This task should be carried out also by NGOs, media and the church.

It is worth to organize intergenerational integration meetings during which every generation would present their pros and cons. That would give seniors the opportunity to share their reflections, fears but also joys of everyday life. Such meetings would facilitate breaking the stereotypes and build positive intergenerational relations and, first of all, protect from social isolation.

The important question is the awareness of seniors of their rights as well as institutions and places in the local environment, where they can find free help. A good solution would be a free senior-dedicated helpline. There, they could anonymously receive support. It is also important to take up preventive measures to unload the caregivers. In the situations of total functional dependence of seniors on their caregivers who are mainly adult children, it is necessary to provide support in care exercised by nurses, adult educators, Red Cross services – people who could unload the caregiver for at least few hours a day. This type of solution should be available without unnecessary paperwork.

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