

MYTHS AND PREJUDICES ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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Abstract: Domestic violence represents the origin of the most difficult social problems of the community; it is an action that breaches the fundamental right of a human being, that of protection and freedom.

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Rezumat: *Violența în familie se află la originea celor mai dificile probleme sociale ale comunității; este un act ce încalcă dreptul fundamental al omului la protecție și libertate.*

Cuvinte cheie: *violența domestică, prejudecăți, prevenire*

“... observing the human rights must be part of the global education and human dignity, and all aspects of physical and mental violence against a person represent a violation of his rights.” *The European Parliament Resolution, 11 June 1986.* Prejudices, culturally transmitted or learned at a young age, sometimes prevent us, both as citizens and as professionals, from realizing the fact that domestic violence is an act of criminal connotation directed against a person, violating his fundamental rights to protection and freedom.

Types of prejudices (or mistaken conceptions) that people and societies transmit:

1. Domestic violence is not so extended or serious. Unfortunately, studies accomplished in the U.S.A. show that every 15 seconds a woman is beaten. 60 million women were murdered due to their intimate partners' violence. 35% of women who arrive at the emergency rooms are victims of domestic violence. One in 5 women in Europe is assaulted inside her family. 75% of women who had the courage to end the relationship with a violent partner were assaulted after ending the relationship and suffered even worse medical consequences. Studies show that 3,6 million children are abused every year and not all aggressions are reported, so their number is probably higher than we know.

2. Beating occurs in a moment of losing temper. In fact, this occurs in a relationship where the abuser has already controlled her partner through fear and fright. One in five women who left their husbands reported abuses and harassments from them. Beating is only one form of aggressive behaviour, in fact it is accompanied by other behaviours such as: intimidation, menace, psychological

abuse, isolation and punishment.

3. If violence were that serious, the woman would end the relationship with her partner. The woman, who is most of the time affected, cannot find the resources to end a relationship after the first aggression against her. Reasons: her emotional and financial dependence on the aggressor, feelings of love and loyalty for him, the presence of children and limited resources to raise them, lack of confidence in herself and low self-esteem, low social and family support, feelings of shame and depression, isolation.

4. Domestic violence occurs only in the families of low social classes and in poor educated people. Domestic violence is manifested in all social and cultural backgrounds, without exception. There are victims of this phenomenon even among career people and highly educated people, irrespective of age. It is possible that this prejudice starts from the idea that people of high education or income can solve more easily a situation of conflict. The reality is that, the women belonging to these backgrounds report the aggressions with more difficulty, because of different reasons: shame, higher social pressure, image affected at work, emotional dependence on the aggressor and reduced support from the part of the social community.

5. Women provoke violence and they deserve it! Violence is not a way to solve the conflicts. Men have no right to abuse in anyway a woman, no matter what the “provocation” is.

6. It is not violence, it is only a quarrel. There is a clear difference between fight and violence: while during a fight, the power level is approximately equal, in an action of violence, the power and force ratios are not the same, due to the fact that one of them has definitely more power than the other.

7. Domestic violence is a private problem, nobody should interfere! The spread of this phenomenon statistically proved, as well as the complexity of consequences on women, relationships between adults and children, turn this social phenomenon into a problem of public health, of the society, a problem that regards us all.

8. Men are violent because they were abused/maltreated during childhood or come from violent families. Although, there is a significant percentage of

men who suffered abuses during childhood, not all of them repeat the abuses during their adulthood.

9. Violent men are mentally disturbed. The reality of studies denies this belief.

10. Men abuse women because they do not know another way to express their emotions. Reality denies this idea, through even the abuser's behaviour during the so called "honey phase", that usually follows after the violent episode. In this stage, the man seems to regret it, asks for forgiveness, promising that the aggression would never repeat.

11. Alcohol is the cause of domestic violence. Reality shows that only in half of the cases of violence, the man is under the influence of alcohol.

12. Violence will stop some time. Studies show that once the cycle of violence started, there are minimum chances for the violence to stop.

Ways of acting in cases of domestic violence:

First of all, you must recognize your intimate partner violence, even if it is unpleasant and you feel humiliated.

A second step consists in refusing the feeling of guilt that you are probably experiencing! Nobody deserves to be aggressed, humiliated or abused, so much the less inside the family, where relationships must be based on love and understanding. You must understand that only by taking action you could put an end to being abused.

The third thing that you must do is to start looking for help and support. Call those who can really help you, starting with the police and going further to institutions and organizations specialized in solving these problems.

W.H.O. programme to prevent violence:

The malefic consequences of violence made W.H.O. launch in 1996, a programme meant to prevent violence, especially regarding the manifestation of violence inside the family.

The programme indicates 4 risk and intervention levels, necessary in approaching this phenomenon:

1. **Individual level.** The risk of violence is given by the previous experiences of abuse and rejection, such as mental diseases and disorders. It is obvious that ample programmes of community education can be very useful at this level.
2. **Inter-personal level.** The risk of violence is related to the consumption of alcohol and drugs, to the man's control over the family goods, as well as to the conflicts inside the family. Prevention means raising the family cohesion, cultivating good relationships between parents and children and encouraging the women to take part in controlling the household income.
3. **Institutional level.** It is represented by the causal factors for violent behaviours: a low social economical level, unemployment, etc. Prevention can be materialized by attending schools and educational community programs, by developing family services and facilities.

4. **Structural level.** The risk of violence is accompanied by the cultural tolerance of violence in solving the disputes, by promoting rigid gender roles and by cultivating the male dominance element. Protection is represented by political stability, the control of the labour market, promoting gender equality and non-violence in society.

Finally, the conclusion to all these statements is that domestic violence is at the origin of the most difficult social problems of communities. It seems unbelievable that the opinion of the specialists and of the public regarding this social disease dates for a short period of time. As long as domestic violence is ignored and let to develop its secret and devastating existence, we can not talk about a real social policy, aiming at a good life for the individual and his/her family.

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