

Domestic Violence against Women in Slovenia: A Public Problem?

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The article deals with violence against women within the family and the question to what extent it is identified as a relevant public (social and political) problem in Slovenia. The analysis touches upon changes at the policy level; however the main focus is placed on the public opinion, as it reflects the degree of recognition and acceptance of these problems in a society, as well as beliefs framing it. The empirical analysis of the public opinion survey on domestic violence in Slovenia shows that dual views on violence against women exist. On one hand, the public in Slovenia is aware of the problem of violence against women and it recognizes, discusses and defines it as a social problem and responsibility, while on the other hand it displays a relatively high level of tolerance for certain forms of violence and the belief that domestic violence is a private matter. The public (at least in part) thus often reproduces stereotypical beliefs and myths about violence against women within the family and does not recognize it as a broader social problem.

Key words: violence against women, family, public opinion, policy.

INTRODUCTION

In the past domestic violence against women was primarily perceived as a private problem. The last few decades, however, have witnessed an attempt to take this issue into the public sphere and recognise it as an important social and political problem. It therefore seems that violence against women and its associated social, health, and financial consequences have become

increasingly recognized phenomena (e.g., Heskainen and Piispa, 1998; Keeler, 2001; Reid 2003; Robnik et al., 2003; Selič, 2004; Hagemann – White, 2006). The presence of the problem of violence against women has also intensified in discourse at the level of the European Union. Several recommendations and guidelines concerning domestic violence against women have been issued,

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and the problem is being integrated into social policies of individual states.

Increased research, media, and political attention have led to a slightly higher level of information about and awareness of the problem of violence against women in the Slovene public. Nevertheless, significant efforts will have to be invested by the actors involved in this field before this form of abuse is recognized as a relevant social and public problem (Robnik et al., 2003:5). Research studies examining media representations of domestic violence (Rožman and Knežević – Hočevar, 2005; Luthar et al., 2006) show that in the last decade the number of media reports on domestic violence has increased which, however, does not necessarily entail »a higher level of reflection in society and media concerning violence as a social problem« (Luthar et al., 2006:2).

With the adoption of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act/ *Zakon o preprečevanju nasilja v družini* (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia/ *Uradni list Republike Slovenije* no. 16/2008), Slovenia recognized the need for the regulation of the field of domestic violence, which had been emphasized for a number of years by non-governmental organizations in particular (e.g., Kozmik and Dobnikar, 1999; Robnik et al., 2003; Gotnar and Veselič, 2004; Veselič, 2007). In addition, non-governmental organizations play a very important role in the field of domestic violence against women, the placement of this problem into the public sphere, and efforts to establish a coordinated approach in inter-institutional cooperation of all institutions involved in the field of domestic violence against women (social work centres, police, health institutions, courts) (Veselič, 2007).

This article examines the level of placement of domestic violence against women in the Slovene public domain and its rec-

ognition as a (significant) social and political problem. The analysis touches upon changes in Slovenia at the policy level. The primary focus is placed on the public opinion, which reflects the level of recognition and acceptance of a problem (domestic violence against women) and the beliefs that provide a framework for these issues. Finally, the results of the only Slovene public opinion survey on domestic violence will be presented.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN – BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

In order to understand both the response of the public and policies regarding domestic violence against women, its position within the relation between public and private has to be considered first. More often than men, women experience abusive behaviour perpetrated by a person they know, a family member or their intimate partner. Hence, most acts of violence against women occur in the private sphere. Data show that there is a higher probability that a woman will experience violence inflicted by a present or former intimate partner than by any other person (Reid, 2003:15), a fact confirmed by findings of various research studies on violence against women (e.g., Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000; Hagemann-White, 2006). Violence against women most frequently occurs within the family, in the private domain, which is the primary reason for the difficulty in exposing this as a public problem. The relegation of a problem primarily into the private sphere most frequently means that it will not be given appropriate attention. The relation between the family as a private experience and the institution of family as a subject of public discussion and policies is the core element of discussion about families in social policies (Pascall, 1997) given that the family is

a space beyond simple intervention or, in other words, intervention into the domestic field depends on the level of state regulation of privacy.

The difficulty of research on domestic violence as a public problem is further hindered by numerous stereotypes held in relation to the family and family relations and roles. Traditionally, the family has been a space of shelter and safety, and the existence of domestic violence represents an objection to these perceptions. As Pascall says (1997:45):

»But violence at home contradicts both sociological and commonplace stereotypes of family life: home is a place of safety and trust, the family is the focus of love and affection; the family is a unit with common interests even when members have different roles. But violence in families indicates that for many women the home is not a place of safety, that it is the centre of intense human emotions of all kinds – including anger and hatred as well as love, that the interests of different family members do not inevitably coincide and that men in families assert power over women.«

In modern society there is still a deeply rooted myth of traditionally harmonious family life (Švab, 2001) and, as a result, to a certain degree domestic violence is socially accepted and not viewed as a social problem. Societal tolerance of domestic violence stems from its traditional¹ presence in our societies. Consequently, together with the social acceptability of domestic violence tolerance plays a significant role in the preservation of domestic violence within the private sphere.

Despite all these factors, significant changes have occurred in society concern-

ing the recognition of the problem of domestic violence. Only four decades ago no terminology existed to describe violence against women (Bergen, 1998:x), while today it is used with relative frequency and is given more research attention. Due to the influence of feminist movements, domestic violence has made the successful transition from a problem of the private sphere into a public problem ranked high among the priorities of local, national, and international agendas (Harne and Redford, 2008:1). A question that this article addresses is whether it is recognized as such among the Slovene public and in policies. A significant role in the recognition of the problem of domestic violence against women and the introduction of political changes in Slovenia has been played, as elsewhere, by non-governmental organizations and feminist movements (Gotnar and Veselič, 2004:3–4). An important result of their efforts is change at the level of legislation – the adoption of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act that came into force in 2008.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research on domestic violence against women is characterized by a variety of theoretical frameworks concerning the **causes** and **placement** of violence in society. Primarily but not exclusively, traditional research on violence against women looked for causes of violence in the physiological and psychological properties of individuals and in family dynamics or pathology. Feminist stances prevail in contemporary theoretical research on violence against women. It is perceived primarily as a part of the problem of gender inequality in society (e.g., Yllö, 1993; Dobash and

¹ Key determinants of tradition include religion, science, men dominated ideologies supported by social institutions.

Dobash, 1998; Walby, 2005). The degree of violence against women is thus supposed to be mostly a reflection of gender relations or inequalities that are structurally grounded in western societies. These theories have replaced traditional theories that view domestic violence against women mostly as a »pathology« or individual deviation from social norms (Jasinski, 2001). Thus, violence against women is placed within the framework of often previously overlooked or marginalized gender issues. Feminist theoreticians were among the first to have identified and emphasized these problems and attempted their placement into the welfare state concept (Williams, 1989; Sainsbury, 1994). As a result, the gender relation or gender as an analytical concept has been included into the research on violence against women. Gender based violence has become a public topic that is discussed within political agendas only in the last decades (Ronkainen, 2001). Within this framework, the principle of »gender mainstreaming« was introduced into European policies. Gender mainstreaming or integration of gender equality is a strategy for the achievement of gender equality at all levels of social life, aiming at effective improvement of mainline policies by »making visible the gendered nature of assumptions, processes, and outcomes« (Walby, 2005:321). Social policies reflect assumptions regarding gender relations in society, while also affecting them (Pascall in Manning, 2000:10).

The research interest for domestic violence against women and its recognition as a (socially) relevant problem can be related to the women's movement and

feminist ideas from the 1970s, to the second wave feminism, which by far most explicitly exposed the status of women as a problem by introducing gender as a significant social and analytical category (Švab, 1997:60). With the recognition of feminist movements, their demands, and social activism, social care for women, victims of violence, in particular within the private sphere, increased. Under these influences the research on family violence, first primarily violence against children and then also violence against women, significantly expanded.

The first studies on domestic violence were done in the late 1960s and since then research interest into this topic has been on the increase. The first wave of studies focused on physical aggression against children², while violence against women had not yet been examined or was considered a rare form of abuse that could be primarily attributed to the pathological nature of the violent partner (Gelles, 1993:8) or of the women themselves (Muehlenhard and Kimes, 1999:236). In the early 1970s the first different conceptualizations of violence against women emerged in Western Europe (in particular Great Britain) and the USA, and violence started to be viewed as an expression of male dominance in society (Bergen, 1998:x). The development of the research field led to the examination of a wide variety of aspects of domestic violence against women. In addition to the research of the causes and consequences of violence (e.g., Finkelhor, 1983; Yllö, 1993; Gelles, 1993; Straus, 1993; Dutton, 1998; Dobash and Dobash, 1998), several com-

² Violence against children was the first form of domestic violence that was considered and treated as a serious social problem. The first article examining this issue, »The battered-child syndrome«, was published by Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegemueller, and Silver in 1962 in the Journal of the American Medical Association (Bergen, 1998:x).

prehensive research studies (based on large samples) on the prevalence of violence against women were made (e.g., Walker, 1983; Heskainen and Piispa, 1998; Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000; Lundgren et al., 2002; Walby and Allen, 2004).

Under the influence of women's movements, a more intense research into the problem of violence against women in Slovenia began only in the 1990s. Nevertheless, today only a few male and female Slovene researchers are involved in the field of domestic violence or domestic violence against women. As has been found by Sedmak and Kralj (2006), the prevalent aspects under research are inherent to criminal law and social work, while there is less sociological research and theorizing, which, for instance, are prevalent in the English and American research spaces. The data concerning the prevalence of domestic violence is also scarce. This is a result of the lack of empirical research, as well as the nature of the problem and its placement into the private sphere, which hinders the recognition and recording of its frequency. The lack of empirical research certainly affects the levels of legislation and state intervention. In addition, it seems that the media most frequently reproduce and adopt the generally accepted attitudes concerning gender relations. The prevalent patriarchal discourse does not consider the problem of violence against women as a part of the existing gender inequality or a problem calling for systemic solutions (Luthar et al., 2006:7–11). This article will discuss a topic that had not previously been subject to research in Slovenia, the degree of recognition of violence against women as a public problem.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN SLOVENIA

The degree of recognition of a problem as socially relevant is reflected by adopted legal regulations and systemic actions. Therefore, this section focuses on domestic violence against women within the framework of policies.

In Slovenia, non-governmental organizations played a significant role in putting domestic violence against women into the public sphere and in attempting to include it in the field of gender inequality. The legislative regulation adopted as a result of years-long efforts of non-governmental organizations is directed toward the recognition of domestic violence as a specific problem and not simply as a problem of violence in society in general. The 2008 Domestic Violence Prevention Act/*Zakon o preprečevanju nasilja v družini* (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia/*Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, no. 16/2008) has a high symbolic value, as it merges previously dispersed regulations, and provides a more systemic and integrated regulation of family violence. With the aim of enhancing the effectiveness of inter-institutional operation, in 2009 the Rules on the Organization and Work of Multidisciplinary Teams and Regional Services and on Actions of the Social Work Centres in Dealing with Domestic Violence/*Pravilnik o sodelovanju organov ter o delovanju centrov za socialno delo, multidisciplinarnih timov in regijskih služb pri obravnavi nasilja v družini* in (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia/*Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, no. 31/2009) came into force. The Rules define the procedures of reciprocal provision of information and assistance among the different actors involved in the field of domestic violence.

The Slovene women's movement that emerged in the 1980s had a significant impact on the beginning of public debates on domestic violence against women³. The first non-governmental organizations dealing with violence against women were established in the late 1980s: in 1989 the SOS-phone for children and women, victims of violence/ *SOS telefon za ženske in otroke - žrtve nasilja*, was founded as the first form of assistance to victims of domestic violence. In the 1990s, in particular after Slovene independence and the transformation of the political system, several non-governmental organizations were founded, for instance the Women's Counselling Service/*Ženska svetovalnica* (1993) and the Association Against Violent Communication/*Društvo za nenasilno komunikacijo* (1996), currently the only organization in Slovenia with programs for perpetrators of violence. The first safe house was established in 1997 in Ljubljana. As mentioned earlier, non-governmental organizations had a significant influence on changes in the field of violence. In addition to raising the level of information among the public and professionals, they also made a significant contribution to policy formation. Non-governmental organizations were the first to make a transition from curative to preventive actions, exposing the gendered nature of domestic violence against women (Robnik et al., 2003).

In the political arena the problem of domestic violence first appeared in 1997 during the discussion of amendments to the Penal Code/*Kazenski zakonik* and the Criminal Procedure Act/*Zakon o kazenskem postopku*, when the question of domestic violence as a major offence was put forward, and in 1998 the restraining order that prohibits approaching a location or person was introduced as an alternative to detention. As late as March, 1999, domestic violence was defined as a criminal act within Article 299 of the Penal Code/*Kazenski zakonik*.

A significant improvement in the regulation of the field of domestic violence against women was the adoption of an article into the Penal Code/*Kazenski zakonik* in 1999, which gave the courts the power to remove the perpetrator of violence from the common residence if deemed necessary for the prevention of family violence. For instance, this allows women, victims of violence, to stay in their residence during the process of obtaining divorce (Gotnar and Veselič, 2004:3–4).

Gotnar and Veselič (2004:4) also emphasize the year 2002 as a significant turning point in the public debate on violence against women or the transition of attention from the victim to the perpetrator of violence, the possibility of removal of the violent person from the common residence, and the validity of a restraining order as long as the possibility of repetition of acts of violence exists.

³ It is important to stress, however, that the issue of violence against women was not completely unheard of prior to 1980s in Slovenia. Domestic violence has been thematised as early as 1920s and 1930s by Slovene women's movement (see for example Angela Vode, 1998). Also, The 1977 SRS Penal Code, Official gazette SRS/*Kazenski zakon SRS*, Ur.l. SRS, nr. 12/77 was one of the first to criminalize marital rape (see Maca Jogan, 1986.: 43 and Domestic Violence Prevention Act proposal, 2007/ *Predlog Zakona o preprečevanju nasilja v družini*, 2007).

The Rules on Restraining Order Prohibiting Approach to a Certain Location or Person/*Pravilnik o prepovedi približevanja določenemu kraju ali osebi* (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia/ *Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, no. 95/2004) came into force in 2004 and include the prohibition against approaching the location of a victim's residence, work, school, location where he or she is taken care of, and places he or she might visit during everyday activities. The prohibition against approaching a certain location or person includes the prohibition against harassment through media of communication (Rules on Restraining Order Prohibiting Approach to a Certain Location or Person/ *Pravilnik o prepovedi približevanja določenemu kraju ali osebi*, Article 2).

Moreover, Gotnar and Veselič (2004) point out that significant political attention was given to domestic violence in 2003 while later, at the time of the 2004 parliamentary election campaign, domestic violence was mentioned only rarely. Supported by governmental and non-governmental organizations, the Association Against Violent Communication/*Društvo za nenasilno komunikacijo* started the preparation of the State Action Plan on Violence Against Women/*Državni akcijski načrt o nasilju nad ženskami* in 2003.

Non-governmental organizations also played a key role in the preparation of the 2008 Domestic Violence Prevention Act/*Zakon o preprečevanju nasilja v družini* (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia/ *Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, no. 16/2008) with the provision of professional premises (e.g., Filipič et al., 2004) and participation in discussion during the preparation process of the act. The political debate on domestic violence which accompanied the preparation process of the act was characterized by fierce reciprocal accusations among political parties, which

hindered and slowed down the adoption of the act (Sedmak and Kralj, 2006). The discourse was frequently permeated with bias, stereotypical attitudes, the conceptions of conventional wisdom, and sexist attitudes towards domestic violence (Sedmak and Kralj, 2006:99).

In 2009 the motion of the Resolution of National Programme of Domestic Violence Prevention 2009-2014/*Resolucija o nacionalnem programu preprečevanja nasilja v družini med letoma 2009- 2014* was adopted. Being a strategic document, it defines the objectives, actions, and bodies responsible for policies aiming at the prevention and reduction of domestic violence.

PUBLIC OPINION: BELIEFS

As has been shown, significant changes have been made to Slovene legislation in the field of domestic violence against women. The question we will explore in the following sections is the reflection of these changes in Slovene public opinion.

Public opinion researchers agree on the influence of public opinion on policies (for an overview see, e.g., Burstein, 2003). Attitudes and beliefs of people concerning the prevalence of domestic violence, the conceptualization of its causes and other characteristics reflect the general societal attitude toward the problem and its acceptance as a public problem. In addition, they are also important from the perspective of the implementation of policies given that the effectiveness of policy also depends on the consideration of the attitudes of people or the extent to which the majority opinion perceives them as »theirs« or acceptable (Pollitz Worden and Carlson, 2005:1220).

The following sections provide an insight into domestic violence through the lens of public opinion, more specifically through the results of a public opinion survey on domestic violence conducted in Slovenia.

Research description and methodology

The study was conducted in June 2005 at the Science and Research Centre of the University of Primorska as a part of the research project *Analysis of Domestic Violence in Slovenia – Suggestions for Prevention and Action*, conducted from 2004 through 2006 under the leadership of M. Sedmak. The research was funded by the Slovene Ministry of Labour, Family, and Social Affairs and the Slovene Research Agency.

The target population was adult inhabitants of Slovenia (18 years of age and over). The data was collected using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) through the Public Opinion Centre of the Science and Research Centre of the University of Primorska. The research was conducted on a representative sample of 1006⁴ adult individuals selected using telephone directory sampling and the last-birthday selection method. 12 regular interviewers were trained for the survey by Public Opinion Centre staff in survey content, concepts and procedures.

The statistical package SPSS was used to run basic statistical analyses (frequency distributions of variables) and some additional comparative analyses between variables, usually by gender. For the analysis of data correlation coefficients, the chi-square test was used. The level of significance set for this study was at $p=0.05$.

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the sample in terms of different demographic parameters (gender, age, highest level of education, employment status, marital status, children, religion, place of residence).

Table 1.
Sample characteristics

	Sample (%)
N= 1006	
Gender ⁵	
Male	50.0
Female	50.0
Age	
18 to 28 years	22.2
29 to 39 years	18.1
40 to 50 years	21.7
51 to 61 years	18.0
62 to 72 years	13.3
73 and older	6.8
Highest level of education	
Finished or unfinished elementary school	13.2
Finished secondary or vocational school	62.7
Finished university college or more	24.1
Employment status	
Employed	49.0
Unemployed	5.8
Retired	28.3
Student	13.4
Housewife	1.1
Farmer	1.0
Other	1.4
Marital status	
Single	27.6
Married or living in a consensual union	58.8
Divorced	3.9
Widow/-er	9.8
Has children	
Yes	68.6
No	31.4
Religion	
Catholic	67.5
Orthodox	1.9
Muslim	1.3
Evangelist	0.3
I am not religious	26.9
Other	2.1
Place of residence	
Urban	43.7
Suburban	37.9
Rural	18.4

⁴ The answers presented in the tables only include the number of respondents that answered each particular question (the answers »I do not know« or »No answer« have been excluded from the tables), which is why the total number of answers often is lower than 1006.

⁵ Given that the share of men and women in the sample does not correspond to their share in the population (the sample included 30.5% or 307 men and 69.5% or 699 women), the variable »gender« was loaded (female gender with 0.72 and male gender with 1.64).

Methodological limitations

This survey represents the first and to date the only public opinion survey in Slovenia on domestic violence, and includes different forms of abuse. The findings should, however, be interpreted in the light of methodological constraints. The data was collected through telephone interviews, which means the study has some limitations. First, by their nature telephone surveys exclude people living in households without telephones (thus they might under represent particular groups, for example young people who, due to a growing number of personal cell phones, might not have home phones). Other types of survey methodologies were not used to reach residents who may not have a working telephone in the home. Secondly, the response rate in telephone surveys is usually relatively low (18.3% in our case). Thirdly, given the sensitive nature of the topic responses may be biased and subsequently the extent of violence might be underestimated. (On the other hand, however, telephone interviews guarantee a level of anonymity, which is particularly important when examining issues that touch upon personal experiences of violence or other questions that are perceived as personal). Finally, another limitation in relation to the topic examined by the present article is that the research not only focused on violence against women, but on different forms of domestic violence, which means that the questions often refer to domestic violence in general. Nevertheless, we strongly believe that the study is also relevant for research regarding violence against women as that it provides an insight into the general attitude of the people toward domestic violence and thus reveals the level of tolerance of domestic violence. In addition, some questions exclusively refer to violence against women.

Perceptions of Family Violence

Through the results of the survey, the attitudes and beliefs of the Slovene public concerning the questions about whether domestic violence is a recognized problem and whether it is considered as a primarily private or public problem will be presented. Research that examined beliefs about domestic violence show that the public considers domestic violence to be a frequently occurring problem. In addition, the respondents' usual estimate is that it is quite widespread and that it leads to significant social consequences (Carlson and Pollitz Worden, 2005:1199). The results of the present study have shown that more than a half of respondents (57.3%) thought that domestic violence is a common or very common phenomenon in Slovenia, while only 10.4% said that it is an uncommon or very uncommon phenomenon. The majority of respondents thought that the violence rate in Slovenia is not higher than that of other European countries. 13.6% of respondents agreed with the statement that the violence rate in Slovenia is higher than that of other European countries. 52.8% share the opinion that it is lower, and the others were undecided.

Two thirds of respondents (67.3%) said that domestic violence is a social problem, whereas a not insignificant 32.7% answered it is a private family problem. Therefore they do not recognize it as an economic, health or political problem. In addition, most respondents thought that domestic violence most often remains a hidden part of the private sphere. The vast majority said that despite being a social problem domestic violence remains hidden within the four walls of the home (84%).

Therefore, the opinion of the majority of respondents is that domestic violence is frequently not spoken of or not reported

and that fewer cases of domestic violence are uncovered than are actually happening. More respondents who saw domestic violence as a social problem agreed with this statement (86%) if compared to respondents who viewed domestic violence as a private problem (79%)⁶.

Given that a certain level of social tolerance of violence in the private sphere certainly is a factor that enables its prevalence and perseverance, states coping with violence against women and domestic violence strive for the achievement of the zero tolerance policy to violence⁷. In their study on violence against women, Černič Istenič et al. (2003:139) found a low level of awareness among the professional and in particular general public concerning domestic violence against women, and suggested that the attitudes toward violence in general should be changed and stereotypes about violence shattered. In their words, »in the Slovene system of values there is a concealed tolerance of violence« (Černič Istenič et al., 2003:133). As a result, another aim of the present study was to verify the level of tolerance of domestic violence and in particular of violence against women in the answers of our respondents.

The majority of respondents agreed that a husband cannot hit his wife under any circumstances, and vice versa (an opin-

ion shared by 84.4% of respondents while 8.9% agreed with the opposite statement, the others were undecided). Men expressed slightly more tolerance of violence between intimate partners ($\chi^2=12.600$; $p=0.013$). Therefore, on the level of principles, the respondents do not support (physical) aggression against the partner. However, the following questions (in particular the one concerning various forms of abuse) reveal a significant level of tolerance towards violent acts within the family.

The answers presented in the following tables indicate a higher level of tolerance of violence than the answers to the previous question.

Table 2.

»Slapping the wife/husband once is not domestic violence«: Distribution of answers by gender

	Men		Women		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I do not agree	275	56.4	325	65.9	600	61.1
I neither agree nor disagree	72	14.8	70	14.2	142	14.5
I agree	141	28.9	98	19.9	239	24.4
Total	488	100.0	493	100.0	981	100.0

$\chi^2=13.852$; $p=0.008$

⁶ Correlation between the two answers was analysed: 1. In your opinion domestic violence is a) social problem b) private problem and 2. Domestic violence remains hidden within the four walls of the home. ($\chi^2=7.489$; $p=0.024$)

⁷ In April, 2009, the European Parliament adopted a declaration against violence that suggests that one of the following five years (2010-2015) should be the European Year of zero tolerance of violence against women (European Parliament, 2009). As early as 1997 the Resolution on the Need to Establish a European Union Wide Campaign for Zero Tolerance of Violence against Women was adopted.

Zero tolerance of violence is also advocated by the Office of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Equal Opportunities: »The whole system of the prevention of violence against women in their domestic environment and partner relationships has to be based on zero tolerance of any form of violence.« (Urad Vlade Republike Slovenije za enake možnosti, 2009).

Table 3.

»In order to keep the family together, one can put up with being slapped once or twice«: Distribution of answers gender

	Men		Women		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I do not agree	257	53.6	372	77.2	629	65.4
I neither agree nor disagree	100	20.8	56	11.6	156	16.2
I agree	123	25.6	54	11.2	177	18.4
Total	480	100.0	482	100.0	962	100.0

$\chi^2=85.564$; $p=0.000$

Almost one quarter of respondents agreed that slapping once should not be labelled as domestic violence and 18.4% agreed with the statement that in order to keep the family together one can put up with being slapped once or twice. Men agreed with both statements more strongly than women.

Table 4.

»If a husband or wife hits the partner for jealousy, this means real love«: Distribution of answers by gender

	Men		Women		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I do not agree	305	62.9	402	82.9	706	72.9
I neither agree nor disagree	100	20.6	36	7.4	136	14.0
I agree	80	16.5	47	9.7	127	13.1
Total	485	100.0	485	100.0	969	100.0

$\chi^2=58.283$; $p=0.000$

Compared to men, women agreed less with the statement that hitting because of

jealousy means real love. Surprisingly, as many as 16.5% of men, significantly more than women, equated hitting due to jealousy with love.

Tolerance of violence is also shown by the level of reaction to it.

Table 5.

»Would you inform the police if you suspected that physical violence is happening in your neighbours' home?«: Distribution of answers by gender

	Men		Women		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I certainly would	207	42.7	184	38.6	391	40.6
I probably would	161	33.2	154	32.3	315	32.7
I probably would not	74	15.3	99	20.8	173	18.0
I certainly would not	43	8.9	40	8.4	83	8.6
Total	485	100.0	477	100.0	962	100.0

$\chi^2=5.163$; $p=0.160$

More than one quarter (24.2% of men and 29.2% of women) of respondents (no statistically significant differences were found by gender) probably or certainly would not report a suspected case of physical violence in their neighbour's home to the police. A relatively high share of answers »I probably would not« and »I certainly would not« might indicate that a part of the respondents perceives eventual reporting to the police as an illicit interference with another's privacy and family, however other factors, such as for example fear, should not be excluded. These answers are in line with the answers to the question on the private/public nature of domestic violence, when 32.7% of respondents said that domestic violence is a private family problem.

Table 6.
»Do you define these acts as forms of abuse?« Total share of answers

	Yes	
	N	%
Checking pockets	464	49.3
Checking financial resources of the partner	571	61.9
Slapping once	613	63.6
Opening letters	648	67.9
Threatening	810	83.0
Verbal humiliation	859	87.4
Forced sexual intercourse	907	92.4
Intimidation	922	93.1

The data presented in Table 6 confirms that some forms of abuse are more acceptable in society than others. The majority of respondents perceive these acts as violent; however, the share of those who hold an opposite opinion is relatively high in the case of some acts. Quite surprisingly, as many as 36.4% of respondents said that slapping once does not constitute an act of abuse. Control of one's partner is also an almost acceptable behaviour; for more than a half of respondents (50.7%), checking the partner's pockets does not constitute a violent act, nor does checking their financial resources (38.1%) or opening letters (32.1%). Among subtler forms of abuse or, in other words, those that are usually classified as psychological violence, as many as 17% did not view threats, 12.6% verbal humiliation, and 6.9% intimidation as abusive acts. A portion of respondents even thought that forced sexual intercourse is not a violent act. Although the share of these respondents is relatively low (7.6%), it certainly cannot be overlooked. Moreover, 6.6% of respondents said that they did not know forcing sex upon their intimate partner is a criminal offence.

These acts were compared by gender and it was found that if compared to

men, women more frequently thought that violent acts include slapping ($\chi^2=42.977$; $p=0.000$), checking pockets ($\chi^2=14.777$; $p=0.000$), threatening and verbal humiliation ($\chi^2=42.977$; $p=0.030$). No other statistically significant differences were recorded, even though women agreed more strongly than men that all of the above are acts of violence. These answers partly confirm the results of a previous study which revealed that women define the parameters of domestic violence more broadly than men and include non-physical abuse among violent acts (Carlson and Pollitz Worden, 2005:1200).

Table 7 supplements the beliefs which acts can be labelled as violent. Most respondents believe that intimidation can be classified among domestic violence acts. The opposite opinion is held by only 10.7% of respondents (there are no differences by gender).

Table 7.
»Intimidation of the partner is not a form of domestic violence«: Distribution of answers by gender.

	Men		Women		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I do not agree	394	80.6	391	79.8	785	80.2
I neither agree nor disagree	52	10.6	37	7.6	89	9.1
I agree	43	8.8	62	12.7	105	10.7
Total	489	100.0	490	100.0	979	100.0

$\chi^2=8.242$; $p=0.083$

The answers reveal the high level of awareness of the problem of domestic violence and its prevalence. Domestic violence is largely perceived as a social problem that, however, remains hidden in the private sphere. Importantly, almost one third of respondents actually placed domestic violence within the private sphere and there-

fore said that violence is a private problem. The placement of domestic violence in the sphere of privacy rather than public debate, and the perception of violence as a private problem which should not be interfered with is expressed on one hand by the tolerance of violent acts or non-perception of some acts as violent, and on the other by the non-responsiveness to violence (one quarter of respondents would not report suspected physical violence to the police). A high level of tolerance was identified in particular among less »tangible« forms of abuse that can be classified in the category of psychological violence (e.g., checking pockets, checking financial resources). Although public opinion views domestic violence (and violence against women) as problematic, a level of tolerance of acts of violence indicates that some situations are understood as private and some circumstances as justifications for abusive behaviour.

Different Beliefs about Causes of Violence

Domestic violence against women is characterized by numerous generally accepted stereotypical conceptions or so called myths that transmit beliefs that frequently inculcate the victim of violence or excuse the perpetrator (Filipčič, 2002; Harné and Radford, 2008; van der Ent et al., 2001). The reproduction of these beliefs in the Slovene public is presented in the following sections.

Causes of Violence

In the opinion of respondents, the most important factors that may lead to domestic violence are alcohol (94%) and illegal drugs (84%), followed by unemployment (61.8%), dissatisfaction with marital life (59.4%), and a difficult childhood (57.4%). The factors that affect domestic violence

least are violent media content (35.3%), low level of education (26.3%), and affiliation to a different culture from that of the respondents (25.8%).

Table 8.
Causes of domestic violence. Total share of answers

	No		Neither yes, nor no		Yes	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Alcohol	17	1.7	42	4.2	933	94.0
Illegal drugs	53	5.6	100	10.5	804	84.0
Unemployment	84	8.5	293	29.7	610	61.8
Dissatisfaction with marital life	93	9.5	303	31.1	579	59.4
Difficult childhood	145	14.9	271	27.7	562	57.4
Poor economic status (poverty)	152	15.4	331	33.4	506	51.1
Low self-confidence	209	21.7	317	33.0	436	45.3
Problems at work	203	20.6	354	36.0	426	43.4
Violent media content	338	34.7	292	30.0	344	35.3
Low level of education	387	39.6	333	34.1	257	26.3
Affiliation to a different culture from yours	422	45.0	273	29.1	242	25.8

Abusive behaviour is an innate characteristic of a person

The belief that abusive behaviour is an innate characteristic of a person is based on a biological or psychological stance and is relatively common, as the opinions presented below confirm. A not insignificant 30% of men and women included in the study agreed that abusive behaviour is innate to an individual. On the other hand,

40.6% of all respondents disagreed with this statement. Focusing on the physiological or personality characteristics of the perpetrator of violence meets the needs of the majority to see violence as behaviour that is typical of someone different from them (Jasinski, 2001:9). However, this transfers the responsibility for violent acts to unchangeable factors (e.g., genetics, mental disorder). By doing so, it provides justifications for the behaviour of violent individuals without allowing for an opportunity to change these behavioural patterns. Nevertheless, these beliefs are still strongly present.

Table 9.
»Abusive behaviour is an innate characteristic of a person«: Distribution of answers by gender

	Men		Women		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I do not agree	200	40.9	195	40.2	395	40.6
I neither agree nor disagree	144	29.4	132	27.2	276	28.3
I agree	145	29.7	158	32.6	303	31.1
Total	489	100.0	485	100.0	974	100.0

$\chi^2=1.874$; $p=0.759$

It is sometimes the woman's fault if she gets hit by the man/she must have deserved it

One of the most common beliefs regarding violence is that it is sometimes the woman's fault if she is experiencing any violence. She might provoke her partner with her behaviour or could prevent violence by behaving in accordance with some expectations (e.g., quieten the children or do the expected household chores). The woman is thus supposed to be responsible both for

the cause of and solution to the problem (Mahoney et al., 2001).

Table 10.
»It is sometimes the woman's fault if she gets hit by the man.« Distribution of answers by gender

	Men		Women		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I do not agree	283	57.6	320	64.6	604	61.2
I neither agree nor disagree	116	23.6	88	17.8	204	20.7
I agree	92	18.7	87	17.6	179	18.1
Total	491	100.0	495	100.0	987	100.0

$\chi^2=30.384$; $p=0.000$

Although more than a half (61.2%) of respondents did not agree with the statement that it is sometimes the woman's fault if she gets hit by the man, as many as 18.1% agreed with it, slightly fewer women than men. Victim-blaming used to be quite frequent in the past, in particular with reference to sexual abuse. Amir (in Bergen, 1998:98), for instance, explains that it is the victim that exposes herself and starts interactions with the perpetrator while her behaviour provokes potentially abusive behaviour. Decades of research and new theories, in particular feminist, have redirected the attention from the victim who has had the responsibility for abusive behaviour attributed to them. Nevertheless, the occurrence of these beliefs is still high, which is confirmed by the results of the present study. Pollitz Worden and Carlson (2005:1222) mention three aspects of victim-blaming: the first was presented above and is that a woman's behaviour provokes violent reactions (implicitly deserving them)⁸, the second views the woman as

⁸ The authors also mention that a few generations ago this argument was legitimized in court decisions (Pollitz Worden and Carlson, 2005).

a masochist who enjoys violent behaviour and thus invites it, and the final blames the victim for not leaving the violent relationship.

Perpetrators certainly come from a violent background, had a difficult childhood

There is still no consensus in the international research community to what extent a difficult childhood leads to abusive behaviour. Some early theories on violence support inter-generational transmission of violence and claim that violent behaviour is learnt in the process of early socialization (e.g. Straus and Jasinski, 2001), yet they do not provide an explanation why some individuals become violent without having been brought up in a violent environment, nor why some adults who had been brought up in a violent background do not grow into violent adults. Thus, the family cannot represent the only formative factor of an individual's personality and their behaviour. According to some studies, only a minority share of perpetrators of violence had experienced violence in their childhood (Kaufman and Ziegler, 1987 in Jasinski, 2001).

Table 11.
»Can a difficult childhood lead to domestic violence?« Distribution of answers by gender

	Men		Women		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
No	97	19.1	49	10	146	14.9
Neither yes nor no	131	26.7	140	28.6	271	27.7
Yes	263	53.6	300	61.3	563	57.4
Total	491	100.0	489	100.0	980	100.0

$\chi^2= 18.955$; $p=0.001$

In the eyes of the Slovene public, a difficult childhood is a significant factor that

may lead to domestic violence, especially among women: as many as 61.3% of women agreed with this statement – statistically significantly more than men (53.6%). These answers do not allow for a conclusion as to whether a difficult childhood exerts an influence on abusive behaviour in the sense of social learning theory, through the experience of violence in childhood (in the form of witnessing or experiencing abuse). It can be assumed, however, that given the prevalence of the social learning theory, this belief is at least partly included in the answers of the respondents.

Alcohol as a cause of violence/»Only alcoholics beat their wives«

Although in the literature a direct causal relationship between alcohol and violence has been suggested (e.g., Flanzer, 1993), alcohol is often just used as a justification for abusive acts in the family as many violent men do not abuse alcohol (Harne and Radford, 2008:19). The data presented in Table 12 does not directly measure beliefs about alcohol as a cause of violence. Nevertheless, we can deduce that alcohol is perceived as a factor which significantly influences violent behaviour. Among all factors included in the study, alcohol is the factor that most respondents see as a cause of domestic violence.

Table 12.
»Can the use of alcohol lead to domestic violence?« Distribution of answers by gender

	Men		Women		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
No	12	2.4	6	1.2	18	1.8
Neither yes nor no	30	6.0	13	2.6	43	4.3
Yes	455	91.5	477	96.1	932	93.8
Total	497	100.0	496	100.0	993	100.0

$\chi^2=17.326$; $p=0.002$

In Slovenia, the prevalent opinion is that alcohol is a cause of domestic violence. This is the opinion held by 91.5% of male respondents and as many as 96.1% of female respondents.

»Domestic violence only occurs in families from lower social classes/among poor classes«

The universal nature of violence is often emphasized, also in documents that focus on domestic violence. The Handbook on Effective Police Responses to Violence against Women for example states: »Any woman, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, education, cultural identity, socio-economic status, occupation, religion, sexual orientation or physical or mental abilities, may be vulnerable to violence« (The Handbook on Effective Police Responses to Violence against Women, 2010:33). The perpetrators and victims of violence can be of different age, and belong to different cultures and social classes. The answers of the respondents indicate that in their opinion a poor economic situation is a significant factor which may lead to domestic violence, as stated by approximately one half of all respondents (49.3% of men and 53.1% of women).

Table 13.
»Can a poor economic situation lead to domestic violence?« Distribution of answers by gender

	Men		Women		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
No	69	13.9	83	16.8	152	15.3
Neither yes nor no	182	36.8	149	30.2	331	33.5
Yes	244	49.3	262	53.1	506	51.2
Total	495	100.0	494	100.0	989	100.0

$\chi^2=5.831$; $p=0.212$

The opinion on the influence of the socio-economic situation on domestic violence can be indirectly measured through the question of the level of education as a factor of influence on domestic violence. Approximately 40% of respondents answered that the level of education does not exert an influence on domestic violence while one quarter said it does. No statistically significant differences were found between men and women.

Table 14.
»Can the level of education be a cause of domestic violence?« Distribution of answers by gender

	Men		Women		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
No	196	40.1	190	38.9	386	39.5
Neither yes nor no	162	33.1	171	35	333	34.1
Yes	131	26.8	127	26	258	26.4
Total	489	100.0	482	100.0	977	100.0

$\chi^2=1.026$; $p=0.906$

Similar to the findings of the study done by Pollitz Worden and Carlson in their public opinion survey (2005), the findings of the present study indicate several factors that can be said to downplay the personal responsibility of violent individuals, for instance the use of alcohol or the perpetrator's difficult childhood. Conventional understanding of violent acts as irrational, unpredictable and unpremeditated acts perpetrated only by alcoholics, mentally unstable individuals, and people from the lowest classes of society is thus reproduced (Dobash and Dobash 1998a:141). Therefore, the (at least partial) reproduction of stereotypes on domestic violence diminishes the responsibility or provides justifications for violent acts or, on the other hand, put the blame on the victim. The preservation of these myths, which include assumptions

on gender relations, on the distribution of power in partner relationships, families, and society, and on the private and public spheres lead to further legitimization and reproduction of violence in society. These beliefs can have a direct influence on behavioural practices in relation to violence against women, as stated in the analysis of working practices concerning violence against women in Slovenia (Veselič, 2007). In the words of Gilbert (2002), the way in which society understands violence has implications for social policies and for the direct experiences of women who are victims of violence within the framework of the criminal legal system.

CONCLUSION

The public opinion views reveal a dual attitude towards domestic violence. On one hand, the public recognizes the problem and considers it a frequent phenomenon, a social problem and responsibility, while on the other hand it displays a relatively high level of tolerance of some forms of abuse and the belief that domestic violence is a private matter. Tolerance of domestic violence against women as a factor of reproduction of violence is an indicator of the actual level of awareness of violence as a social problem. Social tolerance is greater regarding acts of violence which can be described as psychological violence, which is expressed through a high level of support to abusive acts such as control of the partner (checking pockets, opening letters, checking financial resources). A relatively high level of tolerance is also displayed in relation to physical aggression in the form of a single event.

Over the last decades, domestic violence against women has been increasingly recognized as a public problem. Nevertheless, the belief that domestic violence should be placed into the private sphere without considering it a social problem

also continues to persist. The public (at least in part) reproduces stereotypical beliefs about gender roles and partner relationships as well as those concerning abusive behaviour, which focus on the individual and psychological traits of each individual and thus downplay the responsibility of the perpetrator of violence. Importantly, some victim-blaming myths are also reproduced. In this way the understanding of domestic violence (and of violence against women) as a broader social problem and a problem of gender inequality escapes general public opinion, even though in general, domestic violence is understood as gender asymmetric or, in other words, as violence perpetrated by men against women and children. The above mentioned social acceptance of violence against women to some extent reflects structurally grounded gender relations and inequalities that, despite being questioned and problematized, are still deeply rooted in our societies. Institutionally and culturally supported, they contribute to the acceptance of violence against women and its reproduction.

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Sažetak

OBITELJSKO NASILJE NAD ŽENAMA U SLOVENIJI: JAVNI PROBLEM?

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Osnovni cilj rada jest analiza nasilja nad ženama u obitelji i pitanja u kojoj mjeri je identificiran kao relevantan društveni i politički problem u Sloveniji. Problem je analiziran kroz promjene na razini politike, a posebice u kontekstu rezultata empirijskog istraživanja javnog mnijenja koje obično reflektira stupanj prepoznavanja i prihvaćenja problema u društvu, kao i uvjerenja o nekom društvenom problemu. Analiza empirijskih rezultata istraživanja nasilja nad ženama u obitelji upućuje na dvojnost pogleda na nasilje nad ženama. S jedne strane, javnost je svjesna problema nasilja nad ženama, prepoznaje ga kao društveni problem i odgovornost, dok s druge strane, pokazuje relativno visoku razinu tolerancije za određene oblike nasilja i vjerovanje da je nasilje privatna stvar. U javnosti se tako često reproduciraju stereotipni pogledi i mitovi o nasilju nad ženama u obitelji i ne prepoznaje ga se kao važan društveni problem.

Ključne riječi: nasilje nad ženama, obitelj, javno mišljenje, javna politika.