

# **IDENTIFYING FACTORS OF INCIDENCE OF VIOLENCE IN FAMILIES BY WORKERS FROM DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND LEGAL PROTECTION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Abuse of children is considered one of the most serious socio-pathological phenomenon that can occur in families. The first indicators of child abuse can be information from doctors, data from teachers, or police notifications. By analyzing several sources, it has been found that no exists only one factor that would have result in child abuse. It is a complex phenomenon that can be caused by a combination of biological, social, cultural economic or environmental factors. The aim of our research was to identify risk factors which workers from the Department of Social and Legal Protection of Children and Social Curatorship observe in families where child abuse is reported. The research has been conducted using a qualitative research strategy. The interview has been used in order to collect the data. The survey sample consisted from 11 workers from the Department of Social and Legal Protection of Children and Social Curatorship by Local Labour Office, Social Affairs and Family. The results show that there are several risk factors present in families where child abuse is present. As the most serious factors, participants have identified lower mental levels of parents, lack of parenting skills. As an important factor in terms of practice, it seems to be also the presence of violence in the family of origin. As our participants have pointed out the cultural context of the family has a great impact on the perception of violence by family members. On the basis of the findings, work not only with the child but also with the whole family is necessary. Prevention has an irreplaceable place here, not only at the primary or secondary level but especially at tertiary level. For effective prevention of child abuse is consistent identification of risk factors. As a deficiency, we perceive that in the Slovak environment there are no standardized methods of neglect assessment that would be used in the practical exercise of social and legal protection of children. In the context of tertiary prevention, it is necessary to focus on preventing the relapse of abuse and preventing further abuse and the development of long-term health psychological and social consequences.

***Keywords:*** *Family Violence, Risk Factors, Child Abuse, Social Work*

## INTRODUCTION

Child abuse we can define as the harming, ill-treatment, abuse, neglect of any child or young person. It includes: emotional abuse, neglect, physical and sexual abuse. It is not just one smack or one occasional incident. Domestic violence is repeated victimization, long-term violence and abuse. The victim is exposed to violence again and again because there is a close relationship between her and the perpetrator [1]. For domestic violence are characteristic following signs:

- violence takes place in private between close people
- proving power,
- has the character of a cycle that is repeated for a long time
- has an escalating character
- has diverse grades and forms (physical violence, mental, social violence, sexual violence, economic violence)
- violence remains mostly clandestine,
- a person perpetrating violence holds the victim in the form of psychological correction
- violence affects all family relationships [3]

Knápková and Tothová even claim that according to statistical data is family a relatively dangerous environment for children because children are overly dependent on their parents [2].

There is not only one factor affecting the risk of violence against children. It is usually a combination of various factors on the side of the community, family and child.

Maquire and Font found out, that community level poverty has consistently been shown to be associated with higher risk for child abuse and neglect. The authors include among other risk factors the lack of access to medical care, health insurance and social services, social isolation of community and community violence [4]. Fontes lists the following stressors that have been correlated with physical child abuse: paternal unemployment, poverty, single-parent families, parental substance abuse, adult mental health problems, social isolation neighborhood deterioration and importantly physical abuse of the mother by father, belief that fear and embarrassment are the way to make sure children obey, belief that children should be quiet all the times [5]. Knápková and Tóthová add that also important role play characteristics of parents, for example, aggression. The authors consider as risk factors from the psychology view these, that relating to family relationships and family structure (completeness of family), parent-to-child relationships (whether parents wanted the child or not, whether the child is resemble someone their parents don't like), physical or personality features that complicate childcare. Besides of factors is important their intensity (for example level of drug or alcohol abuse) and duration (for example duration of an illness) which can make it more or less increase the risk of violence in family [2]. Some

children have certain characteristics that make it more likely that they will be at risk for abuse. These factors include, for example, illness (especially chronic illness), disability, crying for extended periods, feeding problems, physical appearance (for example resembles someone who is viewed negatively by the parent/caregiver). Fontes states, that in families, where the father is physically violent toward the mother is a higher rates of child physical abuse by both parents [5].

As some research suggests, child abuse is one of the pathological phenomena, in which intergenerational transmission often occurs [7], [8]. It is known as the intergenerational cycle of violence which is based on the fact that experiencing physical abuse in childhood will lead to increased risk for physically abusing one's own children. Child abuse and neglect involve a betrayal of trust, care, and protection within the very relationships upon which the child relies upon for care. Psychological trauma arising from child abuse and neglect is referred to as complex, or developmental trauma. This accounts for the impact of the trauma on the ongoing development of the child into adulthood. Leeman's intergenerational continuity research suggests that parents' childhood experiences and current psychosocial functioning are expressed in their parenting behaviour. To break this cycle of violence is important to be aware of the factors which increase the risk, severity and impact of child abuse [6], [7].

Not only risk factors but also protective factors are very important in examining the risk of a family in case of a child's risk. Protective factors are attributes of individual, families, communities that can promote wellbeing and reduce the risk for negative outcomes. Building protective factors for children exposed to domestic violence can help increase resilience in the short term. It can also promote skills, personal characteristics, knowledge, relationships. According to the evidence to date for children exposed to domestic violence we can include the following as a protective factors: supportive family environment and social networks, concrete support for basic needs, nurturing parenting skills, stable family relationships, household rules and child monitoring, parental employment, parental education, adequate housing, access to health care and social services, caring adults outside the family who can serve as role models or mentors, positive school environment [9], [10].

## **METHOD**

The main aim of our research was *to identify risk factors which workers from the Department of Social and Legal Protection of Children and Social Curatorship observe in families where child abuse is reported*. In our research we were looking for answers to research questions: *What are the personal characteristics of the perpetrator?; What are the relationships between parents in the family where is present violence?; What are the child's manifestations on which is violence committed?; Which protective factors are important for eliminate family violence?*. The research has been conducted using

a qualitative research strategy. The interview has been used in order to collect the data. Participants were selected by deliberate selection. The survey sample consisted from 11 workers (Women, Mean age 35.46) from the Department of Social and Legal Protection of Children and Social Curatorship by the Local Labour Office, Social Affairs and Family and they have been work at least 5 year in Department of Social and Legal Protection of Children.

## RESULTS

The analysis of the data obtained through the semi-structured interview gave us answers to research questions. In this section, we would like to inform the reader about the important findings. We support our findings with some of the interviewees' statements. Participants in the research reported, that risk factors of violence may occur at three levels – community level, parental level, and child level. Some workers claim that most of their clients come from excluded areas where there is a higher incidence of socio-pathological phenomena: *“In regarding of Ladislav's Court (it is so-called an area that is on the outskirts of the city and it has socially weaker citizens, mostly Roma), essentially, everyone practices everything there. Whether shouting, beating, alcohol, drugging. Overall, it is not difficult to observe absolutely everything there. (P1)”* *In the margin parts of the city, inadaptable residents accumulate and the child does not have to look at violence from his parents, but when he comes out on the street and sees how people behave with each other... Essentially, If adult does not copy the violent behaviour, the child copy it (P6).* *“When violence occurs, the environment in which the child grows up plays a significant role. In the excluded areas, violence occurs often, basically in every second family (P8).”* Based on the analysis of interviews, these risk factors are most common at the community level: unstimulating environment, isolation of the environment, crime and occurrence of socially pathological phenomena as well as toleration of violence by members of the community.

The family environment plays an important role in the child's life. The child is emotionally fixed to the environment, which determines his/her first patterns of behaviour - is a kind of cultural pattern from which the child takes patterns of behaviour, takes the views on life, and gains basic moral standards of behaviour [11]. However, it should be remembered that, just if a family can have a positive effect on a child, it can be also the other way around. In 80% of cases, a parent is the identified perpetrator, so the majority of child abuse is committed by someone who knows the child [12]. In our research, all workers agree that the families with violence with whom they work are “socially weaker” families: *“My all families are socially weak, few of them work, most of them receive state benefits (P1).”* *“In the socially weaker families, who are explicitly dependence to the state benefits, alcohol occurs in lesser extent because they can't afford it... but where at least one parents works, or for example, family take parental allowance and they have a little more money, so in these families is also alcohol (P8).”* In addition, a method of education that includes intentional but also unintentional

affecting on the child also plays an important role [12]. Family members, with whom our participant's works, often have only basic or even no education, on the one hand it may not affect their ability to adequately educate children, on the other hand, if there is no other compensation mechanism, this may be reflected in insufficient parenting skills. This is also reflected in our participants' statements: *"When a woman begins to give birth from 16 or 18 years old, she acts as a child herself, she doesn't know lead her children, that this should make it look like this, or you should go to school ... (P4 )."* *"Essentially, everything is related to the parenting skills that they don't have it and which, as children, have not been given, so that they cannot give them further (P2)."* *"With these Roma families ... they just don't realize that they somehow hurt the child when they hit him. They take it as an educational tool (P8) ...whether they are clueless, screaming, slapping, beating, it is a tool for them to have calm (P1)."* Children learn methods are passed down from one generation to another [5]. Collins points out that abuse can be resulted from circular causality [14]. Children from few stimulating families where is violence and other social pathological phenomena take negative patterns of behaviour that give their children. Therefore it is difficult to disrupt the cycle. This has also been shown in statements our participants: *"The risk factor is the family itself, the cycle, it is most important for them (P4)"*. *"I have been working here for a long time and I see that the clients we dealt with as children, now we are working with as adult clients who are doing violence to their children as were done to them. And that's it turns around still. (P1)."* This intergenerational cycle of violence is confirmed by several authors who claim that adults who were abused as children have high probability of becoming abusive parents, or perpetrators in abusive intimate relationships [1], [8]. The literature describes protective factors that mitigate the impact of violence on child behaviour. One of the protective factors at community level is the positive environment of the school. Many times school corrects the negative impact of the family, but the end result depends on the overall context of all the factors, their strength and the quality of those impacts [10]. This is also pointed out by our participants and emphasize that, if the school operation is not systematic and long-term, the changes will be as little as no possible: *"It would be best if they were incorporated into ordinary society so they could be also see other forms of behaviour. On the other hand, it will not help if they are only incorporated in school. Of course, it would be positive for children to see that pupils can behave differently and have respect for the teacher or, other words, for some authority, but if they are evicted somewhere on their street , those 5 or 6 hours at school will not help them, because the rest time they will spend at home, in an environment where behaviour other people is not right. (P1)."* *"The community where the child grows up is stronger than the school environment (P3)"* One of the other starting points that our participants see is a complete cut from the pathological environment: *"If families are able to break away from everything, at least go to the shelter, it's not ideal place, but still better than staying in a margin's area (P11)"*.

Some children have certain characteristics or behaviours that make it more likely that they will be at risk for abuse. According to our participants the risk factors on the side of the child are the disobedience and mental backwardness that some parents cannot always realize. *“When a man come to home tired, and the children shout, run, of course he is nervous and then he solves it the fastest possible way (P1)”*. *“In most cases, there is mental backwardness and, often, the parents do not realize that the child may be affected in this way. They don't see physicality, so they say that the child doesn't know behave. But they don't know behave because they did not get upbringing, also the clear rules and boundaries (P11).”*

For better clarity, we present above risk factors in the following table:

*Table 1: Risk factors of incidence of violence by workers from department of social and legal protection*

Risk factors on the level of community	Unstimulating environment, isolation of environment, criminality and occurrence of socially pathological phenomena, tolerating violence,
Risk factors on the level of parents	Lack of parenting skills, unemployment, transferred experience from childhood, (intergenerational transmission of violence), lower mental level of parents
Risk factors on the level of children	Disobedience, mental backwardness,

One of the other subgoals was the find out what are personal characteristic of perpetrator. Often, in such families, the mother is submissive and the father is aggressive: *“...there was a lower mental level. Violence was mainly from the father's side, the mother was very submissive, she did not stay with the child because she was beaten as well... (P1).”* “Participants are correspond on certain features that are characteristic for the perpetrators: *“...overall more aggressive expression, speech is sharper, do not like to cooperate (P6)” ... explosive nature, and in particular there is no willingness to cooperate. We will come to household and automatically: Are you here again? What you came for? Who sent you? I know that was my neighbour I will give him!...and such speech. These are features of perpetrator, who is able to put hand on a child or on the women (P4).”* On the other side some participants states that some aggressors do not seem at all at first sight: *“I work with family where father affect very politely, no one would talk about him that he is a rapist. When I come to the family he is very willing and tries not to hide anything. But if I go there randomly, shouting comes from the beginning of the street (P8)”* However, exist also cases of violence coming from the mother: *“especially when she change the partners, thus, she is without a partner and she cannot sort this out with the children and with violence she wants to earn respect. Or she is with another partner whose children do not respect (P9)*

In literature is mentioned, that no exist “typical” abuser and people who abuse children may be male or female [12]. However, we can say that mostly the perpetrator is a man / father. In general they are characterized by certain features

such as: tend to be more generally angry and hostile, less assertive, tend to justify or accept the use of violence, weak cooperation.

Another of the sub-goals was to find out what are the child's manifestations of violence. As with the characteristics of the rapists, the child's manifestations can be various and depend on the child's age but also on his or her personality characteristics: *“the smaller children are mostly withdrawn because they are afraid that will be beaten in school, but older children are already more aware that they have some power and if they kicking or slapping, they really hurt, and they can do something to someone, so they discharging anger and basically copy bad behaviour (P1). “they are afraid, fearful, communication at the beginning is difficult with them, but when you talk to them nicely, you can see how affraid fall out of them, but they still remain careful because the hit can come at any time (P9).”*

Workers 'statements are consistent with experts' claims that children on that have been perpetrated the violence, often be situated themselves on two poles either they are excessively withdrawn or excessively aggressive [13].

In school-age children, this may also result in a deterioration in school performance, which is also caused to the inability to concentrate. This problem is caused by disturbing memories of a traumatic event. There are often problems with behaviour in the form of frequent conflicts or, conversely, avoiding any contact with others. Uncertainty, helplessness and the resulting aggression are frequent in adolescents, which can lead to a self-destructive inclination. Finding the meaning of life is marked by frustration from a traumatic event. They can consciously revolt, ignoring school, acting asocial, using alcohol and drugs [11], [14].

## CONCLUSION

Family plays key role in the development of children and adolescents. Children depend on parents and family to protect them and provide for their needs. However, this is not always true. In the above text, we focused on analyzing interviews with workers from the Department of social and legal protection about families in which violence occurs. It is clear from the data presented that workers consider the risk factors of violence at the level of community, family, and child. At the community, level is it mainly the isolation of the environment an occure social pathological phenomenom, at the family level is it mental backwardness of parents and lack of parenting skills and at the child level is it mainly disobedience and mental backwardness. Evidence also suggests that age is predictive of abuse risk. Younger mothers are more prone to abuse because they often have an unwanted child or do haven't enough parenting skills. As next predictive is an area of residence. Areas characterized by poverty broke homes have tend to weaken the social networks and exacerbate ineffective

parental behavior. Is important to focus attention to reinforcement protective factors and so prevent occurrence of intergenerational cycle of violence that can passed down from generation to generation. We consider necessary help parents reduce the number and severity of disciplinary encounters with their children, reduce or eliminate their use of corporal punishment, reduce parental isolation and stress and detect and eliminate the battering women. Many times, also the school corrects the negative impact of the family, but the end result depends on the overall context of all the factors, their strength and the quality of those impacts. By creating optimal conditions for the development of interest activities as well as the using the many-sided offer of free times activities of the institutions, the school has a chance to gain the trust of children not only in the field of education but also in their free time of children.

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