

IT IS IN HER HANDS TO PREVENT THE RAGE: PREDICTORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE MYTHS ACCEPTANCE AMONG MEN**СПРЕЧУВАЊЕТО НА БЕСОТ Е ВО НЕЈЗИНИ РАЦЕ: ПРЕДИКТОРИ НА ПРИФАЌАЊЕТО НА МИТОВИТЕ ЗА СЕМЕЈНО НАСИЛСТВО**

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АПСТРАКТ: Семејното насилство се уште претставува горлив безбедносен проблем за огромен дел од популацијата. Ова истражување ги испитува врските помеѓу ставовите кон родовата еднаквост дефинирани како традиционален и модерен сексизам, стресот кој настанува заради потребата за придржување кон маскулината улога и прифаќањето на погрешните уверувања (митови) за семејното насилство кај мажи од општата популација, на возраст меѓу 18 и 50 години. Како испитаници во квантитативната студија учествуваа 325 мажи со хетеросексуална ориентација, сите етнички Македонци, од 16 различни градови во земјата. Податоците за овој дел од истражувањето беа прибирани со помош на три инструменти: скалата за мерење стрес кој произлегува од притисокот кон придржување на маскулината родова улога, скалата за прифаќање на митови за семејното насилство и скалата за утврдување на сексистичките ставови, како традиционални така и модерни. Квалитативната студија беше спроведена на пригоден примерок од 38 испитаници со слични демографски карактеристики кои одговараа на кусо интервју за тоа како гледаат на изворот и динамиката на семејното насилство. Откако беше утврдено дека сите инструменти имаат соодветна релијабилност а варијаблите ги задоволуваат барањата за спроведување мултипла регресија, беше спроведена статистичката анализа. Квалитативните податоци пак, беа обработени со помош на тематска анализа и истите се ставени во функција на поддршка на наодите од квантитативните податоци. И двата извора на податоци упатуваат на тоа дека мажите во голем степен се ја лоцираат одговорноста за насилството кај жртвата и дека истото го минимизираат и рационализираат. Со оглед на тоа што резултатите покажуваат дека сексистичките ставови се најважен предиктор на митовите за семејно насилство, кои пак

се поврзани со подготвеноста истото да се врши, дискусијата е насочена кон препорачување на стратегии за ефикасна примарна превенција на семејното насилство.

Клучни зборови: митови за семејно насилство, безбедност, стрес поврзан со маскулината улога, сексизам

ABSTRACT: Domestic violence remains a leading human security problem for the vast majority of the population. This study explored the relationships between attitudes towards gender equality (operationalized as old-fashioned and modern sexism) masculine gender role stress, and domestic violence myths acceptance among men in general population, aged between 18 and 50. Participants who took part in the quantitative study were 325 male heterosexual ethnic Macedonians from 16 different cities in the Republic of Macedonia. Data were collected by using three instruments: Masculine Gender Role Stress (MGRS) scale by Eisler & Skidmore, Domestic Violence Myths Acceptance Scale (DVMAS) by Peters and Old-fashioned -Modern Sexism Scale by Swim et al. The qualitative study was carried out with a convenient sample of 38 interviewees with similar demographic characteristics who shared their views on the origins and the dynamics of domestic violence. After demonstrating that all instruments exhibit satisfactory reliability and that all included variables meet the statistical requirements for performing multiple regression examination, the statistical analysis was performed. The qualitative data were explored by thematic analysis approach and they were used to support the quantitative findings. Taking into consideration that both data sources suggest that the strongest predictor of domestic violence myths acceptance (that is on the other hand strongly connected to domestic violence proclivity) the discussion is directed towards recommending strategies for efficient primary prevention measures.

Key words: domestic violence myths, human security, masculine role stress, sexism

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence still remains a predominant human security and public health problem in the vast majority of countries worldwide. Recently, it has been estimated that this form of violence is not only as costly as warfare in terms of money spent, but also, even more devastating in lives lost (Fearon&Hoeffler, 2014). Although these costs do not only affect the present generation (in terms that girls who witness abuse in the home are more likely to be abused in the future and boys are more likely to become abusers themselves), the horrifying pieces of evidence have been so far more or less overlooked. Thus, domestic abuse is neither yet well understood nor properly addressed by vast majority of security studies scholars. On the other hand, the popularization of human security

as a concept referring to the individual instead of the state has 'opened the door' to recognizing that state security does not unavoidably transfer to (all) individuals in the state, especially not to groups that are marginalized or less powerful. In debating necessity for introducing this paradigm shift, feminist security scholars (e.g. Blanchard, 2003; Hoogensen and Rottem, 2004) addressed the role of women and gender based power asymmetry, thus enabling researchers to deconstruct security from the perspective of women's experiences of violence by interrelating violence on the individual, community, national and international levels, and by scrutinizing structural inequities instead of only focusing on the direct violence of war (e.g. Tickner, 1992).

In order to respond adequately to women's insecurity stemming from domestic violence, one has to understand the spectrum of risk factors and factors that in some ways cause domestic violence. Prominent scholars offer different taxonomies, usually identifying several wider (e.g. cultural norms, legal regulations, economic and political status) versus narrower factors that operate on individual level (substance abuse, level of education, socio-economic status etc.). Despite of many differences in determining their role in increasing the likelihood of this kind of abuse, all of them agree that these numerous contributing agents reinforce each other and cannot be treated as isolated causes (UNICEF, 2000; Krug et al., 2002). Although the risk factors are many and their influence is yet to be fully examined, an important development in linking domestic violence with human security is that states are more increasingly seen as responsible for protecting the rights of women in violations committed within the home, by their intimate partners.

Within this article, we are making an effort to shed light on a very particular human security need – prevention from domestic violence. To do so, we focused on providing data on the prevalence of acceptance of so called domestic violence myths among general male population in the country. Our decision to focus on exploring these myths defined as: "*stereotypical beliefs about domestic violence that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and which serve to minimize, deny, or justify physical aggression against intimate partner*" (Peters, 2003: 138) is primarily connected to the research data which strongly suggest that there is an association between violence-supportive beliefs (such as domestic violence or rape myths) and the actual performance of violent behavior (Flood & Pease, 2009). Further, we explored several potential predictors of endorsement of these attitudes and analyzed qualitative data on how the dynamics of domestic violence is understood and interpreted by heterosexual men. In this particular instance, the term domestic violence refers to "*assaultive and coercive behaviors that adults use against their intimate partners*" (Holden, 2003:155), which is the narrower definition of the phenomenon and comprises only the intimate partner violence component.

RELEVANT RESEARCH

Data on domestic violence prevalence

The most common form of violence experienced by women worldwide is intimate partner violence (WHO 2013). Relevant findings from cross-cultural research on nationally representative samples at ten different countries have shown that this form of violence against women is indeed considerably

widespread. The range of lifetime prevalence of physical or sexual violence, or both, by an intimate partner was 15% to 71%, whereas current violence (acts of violence in the year prior to responding) has been reported in the range was between 3% and 54%, with highest frequency falling between 20% and 33%. At the same time, the reported current rate of emotional abuse ranged between 20% and 75% (WHO, 2007).

In the Republic of Macedonia, the most recent estimated prevalence of domestic violence on a representative national sample for females is 39,4%. Despite the methodological problems that the authors of this research have faced, they registered prevalence of physical violence as high as 6% among the female respondents and prevalence of 1.3% of sexual violence at home .In most cases (over 50%), the perpetrators of the abuse were their intimate partners¹ (Popovska, Rikalovski and Villagomez, 2012). According to data gathered by questionnaires, every fourth women in the country has experienced physical violence within intimate relationship at least once in a lifetime (ESE, 2010). In addition, we are currently witnessing that the number of female victims who are killed by their intimate partners is growing despite the recent efforts of the government for strengthening the national capacities for responding to domestic violence. Moreover, in the last year and a half (from the beginning of 2014 to the mid of 2015), the number of women being killed by their intimate partners in the country was 8. Similarly to any other country, this serious threat to security and integrity has clear gender dimension. The analysis of Court decisions on domestic violence cases clearly continue to show evidence that the vast majority of perpetrators are men and that overwhelming majority of victims are female (Mircheva, Chacheva and Kenig, 2014; Груевска-Дракулевска, 2013).

Domestic violence, sexism and traditional masculine role

This research is grounded in theories that suggest that abusive behavior in men is strongly related to gender role socialization (e.g. Barnett et al.,2005; Straus et al., 1981; Dobash & Dobash, 1979) but also acknowledges that men engage in this behavior because they need or desire to control women (Radford, 1987). Its purpose was to make a contribution to the existing corpus of evidence in the field of domestic violence by providing empirical data on predictors of domestic violence myths in general population of heterosexual men in the cultural context that has not been much explored previously, by examining the relationship between DV myths acceptance, modern sexism and masculine role stress. The choice of expected predictors has been made on the basis of theory and available body of literature related to the issue (see for example Driskell, 2008).

Some feminist scholars consider domestic violence to be a strategy of exerting control by male partners over the woman (Yilo, 1993). From this perspective, violence in intimate relationships has an instrumental function for the individual abuser and it serves in providing and maintaining the superior position of men. Along these lines, domestic violence myths have social function of facilitating the aggression against women. These widely spread set of beliefs that domestic violence is trivial

¹ Less typically, the perpetrators are other members of the family – the parents in law, the children or the siblings.

and that the victim is largely responsible for provoking and not avoiding the abuse are proved to be a useful tool for reducing social support for the victim by transforming her from a victim to provoker.

In general, men are more likely than women to agree with myths and beliefs supportive of violence against women. Research of the predictors of domestic violence myths endorsement is important since there is a clear evidence for the consistent relationship between men's adherence to sexist, patriarchal, and/or sexually hostile attitudes and their use of violence against women. Men who endorse misogynistic gender-role attitudes are more likely to practice marital violence (Heise, 1998) and young men with more rape supportive attitudes are more likely to have been sexually violent (Anderson, Simpson-Taylor, & Hermann, 2004).

Many other biological, social, and psychological correlates of abusive behavior in intimate relationships have been explored, but only recently the focus has been shifted on understanding how conforming to masculine norms is associated with men's use of violence. For example, Murnen et al. (2002) found that masculine ideology was significantly associated with sexual aggression and Locke and Mahalik (2005) have found that adherence to masculinity norms reflecting power with women were strong predictors of sexual aggression perpetration. Along these lines, men's violence has been described as a form of gendered practice. Several studies have shown that using force can be perceived as a way of 'accomplishing' masculine gender role (Anderson and Umberson, 2001; Boonzaier, 2008). In explaining their abusive behavior against women, many men used the rhetoric of maintaining the patriarchal authority and masculine pride. For instance, Wood (2004) showed how violent men argued that their female partners disrespected their power as men, and that it was precisely perceived as the main reason why they had the "right to discipline" them by means of force.

One of the most frequently used concepts that capture the rigidity of male role in the hetero normative context is male gender role stress (MGRS). It designates the stress brought about from a belief that one is incapable to meet the norms of the male role defined by the society (culture) Such stress-producing situations for men are those in which they perceive themselves as being physically inadequate, emotionally expressive, subordinate to women, intellectually inferior, or inadequate in their sexual performance. Empirical data has shown that masculine gender role stress is related to high levels of anger, anxiety, depression, psychosomatic disorders, and hostility in men (Eisler, 1995; Eisler & Skidmore, 1987; McCreary et al., 1996; Rochlen & Mahalik, 2004), but also with traditional attitudes towards gender (Good, Dell, & Mintz, 1990; Sharpe & Heppner, 1991). Copenhagen et al. (2000) found that substance-abusing men with higher gender role stress experience higher levels of anger and that they were more likely to have performed abusive behavior within their intimate relationships over female partners. Compared to those with low gender role stress, individuals with higher MGRS also reported more negative attributions and affect and endorsed more verbal aggression toward threatening behavior of their female partners (Franchina et al., 2001). Among clinical sample of men, gender role stress regarding failure to perform in work and sexual domains was the only factor associated with psychological aggression, gender role stress regarding appearing physically fit and not appearing feminine was the only factor associated with sexual coercion, and gender

role stress regarding intellectual inferiority was the only factor associated with injury to partners (Moore et al.,2008). In their review, Moore and Stuart (2005) conclude that intimate partner violence increases when (1) gender roles are inconsistent and changing, which leads men to overcompensate for their challenged masculinity and (2) that intimate partner violence could be predicted by using indirect approaches, i.e. attitudinal measures. Recently, it has been also shown that MGRS has a mediating role in the relation between adherence to dimensions of a hegemonic masculinity and hostility toward women (Gallager& Parrott, 2011).

Based on this review of body of relevant literature, it has been hypothesized that MGRS and conservative values have more significant role in explaining adherence to domestic violence misconception than sexist attitudes. In other words, it was assumed that conservative values “pressuring” the adherence to masculine role contribute more to intimate partner myths acceptance than the endorsement of traditional gender roles, as well as that modern sexism is weakest predictor of the criterion variable.

METHOD

Participants

The sample for the quantitative study has been selected by following the quota sampling strategy. A quota-type grid was developed with the predefined number of participants in each age and education level cell as well as in each geographical region. The sample consisted of those individuals who expressed interest to contribute after being approached personally by the recruiters and asked for participation. The potential participants were approached by recruiters (trained psychology students) who explained the purpose of the research and the right to refuse participation at any time without any consequence. As a result of this procedure, it was comprised of 352 men from 16 different cities in the country (56% from Skopje) who reported to be heterosexual and ethnic Macedonian. Nearly half of them (52%) have finished secondary education whereas the rest have completed higher education at the time of responding. In terms of relationship, almost half were married (49%), 24% were single and the rest were in some other kind of relationship (divorced, separated, having a girlfriend or else). The age range is from 18 to 50, with mean age of 34.5 years SD=10.1. All participants took part voluntarily based on previously given informed consent and their participation did not involve any kind of compensation.

After gathering quantitative data, a subsequent sample of 38 men at the age ranging from 25 to 50, all heterosexual and ethnic Macedonian, living in 10 different cities in the country were conveniently selected in order to provide answers to 5 questions on the role of victim and the abuser in provoking and preventing domestic violence.

Instruments

The endorsement of domestic violence myth acceptance of the respondents has been measured by using the scale Domestic Violence Myths Acceptance Scale developed by Peters (2008). The scale consists of 18 statements on a 7-point scale that are related to victim blaming, either by claiming that she provokes the violence or that she actually enjoys in it, or to vindicating the abuser and minimizing the violence. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of 0.83 in the present study shows that the scale possesses excellent internal consistency.

The masculine role stress has been measured by the Masculine Gender Role Stress Scale by Eisler & Skidmore (1987). It is a 40-item self-report inventory that provides indication of the degree to which men cognitively assess the stress they would experience in different situations that are culturally defined as challenging masculinity. Examples of such situations are having a female boss or not being able to perform sexually. A highest possible score of 200 could be reached if the respondent estimates that all 40 situations are extremely (5-points) stressful to him, whereas the score 0 designates absence of stress related to such challenges. Authors report that factor analysis revealed that MGRS items cluster around the following dimensions: Physical Inadequacy, Emotional Inexpressiveness, Subordination to Women, Intellectual Inferiority and Performance Failure. The internal consistency of the whole scale for this sample was very high: Cronbach alpha coefficient =0.92.

The Old-fashioned - Modern Sexism Scale developed by Swim et al. (1995) was used to assess the endorsement of contemporary sexist attitudes. It is a 5-point Lickert scale and consists of 2 subscales that measure two aspects of sexism. *The Modern sexism scale* (MSS) is composed of 8 statements (6 of them with reversed scoring) that reflect denial of contemporary gender inequality, or resistance to addressing sexism and advancing gender equality. Thus, highest possible score for this subscale is 45. Cronbach alpha coefficient =0.61. Old-fashioned sexism scale has 5 items that capture endorsement of traditional gender roles, presented by differential treatment of women and men and stereotypes of women's reduced competence in comparison to men. Taking into account its length, it demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency with Cronbach alpha coefficient=0.64.

Respondents have also appraised the individual importance that they ascribe to a set of values that underlie political conservatism. An adjusted version of Social and Economic Conservatism Scale that has been designed to measure political conservative beliefs, was also administered (Everett, 2013). This form was comprised of only 8 as opposed to 12 items in the original version. Due to the considerably different cultural context, only those items that "survived" the test of factor structure similar to the proposed model were included in the further analysis².

² In order to examine the structure, principal axis factoring extraction with direct *Oblimin* rotation was used. Based on the examination of data, 8 items were selected for the final version of the instrument.

The highest possible score is 90 (maximum conservative beliefs) and the lowest is 0. Cronbach alpha coefficient =0.66 which could be considered as acceptable taking into account that the number of items is small.

Procedure

The data gathering process for the quantitative study was carried out in December 2014³, by 68 psychology students who have been trained specifically for this purpose and were supervised by the authors. The subsequent field work organized for gathering qualitative data took place five months later. Trained interviewers, also psychology students were carried out brief structured interviews with the selected respondents who voluntarily accepted to participate in the study, in their households. All statistical tests were performed by using Statistical software SPSS 17 for Windows.

RESULTS

The descriptive statistics for the variables included in the study are presented in Table 1. All averages do not visibly exceed those reported in similar studies. It is worth noting though, that the distribution of the scores for conservatism scale is positively skewed, suggesting dominance of lower acceptance of conservative values in this particular sample.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the included variables

	<i>N</i>	<i>Min.-Max.</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>	<i>K-Sz (p)</i>
Domestic Violence Myths Acceptance	343	2 - 106	61.1 (18.1)	0.88 (>0.05)
Modern Sexism	351	10 - 38	21.4 (5.2)	1.7 (>0.05)
Old-Fashioned Sexism	350	5 - 25	20.4 (4.3)	1.6 (>0.05)
Masculine Gender Role Stress Scale	340	0 - 168	83.4 (30.1)	0.76 (>0.05)
Social and Economic Conservatism	348	10 - 80	55.9 (13.5)	1.8 (<0.05)

The occurrence of agreement with domestic violence myths is presented through average percentages of respondents who stated that they ‘somewhat’, ‘mostly’ or ‘completely’ disagree or agree with different components of these myths. Table 2 shows that considerable proportion of the male population (nearly 40% in average) *fully agreed* with some of the statements claiming that the vic-

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tims character is the basis of domestic violence. This might be either accepting that women victims of violence actually enjoy being maltreated, that they deserve it or that they can easily escape the circle of violence only if they would want to do so. Another strongly endorsed group of myths is denying that domestic violence happens frequently and that when it happens, it is not in a form of terror against the women, but a mutual fight. The least common rationalization of intimate partner’s violence is claiming that the perpetrator is not aware of what he is doing (vindicating the abuser), because only 17.6% strongly agree with it. Worth noting is that in all of the clusters, the most dominant responses were those in the category ‘fully agree’ with the myths.

Table 2. Average percentages of respondents who (dis)agree with different aspects of DV myths

Subscale	Fully disagree	Mostly disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Mostly agree	Fully agree
Minimizing violence	12.1%	11.4%	7.0%	14.5%	11.1%	19.8%	23.9%
Victim’s character	17.6%	6.7%	3.4%	12.7%	7.6%	12.5%	39.4%
Victim’s behavior	19.1%	9.2%	2.5%	16.1%	12.2%	17.0%	20.6%
Vindicating the abuser	18.8%	9.7%	5.3%	19.3%	13.5%	15.5%	17.6%
AVERAGE	16.9%	9.2%	4.55%	15.6%	11.1%	16.2%	25.4%

The thematic analysis of the responses to questions why domestic violence happens, how it could be minimized and who is responsible for it, almost mirrors the findings from the quantitative analysis. Generally, respondents declare that they do not accept violence of men against women. However, most of them explain that to a certain extent, it is justifiable because women/girls are those who trigger it and they are those who can prevent it. It is generally believed that women and girls who “respect, “obey” and are “tactful” with their partners can easily prevent battering. For instance, one respondent at the age of 38, (single, high education) explained: *“If the woman knows her man, she should know how to behave with him. In order to prevent the battering, she should not increase the volume of her voice”*. An elderly respondent at the age of 58, with completed secondary education, married, almost proudly explained:

“A few months ago, I grabbed my wife’s hair with the two hands, pulled it and yelled at her face because she had showed disrespect. She should have respected me!”

Moreover, many respondents believe that the victims aggravate violent reactions from their partners "on purpose" in order to dominate in the relationship or to manipulate them by making him feeling guilty. Some respondents raise the question of "asymmetry" in the way interpersonal violence is treated, by angrily claiming that in the eyes of the society it is always men who are treated as abusers although women "*slap their frequently partners*". The following statements are illustrative of this kind of opinion:

"Women have always been smarter for some things than men, especially regarding man-women relations. They know that after being battered they are the only victim at the end, regardless of how they have contributed to the quarrel and they knowingly create and use such situations".

High education, 27, in a relationship

"In 70% of cases women are those who create the problem and make men appear as their executors! Women can overcome this problem with their (proper) behavior".

Secondary education, 56, married

On the other hand, the actions of the perpetrator are in many accounts more rationalized than unquestionably condemned. Frequently, the aggression of male partners against women is described as reaction to the "*provocation*", or as a result of their "*powerlessness*", "*cowardly behavior*" of men and in some instances as a consequence of pathological disorders or substance abuse. Although nobody declared that domestic violence is acceptable, majority of the interviewed respondents are *de facto* justifying the violent attacks because they see valid reasons for that. Most frequently, the excuses are sought in the victims' behavior and thus violence is seen as means for disciplining women who behave "inappropriately". These are examples of such reasoning for the roots of the violent acts:

"Violence happens when the wife does not meet the needs of her husband and if she cheats on him or lies. The man will beat her in order to teach her a lesson and she will not repeat that again".

Secondary education, 38, single

"I consider battering as a corrective measure for the women who do not want to participate in solving the problem. It has nothing to do with courage - he just has to show her where her place is."

Secondary education, 57, married

The data revealed deeper complexities and contradictions in men's beliefs about the role of masculinity in domestic violence cases. On one hand, majority considered it a cowardly or non-manly

act to beat a woman, because it is easy to do that and at the same time they implicitly argued in favor of gender power asymmetry and the need of controlling and dominating women. Only several respondents condemned violence completely and tried to link it with patriarchy and gender roles as opposed to the behavior of victims or some personal weaknesses of the perpetrator.

In order to test the research hypothesis, we performed hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis. The analysis was conducted in three steps: in the first step social and economic conservatism variable was entered, in the second block old-fashioned sexism and modern sexism were employed, while in the third step of the analysis masculine gender role stress variable was entered to examine their contribution to domestic violence myths acceptance prediction. Table 3 shows only the third step of the hierarchical regression analysis which contains all study variables⁴. As can be seen, conservative values explained significant 5.1% of the variance in domestic violence myths acceptance ($F(1.323)=17.495, p<.001$), whereas old-fashioned and modern sexism accounted for evidently larger part - 15.4% of the variability of domestic violence myths acceptance ($F(1.322)=31.061, p<.001$). Masculine gender role stress contributed to very small, albeit yet significant 1% in the variance of domestic violence myths acceptance ($F(1.321)=4.238, p<.05$).

Table 3. Hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis: criterion variable domestic violence myth acceptance

<i>Model 3</i>	B	Beta	R ² _{change}
Constant	86.94		
Social and Economic Conservatism	6.59	.183***	,051***
Old-fashioned sexism	1.178	.286***	,154***
Modern sexism	.800	.229***	
Masculine gender role stress	.062	.105*	,010*

Results showed that old-fashioned sexism ($\beta = .286, p < .001$) followed by modern sexism ($\beta = .229, p < .001$) had the strongest contribution to acceptance of domestic violence myths. Namely, when these attitudes were highly expressed, domestic violence myths acceptance among male increased. Persistence of explored violence myths was positively related to social and economic conservatism as well ($\beta = .18, p < .001$). Respondents who reported higher

⁴ The other models are not presented due to the limitations in space. The presented model has the best statistical fit.

gender role stress experience, also demonstrated tendency to accept domestic violence myths ($\beta = .105, p < .05$) although the contribution of this variable to endorsement of domestic violence myths is considerably smaller in comparison to the other variables included in the model.

DISCUSSION

Domestic violence is a serious threat to women's security. Directly, it causes physical harms and pain, frequently resulting in serious injuries and sometimes death. Apart from being serious threat to physical integrity, domestic abuse profoundly damages the emotional, mental and social well-being of women. It has been well documented that domestic violence victims suffer from various health problems, psychological disorders, significantly higher levels of suicidal thinking and suicidal attempts, substance abuse and poverty in larger proportion than women who have not been subjected to this kind of aggression (Campbell, 2002; Ellsberg et al., 2008; WHO, 2010). In addition to this, domestic abuse has long term negative effects to the security of children and other family members. Some children from households where there is intimate partner violence may suffer from behavioral and emotional problems linked to violence witnessing that can result in increased difficulties with education and employment (Dube et al., 2002).

How could finding from this study be interpreted in the human security framework? Descriptive results from this study have shown that the prevalence of domestic violence myths expressed mainly through shifting the responsibility for intimate partner abuse from the perpetrator to the victim and by denying the seriousness of it is really overwhelmingly high. On average, more than half of the respondents accept in different extent various aspects of domestic violence myths. Taking into account that the connection between violent behavior and these attitudes has been empirically confirmed, it can be concluded that many men in the country are well equipped with the psychological prerequisite to perform such kind of violence. Believing that victims character or behavior are the main cause for domestic violence might on the other hand deepen the misleading beliefs about the responsibility for the violence and the expectations for proper response of the relevant institutions to it. High prevalence of acceptance of attitudes that blame victims themselves inevitably create hostile societal atmosphere for the victims and certainly prevents them in deciding to report intimate partner violence. Understandably, being aware that the belief about their responsibility in being battered is widespread, they might both fear that reporting will contribute to making things worse and blame themselves for the violent attacks.

The results clearly support the feminist scholars' thesis on 'normalization of violence', particularly domestic violence. Since such 'events' are becoming part of everyday life (Dobash & Dobash, 1998) they should be understood as an expression of systemic gender inequalities and injustice and thus reflective of a deeper, structural violence. However, situated in a context where the institutions are based on patriarchal values, intimate partner violence is typically perceived as being pathological in common sense, media or legal constructions, and even more through professional interventions. Thus, the interconnections between domestic and structural violence are blurred and violence is constructed as treatable at a psycho-social level.

The regression analysis sought answers to the question which of the included potential predictors of myths acceptance is the strongest one, in order to help in prioritizing the areas in which policy makers should focus their future activities. It failed to confirm that the pressure to adhere to the male gender role among heterosexual men largely sustains promoting intimate partner violence misconceptions. This most probably means that being “tough” with the female partner is not very important piece of the culturally defined masculine gender norm. Therefore, those who fail to follow it do not anticipate social exclusion and most likely, do not face anxiety and low self-esteem in regards with that. On the other hand, the analysis showed that the concatenation of sexist beliefs supported by conservative values is considerably related to attitudes supportive to violence against women. These beliefs and attitudes shape men’s controlling and violent behavior against women and therefore, for designing operational prevention or intervention domestic violence programs, it is necessary to prioritize demystification of these negative gender stereotypes and to alter the traditional gender ideology.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary prevention of violence by intimate partners is often dominated by a large number of activities designed to deal with the immediate consequences of violence. That is understandable, however, far from being very efficient. It has been documented in many instances, especially in this country, that even high quality legal instruments fail to bring about effects at the implementation level because civil servants in the relevant institutions lack gender sensitivity or cannot link this issue with human security or human rights (Mircheva et al, 2014; Mircheva & Kenig, 2015). This practice might be seen as an illustration for the gap between human security and human rights as normative ideals and the process by which they are realized which leads to results emptied of any radical or transformative promise it may have held (Christie, 2010). That is why considerable number of scholars insist that in order to achieve effective improvement in women’s human security, the changes in social institutions’ political, economic and legal structures need to be in line with feminist perspective (e.g. Hampson, 2004; Apalaghie, 2015).

Consequently, both policy-makers and activists in this field have to prioritize the undeniably important mission of creating a social environment that promotes gender equality based on confronting deep-rooted beliefs that gender roles are essential or useful and revealing the negative consequences and huge costs of traditional patriarchal values for both genders. In doing so, they have to take into account that the strongest support to widespread misconceptions of what domestic violence is and who is responsible for it, comes from the traditional form of sexism followed by modern sexism. In other words, the focus needs to be put almost equally on traditional attitudes toward women’s position in society and newly developed beliefs that women had got everything they called for. Additionally, the role of conservative values should not be ignored, too. This conclusion is based on conducted regression analysis which did not demonstrate that the stress of drifting from the culturally prescribed masculine role is considerably linked to misconceptions about violence towards

women in intimate relations. The data in this study support the perspective that aggression against women is largely sustained by “non-deviant” cultural norms like beliefs that traditional gender roles are acceptable, useful, essential and that they are inherently connected to the biological sex, thereby justifying the idea that violence is used as a tool for keeping the gender regimes in a status quo. In addition, significant sustenance to these beliefs is provided by conservative social values. It suggests that continuation of favoring such values will certainly reinforce broader social relations of male power and female subordination, which allows flourishing of domestic violence.

Based on the study from this rather exploratory study, we could conclude that primary prevention should be strongly concentrated on challenging the *institutional acceptance of male dominance* as well as on changing attitudes towards traditional way of defining gender and gender regimes. The first steps in addressing this might be taken within the realm of formal education by targeting young peoples’ gender equality attitudes. The evaluation data suggests that such programs in schools do have impact when carried out in both primary and secondary education and can be successful in producing attitude changes (Harne&Radford, 2008). At the same time it needs to be admitted that educational programs alone cannot be a comprehensive solution to preventing gender violence without a parallel public campaigning aiming to deconstruct or at least seriously challenge those sexism generating values and norms that are deeply embedded in the culture. Unless this happens, campaigns that tackle only the need of reporting domestic violence or its consequences will not be effective, simply because the widespread beliefs that women ‘provoke’ or ‘deserve’ their experiences or that these events are rare will remain the same.

Last, but not least, exploring the subtleties of how domestic abuse is constructed in the everyday discourse might have valuable effects on understanding violence in general. Recently, it has been proposed that both the roots and the dynamics of terror experienced in intimate relations might contribute to enhance the understanding of violence on national and international level because they have shared foundations and points of direct connectedness, especially in the way in which they attempt to exert control over victims (Pain, 2014). Acknowledging the similarities of violence that happens in the private sphere with intergroup violence, especially in the ways in which they are mediated by relations of power and privilege will certainly contribute to creating better and more inclusive responses to human insecurity. Critical discussions of the idea of human security from a feminist perspective (see Trypp and Ferree & Ewig, 2013) that offer valuable contributions in defining the ways in which security might be achieved through transforming power and power asymmetries, seem to be the right answer to the epidemic gender based violence.

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