

Domestic Violence – Can We Combat the Crime of Domestic Violence?

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Abstract

Domestic violence is put together by patterns of behaviors used in a desperate attempt to gain and maintain power and control over another human being within the context of a relationship, mostly a love and- or intimate relationship. From this perspective domestic violence does not discriminate, it can happen to anyone. Domestic violence is a huge global problem and affect people from all levels of society, socioeconomic, cultural, educational, emotional etc. Domestic violence is exercised both physically, sexually, materially, psychologically, latent and as counter abuse. Societal institutions like CPS (Child Protective Services) and prison represents to certain degree an unclearness due to the fact that they both exercise the implementation of sanctions, help and therapy. CPS and prisons strip people from their autonomy, the right to self-determination, work and children (indirectly, of course), they cooperate with district attorneys, prosecutors, prison and secret services – creating ambiguous roles who are difficult to handle. In this article I will attempt to describe what abuse is, its nature, how to recognize domestic violence and how we can meet people that experience domestic abuse. How can we help people that have been subjected to domestic violence from a collaborative approach? There are many interpretations on the subject of domestic violence, and I will by no means postulate that my version is an exhaustive one, it's just one way at looking at the subject hoping that it will contribute to a greater awareness on the topic, and contribute to a more extensive development of skills enabling us to combat the crime of domestic violence, successfully.

Keywords: Domestic: Violence: Relationship: Power: Control

What is Domestic Violence?

In order to combat the crime of domestic violence, we need to know what it means. Domestic violence pertains not just to the physical aspect, too, domestic violence is psychological, sexual, material, latent and counter-latent in its nature [1]. In order to understand domestic violence, we need to address it by name: Domestic violence is often be perpetuated by wrapping it inn, not calling a “spade for a spade”. People tend to talk about topics leaving out issues: we must talk about the issues that upholds the topic – domestic violence [2]. Calling domestic violence for what it is can help us significantly in raising awareness on this horrific subject. In order to combat domestic violence, we desperately need to develop a clear concept on what abuse is about. The simplest and probably most used definition of domestic violence is:

Domestic violence is any use of physical coerced power in order to hurt, damage, offend or harm another person

This definition though is limited since it reduces abuse to primarily a physical abusive activity, leaving out other non-physical determinants (issues) of hurting people. Too, the definition suggests that there is a conscious *intent* present in harming another person. Yet the

predator and prey are not always experiencing abuse as an attempt and desire to hurt [3]. I suggest that we approach violence as a perpetrators *functional* attempt to gain access to control and power that can be exercised over another person(s). Rather than just linking the definition of violence to an alleged purpose, I suggest that we focus on the *action* of violence and the detrimental consequences of these abusive violent actions. Violence is always relational in nature since it needs a subject to be abusive against. Domestic violence is about actions between people and where the essence of these actions is power and control. Domestic violence is any action aimed at a person and is experienced as fearful, painful, offense and hurting [4]. One of the aims of domestic violence is any action that coerces another individual to do things against his or her own free will. From this perspective domestic violence can be perceived as a functional act [5]. The functional act(s) serves a specific purpose, namely, to influence and coerce another person to uncompromised submission [6]. Too, domestic violence can be perceived as a form for communication that addresses (a) the abuser, (2) the abused, and (3) and, the message (violence).

Domestic violence includes all sorts of behaviors and actions that physically, mentally, and emotionally harm another human-being. Domestic violence arouses fear and is therefore threatening and

abusive in its core nature. It aims at controlling another human-being so that he or she is no longer free to exercise and follow his or her own free will. By doing so, Domestic violence represents and poses a constant intimidation and a constant threat of physical, sexual, psychological harm and deprivation [7]. There are two core elements compose domestic violence [8]. The first one is the “functional” element of abuse; the message - the application of damage, hurt, fear and offense.

The second element is that abusive behavior is implemented *purposefully*, i.e. it attempts to influence or- and control the behavior of another person. Domestic violence is often understood and perceived in a far too limited measure that is, just physically. Yet, domestic violence is composed by a set of actions that consists of more than just physical abuse: Domestic violence are all actions that affect another person through the application of pain, damage, fear and offense. Domestic violence can categorize by the following subcategories however, this is not an exhaustive list and may also be extended to include other forms for abuse e.g. economic, threats, cyber stalking

1) Sexual abuse: as defined by WHO (chapter 6; Sexual Violence): “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.

2) Physical violence: can be defined as: “hitting, biting, slapping, battering, shoving, punching, pulling hair, burning, cutting, pinching, etc. (any type of abusive behavior inflicted on the victim). Physical abuse also includes denying someone medical treatment and forcing drug/alcohol use on someone”.

3) Emotional abuse: “involves invalidating or deflating the victim's sense of self-worth and/or self-esteem. Emotional abuse often takes the form of constant criticism, name-calling, injuring the victim's relationship with his/her children, or interfering with the victim's abilities”.

4) Psychological abuse: “involves the abuser invoking fear through intimidation; threatening to physically hurt himself/herself, the victim, children, the victim's family or friends, or the pets; destruction of property; injuring the pets; isolating the victim from loved ones; and prohibiting the victim from going to school or work”.

5) Stalking: “can include following the victim, spying, watching, harassing, showing up at the victim's home or work, sending gifts, collecting information, making phone calls, leaving written messages, or appearing at a person's home or workplace. These acts individually are typically legal, but any of these behaviors done continuously results in a stalking crime”.

Source: <https://family.findlaw.com/>

Domestic violence is always in context with and controlled by a person’s unmanaged and uncontrollable *anger, aggression* and *fear* [4]. It sorts to intimidation in an attempt to gain unrestricted power and control [9]. In making another person afraid by e.g. using covert aggressive gestures, smashing things, destroying property etc., the abuser attempts to control his victim [10,11].

How to Recognize Domestic Violence

Domestic violence can be recognized by determinants such as, (a) emotional abuse, (b) isolation, (c) the using of children, (d) economic

abuse, (e) minimizing, denying and blaming the victim

A) Emotional Abuse

The abuser has the propensity in sorting to emotional abuse. Emotional abuse can be recognized in that the abuser puts his victim down through belittling and demeaning actions, making him or her feel bad and- or little about him- or herself. Emotional abuse is any form for “calling names” e.g. “you are a slut”, or “you are a whore”, or “you are the worst mother in the world” etc. When someone repeatedly hear such messages he or she will become inclined to think that he or she is crazy, nothing worth, not fit, not good at all for nothing and nobody, nobody wants you etc., and these are just some examples on how the abuser maintains power and control by playing *mind games*, humiliating him or she and making him or her feel guilty [4,9].

B) Isolation

Another severe form for Domestic Abuse is *isolation*. Isolation is any form of controlling an individual’s social- and or familiar environment where he or she is a part of, controlling what he or she does at all time. This includes what he or she is giving attention to, e.g. television, reading, talking to, whereabouts, limiting social public involvement. Isolation is always in context with jealousy – the perpetrator feels threatened and is afraid of losing his or her position of power, therefore he or she attempts to isolate its victim in order to consolidate the position of power and control [12].

C) The Using of Children

In his attempt to control (mostly the ex-spouse/partner) the other person, the abuser may choose to use the children as a means of gaining and remaining in power and control. The abuser does not shy from using the children by making (mostly the mother) the other feel guilty about the children; she allegedly is not a good enough mother for them.

Using a child in relaying messages is another form of exercising power and control. This form for control relegates the child to the role of a *messenger, a ‘go-between’*. Such roles are detrimental to a child’s psychosocial development, the child becomes parentified. Parentification is often defined as a type of role reversal, boundary distortion, and inverted hierarchy between parents and other family members in which children or adolescents assume developmentally inappropriate levels of responsibility in the family of origin that go unrecognized, unsupported, and unrewarded. When spouses are divorced using visitation to harass one another is both common and damaging. Too, it is common that the abuser threatens to take away the child (ren) claiming full custody [13,14].

D) Economic Abuse

This form for domestic abuse aims at isolating the subject, coercing him or her into total submission by preventing him or her from getting or keeping a job and getting around. Too, control is exercised by controlling all monetary funds, cash-flow that are in the couple’s possession. One way of controlling is letting the victim not know about income and expenditure and denying him or she access to money, ATM, bank account, etc.

E) Minimizing, Denying and Blaming the Victim

Within the domain of domestic abuse, the perpetrator expresses no concern nor remorse whatsoever, on the damage he or she inflicts on his or her victim: he or she does not perceive the issues concerning

domestic abuse as serious. Rather, he or she denies that there is any domestic abuse going on - it does not and did not happen? Too, a role reversion occurs in that the abuser shifts the focus of responsibility for the abuse arguing, he or she caused it [8,15-17].

Warning-Signs of Domestic Violence

First, no one can with certainty predict if a starting relationship will turn sour and become abusive. There are though behaviors that we can label as “warning signs”. These signs may seem trivial, especially when your partner looks to be *perfect* in the preliminary stages of a relationship. Violent, controlling and possessive behavior does not occur ‘overnight’, it emerges and grows in strength as the relationship grows. Too, since relationships are different from relationship to relationship, and, context to context domestic violence has no specific outspoken uniform “face”, rather it can be compared with a “wolf in sheep’s close”. There are though commonalities in an abusive relationship, namely that the abuser does display many different tactics in order to gain and remain in power and control [4,18-20].

Some Warning-Signs of a Domestic Abusive Relationship

- Extreme jealousy
- Discourages you from seeing family, friends etc.
- Controls all income and expenditure
- Controls *who* you see, *what* you do and where you go
- Preventing you from making your own decisions
- Pressure to sex even when you are not comfortable with it
- Demeans, degrades or shames you, belittling you in front of the family and- or friends
- Pulling your hair, kicking, biting or choking you
- Depriving you from sleeping and- or eating
- Preventing you from seeking legal and- or professional help
- Doing harm to your children

Domestic Violence – Who’s Responsible?

All responsibility for domestic violence must be relayed to the abuser, without any exceptions! One of the things we need to deal with concerning domestic violence is culture. In much of our western culture domestic violence has become an ingrained part of everyday life within many intimate relationships since it is, in many cases sustained by a religious value system, justifying patriarchal vertical power, legitimizing parents to “spank” children and men to abuse their alleged “unruly” and “disobedient wives. It seems like we lack substantial cultural counterweight that can promote a different message: the message that “spanking and abusing” is not okay. This leaves us in limbo concerning who is responsible for domestic violence. The problem with a vertical patriarchal system is the “*reversal of responsibility*”; e.g. I have the right to be violent when you do not listen to me. This approach is dangerous since it relays responsibility for domestic violence totally to the abused -the victim: if you do not abide by my rules then it is your responsibility of what will happen next! As we can see, this argument releases the perpetrator from any responsibility while the abused gets overloaded with all responsibility and guilt. The message is “you should not challenge my “scripture-based” power without consequences!” The patriarch in the family beats his children because he thinks he has a right to do so (he who loves his children do not spare the rod, Proverbs 13:24); he hits his wife because he thinks he has the right to do so when she does not respond accurately to his cues– she is his property. Afterall, he is the head of the house (Ephesians 5:23)! Sadly, this mindset is embedded in much of our western, especially

religious culture and therefore difficult to change: “You think you are thinking your thoughts, you are not; you are thinking the culture’s thoughts” (Krishnamurti).

There are just too many privileges involved for the abuser in order to change – there is just too much profit to gain from this abusive vertical power-construct. Abuse becomes the means of justification for violent abusive behavior.

I suggest that we as a “thumb of rule” agree on one ethical standard; all responsibility for domestic violence is relayed to the abuser! All responsibility for domestic violence must be relayed to the aggressor, to his or her feelings and needs. It is he or she that makes the decision to be violent and he or she should be held accountable. The problem in our society today is, that people want responsibility without accountability. Yet, maturity does not come by age but by being accountable for your actions. When the abuser gets off the “hinge” by finding acceptance for his or her reasoning that violence was justified due to provocation and disobedience, we then contribute to the fostering of a “non-accountable” generation – a generation that will not stop the exercise of domestic violence since it brings too many privileges with it. The culture of domestic violence becomes thus, in a sense, glorified and encouraged. This counts especially for the “male” role since many values are connected to this role. The male-role has for many years been permeated by the idea that *no-one* can tread upon or challenge male authority without the danger of repercussions; “I will get back at you ...just wait and see.” Violence becomes thus an integral part of a male’s identity and fear-response-repertoire, and from a Biblical vantage-point, “an eye for an eye, and tooth for tooth.” Violence from the latter perspective is justified as a form for counter-violence, meaning that *I hid you because you do not listen; I spank my child with a belt because he does not respect me.*

Domestic violence takes on a sinister and perverse attire when explained from a linear *cause-and-effect* perspective. From a linear approach, violence becomes justified because someone else instigated it. The linear approach is one of self-justification, always putting the blame on the abused; the abuser reasons that he or she never is the source of violence, he or she acts completely in correspondence to the provocation of another. Causality contains (a) a cause, and (b) an effect for which (a) is responsible; If she had not laughed, I would not have hit her – a form for reasoning that leaves all responsibility for violence to the abused. I suggest that we in order to combat the crime of domestic violence that we consequently display “zero-tolerance” for violence no matter what justification the abuser may come up with! Domestic violence contains always an *intend, action* and *result*. Any form for domestic violence is exercised with a specific purpose: I beat (the action) you with a belt because you defied my rules (the result) until you subdue and conform to my rules (intend) I will continue to beat you.

How Can Professionals Meet People Exposed to Domestic Violence?

Acting violent in the broad sense of the word is part of a person’s fear-response-repertoire activated when feeling rendered powerless [21]. This emotion can be experienced in diverse ways. E.g. if a prisoner (I have worked for four years as a social worker at a correctional institution) attends “anger-management” classes this context than is different than that of attending anger-management classes provided by CPS (Child Protective Services) [13]. If you

flunk anger-management classes in prison, consequences are mostly marginal compared to the possible consequences CPS can implicate when mandatory anger-management classes provided by them, are defaulted [22]. As a prisoner you will be relegated back to your cell, yet CPS provided classes are always correlated to some sort of threat, that if you do not comply by their interpretation of the law, CPS will take measures. From this perspective CPS becomes and represents a constant threat instead of a societal institution that assist parents in parenting and securing their children's wellbeing [23].

Due to CPS legal mandate, a person may feel implicitly coerced to overly comply and abide by their rules and regulations displaying acceptable (instrumental) behavior. Yet, covertly, nothing changes as far as the abuser's mindset and value system is concerned. He or she uses the system as a tactic, an instrument for grinding his manipulative skills. For all we know, to the abuser anger-management classes can just be one-way of socializing. Yet, when CPS comes into the equation the emotion of powerlessness will assumable be experienced in a much larger measure than that of a prisoner. The prisoner is just relegated to his cell while CPS imposes threatening interventions and many times without parental consent; CPS becomes a latent threat. This represents a dangerous and "slippery slope"; CPS is in danger of losing its public credibility and professional weight when the public opinion, media and people in general connect CPS to a constant posing "*danger and Threat*" (are they going to take custody over my child(ren)?). Most services that CPS provide can only be performed in context and conjuncture with the trust and confidence of the public. The public's ability to trust CPS becomes altered when "*fear*" and "*threat*" is omnipresent. From this perspective we can appreciate the idea that not only the person has to change but too, the structures in our society that represent powerlessness has to change as well. We as professionals, as a representative of the *system*, need to develop measures and skills that can help us to talk with clients in ways that do not pose any threat and danger.

In a rehab where I worked as a therapist, clients often expressed their well-founded fear for CPS. Mine clients where men and pregnant woman who were or became a parent for the first time. These men and women were in rehab due to many years of substance abuse, in some cases (gang) violence and intoxication. What these men and women had in common was their connection to CPS. CPS, in many cases demanded active treatment if these women were to keep their baby and- or child. Many women were trying hard to comply due to the imminent threat CPS posed (taking over custody). Clients worked off their *bud* in their attempt to develop parental skills in order to minimize the imminent latent threats posed by CPS (e.g. taking full custody over the child if one fails to comply and abide by whatever CPS-standard). I suggest that all professionals in the mental-health sector adopt and internalize values, attitudes, and skills such as; respect, equivalence, respectful listening, the skill of being together with ... the client in a respectful manner, showing respect for the clients point of view and his or her life-narrative, reducing at all time the overarching danger of powerlessness through attitudinal awareness.

The client is always entitled to be approached by the professional in a respectful and "*loving*" way. He must never be experienced as condescending by the client. Although feelings of being condescended is a subjective experience, we as professionals are obliged to take those signals very seriously once the client signals

that he or she feels "looked down upon", not relegating them back to the client as being a person that does not understand a *thing*. A professional must never come in the predicament that he or she can be linked to arrogance, impoliteness, condescend, inequality, not interested, not listening and so on. He must behave as a fellow equal human-being, not as an expert.

As soon as the professional introduces the role of an *expert* in the client-professional-relationship, he or she than will introduce an artificial power hierarchy in that relationship. This will render the client (the abused) even more powerless since the expert-role comes with expert-language. When a professional uses "*expert*" language he or she sails too far away from a client's mundane vocabulary, rendering him or her powerless.

People experiencing domestic violence tend to become gradually conditioned to respond from their "fear-response-repertoire"; a function seated in the "*reptile brain*": Fight, Flight and Freeze. When an abused person applies for professional help, the professional must be extremely sensitive and aware on how he or she behaves and talk. If he or she behaves too "clinical" (cold and- or distant) applying too abstract language permeated by professional "*lingo*", the abused victim may even feel more isolated, abandoned, not understood, and not taken care of. As a result, he or she may sort to one or more of the fear-responses in order to protect his or her integrity. Instead of cooperation we obtain the opposite, shutdown; the abused individual freezes (shuts down) and becomes busy with finding safety (flight). Professionals working with people who have been subjected to domestic violence must develop attitude, behavior and language that promotes communication, safety and dialogue. Too, not ever must the abused victim feel coerced to speak when he or she is not ready to do so [24]. When the abused is not able to talk, the professional should not translate this as personal failure, rather, interpreting it as a message of; "I need more time to get acquainted with you, so it feels safer to talk" [25]. The only power-relationship that is legitimate in my opinion is that of the "parent-child" relationship since its aim is development and independence. The behavior and language of the professional must always facilitate communication on the terms of the client. In meeting and helping people that are abused or are constantly subjected to any form for violence, we as professionals need to develop communicative skills, that enable us to talk "*with*" the victim, not "*to*" the victim [26,27]. It is not primarily our skills that help the abused, but our "*attitude*" – how do we meet the abused mirrored through our interpersonal- and communicative skills; It is how we meet and talk with ... the abused, that will make a difference?

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