Reprezentatívny výskum výskytu a skúseností žien s násilím páchanom na ženách (VAW) na Slovensku

Representative Research on Prevalence and Experience of Women with Violence against Women (VAW) in Slovakia

Záverečná správa
VÚ č. 2224

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Bratislava, máj 2008
SUMMARY

Representative research on violence committed against women has been carried out in order of and financed by Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of Slovak Republic with the co-financing of UNIFEM. Institute of Labour and Family Research was charged with realisation of the research and analysis of data. The primary aim of the research was to measure the current prevalence of violence committed against women and focus on changes throughout 5 years period. To follow the dynamics in prevalence and attitudes of women and Slovak population concerning violence committed against women, we used data and findings from the first representative research of domestic violence and violence against women in Slovakia from the year 2002 (see Bodnárová, Filadelfiová, 2003).

The data were collected in February 2008 by the mean of face-to-face interviews and by almost identical standardized questionnaires as in the year 2002 on representative sample of 827 women in age of 18 – 65 years (for prevalence and attitudes of women) and on representative sample of 1 038 adult persons (for attitudes and experience of population). The field collection of data was realized by agency Focus. The interviews with women were conducted by trained network of interviewers consisting exclusively of women having a sensitive approach to the topic and respondents - women. Throughout the years some structural shifts in population were occurred. The most obvious shift was in educational attainment of women. This changes in samples were considered by analysis and interpretations of findings.

The actual key findings in comparison to year 2002 indicate following main conclusions:

- The aggregate prevalence of violence committed against women by their intimate partner changed only slightly or remained the same in comparison to year 2002. Combined type of violence by current intimate partner is experienced by 21 % of women having a current partner. The violence is experienced by women of all age, levels of education, regions or size of residence with the emphasis of women in middle age, with primary education, economical inactive and from smaller towns.

- The basic character sets of violence committed against women by her partner found out in 2002 remained similar: prevalence by ex-partners is generally higher than by current intimate partners; the violence consists of more type of abuse and assaults (psychological, physical, sexual, economical, social exclusion and control), is enacted in long-term relationships and experienced mostly by first-married women and with children witnessing the violent behaviour in family.

- Profile of victims and of perpetrators is effected by principle of prevalence in all groups with emphasis on one particular group of women and men: the most effected woman living in violent intimate partnership is middle aged, lower educated, manual or specialized worker or old-age pensioner, mainly from little villages; typical perpetrator is older men about 45 and more, lower educated and manual worker or out of labour market.

- In comparison to year 2002 more women are looking for solving the violent relationship: during the long–lasting violent relationship (average duration of the violent relationship is 14 years) women are trying more sorts of handling proceedings before decide to breaking-up or to leave; the reasons for staying in violent
relationship is to maintain the family cause children and the concern of loosing financial recourses; not always are women satisfied with provided professional help and the biggest failing is seen in work of police, social offices, courts and legal advocates; women highly support all measures and actions to stop and prevent violence; the biggest expectations are focused on intervention of police, function of courts and development of specialized services.

- Although the occurrence of violence by other men (not intimate partners) is high (68% women referred at least one experience with violent behaviour by men during their lives), over the years aggregated prevalence decreased: women experienced harassment or violent assault mostly by men they know, proportion of un-known perpetrators is 41%; the proportion of women not solving the violent situation (66%) remained over the years the same.

- Public opinion on relevance of problem of violence committed against women is relatively sensitive, nevertheless, over the years the sensitiveness has weaken; most of people support external intervention in case of violence committed against women by intimate partner; despite of support of preventive and discontinuance procedures by majority of public, in comparison to year 2002 the total decidedness of support has slightly weaken; people are informed about specialized institutions intended to help women only moderately.

- Despite of predominant public opinion on increasing trend of violence in society in period of last 5 years, the direct experience with violence decrease in comparison to year 2002:
  20% – 30% of Slovak population perceived distinctive sense of being threatened in chosen everyday situations: subjective sense of threat is significantly higher by women in comparison to men.

Fields and activities of future intervention have been delineated according to the findings and conclusions:

1. Strengthening national obligation to conduct against violence and support activities reducing violence

- Promotion of gender equality in long-term perspective as a mean of strengthening legal and socio-economic status of women
- Creation, implementation and monitoring of multisectoral action plan at various level (from national to local) with interconnected agendas obliged for all sectors (health, education, social affairs, justice, home affairs) with relevant financing

2. Increasing of primary prevention

- Creation, implementation and evaluation of programmes focused on gender opinions, believes and values change and remove of obstacles for women to talk and use the supportive services
- Striving for save environment for women in schools, workplace, cities and villages
- Targeting particular categories of women mainly of other nationalities than Slovak, from smaller towns, lower education and strongly believers and adjust the activities for their needs

3. Work with public opinion
• Increasing of effectiveness of public campaigns to strengthen the decidedness of support and awareness of relevance of violence committed against women in Slovakia
• Gain social, political, cultural leaders for condemnation of violence against women (mainly men)
• Strengthening the zero tolerance of sexist and sexual manifestations of men against women in public sphere to discredit the naturalised behaviour among men and women
• Increasing the informedness about institutions and shelters for women

4. Engaging sector of education
• Implantation of the topic of violence committed against women in curriculum and zero tolerance of any kind of violence, physical penalties andmobbing in schools
• Implementation of gender sensitive pedagogy with the emphasis on equal treatment to girls and boys and point out to the dysfunction and threat of traditional masculinity for family lives and lives of young people

5. Strengthening activities in the field of health sector
• Creation of unified and coordinated systemic approach of health care institutions to various symptoms of violated women and its connection to other form of help (police, NGOs, social departments)
• Usage of reproduction health services as the incoming space for identification and support of women living in violent relationships

6. Supporting women experiencing violence
• To strengthen formal and informal supportive networks inclusive regional availability - social services, consultancy, shelters, psychological help, social work including also sensitising of religious leaders
• To provide decent and regular budgeting of programmes focused to prevention and elimination of violence committed against women and helping organizations
• To persuade women to stop the violent situation harmful for witnessing children and provide immediate financial and material support for women as consequence of breaking-up the violent relationship
• Increasing availability of information about helping organizations

7. Sensitising and improvement of judicial and legal system
• Sensitising approach to justice seeking women of police, investigators, layers, judges according to needs of women
• Supporting women in their decision to stop violent relationship by the implementation of amendment of the law which allows to order out the perpetrator from the common household for 48 hours and consider the risk after this time
• Consider the contra-indication of the severity of sentences and the willingness of victims to stop the violence in interactivity of the found reasons why women maintain in the violent relationship

8. Promotion of research and cooperation
• Increasing the number and frequency of research activities about reasons, impacts and effectiveness of implemented measures
• Creation of standardized system of collection of statistical data and methodology about violence against women by the protection of personal data
Analyses of educatory programmes for perpetrators in abroad, effectiveness and fruitfulness and possible implementations in Slovak environment

The comparative survey confirm and enhance previous findings and brought a lot of new ones. We believe, that the research would help to formulate new measures and action plans for long-term process in combating the violence against women. We assume, that extended knowledge database would be helpful for preparing the Action Plan for Prevention and Elimination of Violence Committed Against Women for the Years 2009 – 2012 and for all professionals striving to help victims and improve the situation.

Keywords: violence against women, violence based on gender, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, harassment, elimination, prevention, comparative research, representative research

KEY FINDINGS

Violence against women by intimate partner

- Violence against women is significant public problem in Slovakia: it affects large group of women, it is related to different areas of life from childhood to adulthood, intimate relations included.
- In Slovakia it is one out of every five women: every fifth adult woman having currently a partner experienced violent behaviour by partner – exactly 21,2 % of grown women in Slovakia aged 18 to 65 having a partner during the survey experienced violence committed by him (in 6 % it was acute violence, i.e. often repeated physical and sexual violence and almost permanently present psychological, social or economic violence).
- In case of ex-partners the occurrence of violent behaviour is higher: among women with ex-partner there are 27,9 % who experienced violent behaviour by ex-partner (in 12,2 % it was acute violence).
- There is no type or form of violence against women in intimate relationship that would be absolutely unknown in Slovakia: all known types occurred from physical and sexual through psychological and social up to economic violence (15 % of women experienced physical violence by current partners and nearly 40 % of women suffered violence by ex-partners; 9 % of women experienced sexual violence by present partners and more than 25 % by ex-partners).
- Women in Slovakia are seldom subject to one form of „partner“ violence only: physical violence is often preceded or accompanied by psychological or social violence, sexual violence is very often connected to various forms of psychological or social violence, economic violence is interconnected with psychological violence, etc.
The relations in which violence against women occurs are not accidental: it is by rule a matrimony (76% of women living in a violent relationship are married for the first time, almost 80% of women living in acute violence relationship are married for the first time) and a long-term relationship (in average longer than 20 years).

Children often witness violence: nearly 70% of women suffering violence by their current partner live together with children or a child in a household.

Violence in intimate relationships is experienced by all groups of women and concurrent more frequently by specific category of women: women of all age categories experience violence, but more in middle age (45-60 years old); women of all education level are affected, with emphasis on women primary educated and apprenticed; economic active and non-active women live in violent relationships, within economic active women especially manual workers and specialized workers are effected, within non-active mainly old-age pensioners; according to scale of residence effected women live mainly in villages to 2000 inhabitants and throughout the years with slightly increased prevalence within women of other than Slovak and Hungarian nationalities.

All categories of men participate in violent relationships, more frequently in particular category: men of all age categories committed violence, more frequently older men (45 and more); violators are of all education levels, particular more primary educated and apprenticed; all groups of economic active men are represented, more frequently manual workers and men out of labour market.

Various forms of help are needed in case of violence: lot of women had to escape from home (more than half being violated by ex-partner and almost half by current partner), had to be treated by doctor (37% a and 31%), had to call for police (more than 57% and 35%); needed psychological or psychiatric help, help from municipal or city office, crisis centres or emergency lines, courts or lawyers; women are trying more solutions – they decide not immediately for breaking up (the average duration of the violate relations is 13.7 years).

More women are looking for solutions of violent situation: in comparison of years 2002 and 2008 the proportion of women not handling the violent situation or not perceiving the reasons to solve it, has decreased.; it is presumed, that the realised campaigns strengthened the intention and opened possibilities for women to handle violence by intimate partner. Women not perceiving the reasons to handle violence have been markedly elder, Hungarian or other nationality, deep believers, from smaller towns and lower education (in these spaces the awareness of violence and human rights is needed to be strengthened).

Women are not always satisfied with the provided help: not all women received in the case of solving the violence by partner satisfactory help from the side of institutions. According to women responds the police should improve its approach in the first place, social departments in offices and courts or legal representation as well.
However, satisfied or unsatisfied voices of women occurred by all situation – it is assumed, that there are big regional gaps in quality of help, but also differences in the rate of sensitiveness of particular representatives (men and women) of existing institutions.

- Violence inhibits the full participation of women in social life: data showed, that the more intensive the violent, the more health problems are occurred by women, the worse self-assessment of their state of health, the more dissatisfaction of their family life.
- Strong support for violence combat activities has been spoken: all groups of women claimed support for activities aimed to prevention of violence or immediate amendment or help by acute violence (reinforcement of legislation, development of services of various kinds and revising awareness of society about violence and zero tolerance).
- Other nationalities in Slovakia had to be considered as well: slight increase of occurrence of violence in groups of other than Slovak nationalities in the case of acute violence indicates that it is needed to spread information (about human rights, violence and help possibilities) in language mutations to avoid non-reaching in some specific environments.

**Violence against women by men – not intimate partner**

- **Women are threatened and assaulted by men beyond partnership:** 67.8% of women reported experience with at least one of the observed manifestations of violence; more precisely, 14% of women experienced direct physical attack, 14% of women were menaced by being beaten or killed, 10% experienced attempt on rape and 2% were raped. In comparison of year 2002, there has been slight aggregate decrease regarding all kinds of violence except of physical violence. In that case the rate remained the same.

- Women are harassed or attacked most frequent by men, who are known by women: unknown men took a share in violation in proportion of 41%; within the known men the most frequent perpetrators are men connected with work and friends, acquaintances or neighbours. Despite of lower total number of marking, proportion of un-known men and men related to family is slightly increasing.

- Proportion of women not handling the violent situation stayed during the years the same: approximately 60% of women experiencing not-partner harassment or attack did not handle the situation; one third of them did not tell about it at all; most frequently women did not consider the situation worth to handle (30%), or did not believed in improvement or were afraid of secondary victimisation.

- Most women acknowledge a behaviour for violence connected with physical touch or expressive psychological terror only: nondescript sexual harassment and sexist behaviour by men is definitely considered for violence approximately by 30% of women; over the years the tolerance of women to “non-physical” forms of sexual harassment has decrease, but the conditional consideration for violence has increased.

- Subjective sense of threat is significantly higher within women than within men: women perceive stronger and more frequented fears in everyday lives in comparison
to men. The most intense jeopardy is perceived in situation connected in evening and night hours and women conduct preventative more frequent, too. Sense of threat or experience of stalking by strange man was referred by 37% of women mainly from big town. Throughout the years the referred experience with stalking has decreased.

**Public opinion on violence against women**

- **Public is sensitive to relevance of women abuse and beating by her partner:** 4/5 of Slovak population consider beating and abuse of women by their intimate partners for highly and more likely for serious problem. Less sensitive is the problem perceived by men and people with basic education degree. Over the years the sensitiveness of public has slightly decreased and the proportion of people who consider the problem for not serious at all slightly increased and minor increase occurred in number of people who did not know to assess the seriousness.

- Approximately 2/3 of people suppose, that in case of violence committed against women by her intimate partner the external intervention is needed: the rest of public suppose the violence for the exclusively problem of partners. In comparison to year 2002 proportion of supporters of externally intervention slightly decreased and number of people who could not decided increased either.

- Promptness and effectiveness of judicial system and police intervention are highly preferred procedures for stopping violence against women by her partner: people emphasize school education to non-violent behaviour and immediate help in case of need in form of network of telephone links, accessibility and sufficiency of asylum shelters and work with perpetrators. Despite of supporting majority of prevention and discontinuance procedures by public, in comparison to year 2002 the total decidedness of support has slightly weaken.

- The predominant opinion to reasons why women are remaining in violent relations, is the effort of women to keep the family cause of children, another perceived reasons are fear of loosing financial resources and the worsening of violent situation. In case of concurrence with acute violence of men against his partner/women, most of people would call the police or try to speak fair to perpetrator.

- People are informed about how to help or who to call in case of violence against women by her partner only moderately: according to public opinion, people in surroundings are informed about help only insufficiently, 40% of people think they are informed sufficiently.

**Public experience with cases of violence**

- **Distinctive rate of threatens in everyday situations is perceived by 20% - 30% of people:** situation connected with evening and night hour are concerned for most threatened; more women behave preventative in comparison to men. The general rate of subjective sense of threat slightly decreased in comparison to year 2002.

- Despite of predominant public opinion on increasing tendency of violence in society in period of last 5 years, the personal experience with violence decreased in comparison to year 2002. However, 24% people have been buffered, 10%
experienced menace and 7% of population have been assaulted. Indirect experience almost doubled in all forms of violence. Women in comparison to men are more frequently victims of psychological or physical abuse and of sexual harassment. The inconsistence of number of direct violent experience and estimation of increasing trend of violence criminality indicate the grow of crime latency and/or accentuation of the violence criminality in the media.