

A THEORETICAL-DESCRIPTIVE APPROACH TO GENDER VIOLENCE: PROPOSALS FOR PREVENTION

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The serious cases of gender violence reported with alarming frequency by the mass media indicate that this type of violence is a real and constant threat to women throughout society. This work takes a theoretical-descriptive approach to gender violence in an attempt to clarify the variables that may be associated with violent behaviour in the family context. The authors offer a brief introduction to the concept of aggression and discuss the factors that may lead to its development and expression. This is followed by a description of some of the characteristics associated with the personality profile of the aggressor, and the potential physical and psychological consequences of violence in victims. Finally, the authors propose some essential features for a programme of intervention with aggressors.

Key words: Aggressive behaviour, aggression, gender violence, maltreatment, victim, family, intervention programme.

Los graves episodios de violencia que transcurren en numerosas familias a diario, es uno de los temas que mayor protagonismo ha ido adquiriendo en las noticias de sucesos. La violencia de género es una consecuencia más de un comportamiento violento que recae sobre una víctima, en este caso la mujer. En este trabajo se presenta el desarrollo de una aproximación teórico-descriptiva de la violencia de género en un intento de aclarar qué variables podrían estar asociadas a su manifestación dentro del contexto familiar. Así, en primer lugar, se hace una breve introducción del concepto de agresión y de los posibles factores que predisponen a su desarrollo y manifestación. A continuación, se describen algunas características que pueden estar relacionadas con el perfil de personalidad del maltratador y las consecuencias tanto físicas como psicológicas que dicha violencia puede ocasionar en la víctima. Finalmente, proponemos algunas de las líneas esenciales a desarrollar en un programa de intervención para maltratadores.

Palabras claves: Comportamiento agresivo, agresión, violencia de género, maltrato, víctima, familia, programas de intervención.

The mental health, education and socialization of children have become matters of great concern for many professionals (psychologists, psychiatrists, teachers, social workers, and so on). Aggressive behaviour in childhood may constitute one of the most significant precursors of the development of aggressive and violent behaviours in adolescence and adulthood, and may even herald episodes of antisocial or criminal behaviour (Patterson, 1982; Blumstein, Farrington & Moitra, 1985). In some children, antisocial behaviour becomes stabilized even as early as primary school, and is maintained into secondary education (Ghodsian, Fogelman, Lambert, & Tibbenham, 1980; Loeber & Dishion, 1983; Kohlberg, Ricks & Sharey, 1984).

When aggressive behaviour is frequent and generalized in the different contexts in which children interact, there is greater risk of its being maintained, and leading to anti-social and/or criminal behaviour in adulthood (Blumstein & cols., 1985). Moreover, the early onset of such behaviour appears to predict frequency of drug use in adolescents (Simcha-Fagan, Gersten, & Langner, 1986). This suggests a need for prevention programmes aimed at reducing anti-social behaviour (and aggressive behaviour in particular) in children to be applied early in the school system, with a view to preventing the use and abuse of harmful substances and of undesirable and socially inappropriate behaviours. It should also be taken into account that the regular repetition of aggressive episodes in young people, beginning at an early age and in diverse contexts, can lead in adulthood to regular episodes of aggression and violence within the nuclear family.

We shall continue by defining the concept of aggression and analyzing some of the variables potentially associated with its expression, as well as some of its possible consequences.

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DEFINITION OF THE CONCEPTION OF AGGRESSION

An overview of work carried out on aggressive behaviour from different theoretical models reveals a wide range of definitions dealing with the concept of aggression. According to Caballo (1987), for example, aggressive behaviour “implies the defence of personal rights and the expression of thoughts, feelings and opinions, but in a way that is dishonest and normally inappropriate, and always violates the rights of the other person” (Caballo, 1987, p. 326); an alternative definition of aggression is: “Any form of behaviour aimed at doing someone physical or psychological harm” (Berkowitz, 1996, p. 25).

On the other hand, there are other terms frequently employed in relation to aggression (*anger, hostility and aggressiveness*). According to Berkowitz (1996), *aggression*, in contrast to *anger*, is related to behaviour deliberately aimed at reaching a specific goal: harming another person; *anger*, on other hand, refers to a particular set of feelings that arise, in the main, from internal psychological reactions and from the involuntary emotional expressions produced by an unpleasant event. The important idea is that anger does not directly instigate aggression, but rather accompanies it. As regards *hostility*, it is a negative attitude towards one or more people that is reflected in an unfavourable judgement. A hostile person is someone who normally judges others negatively, showing general displeasure in relation to many people. Finally, *aggressiveness*, for Berkowitz, refers to a relatively persistent disposition to be aggressive in a wide range of situations.

Similarly, Fernández (1998) draws a distinction between *aggressiveness, violence* and *conflict*. Thus, he defines *conflict* as a situation of confrontation between two or more individuals as a result of the antagonism arising from opposing interests. Some conflicts become aggressive when the mediatory instruments for dealing with them fail. On the other hand, *violence* would be the dishonest, overbearing and opportunist use of power over another, without legitimacy. Terry and Jackson (1985) refer to violence as the physical component of aggression.

PREDICTOR VARIABLES AND CONSEQUENCES OF AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

The manifestation of aggressive behaviour involves a large number of variables that are favoured by particular contexts (individual, family, friends, school, etc.).

Despite the diversity of this range of predictor variables and a long list of studies that have claimed to identify the causes of aggressive behaviour (Moore & Pepler, 1998; Goldstein, 1999), there is as yet insufficient knowledge of some of them, while others do not have enough empirical evidence behind them.

Several authors have argued that aggressive behaviour remains relatively stable from childhood to adulthood (Farrington, 1991), considering this stability as one of the most important risk factors (Huesmann & Eron, 1984; Loeber, Wung, Keenan, Giroux, Stouthamer-Loeber, & Van Kammen, 1993).

Recent studies suggest that at least 5.5% of children present behaviour disorders related to aggressiveness (Olweus, 1990, quoted in Cerezo 1998), and that 60% of children aged 4 to 11 diagnosed with behaviour disorders are hyperactive, which further complicates their relationships with others (Offord & cols., 1991). Moreover, these behaviour patterns are frequently stable, and predictive of a wide variety of social and emotional difficulties in adulthood (Cerezo, 1998).

Among environmental influences we find a number of variables deriving from the family context in general, and from parents' attitude in particular. Stress resulting from the parent-child relationship has been cited as a risk factor in the development of aggression and delinquency (Webster-Stratton, 1988; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1998).

Thus, taking into account the large number of variables that can predetermine aggressive behaviour, Table 1 shows the most significant, and those most frequently referred to in the different studies analyzed.

But we were also interested in examining the consequences of aggressive behaviour. The most worrying of these is violence itself, which finally emerges, leading to a high incidence of, for example, vandalism, theft, rape, damage to public property and other types of crime. Thus, the vandalism that may begin to manifest itself in schools is later reflected directly in the community (Pelegrín, 2001). Another serious consequence is violence in the family (Straus & Gelles, 1986), which can affect not only the members of a couple, but also children (Echeburúa & Guerricaechevarría, 1998 & 2002; Arruabarrena & De Paúl, 2001; Sanmartín, 2002) and older people (*Elderly Abuse*, 1990); and a further context that suffers the consequences of aggression is that of the school itself (Cano, Avery-Leaf, Cascardi & O'Leary, 1998).

Table 2 presents a list of the different consequences of aggression encountered in the bibliographical review

carried out. However, some of the consequences to which authors refer also appear as causes of aggression.

Below, in the next section, we analyze one of the consequences of aggressive and violent behaviour within the family context: male violence in the couple, which is, on a daily basis, one of the principal threats to women, who are the victims of abuse and assault; moreover, its incidence is on the increase, and in many cases leads to the victim's death.

MALE VIOLENCE IN THE COUPLE: A BRIEF THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

There are diverse theories on what leads men to commit violent acts on women (Mullender, 2000). On the one hand, *psychological theories* suggest a view of male

Table 1 Predictor variables of aggression (Pelegrín, 2001)
Predictor variables of aggression
<p><i>Personal</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender - Age - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) - Self-control - Impulsiveness - Competitiveness - Consideration for others - Social withdrawal/isolation - Social skills - Frustration - Perception of the situation - Emotional instability - Extraversion - Psychoticism - Leadership - Biological factors - Physical aggression <p><i>School context</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Values - Inadequate vigilance and intervention in the playground - Bullying behaviour - Internal factors of the institution itself - Influence of the peer group/characteristics of the group - Rejection of peers - Academic performance <p><i>Environmental</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family - Mother's negativity/permissiveness - Socioeconomic class - Models - Television - Videogames - Abuse - Corporal punishment - Verbal scolding - Consumption of harmful substances

violence as the behaviour of men who are *ill* or suffering from a psychological disorder (Maynard, 1993). Researchers have sought an individual male pathology that may be based on organic abnormalities or biochemical alterations of the brain (Dobash & Dobash, 1992), and more frequently, on psychological dysfunctions, but no consistent patterns have been found in this regard (Bograd, 1988). In the scientific literature there are more psychological explanations than physiological ones, and these tend to focus on the uncontrollable anger resulting from unresolved family conflicts, on primitive aggressive reactions, on the fear inside the bully, on the insecurity of the man due to his dependence on the woman, or on any other form of internal stress (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). Maynard (1993) cites a range of North American studies that failed to demonstrate the existence of psychological disorders in husbands who abuse their wives.

On the other hand, *psychosocial theories* postulate that men become individually abusive in response to social and contextual pressures, such as poverty, precariousness of housing, poor quality of life, unemployment, exploitation at work, racism, academic

Table 2 Consequences of aggression (Pelegrín, 2001)
Consequences of aggression
<p><i>Intra-personal</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social maladjustment - Problems in conflict resolution - Anti-social and criminal behaviour - Depression - Aggressive and introverted mothers - Coronary diseases - Homicide <p><i>Family</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partner abuse - Intergenerational transmission of aggression - Child abuse - Behaviour problems in the children <p><i>School</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assaulted victims - Aggression towards teachers - Aggressor victims - Disruptive behaviour in the classroom - Rejection by peers - Academic failure - Bullying behaviour <p><i>Environmental</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unemployment - Formation of gangs - Members of maladaptive groups

failure, unsatisfied material desires in a consumer society or lack of hope in the future (Gelles, 1983; Smith, 1989). Despite the perspective of such theories, it has also been suggested that one of the methodological shortcomings in some research is the use of samples of women from shelters, and the fact that in many cases these women come from poor environments (Pahl, 1985), while those who have savings, their own income or economic support from their family, despite suffering abuse, do not generally resort to refuges, but tend to find other ways of escaping from their situation.

Although the term *gender violence* covers a range of actions carried out, in the majority of cases, by men on women, it can be defined, according to Mullender (2000), as:

“Using physical or psychological violence against a woman, terrorizing her, sexually abusing her in all possible forms, including rape and holding her virtually or actually prisoner. Economic domination and the abuse of male privileges is also an important aspect, as is turning the children against their mother, abusing them or maltreating pets in order to frighten or threaten the woman” (Mullender, 2000, p. 27).

With regard to the demographic and psychopathological profile of abusers, according to data from the Family Violence Service in Bilbao (Fernández-Montalvo & Echeburúa, 1997), those perpetrating domestic violence have an average age of 40-45 years, are mostly married with children, and belong to a socio-economic level ranging from middle to low (though this is not to say that abuse is exclusive to these populations).

Furthermore, there are different *types of abuser*, which can be identified according to the scope of the violence (whether they are violent only in the home, adopting

socially appropriate behaviours outside, or violent in general, using violence both at home and outside) or to their psychopathological profile (with deficient interpersonal skills); there are also abusers who lack control of their impulses, who are subject to sudden and unexpected episodes of loss of control with violence (Fernández-Montalvo & Echeburúa, 1997).

As far as *types of abuse*, are concerned, the majority of aggressors abuse physically. However, psychological abuse accounts for 37% of cases (humiliation, degradation, insults, etc.), or indeed, the two types of abuse may be employed at the same time. The period of family violence usually extends beyond 5 to 10 years, and frequently dates from the time of courtship or the first year of marriage (Sarasua & cols., 1994).

Abusive men tend to be affected by numerous cognitive biases, related, on the one hand, to mistaken beliefs about sexual roles and the inferiority of women, and on the other, to ideas about the legitimacy of violence as a form of resolving conflicts. Likewise, they are highly sensitive to frustrations, display quite limited communication skills and lack adequate problem-solving strategies (Fernández-Montalvo & Echeburúa, 1997). Table 3 shows the profile of the potential perpetrator of domestic abuse.

Sexual and physical violence often form part of dominance behaviour that includes marital rape (Russell, 1990). Thus, in addition to a wide range of forced activities (Kelly, 1988a & 1988b), which include the imposition by the man of all kinds of imitate relations while the woman is still suffering because of the harm inflicted previously (e.g., demanding sexual practices to which she may have consented at other times), she is obliged to bear acts she does not want, or finds degrading or unpleasant (e.g., being photographed in sexual positions against her will or forced to have sexual relations with others while the partner looks on; Burstow, 1992). Thus, abuse often involves a combination of physical and sexual abuse, such as forced sex and aggression that results in lesions on the breasts or in the genital region (Pence, 1987; Frieze, 1983).

Apart from actual physical and sexual violence towards women by their partners, various studies have shown how abuse can also involve *emotional abuse* in which, for example, the man mocks the woman by telling her she undesirable; openly has sexual affairs with other women and makes negative comparisons with her; and humiliates and degrades her sexually in a variety of other ways (Hoff, 1990). Thus, we can say that the woman is being

Table 3 Profile of the potentially violent man in the home (Echeburúa & Fernández-Montalvo, 1998)
Warning signs: the profile of the potentially violent man in the home
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Excessively jealous. - Possessive. - Easily irritated if limits are put on him. - No control over impulses. - Excessive drinking of alcohol. - Blames others for his problems. - Sudden mood swings. - When angry, acts violently and breaks things. - Thinks women should always be subordinate to men. - Has already abused other women. - Low self-esteem.

emotional abused when the man uses any word or action aimed at weakening her internally and undermining her self-image and self-esteem (Mullender, 2000). In this line, the same author adds the following:

“Men who abuse physically also use psychological tactics to reinforce their control over them. Once they have created in the woman the fear of further attacks, it requires nothing more than a verbal threat, a gesture or a look to maintain the atmosphere of constant fear and anguish as the woman tries to discern when it might occur to them to assault her again. They can make use of anything to scare her: shouting, banging the wall, driving recklessly when she is in the car, showing her their guns, threatening her, maintaining long silences, breaking things, or maltreating the children or pets (and in the latter case the torture is twofold, because she is watching, and knows that it could be her next). These women live in a state of constant terror, every single day of their lives” (Mullender, 2000, pp. 47-48).

Emotional and psychological abuse can have such negative effects that they have even been compared to the torture suffered by hostages (Graham, Rawlings & Rimini, 1988). According to Stanko (1985), in psychological damage brought on by abuse it is common to find symptoms of stress, depression and anxiety, which aggravate the situation and make it more difficult to escape the abuse; a considerable percentage of women even commit suicide (Stark, Flitcraft & Frazier, 1979; Hanmer & Saunders, 1984; McWilliams & McKiernan, 1993). Thus, it may be difficult for the women themselves to realize at that time that they have suffered psychological abuse, or they may not even be able to give a name to what has happened to them (Mullender, 2000). Kennedy (1992, quoted in Mullender, 2000) describes the appearance of women who have recently suffered emotional damage:

“They appear lifeless, without emotion, without energy or the will to fight (which does not much resemble the look of a woman who has just suffered an isolated assault, even though this is what is normal or what is expected to be seen in courts in cases of domestic violence). These differences may lead people to mistaken conclusions and make it difficult for judges and juries to understand the hell the woman must have been going through. They may also confuse social service professionals, who perhaps expect to see a

woman full of fear or anger” (Kennedy, 1992, quoted in Mullender, 2000, pp. 86-87).

Echeburúa and Corral (1995) describe the consequences of male violence *in the family* in the form of the following symptoms:

- a) *Behaviours of extreme anxiety*: These emerge as a consequence of a situation of uncontrollable threat to one's life and personal safety. Repeated and intermittent violence, interspersed with periods of contrition and tenderness, causes the woman to be in a constant state of alertness and fearful expectation.
- b) *Depression and loss of self-esteem, with feelings of guilt*: Symptoms of depression, such as apathy, helplessness, loss of hope and guilt feelings, contribute to making it even more difficult to decide to seek help or take appropriate measures. Depression is closely related to low self-esteem and the gradual withdrawal from involvement in fun leisure activities. More specifically, helplessness is born out of the incapacity to predict or control the violence directed at the victim.
- c) *Social isolation and emotional dependence on the dominant man*: The social shame experienced may lead to concealment of what has happened and contribute to greater dependence on the aggressor, who, in turn, increases his dominance as the greater isolation of the victim becomes more evident.

Of all the forms of abuse, physical violence, or the threat of it, is the key element that serves to perpetuate all the other types. It is for this reason that the *Domestic Abuse Intervention Project* in Duluth, Minnesota, portrays abuse as a wheel, in which physical abuse makes all the axles turn; this wheel moves towards a main objective, which is the man's power and control over the woman. Among the spokes of this wheel are all the forms of abuse in which intervention is necessary if women are to be helped to survive and men to change their behaviour through multidisciplinary programmes (Mullender, 2000, see Figure 1).

A study by Fagan, Stewart and Hansen (1983) showed that a significant proportion of men that had been victims of child abuse and who abused their wives also tended to be aggressive towards people outside of their family. However, it should be acknowledged that there are some men whose violence is limited to their families, while in other cases their violent side only emerges outside of the home (Shields, McCall & Hanneke, 1988). In a similar line, Hotaling and Sugarman (1986) reported that in 88% of the studies they reviewed, abusive husbands were more likely than non-abusive

husbands to have witnessed violence while growing up in their own families. Likewise, in 69% of relevant studies, men who beat their wives had themselves been beaten in childhood. Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz (1980) asked men and women to recall the frequency with which they had been physically punished by their parents when they were around age 13. It was found, for both men and women, that those who had been punished most frequently in childhood were more likely to commit these types of aggression. The greater the frequency with which these people had been beaten as children, the higher the probability that they would seriously abuse their spouses (Rosenbaum & O’Leary, 1981; Straus, 1983).

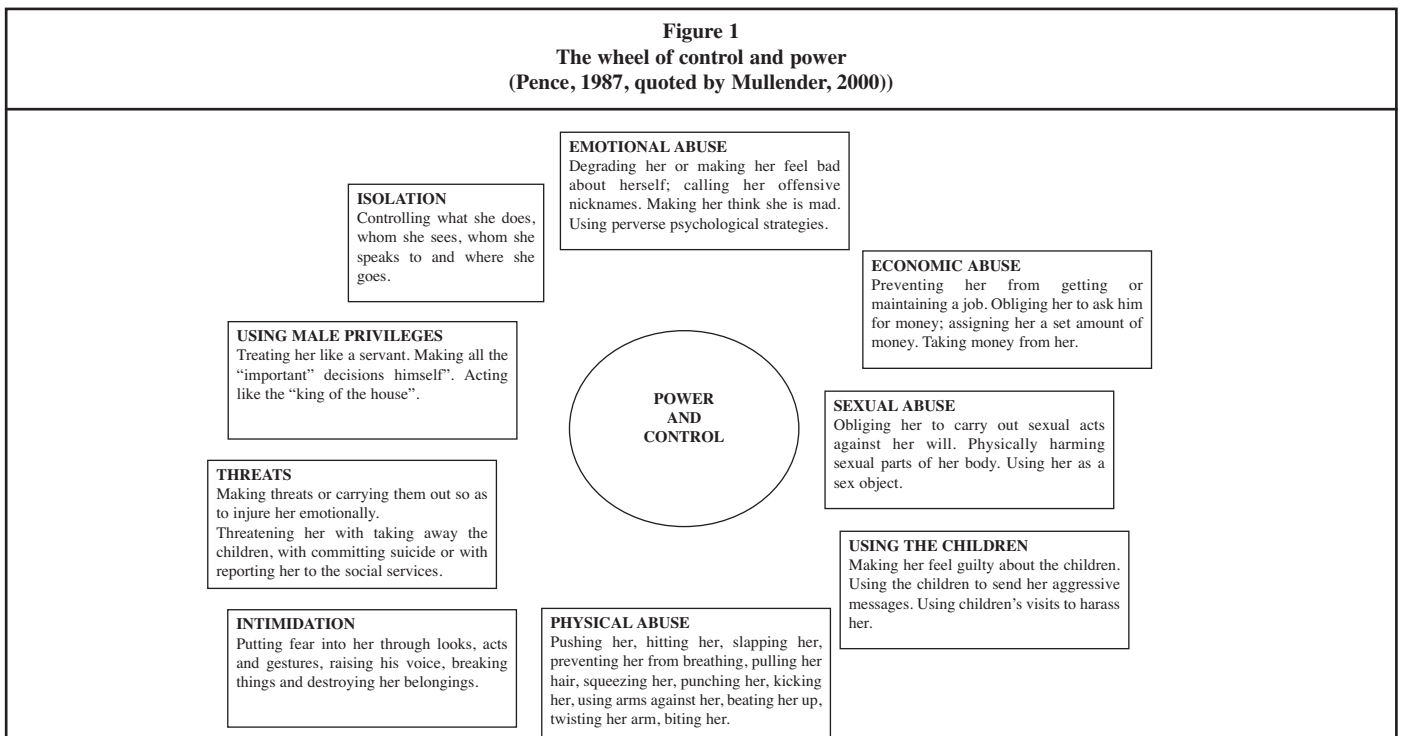
Other research suggests that the problem of the abuse of women is also subject to racial, cultural and economic factors (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Davies, 1994), and that victims constitute a population group characterized by low educational level, without much involve in activities or work outside of the home, low-skilled occupations, financial dependence on the husband, scarce social support and the frequent presence of young children and overcrowded living conditions (Echeburúa, Corral, Sarasua, & Zubizarreta, 1996). The same research group also point to the presence of certain psychological variables –such as minimization of the problem due to habituation to the situation of tension, fear, helplessness, reluctance to admit the failure of the

relationship, fear of a future alone (Echeburúa, Corral, Amor, Sarasua & Zubizarreta, 1997), and lack of information (which may lead them to think that being “knocked about” does not really constitute abuse)– that obstruct an attitude of non-acceptance and calling for help that could lead to effective intervention.

One of the peculiar characteristics of the abuse of women is, one the one hand, the early onset in the relationship, and, on the other, its chronic nature. On average, women suffer the situation of violence over a period of at least 10 years (Zubizarreta & cols., 1994). Moreover, it is a phenomenon of great concern, since, as Mullender (2000) points out, “the domestic violence cases of today are often the murders of tomorrow [...]”. Many murders are committed by ex-husbands, or former boyfriends or partners” (p. 26).

Studies on domestic violence normally speak of women as victims and men as aggressors. Nevertheless, the action of abuse can swap roles, so that it is the woman who abuses and the man who is the victim. Abuse by women appears more in the form of humiliations (economic abuse, emotional indifference, isolation of the man in the family, etc.) and dismissal or debasement than of physical blows, and emerges above all in situations in which the man’s professional or social role is (or has become) inferior to that of the woman, or in cases in which the woman is much younger than the man and makes high demands in different areas of life.

Figure 1
The wheel of control and power
(Pence, 1987, quoted by Mullender, 2000)



Also, female abuse towards males often constitutes a response to repeated abuse in the other direction, in extreme cases of self-defence or in situations of unbearable fear, in which violence breaks out explosively as a consequence of anger repressed over a long period (Torres & Espada, 1996). In any case, and despite the undeniable fact that some women abuse their husbands, it should be stressed that, of all abused adults, 95% of the victims are women (Echeburúa & Corral, 1998).

ESSENTIAL LINES TO BE DEVELOPED IN A PROGRAMME OF INTERVENTION WITH ABUSERS

The implementation of intervention programmes for reducing male violence in the couple is one of the actions most urgently being carried out, given the alarming number of women seriously assaulted (in many cases resulting in their death) by their partners in the domestic context.

Intervention programs are focusing on therapy aimed at both aggressors and victims. Although many women decide to leave their partners before or during the period of therapy, a large proportion of them (approximately 30% of treated victims, and 50% of the total) continue to live with them (Echeburúa & cols., 1996). There is a need, then, for an integral treatment approach to abuse oriented to both victims and aggressors, either because they continue to live under the same roof, or because, in the case of separations, the aggressor may repeat the behaviour in future with another woman (Echeburúa & Fernández-Montalvo, 1998).

When psychological treatment in the abuser is accepted voluntarily, the effects are highly favourable, since the aggressor is aware of his problem, and shows motivation to modify his aggressive behaviour. On the other hand, success rates in patients obliged by judicial decisions to undergo treatment are very low. In these cases the abuser has no motivation to see substantial changes in his behaviour (Madina, 1994).

First of all, it is crucial to assess in the early stages of treatment how dangerous the patient is at present, and his motivation to change (Corsi, 1995). The reason for giving such priority to this is the significant statistic that therapy is rejected or prematurely abandoned by almost 50% of patients (Echeburúa & Fernández-Montalvo, 1998).

The aim of therapeutic interventions has usually been, over 10-15 sessions with 1 or 2 male therapists, to teach time suspension techniques, examine the problem of

jealousy, control drinking habits, reassess cognitive biases, design problem-solving strategies, apply training programmes in relaxation and communication skills, and teach strategies for coping with anger and controlling one's impulses (Holtzworth-Munroe, Bates, Smutzler & Sandin, 1997).

The heterogeneity of the programmes and the variety of techniques employed up to now make it difficult to draw definitive conclusions (Gondolf, 1997). Thus, it would be appropriate to work towards a streamlining of treatment protocols in relation to the different variables involved (therapeutic approach, number of sessions, individual or group format) and the different types of abuser (Echeburúa & Fernández-Montalvo, 1998).

Nevertheless, the fact of receiving treatment considerably reduces relapse rates, since relapse (or repetition of abuse) depends more on the personal characteristics of abusers than on the type of treatment received (Shephard, 1992). From a predictive perspective, the factors associated with therapeutic success are as follows: abuser's age, a comfortable economic situation, late onset of the violent behaviour and number of therapy sessions accompanied by the partner (Harris, 1986).

In general, it should be borne in mind that the objective of treatment has to be control of the violence, irrespective of any possible marital reconciliation, and that therapy should not be restricted to the detection of physical aggression through anger management techniques. What is more difficult to control is psychological abuse, which may continue even after the physical violence has ceased (Corsi, 1995).

One of the basic needs in the context of therapy is an adjustment to improve its effectiveness. This could be achieved through the application of individual cognitive-behavioural treatment, according to the specific needs of each person, alternating with groups sessions (groups of abusers) within the global framework of a domestic violence programme and with complementary psychopharmacological treatment for controlling the violent behaviour in cases of especially impulsive patients or those with mood disorders (Edleson & Tolman, 1992; Maiuro & Avery, 1996). Therapeutic programmes should be of long duration (at least 4 months), and with regular follow-ups covering a period of 1 to 2 years).

As far as the group sessions (which can be chaired by therapists together with ex-abusers who serve as models) are concerned, their objective is to neutralize the customary mechanisms of denial, minimization and

external causal attribution of the violent behaviour, to generate awareness of the problem and to help abusers assume responsibility for it, see that change is possible and develop effective coping strategies for dealing with everyday difficulties. Thus, the basic objectives of these therapeutic groups are, on the one hand, for the abuser to take responsibility for his aggressive and violent acts, expressing the need for change as his own decision, and not because of external pressures) and, on the other, to break the chain of violence (Corsi, 1995).

Furthermore, it should be borne in mind that abuse behaviour develops and is maintained for a variety of reasons. Thus, treatment techniques cannot be homogeneous for all cases; for example, in some patients therapy will focus on the elimination of macho stereotypes or the control of jealousy behaviour, and will not have to deal with the question of alcohol abuse (Echeburúa & Fernández-Montalvo, 1998).

Nevertheless, it is useful and convenient to have access to a wide spectrum of therapeutic possibilities with which to confront in a flexible manner the specific situations arising in each particular case (see the treatment protocol by Echeburúa & Fernández-Montalvo, 1998, in Table 4).

Given this situation, there is a need for the incorporation of programmes into an institutional context of assistance for domestic violence cases, which would have a series of advantages (Echeburúa & Fernández-Montalvo, 1998):

- Joint attention to the needs of all the different members of the family.
- The legal, financial and housing assistance that is frequently necessary in these cases.
- The possibility of observation through a one-way

mirror of the initial interviews with the victims of gender violence, with the aim of allowing abusers to become aware of the extent of the harm done by violent behaviour and to generate greater motivation to change.

DISCUSSION: PROPOSALS FOR PREVENTIVE MEASURES IN MALE VIOLENCE IN THE COUPLE

In relation to aggressive and violent behaviour, there is a series of agents or variables that influence the development and expression of maladjusted behaviour –both personal and social– of individuals in their environment. In the present work we have made a brief review of the concept of aggression in an attempt to identify and analyze some of the factors to which the individual is exposed in different contexts (family, school, community, etc.), and which sometimes lead to the development of attitudes and behaviours that go beyond the bounds of rights, norms and respect for others. However, the focus of this work is one of the most serious consequences of men’s behaviour towards women within the family, that is, male violence within the couple.

Currently, acts of domestic violence perpetrated by men constitute one of the most widely reported crimes in the mass media. Coverage by newspapers, radio and TV has led to widespread social alarm, give the large numbers of women (95% of victims in abuse cases are female) being brutally abused, humiliated and in many cases killed at the hands of their partners each year.

Among the measures being implemented with a view to designing interventions and preventing the abuse of women is that of making society aware of the need to detect and *decode* situations involving male aggression response to certain conflicts, which can result in brutal beatings by the aggressor and considerable harm or even death for the victim.

One of the principal preventive measures adopted has thus been the transmission of as much information as possible on male violence towards women through the mass media. The objective of this has been to generate a social awareness for identifying the problem and for aiding cooperation with and generally helping women who are being abused or at risk of being abused. In this way, it will be possible to detect risk situations for the aggressive and violent behaviour that characterizes the aggressor, with the aim of reducing such violence and helping abusers themselves to become aware of what they are doing.

At the same time, and again with a view to the effective

Table 4
Protocol for treatment of abusers
(Echeburúa & Fernández-Montalvo, 1998)

<i>Psychopathological aspects</i>	<i>Therapeutic techniques</i>
Uncontrolled anger	- Explanation of the cycle of violence and the process of escalating anger - Time suspension - Cognitive distraction - Training in self-instructions
Anxiety/stress	- Relaxation
Pathological jealousy	- Cognitive restructuring - Satiation
Abusive consumption of alcohol	- Controlled drinking programme
Deficits in assertiveness and communication	- Training in problem-solving
Distorted ideas about gender roles and about violence as a way of solving problems	- Education about gender equality - Cognitive restructuring
Low self-esteem	- Cognitive reassessment
Deficits in sexual relations	- Education on sexuality in the couple

prevention of male violence in the couple, there is a need for renewed initiatives in relation to programmes aimed at children and adolescents who are in the process of identifying and developing moral values. The aim of such initiatives would be to develop a series of strategies promoting above all respect for one's colleagues or classmates, regardless of gender. Thus, some schools have launched programmes for the prevention of gender violence, with the chief aims of improving relationships between peers of both sexes and providing children with sufficient tools for dealing with conflicts, resolving them effectively without the need to resort to violence (Barragán, De la Cruz, Doblas, Padrón, Navarro & Álvarez, 2001). Following the lines of such programmes, and according to these authors, the objectives would be:

- 1) To encourage critical reflection among school pupils about conceptions of masculinity, violence and emotional education. This would allow examination of the different expressions of masculinity in our own society and in other cultures from the perspective of gender: expression of feelings, violence, gender-stereotyped activities of that men practice through *obligation*, as well as the changes they would like to make.
- 2) To analyze and construct, in a collective fashion, values related to non-violence and conflict resolution. This allows us to work on all the expressions and types of violence in everyday interpersonal relations: peer conflicts, sport, advertising, cinema, violence against women and war.
- 3) To provide pupils with alternative images of models of masculinity not associated with violent behaviour. Through this we can focus on analysis of the concept of men in our culture and others as regards relationships between change of models of maleness, sexual preference and homophobia.
- 4) To make pupils aware of their conceptual ideas on gender violence, types of violence and the social and personal consequences of violence. The purpose of this is to work in greater depth on the analysis of violence against women and children, devoting special attention to male violence in the couple.
- 5) To make pupils aware of the importance of emotional education in men as a form of comprehensive development, free of patriarchal prejudices and gender stereotypes. To propose getting to know oneself better, one's limitations and inhibitions, and trying to reach an understanding of

what it means to educate and learn to channel our own emotions.

Moreover, it should be borne in mind that the broad spectrum of values to which children are exposed is transmitted from adult society. Thus, adults must act responsibly in transmitting values and norms, since they are the principal models available to children. Consequently, the different contexts of children's lives (home, school, community, sport, etc.) should deliberately provide keys and pointers to a code of behaviour in line with suitable norms and values. In this way, both boys and girls can learn to treat their peers in an adaptive way from childhood, where tolerance, respect for norms and consideration for others are of the utmost priority.

We might also consider in this regard the objectives of the *Non-Sexist Workshop*, published in 1990 by Red Cross Youth, and designed for groups of 12 to 15-year-olds working over 8 two-hour sessions. The purpose of this workshop is to generate greater equality in all types of relations between men and women, beginning with education in childhood and adolescence and the interactions that take place in the spheres of family and school. The general objectives of the workshop are as follows:

1. *Experiential objectives*. In order to link reflection with reality and transfer it to practice, within the specific contexts in which children live.
2. *Cognitive objectives*. To develop the capacity for reflection on one's own reality; to learn to objectivize situations and distance oneself from them; to encourage critical analysis; to situate reflection in a framework of historical, cultural, economic and social interrelations and causes; to promote awareness and the ability to make rational choices; to help reveal gender inequalities; and to help to overcome inequalities through *understanding*.
3. *Emotional objectives*. To encourage feelings of repulsion towards injustice and inequality due to gender; to favour the development of positive and supportive or solidary attitudes based on equality; to encourage respect and confidence in interpersonal and intersexual communication; and to promote free and egalitarian relationships between men and women.

González and Santana (2001) propose some criteria for inclusion in prevention programmes on male violence in the couple. These authors argue the need to undertake preventive initiatives in the educational context through

appropriate planning and rigorous assessment that detects possible perverse effects. This would help to avoid reactions contrary to those expected, bearing in mind the difficulty of modifying deep-rooted attitudes (Chaiken, Wood & Eagly, 1996). Moreover, if young men feel that the messages threaten men in general, and not just certain violent individuals, it is quite probable that their masculine identity will be activated, reducing their receptiveness to the messages. On the other hand, if the messages are initially categorized as acceptable, people will most likely perceive less difference between their position and the argument put forward. Therefore, it is recommended to apply programmes at early ages, when it is easier to modify the attitudes of young people.

It is also recommended to reinforce those skills that will permit young people to develop healthy relationships, rather than focusing on the potential dangers. This will help to avoid a climate of pessimism in young people which, in the long run, would be detrimental to couples (Donowey, Freitas, Michaelis & Khouri, 1998).

Furthermore, young people should be encouraged to participate in the process of change, with the aim of channelling the influence of the group, breaking the image of false consensus, learning about those situations and beliefs that can lead to violence, and so on. Research has shown that pressure from friends can encourage violent behaviour within a couple (Barnett, Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 1997). It is also necessary to explore young people's opinions and beliefs and what being a man or being a woman means to them, with a view to analyzing and considering other forms of attaining positive gender identity, which permits cooperation between men and women.

Experts in the field also recommend training young people in the skills that can assist them in their life within a relationship (González & Santana, 2001). In this regard, certain behaviours are potentially negative for relationships, such as continual criticism, or defensive and emotionally distant attitudes (Gottman & Silver, 1999). Thus, it would seem of key importance to for maintaining high levels of satisfaction over time to nurture friendship, based on respect, the capacity for enjoying the other's company, and the use of repair strategies during conflicts (e.g., a joke at the right moment, or an apology gratefully received). Further skills to be trained would include those related to communication, response in situations of conflict, attributions about one's partner's behaviour, and so on. Finally, González and Santana (2001) suggest the need to coordinate these programmes within a general policy of prevention.

Another of the points developed in the present work involved an example of intervention with an abuser. Intervention with abusers is just as important as work with victims, given the importance of creating and reinforcing protection for the victim, in an effort reduce as much as possible the number of cases of male violence in the couple. With this aim, programmes for abusers and victims attempt to structure a series of techniques based on cognitive-behavioural treatment, according to the needs of each person and within a global domestic violence programme (Edleson & Tolman, 1992; Maiuro & Avery, 1996).

Corsi and Bonino (2003) highlight the importance of orienting interventions with men in relation to the problem of gender violence in institutions. Thus, the authors suggest designing strategies of:

- *Promotion of health*, focusing, in relation to men, on the development of cooperative, careful, co-responsible behaviours involving physical presence in all areas of health and community care, and through specific modules in the following contexts: perinatal, sexual and reproductive health, paediatric and general care of others.
- *Primary prevention* for reducing the probability of appearance of the problem, favouring the transformation of risk factors (gender roles, family authoritarianism, learned violence) and designing strategies for the children of violent men.
- *Secondary prevention* for early detection of the problem and rapid, effective intervention (before and not after the serious violence) with men using violence of all types; particular attention should be focused on strategies of intervention with "pre-violent" or risk males, or those who have shown initial signs of psychological or physical violence, such as those in crisis due to feelings of loss of power, or those with a tendency for possessiveness, loss of control, impulsiveness or self-obsession, who may be risk males if they are strongly attached to the traditional masculine model. Men with additional or aggravative risk factors should also be targeted. The behaviour of all such men should be taken extremely seriously as indicators of risk, and it is of paramount importance to detect the activating factors of violence in each case. Also important are strategies aimed at reducing inequalities in domestic organization and resources, in favour of a more equal distribution.
- *Tertiary prevention* for reducing the effects of the problem and avoiding relapse through programmes of recovery and rehabilitation. In the case of

strategies for men who have been reported or are actually in prison, in nearly all countries with experience in this issue these strategies are implemented outside the healthcare system, in independent programmes which, for their success, should be coordinated with the judicial system.

The complexity and diversity of the variables involved in the development of aggressive and violent behaviour make it difficult to identify and analyze the factors that lead a man to brutally assault, or even kill his girlfriend, ex-girlfriend, wife or ex-wife; this points to the need to analyze this issue more profoundly and examine in detail the variables behind such violence.

Finally, it should be stressed that the best tool for preventing violence by men in the couple is to continue insisting on bringing this problem out into the open, so as to reveal to society that such violence has ceased to be a concealed matter to be sorted out within the marriage or relationship, to become one of the major tragedies of the family. It is therefore crucial to continue transmitting (through the mass media, debates, conferences, training, etc.) all those proposals that involve a plan of action developed by teams of professionals (psychologists, doctors, lawyers, social workers, etc.) who provide from their field and coordinate a range of resources aimed at putting a stop to this unacceptable gender violence that threatens the state of mind and the very lives of so many women.

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