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## Psychosocial characteristics of men and women as perpetrators of domestic violence

**Abstract:** The presented study aims to compare men and women ( $N = 227$ ), perpetrators of domestic violence in terms of psychosocial characteristics, present conditions of socialization in which the perpetrator grew and the motives for committing violent act against partners. The population of violence offenders under study and its sub-groups (women and men) did not differ from the norm group in terms of personality traits and temperament. The differences were noticed only in two KSP scales: secure style and avoidance style. The comparison of women and men revealed differences, in three variables: openness for experience, emotional intelligence and avoidance-ambivalence style. Moreover, study showed that despite the good relationship between the subjects' parents, some perpetrators suffered violence from the loved ones. It should be noted that women were more affected by physical and psychological aggression in childhood. Analysis of motives to commit acts of violence indicated that they are associated with three factors: advantage over your partner, influence and control.

**Key words:** domestic violence, gender differences, personality, temperament, motives of violence, biological family.

### Introduction

The aim of the study has been to present the psychosocial characteristics of perpetrators of violence in families, male and female ones, making an analysis of socialization conditions, in which the perpetrators grew up, as well as establishing motives and reasons of their acts of violence, directed at partners.

Studies on violence have been presented, in most of the reports, from the perspective of victims of the violence, or partly from the perspective of male perpetrators of domestic violence acts, yet attempts to describe that violence from the perspective of female perpetrators have never been made.

Studies concerning aggressors, particularly male perpetrators of violence have been only fragmentary. O'Leary (1993), Weitzman and Dreen (1992) characterize perpetrators as persons who are not sure of themselves, experiencing anxieties of various kinds, resulting from feeling inferior, inefficient, and deserted. Barnett, Miller-Perrin, Perrin (2004), Bennett and Williams (1999), Krahé (2005), Wiehe (1998) demonstrated that persons doing harm to their (female) partners are characterized by: low self-esteem, helplessness due to reasons not related to the

relationship, pathological envy, anti-social disturbances of personality. Baumaister and Boden (1988), Jacob (1987), Johnson, (2006) stated that perpetrators of violence had problems with controlling their behaviour. They are also characterized by inclination to react in an impulsive way, aggressive in response to slightest provocation (Holzworth-Munroe, Mochan, Hebron, Rochman, & Stuart, 2003). As is claimed by Kubacka-Jasiecka (2006), persons causing violence more often than not demonstrate a borderline pathology, thus their characteristics must necessarily refer to results of clinical investigations.

Hamberger and Hastings (1986), Campbell, Sharps and Glass (2000), Dutton (2001) distinguished features of borderline personality in persons causing violence, in the order of importance they are as follows: tendency to be involved in unstable interpersonal relations, which sometimes comprise attempts of depreciating the partner, manipulating, or concealed dependency, unsteady self-awareness, coupled with intolerance of loneliness and anxiety of being abandoned, fierce anger, making exaggerated demands and being impulsive, usually coupled with indulgence in alcohol and other substances.

Dutton (2001) noticed that perpetrators of violence of borderline type, face considerable difficulties with

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maintaining stable sense of identity, their self-esteem is very labile, depending on external acceptance and type of feedback received, the consequence of which is a tendency to become excessively dependent on others, and the need for protection; thus they suffer a strong fear of being rejected and losing the partner, they incessantly anticipate its threat where it does not exist.

The typology of domestic violence perpetrators, due to the definite profile of personality factors and temperamental features, have been presented by Rode, who also defined - for each type of perpetrator - the risk factors leading to occurrence of violence on their part (Rode 2010a, 2010b, Rode, & Marganski, 2014). On the basis of symptoms in the behaviour of violence perpetrators, the author underlined that their personality and behaviour developed in strict relation with the disturbed identity and the self-esteem function. A characteristic feature of such people is the unstable and inadequate self image, the attributes of which include over- or underestimating one's possibilities, and sometimes oscillation between those two extremes. A dominating motivation for the behaviour of violence perpetrators thus becomes the eagerness to maintain, protect, and enhance the self-esteem, which usually is accomplished by diminishing the value of the partner (questioning her competences, professional position, attributing negative features), and control of her behaviour.

Attempts of diagnosing the phenomenon of female domestic violence have been made by few researchers (Steinmetz 1987, Rennison, 2009, Murdoch, Vess, & Ward, 2010, Straus 2003), they tried to describe, first of all, the manifestations of violence that women have to towards their partners, as well as the scope and forms which this phenomenon takes. One can clearly notice the absence of research and reports outlining the psychological characteristics of women who are violent towards their partners. The knowledge in that respect is diffused to a large extent, its elements can be found in sources that describe the maltreated husband syndrome (Steinmetz, 1987) as well as cases of female violence in heterosexual relations (Goldenson, Geffner, Foster, & Clipson, 2007, Stuart, Moore, Gordon, Ramsey, & Kahler, 2006).

Steinmetz (1987), on the basis of conducted research, stated that not only women were victims of domestic violence, oftentimes also men were such victims, men who are physically abused by female partners, described wives as aggressors, indicating that aggressive behaviour of women in domestic violence acts is comparable to that is domestic violence acts where men were perpetrators. As time went by, the notions of *husband battering*, and *husband abuse* became part of the terminology used in defining the maltreated husband syndrome.

It should be noted that the scarce literature on that subject revolves practically entirely around the issue of physical violence, whereas the main forms of violence, namely female psychic and sexual violence - apart from a few exceptions (Mathews, Mathews, & Speltz, 1989, Goldenson et al. 2007) - do not pose a subject of research. Focusing upon the problem of physical violence, Straus (2003) stated that in the course of 35 years of conducting research and

nearly thirty violence research areas he analyzed in formal couples and couples living together on informal grounds, the number of assaults initiated by both sexes was equal. A specific research finding of Straus was the one that stated that the most common motive of physical violence, used by both men and women, was the strife to dominate and to be in control. Archer (2002), Mechem, Shofer, Reinhard, Hornig, & Datner, (1999) report that forms physical violence used by women towards their partners are aggressive indeed, men who become victims of female violence are: kicked, bitten, beaten with fists, strangled, as well as stabbed with a knife (Vasquez, Falcone 1997), the consequence of which are depressive conditions in victims, anxiety, psychosomatic disturbances, attempted suicides, self-mutilations.

Straus (2003) points out to the frequent tendency of omitting - in research devoted to violence directed to maltreatment of women - the aspect related to provoking and initiating assaults by women themselves. Rare exceptions, such as the study of Walker (1993), comprising women staying in shelters for abused women revealed that 50 % of women admitted assaulting the partner in the year directly preceding their moving to the shelter, while 41.7% of women declared the use of physical violence towards the partner within six months after leaving the shelter.

Summarizing the material presented above, one has to state that among the studies performed, a majority of comparative studies indicated a similar tendency for initiating physical assaults, both by men and women. Those opinions are reflected in cyclic research reports concerning domestic violence phenomenon, of which a perfect example is the research of the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) from the years 2005-2012.

The report of the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) from 2012, concerning "Domestic Violence and Conflicts" states that that "every ninth woman (11%) and every tenth man (10%) living in steady relationships experienced physical violence from their partners. Every ninth adult (11%) admits having been a perpetrator of domestic violence, whereas women - even more often than men - admit having hit a partner during quarrel (12% in comparison to 10%, respectively). As concerns reactivity of the victims of violence, more than half the studied persons that have been hit by the partner (59%) declare that they have also used violence" (CBOS, 2012, pp. 3-6).

Collective statistics concerning the use of "physical or psychic form of violence" revealed that either was experienced by 21 % of women and 22 % of men (CBOS, 2012, p. 7).

As has been mentioned in a previous quotation, data concerning the scope and forms of violence experienced by females have been reported more often than psychological characteristics of female perpetrators of domestic violence, unfortunately they are only fragmentary. Dutton (1998), Goldenson et al. (2007) underline that those women had problems with maintaining emotional equilibrium, emotional instability causes frequent changes of mood, they have poor control over their emotions, they experience - more often than men - tensions in the form of anger, for example, which increases the probability of

being violent towards people who they blame for causing those emotions. They are impulsive and hyperexcitable. Researchers reached a conclusion that hyperexcitability and aggression may result from hormonal fluctuation, which accompanies pre-menstrual period and make women more prone to emotional reactions, which entails that its influence consists mainly of changed perception of threat, not directly impelling aggression (Niehoff, 2005, p. 502).

On the basis of literature devoted to the subject, and making reference to the theoretical model concerning prerequisites for domestic violence (for technical details and research results, cf. Rode, 2010a) the following main research problems have been formulated: (1) Which personality and temperamental factors distinguish men and women - domestic violence perpetrators - from general population - are there statistically significant differences in personality and temperamental factors between women and men who are domestic violence perpetrators? (2) What were the socialization conditions of men and women - domestic violence perpetrators - are there statistically significant differences in socialization conditions of men and women - domestic violence perpetrators? (3) What were the motives for acts of violence - are there statistically significant differences concerning motives for acts of violence committed by men and women - domestic violence perpetrators?

On the basis of literature devoted to the subject, the following personality factors have been selected, as regards men and women who are perpetrators of domestic violence acts: factors based on the Big Five Personality Traits Model (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness for Experience, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness), emotional intelligence, temperamental traits, as well as attachment styles.

### Personality traits

The authors of the Big Five Model, Paul T. Costa and Robert R. McCrae although they do not provide a clear-cut definition of personality, still understand personality as a set of factors determining adaptation of humans to situations (McCrae, & Costa, 2005). Those authors distinguished five components of human personality. They are: neuroticism, extraversion, openness for experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Those factors describe both emotional and interpersonal styles, as well as attitudes of humans. Research concerning the connections between personality and tendencies for maltreating family members has been conducted for many years. Dutton (1998) demonstrated that a combination of such features as: attachment anxiety, borderline personality features, and chronic trauma symptoms (traumatic experiences) generate the development of the so-called *abusive personality* in men and women who are perpetrators of violence between partners.

Gilchrist et al. (2003), on the basis of investigations of 219 violence perpetrators found out that most of the subjects manifested intensified antisocial/ narcissistic features, while others were offenders with borderline personality features, emotionally dependent. Walsh,

Swogger et al. (2010), investigated whether male domestic violence offenders differ, in terms of personality features, from women who are perpetrators of violence. On the basis of results obtained, the following conclusion has been formulated: offenders committing violence in close relationships, both men and women, can be divided into three groups: antisocial offenders - they are characterized by a high level of psychopathic personality traits, dysphoric offenders - they are characterized by substantial apprehensiveness, depressiveness, as well as other types of psychic disturbances, offenders with low level of pathology - people with correct personality structure, rarely manifesting inclinations for using violence .

### Temperament

Temperament, according to Jan Strelau (1997, 2006), refers to basic personality traits, or traits that are relatively stable in time, which are manifested in formal characteristics of behaviour (energy and temporary parameters).

Activity, as a feature of temperament, has the status of a regulator in search for stimulation, which depends on the reactivity level. Search for sensations has been noticed by researchers studying domestic violence. Studies of Dutton and Golant (1995), as well as Herzberger (2002) allowed to distinguish domestic violence offenders, for whom the source of sensation stimulations were the acts of violence committed on their partners. Aggressive behaviour was used to compensate for stimulation deficit. Jacobson (1993) found out that about 20% of the studied aggressors battering their wives demonstrated low emotional reactivity, and during the conflict (quarrel) revealed slower heart rate, and calmed down inside, despite the fact that their behaviour was characterized by emotional aggression. Jacobson came to the conclusion that individuals reacting in such way apply violence in the most efficient manner, their violence is instrumental and controlled (ibidem). In the research carried out by other authors (Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz 1988) a high degree of reacting with violence to very low value stimuli has been demonstrated. Caprara, Perugini and Barbaranelli, (1994) pointed out to the high excitability of offenders and excessive impulsivity, with strong reactions to even slightest stimuli or provocations. Cabalski (2014) indicated that in psychological profile of women using violence, one can easily notice their hyperexcitability, ease of flaring up, and aggressiveness. Goldenson, Spidel, Greaves and Dutton (2009) demonstrated that such temperamental traits as: emotional reactivity or perseveration matter in committing violent acts.

### Attachment styles

Bowlby (2007, p.34) defines attachment as a long-term, emotional relationship (*lasting connectedness*) with a specific person. This bond is characterized by such traits as: selectivity (that is, focusing on a specific person, who evokes attachment behaviours in a way and scale not encountered in relations with any other person), *searching*

for physical closeness (making efforts to maintain closeness with the object of attachment), *comfort and safety* (resulting from achieving closeness), as well as *fear of separation* (emerging when the bond is broken and it is not possible to achieve closeness).

The theory of attachment styles is the basis for understanding and explaining cognitive, affective (emotional) and behavioural elements of close relationships, in which conflicts and tensions occur (Goldenson et al., 2009; Carnelley, Pietromonaco, & Jaffe, 1994)

On the basis of research (Babcock et al., 2000; Godbout, Dutton et al., 2009) it has been found that domestic violence offenders, more often than men who do not practise violence, demonstrate insecure attachment styles. According to researchers, men who practise violence may be classified - with equal probability - as withdrawing as well as absorbed ones. Offenders with withdrawing attachment style were more in control and distanced, whereas absorbed husbands/partners appeared to be the least distanced in marriage interactions. The results indicate a significant role of repressed anxiety and avoiding intimacy in the path from early exposure to violence in childhood towards violent treatment of the partner. Special attention was devoted to attachment styles in case of women (Goldenson et al., 2007; Orcutt et al., 2005). Results of studies indicate that individuals (women, men) with insecure attachment style demonstrate inclinations to perceive their partners as not available, unreliable, and incredible. Studies on female domestic violence offenders demonstrated a common pattern of psychopathological traits within personality (Simmons, Lehmann, Cobb, & Fowler, 2005; Stuart et al., 2006).

### Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is defined as a „set of abilities that allow the use of emotions in problem solving, particularly in social situations (Matczak, & Jaworska, 2008, p. 7). One can also define emotional intelligence as the entirety of abilities, which enable efficient processing of emotional information (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000). Empathy seems to be an important personality aspect, connected with the tendency to use violence, particularly violence of women. It plays a very significant role in intimate, partner, and family relationships. Results of studies concerning type of violence offenders (Dutton 2001, Holtzworth-Munroe 2003, Rode 2010a, Rode, & Marganski, 2014) indicate that particularly the offenders who have psychopathic personality organization, are distinguished by low emotional sensitivity, do not experience emotional tension nor sense of guilt; generally, as has been indicated by Simmons, Lehmann et al. (2005), Dutton (2001) male violence offenders are diagnosed to have low level of empathy and sense of guilt.

Studies concerning the level of empathy in juvenile delinquents, carried out by Biel (2008), reveal a significant deficit in comparison with average values, however. ”In case of 61 % of female juvenile delinquents, the level of empathy has been diagnosed as low, 23 % of subjects have

had average level of empathy, whereas in 16 % of the female minors, empathy had high levels (Biel, 2008, p. 424).

## Method

### Sampling procedure

In accordance with the assumptions of the study, the selection criterion was the type of offence (purposive sampling). The study comprised women and men, against whom proceedings have been instituted in accordance with art. 207§1,2 or convicted in accordance with art. 207§1,2 for cruelty towards family members. The research has been conducted on the premises of the following penal institutions in Poland: in Lubliniec, Kraków (Nowa Huta), Łódź, as well as the prison for detention in custody pending inquiry in Opole, with seat in Turawa. The authors obtained consent for conducting the research, in accordance with the agreed study procedure, which allowed - with participation of students and other psychologists working for the above penal institutions - to select the study group and to do the research in line with the agreed study programme. Before commencing with the study, students and psychologists participated in suitable theoretical and practical training workshop, which was meant to prepare them for execution of the study scenario, for the purpose of this study (use of research tools and data collection). The subjects gave consent for participation in the study, they had been informed earlier about the study aim and course, as well as about the fact that results would be used anonymously, while the study itself is voluntary, and any subject can withdraw from it at any time, without any consequences. The study was conducted in 2013.

### Participants

The study comprised a total of 227 persons, including 105 women (46.3%), age range from 19 to 67 years of age ( $M = 36.92$ ;  $SD = 10.73$ ). Most of the subjects had primary or vocational education - 72.2% (41.4% and 30.8%, respectively), whereas 27.8% of the study group comprised of persons with secondary or university education (of whom only 3.5% had university education). Mean values as well as deviations concerning age of women and men remained at a very similar level ( $p = .804$ ), yet, as concerns education, women differed in terms of proportion of subjects with primary education in comparison to those with vocational education: the group with primary education was more than twice as big, whereas in case of men both those groups were similar in size (secondary and university education in both groups was represented at a similar level).

In the study group, single persons prevailed slightly (55.9%). However, if we take sex into account, marital status turns out to be more differentiated, because as many as 70.6% of female subjects defined their marital status as “single”. Having children does not seem to be strictly related with marital status: 65.2% of the subjects had one or more children, while this percentage did not differ significantly between sexes.

To complete the socio-demographic characteristics, it seems worth noting that subjects were mostly from cities, towns, or small towns (86.7%), a lot of them were unemployed (49.8% - in the entire group; 59.6% - among females; 41.7% - among males).

## Measures

*The Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-FFI) of Paul T. Costa and Robert R. McCrae.*

The Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-FFI) of Paul T. Costa and Robert R. McCrae, adapted by Bogdan Zawadzki, Jan Strelau, Piotr Szczepaniak, and Magdalena Śliwińska is a tool meant for studying personality (cf. Zawadzki, Strelau, Szczepaniak & Śliwińska, 1998). The theoretical basis for developing the questionnaire was Hans Eysenck's personality theory. The questionnaire consists of five scales: Neuroticism (N), Extraversion (E), Openness to Experience (O), Agreeableness (A), and Conscientiousness (C). Each of the scales distinguished by the authors has six components. The Revised NEO Personality Inventory, NEO - FFI consists of 60 statements, 12 in each of the 5 scales. The subjects select their answer in a 5-degree scale, where 1 stands for complete disagreement, whereas 5 stands for accepting the statement fully. The answers are scored 0 to 4, in accordance with a key, respectively for each scale. The questionnaire contains separate norms of women and for men, taking into account five age groups. The reliability (test-retest  $rtt$ ) of specific scales of the tool is satisfactory: N: 0.80, E: 0.77, O: 0.68, A: 0.68, C: 0.82 (ibidem).

*Attachment Styles Questionnaire (KSP) of Mieczysław Plopa.*

A theoretical basis for constructing that tool is the concept devised by Cynthia Hazan and Phillip R. Shaver. On the basis of attachment styles distinguished by the authors, Mieczysław Plopa (2008a) developed a questionnaire, which consists of three scales: secure style, ambivalence - anxiety style, and avoidance style.

The tool consists of 24 statements, which the subjects assume their attitudes to, by selecting answers on a 7-step scale, where 1 stands for absolutely no acceptance of the statement as true, while 7 stands for full acceptance of the statement.

The reliability (internal consistency) of specific dimensions of the KSP questionnaire is high or moderate, being as follows for each of the scales: secure style -  $r = 0.91$ , ambivalence-anxiety style -  $r = 0.78$ , avoidance style -  $r = 0.80$  (ibidem).

*The Formal Characteristics of Behaviour - Temperament Inventory (FCB-TI) by J. Strelau, B. Zawadzki*

The tool is meant for diagnosing temperament. The theoretical basis for constructing the inventory entitled The Formal Characteristics of Behaviour - Temperament Inventory (FCB-TI) has been the Regulative Theory of

Temperament as developed by Jan Strelau (1997, 2000, 2006).

The questionnaire contains 120 items - 20 for each of the six scales. The subjects are required to answer "yes" or "no". The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values for individual scales are as follows: Briskness - 0.77, Perseveration - 0.77, Sensory sensitivity - 0.72, Emotional reactivity - 0.82, Endurance - 0.86, Activity - 0.82 (Zawadzki, Strelau, Szczepaniak, & Śliwińska, 1998). Results in each scale of FCB-TI are calculated by adding up the diagnostic scores (1 point for each diagnostic answer). Raw results are then processed into normalized results, the so-called stanine ones.

*Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (Polish adaptation of INTE) prepared by A. Jaworska and A. Matczak (2008)*

Emotional intelligence measured by means of INTE questionnaire comprises the ability to recognize emotions, as well as capacity to use emotions and assist thinking and action (Matczak & Jaworowska, 2008). The questionnaire comprises 33 diagnostic questions, which the subject answers, using a 5-step scale, from 1 - I definitely do not agree to 5 - I definitely agree.

Internal consistency of the questionnaire is satisfactory, and does not depart from the internal consistency of its original version. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients for normalization tests are within the range of 0.83 - 0.87. Sten norms have been developed for women and men separately, due to the differences between them. Minimum score was 33 points, maximum - 165 points.

*The authors' own questionnaire*

The authors' own questionnaire has been the source of the following data: (1) demographic data of the offender: age, sex, education, marital status, professional status, place of residence, (2) information concerning past diseases and traumas/injuries, as well as dependencies and their treatment, (3) socialization conditions (a) family socialization - family structure, financial and living conditions of the generation family, emotional bonds between family members, ways of solving conflicts, parents' dependency, psychic disturbances, experiences of violence in the family of origin, (b) situation outside the family - causing behaviour-related problems and issues, learning difficulties, criminal record, (4) information concerning marriage and family - why they got married, how long they stay in the relationship, number of children, ways of solving conflicts, behaviour issues, data concerning violence (5) specificity of using violence - motives for acts of violence.

## Results

Results of the research will be presented in the order that follows that of three research problems.

### Personality and temperamental changes

The first of those has been defined as follows: Do men and women - domestic violence perpetrators - differ in terms of selected personality traits? To answer such a question, average results for each variable in the groups of women and men have been compared, while the significance of difference has been verified by means of t-Student test. The results of that analysis are presented in Table 1.

As can be noticed, only three traits out of the fifteen personality and temperament variables differentiate women and men significantly. They are: Openness for Experience ( $p = .005^1$ ), Emotional Intelligence ( $p = .019$ ) and ambivalence-anxiety attachment style ( $p = .005$ ). In the table discussed here (columns with average, values provided in brackets) there as average normalized results (in stens or stanines - depending on the scale<sup>2</sup>). This

information is meant to help in psychological assessment of variables in the analyzed groups<sup>3</sup>. It should be stated, on its basis, that in case of the majority of variables the results - in comparison with general population (that is, the normalization group) - are at average level of 5-6 stens and 4-6 stanines. Among the few exceptions, the first to be mentioned would be the results in KSP which, in the case of avoidance style are in the low range (second sten in women and fourth in men) whereas in case of secure style they nearly reached the level of ninth sten. Less extreme, but also exceeding the average results can be observed in case of Conscientiousness, which in both groups have been slightly elevated (at the level of the seventh sten, with slight "advantage" of women), as well as Perseveration, with the result close to seventh sten, in case of women.

**Table 1. Selected personality and temperament variables.**

	Female (n = 81*)			Male (n = 110*)			Student's t-test and effect size			
	<i>M</i>	( <i>Mn</i> **)	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	( <i>Mn</i> **)	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
Personality (NEO-FFI)										
Neuroticism (N)	21.99	(4.9)	8.30	21.51	(5.8)	8.23	0.375	165.0	.708	.029
Extraversion (E)	29.04	(6.0)	6.31	28.97	(6.3)	4.76	0.082	134.1	.935	.007
Openness to Experience (O)	26.25	(5.3)	5.24	23.67	(4.7)	4.75	3.307	162.0	.001	.251
Agreeableness (A)	28.81	(4.7)	5.24	27.52	(4.9)	4.46	1.754	171.0	.081	.133
Conscientiousness (C)	36.19	(6.9)	6.85	34.15	(6.5)	7.22	1.854	165.0	.065	.143
Temperament (FCB-TI)										
Briskness (BR)	14.95	(5.4)	4.08	14.52	(5.0)	4.08	0.714	188.0	.476	.052
Perseveration (PER)	11.71	(4.1)	3.60	11.38	(5.1)	3.87	0.585	182.0	.559	.043
Sensory sensitivity (SS)	14.31	(4.4)	3.60	13.30	(4.3)	3.65	1.825	177.0	.070	.136
Emotional reactivity (ER)	9.60	(3.8)	4.62	8.40	(4.8)	4.34	1.807	185.0	.072	.132
Endurance (EN)	12.15	(6.5)	4.97	12.15	(5.4)	4.62	0.005	175.0	.996	< .001
Activity (AC)	10.85	(5.9)	4.07	11.51	(5.8)	3.64	-1.135	172.0	.258	.086
Emotional Intelligence (INTE)	127.14	(5.7)	23.61	119.20	(5.2)	18.78	2.377	160.0	.019	.185
Attachment Styles (KSP***)										
Secure	43.63	(8.8)	11.75	42.68	(8.7)	9.75	0.588	151.2	.557	.048
Anxious/ambivalent	28.16	(5.5)	12.17	33.25	(6.9)	11.59	-2.822	175.0	.005	.209
Avoidant	20.45	(2.2)	10.31	23.54	(3.6)	11.07	-1.931	184.0	.055	.141

Note.

\* sample size for each test may vary slightly because of missing data.

\*\* mean of normalized results (FCB-TI scales are expressed in stanines, others in stens).

\*\*\* KSP = "Questionnaire of Attachment Styles" (there is no English version of KSP).

<sup>1</sup> All the tables in this paper contain information about effect size (depending on the test, this is  $r$  or  $\omega$  statistics), [cf. King, Minium, 2009]. The authors resigned from their systematic interpretation, since none of the values does not exceed 0.251, which, with commonly accepted method of interpretation (cf. ibidem), is below average value. Please take into consideration the non-experimental (exploratory) nature of this study, if those statistics are to be used.

<sup>2</sup> Norms for FCB-TI are expressed in stanines, others in stens.

<sup>3</sup> It has not been considered necessary in this case to determine the statistical significance.

To sum up: as regards personality and temperament, both the entire population of violence offenders, and its sub-groups (women and men) do not differ from the general population. The main exception concerns two KSP scales: secure style and avoidance style, which in both groups are at high and low level, respectively, in comparison with the general population. The comparison of women and men did not reveal many differences, they occur only in case of the following three variables: Openness for Experience, Emotional Intelligence and Avoidance-Ambivalence. In the category of effect size the changes noted, albeit substantial, are not significant.

### Socialization conditions

The second research problem has been formulated as follows: What were the motives for acts of violence - this problem comprises the following detailed question: are there statistically significant differences concerning motives for acts of violence committed by men and women - domestic violence perpetrators?

The offenders' socialization conditions have been processed taking into account the following variables: family structure, conflicts between parents, excessive alcohol consumption by parents, parents' mental diseases, as well as exposure of the subjects to violence at home. The results of analyses in that respect are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. The biological family of the perpetrator.**

	Total		Gender				Chi-square test and effect size			
	(N = 227)		Female (n = 105*)		Male (n = 122*)		$\chi^2$	df	p	$\omega$
Upbringing in full family	165	(73.7)	65	(61.9)	100	(84.0)	14.08	1	< .001	.251
Material and household situation of the biological family **	198	(90.4)	94	(92.2)	104	(88.9)	0.67	1	.413	.055
Mental disorders in the biological family	19	(10.3)	11	(13.3)	8	(7.9)	1.40	1	.237	.087
Alcoholism in the biological family:										
father's	52	(31.3)	28	(34.1)	24	(28.6)	0.60	1	.439	.060
mother's	20	(13.2)	8	(10.8)	12	(15.4)	0.70	1	.404	.068
Relationships between parents										
they respected and helped each other	127	(60.5)	59	(64.1)	68	(57.6)	0.92	1	.339	.066
they quarrelled and argued	14	(6.7)	7	(7.6)	7	(5.9)	0.23	1	.629	.033
they were not able to communicate	15	(7.1)	6	(6.5)	9	(7.6)	0.10	1	.758	.021
it varied - they quarrelled and reconciled	59	(28.1)	23	(25.0)	36	(30.5)	0.78	1	.378	.061
Frequency of conflicts between parents **	27	(17.8)	16	(25.4)	11	(12.4)	4.29	1	.038	.168
Occurrence of violence:										
physical	44	(20.4)	26	(26.0)	18	(15.5)	3.64	1	.056	.130
psychic	30	(14.7)	19	(20.4)	11	(9.9)	4.47	1	.035	.148
sexual abuse	13	(7.4)	11	(12.5)	2	(2.3)	6.62	1	.010	.194

Note.

\* sample size for each test may vary slightly because of missing data.

\*\* "satisfactory or better" vs. "bad / very bad".

\*\*\* "often / very often" vs. "sometimes / very rarely".

Only in case of four variables (being raised in a family with both parents frequency of conflicts, as well as occurrence of psychic and sexual violence) women and men differed in a statistically significant manner. Those variables will be discussed first.

Most of the offenders studied, both women and men, come from two-parent families (73.7%). Sex differentiates this variable in a significant way ( $p < .001$ ): female offenders come from single-parent families far more (about 38%), in comparison with men, for whom this variable amounts to only 16%.

Conflicts have been defined as occurring "often/very often" by 17.8% of the subjects, while in women that percentage reached the level of 25.4% which, in comparison with 12.4% in case of men turns out to be statistically significant (although the effect is of low value - .168)

The last two variables differentiating women and men are: psychic violence and sexual abuse. As in the case of conflicts, those type of violence are not often represented in the study group (14.7% for psychic violence and a mere 7.4% for sexual abuse). However, sex differentiates those values significantly: women far more frequently admit the occurrence of such phenomena in their biological families (20.4% in case of women, vs. 9.9% in case of men, for psychic violence; 12.5% in case of women vs. 2.3% in case of men, concerning sexual abuse).

For the remaining variables in that scope, sex does not matter significantly. Having the above in mind, they will be discussed shortly for the entire group.

Thus, a decisive majority of subjects (90.4%) assessed their financial and social conditions as satisfactory, at least. Only a few people (19 persons, which accounted for 10.3% of the entire group) confirmed the information about mental disorders in their biological family. The situation is somehow different as concerns alcohol abuse in offenders' families: more than 1/3 of the subjects informing about a drinking problem were fathers in biological families. The occurrence of alcoholism in the biological mother has, however, been declared by merely 13.2% of the subjects.

More than half the subjects (60.5%) assessed the relations between their parents positively ("they respected each other and helped each other") while 28.1% were ambivalent in that respect ("it differed - they quarrelled and became reconciled"). Only some 14% of the subjects declared that there were rows, quarrels, and lack of understanding. This information is supplemented by data concerning frequency of conflicts, only less than 18% of the subjects taking part in the study stated they were "frequent or very frequent".

The most common form of violence was physical violence: more than one fifth of the subjects experienced it.

### Motives for using violence

When looking for the answer to the question: What were the motives for acts of violence - are there statistically significant differences concerning motives for acts of violence committed by men and women - domestic violence perpetrators?, the following findings have been established.

First of all, of the eight motives for violent acts that have been distinguished, with assessment of their intensity (*moderate/high, absent(no)/weak,*), three motives with frequencies above 40% turned out to dominate in the study group. They are: defensive motive 56.4% relieving negative emotions (44.9%) as well as suffering experienced, caused by the partner (41.1%). The results are presented in Table 3.

Second of all, the comparison of men and women, as regards motives, revealed significant differences in three of those motives: relieving negative emotions ( $p = .001$ ), revenge/jealousy ( $p = .003$ ) and subordination of the victim ( $p = 0.024$ ). In case of those three variables, men - on regular basis - nearly twice as often as women treated those motives as triggering their aggression towards their partners.

**Table 3. Motives for using violence\***

	Total ( <i>N</i> = 227)		Gender				Chi-square test and effect size			
			Female ( <i>n</i> = 105**)		Male ( <i>n</i> = 122**)		$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	$\omega$
Relieving negative emotions	70	(44.9)	20	(29.4)	50	(56.8)	11.65	1	.001	.273
Defensive motive	84	(56.4)	35	(49.3)	49	(62.8)	2.76	1	.096	.136
Humiliation of the victim	33	(23.4)	12	(17.9)	21	(28.4)	2.15	1	.143	.124
Revenge, jealousy	50	(34.5)	15	(22.1)	35	(45.5)	8.75	1	.003	.245
Subordination of the victim	33	(23.4)	10	(14.9)	23	(31.1)	5.12	1	.024	.190
Suffering experienced, caused by partner	60	(41.1)	27	(38.0)	33	(44.0)	0.54	1	.464	.061
Economic factor	51	(36.2)	20	(29.4)	31	(42.5)	2.60	1	.107	.136
Others	21	(21.4)	10	(21.3)	11	(21.6)	0.00	1	.972	.004

*Note.*

\* "moderate/ high" vs. "no/weak"

\*\* sample size for each test may vary slightly because of missing data

## Discussion

The analysis of study results concerning psychological characteristics of female and male violence offenders suggests that women are more open to experience, have gone through more experiences, whereas male offenders remain more conventional in their behaviour and conservative in the opinions. This way of interpreting things may be considered highly probable, Dutton (2001), Rennison (2009) indicate that male violence offenders are more stereotypical in perceiving the roles and responsibilities that agree with gender, and demonstrate profound conservatism in assessing the tasks resulting from them. The role of the wife is bring up children and look after the overall functioning of family, thus - for the good of the family - her functions require continuous supervision of the husband/partner, so that the wife delivers fully.

In female violence offenders, the supporting factor may be the ease of adapting to various situations, due to higher level of emotional intelligence, which allows for more flexible behaviour and openness towards others. It should be immediately added - however - that regardless the sex, violence offenders manifest, in the sphere of emotional functioning, lowered competence and skills, which enable them to efficiently process emotional information, and to cope with requirements and community pressure, including that for maintaining close interpersonal bonds. Substantial support for that conclusion may come from the results of studies concerning attachment styles. Male domestic violence offenders are characterized, to a larger extent than female violence offenders, by anxious-ambivalent attachment style, upon which depends the quality of functioning in various interpersonal relations. In accordance with that point of view, responses of parents to affective signals of the child failed to lead to internal organization of emotional experience. That is why, in close relations, male violence offenders experience strong anxiety and anger, which are connected with the fear of abandonment. The fear of being separated from a close person evokes anger in men, anger that has been suppressed by them for a long time, and which is - as the consequence of having been cumulated - transformed into fury, which is the main cause of aggression. Physical supremacy, in turn, leads to violence, the aim of which is to make the partner stay (Dutton, 2001). The relation between the attachment style developed in childhood and use of violence in intimate relations was noticed by Babcock, Jacobson, Gottman, and Yerington (2000). They found that men tormenting people close to them demonstrate insecure attachment styles far more often than men who do not use violence. Unfortunately, there are no studies concerning attachment styles in female violence perpetrators, and their importance in conditioning the acts of aggression. In reference to the study results obtained by the authors, one should agree with the view that attachment behaviours are regulated by inborn motivation system, developed through natural selection, in order to guarantee safety and care, thus women who are characterized by anxious-ambivalent attachment style, experience - the same way as men do - fear related to being in an intimate

relation, fear of losing the partner, not noticing oneself in the intimate relation. The frustration resulting from failure to meet the needs in the relation with the partner may give rise to anxiety, followed by irritation and anger. Irritation is a consequence of unfulfilled attachment needs (women on the one hand cling emotionally to the partner, on the other hand punish the partner for being unapproachable and not loyal) and this may, perhaps, be the lifestyle practised by female violence offenders, the style of reacting with anger to feeling lonely and rejected in a relationship. The results obtained by the authors, as well as the conclusions formulated, require further studies in the field of psychological characteristics of violence offenders.

The notion of socialization is the one that allows to demonstrate both the forming of personality structures, which determine human behaviour, and the delineation of conditions as well as influence of environmental factors upon human behaviour (Malak, Frączek, 1986). The obtained results confirm the conviction that it is not the fact that the family is full (two-parent one) (most of the offenders were brought up in full families) but the climate in the family - which is the source of norms, values, and specific interpersonal skills - which may promote the process of social maladjustment (Field, 1996; Plopa, 2008b). Families may formally be full but in fact homes can be broken, due to chronic conflicts between parents, which are accompanied by the atmosphere of tension, and parents' addiction to alcohol.

The question whether parents of violence offenders were addicted to alcohol, which of them was addicted more, seemed important, in the light of views that alcohol is often a cause of family conflicts, and a major risk factor for domestic violence. However, no statistically significant differences have been noted between the groups of females and males. It is worthwhile to pay attention to the distribution of percentages, which indicated that alcohol abuse problem occurred in 1/3 of the studied subjects who were fathers. Such a distribution of results may suggest that alcohol abuse in the family is neither a necessary nor sufficient precondition for developing violence behaviour in future, yet it indicates the possibility of developing a destructive life script concerning family, ways how to actualize one's own potential and how to solve problems (Bowlby, 1984; Tryjarska, 1995). This may promote, in future, ways of solving conflicts and meeting needs, based on aggressive attacks on others.

Usually, when the relations between parents are not correct and conflicts occur, the ability of couples to assume their roles and responsibilities of parents is weakened. Children may be neglected, worrying behaviour can emerge in children: withdrawal, aggression, timidity (Plopa, 2005).

Many researchers pay attention to the relation that exists between growing up at Home where domestic violence occurred, and being an offender or victim of violence in a mature relationship (Smith, Penn, Ward, & Tritt, 2004, Dutton 2001, Ehrensaft et al. 2003). Studies revealed that despite good relations between parents of the subjects, some offenders experienced acts of violence committed by those near and dear to them, and women were more affected by

acts of physical and psychic violence in childhood. It should be stressed, then, that the experience of domestic violence may lead to its application in adult life, not only through modeling of specific types of behaviour (in the results of studies one can notice that most of the offenders do not come from families with alcohol abuse problem, or families in which there are conflicts, they grew up in families without signs of pathologies) - but first of all due to the lack of emotional protection provided by adults, who played an important role in the lives of children, children then learn to perceive the world as threatening and unfriendly. The children who have not been given love and emotional support in childhood, in their later close interpersonal relations: in marriage or partner relation there are more negative emotions, in comparison with persons brought in homes with strong emotional bonds, also the former more frequently thought the use of violence was a proper way of solving problems (Smith et al., 2005; Herzberger, 2002; Rode, 2010b). The experience of violence in the family of origin may be a risk factor for the occurrence of violence in the procreative family.

The motives for committing acts of violence indicate that the forms of violence men use are more reactive and aggressive, in comparison of acts of violence committed by women. Referring to the literature concerning that topic (Bennett et al. 1999; Dutton, 2001; Babcock et al. 2000), in particular the psychological functioning of male violence offenders, one should notice that in their relations with the partner they strive for dominance and executing control. In connection with that, they experience a wide range of feelings, comprising fury, envy, or anxiety; while having intensified need to control and subordinate the partner, they often misinterpret the intentions of the latter, blaming them for their own moods. This, in turn, causes rage to increase, the rage that they cannot do away with in any other way, but by aggression (Rode, 2011). Revenge and envy, in situations of continuous control, are factors that motivate to even stronger establishment of the subordination-superiority hierarchy.

On the other hand, the motives for female acts of aggression (on the basis of significance of differences) may be labeled protective-defensive, which serve merely the woman's defensive attitude, in confrontation of direct attacks of the man. If, however, we are to look at the results of studies, having their percentages in mind, one could notice that the defensive motive and the motive of suffering experienced, caused by the partner occur in both groups, almost equipotently, that is men facing self-defence as a requirement, also reach for aggression, in defence against attacks by the woman-partner. The conviction that wives use violence towards their partners only when they are directly threatened with the latter's aggression, should already be classified as a social stereotype. The studies of Straus (2003), Stuart et al., (2006), Simmons et al., (2005), Caldwell, Swan, Allen, Sullivan, & Snow (2009) report that motive are similar for both sexes, and both most often strive at getting control over the partner, as well as forcing the partner to behave in a desired way, and punishing for not being loyal.

In conclusion, motives for violence in close relations are invariably related to three factors in the interaction between partners: maintaining advantage over the victim, obtaining possibilities of exercising influence and control. This is true for both male and female violence offenders.

The authors' own study reported here refers to selected aspects of extremely complex issue of the characteristics of violence offenders, and psychological processes that are conditions for acts of violence. The empirical material allowed to present vital research findings, together with their interpretation. However, there are issues which require devoting special attention and further studies. They include: definition of personality profiles of violence offenders - both men and women - as well as explaining regularities connected with the type of violence offender having a specific profile of traits/features and inclination to commit acts of violence. It is necessary to Carry out research concerning specific dynamics of the relations between victim and offender, from the perspective of the victim as well as the offender of violence. Researchers point out to the profound ambivalence of violence perpetrators: men and women, in relation to dependency relations between them and their partners. Only by showing that mutual dependence, together with the dynamics of a relationship, will allow to describe what the conditions for acts of violence are. It seems important to search for factors that shape script experiences of male and female violence offenders and their influence upon the perception of conflicts in marriage and ways of coping with them. That would help specify the answer to why the experience of having been exposed to violence in childhood leads - in some perpetrators - to its use in adult life, whereas in others it does not have Any importance, as they never committed acts of violence towards their near and dear ones.

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