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Risk factors for the prevalence of domestic violence against women in Cyprus



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ABSTRACT

This paper, which is based on the first national survey on domestic violence against women in Cyprus, presents the risk factors associated with the prevalence of domestic violence. The sample size of the survey is 1107 Greek-speaking women living in the area controlled by the Republic of Cyprus. Overall, 28% of the women that took part in the survey report to have suffered domestic violence from their partner or husband at least once in their lives. Multiple logistic regression shows that age, marital status, place of living and family budget are significant risk factors for the prevalence of domestic violence against women in Cyprus.

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1. Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO), in its World Report on Violence and Health (2002), defines violence as the “intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation” (WHO, 2002, p. 5). Similarly, the General Assembly of United Nations (1993) defines violence against women in particular as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”.

Violence against women is recognized by many studies as a global social problem (Ardabili, Moghadam, Salsali, Ramezanzadeh, & Nedjat, 2011; Brownridge & Halli, 2002; Kocacik & Dogan, 2006; Kocacik, Kutlar, & Erselcan, 2007; Leppäkoski, Paavilainen, & Åstedt-Kurki, 2011; Ustaa, Farver, & Pashayana, 2007). This study focuses on the socio-economic factors which determine domestic violence against women in Cyprus. There is ample international literature regarding risk factors for the prevalence of domestic violence against women. Urban residence, older age, lower education and lower family income are socio-economic characteristics of a woman-victim which are significantly associated with the occurrence of domestic violence (Bontha & Shantanu, 2009; Oyunbileg Sumberzul, Udval, Wang, & Janes, 2009). Parallel, a study by WHO (2005) shows that lower education is associated with significantly increased violence against women by their partners in many countries.

Richardson et al. (2002) and Jeyaseelan et al. (2007) show an increased risk of physical violence against

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unemployed women of low socioeconomic status. Apparently, higher socio-economic status acts as a protective buffer against domestic violence. Finally, a Pakistani study (Azhar, Sohail, Yasin, Mahmood, & Mushtaq, 2012, p. 1617) underlines that “women are more prone to bear and face domestic violence due to economic dependence” confirming the significance of economic factors in the prevalence of domestic violence against women.

A multi-country large-scale study conducted by the American health research company, ORC Macro, in ten countries around the world, examines the characteristics of women who experienced violence in order to identify some of the common risk factors for violence (Kishor & Johnson, 2004). The study reveals that in all countries, women who have been married more than once, divorced or separated, report higher rates of violence than women who have been married only once. In addition, in most countries women who are older than their husbands are more likely to report having experienced violence. In all countries the findings demonstrate that rates of domestic violence tend to be lower in couples who share responsibility for household decisions than for couples in which one makes household decisions alone.

Conclusively, various studies support that among other socio-economic characteristics of the women, younger age, lower education, low socio-economic status and lack of sharing responsibilities with the partner are identified as significant risk factors for the prevalence of domestic violence. Even though the factors which determine domestic violence against women vary in different parts of the world, in principle, any woman regardless of socio-economic status may suffer domestic violence (Flury, Nyberg, & Riecher-Rössler, 2010).

The phenomenon of domestic violence against women in Cyprus has never been investigated in the form of a national survey. Official information on the number of reported incidents is only provided through the Cyprus Police or through the Association of the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family, an NGO that runs a domestic violence hotline and a women's shelter. Based on the recent report of the *Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies* (2011) “Criminal statistics collected by the (Cyprus) Police show a general trend of increased reporting of violence in the family with reported cases almost doubling from 2002 to 2008 (538 and 969 cases, respectively). Over this period, the large majority of cases have involved physical violence (79%), followed by psychological violence (18.5%) and sexual violence (2.4%). In terms of gender, the majority of victims during the period 2002–2008 were women at 71.18%”. Statistics from the Cyprus Police Department can partly describe the trend in reported cases of domestic violence against women but cannot provide the true picture as many incidents are not reported. In 2010, 884 incidents are reported to the Police, of which 611 concern physically abused women. This trend is also verified by statistics of the Association of the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family. According to the statistics, domestic violence triples over the years 2004–2009; while over 80% of the victims are women in 2009 as compared to 8.6% who are men. In addition, the 2010 annual report of the *Association of the Prevention and Handling of*

Violence in the Family (2011) depicts 1051 incidents out of which 815 involve abused women aged 41–50 (17.8%). Moreover, 96.1% concern psychological violence towards women (1009 out of 1051) while 78% are living with the perpetrator. Based on the statistics, it is clear that incidents which involve physical abuse are reported to the Police while incidents involve psychological abuse are reported to the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family.

Two studies conducted in Cyprus concerning the perceptions of Cypriots on domestic violence (Intercollege, 2000) and the perceptions of health professionals on domestic violence (Apostolidou, Apostolidou, Payiatsou, & Mavrikiou, 2007) conclude that the society in Cyprus is still conservative and male-dominated. At the same time, women do not easily disclose incidents of violence against them as they consider such incidents very diminishing.

This study comprises the first attempt to record accurately the current situation in Cyprus concerning domestic violence against women from an intimate male partner or husband. The main purpose of this paper is primarily to investigate the socio-economic risk factors that determine this situation. Specifically, the challenge of this study is whether international findings coincide with the Cyprus' survey findings. The need for this study arises from the dearth of data on domestic violence against women in Cyprus. The Cyprus Police, the Social Welfare Services, the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family and the Advisory Committee for the Prevention of Violence in the Family are the main departments and organizations that provide official information on domestic violence. Still, the various ways of recording these incidents and the lack of a common database impose a need for this study.

2. Methodology

The aim of any sampling procedure is to estimate the characteristics of the population under study with the minimum bias. The type of data collection strategy to follow depends on the limitations of each survey. Both, the sensitive subject of the survey – gender-based violence – and financial restrictions, are very serious reasons to consider. Therefore, to minimize the problems created by these limitations, the most appropriate technique for data collection is the random distribution of the questionnaires and collection through postal mail.

The population under study is the Greek-speaking women in Cyprus over 18 years of age. The sampling frame used for the survey is the census conducted in 2011 by the Statistical Services of the Republic of Cyprus (SSRC, 2011). Based on the census, it is assumed that one relevant woman corresponds to each household, hence, an observation unit coincides with the element under study. According to this assumption, the sample frame chosen is ideal and the coverage error negligible.

Relevant literature suggests that the response rate of a survey when the return is achieved through the postal system is between 20% and 50% (Kaplowitz, Hadlock, & Levine, 2004). Using proportionate stratified sampling per municipality and village, 95% confidence level and 1.55%

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