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Intimate partner violence by men abusing alcohol

As the data collected in 48 countries show, between 10% and 69% women reported being physically assaulted by an intimate male partner at some point in their lives (7). According to the WHO World Report on Violence and Health, it is women who are victimized by their male partners in most cases (10).

Report on Violence against Women in the 1990s in Poland by Women's Rights Centre (Centrum Praw Kobiet, CPK) points out that men constitute 98% of the number of perpetrators of domestic violence. According to statistics from courts, in 1996 there were 15,412 cases of domestic violence, including 13,405 finished in giving a sentence. The number of those who were given a sentence rose from 10,449 in 1993 to 13,405 in 1996 and then fell in 1997. At the same time, however, the number of suspended sentences rose from 9,143 in 1993 to 12,087 in 1997 (13). According to the survey by Publish Opinion Research Center (Centrum Badań Opinii Publicznej, CBOS) conducted in 1993 and 1996, 18% of female respondents reported having suffered from domestic violence, including 9% of women having been battered by their husbands frequently and repeatedly and 9% of them having been beaten occasionally within their relationships (CBOS, 1997).

Among a variety of risk factors for intimate partner violence, alcohol use is to be found one of the most consistent ones (3, 8). This relationship appears to be complex, though. There is no sufficient evidence that alcohol use per se could result in committing acts of violence. For instance, according to Moeller and Dougherty (12), people with the antisocial personality disorder are more susceptible to alcohol aggression-related effects and Phil et al. (14) claim that alcohol has its greatest aggression-potentiating effects for individuals with low executive cognitive functioning. On the other hand, alcohol mis/use may provide ready fodder for arguments between couples (6).

All in all, even though there is a considerable body of research on the relationships of alcohol and violence, little is known about the nature of alcohol-abusing perpetrators as a group. This paper presents the findings of the research on men abusing alcohol who victimize their intimate partners.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The study was conducted in the office of the Association for Violence Prevention in Lublin, in 2001–2003. Phone calls from victims were the starting point for recruiting participants (only the first call of each person was taken into consideration). Afterwards, both victims and perpetrators were asked to participate in a scientific research (one third of those who called the Association to report acts of violence refused). Those who gave their consent were asked to complete a self-administered questionnaire in an individual session at the office of the Association. A trained member of staff was present in the room to explain and help with any problems that might arise. This approach led to the examination of 800 subjects, including 400 victims and 400 perpetrators selected on the grounds of

1,113 phone calls. Among them, perpetrators of violence constituted the actual research sample and victims were a source of information about acts of violence. In order to collect data, different questionnaires were designed for victims and for perpetrators. The questionnaire for victims included, aside from a demographics part, 12 questions referring to the circumstances under which acts of violence occurred. The victims were asked about a type of violence they experienced. The following types of violence were included: physical violence (striking with hands or an object, punching, kicking, beating); sexual violence (forcing someone to have sexual intercourse or another unwanted sexual contact performed solely for the gratification of the perpetrator); intimidating (repeated insults, emotional blackmail, and threats to do physical harm to a victim, which makes them feel frightened); neglect (persistent failure to provide for basic needs of people being in a perpetrator's care, e.g. depriving of food, leaving minors unattended).

The questionnaire for perpetrators included, aside questions about sociodemographic data, the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT). The test was designed by WHO to identify hazardous and harmful alcohol use (15). A score of 8 and above in tests has been recognized to be sensitive in predicting harms caused by alcohol consumption and current problematic drinking (5).

RESULTS

Most perpetrators met criteria for alcohol abuse described in DSM-IV-TR (APA, 2000). About 76% of perpetrators scored 8 and above on AUDIT. For over 58% of perpetrators, beer (5% alcohol by volume or above) was the most popular usual drink. About 26% of them drank vodka as their usual drink and 16% of them preferred wine. The majority reported drinking alcohol heavily in their own home or at a friend's place. Perpetrators aged 18 to 45 were in majority (79.4%). Overall, they completed primary or vocational school (75.5%). 9.8% of the perpetrators were in permanent employment. A total of 29.7% had criminal records. 37.8% of the subjects studied considered themselves to be both religious believers and churchgoers.

An incident of violence most frequently occurred after alcohol consumption (84.8%). As far as the victims are concerned, it was found that approximately 60% of adult women, 13% of adult men and about 24% of minors (persons under the age of 18 of both genders) were victimized by perpetrators.

The relationship between perpetrators and victims was also analysed. Three categories of perpetrators were included in the statistical analysis: 1) victims' intimate partners, i.e. their husbands, cohabitees, and fiancés, 2) victims' children, 3) victims' parents or caregivers. In all three categories alcohol-abusing intimate partners, children, and parents/caregivers were more likely to perform violence (78.6%, 20.6%, and 26.9%, respectively).

Generally, a combination of at least two types of violence was reported. The perpetrators tended to use physical violence (78.2%) and intimidate their victims (58%). Neglect was also frequently reported (48.4%). The perpetrators were relatively rarely accused of sexual abuse (9.14%) (rape was reported in 1.6% of cases). The subjects studied most frequently performed violence in their own homes (98.2%).

DISCUSSION

In this paper, there have been reported the results of a survey of perpetrators of domestic violence living in Lublin. The author of the paper fully acknowledges the limitations of the small sample size and does not claim that the results can be generalized to all perpetrators of domestic violence. Given that the incidents of violence occurred after alcohol consumption by perpetrators in over the half of

cases, the obtained results appear to corroborate the findings from earlier studies stating a link between alcohol mis/use and committing violence (Friedman 1998; Walsh 1999).

The results referring to a place of an incident of violence seem to support routine activity theory by Felson (6). The author claims that perpetrators are likely to select a place which they find the safest and which they associate with the least amount of effort needed to act. Accordingly, incidents of violence are likely to take place at home because a person being there makes an easy target (compared with those from outside), an assailant does not have to put a lot of effort to find a victim, and there is a lack (or there are few) of potential "guards" who could intervene. Besides, victims of domestic violence are unwilling to report such acts to the police (11).

Nearly 70% of the subjects studied considered themselves to be religious persons and reported their church service attendance. This might appear quite surprising since Christianity is expected to be negatively related to aggressive behavior. The possible explanation is that making a declaration of one's religiosity is not synonymous with their obeying religious rules; the majority of Polish society tend to exhibit ritual behavior but at the same time, the considerable number of people do not know the principles of their religion and/or are selective about them. The perpetrators were more likely to be young men with low educational level and problems with law, and less likely to have permanent jobs (and consequently lower income). These are demographic factors commonly associated with a man's risk for abusing his intimate partner (10).

The most interesting finding appears to be the gap between physical and sexual violence performed by the group studied. Alcohol consumption might give men "liquid courage" (1); perpetrators could use it in order to justify their socially unacceptable behaviour. As it seems, those who perpetrate violence against their intimate partners might not need such a trigger.

CONCLUSION

The study presented here focuses mainly on perpetrators' socioeconomic traits, their relationships with victims as well as the type of violence performed. Therefore, there is a clear need for a study on perpetrators' personality traits. Hopefully, this work will provide a reference point from which to conduct further research into violence and alcohol consumption patterns. This sort of attitude might prove valuable in identifying violent behaviors and undertaking effective prevention programs. Additionally, this study may be a useful starting point for finding differences between abusing and non-abusing alcohol perpetrators.

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SUMMARY

This paper describes the findings of the research on men abusing alcohol who committed violence against their intimate partners. The data were obtained both from perpetrators (400 subjects) as well as the victims (400 subjects). In order to measure alcohol use in the perpetrators, the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) was used. About 76% of the perpetrators scored 8 and above on AUDIT. 84.8% perpetrators committed acts of violence after alcohol consumption. They were likely to be young, without permanent jobs, with low educational level and with criminal records. 78.2% of them committed physical violence and only 9.14% – sexual violence.

Przemoc w związkach z partnerem nadużywającym alkoholu

Praca próbuje wskazać cechy mężczyzn nadużywających alkoholu, którzy dopuścili się aktów przemocy wobec swoich partnerek. Dane zostały zebrane w badaniu sondażowym przeprowadzonym wśród sprawców (400 osób) i ofiar przemocy (400 osób). Test AUDIT został zastosowany celem zmierzenia nadużycia alkoholu u sprawców. Około 76% sprawców osiągnęło wynik 8 i powyżej w tym teście. 84,8% sprawców nadużywających alkoholu dopuściło się aktów przemocy po spożyciu alkoholu. Sprawcy nadużywający alkoholu byli ludźmi młodymi, z niskim wykształceniem, problemami z prawem oraz nie mieli stałej pracy. Sprawcy ci częściej dokonywali aktów przemocy fizycznej (78,2%) niż przemocy seksualnej (9,14%).

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*Young women's attitudes towards the anti-abortion act
binding in Poland*

The necessity of undertaking abortion has been practiced for thousands of years. It has appeared in all societies and cultures all over the world. Descriptions of the methods of performing abortion intervention were found in ancient Egypt and China. The problem of abortion is not only a matter of women, who decide to undergo pregnancy termination, since it is reflected in various spheres of human and social lives (2). Therefore, we should see abortion as a multi-dimensional phenomenon: philosophical, psychological, theological, medical and social one (5, 6, 7).

The attitude towards abortion is one of the most controversial social questions in Poland too. Legal regulations concerning pregnancy termination were several times in dependence on government which was in authority. The termination of pregnancy was made legal in Poland in 1956. From 1956 to the early 1990's, abortion was widely accessible, both on medical and social grounds. Terminations were conducted in public hospitals and in private clinics as a paid service (4,8). Political features of the discussions on abortion in Poland were not conducive to undertaking by researchers deep consideration to human consciousness conditioning and attitudes towards abortion. The restrictive abortion law in Poland has not increased the number of births, it has only caused suffering among women and their families (1, 3).

Therefore, abortion is a problem which still arouses many emotions, that is why it became the subject of the research presented here.

The purpose of the work was an analysis of women's attitudes towards abortion. We also tried to estimate the knowledge on the subject of the anti-abortion law in force in Poland, and also behavior in case of unplanned pregnancy.

RESEARCH METHOD

There were 870 women examined. The socio-demographical data are presented in Table 1. The research was executed with the use of a specially constructed questionnaire. The blank was made up of 21 questions, which mostly concerned the knowledge of the anti-abortion law presently in force in Poland, but there was also touched the question of behavior in case of unplanned pregnancy. None of the examined women refused to fill up the questionnaire. General perception was positive. The subject of the questionnaire aroused a great interest; some of the respondents expressed the will for conversation on the subject.

Table 1. The socio-demographical data of the examined group

Age	20–24 years old
Social status	single
Family status	childless
Place of residence	35% in a village, 36% in a town, 29% in a city
Education	higher in course

RESULTS

Since 1997, Polish law permits the possibility of pregnancy termination:

1. If pregnancy menaces the woman's life or health, which is ascertained by a doctor, but the performing one. Doctor at hospital performs pregnancy termination.

2. If prenatal examinations, or other medical premises, present great likelihood of serious and irreversible fetus's handicap, or his incurable disease menacing his life, which is ascertained by a doctor, but the performing one. Doctor at hospital performs pregnancy termination.

3. If there is the suspicion (ascertained by public prosecutor) that the pregnancy appeared as a consequence of an illicit act. Pregnancy termination is permissible in such a situation, if since the beginning of the pregnancy there have not elapsed more than twelve weeks. The circumstances which qualify for pregnancy termination are ascertained by public prosecutor. Pregnancy termination could be performed in a private consulting room.

Knowledge of the law and the attitude towards it is very important for proper understanding of the phenomenon of pregnancy termination in Poland. That is why the respondents answered the questions concerning legal regulations in force (Fig. 1).

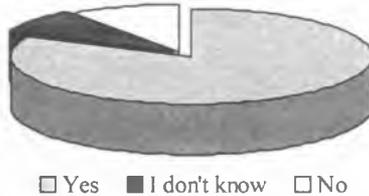


Fig. 1. Does every woman have the right to decide about her own life, lot and her body, and does the present anti-abortion law make it impossible?

Most, that is 714 respondents (82%), answered that the law in force hinders women from deciding about her own life, 87 of them (10%) recognized that the law has no such influence, few, only 8% they ascertained that they did not know how to answer. Besides, the examined people were asked about the knowledge of the anti-abortion law, the thing that is very important (Fig. 2).

Among 870 responding women only 383 (44%) knew the law content, whereas most – 487 women (56%) acknowledged that they do not know the conditions for the admittance of pregnancy termination in Poland. The obtained results are alarming considering that most of the respondents answered positively to the previous question concerning limitations of women's rights in the light of the law that they, as it appears, do not know in fact. The women knowing the anti-abortion law assumed attitudes towards what they think of the law (It was possible to mark more than one answer) (Fig. 3).

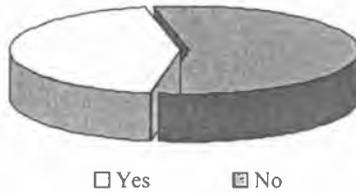


Fig. 2. Do you know the anti-abortion law presently in force?

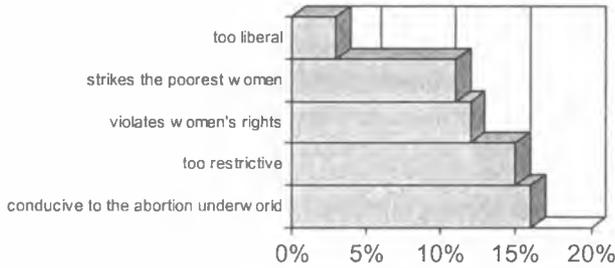


Fig. 3. The anti-abortion law presently in force is...

As it is shown in figure 5, none of the answers gained majority. However, the law in force seems to be disadvantageous to the examined as a legal document: too restrictive for 130 respondents (15%), violating women's rights for 104 (16%). Ninety-six of the examined women (11%) think that it has the greatest influence on women of low social status, and only 26 (3%) consider that the law is too liberal. It is alarming that more than half of the respondents do not know the presently functioning law, nor are conscious of its effects.

As an interesting thing seemed to be young women's opinion about the need for the need for organizing referendum considering pregnancy termination in Poland (Fig. 4). A great majority of the respondents, 661 (76%), marked the answer 'yes', 121 (14%), decided rather yes, only 44 women (5%) ascertained that the referendum is not necessary, similar result (5%) was reply - 'no'. Therefore, women notice the need for referendum having its aim in getting to know Poles' opinion about abortion.

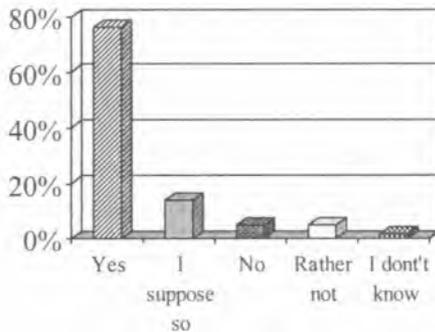


Fig. 4. Do you think there should be a referendum about abortion?

Besides, the examined women answered a question about the people who should participate in the referendum. Most women – 652 (75%) – acknowledged that in the voting there should participate men and women at the age 18–60, the remaining 218 respondents (25%) ascertained that it should be only women in reproduction age. Apart from the anti-abortion law and referendum, the questionnaire contained a question about women's rights in Poland. As many as 618 respondents (71%) noticed that women's rights are violated in Poland, only 78 (9%) ascertained that they are not, whereas 174 people (10%) ascertained either they rather are or they are rather not.

As it appears from research executed by OBOP (OBOP 1998), where respondents were asked about human rights concerning especially women, only a third part were convinced that such rights exist. Among 31% of the examined who acknowledged violating human rights in relation to women in Poland, only 16% ascertained that it refers to the right for abortion, and even less – 6%, noticed the right for possessing children. They also called attention to women's attitude towards a possible unplanned pregnancy. They were asked what they would do in such a situation.

There were only 18 people (2%) who would terminate pregnancy; most of the women would accept such pregnancy, even though it would be unplanned one. Similar research was executed by Polish Federation of Women and Planning Family (Nowicka 2000). That research was executed in the village environment women, who were asked similar questions. They were at the age 18–24. 49% of them acknowledged that in the situation of unplanned pregnancy they would rather give birth, 45% marked that they would give birth for sure, whereas 5% would rather terminate such a pregnancy.

The further part of the research was to show the respondents' opinion on men's participation in deciding about pregnancy termination.

Analyzing the received answers we can clearly see that most women – 687 (79%) – acknowledged men's right to co-decide about pregnancy termination, and only 68 (9%) declared categorically against it, whereas 87 of the examined (10%) were convinced about the possibility of a decision made only by women.

DISCUSSION

Examining the attitudes towards abortion and their conditions, based on empirical data obtained through quantity researches, is rendered difficult by the fact that the declared views and opinions strongly depend on their context in which the questions are asked, the way how the questions are read, and the expressions used. Among the examined persons, all the factors trigger off a definite way of thinking of abortion either in moral categories, or in relation to the law, which is to be decisive, or in the aspect of women's law, or in perspective of real women's life and their individual and collective interests.

Attitudes towards abortion are shaped more by value systems and normative convictions of the examined than thinking in categories of collective interest. The domination of the perspective makes that abortion is mostly spoken of in moral categories, and this point of view is dominant in opinions about legal regulations. Taking the perspective of collective interest towards the right for abortion or women's rights as human rights is out of proportion to the perspective of moral appreciations. For the abortion opponents their values are a child and his right for life, whereas abortion advocates think highly of woman subjectivity, her right to decide about herself and taking free decisions in the sphere of procreation. People declaring against abortion are characterized by general disinclination to sexual life. The sphere of sexual life is wholly rejected by such people, it is a taboo regulated by social norms, which does not undergo discussion, education and reflections. Women's reproduction rights, women's right for the decision for abortion in it are not seen in the perspective.

We could draw a conclusion from the executed research that the examined women approached the problem in rather a liberal way, there were no radically restrictive attitudes, though most of the respondents qualified themselves as believing Christians. It was alarming that most of the women acknowledged that their rights are violated by legislation concerning abortion, and by it they are deprived of the right to decide about their own life.

Most of the respondents did not know the content of the anti-abortion law presently in force in Poland, nor heard, nor were conscious of its tragic consequences. The subject of pregnancy termination itself is certainly ticklish. For the question about legal admittance of abortion because of women's difficult financial situation half of the women answered positively and half negatively. Answers to some questions were very differentiated, much depended on the question content, sometimes the respondents answered in a very restrictive way.

One of the positive conclusions is the fact that most respondents thought that a woman in such a difficult situation should not stay alone. Almost all respondents acknowledged that her partner has the right to decide about abortion. Analyzing the attitudes towards abortion and other subjects, which may be counted as ticklish, we should ascertain that the respondents' convictions are more and more liberal; of course, they are influenced by the mentality of society and also the reality in which we are to function.

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SUMMARY

The necessity of undertaking abortion has been practiced for thousands of years. The attitude towards abortion is one of the most controversial social questions in Poland too and it became the subject of the research presented here. The purpose of the work was an analysis of women's attitudes towards abortion. We also tried to estimate the knowledge on the subject of the anti-abortion law in force in Poland, and also the behavior in case of unplanned pregnancy. There were 870 young women examined. The research was executed with the use of a specially constructed questionnaire. The blank was made up of 21 questions, which mostly concerned the knowledge of the anti-abortion law presently in force in Poland, but there was also touched the question of behavior in case of unplanned pregnancy. The examined women approached the problem in rather a liberal way, there were no radically restrictive attitudes. Most of the respondents did not know the content of the anti-abortion law presently in force in Poland. Almost all respondents acknowledged that her partner has the right to decide about abortion.

Postawy młodych kobiet wobec obowiązującej w Polsce ustawy antyaborcyjnej

Konieczność dokonywania sztucznych poronień staje przed kobietą od tysięcy lat. Stosunek do aborcji to jedna z bardziej kontrowersyjnych kwestii społecznych również w Polsce i dlatego stał się przedmiotem przedstawionych tutaj badań. Celem pracy była analiza postaw kobiet wobec aborcji. Próbowano również określić wiedzę na temat obowiązującej w kraju ustawy antyaborcyjnej, a także zachowanie się w przypadku nieplanowanej ciąży. Badaniem objęto 870 kobiet. Badanie zostało przeprowadzone z użyciem specjalnie do tego celu skonstruowanego kwestionariusza. Formularz składał się z 21 pytań, większość z nich dotyczyła znajomości obecnie obowiązującej w Polsce ustawy antyaborcyjnej, ale także poruszono kwestię postępowania w przypadku nieplanowanej ciąży. Badane kobiety podchodziły do problemu aborcji dosyć liberalnie, nie zdarzały się skrajnie restrykcyjne postawy. Większość respondentek nie знаła treści obecnie obowiązującej w Polsce ustawy antyaborcyjnej. Prawie wszystkie ankietowane uznały, że partner ma prawo do decyzji w sprawie aborcji.