



MWIA CASE STUDIES

CULTURAL VIOLENCE

Case 8: Domestic Violence in Greece

Objectives

- To show the impact of economic situations (e.g. financial crisis) on the rate of domestic violence
- To show how victims of violence often find excuses for their injuries and believe that they must have done something wrong.

Narrative Case

** At the end of the case study you can find "Learning points" related to information presented in the narrative case, denoted by numbers in square brackets.*

Melina, a 35 year old Greek woman, lives with her husband and family in Athens. One day a friend noticed a bruise on Melina's face. When asked about it, Melina first tried to find excuses [1] but her friend persisted [2]. She then admitted that her husband had become violent in the last couple of weeks after he lost his job because of the financial crisis [3]. Melina, an interior designer, had also lost her job [4].

She did not go to the police or seek any form of help until she confided in her good friend [5]. She pointed out how guilty and ashamed she felt about the whole situation and believed that she was in some way responsible and that she herself might have been to blame [6].

With the help of her friend she was able to acknowledge that she lived in a violent and abusive relationship [7] and decided to seek professional help. Today she lives a confident life away from her abusive ex-husband.

Learning Points

- [1] Many victims deny their problem because they feel too ashamed or think that the incident was not serious enough. According to an EU study, 34% of victims of physical or sexual violence who did not go to the police thought that the incident was too minor. 7% did not want the perpetrator to be brought to justice or they feared the end of the relationship.
- [2] As many victims are reluctant to reveal domestic violence, it is extremely important to have someone from outside their family to talk to them. Asking about bruises offers an opportunity for the victim to talk. The biggest problem with domestic violence is ignorance and silence by both the victim and others around them. Doctors need to be trained to recognize signs of domestic violence and must be given guidelines on how to talk to women about it.
- [3] Losing a job can be devastating for a man. He feels useless because he cannot fulfil the role of "breadwinner" for the family. Sometimes this frustration can turn into aggression against members of his own family.
- [4] The fact that the victim is an interior designer shows that having a higher level of education does not protect a woman from domestic violence. An EU-study shows that there is no significant difference in the incidence of domestic violence between women with very little education and those with tertiary education. The fact that she lost her job as well as her husband means that monetary problems are likely. 30% of women who

are unsatisfied with their household income have suffered physical or sexual violence while only 18% of women who are satisfied with their financial situation have experienced domestic violence.

- [5] In Greece only 14% of victims reported the incident to the police. In Europe as a whole only one third (33%) of victims seek any form of help (hospital / lawyers / women's shelters or faith-based organisations etc). The reasons for this vary but it is alarming that according to the EU-study only 63% of victims who seek help at a police station were satisfied with the police. Further work must be done to improve the service so that victims are encouraged to report more cases of violence to the police.
- [6] Feeling ashamed and guilty, as well as embarrassed is a typical reaction of victims. Remarkably, the most common feeling after an incident of sexual or physical violence seems to be anger: according to the EU study 63% of the victims felt that way. However, as many victims did not seek help or go to the police and it is not known if anger is directed towards the perpetrator or themselves. The second strongest feeling was fear (52%). Together with the feeling of shock (34%) this might explain why so many victims did not report the incident.
- [7] When victims of physical or sexual violence were asked what had helped them to survive and overcome this incident, the most common answers were the support of their family and/or friends (35%) and their own personal strength (32%). Here, again, one can see the importance of the support of people the victim knows and confides in.

10% reported that another important step to overcome the incident had been to acknowledge that they lived in a violent relationship. Sadly only 6% of the victims reported that professional support played a role, which underlines the fact that many victims do not seek professional help. Often women do not know that support services exist. This shows that a) information flow has to be improved and b) more low-threshold services (organization that do not ask for any information such as the name or the perpetrator but do help everybody who wants help) are needed. However in countries such as Greece with a major financial crisis there are often no funds available.

Background information

Violence against women is still a major problem in the European Union. About 33% of women in the EU study reported experiencing physical or sexual violence at least once since the age of fifteen years. In Greece, 5% reported such an experience had occurred in the last 12 months with their current partner and overall 7% had experienced such an assault.

References

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- European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (March 2014). *Violence Against Women: an EU-wide survey*. Retrieved from: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report>