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Typology of perpetrators of domestic violence

The objective of the research conducted by the author was to obtain an answer to the question: could we distinguish different types of intrafamily violence perpetrators considering a specified profile of personality factors and temperament traits and how domestic violence perpetrators cope with stressful situations? The research was conducted on a group of 325 men who were convicted pursuant to article 207§1 & 2 of harassment over family members. In terms of a gender the group was homogenous. On the basis of the literature on the subject, the following personality traits of violence perpetrators were categorised: locus of control, self-acceptance, aggressiveness, hostility, intelligent quotient and temperament traits. The following research techniques were employed in the study: the Wechsler Intelligence Scale, Berger's Self-Acceptance Scale, the Delta Questionnaire by R. Drwal, the SABD Questionnaire - Buss-Durkee (prepared by J.M. Stanik, A. Roszkowska, J. Kucharewicz), Formal Characteristics of Behaviour - Temperament Inventory (FCZ-KT) by J. Strelau, the WCQ questionnaire (The Ways of Coping Questionnaire) by R.S. Lazarus and S. Folkman, a categorised interview and an analysis of court records. As a result of the analysis conducted on a group of the studied sample of violence perpetrators, four subgroups (clusters), differing in terms of selected personality traits, were specified. They are reactively aggressive perpetrators (113 persons), perpetrators of low preventive competences (71 persons), psychopathic and retaliatory perpetrators (66 persons) and perpetrators with a big adaptive potential (75 persons). Further on, four distinguished groups have been characterised in terms of stress-coping strategies, and psychological processes of coping with stress proceeded differently in the research group.

Keywords: domestic violence perpetrator, violence towards women, domestic violence, types of domestic violence perpetrator

Research issues and objectives

Most research studies into domestic violence have been analysed from the perspective of victims of violence, yet there have been no attempts to describe violence from the perpetrator's perspective. Research into aggressors has been conducted in a rather fragmentary way (Vaselle-Augenstein, Ehrlich, 1992; Hamberger, Hastings, 1986; Dutton, 1988, 2001; Holtzworth-Munroe, et al. 2003).

Inadequate existing research into the characteristics of perpetrators of domestic violence show these perpetrators as insecure individuals who experience a variety of fears resulting from lower self-esteem, weakness and abandonment (O'Leary, 1993; Browne, Herbert, 1999; Weitzman, Dreen, 1982). Perpetrators of violence are characterised by a low level of assertiveness and poorly developed social skills (Goldstein, 1986; Faulk, 1974, after: Browne, Herbert, 1999; Bland, Orn, 1986). Perpetrators of violence also show low self-esteem, poor self-control,

lacking social skills, emotional disorders (anxiety, anger), and lacking empathy and compassion (Browne, Herbert, 1999; Barnett et al. 1997; Bennett, Williams, 1999; Wiehe, 1998). Consequently, a few writers (R. Vaselle-Augenstein and A. Ehrlich 1992, Mott and McDonald (quoted after Saunders 1992), Dutton 2001) have made attempts at distinguishing groups of perpetrators of violence by taking into account various criteria such as personality traits showing an inclination to violence, frequency of violent acts, environments where violence is used (in the family, outside the family). It is also implied that perpetrators of violence have problems with alcohol abuse (Browne, Herbert, 1999; Saunders, 1992; Dobash R., Dobash E., 1979), have experienced violence in the past (O'Neil, 1981; Dutton, 2001; Giles-Sims, 1983; Rode, 1998; Badura-Madej, Dobrzyńska-Masterhazy, 2000), were subjected to a strict upbringing and suffered from emotional rejection (Steinmetz, 1987; Wiehe, 1998), manifesting inappropriate ways of reacting to stress (Steinmetz, 1987).

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In general, research findings indicate that violence perpetrators face problems in respect of *control* (Browne, Herbert, 1999; O'Leary, 1993; Holzworth – Munroe, Stuart, 1994; Baumeister, Boden, 1998; Saundres, 1992), *self-esteem*, *self-acceptance* (Goldstein, 1986; Dutton, 2001; Barnett et al. 1997; Bennett, Williams, 1999; Wiehe, 1998; Toch, 1993), *disorders of the self* (O' Leary, 1993; Sugarman, Cohn, 1986; Bennett, Williams, 1999).

The analysis of typical psychological characteristics of perpetrators described in the subject literature leads to the conclusion that it is not possible to isolate one type of a domestic perpetrator; nor can we be certain what conditioning may form influential personality traits since it is assumed that various factors influence the manifestation of aggression by perpetrators of violence.

The objective of the research conducted by the author was to seek an answer to the question: can we distinguish different types of intrafamily perpetrators of violence considering a specific profile of personality factors and traits of temperament and how perpetrators of domestic violence cope with stressful situations.

The following definition is accepted in this study: "Domestic violence, also referred to as violence in the family, is an intentional activity exploiting the advantage of power directed against family members, which infringes rights and personal interests causing suffering and harm" (Programme of Counteracting Domestic Violence run by PARPA in Poland, Sasal, 1998, p. 17).

This definition encapsulates an act of violence when both perpetrator and victim can be often an adult or a child. The perpetrator is most frequently an adult while victim is the partner and/or a child, however the relationship may be reversed. This definition encompasses the intentions of a perpetrator of violence; violence is dependent on an intimate relationship (partner, spouse) where there is an unequal balance of power leading to the abuse of power, and the use of physical force over the weak by the strong, causing harm and violation of all personal rights, where the affected individuals have no possibility to defend themselves.

According to Polish Penal Law, using force on a family member is defined as harassment. In the Penal Code, harassment is one of the offences against family and custody as specified in Article 207§1, 2, 3 of the Act of 6 June 1997. The main rights protected by this provision are: due and harassment-free treatment of family members in terms of their physical and moral welfare. The concept of harassment can be interpreted as an action or abandonment (active or passive violence) consisting in deliberate infliction of physical pain or acute moral suffering (physical or psychological violence) which are recurrent or isolated but intense and spread over time.

Research methods

The research was conducted with a group of 405 men convicted of harassment over family members pursuant to article 207§1, 2. In terms of gender, the group was homogenous.

On the basis of the subject literature, the following personality traits of perpetrators of violence were categorised: *locus of control*, *self-acceptance*, *aggression*, *hostility*, *intelligence quotient and traits of temperament*.

The following research methods were employed in the study:

1. The Wechsler Intelligence Scale, a method of measuring intelligence in the form of an intelligence quotient, by means of standardised questions and tasks (to evaluate the individual's abilities to act intentionally).
2. The Self-Acceptance Scale created by E.M. Berger, consisting of 36 items, requires subject responses (on a five-point scale) to what extent their given statements accurately reflect personality, emotions, behaviour, attitudes and beliefs. The reliability of the E. M. Berger scale was verified under Polish conditions by means of Cronbach's alpha factor which amounted to 0.87.
3. The Delta Questionnaire by R. Drwal is a tool for measuring a generalised locus of control viewed as a dimension of personality. It consists of 24 statements of a LOC (locus of control) scale which indicate internalised and externalised locus of control and 10 statements which make a lie scale - (KŁ). Reliability of the scales calculated by means of Cronbach's alpha factor was 0.81 for LOC scale and 0.79 for the lie scale (KŁ).
4. The SABD Questionnaire - Buss-Durkee (Polish version prepared by J.M. Stanik) was used to characterise perpetrators of violence regarding the subjective trait of aggression, and to show differences and similarities in the intensity of forms of aggression amongst the subjects. The writers measured reliability of the scales by calculating absolute stability by means of a "test-retest" method, and a reliability factor for respective scales as follows: Physical aggression: 0.984, Indirect aggression: 0.937, Irritability: 0.967, Negativism: 0.968, Resentment: 0.962, Suspiciousness: 0.968, Verbal aggression: 0.975, Sense of guilt: 0.964.
5. Formal Characteristics of Behaviour - Temperament Inventory (FCZ-KT) by J. Strelau. This test is a tool designed to diagnose basic, primarily and biologically determined personality dimensions referred to as temperament. The psychometric properties of FCZ-KT scales are as follows: Briskness (ZW) - 0.77, Perseverance (PE) - 0.79, Sensory sensitivity (WS) - 0.73, Emotional reactivity (RE) - 0.83, Resilience (WT) - 0.85, Activeness (AK) - 0.83.
6. A categorised interview with perpetrators of violence was conducted.

7. An analysis of court records was carried out and for this purpose a taxonomic matrix was drafted to make it possible to code data included in the case records. The data included in the records of each case were systematised in accordance with the following categories: demographic data of perpetrators of violence, penological data, psychological parameters of the perpetrators obtained from court expert testimonies and circumstances of committing an offence.

In the first stage of statistical analysis, the sample group of 405 perpetrators of domestic violence that participated in the research were subject to categorisation, so as to form subject sub-groups which differed in terms of selected personality traits and temperament: *level of intelligence*, *level of self-acceptance*, *locus of control*, *aggression* (in 4 subscales: physical aggression, verbal aggression, indirect aggression, irritability), *hostility* (in 2 subscales: resentment, suspiciousness) and *temperament* (in all subscales). Subsequently, a *k*-means cluster analysis (Marek, 1989) was conducted for this purpose.

Since the research material was lacking in some data, a total group 325 perpetrators were suitable for further analysis. A number of clusters were established by making subsequent calculations using their different scores (while maintaining the same criterial traits prepared in the same way), and subsequently, an approach was selected to give optimal variation which was possible to analyse in terms of content.

As a result of the analysis conducted on a group of the studied sample of perpetrators of violence, four sub-groups (clusters) differing in terms of selected personality traits were identified.

Research findings

Characteristics of a group of perpetrators in the scope of chosen personality traits

Cluster centres (the means values expressed in stens, standard deviation) in respect of seventeen individual factors are presented in Table 1 and Figure 1.

A number of criteria in the conducted cluster analysis are sufficiently significant to present clear interpretation. Firstly, all the findings which constituted a basis for distinguishing specific types of perpetrators of violence in terms of personality traits and temperament were referred to in the article.

By focusing on intra-cluster diversity, it can be assumed that there is a specific system of traits which characterise each group forming a constellation. The groups can be characterised in the following way:

Group A (113 people) - reactively aggressive perpetrators are characterised by an intelligence quotient defined as a level of intelligence below the average (mental

retardation), which indicates low mental agility of thought processes, though they remain within an intellectual norm. It can be predicted that these individuals may have difficulty solving various life problems. Reactively aggressive perpetrators are also characterised by an average level of self-acceptance, which implies that a divergence between the “real me” and the “ideal me” is low. Thus, the behaviours of these perpetrators are regulated by both expectation and level of aspiration. These individuals demonstrate the conviction that incidents of the daily life and their behaviour are a result of situational and random factors, and are not subject to their control. Consequently, there is no point in getting involved in any activity since any incident which occurs is not dependent on these activities.

They show high emotional reactivity, low briskness and activeness, average sensory perception, perseverance and resilience. Those demonstrating a high degree of reactivity are characterised by considerable emotional excitability, even with regard to incidents of the slightest importance. They demonstrate poor emotional resilience with a tendency to break down in difficult situations. Conducting a structural analysis of the FCZ-KTT results, shows that these individuals are of average resilience, highly reactive, poorly active; showing average sensory perception and perseverance.

To recap, the reactively aggressive perpetrators are characterised by a high level of emotional aggression (aggressive behaviour may be a reaction to stimulation overload, used as an effective way of reducing stimulation, or an over-optimal level of activeness). Regulation of behaviour is at an emotional and impulsive level (insufficient ability to control aggressive behaviours cognitively, a below average intelligence quotient), insufficient ability to cope proactively with tasks in difficult situations. They react to such situations with irritation, anger and fury, instead of solving them (low activeness, briskness, average resilience). They perceive the effects of their behaviour as remaining outside their control (poor activeness manifesting itself in few behaviours directed at specified goals).

Group B (71 people) - perpetrators of low preventive competence involve a more wide-ranging analysis than the remaining groups because of their specific configuration of traits. They are characterised by an intelligence quotient on the borderline between mental disability and normal intelligence. This indicates considerable difficulty in processing information in the central nervous system, and most notably it reduces the precision of information received, as well as the potential for correct use of this processing in reality. This results in poorly-developed abstract thinking. They have a limited ability to analyse and generalise, and to notice the essence of things and make logical deductions. According to the opinions of researchers, individuals on the borderline of retardation are characterised by low

Table 1
Descriptive statistics.

Criteria variables – stens	Cluster	N	M	SD
intelligence quotient	A	113	4.584	0.989
	B	71	3.420	1.418
	C	66	6.318	1.438
	D	75	8.240	1.063
self-acceptance	A	113	5.106	0.724
	B	71	2.972	0.736
	C	66	8.379	0.739
	D	75	6.347	0.814
sense of control	A	113	6.487	1.389
	B	71	7.670	1.205
	C	66	3.242	1.589
	D	75	4.387	1.394
negativeness	A	113	4.159	1.948
	B	71	3.493	1.985
	C	66	5.439	2.240
	D	75	3.973	2.124
resentment	A	113	5.027	1.998
	B	71	4.423	2.660
	C	66	6.963	2.065
	D	75	5.453	1.877
suspiciousness	A	113	6.265	1.722
	B	71	4.662	2.426
	C	66	7.630	1.338
	D	75	4.013	2.147
physical aggression	A	113	7.221	1.926
	B	71	6.634	1.447
	C	66	6.106	1.773
	D	75	4.813	2.179
verbal aggression	A	113	8.133	1.398
	B	71	8.211	1.264
	C	66	6.273	1.811
	D	75	6.680	1.517
indirect aggression	A	113	4.735	1.674

	B	71	5.155	1.191
	C	66	3.742	1.591
	D	75	3.747	1.918
irritability	A	113	8.071	1.684
	B	71	6.489	1.286
	C	66	5.515	1.481
	D	75	4.033	2.022
sense of guilt	A	113	5.237	1.321
	B	71	4.715	1.532
	C	66	3.327	1.102
	D	75	7.633	1.755
temperament BRISKNESS	A	113	4.062	1.549
	B	71	3.056	1.275
	C	66	6.121	1.196
	D	75	6.613	1.916
temperament PERSEVERANCE	A	113	5.027	1.497
	B	71	4.408	1.785
	C	66	3.455	0.948
	D	75	4.760	1.777
temperament SENSORY SENSITIVITY	A	113	4.743	1.368
	B	71	5.479	0.908
	C	66	3.136	1.518
	D	75	5.653	1.751
temperament EMOTIONAL REACTIVENESS	A	113	8.580	1.892
	B	71	6.163	1.719
	C	66	3.006	1.872
	D	75	5.293	1.558
temperament RESILIENCE	A	113	4.628	1.712
	B	71	2.986	1.563
	C	66	7.470	1.427
	D	75	6.627	1.769
temperament ACTIVENESS	A	113	4.513	1.626
	B	71	3.437	1.451
	C	66	7.379	1.557
	D	75	6.693	1.823

effectiveness of cognitive activities such as perception, imagination, attention and partly, memory.

The perpetrators of violence belonging to this group display a very low level of self-acceptance, correlating to a significant discrepancy between their “real me” and “ideal me”. This discrepancy leads to “ideal me” overtaking the regulatory functions, i.e. level of ambitions. It is a source of emotional and motivational tension, where strong stimulation evokes an over-optimal increase in activation and strong emotional tension (Jakubik, 1997).

The perpetrators in this group are characterised by a strong locus of external control. They are convinced that

incidents which occur in their lives are not dependent on their actions and that other forces and individuals have an impact on these occurrences. They lack trust in their own potential and ability to control what is going on in particular situations. The perpetrators with a low level of self-acceptance and an external locus of control perceive the effects of their actions to be random, out of their control. Consequently, the outcome of their actions ceases to control their behaviour, and therefore is not susceptible to the involvement of motivation aimed at changing their behaviour or a situation. The perpetrators with an external locus of control are positive about the unpredictability of

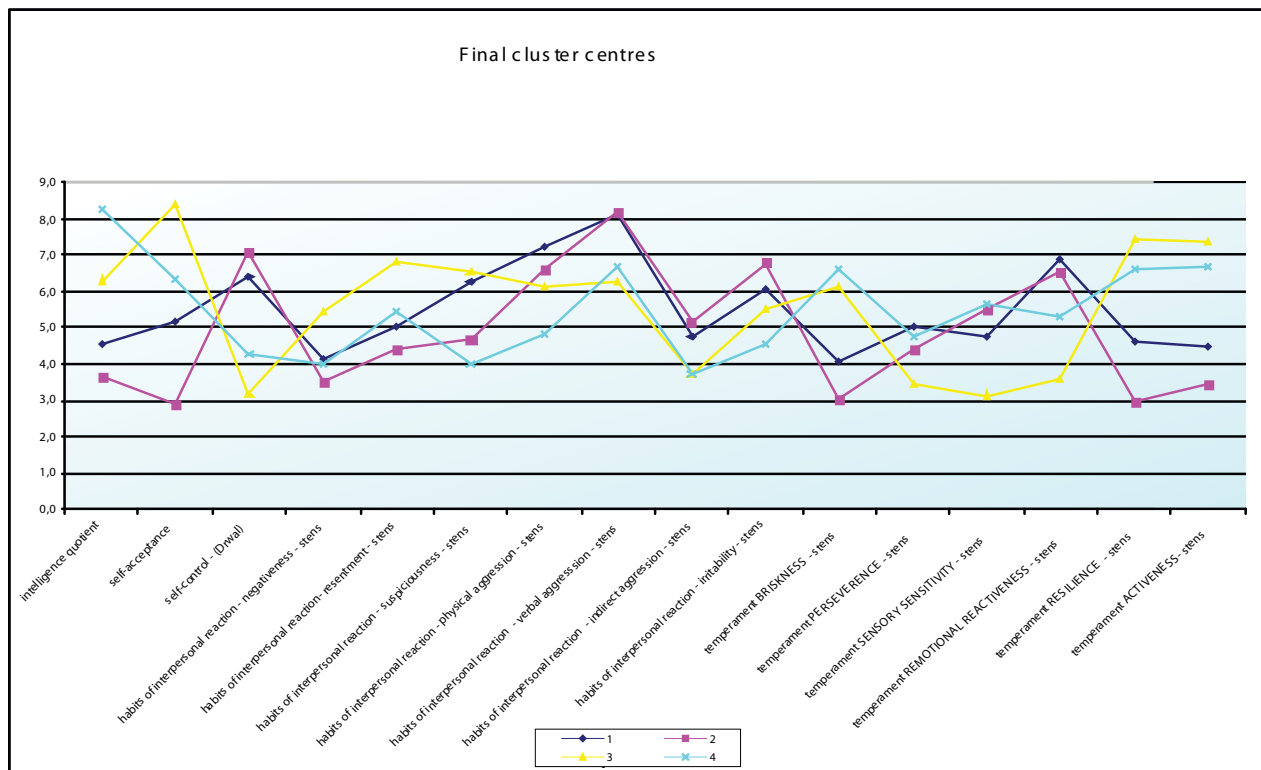


Figure 1. Final cluster centres.

incidents in their environment, and their inability to control them by themselves. Considering their low intellectual level resulting in difficulty in processing information and low self-acceptance – this gives them a conviction about the lack of correlation between their own behaviour and incidents that occurred.

Average physical and indirect aggression, average suspiciousness, low negativism and resentment indicate that these perpetrators are inclined to attack others, either directly or indirectly, and mostly in a verbal way. They are emotionally labile (they manifest a wide spectrum of emotions ranging from anger and jealousy to fear and anxiety). They do not have a sense of bitterness or anger. They are poorly immune and resilient and they cannot cope with daily problems.

Summary: perpetrators of low preventive competences are poorly resilient and active with low emotional immunity, they are emotionally labile; in their behaviour they demonstrate poor professional and social activeness and low flexibility (they have a limited ability to analyse and generalise, and to make logical deductions). They show an inclination to attack others, either directly or indirectly, in a verbal way. The aggression of these perpetrators may manifest itself as a mechanism which increases a level of self-acceptance and their control over the environment; being the increase achieved through decreasing the value of others (Kubacka-Jasiecka, 1996). Their aggression may be triggered either by an attack or irritants.

Group C (66 people) - psychopathic and retaliatory perpetrators. The dominant traits of this group are hostility, very low sense of guilt and low reactiveness. According to Buss (after Kosewski, 1977) hostility manifests itself in hatred towards the environment, jealousy, suppressed anger and resentment. These individuals are convinced that others inflict harm on them or plan to harm them. They are in opposition to authorities and governing bodies, and often towards the law. They are unaffected by social and peer pressures; they control their environment.

A significant psychological trait in the profile of these perpetrators is low emotional reactiveness which, accompanied by low sensory sensitivity, indicates that their emotional sensitivity is narrow; they are unaffected by emotional tension or a sense of guilt. They are emotionally immune and show no tendency to break down in difficult situations. The efficiency of this group is high: these individuals are highly active in their behaviour, they are resilient and can manage well under unfavourable conditions. They are low-reactive, and consequently show an increased demand for stimulation. This can be external stimuli (e.g. the environment, a situation, a task), as well as their own behaviour. While considering the context of aggressive behaviours – violence towards the closest in the family – it can be suggested that the aggressive behaviours of such perpetrators are often a source of strong stimulation, in particular, instrumental (causal) aggressive behaviours are used to compensate for a deficiency of stimulation. This suggestion can be confirmed by a self-

acceptance index. Very high self-acceptance indicates a low level of divergence between the “real me” and the “ideal me”. Therefore, the regulators of behaviour are expectations, which are expressed in the aim to confirm these expectations by consolidating the “real me”. A small divergence between two kinds of “me” (high self-acceptance) has a low stimulant value, which may be one of the reasons behind constant understimulation, so typical of abnormal personality (Eliasz, 1981).

To recap, the perpetrators from this group have a number of abnormal personality traits: low reactivity/high demand for stimulation (Zuckermann, 1978; Hare, 1985; Pastwa-Wojciechowska, 2004; Millon, Davis, 2005; Hare, Jutai, 1986), lack of a sense of guilt, hostility, emotional superficiality and effective intelligence. They are characterised by the distinctive advantage of an emotional and impulsive sphere over a cognitive and sensational one. They are able to demonstrate relatively unemotional functioning, even in situations causing strong emotional tension in others; their inner reactions are reserved and under control. On the basis of the research findings regarding violence perpetrators, N. Jacobson (1993) and D. Dutton (2001) showed that although the perpetrators' behaviour was marked by emotional aggression, they remained reserved and focused, with suppressed reactions of an autonomic nervous system (among others reduced heart rate). Psychopathic and retaliatory perpetrators are predisposed to controlling an external situation by a deliberate exertion of influence on particular people, most frequently by imposing their will, using pressure and threats. They disregard the needs of other people. They demonstrate poor emotional sensitivity, and, at a cognitive level, have an inability to discern other people's emotions. Their poor ability to experience guilt allows them to divest responsibility for their own behaviour and shift responsibility upon the victim.

The aggression of this type of perpetrators may be, firstly, a source of strong stimulation, secondly, a mechanism of gaining control, self-confirmation (dominance, imposition of a single “correct” viewpoint, egoism). D.G. Dutton (2001) refers to aggressors with such traits as psychopathic aggressors, believing as Hare does (2001) that a significant psychological trait of psychopathy is a lack of emotional reactivity or sense of guilt – conscience.

Group D (75 people) - perpetrators with **high adaptive potential**. On the basis of the results obtained, the perpetrators from this group can be defined as those without any dysfunction in their personality structure; they are people whose individual resources benefit their functioning, both cognitively and socially (i.e. their ability to manage in different daily situations). They have high intelligence, high self-acceptance and internal self-control. They also show a low level of negativism, suspicion, indirect aggression and physical aggression. They are

characterised by average verbal aggression and resentment, high activeness, resilience and briskness. They demonstrate average emotional reactivity, sensory sensitivity and perseverance, and a high level of guilt.

This configuration of traits indicates an effective regulation of stimulation, and a general tendency to seek stimulation (a level of excitement within optimal limits). These people are characterised by generally big adaptive capabilities, criticism, and, as a rule, they act very constructively in frustrating situations and show consideration for feedback about the consequences of their conduct. They manifest increased activeness in searching for information, facilitating a specific decision-taking process.

Summary: the functioning of the integration and regulatory mechanisms in the personality of these perpetrators, both at an impulsive, and emotional and cognitive level, does not raise any objections. They have a stable and external locus of control, which is conducive to a better ability to cope with stress and increases the likelihood of fulfilment of their various needs (a sense of security and strength). The aggressive behaviour of perpetrators with a big adaptive potential can be conditioned by situational influences, mostly by external situational factors such as a specific type of frustration or stress, the negative attitudes of partners, or their perception of information etc. It can be assumed that certain signals occurring in a given situation activate the subjects' cognitive patterns connected with aggression, and in this way they increase the distinctiveness of aggressive reactions, even if an individual does not experience strong affective arousal.

Strategies of coping with difficult situations employed by violence perpetrators

In the subject literature, domestic violence perpetrators are presented as individuals reacting inappropriately to stress (O'Leary, 1993; Saunders, 1992; Kubacka-Jasiecka, 2006) and showing a poor ability to manage difficult situations (Vaselle-Augenstein, Ehrlich, 1992). This was presented as one of the properties of a psychopathological mechanism responsible for dynamics of violence in marital relationships.

There were no research studies into the ways the perpetrators of violence manage stress-evoking situations, i.e. categories of coping styles, and process and strategies of coping in difficult situations.

In the framework of these research studies, attempts to respond to the following questions were made: (1) What coping strategies are used by violence perpetrators in stressful situations? (2) Are there significant statistical differences between violence perpetrators in terms of coping strategies they used?

In order to obtain answers the WCQ Questionnaire (The Ways of Coping Questionnaire – R.S. Lazarus and

Table 2
Strategies of coping with difficult situations by violence perpetrators (one-factor variance analysis).

Group	N	M	SD	SEM	TEST								
					UPER	LOWER	Min	Max	Levene	df1	df2	P	
WCQ_1	A	113	21.0177	1.48193	.13941	20.7415	21.2939	18.00	23.00				
	B	71	19.2394	4.94676	.58707	18.0686	20.4103	16.00	35.00				
	C	66	20.7424	2.45144	.30175	20.1398	21.3451	18.00	24.00	24.671	3	321	.000
	D	75	42.1867	1.21581	.14039	41.9069	42.4664	38.00	43.00				
	TOTAL	325	25.4585	9.60464	.53277	24.4103	26.5066	16.00	43.00				
WCQ_2	A	113	37.7333	2.05554	.23735	37.2604	38.2063	33.00	41.00				
	B	71	20.8133	7.42336	.88099	20.4964	21.0106	22.00	51.00				
	C	66	63.1515	2.03237	.25017	62.6519	63.6511	60.00	66.00	11.898	3	321	.000
	D	75	28.1593	2.38510	.22437	27.7147	28.6039	24.00	32.00				
	TOTAL	325	37.0585	14.41063	.79936	35.4859	38.6310	22.00	66.00				
WCQ_3	A	113	19.3717	1.85739	.17473	19.0255	19.7179	16.00	22.00				
	B	71	25.2535	1.39200	.16073	24.4931	26.1336	18.00	23.00				
	C	66	13.4242	2.83419	.34886	12.7275	14.1210	9.00	17.00	18.266	3	321	.000
	D	75	9.1549	3.10137	.36807	8.4208	9.8890	7.00	15.00				
	TOTAL	325	16.2646	5.11873	.28394	15.7060	16.8232	7.00	23.00				

WCQ_1 – solving problems with support of specialists
 WCQ_2 – avoidance (escape)
 WCQ_3 - minimising problems with wishful thinking

S. Folkman) was used in the research. The Questionnaire is a tool designed to evaluate the activeness undertaken by a man in a stressful situation. To define the accuracy of the test, an exploratory factor analysis was used (a method of discovering a factor – principal axis factoring; varimax rotation method). On the basis of the chart and the percentage of the explained variance, the final number of three factors was established. Their interpretation provided the following scales: “*solving problems with support of others*”, “*escape/avoidance*”, “*minimising problems with wishful thinking*”.

The obtained results are presented in Table 2.

Significant differences were observed in the application of coping strategies in difficult situations by perpetrators. Reactively aggressive perpetrators (group A) used a strategy of “*escape/avoidance*” in difficult situations (M=37.7333), “*solving problems with support of others*” (M=21.0177) and “*minimising problems with wishful thinking*”(M=19.3717).

The perpetrators with low preventive competences (group B) used preventive strategies in the form of “*minimising problems with wishful thinking*” (M=25.2535), “*escape/avoidance*” (M=20.8133); the least used was the strategy of “*solving problems with support of others*” (M= 19.2394).

Escape/avoidance is (in comparison with the remaining groups) the strategy most often used by psychopathic and retaliatory perpetrators - group C (M= 63.1515). The subjects then managed in difficult situations using “*solving*

problems with support of others” (M=20.7424), while the strategy least used was “*minimising problems with wishful thinking*” (M=13.4242). The perpetrators with a big adaptive potential (group D) when solving difficult situations, resorted in the first place to a strategy of “*solving problems with support of others*” (M=42.1867). To a lesser extent a way to solve their problems was “*escape/avoidance*” (M=28.1593) and “*minimising problems with wishful thinking*” (M=9.1549).

It should be emphasised that an individual’s use of a specific strategy is conditioned not only by the type of situation but also by the personality traits of the subjects. In accordance with the ideas of S. Hobfoll (2006), R.S. Lazarus (1966, 2006), some personality traits may be restricted to a category of resources, that is to say properties of an individual relating to itself or its relations in a given situation affecting the form and course of preventive actions. Problem-solving abilities, self-assessment, a locus of control (Kobasa, Puccetti, 1983), intellectual capabilities, cognitive flexibility, a sense of competence (Holohan, Moos, 1991) and proper self-structure (Hobfoll, 2006) are some of the categories of resources an individual may use which determine the ability to cope with a difficult situation. The strategy undertaken is a result of these variables.

The analysis of the material obtained on coping strategies, used by the subjects in terms of their personality traits, enabled the author to make certain reflections. They definitely do not claim to lead to general conclusions since further study is required.

The reactively aggressive perpetrators (group A) used a strategy of escape/avoidance in difficult situations. It is a common way of coping with problems, since escaping from a problem which is a source of stress may alleviate the negative emotional state and reduce unpleasant tension. The subjects from this group are individuals who are characterised by high emotional reactivity, low activity and resilience. Thus, it should be predicted that a basic coping strategy should involve reduction of unpleasant tensions such as aggressive behaviour, however, how can application of the escape strategy and avoidance of problems be justified. It seems that reactively aggressive experience stronger negative emotions in a difficult situation than others (they react particularly easily and particularly strongly). Emotional reactivity increases psychological distress, and consequently they act to eliminate unpleasant tensions quickly and efficiently, and these are frequently aggressive behaviours playing a defensive role towards overly strong external stimulation, triggering high levels of arousal and anxiety. I think that it is possible to distinguish two stages of coping with stress: the first one is an outburst of negative emotions, the other one, when unpleasant tensions persist, is escape – “distraction”, “exclusion of negative thoughts” – from a problem in the form of watching TV, drinking alcohol, the escape from home in a literal way – i.e. going out. Alcohol consumption reduces tension but it impedes performance of tasks or causes abandonment of task-oriented activities. Alcohol abuse minimises the effects of stress but immediately results in additional harm which is another source of stress. In coping with problems, reactively aggressive perpetrators are not inclined to undertake tasks and solve problems; their strategy is directed towards escapism – denying a problem, preventing oneself from thinking about it and avoiding reliving experiences connected to a specific situation. In addition, the conviction about a relationship between occurrence and fate and the lack of connection between one’s own behaviour and a situation (an external locus of control), considering a low level of self-acceptance, means choosing an avoidance strategy instead of overcoming stress/threat in an active way. “Struggling” with one’s own emotions exhausts individual’s resources, weakening its energy necessary to cope with stress, and may lead to a state of “cognitive demobilisation”, precluding a constructive approach to a problem (Sędek, 1991).

The perpetrators with low preventive competences (group B) used defensive strategies when confronted with a stressful situation, namely minimising problems with wishful thinking and escape/avoidance. Minimising problems with wishful thinking is a strategy aimed at obscuring a problem, lowering its significance and waiting until a situation or crisis will resolve itself. It is used to build self-defence – avoiding the information connected with the threat. The individual qualities of perpetrators

with low preventive competences suggest that they may have difficulty taking advantage of their resources in order to cope with a difficult situation. This mainly concerns the conviction about their own capabilities connected with a locus of control, low self-acceptance and the limitation of their intellectual functions (on the borderline of retardation). The subjects minimise a problem, do not want to, or cannot evaluate it and interpret it considering their low intellectual and social competences. A high external locus of control may manifest a defensive stance – a mechanism allowing the perpetrators not to assume responsibility for their own behaviour/situation. In the process of managing a difficult situation, the perpetrators from this group prepare themselves for the reduction of emotional tension, actually lowering its level by assessing the situation in contrast to reality. Preventive activities are incorporated in wishful thinking, illusions which fulfil defensive functions maintaining previous self-evaluation, as well as opposition to lowering the ideal “me”. Minimising a problem, not recognising it, is also a result of processes of denial and daydreaming (wishful thinking).

Psychopathic and retaliatory perpetrators (group C) used a strategy of avoidance/escape in a specific situation. Further way of coping with problem-solving was the activity or support of specialists or others. An analysis of the psychological profile of this group of perpetrators made it possible for the author to present certain reflections with regard to stress coping strategies. While in a difficult situation psychopathic and retaliatory perpetrators take actions aimed at manipulating and controlling the emotions and tension caused by stress. This allows them to keep distance from danger. However, in situations which require further-reaching solutions, it appears to be inefficient or even destructive. Resentment and suspicion, a low level of guilt, and high self-acceptance, do not let subjects cope with a problem despite good intellectual prowess, or to evaluate a situation realistically, as well as their own role in this situation. Avoiding thinking about a situation and a problem and refraining from activities is the best way of maintaining the integrity of their personality: maintaining their self-image, self-evaluation and identity. This mechanism involves an avoidance of informational discrepancy between the anticipations generated by “the self” and the information generated by the cognitive system, i.e. the environment.

Perpetrators with a big adaptive potential (Group D) employed a problem-solving strategy based on the support of others, i.e. a strategy intended to solve problems, seeking to engage with the environment and change a situation. It should be noted that this group is composed of people with a high intelligence quotient, a high internal locus of control and high self-acceptance, and is characterised by high resilience and moderate emotional reactivity. The research findings of J. Strelau (2000, 2006) and

Klonowicz (1984, 1992) prove that traits of temperament, such as reactivity and activeness are closely connected to stress-coping mechanisms in terms of moderating the level of activeness triggered by a specific stressor (they affect a type of experienced emotions). At the same time, according to R.S. Lazarus & S. Folkman (1984), a dimension of personality constituting a locus of control plays an important role in motivating behaviour in difficult situations. It can be assumed that the violence perpetrators from group D, as "inner-controlled" persons (on account of their higher self-confidence, confidence in their own abilities, and bigger internal pressure to act resulting from a need for protection, control and self-acceptance) tried to make a quicker situational analysis and discover the cause of a problem. These perpetrators also made a faster evaluation of a problem by considering it as one possible to be solved or not. When definite activities aimed at solving an existing problem bring no effect, the subjects take advantage of the help offered by others. The data obtained from the interview indicated that those who provided assistance were mostly psychologists, employees of Crisis Intervention Centres and priests. The skill to use support offered by others is related to the social competences of these perpetrators.

A certain number of perpetrators (presumably in a situation which appeared to be too difficult) showed a tendency to avoid and not to make further efforts, which was often caused by the fact that they were waiting for more beneficial circumstances, such as support from others and additional information.

Summary

The objective of the research conducted by the author was to present the characteristics of domestic violence perpetrators. The research material obtained made it possible to categorise four groups of perpetrators differing in selected personality traits: locus of control, self-acceptance, habits of interpersonal reactions, a structure of temperament and intellectual functioning. Furthermore, four distinguished groups were characterised in terms of stress-coping strategies.

The analysis of the stress-coping strategies used by different types of violence perpetrators in difficult situations, spread over time, enabled the author to draw simple conclusions: psychological processes of stress management in the research group proceeded in a fundamentally different mode; in group A: reactively aggressive perpetrators; in group C: psychopathic and retaliating perpetrators by means of a strategy of escape/avoidance, that is withdrawal from a direct confrontation with difficulties; in group D: perpetrators with a high adaptive potential used instrumental task-oriented activities intended to solve a problem, frequently with support from specialists, and

perpetrators from group B: individuals of low preventive competences applied a strategy of minimising a problem with wishful thinking intended to control emotions and self-protection. The findings indicate that reactively aggressive perpetrators (group A), with low preventive competences (group B) and psychopathic and retaliating perpetrators (group C) take advantage of a few strategies, yet in the first place they use strategies oriented to reduction of emotional tensions. In the main, they aim to change their own attitude to a problem by means of defensive mechanisms without changing the source of stress.

The conclusions from the research studies are as follows: thorough research into violence perpetrators should make it possible to adapt a system of support for victims and perpetrators of domestic violence in a more efficient way. The treatment of perpetrators cannot be an alternative to court proceedings; it needs to become an element of complex intervention programmes to counteract domestic violence. Distinguishing violence perpetrators in respect of their personality traits, with a specific profile, facilitates the assessment of the level of threat of aggression shown by perpetrators, and enables selection of an appropriate medicinal and therapeutic programme. An advisable psycho-educational programme of a behavioural and cognitive nature would also be advisable for situationally aggressive perpetrators (group D). A therapeutic programme for reactively aggressive perpetrators, apart from psycho-educational material, should include their own work on the reinforcement of control mechanisms and learning how to cope with stress. A programme for aggressive perpetrators featuring abnormal personalities (group C) should incorporate the treatment of personality disorders, and therapeutic activities need to be aimed at changing the convictions of perpetrators with regard to violence, especially in respect of a mechanism of denial. The perpetrators from group B should be exposed to psychological activities which will enable them to acquire the skills to cope with stress in various difficult situations, control their emotions and build up self-esteem.

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