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## **Statistical Data on Intimate Partner Violence**

What statistical data support the fact that primarily men are the perpetrators of intimate partner violence and women are its victims?

### ***Summary***

This paper surveys the kinds of statistical data from which the proportion of men and women as perpetrators and victims of intimate partner violence can be inferred. I identify three types of data: data coming from human service providers, representative surveys and criminal statistics. I survey the various proportions that can be discerned from these types of data, evaluate the methodology through which these data were gained, and consequently their reliability. I conclude that overall the data support that the majority of the perpetrators of intimate partner violence are men, and that the majority of victims are women. Finally, I discuss some of the consequences of this information when designing interventions to combat intimate partner violence.

### ***Introduction***

Until recently, public discussion of domestic violence in Hungary never questioned the fact that the majority of perpetrators of domestic violence are men and the majority of victims are women. However in 2005, several news items and publications were released that seem to question this widely held view. Therefore it is worth having an overview of the literature on the subject, especially the research that yield data that allow a direct comparison of men and women.

It may be important to see clearly in this respect when designing the psychological, social and legal interventions to combat intimate partner violence. If it is really so that women and men are equally aggressive, as some publications suggest, then one can work on reducing aggression in the family in general. In this case, intimate partner violence is no different from other kinds of violent crimes. However, if it is true that it is typically men who are violent against women in intimate relationships and not vice versa, then perhaps those people are right who think that intimate partner abuse is the manifestation of the societal inequality of the sexes within the relationship. In this case, it is not enough to generally decrease people's aggressiveness to combat intimate partner violence, but it is also necessary to increase women's assertiveness, ensure their equal opportunities and see that men relinquish the prerogatives they are not entitled to.

### ***The kinds of data at hand***

In general, there are three types of data on the proportions of men and women among the perpetrators and victims of intimate partner violence:

- the statistics on those using services for victims and perpetrators;
- representative surveys on intimate partner abuse; and
- criminal statistics on abuse and violent criminal acts.

At first glance, these data contradict each other. Based on the data from services, it seems obvious that perpetrators are men and victims are women. Representative surveys often show that men and women abuse or become victims in equal numbers. Criminal statistics show overwhelmingly again that more men commit a violent crime against their partners than women. In order to clear up this contradiction, this survey analyses these three types of data.

## ***Data coming from service providers***

According to the data coming from services for abusers and victims, victims are predominantly women, abusers are predominantly men. In Hungary and the world, 95% of those turning to services for victims are women.

This figure is sometimes criticised for the following reasons:

- The services for victims are often advertised for women, so it is no wonder abused men do not use these services;
- The services for abusers are, on the other hand, advertised for men, so if there are violent women, they will not turn to these;
- There is much greater social pressure on abused men than on abused women to keep their victimisation a secret, because a man that has been abused by his wife would be subjected to ridicule. Therefore abused men will not report the abuse and will not turn to the services catering for victims.

It is probable that it is more difficult for abused men to turn to services advertised for victims or for women victims than to a service that is for both men and women. This theory can explain the difference in the number of men and women who turn to service providers, but it remains a theory until other facts support it. A competing theory is that abused men are in very small numbers indeed. In order to be able to decide between these theories it is worth examining the data coming from other statistics.

## ***Hungarian data***

Data coming from Hungarian service providers also show the unquestioned predominance of women victims, but the above criticism can be brought up against them, too. In Hungary, NANE Women's Rights Association runs a hotline for abused women and children, and OKIT (National Crisis Intervention and Information Hotline) advertises its services to abused persons, men and women alike. According to the data of the period between September 2004 and May 2005, an average of 50 abused women (94%) and 3 abused men (6%) called NANE monthly.<sup>1</sup> This is in line with the idea that the majority of abused persons are women but the other explanation can be applied—that it is only because NANE offers its service to women and children that there are so few male callers.

## ***Representative surveys***

Representative surveys are surveys of large samples that, according to the intentions of their designers, well represent the full population of a country or other community. Data from people of various sexes, ages, education, place of residence, ethnicity, etc. are taken into account after the survey to the extent that these groups are represented in society.

Representative samples often yield the result that men and women perpetrate and suffer from partner abuse to the same degree. The first such surveys were carried out in America in the 1970s and research based on the methodology developed in the 1970s has produced similar results ever since. For instance in a survey in New Zealand that was conducted in 1999 but used the methods worked out in the 1970s, 27% of women and 34% of men said that there had been instances of their partners abusing them. In the same survey, 37% of women and 22% of men acknowledged having hurt their partners<sup>ii</sup>.

On the other hand, these surveys are criticised for taking the violent actions out of context. Usually they only ask, as in the research in New Zealand, how many times it has occurred that the woman or the man hit or kicked his or her partner, attacked him or her with a knife, etc. In answering these questions, men and women list approximately the same number of events.

### **Hurting and abuse**

Intimate partner abuse, however, does not manifest only in the number of blows a person has given out or suffered. There is an important difference between hurting and abusing someone. Hurting someone is a one-off event, both parties may perpetrate it, it does not recur in a cycle and its intensity is likely to decrease or remains constant within the same relationship. Abuse, in contrast, happens several times, it is usually only one of the parties who perpetrates it while the other is in fear, violent episodes are followed by calm periods in a cycle, and its intensity can escalate to deadly criminal acts. The motivation of the attacker is an important difference between hurting and abusing someone: while the reason for hurting can be self-defence or that the person revolts against his or her subjugated position, abuse is done with the aim of controlling the other person. Table 1 shows the differences between hurting and abusing someone.

Hurting	Abusing
One-off	Repeated
Even or decreasing intensity	Increasing intensity within relationship
Both parties perpetrate	Typically only one party perpetrates it
Neither party fears the other	One party is afraid, the other is angry
Irregular	Returns in cycle
Multiple reasons	With the aim to control

Representative samples then ask most often if the person has been hurt or if he or she has hurt his or her partner. If, in similar surveys, one asks whether the person was hurt repeatedly, if he or she was afraid or injured as a result of the abuse, it turns out that women are beaten by their partners several times, they are the ones who are afraid and they get injured. Men are the perpetrators who repeatedly beat their female partner, keep her in fear and cause her injuries. For instance according to the results of a survey commissioned by the Scottish police in 2002, although men and women report their partner's hitting, kicking or threatening them in equal numbers, meanwhile women are afraid more often, suffer more injuries and they are more often hurt by the same partner than men.<sup>iii</sup>

### **The Conflict Tactics Scales**

Numerous representative surveys are conducted with the questionnaire called Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS) in the United States, which was developed in the 1970s by Murray Straus. The questions of the CTS are usually asked verbally (usually over the phone) and they assess the number and kinds of aggressive actions that the respondent

has carried out against his or her partner in the course of some conflict.<sup>iv</sup> Because the CTS is still widely used internationally and because Hungarian literature increasingly refers to these surveys, it is worth having an overview of the results achieved with this research method.

Representative surveys using the CTS usually conclude that men and women perpetrate violence in nearly equal proportions. For instance in a survey by Suzanne Steinmetz in 1975, 12% of both men and women responded that they had used physical violence against their partner over the previous one year.<sup>v</sup> Let us consider why one should not take these results at face value.

### **It takes violence out of context**

It bears repeating that the research conducted with the CTS does not understand violence in its context. The questionnaire does not ask about the attacker's motivation. It is known from other research that does ask about motivation that women use violence primarily out of self-defence, and men to control their female partner<sup>vi</sup>. Because the CTS does not ask about this, it mixes women's self-defence with men's violence perpetrated in order to control their partners.

### **It regards violence as a conflict tactic**

When the CTS is taken, the interviewer asks the respondent to think of the conflicts between him or herself and his or her partner and to say how many times he or she shouted at, hit, kicked etc. his or her partner during these conflicts. However, the abuser often perpetrates the violence not as part of a conflict. It is possible that when responding to the CTS abusers do not think of the cases when they simply have a tantrum or when the abuse has escalated to a level where the abuser need not quarrel with his partner to enforce his will. Because in these cases there is no "conflict," these events are not surveyed by research done with the CTS.

### **Does not ask about injuries**

There is a difference between pushing someone out of the way and pushing someone down the stairs. You can even die of the latter. The CTS does not differentiate between these two events. Meanwhile, men usually cause more severe injuries to their female partners than women do to men, only by virtue of their greater physical power. And more severe injuries are a very important measure of inequality between the sexes, since the greater the injury an attack causes, the better it can be used to intimidate the woman and to build the man's power.

### **Does not ask about rape**

In its original form, the CTS does not ask questions about rape at all. Therefore it ignores one of the most severe forms of intimate partner violence, perpetrated almost exclusively by men.

In light of the criticism on the CTS, its developers Straus and Gelles reworked the original CTS and included questions on injuries and sexual assault<sup>vii</sup>. At the same time, the CTS2 still does not ask about the attacker's motivation and continues to assess the violence that occurs in conflict situations. Gelles himself stated that:

one piece of statistical evidence [...] is hauled out from my 1985 research [which was done with the CTS] - and distorted - to "prove" the position on violence against men. [...] The statement that men and women hit one another in roughly equal numbers is true,

however, it cannot be made in a vacuum without the qualifiers that a) women are seriously injured at seven times the rate of men and b) that women are killed by partners at more than two times the rate of men.<sup>viii</sup>

### **Hungarian data**

To this day no representative study that surveys abuse by both men and women has been conducted in Hungary. The only representative study on domestic violence surveyed violence against women<sup>ix</sup> so therefore it cannot be used to establish whether men or women abuse their partners in larger numbers.

### **Conclusion**

Data from representative samples on the one hand call attention to the fact that women hurt men, as well. But when collected with due methodological care, they also show that women are more afraid, are more likely to become victims of systematic abuse repeatedly, receive more severe injuries, and when they are aggressive, they act more out of self-defence in contrast to men. This allows the conclusion that it is men who repeatedly terrorise women in families, and who act not out of self-defence but use violence in order to control and dominate their partners.

### ***Criminal statistics***

Again and again, criminal statistics show that women are more often victims of any kind of crimes by close relatives, not just within a relationship but also in the wider family, than men are. This supports the fact that the same is true for partner abuse: women are primarily victims and men are perpetrators. This is demonstrated by the statistics of US aggravated criminal acts, 1987 to 1999, shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Violent criminal acts against persons per 1000 persons in the USA between 1987 and 1991 according to relationship between victim and perpetrator and sex of victim

Relationship of victim and perpetrator	Sex of victim	
	Female	Male
Partner	5,0	0,5
Other relative	1,0	0,7
Known	8,0	13,0
Unknown	5,0	12,0

Source: US Bureau of Justice Statistics<sup>x</sup>

As shown by the figures, many more women are victimised by their partners, than men are (line 1). Even other relatives figure more often among the attackers of women than among the attackers of men (line 2). Men are typically attacked by more distant acquaintances and unknown perpetrators (lines 3 and 4), although a small number of them are attacked by their female partner (line 1). Thus, these data support the claim that men are the perpetrators of intimate partner violence and women are its victims. Similar figures will be found in the criminal statistics of several countries; in Poland, according to a 2005 compilation, 95% of the victims of domestic violence are women and children<sup>xi</sup>, and the same is shown by police statistics in Slovakia.<sup>xii</sup>

## **Hungarian data**

For the time being, no reliable publications exist that draw conclusions from criminal statistics on the proportions of men and women as perpetrators of intimate partner violence.

At the same time, it has been widely publicised in Hungary that according to criminal statistics compiled by the National Institute of Criminology (OKRI)  $\frac{2}{3}$  two-thirds of all the victims killed in domestic violence cases are men.<sup>xiii</sup> Many understood this news to mean that  $\frac{2}{3}$  two-thirds of the perpetrators of killings in the home are women. However, one of the publications on the research by OKRI makes it clear that these data include not only violence perpetrated by a partner but any violence ending in death perpetrated by any family member.<sup>xiv</sup> It may be true that men are more often victims of killings within the family (just as outside the family) than women, but the majority of perpetrators are also men (just as in the case of criminal acts outside the family). Therefore, this publication does not support the idea that there could be more women among the perpetrators of domestic violence than men.

On the contrary. OKRI's research data support the fact that partner abuse is perpetrated primarily by men against women. Between 1997 and 2000, the statistics in question included a yearly average of 2700 criminal acts that a man committed against his partner or ex-partner, while mentioning only 478 criminal acts that were committed by women against their partners or ex-partners.<sup>xv</sup> Although these data include all kinds of criminal acts against partners and ex-partners, not only violent acts, there is no reason to believe that the situation is different for violent acts, including partner abuse.

One may add that these Hungarian data do not provide an accurate picture of intimate partner abuse. According to our experiences in the legal aid service of the Habeas Corpus Working Group, women are often afraid to even report the violence to the police because they know that the police will not act or will not act in a proper way in these cases, and that the abuser may later on avenge himself on the woman for making the report. Even if there is a report, the police or the prosecutors start investigations in very few cases of intimate partner violence. Therefore, crimes against women are less likely to enter the police and prosecutors' statistics surveyed by OKRI than crimes against men. Even so, these figures indicate that men are more violent than women within the family as well.

## **Conclusion**

Criminal statistics show unambiguously that the majority of the perpetrators of crimes against intimate partners are men and the majority of victims are women.

## ***Final conclusions***

We have surveyed three sources of data on intimate partner violence. Data coming from service providers are unambiguous in that women are abused by their male partner and not the other way round. Data coming from representative samples are more reliable, and when collected with due methodological care, they, too, show that men abuse their female partners. Finally, according to criminal statistics, the majority of perpetrators of any kinds of criminal acts against intimate partners—not just violent acts—are men, from which it can be concluded that the situation is no different when counting only intimate partner *violence*. The data therefore support the claim that many more men abuse their partners than women.

## ***Discussion***

Since the victims of intimate partner violence are primarily women and its perpetrators are primarily men, this necessitates fundamentally different interventions than what would be necessary if the two sexes were equally violent.

If the two sexes were equally violent within a relationship, perhaps it would lead to good results if the man and the woman sat down in the presence of a mediator to discuss non-violent ways of reconciling conflicts. If, however, only one of the partners abuses the other one and breaks the other's assertiveness in a long process of abuse, the victim will not put forward her own interests even in the course of such a "peaceful" discussion because she will be afraid of the man's revenge. If we think that intimate partner abuse is not a fight between equal parties but typically the man abusing the woman, then the woman will need special support in any process where she wants to face the abuser. If, in reality, the victim of abuse is always the same party, she will primarily need to obtain protection from the perpetrator. No psychotherapeutic or social intervention will be effective that does not set the safety of the woman as its first goal.<sup>xvi</sup>

If the two sexes were equally aggressive, perhaps it would not improve the situation, and it definitely would not be fair, to remove one of the partners from the joint home. However, if we believe that intimate partner abuse is repeatedly perpetrated by the same party against the other and with the aim of building up his power, it is effective and fair to remove that party from the joint home. This solution is called the restraining order or protection order, which has the aim of ensuring the victim's safety by removing the identifiably violent person from the victim's environment as a preliminary but immediate measure. In the countries where it works well, it is complemented by a number of other measures: a social worker contacts the abused woman, she is supported in making the report to the police, abused women participate in self-help groups and/or receive psychological help. And the abuser can enter a programme for violent men that helps him take the responsibility for the abuse and change his behaviour.

These complementary measures are fully lacking in Hungary at the end of 2006 and the restraining order itself is a farce on the original concept rather than its responsible implementation in the Hungarian environment. If based on the data and analysis provided here we think that men gradually build up their power with repeated violence in the process of intimate partner abuse, and that women gradually lose their assertiveness and are intimidated, it is cynical to expect the woman to make a report to the police before the restraining order is issued. Originally, the restraining order was aimed at enabling the woman, among other things, to make a report by freeing her from the threat of immediate violence. In Hungary however, the woman has to report the violence first to be granted the restraining order and there is no special institution to support her in this. Thus the Hungarian legal regulation disregards one characteristic of intimate partner abuse: that it is not a fight between equal parties, but that one of the parties repeatedly intimidates the other.

The statistical data discussed here are important because they serve as a compass in planning the social, psychological and legal interventions related to intimate partner abuse. They indicate that there is a need for interventions which reflect the fact that the majority of abusers are men and the majority of victims are women. They point to the fact that intimate partner abuse is the manifestation, within one relationship, of women's disadvantaged situation in the whole of society. Therefore, they point towards interventions that focus on the safety of abused women,

on supporting the women to counter the abusers, and on calling violent men to account.

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- <sup>xvi</sup> On the priority of creating the victim's safety see: Szil P. (2005) *Why does he abuse? Why can he abuse? I. Domestic violence: men's responsibility*. Habeas Corpus Munkacsoport, Budapest. Available in English at <http://www.stop-ferfieroszak.hu/home/publications.html>. See also: Herman J.L. (1997) *Trauma and Recovery*. BasicBooks.



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