

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OVER THE ELDERLY WITH  
SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE REPUBLIC OF  
MACEDONIA**

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**Abstract**

***Keywords:***

Violence;  
Domestic violence;  
Abuse over the elderly;  
Risk factors;  
Consequences.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze and study the domestic violence over the elderly, as one of the forms of domestic violence within the broader categorization of forms of domestic violence. The purpose of this paper is brought into correlation with the conditions of domestic violence over the elderly in Republic of Macedonia. The form of domestic violence over the elderly covers the established relations between a family member on one hand and an elderly family member on the other hand, who in the given situation is the violence victim. Proper studying of the domestic violence over the elderly is very important in order to understand the phenomenology and etiology of the phenomenon, as well as developing a prevention system. The general conclusions point out that the domestic violence over the elderly is a phenomenon that unfortunately is present in all societies without exception, including here Republic of Macedonia as well.

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## 1. Introduction

The phenomenon of domestic violence exists from always, it is present throughout the continuous monitoring of the humankind and society. In its manifestations and its characteristics, the domestic violence cannot be connected with particular nation, group of people, race, culture, religion or with some other social circumstances and characteristics. The domestic violence can be categorized into these forms: domestic violence between intimate partners (domestic violence over women and domestic violence over men), domestic violence over children and domestic violence over the elderly. Special attention attracts the domestic violence over the elderly.

The elderly, as a separate category, are often exposed to various forms of discrimination, violence, abuse and neglect, both within the family and in institutions housing the elderly, as well as the broader social environment.

The United Nations are dealing with the problem of violence over the elderly. They conclude that these actions mean blatant violation of the basic human rights and freedoms, which lead to complete social isolation and marginalization of the elderly in society. In order to prevent the domestic violence over the elderly and help in their protection, the United Nations adopted a special plan which envisages activities and measures for prevention and protection of the elderly from violence, i.e. they adopted the Madrid Action Aging Plan (MIPAA).

The World Health Organization defines the violence over the elderly as individual or repeated act or lack of appropriate action which occurs in any terms of expectations and trust, which by itself causes damage, pain and discomfort to the elderly. This definition includes and distinguishes body or physical violence, psychological violence, sexual violence and economic violence, at the same time providing a wide range of the rationalization over the elderly as a social phenomenon (Ajdukovic, Ogresta and Rusac, 2008).

The domestic violence over the elderly can be also defined from medical aspect according to which it represents neglect of the elderly as a way of reaction from some other person or persons or omission by them due attention, which ultimately results in harming the elderly as well as a violation of his/hers health (Rakel, 2010).

The violence over the elderly within the family is a specific form of domestic violence. This type of violence can be defined with help of the specific types of domestic violence, with help of physical violence, psychological violence, sexual violence and economic violence. Thus, according to this, the violence towards the elderly is execution of any of these types of domestic violence by some person within the family. The purpose with this type of violence over the elderly, as well as with the other forms of violence, consists in enabling control over the persons, their physical injuries, economic dependency, sexual abuse, depending on the method of carrying out the violence, as well as the consequences specifically incurred for the elderly.

Acts of domestic violence over the elderly can happen to anyone, in any family or in any circumstances. This kind of violence is carried out regardless of the origin of the victim or the perpetrator, regardless of the age, race, culture and ethnicity. Given the fact that the elderly represent a specific and vulnerable group, as such they often represent potential victims of violence within the family.

The domestic violence that is performed over the elderly includes acts and activities of injuring the elderly, their neglect, physical and sexual abuse, emotional abuse, material exploitation, abandoning the elderly as well as neglecting the elderly (Phillips, 1989).

In a much greater risk are the elderly who have some functional and mental health problems and because of that they are partialy or completely dependent on other people. Also at high risk are older women. The acts of violence over older women and the acts of violence over younger women differs on several basis: there are some differences as to the adopted values, the economic status of women over the years is worsening and the same applies to their health condition without distinction if the elderly is dependent on other people or in situations when she takes care of her immobile partner or she is socially excluded (Payne, 2005).

## **2. Consequences of domestic violence over the elderly**

The consequences that occure as a result of the domestic violence over the elderly are very complex. As a result of this kind of violence, the health of the elderly can be endangered

(physical and mental health), their dignity can be jeopardised, as well as the quality of life and life itself (Petrusic, Todorovic and Vracevic, 2012). The health consequences are big, from acute to chronic health problems such as continuous and chronic stress. Permanent and long-term stress on the elderly can cause decrease in the immune system of the older person as well as a range of diseases that occur as a result of the reduced immunity (diseases such as ulcers, high blood pressure, heart disease, malignant diseases, paralysis etc.). The stress symptoms are numerous and they disrupt the lives of the elderly and endanger their health. As typical symptoms of this stress primarily come constant insomnia, decrease in their durability and resistance, increasing organism sensitivity, deterioration of health conditions, permanent depression, anxiety, nervousness, despair, abdominal pain and so on.

The psychological consequences that occur as a result of domestic violence over the elderly can emerge and manifest as: tension, constant restlessness, feeling weak and unable to carry out daily and basic needs, constant feeling of fear, guilt for the committed violence, loss of self-esteem, different neurotic effects such as depression, panic attacks, disturbances in diet, aggressive behavior, destructive and even suicidal thoughts and suicidal actions.

Due to the fact that the elderly hardly decide to report the violence over them that occurs within their family, established are several signs that indicate if a particular older person is a victim of violence within their family. In recognition of these signs, one should especially pay attention to: (Radulovic i Vujovic, 2006)

- Changes in behavior of the elderly (often showing great anxiety which in the past was not typical for them, they are depressed and withdrawn, show a high level of aggressiveness that has never been their feature, constantly will their own death as a way to be saved from the severe mistreatment etc.);
- Changes in lifestyle and daily habits and routines (the elderly completely isolates him/herself from family members and the wider environment, often can be seen that is untidy even though in the past they were always put together, they are no longer neat and tidy, don't pay attention to the sloppiness in their home etc.);

- Visibility of physical or bodily violation (the body has visible bruises, swelling, redness, fractures that resulted from the physical domestic violence);
- Financial difficulties are also one of the indicators that an elderly person is domestically harassed (for example not paying their bills, constantly borrowing and lending, not supplying the everyday products etc.);
- In public emphasize too much that everything is fine with them (this over-emphasis of their fictitious good condition is a result of fear and shame to show to the general public that they are a victim of domestic violence);
- Requesting attention of many people (often attend the doctor's office, often call the emergency medical assistance, call members of the wider family. This may be an indication that the elderly feels safe in the presence of others or with these activities wishes that others will notice that there are some problems);
- Scared look in presence of some family member (the elderly can cry, start to be quiet, start shaking etc.);
- Sudden weight loss, rapid disruption and deterioration of health conditions, poor appetite, irregular and non-existing diet, immunity decrease, irregular checks by the family doctor, refusing to drink the medicine etc.

The domestic violence that happens over the elderly within the family is a large-scale problem, problem that we are all facing. We should strive to create a healthy and functioning family in which all members are equal, including also the elderly persons.

### **3. Domestic violence over the elderly in Republic of Macedonia**

Recognizing the violence over the elderly in Republic of Macedonia as an issue of social importance, in 2011 was conducted a research in order to discover the issues related to the domestic violence against this vulnerable group of persons. (Caceva, 2011).

The research deserves special attention since it deals with topics that have not been treated this way. As a base for this survey is taken into account the need for conducting this type of research. This was defined in the Report on Violence and Health from 2006 which was published by the Ministry of Health of Republic of Macedonia (Tozija Gjorgjev, Cicevalieva 2006). The research

about domestic violence over the elderly in the country establishes several circumstances and facts:

- It is established that from the total number of respondents, 960 people, 34.6 % were victims of domestic violence of various kinds, physical, sexual and psychological domestic violence;
- According to the survey, most respondents have been victims of psychological violence, followed by financial abuse and physical violence and the lowest percentage goes to sexual domestic violence over the elderly;
- Most frequent perpetrators of domestic violence against the elderly in Republic of Macedonia are the life partners of the elderly, the husband, the son or the daughter in law;
- In the framework of this research it is also established that the females are more likely to appear as victims of domestic violence, unlike the males. The gender is defined as one of the facts that have meaning to increase or decrease the risk of committing domestic violence. The elderly women have increased risk of such violence, while among the elderly man this risk is much smaller;
- The biological characteristics of the genders and the differences that exist between them have been identified as significant and influential for the perpetration of domestic violence against the elderly, specifically for the perpetration of domestic violence against elderly women;
- Education is also one of the reasons that leads to perpetration of domestic violence against the elderly in the country, i.e. there is inverse relation between lower educational levels and frequency of domestic violence. In fact, the persons that have lower educational qualifications more often become victims of domestic violence;
- Also, the depression among the elderly is listed as one of the factors for committing domestic violence. It is found out that elderly people that have lower levels of depression less frequently appear as victims of domestic violence, unlike the elderly who have depression of higher degree.

Specific research on "Prevalence of the abuse of the elderly" in Republic of Macedonia comprehensively treats the issue of domestic violence in this persons' category, setting the most frequent and the most common types and forms of domestic violence as well as the reasons for committing this type of domestic violence.

#### 4. Conclusion

The domestic violence over the elderly is a serious problem not only for the family in which it occurs, but a problem for the society because of its destructiveness and the serious consequences it causes. Given the fact that special attention to the domestic violence over the elderly in Republic of Macedonia is given in the last few years, a scientific research is more than necessary. If we add the fact that there is a lack of specific research on domestic violence over the elderly in Republic of Macedonia, as well as the insufficient professional literature regarding this issue, then it becomes clear that there is a need for an overall research on this phenomenon. Studying and analyzing the domestic violence over the elderly cannot be conducted in isolation. It assumes full integration of different sectors in society in order to create conditions and favorable climate to eliminate the forms of this type of violence, domestic violence over the elderly.

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