Mental abuse in marriage. Case study

Kempińska Urszula¹
Rudenko Mykola²
Wyszatycka Agnieszka³

¹Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Director; Pedagogy Institute Cuiavian College KSW in Wloclawek; Republic of Poland
²Ph.D., Associate professor of the department of Professional Education; Kyiv National University of Construction and Architecture; Ukraine
³bachelor's degree, graduate of 1st degree pedagogy, specialization: Resocialization; Cuiavian College KSW in Wloclawek; Republic of Poland

Abstract.
The article presents the statistics of violent behavior, the effects of violence and the legal consequences of its use. The authors pay attention to aspects of psychological violence: emotional abuse and control behavior, as well as to the increasingly popular phenomenon of gaslighting. The research was carried out using the method of individual cases and the technique of document analysis, observation and interview. The study covered a woman – a victim of domestic violence and her mother. The aim of the study was to find out the answers to the following research problems: When and under what circumstances did the respondent meet her husband? Why did she get married? How long did the violence in the relationship last? What were the effects of the violence? Where did the respondent look for help?

Keywords:
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Partner Violence Against Women (IPV) is a global public health problem. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality, psychological violence is defined as "any act or behavior that causes emotional harm to a partner or ex-partner". It is estimated that psychological violence is the most common form of intimate partner violence (IPV) and can occur in isolation or in combination with other forms of violence. Many studies show that psychological violence is considered to be one of the main risk factors for aggressive behavior. The aim of the article is to present the causes and effects of psychological violence in marriage on the example of a case study.

Introduction. Partner Violence Against Women (IPV) is a global public health problem. The term "violence against women" has been defined as "any act of violence related to the fact that a person is a specific gender, the result of which is, or may be, physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering to women, including the threat of such acts, coercion or arbitrary acts of deprivation of liberty, regardless of whether these acts take place in public or private life" [1]. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality, psychological violence is defined as "any act or behavior that causes emotional harm to a partner or ex-partner" [4]. When assessing this type of violence, two aspects are usually taken into account: emotional abuse and control behavior. Emotional abuse includes behaviors aimed at causing harm or threats of harm, such as insults, humiliation, intimidation, destruction of things, threats, harm, attempts to take away children, while controlling behavior consists in monitoring the behavior of the partner or isolating him by limiting actions such as such as prohibiting leaving the house, limiting contact with other people or constant insistence on knowing the victim's whereabouts and limiting access to financial resources, employment, education or medical care [after: 2 and 9]. Recently, the concept of gaslighting has become famous in the context of the discussed form of violence. It comes from the pre-war play Gas Light by Patrick Hamilton, which tells the story of an overbearing man who torments his wife by making her mentally ill. The woman in the spectacle becomes more and more paranoid, fearful and
insecure as a result of her husband's manipulation. He wants to convince her that she is sick, hears sounds that are not there, and sees things that do not really exist. You might think it's a rarity, but unfortunately it turns out that in many violent relationships there is a tendency to manipulate the partner in such a way that he or she feels that he/she is losing mind, is emotionally unstable and cannot trust himself/herself and there's more to this than meets the eye - the victim should only trust the torturer. Gaslighter is usually a male person with psychopathic character traits. Gradually, he wants to dominate his partner, incapacitate her in order to be able to do what he wants with her. Gaslighters often cheat, abuse various substances, and have conflicts with the law. On the one hand, they do not want to leave their partners, and on the other hand, they cannot respect them. As psychopaths, they do not respect anyone, they only need people to meet their own needs. The victims of gaslighters are usually people who do not believe in themselves and have low self-esteem. An intelligent manipulator is able to efficiently and slowly destroy the partner who does not realize that is entangled in a sick system and that her self-confidence is gradually weakened [8; 5].

It is estimated that psychological violence is the most common form of intimate partner violence (IPV) and can occur in isolation or in combination with other forms of violence. Many studies show that psychological violence is considered to be one of the main risk factors for aggressive behavior [11]. A multicentre study conducted in 11 countries around the world showed that approximately 15-71% of women have experienced physical and sexual violence in their lives, and 20-75% have experienced emotional violence [15]. In the USA, 47.1%, or almost half of women, experienced psychological violence by an intimate partner; 39.3% reported emotional aggression, and 39.7% forced control [12]. According to the Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the prevalence of psychological violence in the EU is 43%, ranging from 31% in Ireland to 60% in Latvia [14]. In Poland only in 2017, there were over 77 thousand cases of psychological violence, while physical - almost 60 thousand, sexual - over 1.2 thousand, economic - over 1.8 thousand. [10]. It should be emphasized
that the average incidence of IPV in large population studies varies greatly depending on how this type of violence is defined and measured. The frequency and severity of mental IPV can also vary greatly by country, culture, and religion. Moreover, the lack of a clear and consistent definition of psychological violence makes it difficult to compare the results [9]. Well-documented research results indicate that IPV can have wide-ranging consequences for the mental health of victims: interpersonal trauma, depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, substance abuse, sleep disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) [3 and 6]. This has led legislators in some European countries to criminalize psychological violence as an independent crime, making it as punishable as physical violence (eg Norway and England) [2].

There are no provisions in the Polish criminal code relating directly to psychological violence. Physical and mental abuse is combined in one article 207 § 1. Whoever physically or mentally harasses the next of kin or another person in a permanent or temporary relationship depending on the perpetrator, or over a minor or helpless person due to their mental or physical condition, shall be subject to the penalty of deprivation of liberty for a term of between 3 months and 5 years. § 2 If the act specified in § 1 is connected with the use of a particular cruelty, the perpetrator shall be subject to the penalty of deprivation of liberty for a term of between one and 10 years [13]. The aim of the article is to present the causes and effects of psychological violence in marriage on the example of a case study.

**Methodological notes.** The study was conducted at the woman's place of residence using the method of individual cases and techniques of document analysis, observation and interview. The study covered a woman - victim of domestic violence and her mother. The respondent's father did not decide to participate in the study, explaining that it was too difficult an experience for him.

The aim of the study was to find out the answers to the following research problems:

1) How long did relationship violence last?
2) What were the effects of the violence?
3) Where did the respondent look for help?
Case report. Woman, Joanna (name changed), 41 years old, a graduate of first-cycle studies, living 10 km from the county town, from an intellectual family. Both parents worked in public administration positions. He has two siblings. At the age of 11, she was involved in a car accident in which her sister, two years younger, died. The family was not looked after by a psychiatrist or psychologist, which influenced their further life. Two years later, the first health problems appeared in the examined woman, which were ignored by her, and later spontaneously resolved. Upon reaching the age of majority, she started working and tried to study at universities, but each attempt was unsuccessful. At the age of 24, her health deteriorated so much that she saw a psychiatrist. The medical documentation provided by the woman shows that she was diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome. She resigned from gainful employment and remained on an invalidity pension for a longer period of time. The treatment did not improve her health, therefore she was referred to a psychiatric ward, where she stayed for 2 weeks. After leaving the hospital, she was still under the care of a psychiatrist. In 2011, she broke up with her longtime partner, the relationship broke up due to divergent plans for the future. The undertaken behavioral and cognitive therapy and the stabilization of her personal life resulted in the improvement of her health, which resulted in the cessation of the treatment. In 2012, she enrolled at a university and started looking for a job.

The interview with the woman shows that the couple met on one of the popular dating sites. The man was 16 years older than her, he had an engineering degree in construction. After a short exchange of messages, a telephone conversation took place between them, during which they both decided to meet on February 13, 2013. The man made a great impression on her, he was eloquent, charming, gallant, extremely bright, it was obvious that he was a person who cares about his image. He claimed to be a very prosperous numismatics entrepreneur, and has never had a problem with a lack of money. He founded the company in Great Britain, but after 6 years he was forced to return to Poland as he was the only child and his parents needed care. As confirmation, he deigned her with stories
about his colorful private and professional life, at the same time insisting that the woman open up to him, describing her family situation. They were both deeply committed to the new relationship. They wrote to each other incessantly. Very quickly the man made a confession of feelings and a declaration of love. The acquaintance developed at a lightning speed.

After 3 weeks, they went to the mountains together for 5 days. Her partner showered her with gifts, complimented her, and at the same time claimed that his previous life was a series of misfortunes, and all previous partners were bad, mentally ill women who cared only for his money. He spoke openly about his two failed marriages, of which he had two adult children. The first daughter did not want to keep in touch with him, therefore he did not feel any emotional bond with her, while the second daughter was under the influence of his former wife, who had successfully manipulated their child in a perfidious and sophisticated way. Only Joanna turned out to be the right one: good, tender, caring and selfless, he called her his angel. He raised her on a pedestal, said she was the first woman who really understood him.

After a month, on his initiative, he was presented to the parents of the respondent. He constantly declared his serious intentions towards the respondent. From the interview with Joanna's mother, we can conclude that from the beginning she saw a man as a calculating and cynical person who criticized the behavior and way of life of others. According to the woman, the daughter's partner often emphasized his higher education by discrediting interlocutors. Three months later, the man booked a seven-day vacation in a luxury hotel in Egypt, during which he proposed to Joanna. After returning from vacation, they both started planning the wedding and the future together. The interview with the respondent shows that at that time she began to notice the first scratches on the ideal image he created. As he claimed, his contractors were delaying the payment of the money owed to him, so he managed to persuade the woman to take out a few loans, which he undertook to pay back as soon as the creditors repaid the outstanding debts. Joanna also began to notice his negative
attitude towards other people; he referred to each of them as "cloud", "idiot", claiming that he exceeded everyone with his IQ, cleverness and resourcefulness. The interview with Joanna shows that when she placed all her feelings in their relationship, the man's approach to their relationship and herself began to change. More and more, she heard sarcastic comments from him about her place of residence - a house that was completely different from his expectations - too small, poorly furnished and that she was dependent on her parents. There were also more and more frequent conflicts between the respondent's parents and her partner. He was particularly negative about her mother, brother and sister. At every step, he emphasized his aversion to the above-mentioned people, trying to confront the whole family at the same time. According to Joanna's mother's account, the man became more and more impulsive, constantly criticized and ridiculed others, and all attempts to take their daughter away from marriage ended in a quarrel. Despite the doubts that engulf the woman, the couple got married in September 2013. Only the family and friends of the respondent were present at the ceremony - 40 people and three invited from her partner: parents and a daughter from the second marriage. The man explained the lack of more invited guests with the recent return from abroad, which resulted in the inability to renew contacts with his loved ones. According to the respondent, shortly after the ceremony, the partner began to count the money collected by them, while commenting in a vulgar way on small amounts left in the envelopes. After the wedding, the couple moved to the family home of the respondent. According to the respondent's mother, shortly after getting married, her daughter became secretive and began to cut off the strong family ties between them existing so far. According to the woman, gradual criticism and ridicule of weaknesses led her daughter to lose faith in her own abilities. In October 2013, Joanna found out that she was expecting a baby. As the woman claims, she was tormented by contradictory feelings: on the one hand, great joy, on the other, fear for the future with her partner.

Upon hearing information about the pregnancy, her husband ordered her to immediately resign from studies, as he claimed
"for the sake of the unborn child". In order to ensure the existence of the family, the man decided to focus on buying and selling the precious coins he owned. For this purpose, he used Joanna's existing account on one of the trading portals. After some time, he admitted to the woman that he was in the process of creating the so-called pyramid scheme: he was selling coins that were not yet in his possession. His plan, however, had many shortcomings, and soon several defrauded people reported the case to law enforcement. At the beginning of 2014, police officers began to visit the respondent and interrogated her about extorting money from the victims. In view of the situation, the man went to his parents to borrow from them the amount of money needed to pay back. This resulted in the partial discontinuation of some cases. Due to these circumstances, the conflict between the woman's parents and her husband escalated. The interview with Joanna's mother shows that the household members began to worry about the fate of their family, because the daughter's partner threatened to hurt them.

Their son was born in March 2014. A month after the child's birth, as a result of growing conflicts, Joanna's parents demanded that the man leave their home, declaring at the same time that the daughter and grandson could still live under their roof. Also during this period, Joanna discovered that her partner exchanged intimate messages on social networks with other women. Confronted with her knowledge, the man downplayed the situation, claimed that it was only innocent jokes and she lacked a sense of humor. From the woman's account, we can conclude that she did not decide to stay with her son in the family home. As the respondent claims, she still believed in his love and the institution of marriage because of the models she learned from home. She was sure that a young couple needed time to develop their own rules and compromises. They both moved out in June, despite the unfinished renovation of the house that Joanna had inherited from her grandmother. For a month, they lived with the respondent's cousins. At that time, they often argued over her husband's alcohol abuse and lack of money. Twice a week the man went to his parents asking for a loan for milk and diapers for his son. More and more often he became
aggressive towards Joanna, blaming her father and mother for their financial and living situation. According to the respondent, she broke off contact with her family in order not to provoke her partner to further quarrels. The situation did not change even after the couple moved into a new apartment. The interview with the respondent shows that all equipment was fully financed by her family. The lack of money to meet basic needs led to aggression on the part of Joanna's husband. He argued that since he could not find a job, she should take care of the family. He forced her to take up a job, he sent her to aid institutions for grants. He demanded a ruthless break from all contact with her entire family. Whenever she tried to resist, he would silence her or insult her. Most often she heard that she was lazy, idle, that she was useless, that she could do nothing, she would not be able to cope without him. One day, after a week of silence on the part of her partner, the woman decided to visit her parents. After returning home, when she heard that she was a "louse", "traitor", "spy", she told him to leave. The next day, her partner would kneel in front of her and apologize, assuring her of his love and promising her that this would not happen again. She believed in his words. According to the woman's account, her partner found a job abroad six months later. Joanna moved to her parents, returning once a month, while the man was in Poland. Unfortunately, the long separation between the spouses did not change the husband's behavior.

The partner convinced her of her emotional instability. He claimed that she was losing her memory, not knowing what she was saying, not being in control. He blamed her for the lack of money, took her ATM cards and sent out loans to her parents. Joanna had the feeling that she was losing her mind more and more. As a result of this situation, the woman suffered a nervous breakdown and was referred to a psychiatrist. After this incident, she and her son moved permanently to their parents. Her very poor health was aggravated by the man's threats of divorce, throwing out her personal belongings, and destroying her family. In 2020, the man completely cut off contact with Joanna and their child. A year later, the woman filed for divorce. Currently, she is awaiting the first hearing, which is to be held soon. She
continues her studies at the university - the second degree. She is under the care of a psychiatrist all the time. The respondent emphasizes that if it were not for the support of her parents, the awareness that she has nowhere to run away and who to count on she would still be in the violent relationship if she were still alive.

**Strengths:** mental and financial support from parents, willingness to use professional care, talking about the problem, undertaking higher education;

**Weaknesses:** fear of a partner, low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, blaming herself for the death of her younger sister (the sister fell out first through the glass and her body cushioned the subject's fall);

**Possibilities of assistance:** taking up a permanent job, finding a therapist closer to home.

The tendency to enter into toxic relationships is most often shared by people whose family has not satisfied the needs of love, belonging, respect and interest. These unmet psychological needs cause a disturbance in self-esteem, which in turn causes a subconscious search for a partner with problems related to emotional expression or controlling aggression, psychopaths and / or addicted to psychoactive substances, sex or gambling. The woman's problems began at the age of 11, when her sister died in a car accident. The accident trauma affected the whole family, which plunged into depression. The woman at all costs wanted to leave the family home, and with it the specter of her deceased sister. It seemed to her that a good solution would be a relationship with a much older and seemingly caring and charming man. He is a troubled looking for love and warmth, she is a strong woman who will pull him out of every oppression and heal all his problems with her love. In this relationship, from the very beginning, there was no partnership, but a sense of loneliness, emotional emptiness. A troubled and guilty woman, insecure, from a small town she became an easy victim of a manipulator. Looking for warmth and understanding, she fell into the trap of toxic love.

**Summary.** Psychological abuse means repeated humiliation and ridicule, manipulation for one's own ends, involvement in conflicts, lack of proper support, e.g. ridiculing views,
religion, origin, imposing one's own views, punishing by refusing interest, feelings or respect, constant criticism, persuading mental illness, social isolation, i.e. controlling and forbidding or limiting contacts with other people [7]. Psychological abuse is abuse, the tool of which is the word, and therefore it is the most elusive and disguised form of abuse. Physical or sexual violence is crossing the boundaries of our body, these forms of violence are noticeable. Psychological violence is difficult to measure because its limits are still undefined.

Many victims of psychological abuse for this reason do not report to the police or the prosecutor's office, because they are convinced that no one will believe them. The basis for adjudication by a court is to prove guilt, and in cases involving events in which two people are most often involved - the perpetrator and the victim - it is difficult [10]. There are no witnesses, no evidence, only words, often spoken by the master of manipulation. Violence leaves a permanent mark on the psyche, depriving a person of self-esteem, self-confidence and security. The process of recovering from the trauma of a victim of psychological violence lasts for years, precisely because of a disturbed faith in one's own strength and possibilities. This process is also delayed by the lack of agency and real support from institutions, such as the Police or Social Welfare Centers, and the lack of therapists. Professional support can be obtained in large cities, which means that many victims remain in violent relationships. The example of the respondent shows that you can free yourself from the perpetrator by using external forces in the form of an extraordinary power, which is the family.

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