

The Spiral of Domestic Violence – Why we see only the Top of the Iceberg

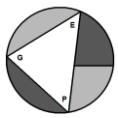
Rodolfo Valentino

*The two subsequent contributions in this issue of our journal concern German and Spanish texts of the same article translated by the author himself, who works for the European Institute for Migration and Social Inclusion (IEM) and Independent European Sociological Research (EUROSOR). An earlier version of the article can be found at www.researchgate.net/publication/321732727 *The violence spiral of domestic violence-why we see only the tip of the iceberg.**

Introduction

Since the #METOO scandal involving American Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, media and experts have once again stepped up the issue of sexual violence and domestic violence against women. But what about the men who are victims of domestic or non-domestic violence (e.g. in the workplace)?

Most people here would think of a weak man who cannot defend himself against his oversized wife. But that concerns, if at all, only a small minority of cases. What many experts have been talking about for decades is the spiral of domestic violence, which often starts with female psychological violence or psycho-terror.



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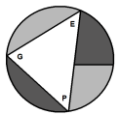
The Study: When Men are the Victims of Domestic Violence

Sociologists and Inclusion experts like Rodolfo Valentino agree that women are more likely to use psychological violence or psycho-terror. Physical violence, if one does not count pushing or moving, plays a very minor role in domestic violence. In an interview with a victim, Michael S. told us:

“If my ex-wife insulted me as a ‘wimp’ or a bad father who does not care about his kids, I just tried to stay calm, but that became more and more difficult each time. When I was outside the relationship or alone, I often realized that this relationship was not good for me at all and that I wanted to distance myself from it and that I really wanted to fight back. I did not manage to leave her. After years of psycho-terror I did it. I hit her harder and harder because she did not stop talking and insulted me more and more.”

An exception? If one looks at the case of Michael S., one does not have the impression that he lacks self-confidence. He is friendly, but also clearly represents and articulates his opinion. How is it possible that this man suffered violence from his wife? Today, Michael S. is one of the men who would like to accept help. He searched the Internet for other victims:

“What I read there in blogs and forums, rather demotivated me. One read only 'Victim Blaming' comments, so comments that



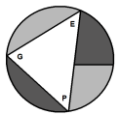
make the victim himself responsible for the acts, e.g. things like, 'What kind of man are you? And it's your own fault if that happens to you.' That pulled me down even more."

The Spanish-German sociologist Rodolfo Valentino, the author of this article, explains it this way:

"The 'maltreated' men are men from all social and educational backgrounds. They are people like you and me. They are men who are actually very self-confident and successful in their jobs or other pursuits. But when they are regularly insulted by their partner and exposed to their 'psycho-terror', they think they should not fight the 'weak' sex. Especially in these days men are often the target of socio-critical and media attacks. It is therefore important that sociologists and experts point out this phenomenon so that men won't remain stuck in their victimhood and at worst resort to (physical) violence."

In fact, in a recent online survey, we find that more than half of the adult men in Germany and Spain are constantly exposed to insults and allegations such as: "You are never there for your son, you never mind", "You always leave me alone somewhere", "I always have to do everything", "You recognize me not really" or "even in bed you are not useful anymore".

Except in 'toxic' pair relationships, there are also such phases of 'psycho-terror' in 'normal' relationships, like if the male partner suddenly becomes unemployed, the relationship changes or if the partnership



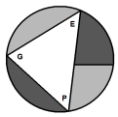
goes to the next stage, such as marriage or childbirth. The communication and the relationship can change negatively in these phases and become more violent, both psychically and physically.

Conclusion

Why is it so difficult for men to talk about violence in relationships? They seem to have a much bigger problem with that than women. In our expert discussions with psychotherapists, we learn that those male clients or patients who are suffering from violence in a couple relationship with a woman and decide to seek help, are generally misunderstood and find no appropriate psychosocial help.

It is probable, and many gender researchers also suspect this, that for decades they have been concentrating on the patriarchal structures in Western societies and have socially ignored the men. So it is much simpler for a woman, at least in Western societies, to say that her limits have been exceeded than for a man. Many men are struggling to pronounce things clearly, such as, 'No, that was not okay, that went too far' due to a still prevailing masculinity cult. Any male who reveals he has been psychologically or sexually assaulted by females is still considered a 'coward'.

To admit to oneself that one needs help as a man in such a situation, many men perceive as a weakness or even humiliating embarrassment. On the one hand, it does not fit into the social picture of the breadwinner and the strong man who never cries, that many boys learn from an early age. On the other hand, it does not fit in with the image of

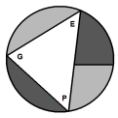


the feminist Enlightenment and the media-staged gender struggles, in which the man is portrayed as the structural or even universal aggressor and the woman as the structural or even universal victim.

So all of this accounts for the difficulty Michael S. faced to convince other people that HE, not his wife, was the victim:

“In previous arguments, I was always afraid to hurt her, and when she held on to me and continued to insult me loudly, I tried to break free to leave the house. Once I called the police and then I was expelled from our house. For a week I had to stay with friends and did not see my children. In one of these quarrels then it came to a scandal. I freaked out and beat her to hospital. Now I am in therapy. I like that, but I do not like the fact that in the eyes of my friends, acquaintances and neighbors I stand as a ‘thug’ just because they do not know the whole truth.”

*Dr Rodolfo Valentino is a Director of the Independent European Sociological Research institute (EUROSOR; www.facebook.com/eurosor), and a Director of the European Institute of Studies on Migration, Social Inclusion and Intercultural Learning (IEM), Bonn, Germany (<http://bimev.de>; <http://migrapolis.de/bim-e-v/>).
eurosor.iem@gmail.com psciocura.valentino@gmail.com.*



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NB: do you have any comments on Valentino's article?

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