Domestic violence. General traits.

Gender based violence is any form of violence by the use or threat of physical or emotional force, including rape, wife battering, sexual harassment or incest (European Commission, 1998; ONU, 1994).

This work focuses on a specific form of violence against women: domestic violence. Domestic violence can be defined as any form of physical, sexual or psychological violence that puts the safety or welfare of a family member at risk and/or use of physical or emotional force or threat of physical force, including sexual violence, within the family, or household. Includes child abuse, incest, wife battering and sexual or other abuse of any member of the household; and wife battering can be defined as violence against women by their partner (European Commission, 1998).

Nowadays, domestic violence against women is considered an important social problem and is analysed from a multi-causal perspective (Corsi, 1995; Heise, 1998).

It is difficult to know the real magnitude or consequences of domestic violence on health because it is a hidden problem (WHO, 1998; n.d./1999). It seems be clear that we know just between five or ten percent of domestic violence of total cases (Eriksson, 1997; WHO, 1996, 1998).

About its repercussion, we know that domestic violence victims suffer several psychological and physical health problems (Follingstad et al., 1991; Goodman et al., 1993; Acierno et al., 1997; Resnick et al., 1997).

Nevertheless the research about this topic, an important quantity of myths still persists concerning this type of gender violence.

Among them the myths about the causes of domestic violence and the women reasons for remaining in this type of relationship stand out for its importance.

These myths are very much extended and have relevant repercussions in the attempts undertaken to cope with the problem.

Recent researches in the European Union and in Spain allow us to know the beliefs and attitudes towards domestic violence, both in adult population and in teenagers.

The European Commission presented in 1999 the Eurobarometer “Attitudes to violence against women”. The findings show a massive condemnation of violence, particularly of sexual violence. A majority of Europeans are aware of the fact that this problem exists, but most people have become aware of the problem through information in the media. And contrary to the actual situation, most people believe that the victims are most at risk from people they do not know. Finally, alcohol, drugs, unemployment, poverty and social exclusion top the list of circumstances seen as the main causes for violent behaviour.

62% of Europeans considered domestic violence against women to be unacceptable in all circumstances and always punishable by law.
The findings obtained in Spain by the “Sociological Research Centre” (Centro de Investigaciones Sociolóxicas, CIS) are very similar (CIS, 2001). 96% of Spanish people considered domestic violence against women to be unacceptable in all circumstances; against 2% who considered it unacceptable in some circumstances and 1% who considered it acceptable.

There are also some recent studies with student samples in Spain (Díaz-Aguado, 2002).

A research project.

The aim of our research is to analyse the beliefs and attitudes about domestic violence in a specific segment of population: university students. Particularly, we will carry out our project with a representative sample of the University of Balearic Islands’ students (n=2,066). This sample is of interest because this is precisely the group of future professionals that (shortly or in the medium term) will have to face domestic violence, directly or indirectly. The objectives are:
- Analysing the knowledge on domestic violence against women in a sample of university students.
- Analysing the beliefs on domestic violence against women in a sample of university students.
- Analysing the attitudes on domestic violence against women in a sample of university students.

For making these objectives we will study these variables:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sociodemographic variables: Gender, age, social status, …</td>
<td>Interview ad hoc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiar characteristics: Type of education, laboural history of parents, …</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge about domestic violence against women: studies, courses, …</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about domestic violence against women: opinion about the problem, its importance, incidence, …</td>
<td>Questionnaire ad hoc (asking the same questions of the European Eurobarometer and CIS).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes about domestic violence against women</td>
<td>Spanish version of the Marlowe Crowne’s Social Desirability Scale (Ferrando &amp; Chico, 2000).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social desirability</td>
<td>Spanish version of the Marlowe Crowne’s Social Desirability Scale (Ferrando &amp; Chico, 2000).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions.

For the moment, we are presenting only a project. We have a little grant for developing this project. The data collecting will start next academic course; and the project will be completely ended on 2004.

Analysing the results and the knowledge, beliefs and attitudes of university students on domestic violence will help us to detect their training level and sensibility. And also, it will help us to understand their strengths and weaknesses to coping with it and, eventually, to proceed to design actions and recommendations in order to improve their possibilities of performance.

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http://www.cis.es


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http://www.who.int/frh-whd/GandH/Ghreport/gendertech.htm


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