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# Emotional Profile of Women Victims of Domestic Violence

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Research indicates that women victims of domestic violence show significant cognitive changes, emotional numbing, and avoidance of interpersonal relationships. **Aim:** The aim of this research was to analyze emotional profile of women victims of domestic violence, and to determine the relationship between dimensions of emotions and frequency of women exposure to domestic violence. **Methods:** The research was conducted on the sample of 169 women, 111 were victims of domestic violence and 58 were women who did not experience domestic violence. Plutchik's Emotions Profile Index (EPI) was used for measuring of the emotion profile, and the Modified Inventory of Domestic Violence for measuring experiences of different types of violence. Basic socio-demographic data were also collected. **Results:** Significant differences between women victims of domestic violence and women who did not experience domestic violence were found in a few dimensions of emotional profile. Women victims of domestic violence had higher results in the dimensions of deprivation/depression and aggression/destruction, while women who did not experience domestic violence had higher results in dimensions of reproduction and incorporation. Aggression was in significant negative correlation with reproduction, incorporation and self protection, whereas it was significant positive correlation with deprivation and opposition. There were significant and positive correlation between the dimensions of aggression and deprivation and frequency of all three forms of domestic violence and age of women. **Conclusion:** According to results obtained in this research, it can be concluded that women victims of domestic violence have significantly more intensive negative emotional dimensions in comparison to women who were not abused. Women victims of domestic violence with higher frequency of abuse describe themselves as more sad, apathetic, lonely, angry, quarrelsome and less sociable. Prominence of negative

emotions, deprivation and aggression, can be factor of risk for mental health disorders and for re-victimisation of women victims of domestic violence.

**Keywords:** domestic violence, women victims, emotional profile, aggression, deprivation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is wide spread, appears in different situations and different forms and manifestations. Most common form of violence against women is domestic violence or intimate partner violence which appears in different prevalence all over the world. During the last more than three decades, general concern because of growing incidence of domestic violence is increasing. According WHO (1) data around one third (30%) of all women who have been in a relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner, and in some regions 38% of women have been abused. García-Moreno and Stöckl (2) noted that domestic violence has been associated with fatal health outcomes and a broad range of adverse health effects. Moreover, a correlation between abuse and somatic health of women has been determined, as well as those women with experience of violence significantly more use services of health system utilities (3). Earlier domestic violence has been identified as a factor of risk of developing psychiatric disorders and psychological problems in women (4, 5). Emotional and behavioural consequences of domestic violence may include several general responses to trauma, such as neglecting or minimalism of abuse, emotional avoidance, impulsiveness, aggressiveness, helplessness, anger, and anxiety, sleeping problems and eating problems, the use of alcohol or other psychoactive substances, and suicidal behaviour. Victims use some of these consequences as coping mechanisms, which represent a barrier in accepting help and leaving a violent relation-

ship. Besides that, in several studies and theoretical models which explain dynamics of relations in violent relationship, personality traits of partners are quoted as possible predictors of domestic violence (6). Although, women victims of domestic violence have violent partner some of them remain in violent relationship. There are multiple reasons why they remain in violent relationship. Several authors, beside external factors such as economic and social, quoted inefficient coping strategies, personality traits and emotional factors, as possible predictors for women remaining in violent relationship (7, 8). Understanding the factors that contribute to domestic violence and the factors that affect a woman stays in an abusive relationship, is important for the prevention program as well as drawing up a plan of treatment of women victims of domestic violence.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, there are several studies that focused domestic violence and its health and wider consequences, as well as factors that contribute to domestic violence and seeking help (9-12). Although the phenomenon of "battered women" and domestic violence against women is known since the 60s of the last century and is recognized as a social problem, and since the 90s as a public health problem, on domestic violence against women only last several years people began to talk in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Research of the Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina on the prevalence and characteristics of violence against women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, indicated that violence against women by current or former partners was present in 71.5% of cases and concerning consequences most frequent are sadness, anxiety, and fear. Also, in this study, they found that 58.4% of women who were exposed to physical violence did not recognize that they were victims of violence by a partner, and only 5.5% of women exposed to violence sought help from the institutions (13).

## 2. AIM

The aim of this research was to analyze emotional profile of women victims of domestic violence, and to determine the relationship between dimensions of emotions and frequency of women exposure to domestic violence.

## 3. SUBJECTS AND METHODS

The study included 169 women from Tuzla Canton region, where 111 were victims of domestic violence, and 58 were not exposed to domestic violence. Sample was formed by using a multistage stratified sampling technique. In this research the following inclusion criteria were used: age between 16 and 65 years, living in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war (1992-1995), that they did not have psychiatric treatment, and signed informed consent. The Partner Violence Screen Questionnaire (14) was used for estimation of current or previous domestic violence experience. The Modified Domestic Violence Inventory (15) was used for estimation of domestic violence type and frequency. Questionnaire contains 79 statements related to exposure to physical, psychological and sexual violence during the lifetime. On a scale from 0 (never) to 6 (more than 20 times) is designated

frequency of each of the types of violence listed in the statements. For analyses of emotional characteristics of personality was used Plutchik's Emotions Profile Index (EPI) (16, 17). EPI is a standard personality questionnaire based on the forced choice. It consists of 12 different traits (adventurous, affectionate, brooding, cautious, gloomy, impulsive, obedient, quarrelsome, resentful, self-conscious, shy, and sociable) that are paired with each other in all possible combinations, so it contains 62 items questionnaire. Task of respondents is to choose one of the features of two paired that describes her/him best. The test measures the intensity, as well as the analogy and the bipolarity of eight basic emotions, where in the intensity of the emotion scale shows the rating from 0 to 100%. With each of the emotions, characteristic behaviour and function is linked which together describe one personality trait. By analyzing the results of the questionnaire for each respondent the following dimensions with the corresponding emotion, personality trait and behaviour are provided: incorporation (acceptance, trusting, incorporation); orientation (surprise, indecisive, impulsive, stopping); self-protection (fear, shy, timid, escape); deprivation/depression (sadness, gloomy, apathetic, lonely); opposition/rejection (disgust, hostile, scornful, critical); exploration (expectation, curious, orderly, controlling); aggression/destruction (anger, quarrelsome, grouchy, sarcastic); reproduction (joy, sociable, generous, sympathetic). A control scale (bias) measures dissimulation tendency or tendency to appear in the best way possible. Also, for basic socio-demographic data was used socio-demographic questionnaire.

Statistical methods used in data processing included

Socio-demographic variables	Women victims of domestic violence (n = 111) n (%)	Women who did not experience domestic violence (n = 58) n (%)	Total (N = 169)
Age (M ± SD)	45.61±8.48	38.74 ± 10.95	41.90±10.11
Education			
none	19 (17.11)	-	19 (11.24)
elementary school	33 (29.72)	3 (5.17)	36 (21.30)
high school	44 (39.63)	39 (67.24)	83 (49.11)
university	15 (13.51)	16 (27.58)	31 (18.34)
Marital status			
unmarried	8 (7.20)	16 (27.58)	24 (14.20)
married	57 (51.35)	41 (70.68)	98 (57.98)
divorced/separated	24 (21.62)	-	24 (14.20)
Living out of wedlock	15 (13.51)	-	15 (8.87)
widows	7 (6.30)	1 (1.72)	8 (4.73)
Marriage duration (M±SD)	18.89±11.92	11.80±9.50	15.35±10.71
Employment			
employed	57 (51.35)	53 (91.37)	110 (65.08)
unemployed	13 (11.71)	2 (3.44)	15 (8.87)
housewives	37 (33.33)	3 (5.17)	40 (23.66)
retired	4 (3.60)	-	4 (2.36)
Childhood abuse			
yes	33 (29.72)*	5 (8.62)*	38 (22.48)
no	78 (70.27)	53 (91.37)	131 (77.51)

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the study group of women (N = 169). \* $\chi^2 = 0.966$ ,  $p = 0.001$

Dimensions of emotions	Dimensions of emotions in women who				p*	Normative value (Median)
	did not experience domestic violence (n = 58)		victims of domestic violence (n = 111)			
	M±SD	Median	M±SD	Median		
Reproduction	81.03 ±15.15	90	71.95±24.57	75	0.007	80
Incorporation	78.94 ±14.47	85	72.86 ±21.71	74	0.042	70
Orientation	40.81 ±20.33	40	40.05 ±18.81	40	0.801	60
Self-protection	58.94 ±15.04	59	58.69 ±15.38	59	0.916	52
Deprivation/depression	42.85 ±17.48	40	50.72 ±19.04	50	0.006	30
Opposition/rejection	30.44 ±12.71	30	32.43 ±16.63	30	0.398	37
Exploration	42.31±12.39	40	41.28 ±14.06	40	0.620	63
Aggression/destruction	35.34 ±13.31	34	40.77±15.51	41	0.017	26
Bias	68.00 ±10.58	68	62.92±13.88	63	0.010	69

Table 2. Dimensions of emotions of women who did not experience domestic violence and victims of domestic violence. \* ANOVA

Dimensions of emotions	Pearson's correlation coefficient								
	Reproduction	Incorporation	Orientation	Self protection	Deprivation	Opposition	Exploration	Aggression	Bias
Reproduction	-								
Incorporation	0.885**	-							
Orientation	-0.119	-0.209	-						
Self-protection	-0.060	0.295**	-0.347**	-					
Deprivation/depression	-0.284*	-0.300**	-0.621	-0.035	-				
Opposition	-0.639**	-0.758**	0.061	-0.481**	0.109	-			
Exploration	-0.447**	-0.461**	0.113	0.256*	-0.052	0.214	-		
Aggression/destruction	-0.459**	-0.573**	0.135	-0.533**	0.364**	0.602**	-0.375**	-	
Bias	0.668**	0.806**	0.038	0.523**	-0.485**	-0.788**	0.052	-0.812**	-

Table 3. Correlation between dimensions of emotions in group of women victims of domestic violence \*p&lt;0.05, \*\*p&lt;0.01

percentages and rates, median, mean, standard deviation, Chi-square test, t-test, ANOVA, and Pearson's correlation coefficient. All P values of less than 0.05 were considered to indicate statistical significance. Statistical analysis were performed by using a software package (SPSS for Windows, version 14; SPSS Inc., Chicago IL, USA).

#### 4. RESULTS

Socio-demographic characteristics of the women in the sample are shown in Table 1. From the total of 111 women with experience of domestic violence 37 (33.3%) often experienced physical abuse, 28 (25.2%) frequent sexual abuse, and 28 (25.2%) often experienced psychological abuse. The combination of different forms of violence was found in 96.4% of women victims of domestic violence. The mean value of the frequency of exposure to different types of domestic violence was  $131.77 \pm 77.04$  with the IQR of 123. We have found that women victims of domestic violence showed statistically significant higher scores in dimensions of deprivation and aggression, while women who did not experience domestic violence showed statistically significant higher scores in dimensions of incorporation, reproduction and bias (Table 2). In comparison to normative value, we found that women victims of domestic violence had lower values than normative in the dimensions of reproduction and bias, while in both groups of women were lower values than normative in the dimensions of orientation, exploration and opposition, and higher than the normative in dimensions of self-protection, deprivation and aggression (Table 2). Most intensive emotions in both groups of women were reproduction and incorporation, while the lowest value was in dimension of opposition. At the women victims of domestic violence there was statisti-

cally significant, negative correlation between dimensions of aggression and dimensions of incorporation, reproduction, and self-protection, and a significant positive correlation with dimensions of deprivation and opposition (Table 3). Furthermore, we found a statistically significant, positive correlation between the frequency of all three types of domestic violence, the overall frequency of violence and dimensions of aggression and deprivation, and a statistically significant, negative correlation with the reproduction and incorporation. This means that women with a higher frequency of exposure to violence had higher scores on negative dimensions of deprivation and aggression, and less on positive dimensions of reproduction and incorporation. Also, there was a statistically significant correlation between age and the dimensions of aggression and deprivation. Older women had higher scores of deprivation and aggression. The duration of the marriage was not associated with dimensions of emotions although it was found statistical significance (Table 4).

#### 5. DISCUSSION

Domestic violence against women is associated to several factors which, among others, include psychosocial characteristics of women victims of domestic violence that can contribute to the severity of problems and be associated with mental health and general well-being of women. In numerous studies, are well documented risk factors of domestic violence such as poor socio-economic status of women, low level of education, partner's use of alcohol and psychoactive substances, lack of social support (9, 13, 18). Several studies have analyzed the role of personality traits of women victims of violence, partner relations and coping strategies in domestic violence and in women staying in abusive relationships

Dimensions of emotions	Physical violence	Psychological abuse	Sexual abuse	Frequency of abuse in total	Age	Marriage duration
Reproduction	-0.29**	-0.29**	-0.24**	-0.32**	-0.17*	-0.15
Incorporation	-0.25**	-0.26**	-0.28**	-0.28*	-0.17*	-0.13
Orientation	-0.11	-0.15**	-0.13*	-0.16*	-0.15*	-0.08
Self-protection	-0.03	-0.07	0.10	-0.07	-0.08	-0.03
Deprivation/depression	0.28**	0.33**	0.26**	0.35**	0.32**	0.20*
Opposition	0.20**	0.23**	0.24**	0.24*	0.10	0.09
Exploration	0.02	0.01	0.01	-0.02	-0.15*	0.16*
Aggression/destruction	0.29**	0.28**	0.27**	0.31**	0.25**	0.18*
Bias	0.29**	-0.34**	-0.27**	-0.35**	-0.28**	-0.21*

Table 4. Correlation among dimensions of emotions and frequency of exposure to domestic violence, age and marriage duration in group of women victims of domestic violence. \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

(6-8). In this study, starting from Pluchik's theory of emotions (19) according to personality traits are the result of permanent situations that produce mixed emotions we have analyzed the dimensions emotions in women victims of domestic violence. By statistically analysis of data, we found that women victims of domestic violence show higher results than normative, on dimensions of two negative emotions, deprivation/depression and aggression/destruction. Also, on this dimensions, women victims of domestic violence had significantly higher results than women who did not experience domestic violence. Higher scores on a scale of deprivation indicate sadness, depression, pessimism, anxiety and social deprivation. Deprivation was significantly negatively associated with two positive dimensions of emotions, reproduction and incorporation, and positively associated with dimension of aggression. This means that sociability, cheerfulness, openness, warmth, trust, acceptance and willingness to cooperate were less prominent at women who have had more prominent dimension of depression. Deprivation and aggression were positively associated with the frequency of psychological, sexual and overall abuse, and the age of women. The results obtained suggest that women with a higher frequency of violence and older age have more prominent dimension of depression. El Moez et al. (20) in study conducted in a group of women, who because of physical domestic abuse sought help at the emergency department, found that this group of women on personality test showed more depressive, psychotic and psychopathic manifestations. Amini et al. (21) found the connection of depression and anxiety with the degree of extraversion and neuroticism, and that personality traits of abused women have an impact on their mental health. In an earlier study Avdibegović and Sinanović (22) carried out on a sample of women victims of domestic violence which as well included women who had psychiatric treatment, also the score of deprivation and aggression was higher in women with experience of domestic violence. Significantly higher result on dimension of aggression in women victims of domestic violence indicates that anger, fury, impulsive, quarrelsome and expressing of dissatisfaction because of frustration are present. These personality traits can be associated with the victimization of women but also may occur as a consequence of chronic exposure to traumatic situations. Pico-Alfonso et al. (23) stated that women victims of intimate partner violence have symptoms of personality disorders such as schizoid, avoidant, antisocial, narcissistic, aggressive, passive-aggressive and to show more personal-

ity disturbances than women who were not abused. Aggression as a consequence of domestic violence is often present and the victim can direct it towards itself and others. Dillon et al. (5) in the review article noted that number of studies reported on the relationship between experiences of abuse and an increase of suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts in women. They also stated that it was found in several studies that the history of domestic violence was a significant predictor of self-harm. In this study, it was found that the aggression was significantly associated with the total frequency of abuse, depression and opposition. The opposition reflects personality traits such as self-conscious, resentfulness and quarrelsome. The results of correlation between dimensions aggression, deprivation and opposition, and frequency of abuse may indicate that depression, resentfulness, tendency to arguing as personality traits in women victims of domestic violence are consequence of chronic exposure to traumatic situations. Specified deprivation, opposition and aggression along with low expressed reproduction, incorporation and tendency to social acceptance indicate direct changes in personality. Withdrawing, social isolation and destruction can be observed as negative coping strategies which can have negative psychological outcomes with changes in structure of personality, as consequences. Changes in structure of personality women victims of domestic violence occur as do changes of personalities in other traumatized people. There are several studies that suggest that chronic trauma can lead to the change of psychological personality traits such as increased aggression, depression, distrust, alienation, tendency to withdrawal and isolation, impaired self-protection, and poor social integration (23, 24). The psychological consequences of violence may include permanent modification of the personality and occurrence of maladapted personality traits such as hostility, emotional dependence, lack of trust that may affect the person's functioning. These personality changes may be a chronic condition and may have as the consequence occurrence of complex post-traumatic stress disorder or other mental disorders. Also, there are several studies that point to important role of personality traits in the occurrence of mental health problems in victims of domestic violence, as well as the interaction between a certain type of personality and domestic violence victimization (25). The research results of Motevaliyana et al. (26) conducted among women in Iran indicate the importance of personality traits in the understanding of domestic violence, making of strategies for prevention of domestic violence as well as treatment plan.

Knowing the emotional profile of women victims of domestic violence, their personality traits helps in understanding why some persons develop a mental disorder and the others do not. In addition, it can help in understanding why some women seek help and others not, or why some women remain in abusive relationships. Furthermore, screening of women exposed to domestic violence on symptoms of personality disorders and recognition of personality traits, as well as emotional profiles that make them vulnerable to violence and mental disorders, is important for interventions planning and prevention of repetition of exposure to abuse.

The limitations of the study include the size of the sample, as well as choice of EPI as only questionnaire for measuring of emotional profile and personality traits of women victims of domestic violence. Also, the limitation is in that research does not include women's partners and the influence of partner's emotional profile on mutual relationships, occurrence of violence and the consequences of abuse.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Domestic violence against women is global public health and social problem, where several factors in mutual action contribute to victimisation of women. Emotional profile and personality traits, not only of abuser, but also of victim, are significant factor in understanding of domestic violence dynamics, screening, prevention planning and treatment. According to results obtained in this research, it can be concluded that women victims of domestic violence have significantly more intensive emotional dimensions of deprivation and aggression than women who were not abused. Prominence of negative emotions can be factor of risk for mental health disorders and for re-victimisation of women victims of domestic violence, as well as an obstacle for seeking help and for outcomes of therapeutic procedures.

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