

Peer-reviewed academic journal

Innovative Issues and Approaches in Social Sciences



IIASS – VOL. 7, NO. 3, SEPTEMBER 2014

DEALING WITH CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

Mitja Krajnčan¹, Rada Polajnar², Olivera Gajić³

Abstract

The family should be a place of respite for all its members, but can also be characterised by the hidden reality of oppressive relationships involving various forms of violence and abuse. This article outlines the basic characteristics of the family, the forms of violence that can exist within its confines, its specific qualities and possible help. The results of the qualitative research are outlined, in which we explored, using a case study as the basis, the various forms of violence that can exist within the family unit, and the traumatic consequences that stay with victims until adulthood. When dealing with trauma, a plethora of self-help options offer possible ways to eliminate the traumatic conditions present.

Keywords: family, violence, trauma, dealing with trauma, self-help, help

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12959/issn.1855-0541.IIASS-2014-no3-art09>

¹ Ph.d. Mitja Krajnčan, Associate professor, Department for educational sciences
University of Primorska, Koper, Slovenia, Mitja.Krajncan@pef.upr.si

² Rada Polajnar, Professor of History and Geography, Councillor and Graduated Social
pedagog, Prežihov Voranc Primary School, Jesenice, Slovenia,
Rada.Polajnar@guest.arnes.si

³ Ph.d. Olivera Gajić, Full professor, Department for pedagogy, Faculty of Philosophy,
University of Novi Sad, Serbia, gajico@ff.uns.ac.rs

Introductions

Home, warmth and security are the words most often referred to by young people when talking about family (Ule, Kuhar, 2003). However, a child may sometimes think differently about the issue and struggle to find positive things to say when discussing the topic, or simply fall silent. At other times he might speak in a resounding, ostentatious manner about family experiences and feelings. Why? What are these children hiding? What would they like to talk about? In their day-to-day lives, teachers and social pedagogues are in contact with many people who are dealing with trauma, in their adolescence or in the adult world, which has strongly affected or influenced their lives in their childhood, or in their families. This article aims to offer support to the victims of violence, as well as teachers and professionals, in order to understand its associated problems, especially those experienced by the victims of domestic violence, and to find the best and most appropriate solutions in terms of providing help.

The family

"The family, as the basic unit in every society, helps to create each society, just like the society helps to create the family" (Novkovič, 2009: 3). "A family is a system with some kind of internal activity, which is constantly in reciprocal contact with everything that happens in its environment..." (Tomori, 1994: 10). "In a narrow sense, a family is defined as a nuclear family, which consists of two or more people who live in a joint household and are bonded with each other by marriage, cohabitation or parental relationship" (Keilman, 2003: 11). The United Nations defines family as being "composed of at least one adult or group of people who take care of the children, and is also defined as such in the legislation or practice of Member States" (United Nations, 1992). In the second article of the Law on Marriage and Family Relations in RS (2004), family is defined as follows:

"A family is a community of parents and children which enjoys special protection since it benefits children". At their patriotic, civic and ethics classes, seventh grade primary school pupils become acquainted with the following definition: "A family is a group of individuals who are linked with each other by blood line, marriage or adoption, and in which the adults are responsible for raising the children." (Milharčič Hladnik, Peček Čuk, Devjak, 2004: 20).

In much the same way as there are various definitions of a family, there are also different typologies. The sociological typologies of families have investigative and socio-political importance; the same could be said for statistical typology, which is mostly used for data collection purposes. The existing typologies explain a great deal more about family structure

than they do about family life (Rener et al, 2006). The Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (2002) provides insight into the following family typologies: "Married couples without children, married couples with children, mothers with children, fathers with children, unmarried partners without children, and unmarried partners with children." Haralambos and Holborn (2001) believe that only two types of family prevail – the nuclear and the extended. In their view, the nuclear family comprises a married couple and its underage offspring; the extended family is a larger family unit, which is divided to include the vertical and horizontal integration of family members; they add that the nuclear family is universal – the basic social group from which all other, newly composed and more complex forms originate. The nuclear family exists in every society and is known as the family's most functional form.

In the Slovenian environment, Rener (2006) suggests a division between core families (two parents, one parent and restructured families) and extended families; however, at the same time, more and more young people live an extended youth with their parents. This period of time has been labelled the LAT phase (living apart together). "The LAT phase is an intermediate phase that lies between family dependence and a parental family of complete independence. It is characterised by full or semi-economic dependency on the parents, while at the same time being socially independent" (Rener, 2006: 18). The nuclear family's presence has been dominant in western culture for centuries. This is a result of the influence of the Catholic church, which prohibited polygamy, extramarital relations, marriage within the family, divorce, re-marriage and adoption (Greif, 2005) and, as a result, the related forms defined thereto (Rener, 2006).

The biological system of a family is similar to a life cycle, moving from one phase to another. Bajzek, Bitenc, Hvalič Touzery, Lokar, Ramovš, Strniša Tušek (2003: 14) refers to natural cycles such as "birth, childhood, divorce, old age and death, as well as unnatural, unpredictable, random and sometimes fatal cycles. These fatal cycles are the most common causes of crisis in the family." The nine levels of a life cycle, which transition from the initial period of family formation to bereavement, is built as a classic cycle on the presumption of a stable partnership family (Ule and Kuhar, 2003).

Examination of the various family cycles allows for insight into the various functions that family exercise in a given cycle. The family, an institution in which social power has fluctuated over time in inverse proportion to the power of the state, has lost many of its functions. "Families are no longer bound together by economic reasons; a strong

country allows an individual who is preserving family bonds to be free of family ties until this manner suits him for emotional reasons. This type of individual is, in fact, still not independent." (Pavlović, Korošec, 1997:7) Pavlović and Korošec add that a family is left with:

reproduction, the emotional and physical care of the children, learning experiences, thinking and speaking, beginning to become familiar with how to behave correctly, and the interrelation of the emotional care of the adults, without which even parents could not take care of children (ibid).

A family is the basic environment in which the personality of the individual is shaped and formed. A traumatic family life is a source of the majority of negative events (Musek and Pečjak, 1997). "Emotional and behavioural problems are not only a result of a poor relationship between parents and children, but are also a cause, and further worsen already fragile emotional bonds between parents and children" (Krajncan, 2006: 30). Modern society is "a risky society" (Beck, 2009), exposed in particular to vibrant external socio-economic impacts, as well as the challenges within the family unit itself. A family is still a foundation and reality of social construction. "In it, the events of a family relationship are decided and processed, which touch the deepest aspects of family life in general." (Gradišar, 2005: 61). For many some families are a place of painful traumatic experiences; a place where they cannot find shelter and true support for their own personal development.

A family and violence

For most, a family is synonymous with a safe and supportive environment, but family life can also be hostile and dangerous. This hostility and danger is mostly represented by different forms of violence. "Violence is the disrespect for another person's personal boundaries" (Plaz, Veselič, 2002: 123), The Dictionary of Standard Slovene defines violence as a "frequently occurring relationship towards someone, typically through the use of force or pressure". There are other types of violence in the family: physical, verbal, psychological or emotional violence, sexual, economic, and others. "The perpetrators of these types of violence are normal people who live among us" (Munc, 2010: 128) and, although we know that the perpetrator can be of either gender, "data show that a greater proportion are men than women" (ibid). We talk mostly about physical and bodily harm, both of which leave the most victims behind, even in our country; these victims are women and children, mostly children under the age of seven. The most covert form of violence is that which is psychological in nature, such as emotional blackmail, causing fear, etc.

Children are, by far, the most common victims of psychological violence, but until recently we did not consider this form of violence to be actual violence; we know very little about it. The different types of violence that exist often overlap. The definition of each form of violence is strongly linked to its social and economic context, and therefore changes depending on the contextual history and culture.

Among the theories that explore the causes of violent conduct, there are a number of different approaches, three of the most established of which are as follows (Sedmak, 2006):

theories which are based on a social-political approach - as a cause of violence in families they cast light on traditional, patriarchal patterns and from a gender and age originating inequality of social power;

individualistic theories, which originate from individualistic explanatory models and psychological interpersonal differences - these include approaches which link personal, characteristic disturbances, mental illness, the abuse of alcohol and other substances, as well as other intra-individual processes of violence within the family;

the theories of family dynamics highlight that the cause of violence stems from the patterns of family interaction, which is generally based on weak and unsuccessful communication and inappropriate strategies for solving interpersonal conflicts. The theory derives from the view that we form our behaviour through what we were exposed to at a young age.

For a child who faces violence in a family, this violent behaviour is an ordinary and everyday occurrence, something normal. Plaz, Veselič (2002) states:

The child is certain that in other families similar things also happen; therefore the child adapts his behaviour according to the current parent's mood; he hides what is going on at home because he wants to protect his parents; he observes his father's attitude and keeps his mother informed about him: he is careful not to make any mistakes because he feels guilty about violence in the family; he is afraid what others might think about him; he believes he is bad and depraved, and that none of this would have happened if he were not; he is certain that no one would believe him; he is scared because he is told by his parents that he should not discuss the situation with anyone. (Plaz, Veselič, 2002: 130). When violence is inflicted, children often actively intervene. They stand up for the mother and try to protect her, they come between the father

and the mother, keep the mother aware of the father's mood, create a good atmosphere in the family, keep the father happy to prevent him from being violent. In cases where there is violence in the family, it clearly comes down to the interaction between and interweaving of two forms of violence in the family: violence against women and violence against children.

Men who cause violence are often also sexually, physically and psychologically violent to their own children. Many tormented women insist on living with a violent person in the belief that things will improve (Ackerman, 1995); they search for the causes of violence within themselves, are economically dependent of their partner, fearful of further repercussions, are physically and psychologically exhausted, have less access to information about possible help and are, at the same time, in a weak position owing to society's tolerance of violence. The implications of the violence, direct or indirect, manifest themselves in the victim's physical, emotional and social states, and sometimes we even do not recognise them as being a result of the violence, and very often they transfer from childhood to adulthood. (Plaz, 1999).

The consequences for sexually abused children (incest, sexual acts, and sexual abuse) are particularly traumatic. Not only are there serious physical consequences, but there are also grave emotional and behavioural effects, some of which are as follows: a fear of, or resistance to, being touched, loneliness, depression, aggression, poor self-esteem, anti-social behaviour, split personalities, and the like (Vanček, 2002). Those who have survived childhood abuse can deal with problems such as questions of self-worth, a feeling of ostracism, rejecting the body, guilt, fear, embarrassment and problems concerning developing relationships as adults. Victims of sexual violence are often reluctant to discuss the abuse they have suffered owing to a lack of trust; because they feel dirty, and/or are ashamed of what had occurred. However, "those victims who do not reveal the sexual violence they have suffered feel much bigger implications than those who do talk about it and go through the recovery phase" (Vanček, 2002: 160).

Violence in the family and help

Slovenian and European legislation imposes a responsibility on state authorities and other organisations to implement all the procedures and actions required to ensure protection and help to victims of violence in the family. The roles of the police, state prosecutor and judiciary, social work centres, health care organisations (institutional support) and NGOs, associations and societies (non-institutional aid) should be structured so that they are all working together to prevent violence and

offer help. Horvat (2009) avers that it is vital that there is "cooperation in the formation of policy on violence, professional cooperation in the prevention of violence, participation in the awareness of the general public, and co-operation in dealing with individual cases of violence, and more."

The question is how to help those who shoulder the traumatic repercussions of violence into their adulthood. A dilemma arises then as to whether there are enough professionals available within the institutional forms of assistance that are in place to help victims, and are the victims ready to cooperate with them at all? NGOs play an important role in offering assistance to victims of violence, many of whom possess a certain level of self-awareness of the issue and seek help in dealing with the after-effects of the violence they have suffered. In addition to all this, breaking the circle of violence is imperative. Munc (2010:176) states the following: "information – awareness – help plan – operation." Of these, "awareness" is the most important.

The research

The problem, the objectives and aim of the research

Childhood is like a field, planted with the seeds of the future. The vulnerability of childhood and the wounds of youth create the setting for various emotional traumas. Its influence does not keep still, but instead grows and expands. Childhood trauma could be caused unintentionally – as a result of parents' beliefs that their actions are well-intentioned – but all could have far-reaching consequences. Efforts are made, through this case study, to warn of the traumatic conditions involved, and the long-term consequences that can be experienced by someone exposed to various forms of family violence during childhood. However, one of the key objectives of this research is to help assist individuals and self-help groups in order to improve the conditions and awareness of professionals and others who deal with this particular issue.

In order to achieve these aims, the following questions were set:

- ☒ Which forms of violence was the case study exposed to during childhood, from whom, and how did he feel it?
- ☒ Was the case study offered help during childhood, what form did it take, and in which case?
- ☒ What consequences did the case study transfer into adulthood? Describe the case study's feelings?
- ☒ Which methods were adopted by the case study in order to cope with the trauma experienced?
- ☒ What forms of help were used by the case study when attempting to overcome the trauma?

Research method, workflow and processing data

This research is based on the qualitative research method. As a basis we used selected notes concerning the life story of the case study, submitted in the form of personal notes, thoughts and memories, and letters that were never sent. In this, the written events of the present coincide with the events of the past. The events noted down and selected serve as a reminder of certain traumatic conditions, which the case study reveals only when in late-middle age, a period when he is consciously dealing with childhood traumas in order to develop further. Therefore, on the basis of our prior understanding of the problem, we broadened our findings whilst working through the documents, which should give us a wider insight into the case study and, through this, a wider understanding generally.

The data was processed in accordance with the qualitative analysis procedure. We chose the open coding—inductive approach, where, while reading them, we added brief terms or sentences to original, substantively meaningful texts which described the main topics for our research. We collated the material collected into charts, added codes of the 1st order to certain parts of the text, which we merged into the codes of the 2nd order. We gave the same descriptions for things in common – this also led us to the final aim— to find answers to the research questions provided. The regulated data followed a justified analysis of individual answers and then a total analysis of the research. The final findings of the qualitative research are included in the conclusion, together with theoretical formulation, in which we set out the path towards a new, different type of help. Through the qualitative analysis method, we sought to obtain a rich understanding of the substantive aspects of the problem, which should also give us direction in the practical work.

Description of the results and interpretation

Childhood – exposure to violence and forms of violence

The findings pertaining to the work carried out are presented with a description of the case study. In her notes, she adopted an interesting narrative method. She began in the present and, through her memories, returned to childhood, adolescence, and times in between, in which certain people or events warned her about particular events, in which she recognised traumas which had shaped and still shape her life, before returning back to the present. The time of her observation and identification of her trauma goes back to the last couple of years. She lives with her partner, with whom she has two children. She sought

answers as to why she was unable to live a fulfilling relationship with her partner.

It appears that certain behavioural patterns and ways of reacting, trapped in her relationship, prevents her from continuing with her personal growth. The decision made to change her reactions on the basis of identifying and removing the causes led her to search for the truth. She no longer wants to bear the burdens of the past. As she says herself, she simply "wants to be". Despite her good intentions and the work she has carried out and is still ready to take on, her "healing" has not yet concluded. In the event she realises that the burden is still too heavy, she is ready to seek professional help. "Why? So one day she could truly feel herself and not have to constantly think and look for the meaning of life." She feels like she is playing two roles in her life. She is afraid to be who she really is in her everyday life – to be her. "Here, I constantly deny myself – I deny my abilities, gifts. She is submissive. "To always obey, listen, please before anyone demands! To read minds! To do! At any cost!" She is even embarrassed by all her abilities. "Because I do not accept myself. Again, I am afraid to be hurt...I am afraid someone will hurt me."

At the same time she is aware that she mostly hurts herself through such conduct. "I am afraid of the closeness. Because I am afraid of myself. I am afraid of change." Fear and shame have long confined her to one position. From the external perspective, she is an extremely successful woman; she has a successful career and is constantly developing her knowledge. Despite this she is restless, has an eternal wish to seek, and often she thinks of running away. Retreat? For what? Is she against accepting reality? Or is she against herself? She is very emotional: "there is a little girl hiding inside me, a gentle creature who wants to hear that someone loves her. Someone to hug and console her...I miss the small tendernesses I should have experienced in my childhood ...With this terrifying longing I am walking the world, trapped in the anticipation of fulfilment."

In her childhood she lived with her parents – who were also exposed to various traumatic experiences in their childhoods – and three other siblings. Beside the memories of a beautiful and pleasant experience, notes on different forms of aggression are brought to the fore. Not only are there direct forms of violence inflicted upon her, but also a physical presence in violent occurrences. The following forms of violence were the most prevalent:

- ☒ verbal violence: screaming, swearing, shouting and threats;
- ☒ physical violence: beating, hitting, pushing;
- ☒ psychological violence: bullying, destruction of property and personal belongings, creating a fearful atmosphere, terror, ever-present fear:
- ☒ economic violence: destruction of personal belongings, disrespecting shared property;
- ☒ animal violence: brutal conduct, physical torment, fighting, animal cruelty;
- ☒ sexual violence: sexual abuse.

The creators of violence

Analysis of the text brings us to the most prominent creator of the violence – the father who, during her childhood, occasionally turned to alcohol; his son – the girl's brother – also later encountered problems with alcohol. Alcohol in particular was the most common cause of the violent behaviour. The father kept the whole family walking on eggshells with his unpredictable behaviour when drinking. In the case study, violence is present. The note selected enables us to recognise this: "What is going to happen again? What mood you are in? How are we going to talk? Are we going to ask the right question? Oh God, how much aggression are you bottling up inside yourself? How did you release it? Through shouting and banging. By arguing with my mother. There were many arguments during my adolescence."

The aggression is also noticeable in the relationship between the father and the mother, with the father saying the following to his son in an argument: "God forbid that I should come back from the war front without an arm and a leg!" Violent behaviour has been a part of family tradition for three generations – we could not delve deeper due to the length of time that had passed. Usually it develops into a physical fight between the father and the son – already an adult, the son stands up for his mother and takes the side of others, which the mother supports. The note gives us an answer concerning the son's physical superiority: "I saw my father in the morning – with scratches and wounds to his head." The brother, trapped in the patterns of the violence, continued these in his own family: "He stepped out of the house, grabbed a rope which we

used to use to tie the hay loaded cart, and before he had even left you could hear the mother and wife begging him not to do anything stupid and to stop with his suicidal threats." However, the brother's aggression also escalated while working with the animals. "He approached the horse, took the reins into his hands and started hitting. The horse trapped under the loaded weight, dug with the hooves in the ground of the forest path and tried to move the heavy load...but the loaded weight held it aback. It just did not move. Again the punches fell. The horse snorted, shook its head, its nostrils flaring wildly; he tried to move away...the punches continued. The horse stopped... but because he did not move, the master took the hammer in his hands. With all his strength he beat the black horse's left hip, causing the skin to redden and crack open. The blood slowly flowed out of the wound and dripped towards the horse's hoof. Drops of blood fell to the ground and stuck to the dust as they fell. I stood only few metres away and begged in tears: "...No!"

These notes familiarise us with various forms of violence; the whole family finds it increasingly difficult to endure the tragedy of life. Perhaps this is why the girl was so affected by the memories of being punished by being locked in a dark stable with the cattle, because "the fear and terror I felt and carried with me for so long was a terrifying punishment which was loaded on me...I do not know who opened the door. I can only see that the door opened and I walked in, blinking eyes, passed the dog in the yard. I was so terrified. How obediently my legs traipsed alongside my companion, who opened the door for me. Into the light. To freedom. The fear went with me."

Despite everything, the most poignant part of the research is the notes about sexual abuse: "I slept on the bed between you and my mother. With my mother. I did not want to sleep on your side of the bed. You always smelt of alcohol and cigarettes. However, some memories surfaced regardless. Vivid. Horrible. Painful. Shameful. Never forgotten. For many years kept inside me. When both you and mother died, I revealed them to my sisters...I do not know how many times that happened. I just know it did happen but it SHOULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED. Were you aware of your actions? I can still see the bed that should have given me shelter and tranquillity, but instead filled me with fear and terror."

Perceptions and feelings of violence

Our case study felt and perceived the violence in various ways, but the consequences manifested themselves in her emotional, behavioural and physical states. She exhibited signs of the following: Fear – she describes the most commonly highlighted perception with words: "...this fear. It bit into my soul. In every cell of my body...ever present...I am so afraid...fear left me rooted to the field by the house..." A sense of helplessness – "I cupped my hands over my ears so as to not be able to hear...how obediently my legs traipsed alongside the person who opened the door..." Helplessness is caused by being caught in situations from which it is impossible to escape. Feeling guilty – "She attributes the causes of violence to herself as a result of her not being able to say the right thing"...I caused a lot of trouble to my mother.

A situation solver – she assumes the burden for preventing the violence "In order to ease the tension I felt, I used all my acting abilities and calmly accepted the situation. I tried to redirect conversation to other topics...for the sake of keeping the peace," However, she also doubts herself, "that I am not good enough...that I did not solve the situation..." Submissiveness – The result of "being the one to solve situations" causes her behaviour to become submissive, accepting the feeling of being a victim. "I accepted all the norms and rules: I learned how to be good, obedient, hardworking, patient..."

Emotional suppression and disguising events – She tries to hide and forget the most violent events as well as her own feelings, "in order not to hurt", to be able to survive easily "that was just one part of my childhood, the other has long been pushed in oblivion. Today I know why...the bitterest one I buried deep inside me. In the most hidden places of my heart. So nobody could ever find them. I even hid them from myself."

Creating an internal, parallel world – building it gives her the opportunity to escape from reality "... I ran. I took shelter in the nearest forest and talked to myself. I was probably creating my own world..."

Physical perception – When viewing violence, emotional conditions can cause physical pain, which have stem from stressful situations..."I have stomach ache... probably due to fear she has experienced. The fear trapped inside me felt so bad, I was already feeling pain and nausea when you were on your way home. The whole of my body shook when I saw you..."

Behavioural consequences – The pattern of this family's interactions is recognisable even from the violent behaviour exhibited by the brother–

just like the father, the son is also trying to solve the problem through violence.

It is possible to summarize from the results that the consequences of the violence strongly interlink and have helped to create the girl's life. The environment in which the girl was growing up not only affected her, but the family as well.

Help and protective factors

During the violence the case study experienced during childhood, society did not offer the individuals or the family any help; at least there is no reference to this in the notes. The family resolved violent situations by itself or they remained a family secret (or perhaps not?); however this is not possible to observe from the notes. Our note taker does not mention any help provided by social services to prevent the violence. However, it was possible to find some protective factors in the notes, which were of a great help to the note taker.

Nature – life on the outskirts of the village offers her quiet satisfaction and protection at the same time – "My sister grabbed my hand and we ran into the protective cloak of the darkness. We took refuge behind the fence, not far from the house...With nephews we moved away in the shelter of the blossoming fields."

Cultural society – "Perhaps I was lucky to be enthusiastically intrigued by the work of the cultural community, a place where I could improve my gifts. That was a period of time when I temporarily did not live at home. There I could be me. Me alone." To be actively engaged in the work of the cultural community proved to be the greatest help. She can literally live there. To be. For a short time she can even forget about her fear.

Music –she usually refers to music as a protective factor in connection with activities in the cultural community.

Faith – inner support, which enables her to leave her family environment for a few hours while attending religious services. "It also accompanies me throughout my life. Hope and trust. Faith..." is also of great help.

Sister – her older sister occasionally offers her shelter, a different kind of socialisation. "I had to become an adult almost overnight – because I am already a grown up and it is good if I leave..." This enables her to move away from the unbearable social environment. This is probably one of the best solutions and ways to help.

Adulthood and the consequences of violence

In adulthood, the person does not recognise for quite some time that her behaviour is still influenced by the violence experienced in her childhood. Over the years, distancing herself from home often put her in situations where she recognises and raises an awareness of tragic youth. She recognises the consequences which appear in adulthood in emotional and behavioural areas.

Fear – is still her most frequent silent companion. "Still here, where I live, I have long been afraid to sleep with my legs uncovered – thinking that something bad would happen to me, that someone would grab my legs. Who? I do not know? I even do not know where this fear stems from. However, I know its roots can be found in my childhood, because I felt just the same back at home."

Self-acceptance – Very often we come across the author's lack of self-confidence; herein lies a belief that she is never good enough. "...I deny my abilities, gifts...because I do not accept myself. Again I am afraid to be hurt. That is why I built an energy shield around myself - to stop anyone from hurting me."

Parallel world – Her parallel world, which had already been constructed in her youth, can be divided into several parts in adulthood. The first is the world of the stage. "... There on the stage my family should not see me, because even they do not know who I am. Because only there I am what I am." She links the second, in which she walks imaginary paths, to the cognitive dimension. She takes refuge there when she feels that she is unable to face reality or does not see a way out of the situation. She withdraws into herself through meditation. "...I thought that I like to wrap myself up in my own world too often..."..."My real 'me', this childish cheerfulness, surfaces from time to time. Increasingly frequently. It knocks, calls, wants to go and live. Not only in the parallel world, which I had constructed in order to survive in certain way, but also with me every day." The third, long ignored world is that of her poetry and other writing. In it she feels complete. This is the world of the heart.

Security – Her current wish, to live in an environment where she would not feel threatened and could simply just live, is the result of the childhood violence she suffered. "For many years I have been looking just for security from my partner. I remember I often lamented to him about how frightened I felt. With him I feel secure."

Partnership – She recognises the problems in her partnership and sometimes moves away from it. She writes the following." Do I escape

into myself because... I am unable to establish a real relationship?" Why does she not face it head on? Of course, she can justifiably ask herself if the cause has its basis in the patterns she acquired in her youth.

Subordination – In the house where she moved after the wedding, she subordinates established norms, which is expected considering the way of upbringing and patterns in nuclear families. The aim of her life was to be accepted. "I am well behaved again, obedient, an adaptable daughter-in-law in the house of my husband, brought up to be well mannered, so I accept these characteristics – for the sake of keeping the peace in the house."

Split personality – after all this case has to offer us, it is clear that here we are also dealing with an example of a split personality. In the material we often read that she is not in touch with herself in certain situations. She is not 'ME'. She perceives herself to be "another person, the one I feel is more realistic and comes out on special occasions". This literally is the real personality, it really is her, it is her real 'ME', the rest is only a role play she learned in order to survive.

Physical perceptions – the burdens that man bears and is exposed to force him through pain, to abandon them if he is able and knows how to listen to them. We noticed the same in our case. "Weeks ago I tried to shed the burden, which is trapped in my seventh vertebrae, at an acupuncture therapy session. Trapped in the body, pierced with the needles, I had an opportunity to let certain events from the past come to the surface. Again they returned..."

Suppression of the events and emotions – because the consequences of the violence are so strong, everything starts to entwine again. We cannot just put an end to it. It is a vicious circle. She hid and suppressed everything bad that had happened to her deep inside herself, unable to talk about it during all these years.

Communication – her fear and embarrassment about revealing what had happened to her have prevented her from talking about it for many years. "Be quiet!" Even her conscience forbids her. In this way, she sought to protect her family and herself. The violence she experienced as a child left traumatic consequences. She did not recognise these as an adult immediately, but they did eventually surface, probably because she had moved away from her previous violent environment and possessed a greater calmness and self-knowledge. These deeply suppressed feelings hamstrung her personal growth. She became aware that she needed to put a stop to these established forms of behaviour.

Dealing with trauma

From the notes of certain events at our disposal for research purposes, we can see the opportunities, events, people and perceptions that have enabled the case study to recognise her childhood traumas, and the way she has dealt with them and become more aware of them, as well as her attempts to eliminate them.

Awareness – One of the most important factors when dealing with trauma is being aware of certain events, moments and conditions. "I have to speak and write down. I have been carrying this load, which is constantly holding me back, for too long. Recently, I have become aware of the events that have created my personality." This awareness has had a crucial influence on my desire to deal with my trauma. Wherever she refers to her feelings, awareness or events in the notes, she also adds the importance of the awareness of everything she has experienced or is experiencing. The triggers for awareness generally are, however, different.

Encounters with people –At the beginning of the text, the case study relates to us a story in which the lead role is played by a man, who she later links to her father after she tries to find out where all these thoughts of childhood violence come from, "I knew it then – all his gestures, the shape of his body, the voice, and even his face reminded me of my father."

Triggering events, situations – she is able to recognise some awareness of trauma in random situations, events she was involved in. "...Help! A loud voice calling for help – my ears pricked to the sound of noise and pleading spoken with huge despair...but at that moment I realised that I had actually consoled MYSELF, I had consoled my inner girl, who once went through a similar experience in childhood."

Death – the death of her father, mother and brother shook her terribly. She needs to deal with the transience of life and her memories at the same time. "When you died I managed to console myself only with words. You do not know how it hurt. My soul was full of sadness."

Memories – During the loss and the mourning period, she has a great opportunity to return to her childhood through memories. She becomes aware of many events only after one of the perpetrators has long gone. "See, the memories of those events are the most traumatic for me." The depth of her inner world enabled her to have a wider insight into the traumas from her past through different ways of thinking about the events she had relived in her memories.

Intuition – With her own awareness of certain findings, with behaviour from nowhere, she manages to recognise and be aware of any traumatic event. "On this occasion on the mountain, I felt a strong message which crept into my thoughts...I suddenly fell quiet, because yet again I had felt a new message."..."Sometimes I feel a special glow in my heart. This one is saying to me that this is the right thing!" Through identifying these intuitive messages, which deepen in you and help make sense of events, this tangle of traumatic events starts to unfold.

Dreams – In those moments where she is aware of her conditions and abilities, she also deals with her traumas in her dreams. "Sometimes you walk into my world through my dreams...then I see you differently. Even now. But only a few years ago I processed all my difficult times with you in my dreams." Dreams have also helped her to raise her awareness of her trauma. Sometimes the sub-conscious works better than the conscious.

She began to change her life as she dealt with her trauma. Awareness and acceptance of conditions and events from the past were very important. The awareness triggers helped her to take certain steps towards her final aim.

Help

The impacts of traumatic events can leave irreversible consequences with the person affected. Trauma needs to be dealt with, its causes found, and left behind. When a man is aware of certain traumas and takes away their emotional charge, they lose their power. The help to be provided when dealing with traumatic conditions depends on each individual separately.

Protective factors from childhood – whatever helped her to survive her childhood when exposed to violence, it also helps her in adulthood – nature, faith, music, cultural activities – of these, the latter is the most prominent.

Self-awareness – The moment she is completely aware of her trauma, and truly understands how she feels, marks the beginning of the help and treatment. "No, I have had enough. I no longer want the past to have any power over me. This is very important. The decision has to come from her alone,"...I realised that this feeling needs to mature in me alone; that nobody else apart from me can ensure this.

Partnership – Family – Although doubt concerning the successfulness of the partnership emerged through the notes, her partner offers her security and shelter, a place where she can be at peace. We also do not

see any evidence that her husband would hinder her from making her numerous retreats to her inner world, parallel activities, walks in the mountains, meeting various people. She writes: "I am safe."

Literary creation – these activities give her the most meaning in her life. She is at her strongest here. The world of the written word takes her into the expanse of the visible and invisible world. Even when reading the notes we are blown away by the power of her writing, she playfully walks through worlds where nobody has been allowed to enter for a long time. "...You know how my songs emerge. The best ones, with soul, come from depth of recognition." The written word is part of her catharsis.

Dreams – dreams do not only enable her to deal with her trauma, but also help her as well. Through them she processes many of her traumatic memories. "...In my dreams I took a knife and, with it, symbolically cut my mattress; I was killing fear and terror. And with it you as well. Another time, I hung you on the butchers hook in my dreams. I felt relieved. And rarely do I feel frightened." We can imagine all the terror of the action, but at least through this she partly frees herself. It presents an insight into how badly the abuse had wounded her and how deeply she had buried it inside her all these years.

Intuition – the power of recognising nonverbal messages and meanings helps her to identify certain events and traumas. At the same time she has a special ability to sense energies. "I do not know what I carry in me, what is given to me, but I know that mental energy is very powerful...My body can sense a great deal. I do not know why, but I have been carrying this with me for a long time – too long."

Communication – Regardless of the form of communication used, it enables release. In our case it is not only verbal communication, but also non-verbal communication and crying. "Sometimes he only understood how I felt when I cried." Barriers are created in the body when emotions are contained, which then lead to psychosomatic disorders. Through communication she warns of her feelings and recognition of conditions and accelerates the energy flow.

Therapist – a therapist is not necessarily a professional, but can be a person who is able to listen. "I had to talk about each and every moment that had affected me. Thank you, because he listened." It is important that the person seeking help feels accepted, can trust people, and not have this trust betrayed.

Study – After becoming more aware of her trauma and countering its effects, she decides to develop her career. Newly acquired knowledge is of great help and support in her mission and personal growth. At the same time, when she is aware of the traumas, the study enables familiarisation with some additional literature which shows her how to overcome the problems.

Love – forgiveness – acceptance – To be a man is to know how to forgive. All forms of help, especially self-help, enrich our case study and allow her to carry out one of the most human actions of all, forgiveness and acceptance of her trauma. By loving herself and accepting herself as a unique person, she is also able to accept those who caused all her problems. At the same time we could not deny that actions had occurred, but the point is that the actions have lost their sharpness and charge. With this they lose their power over the victim. "Now you are long gone. Sometimes, when I am cold, I wrap myself in a scarf that I have been saving as a memory of you. I write a song. The view extends across the valley, back to home. More and more rarely. I prefer to look into myself, stand in the silence and ask: "Let it be good!" Wherever you are, I ask you to help, should our thoughts connect after realising my wish for a hug. I send you my love, because I know you never got enough of it...And now, when I am talking to you like this, know that I forgive you! These are only memories. This has happened to us. We do not know why. I no longer want to carry this burden with me. The past has no power over me. In my dreams you are beautiful and bright. And I am very close to learning how to hug the girl inside me and console her. To love her."

A model which is right for one person can be completely useless with another, and that is why there are no standard instructions as to how to act. We can only quote them as an example that has helped someone, while someone else might choose a different path.

Conclusion

The case study belongs to a group of children who were stigmatised by family violence. She felt the impact even in middle age. With this, the results of our analysis confirm the theoretical findings of the individuals concerned, that a person can suffer the consequences of violence all his life as they cut into every cell of his body and soul. Tomori (1994) states that there is no absolutely happy or unhappy family. We can also confirm in our case that we were dealing with a family that cannot be said to be happy or unhappy; however we can claim that in this family completely gave up in some respects. Learned patterns of problem solving, particularly through the use of violence and aggression, have simply

continued. In this specific case, we could highlight the author's note when describing her brother and father, who both exhibit similar behaviour, which they assumed from family socialization. The girls do not outwardly display violence, at least not in any specific case, but we can assume that the violence is hidden. In the case of non-acceptance of oneself, is this not a case of constant denial of one's needs and hiding feelings, a case of violence against oneself? In such cases the pain can be even worse. It is much easier to blame someone else for your situation, but it is harder to look inside yourself and to recognise yourself as your own bully.

Violence leaves long-term consequences for the victim. Regardless of the parents' difficult childhoods, which make them victims too, let us dedicate some of our thoughts to the children, particularly the case study. Miller (1992) finds that a child is willing to give up many of his parts and to push many traumatic experiences in oblivion only to preserve the feeling that the parents love him and to preserve the love. The defence mechanisms of shouldering the blame and idealising the parents also form part of this strategy. If the trauma is not experienced, it will have to be endured later in life, in a pattern of forced repetition, which is the basis for the transmission of violence between generations. Should a child experience the pain of trauma, he also has to have an adult at his disposal who can offer emotional support and accept the truth. If this particular person, who should offer support, is the source of the trauma, it is impossible to overcome this problem. Dealing with suppressed trauma is equally very painful even later in life and even an adult (former victim) will not easily manage without a therapist, who will give this person a feeling that he is unconditionally taking their side in the often long-term grieving process (Pavlović, Korošec, 1997).

"A human who has experienced psychological trauma as a child – in any form – becomes accustomed to certain behaviour and responses and does not stop to question this," states Markham (1999). However, in this case, a level of personal maturity has been attained, which has enabled our selected person to recognise and be aware of certain traumatic conditions. She was only able to deal with the trauma she experienced in childhood many years after the perpetrators of the violence had passed away. Self-help is very demanding, and when looking for the causes of traumatic events we look and also find excuses for the perpetrator's violence. This might be a trap if we try to solve the problem alone. Is it possible that the victim is still trying to nurture his inner child, and at the same time is grieving for long lost childhood? Of course, the childhood abuse did not enable him to live out his childhood dreams, fears and traumas caused by the abuse. At the same time, a trap

appears and leaves our victim unable to move on: In a way he cannot grow up and deal with the reality of living in the "here and now". The abuse can serve as an excuse to continue in a dependent state.

Were the perpetrators punished for their violence? Not from a legal perspective. Who sentences or pardons the perpetrator? The state, the law, perpetrator himself? After all, it could be said that it is the child (the victim) who forgives if ready to do so. This is also the case in our study. In an effort to curtail the current of abuse, our victim sends love to the perpetrators and symbolically forgives all those who were involved, as she is certain that she needs to relieve the burden on herself. She is only able to do so by dealing with her traumas, recognising their causes, accepting them, but mainly by coming to terms with her past. For even though she cannot change the past, she can still create her "present". There are no generalized examples of help and they cannot even be reliably used to help other victims of abuse. However, the research and analysis presented here helps raise global awareness on the issue.

Resources

- Ackerman, Robert J., Pickering, E.Susan (1995): *Before It's too Late: Helping Women in Controlling or Abusive Relationships*. Florida: Health Communications, Inc.
- Bajzek, Jože, Bitenc, Mateja, Hvalič Touzery, Simona, Lokar, Alenka, Ramovš, Jože, Strniša Tušek, Špela (2003): *Zrcalo odraščanja*. Radovljica: Didakta.
- Beck, Ulrich (2009): *Družba tveganja: na poti v neko drugo moderno*. Ljubljana: Krtina.
- Gradišar, Cveto (2005): *Sotočja družinskih odnosov*. Novo mesto: samozaložba.
- Greif, Avner (2005): *Family Structure, Institutions, and Growth: The Origin and Implications of Western Corporatism*. Stanford University. Prepared for an AEA session on: the Family, Institutions, and Economic Growth.
- Haralambos, Michael, Holborn, Martin (2001): *Sociologija: teme in pogledi*. Ljubljana: DZS.
- Horvat, Dalida (2009): *Dobra praksa sodelovanja nevladnih organizacij z organizacijami pri obravnavi nasilja*. Interno gradivo: Društvo SOS telefon.
- Keilman, Nico (2003): *Demographic and social implications of low fertility for family structures in Europe*. *Population studies*, 43. Strasbourg: Council of Europe publishing.
- Krajncan, Mitja (2006): *Na pragu novega doma: oddaja otrok v vzgojni zavod*. Ljubljana: Pedagoška fakulteta.

- Markham, Ursula (1999): *Travme iz otroštva: Kako prepoznamo in odpravimo boleče spomine*. Ljubljana: Založba Mladinska knjiga.
- Milharčič, Hladnik, Mirjam, Peček, Čuk, Mojca, Devjak, Tatjana (2004): *Državlanska in domovinska vzgoja 7*. Ljubljana: DZS.
- Miller, Alice (1992): *Drama je biti otrok in iskanje resnice o sebi*. Ljubljana: Tangram.
- Munc, Matija (2010): *Nemoč nasilja*. Maribor: De Vesta.
- Musek, Janek, Pečjak, Vid (1997): *Psihologija*. Ljubljana: Educy.
- Pavlovič, Zoran, Korošec, Damjan (1997): *Slabo ravnanje z otroki v Sloveniji – opažanje in obravnavanje*. Ljubljana: Inštitut za kriminologijo pri Pravni fakulteti Univerze v Ljubljani.
- Plaz, Maja (1999): *Nasilje nad žensko v družini, partnerskih in sorodstvenih zvezah*. Diplomsko delo. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede.
- Plaz, Maja, Veselič Špela (2002): *Nasilje nad ženskami in nasilje nad otroki v družini*. In Lešnik Mugnaioni, Doroteja (Ed.): *Nasilje – nenasilje*. Ljubljana: i2. pp.: 123-148
- Renner, Tanja (2006): *Težave s pojmom družine*. In Renner, Tanja, Sedmak, Mateja, Švab, Alenka, Urek, Mojca (Eds.): *Družine in družinsko življenje v Sloveniji*. Koper: Založba Annales., pp.: 13-26.
- Renner, Tanja, Sedmak, Mateja, Švab, Alenka (2006): *Uvod v raziskovanje družin in družinskega življenja v Sloveniji*. In Renner, Tanja, Sedmak, Mateja, Švab, Alenka, Urek, Mojca (Eds.): *Družine in družinsko življenje v Sloveniji*. Koper: Založba Annales., pp.:27-42.
- Sedmak, Mateja (2006): *Nasilje v družini*. In Renner, Tanja, Sedmak, Mateja, Švab, Alenka, Urek, Mojca (Eds.): *Družine in družinsko življenje v Sloveniji*. Koper: Založba Annales. pp.: 163-189.
- Tomori, Martina (1994): *Knjiga o družini*. Ljubljana: EWO.
- Ule, Mirjana, Kuhar, Metka (2003): *Mladi, družina starševstvo:spremembe življenjskih potekov v pozni moderni*. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede.
- United Nations. (1992): *Family: Forms and Functions (Occasional Series Papers, No. 2)*. Vienna: United Nations.
- Vanček, Nataša (2002). *Spolno nasilje*. In Aničić, Klavdija, Sardoč, Mitja (Eds.): *Nasilje – nenasilje*. Ljubljana:i2., pp.: 149-174.
- Zakon o zakonski zvezi in družinskih razmerjih. Uradni list RS, št. 69/2004 –UPB.