

Attitudes of Estonian inhabitants in relation to gender-based violence and human trafficking

2014

Main findings

TNS Emor



Objective of the survey was to map the attitudes and awareness of Estonian inhabitants in the areas of domestic and gender based violence and human trafficking. In order to do that, we combined results from a national population survey (1111 inhabitants aged 15 and older) and three focus group interviews (each group had 8 participants aged 20-60). The survey was conducted by TNS Emor in March and April of 2014.

Domestic and gender based violence

- People understand the definition of domestic violence very well and can define it adequately. **This definition is rather wide for them** and encompasses the relationships of different parties within one family: relations between couples (spouses, partners), children and their parents (also grandparents and other closely related adults), brothers and sisters. More apparent side of domestic violence is **physical violence** but **mental violence** is more hidden and difficult to detect. Experiencing both types of violence can have a significant impact on the victim: the result of humiliation, belittling and breaking someone's personality is „broken people“.
- **Gender based violence** is seen as one type of domestic violence (conflicts between different genders in the family) as well as application of gender based inequality and stereotypes in home as well as professional environment.
- **Intimate partner violence** includes various different situations involving physical and mental abuse. The majority of people consider the following to be serious or light forms of violence: hitting another person (96%), threatening to kill (93%), physically restraining the other person (91%), sexual intercourse with partner using influence (87%), threatening to hurt the other person (83%) and threatening the other person by threatening to kill oneself (75%). In case of these situations half or more of the people find that this is serious violence. Many also consider the following as violence: threatening to hurt the other person (83%), continuous mocking, insulting and criticizing of the other person (78%), intentional breaking of valuables belonging to the other person (77%), not allowing the other person to work, attend school or additional training (69%) but less than half of the population consider these to be serious forms of violence. The following situations are the most ambiguous: one partner causing the other to go in debt (considered to be violence by 50%), one partner taking the other's bank cards and limiting their purchases (62%), forbidding communicating with friends (55%). In case of these situations a relatively large part of the population – 30-40% - still find that this is just an unpleasant situation.
- In case of all situations involving intimate partner relationships measured in the survey we can say that **men and women have similar** attitudes towards situations involving **physical violence or threatening with it**, considering most of them to be abuse (threatening to hurt, hitting, threatening to kill, physically restraining the partner, threatening the other by threatening to kill oneself, sexual intercourse using influence, constant mocking). At the same time, **in case of situations involving mental violence** (incurring debt for the other person, taking the other person's bank cards and limiting their purchases, forbidding communicating with friends, not allowing the other person to work, attend school or additional training, intentionally breaking valuables belonging to the other person, mocking the other person) **women are significantly more sensitive than men** and two thirds of them consider practically all of these situations to be violence (57% of men).

As a whole, we can say that in case of the measured situations involving physical and mental violence they are more likely seen as violence by younger and middle aged people (primarily those between the ages of 25 – 49), more educated people (primarily with higher education), those with higher income, inhabitants of Tallinn or surrounding counties, in case of mental violence – Estonians. Among older people, those with basic education, inhabitants of rural areas and other nationalities (in case of mental violence) there is an above average number of those who don't consider many of the measured situations to be violence but simply unpleasant situations or normal life.

- The main **victims of domestic violence** are considered to be **children**, whose still developing view of the world may forever be influenced by the experienced violence. **Children raised by single parents** and people **financially dependent on their partner** (it's primarily women in these situations) are also seen as risk groups. Women are seen as main victims of domestic physical violence, at the same time 93% agree that men and boys may also be victims of sexual violence. In case of mental violence they find that men as well as women can be victims, also there is increasingly more mental violence against men (or simply people's awareness has

increased: situations that used to be seen as normal are no longer that). **Sexual abuse in specific situations**, such as prison or war, is seen as justified by a small portion: 17% in case of prisoners and 8% during war.

- Attitudes towards victims of violence were mostly sympathizing. **A typical perpetrator** is considered to be someone whose self-esteem has suffered due to violence they experienced in their childhood. There might be various reasons for the violence: **dissatisfaction with one's life on the whole, with work, career progress, no achievement in life, also the inability, incapacity to manage with one's life but also not being satisfied sexually, health, health problems and depression, fear, helplessness associated with them may trigger aggression and anger.** Another group of perpetrators is educated people who deliberately enjoy inflicting mental violence on their victim.
- Slightly more than half of the people (54%) believe that the **victim of domestic violence is to be blamed.** Based on focus group discussions we can say that while people think that no one deserves being a victim of mental of physical violence, but when it comes to **remaining in that situation**, there are different opinions. There are those who believe that remaining a victim cannot be justified and no one should settle for that. Others thought that victims often have low self-esteem as well (possibly having experiences domestic violence before), they lack the initiative to leave behind the co-dependent relationship. This might be made more complicated by being financially dependent on the partner, weak support network and inability/lack of desire/being ashamed to look for help. **The culprits of domestic violence** are considered to be alcohol, inadequate upbringing at home, experiences with domestic violence in childhood as well as stress and tension resulting from socio-economic environment. All of these reasons influence victims of violence as well as the perpetrators themselves.
- Slightly less than half, 47% of the people agree that **female victims of sexual violence cause becoming a victim with the way they dress.**
- **Domestic violence is considered to be a very significant problem in Estonia.** According to people's evaluations it is not talked about enough in Estonia, society's attention is not brought to it enough and on the state level, it is not dealt with sufficiently (compared to European welfare states). Here a bigger problem is mental violence that is difficult to define and detect and to regulate with legislation, but the results of it can be comparable to physical violence for the victim.
- 77% of people do **not think domestic violence concerns only the family** and 94% find that **violence in family relations/close relationships is a crime.** According to people it is important to notice domestic violence but it may not be easy, especially in case of mental violence.
- 53% of people have personally **heard, seen or suspected instances of domestic violence**, 62% of them have **reacted** in some way. Most often they have intervened to solve the situation (it is primarily men who do that), police has been informed significantly less and a very small share of witnesses have informed other people or institutions.
- Most frequently people **do not get involved in instances of domestic violence** because they don't know what to do. During focus groups it turned out that people don't know exactly, who to inform of such cases. There were also opinions that incompetent involvement may cause more damage than it would do good. People had also not gotten involved because it was someone else's private matter. The reason for this excuse is also the inability to clearly understand what is going on in someone else's family life, is it violence or something else. Approximately one fifth of people are afraid to involve themselves in such cases, fearing unpleasant consequences for themselves.
- 71% of the people agree that **victims of domestic violence might not have the strength to terminate the violent relationship**, mainly due to aforementioned reasons: problems with self-esteem stemming from childhood, financial dependence on the partner and undue shame associated with admitting that they are a victim and asking for help (especially in case of men, here public opinion is not supportive either).
- **Children who have witnessed domestic violence need help** according to 95% and **victims of rape** in case of 98% of the people. During focus group one of the messages that resonated was that while for female victims of violence there seems to be an operational support system

(police, social workers, shelters), in case of male victims and victims of mental violence the question is, what should they do.

- **Preventive measures by the state** should primarily involve greater attention towards the issue and not only in the form of one-time campaigns but by talking more widely and about various aspects of the problem. This means above all drawing attention to mental violence, which so far has remained in the background. It should be voiced that suffering from violence is not normal, what to do and where to turn to when you've become a victim, what kind of help you can expect. Informing people should go hand in hand with support services, also improving the availability of high level psychological help.

Human trafficking

- Human trafficking is most frequently associated with **prostitution**, luring young people (women) to work abroad, the actual nature of it turning out later. Human trafficking is associated less with **luring people to work where the person ends up being dependent of the employer** (documents are taken away, promised salary is not paid). Respondents did not use the term forced labour but they were able to describe the situation. Some also mentioned **child prostitution, child labour, organ donors, theft of adoption aged children, domestic servitude and drug mules**.

In general the topic of human trafficking is much less familiar to people than family and gender related violence, people don't have personal experiences and therefore they are mainly passing on information they've gotten from media.

- When evaluating different **situations that might all be associated with forced labour**, the majority of people considered all the following situations to be violence: when personal identification documents are taken away upon getting to work (83%); when people are lured into becoming drug mules, stealing, begging (76%) and when people are forced to work through threats and false promises (84%) (Graph 21). Only 1-2% of people consider these situations to be normal and less than one fifth consider them unpleasant.
- **In case of prostitution** 70% of people find that it damages the reputation of Estonia and 54% consider it to be violence against women. 31% find that prostitution should be legalized because it provides prostitutes with jobs and income, 26% consider it necessary because it helps to relieve men's sexual tension and stress and only 12% consider it important because different entrepreneurs earn income from this.

On the whole, approximately 14% of the population are **completely against prostitution**. These are people who don't agree with any of the three statements about the necessity of prostitution brought out in the survey (prostitution is necessary for mediators, helps to relieve men's sexual tension and stress and provides prostitutes with jobs and income) and who find that prostitution is violence against women and that it damages the reputation of Estonia (17% of women, 10% of men). At the same time, 3% of the population **support prostitution completely on attitudinal level**, i.e. they believe it provides mediators as well as prostitutes with income and helps relieve men's sexual tension, without it being violence against women and damaging the reputation of Estonia. Most of the population remains between these two extremes in their opinions.

- On attitudinal level, the **risk of Estonian population ending up in forced labour** is relatively small because only 8% of them consider it normal to go work abroad without a contract and 4% find that employer has the right to hold on to the employee's personal identification documents. But during focus groups they found that in real life it may be very difficult to recognize when you are being deceived and the victim might realize it when it's already too late.
- The main reason for **ending up in forced labour as well as going into prostitution** is considered to be financial difficulties. This is followed at practically same rate by the desire to earn a lot of money fast and the third reason for both types of human trafficking is deceit, force or violence used by recruiters. In case of prostitution the third one is also supported by drug addiction and low education level. Other reasons, such as low awareness of work related rights, low education level, competition on the labour market in case of human trafficking and false

understanding of what a prostitute's life is like, lack of support from family and friends and fulfilling one's sexual needs are brought out significantly less.

- Focus group participants were unable to describe **a typical human trafficker** but they did name **several signs that should make people cautious in case of job offers**: jobs that sound too good to be true, offering the opportunity to earn a lot of money fast and in an easy way and don't require special knowledge and skills, offering training on the job.
- There were opposing opinions when it came to **human trafficking as a problem**: some found that this issue is becoming increasingly important, others that it is rather a thing of the past in Estonia. At the same time they were aware that lack of public attention to these issues maybe due to the fact the fact that the problem is perceived to be small. These days the problem seems to be that luring people to work abroad by dishonest means has become much more deceitful and difficult to detect than before, which is why it is increasingly more difficult for young people to avoid being deceived.

Prostitution as forced labour is definitely a problem, primarily when it comes to luring girls to work abroad.

- **To avoid falling victim to human trafficking** people themselves as well as the state can certainly do a lot. **People themselves** should carefully check the background of job offers and employers; never hand over their personal identification documents to their employer, finding out local emergency phone numbers and contact information of embassies before going to work abroad, finding a support person in their country of destination and bringing along an additional amount of money.

State prevention measures should concentrate on informing of human trafficking and businesses associated with that, also providing information and directions concerning what to do when one falls victim to human trafficking. More extensively, human trafficking could be a topic in career counselling programs in basic and upper secondary schools. It is also important to provide basic economic education at home as well as at school so that young people can understand the logic behind how economy works and realize you can't get rich easy and fast.

- In general, in focus groups the issue of human trafficking did not seem as important, requiring the attention of public and the state as much as domestic violence. This must be dealt with, people must be informed of the dangers and should be educated in this area but compared to domestic violence, human trafficking concerns a smaller group of people.

Awareness of the existence of support services for victims of domestic and gender-based violence and human trafficking

- They are most aware of the existence of support services for victims of domestic violence; less than a half know that it is available for victims of sexual violence and slightly more than one third – that services are offered to children who have witnessed domestic violence. In case of other types of victims (forced labour, forced prostitution) or perpetrators, they were significantly less aware of the existence of support services.
- When it comes to **organisations and programs offering support services and counselling**, the largest number, almost three quarters of the people are aware of the Labour Inspectorate, two thirds of the Estonian Women's Shelters and their phone. Other organisations and programs (MTÜ Ohvriliin, state victim support services, MTÜ Living for Tomorrow, Norwegian support program to decrease domestic violence and human trafficking) are known by less than half of the population.