

Domestic Violence During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Abstract: Domestic violence as a global phenomenon which affects every country, people of all skin colours, races and followers of all religions of the world requires a special commitment of state authorities and its institutions to limit the scale of this phenomenon, to help victims and to effectively punish perpetrators. This article analyses the phenomenon of domestic violence during the global COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the general definition of violence and the definition of domestic violence, the article also includes statistical data on domestic violence, as well as an analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the scale of this phenomenon. The last part of the work presents actions, both taken at the state level by organizations providing aid and locally by citizens, targeting the reduction of the increase in the number of domestic violence in the period of isolation related to the pandemic, as well as actions aimed at helping its victims. The article was based primarily on the analysis of legal acts, statistical data, scientific publications on the phenomenon of violence and domestic violence, and it was based the few so far available online publications regarding the impact of the pandemic on the phenomenon of domestic violence.

Keywords: pandemic, domestic violence, organizations providing aid, isolation related to the pandemic

1. Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic affected many human rights and freedoms, and the restrictions related to the isolation of people made these rights even more important, as compliance with them determines the sense of security of every citizen. The fundamental rights and freedoms, the provision of which has become impossible or difficult to ensure, include the right to health, equal treatment, the right to privacy, the right to information and freedom of expression, as well as the right to good administration¹. The protection of human life, understood as protection against infection with SARS-COV2 virus and its further spread has become the priority for the authorities in the countries affected by the pandemic. It turns out, however, that the health crisis quickly led to serious consequences for the economy and turned into an economic crisis. In many countries, such as Poland, the period of the pandemic coincided with political events, such as presidential elections, and the limitations related to, for example, the possibility of conducting an election campaign and conducting the elections resulted in the intensification of social unrest and a crisis of democracy, understood as restricting the right to free, independent elections and access for all citizens to vote².

During the pandemic, people who are at the same time most at risk of contracting the virus, such as the elderly, staying in all-day care centers, being in isolation, for example: in prisons or

¹ M. Sitek, *Right of the society to the good administration (good governance)* [w:] *Collective human rights in the first half of the 21st century*, pod red. M.Sitek, P. Terem, M. Wójcicka (ed.) Józefów 2015, pp. 197-210.

² M. Sitek, *The human right to participate in local government elections* [in:] *Verejná spravá v súčasnom demokratickom a právnom štáte*, cz. I, Košice 2018, pp. 192-201.

nursing homes, have become particularly vulnerable to human rights violations. At the same time, quarantine and isolation have left people around the world sometimes staying at home for the first time for several weeks without going for work, going shopping, meeting extended family or friends or leaving house for any other reason. For many families, such an unusual situation became an opportunity to rebuild family ties, spend time together, and help in distance learning for children, and it had an immensely positive impact on family relationships. On the other hand, for many families, isolation has increased abuses and opportunities for domestic violence. This article will cover the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on domestic violence worldwide and it will talk about the tools used by countries affected by pandemic restrictions to protect against this type of violence.

2. Definition of violence and domestic violence and

The definition of violence in family, also known as domestic violence, should be interpreted in relation to the definition of violence in general, created both by representatives of various sciences and international organizations. The World Health Organization defines violence as the deliberate, threatening, or actual use of physical force against oneself, another person, group or community, resulting in the occurrence or probability of the effects of injury, death, psychological wounds, developmental disorders or deprivation³. Irena Pospieszyl defines violence as “all non-accidental acts threatening the personal freedom of an individual or contributing to physical and mental

³ WHO, *Definition and typology of violence*, online <https://www.who.int/violence-prevention/approach/definition/en/> (access: 05.08.2020).

harm to a person, going beyond the social principles of mutual relations”⁴. In turn, Richard D. Gil created a very broad and hence, according to the author of this article, difficult or even impossible to apply, definition, in the light of which violence means “actions and conditions which inhibit the spontaneous development of innate potential opportunities and the natural pursuit of self-realization.”⁵

Domestic violence is legally defined in many, but not all countries⁶. For the purposes of this article, some of them from selected countries of the world will be presented. In Poland, it is defined as “one-time or repeated intentional act or omission which violates the personal goods or rights (relatives or other people living together or living together⁷), in particular exposing these people to the risk of losing life, health, violating their dignity, bodily inviolability, freedom, including sexual, causing harm to their physical or mental health, as well as causing suffering and moral harm to people affected by violence”⁸. In Great Britain, a country representing the common law culture, the domestic violence is defined as “physical violence, threatening or intimidating behaviour and any other form of abuse which, directly or indirectly, may have caused harm to the other party or to the child or which may give rise to the risk of harm⁹” as well as “sub-category of violence as violence or threats of

⁴ See: I. Pospiszyl, *Razem przeciw przemocy*, Warszawa, 1999, p.16.

⁵ See: D.G. Gil, *Societal violence and violence in families [W:] Family violence*, J.M. Eekelaar J.M., S.N. Katz S.N, Toronto, 1978, p.78.

⁶ There is currently no specific provision in the law of the Russian Federation which would define domestic violence. The article 115 of the Russian Criminal Code (bodily injury) is the provisions of law applicable in the case of acts of domestic violence is

⁷ The article 115 of the act of Act of 6th June 1997 – the Criminal Code (Dz.U.2019.0.1950 and 2128)

⁸ The article 2, point 2 of the Act of 29th July 2005 on counteracting domestic violence (Dz. U. 2005 Nr 180 poz. 1493 as amended.)

⁹ Family Division Practice Direction (Residence and Contact Orders: Domestic Violence and Harm) (No 2) [2009] 1 WLR 251.

violence from a person associated with the victim”¹⁰. In India, the domestic violence is defined as “any act, omission or commission or conduct of the respondent shall constitute domestic violence in case it: harms or injures or endangers the health, safety, life, limb or well-being, whether mental or physical, of the aggrieved person or tends to do so and includes causing physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal and emotional abuse and economic abuse; or harasses, harms, injures or endangers the aggrieved person with a view to coerce her or any other person related to her to meet any unlawful demand for any dowry or other property or valuable security; or has the effect of threatening the aggrieved person or any person related to her by any conduct mentioned in clause (a) or clause (b); or otherwise injures or causes harm, whether physical or mental, to the aggrieved person”¹¹. In China, the domestic violence is defined as beating, tying, mutilation and incapacitation, violation of physical freedom, as well as mental abuse and intimidation between family members¹².

The above cited definitions are only selected examples. It is impossible to create a single, consistent definition of violence in general or domestic violence, due to the multiple forms of violence, its effects and features. Danuta Rode, rightly in the author’s opinion, claims that in order to assess whether a given behaviour is an act of domestic violence, it seems appropriate to adopt the criterion of the so-called socio-moral evaluation, because it takes into account several most important elements of violence, such as:

¹⁰ Housing Act 1996, Section 177, 1A.

¹¹ Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act of 2005, No. 43 of 2005, Section 3.

¹² *Anti-domestic Violence Law of the People’s Republic of China (Order No. 37 of the President of the PRC)* on-line http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=103955&p_count=1&p_classification=01.04 (access: 05.08.2020).

the form, intensity, intentionality, previous experience, the amount of caused harm or may be caused by a given behaviour, role and status of the victim and the perpetrator. According to D. Rode, despite the wide scope of this criterion, it cannot be accepted as possible to implement without encountering difficulties, because its application is conditioned by the situational context of people and the environments in which they live¹³.

3. Domestic violence and the crisis

Domestic violence is unique in that it concerns the environment closest to people and is closely related to its emotional, spiritual and physical development. As John Paul II said, family is “the most complete community from the point of view of interpersonal bonds. There is no bond that binds people more closely than the bond of marriage and family. There is no other that can be so fully covered as ‘communion’. There is also no other in which mutual obligations would be so deep and comprehensive, and violating them would more painfully harm the human sensitivity: women, men, children, parents”¹⁴. The family is the place and the people who have the greatest impact on our upbringing, the values which we learn to believe and adhere to and accompany us throughout our lives. The experiences of family life not only influence our childhood, but also our entire adult life¹⁵. Experiencing domestic violence from the hands of parents, as well as conflicts in a marriage observed

¹³ D. Rode, *Psychologiczne uwarunkowania przemocy w rodzinie. Charakterystyka sprawców*, Katowice 2010, p.30.

¹⁴ Homilia Jana Pawła II w czasie mszy świętej odprawianej na lotnisku w Masłowie, 3 czerwca 1991, online https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan_pawel_ii/homilie/14kielce_03061991.html (access: 05.08.2020).

¹⁵ D.Rode, *ibidem*, pp. 87-100.

by children, may result in the increase in aggressive behaviour in children, or the possibility of using violence by them in adulthood¹⁶. Danuta Rode calls this effect “an intergenerational cycle of family violence in which former victims become aggressors against their loved ones”¹⁷. The effects of violence are revealed both immediately after its use as well as it may affect the victim of such violence over the years. Apart from bodily injuries, diseases and even death, there are many effects in the emotional and psychological spheres, such as: fears, feelings of shame and guilt, disturbed self-esteem, phobias and depression. It is particularly difficult for children, because the use of a dominant position by parents in the form of violence may cause difficulties in later establishing relationships with peers, problems in relationships or learning problems due to stress¹⁸.

Domestic violence has many causes. Among the main causes of domestic violence or causes for the family disorganization, there are such factors as: the industrialization and urbanization processes, the development of metropolitan communities favouring the anonymity of the perpetrator of violence, diminishing family functions, the adultery and suspicion of betrayal, the extinction of moral traditions as well as the lack of permanent livelihood or disease¹⁹. The causes of violence also include social and cultural determinants and psychological determinants of the perpetrator of violence, such as the sense of power and control over the victim and the lack of control over aggressive behaviour²⁰. The abuse

¹⁶ More.: D. Rode,

¹⁷ Ibidem, p.99.

¹⁸ J.Helios, W.Jedlecka, *Wybrane oblicza przemocy*, Wrocław 2017, p.36.

¹⁹ M.Borowski, *Przemoc w rodzinie*, online <http://www.korzan.edu.pl/konferencja/referaty/borowski.pdf> (access: 05.08.2020).

²⁰ Compare: ibidem, p. 31.

of alcohol and other drugs is also indicated as a risk factor for domestic violence²¹. Undoubtedly, the scale of the phenomenon of domestic violence is also influenced by crisis situations²². Małgorzata Słomczyńska identifies the crisis as one of the main causes of pathology in the family. In this context, M. Słomczyńska, as the cause of the crisis in the family, defined as an obstacle, in achieving life's goals, which cannot be solved by conventional methods, mentions poverty intra-family conflicts, deprivation of basic needs, life-threatening situations, health or safety, death of a loved one, disability or illness of a family member as well as social maladjustment of children raised²³. The breakdown or disorganization of family life may also be caused by the lack of sexual satisfaction of one of the spouses or the increase in the freedom and independence of children in the modern family, limiting the influence of parents on their children²⁴.

4. Domestic Violence during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The phenomenon of violence, including domestic violence, is influenced not only by crises in the family, but also by economic, military and health crises. The World Health Organization emphasizes that the refugee women, the displaced women and the women living in areas where armed conflicts are taking place

²¹ M. Such-Prygiel, T. Graca, *Psychospołeczne i strukturalne uwarunkowania sytuacji trudnych* [w:] *Dziecko i rodzina w sytuacjach trudnych. Współczesne dylematy i wyzwania*, Warszawa 2019, ss. 13-29.

²² J. Halicki, *Nadużywanie alkoholu jako czynnik ryzyka przemocy w rodzinie* [w:] „Pedagogika społeczna”, nr 3(69), 2018, p. 222 (222-233).

²³ M.I. Słomczyńska, *Patologie społeczne w kontekście kryzysu współczesnej rodziny* [in:] „Resocjalizacja polska”, 8/2014, pp. 70-75 (67-80)

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

are particularly vulnerable to domestic violence²⁵. In 2020, the problem of increased domestic violence became apparent in the face of the global coronavirus pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the infectious coronavirus SARS-CoV2, began in November 2019 in the Chinese city of Wuhan. As a result of its spread, it quickly became a global health crisis, and on 11th March 2020, it was officially recognized as a pandemic by the World Health Organization²⁶. As of 6th August 2020, worldwide, the WHO officially recorded over 18.5 million infections, and more than 700 thousand people died as a result of contracting COVID-19²⁷.

The pandemic had a huge impact on people's everyday life, work, economy and business activities, but also importantly, from the point of view of this article, on family life and the scale of the phenomenon of domestic violence. The phenomenon of domestic violence during the coronavirus pandemic was primarily influenced by the restrictions and limitations introduced in countries to stop the spread of the virus, including, in particular, quarantine and isolation related to the prohibition of movement. In order to illustrate the nature and types of restrictions, it is worth taking a look at the solutions applied in Poland, which should be assessed as similar to those in countries all around the world. In Poland, the state of epidemic threat began to apply on 13th March 2020, and on 20th

²⁵ *COVID-19 and violence against women What the health sector/system can do*, WHO online <https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/emergencies/COVID-19-VAW-full-text.pdf> (access: 12.08.2020).

²⁶ WHO Timeline, online <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/29-06-2020-covidtimeline> (access: 06.08.2020).

²⁷ WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Washboard, online <https://covid19.who.int/> (access: 12.08.2020).

March 2020²⁸, the state of epidemic was introduced in Poland²⁹. For the purposes of this article, it does not matter which of the following restrictions have been lifted or changed in their scope. Prophylaxis (prevention) to stop the spread of the coronavirus in Poland consisted, among others:

- ▶ the closure of school and educational institutions on 11th March 2020 (childcare was organized until 13th March 2020, and the complete closure of the facilities took place on 15th March 2020)³⁰,
- ▶ the closure of Polish borders to rail traffic, and the suspension of air traffic from 15th March 2020 and the related to this, the reintroduction of border control³¹.

²⁸ Rozporządzenie Ministra Zdrowia z dnia 13 marca 2020 r. w sprawie ogłoszenia na obszarze Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej stanu zagrożenia epidemicznego (Dz.U. 2020 poz. 433) – Regulation of the Minister of Health of 13th March 2020 on the introduction of the state of epidemic threat in the territory of the Republic of Poland (Journal of Laws of 2020, item 433),

²⁹ Rozporządzenie Ministra Zdrowia z dnia 20 marca 2020 r. w sprawie ogłoszenia na obszarze Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej stanu epidemii (Dz.U. 2020 poz. 491) – Regulation of the Minister of Health of 20th March 2020 on the declaration of the state of epidemic in the territory of the Republic of Poland (Journal of Laws 2020, item 491).

³⁰ Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 11 marca 2020 w sprawie czasowego ograniczenia funkcjonowania jednostek systemu oświaty w związku z zapobieganiem, przeciwdziałaniem i zwalczaniem COVID-19 (Dz.U. 2020 poz. 410) – Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 11th March 2020 on the temporary limitation of the functioning of education system units in connection with the prevention, counteraction and combating of COVID-19 (Journal of Laws 2020, item 410).

³¹ Rozporządzenie Ministra Zdrowia z dnia 13 marca 2020 r. w sprawie ogłoszenia na obszarze Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej stanu zagrożenia epidemicznego (Dz.U. 2020 poz. 433) – Regulation of the Minister of Health of 13th March 2020 on the introduction of the state of epidemic threat in the territory of the Republic of Poland (Journal of Laws of 2020, item 433); Rozporządzenie Ministra Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji z dnia 13 marca 2020 r. w sprawie przywrócenia tymczasowo kontroli granicznej osób przekraczających granicę państwową stanowiącą granicę wewnętrzną (Dz.U. 2020 poz. 434), Regulation of the Minister of Interior and Administration of 13th March 2020 on the temporary reintroduction of border control of people crossing the state border constituting an internal border (Journal of Laws of 2020, item 434).

- ▶ introducing of a mandatory 14-day quarantine of all people entering Poland by land. People suspected of coronavirus, showing symptoms or tested positive for the virus, who did not require hospitalization, were subjected to a similar quarantine³².
- ▶ a prohibition for moving apart of work, purchasing the necessary goods and services, satisfying the necessary needs, volunteering to fight COVID-19, and exercising religious worship³³.
- ▶ a ban on certain activities (restaurants, beauty salons, hairdressing salons, event organization, activities related to sports and recreation and other related to the inability or the difficulty in maintaining the appropriate distance between people), including the operation of large-area shopping centers³⁴.

The isolation had the greatest impact on domestic violence. Due to the prohibition of movement, as well as the restriction of certain types of activity, many people stayed at home for many weeks, accompanied by their relatives, family and partners. For many families, this situation had a salutary effect on improving mutual relations. People who struggled with the fast pace of life, filled with work and responsibilities, could finally spend time with their family and loved ones. However, as it soon turned out, the isolation had its

³² Regulation of the Minister of Health of 13th March 2020 on the introduction of the state of epidemic threat in the territory of the Republic of Poland (Journal of Laws of 2020, item 433) and then – Rozporządzenie Ministra Zdrowia z dnia 20 marca 2020 r. w sprawie ogłoszenia na obszarze Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej stanu epidemii (Dz.U. 2020 poz. 491) – Regulation of the Minister of Health of 20th March 2020 on the declaration of the state of epidemic in the territory of the Republic of Poland (Journal of Laws 2020, item 491).

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ Ibidem.

second – dark face, which revealed the weakness of the system of preventing domestic violence. The isolation serving the protection of health and life has contributed to increased aggression towards family members and other people living together.

The COVID-19 pandemic has generated factors which have become a self-fuelling machine of domestic violence. Many people, as a result of limiting their activities, began to struggle with big financial problems. In the United States, the unemployment rate rose from 3.8% in February 2020 to 13% in May of the same year³⁵. The pandemic broke out suddenly and it did not give people the opportunity to prepare financially for being unable to earn money. In addition, the tension was intensified by the presence of all household members in the house, without the possibility of going out, often in a small area. It became most noticeable for people living in the estates, where the area of apartments is relatively small and the restrictions related to the pandemic forbade even walking in the forest or park or playing in the playground. In addition, parents, often apart from remote work, were burdened with the necessity to support their children in learning process during on-line classes, which resulted in an increased level of stress, especially in families with many children. All these factors, additionally fuelled by fear for the health of oneself and loved ones, longing for friends, acquaintances and extended family who could not be visited, caused an increase in conflicts, tensions and family quarrels. Unfortunately, those situations often escalated to domestic violence, which in the media was called “quarantine with the perpetrator”³⁶.

³⁵ U.S Key Fiscal and Economic Indicators as the Nation Responds and Recovers, online <https://www.pgpf.org/understanding-the-coronavirus-crisis> (access: 06.08.2020).

³⁶ <https://lodz.wyborcza.pl/lodz/7,35136,25860467,przemoc-domowa-w-czasie-epidemii-koronawirusa-nasila-sie-dramatyczny.html> (access: 12.08.2020).

5. Statistics on domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic

One of the hallmarks of domestic violence is the so-called the dark number of crimes related to this type of violence. The official statistics, such as those conducted under the Blue Card procedure in Poland, do not illustrate the entire scale of the phenomenon of domestic violence³⁷. Many cases are not reported at all, particularly in the case of sexual violence, due to the fact that the perpetrator is a relative and there is still a stereotype in society that domestic violence is an internal problem of the family which should be resolved by family members. Paradoxically, the victims of domestic violence are afraid of the legal consequences for perpetrators, who are often their spouses or partners, for example due to financial dependence or joint financial obligations. Additionally, the causes of difficulties in estimating the scale of domestic violence include: lack of third parties (lack of witnesses), victims' fears about the future of the relationship, the fate of children, the fear of social stigma, and shame³⁸. It is estimated that only 40% of women who experience domestic violence turn to any institution for help, and only 10% decide to report the case to the Police³⁹.

The World Health Organization estimates that worldwide 35% of women have experienced acts of violence at the hands of their

³⁷ See.: J. Piotrowska, *Przemoc wobec kobiet* [in:] *Białe plamy na mapie równości płci*, ed. A. Dzierżgonowska, J. Piotrowska pp. 118-119 (118-140) online http://projektgender.home.amu.edu.pl/teksty/media_polityka_raport_Kongres_Kobiet.pdf#page=112 (access: 12.08.2020)

³⁸ See.: M. Lewoc, *Diagnoza skali zjawiska przemocy w rodzinie w Polsce* [in:] „Probacja” 2014 no 3, p. 36.

³⁹ P. Mlambo-Ngcuka, *Violence against women and girls: the shadow pandemic*, online <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic> (access: 12.08.2020).

partner or spouse in their lives. It is estimated that every day at least 137 women lose their lives from the hands of their partners⁴⁰. During the coronavirus pandemic, a significant increase in reports of acts of domestic violence was noticed, and in addition, many women and girls were deprived of the possibility of reporting such acts due to isolation (lack of access to a telephone, inability to visit a police station or an organization providing assistance to victims of domestic violence, no contact with colleagues, teachers, priests). In Italy, there were about 55% fewer reports via help-lines and other channels for reporting acts of domestic violence in the first two weeks of March 2020, and the reason for this was that victims of domestic violence indicated that it was difficult to report when they were isolated with the perpetrator at home⁴¹. There is also a problem, till now unknown or unnoticed as a type of domestic violence, in the form of impeding by the abusers the ability to perform the domestic duties. As a result of lockdown, many people were sent home and started working remotely. Such work often requires participation in meetings, making phone calls, also using all kinds of online platforms. The perpetrators of domestic violence make it difficult for the victim to perform their duties by their behaviour, put them in an uncomfortable situation, which affects their level of stress and anxiety: both about escalating violence to another level – from psychological to physical violence, and fear of losing a job. The workplace and contact with co-workers and managers is also a place where, under normal working conditions, other people may

⁴⁰ See.: M.Bojaruniec, *Intimate partner violence and UN activity on woman rights protection* [in:] *Współczesne problemy praw człowieka. Wybrane aspekty/ Contemporary problems of human rights. Selected aspects*, Józefów 2019 (497-514).

⁴¹ *COVID-19 and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls*, UN Woman online (<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/issue-brief-covid-19-and-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-en.pdf>) (access: 12.08.2020).

notice that a given person is a victim of domestic violence. This applies to both visible marks on the body, such as bruises, as well as visible absent-mindedness, problems with controlling emotions, crying or fear of being touched by another person⁴².

In Hubei province, where the global COVID-19 pandemic began, in February 2020, the number of reports of domestic violence tripled compared to the same period last year⁴³. In France, the number of such reports after increased the lockdown announcement by 30%, in Argentina by 25%, in Cyprus by 30% and in Singapore by 33%. There has also been an increase in notifications and an increase of need for *emergency shelters* in Canada, Germany, Spain, Great Britain and the United States⁴⁴. In Poland, the Women's Rights Center, dealing with assistance to victims of domestic violence, recorded an increase in reports to the help-line by approximately 50%⁴⁵.

6. Examples of actions to reduce domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic

The governments of many countries have reacted to worrying data about the domestic violence escalating during the epidemic period

⁴² *The covid-19 shadow pandemic domestic violence in the world of work A Call to action for the private sector*, online <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/brief-covid-19-domestic-violence-in-the-world-of-work-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5715> (access: 12.08.2020).

⁴³ *COVID-19 and violence against*, op.cit.

⁴⁴ *COVID-19 and Ending Violence..* op. cit.

⁴⁵ A.Wądołowska, *Locked down with a violent partner: domestic violence soars in Poland during coronavirus pandemic*, online <https://notesfrompoland.com/2020/04/13/locked-down-with-a-violent-partner-domestic-violence-soars-in-poland-during-coronavirus-pandemic/> (access: 12.08.2020).

of the coronavirus outbreak. In this part of the article, the author presents several examples such activities.

Poland has taken some measures to reduce the phenomenon of domestic violence during the pandemic, although these should be classified as recommendations rather than real actions. In consultation with the Feminoteka Foundation, the Center for Women's Rights and the Blue Line (Institute of Health Psychology), the Ombudsman has developed a "Personal Emergency Plan for people experiencing domestic violence in the coronavirus epidemic"⁴⁶. This document contains a number of practical tips for people experiencing violence, which, prepared in advance, can facilitate escape from the perpetrator of violence or minimize its effects. The plan includes, among others, such advises as:

- ▶ where is it best place to protect ourselves from the perpetrator of domestic violence, what places can be considered the safest (without a hard floor, etc.)
- ▶ the places where one can seek help and the people who can be asked for help in case of danger,
- ▶ what to look for in the aggressor's behaving,
- ▶ a list of things which should be packed by a victim of violence in case they need to run away from home,
- ▶ the information regarding the choice of place and regarding the behaviour after leaving home,
- ▶ ways of calling for help in a public place or in the stairwell, the ways of avoiding blows as well as some other practical advice – for example: how to communicate about help so as not to leave a trace on the phone⁴⁷.

⁴⁶ https://www.rpo.gov.pl/sites/default/files/Osobisty_plan_awayjny_poradnik_0.pdf (access: 12.08.2020).

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

On 30th April 2020, the Sejm of the Republic of Poland adopted the so-called Anti-Violence Act⁴⁸, which has become a real tool to protect victims of domestic violence. After changing the provisions of the Code of Civil Procedure and the Act on Counteracting Domestic Violence, which will take place in November 2020, the perpetrator of domestic violence may be obliged, at the request of the Police Officer⁴⁹, to immediately leave the jointly occupied apartment and its immediate surroundings or prohibit approaching the apartment and its immediate environment for a period of 14 days. After leaving the shared apartment, the victim has two weeks to complete the necessary formalities and submit a formal application to the court for security in cases for obliging the perpetrator of domestic violence to leave the shared apartment and its immediate surroundings or forbidding approaching the apartment and its immediate surroundings. It should be emphasized that the adoption of the aforementioned act was not directly conditioned by the prevailing pandemic and restrictions related to staying at home, but, as the Ombudsman points out, this change is “extremely important in times of prolonged stay and work at home forced by the pandemic”⁵⁰.

An important aspect which makes it difficult to obtain help for victims of domestic violence during the coronavirus pandemic is the restriction in the operation of some help places, such as shelters or health care facilities, in connection with the sanitary regime. Access to medical services during a pandemic is difficult, which may affect

⁴⁸ Act of 30th April 2020 amending the Act – Code of Civil Procedure and certain other acts,

⁴⁹ Similar provisions apply to the powers of the Military Gendarmerie in relation to a soldier on active military service.

⁵⁰ *Przemoc domowa. Ustawa o natychmiastowym opuszczeniu mieszkania przez sprawcę przyjęta. Realizacja postulatów RPO*, online <https://www.rpo.gov.pl/pl/content/przemoc-domowa-ustawa-o-natychmiastowym-opuszczeniu-mieszkania-przez-sprawce> (access: 12.08.2020).

forensics. Shelters, centers or emergency services for victims of domestic violence, like any other public service, may operate, but often operate in a limited way, such as tele-counseling or online advices. Therefore, there is a need to update contact details so that victims of violence do not collide, in a situation where they really need help, with the closure of the facility.

Canada has allocated \$ 50 million under the COVID-19 Economic Response Plan, primarily to the operation of women's shelters and the organizations which provide assistance to victims of sexual violence and to children experiencing violence. Canada has made shelters for such victims as places of basic support for citizens and has recognized the operations of 432 shelters for victims of domestic violence, 93 relief organizations and 167 shelters for women experiencing sexual violence as a priority in the face of the coronavirus pandemic⁵¹. Similar financial support was provided to organizations supporting victims of domestic violence by France, Australia and the United Kingdom⁵².

The coronavirus pandemic also revealed the real possibilities of helping victims of domestic violence using the latest technologies. Since December 2019, the Yours Umbrella application has been operating in Poland, created as part of the project "Effective police – protection of victims and witnesses of violence" and as a part of the European Union program "Rights, Equality and Citizenship Program (REC)". The application officially presents weather information to ensure discretion in its use. However, it makes it possible to obtain information about organizations offering support to victims of domestic violence and also to send information about violent incidents on an

⁵¹ Government of Canada, Status of Woman in Canada, *Supporting women and children fleeing violence during COVID-19*, <https://cfc-swc.gc.ca/fun-fin/shelters-refuges-en.html> (access: 12.08.2020)

⁵² *COVID-19 and Ending...*, op. cit.

ongoing basis, and to quickly connect to an emergency telephone⁵³. A similar application works, for example, in Italy⁵⁴. Additionally, online stores or drugstores are launched, which, using the excuse of purchasing cosmetics, for example, allow information to be provided to organizations helping victims of domestic violence or to the Police about the emergency⁵⁵. Such tools are extremely important from the point of view of controlling every aspect of the life of a victim of domestic violence, which is often manifested by the perpetrator⁵⁶. In France, but also in other countries, the use of the password *Maska19*⁵⁷ has become a popular tool for communicating information about the threat of domestic violence to an outsider. The apparent gesture has become an international slogan which draws the attention of complete strangers to the need to react and inform the relevant services. The tools used in cyberspace, including, for example, through social profiles should, however, be characterized by extreme care for the protection of personal data, because domestic violence is a particularly private and intimate topic, and the spread of information related to it in connection to a particular person is not only a violation of human rights, but also a real threat to this person⁵⁸.

⁵³ Twój Parasol – aplikacja mobilna ((Your Umbrella – Mobile application for people experiencing domestic violence), online <https://twojparasol.com/> (access: 12.08.2020).

⁵⁴ *Youpol: sull'app della Polizia si possono segnalare anche le violenze domestiche*, online <https://www.poliziadistato.it/articolo/135e74a0112e9af858848025> (access: 12.08.2020).

⁵⁵ *Fikcyjny sklep internetowy pomoże ofiarom przemocy domowej. „Możecie na nas liczyć”*, online <https://polskatimes.pl/fikcyjny-sklep-internetowy-pomoze-ofiarom-przemocy-domowej-mozecie-na-nas-liczyc/ar/c6-14918770> (access: 12.08.2020).

⁵⁶ *Wybrane oblicza przemocy...*, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

⁵⁷ Women are using code words at pharmacies to escape domestic violence during lockdown, online <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/02/europe/domestic-violence-coronavirus-lockdown-intl/index.html> (access: 12.08.2020)

⁵⁸ See.: I.Florek, S. Erkan Eroglu, *The need for protection of human rights in cyberspace* [in:] „Journal od Modern Science”, Józefów 2020, pp. 27-34.

7. Summary

The domestic violence is an extremely complex phenomenon, both in terms of the catalogue of people it concerns and its forms or side effects. For the very occurrence of domestic violence, in principle, no additional factors are needed, apart from the psychological conditions of the perpetrator and his internal motivation. Undoubtedly, however, the emergence of additional impulses, in the form of a sense of danger, boredom, increased duties, stress or limitation in movement, causes the escalation of this type of violence⁵⁹. Locking people in the house to stop the spread of the virus has led in many situations to the confinement of victims of domestic violence with torturers within the four walls of the house. Moreover, these victims were deprived of the possibility to ask for help. This applies to the relatives, the extended family, the organizations providing help, as well as to the situations in which, in normal life, someone could notice or suspect the occurrence of domestic violence in a particular person's home. This is reflected in the observed decline in reports of domestic violence both by women and children. In the case of children, the main places where they could count on help or where someone could see traces of domestic violence was a school or other educational institutions. In the United States, 19% of reports of suspected domestic violence against children come from education professionals⁶⁰. Distance learning and spending many days only in the company of often frustrated parents without being able to move around lead to even more abuse of children.

⁵⁹ See.: C.Brandbury-Jones, L.Isham, *The pandemic paradox: The consequences of COVID-19 on domestic violence* [in:] „Journal of Clinical Nursing”, online <https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.15296> (access: 12.08.2020), s. 2047.

⁶⁰ A.M.Campbell, *An increasing risk of family violence during the Covid-19 pandemic: Strengthening community collaborations to save lives*, online <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fsisr.2020.100089> (access: 12.08.2020).

In the face of crises such as the global coronavirus pandemic, it is extremely important that state authorities, uniformed service officers and non-governmental institutions pay special attention to the phenomenon of domestic violence. It is a phenomenon which is difficult to detect and diagnose even in normal living conditions. In the face of isolation of people, but also the simultaneous involvement of all of the above-mentioned entities to combat the spreading pandemic, which in its consequences affected practically every element of the functioning of the state, it is necessary to allocate appropriate financial resources to support aid for victims of violence and to support social campaigns. The crisis of the COVID-19 epidemic indicates an urgent need to spread the information about the phenomenon of domestic violence. It is extremely important for victims of this violence to be informed about how to protect themselves from the abuser and where to seek for help. However, it should be borne in mind that the society should be sensitive to receiving signals from its relatives, neighbours, co-workers, but also from completely strangers, accidentally encountered about possible domestic violence. The victims of domestic violence are very often afraid of the consequences of disclosing this violence, due to their financial dependence on the perpetrator, lack of funds or due to the lack of people to whom they could turn for help. There is an urgent need, especially in the face of crises, to increase public awareness in this regard. A.M. Campbell's research on reports of animal abuse and domestic violence from various agencies in Indiana (USA) shows that 80% of reports of animal abuse are made by neighbours or bystanders, while only 8% of all reports about domestic violence come from such people⁶¹. These results show that there is still

⁶¹ Ibidem.

a belief in societies that domestic violence is a family, private matter and as such should be solved by spouses⁶².

The role of both the state and its inhabitants should be to combat domestic violence, with particular emphasis on crisis situations. The escalation of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic has been noticed in many countries and additional measures have been taken in many of them to reduce the scale of this phenomenon. It is therefore important to continue this policy even after all pandemic-related restrictions would have been withdrawn and lifted. Additionally, it should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing at the time of submitting this article. It is impossible to assess its development and the nature of the actions which the authorities in countries around the world may have to undertake. Undoubtedly, however, the postulate of the Women's Rights Center from Poland of April 2020 to the Prime Minister of the Polish government for the creation of an "anti-violence shield" for victims of violence seems right⁶³. If governments create documents aimed at reducing the negative impact of a pandemic on the country's economy, health care or work, undoubtedly the same attention should be paid to the threats to life and health related to the escalation of domestic violence in the face of this global health crisis.

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⁶² M. Lelek-Kratiuk, *Przemoc domowa wobec kobiet – weryfikacja mitów i ustalenie prawdy* [in:] „Państwo i Społeczeństwo”, no 2/2014, pp. 90 (79-99)

⁶³ *Pandemia z oprawcą. Centrum Praw Kobiet apeluje do premiera o „tarczę antykryzysową” dla ofiar przemocy*, online <https://krakow.wyborcza.pl/krakow/7,44425,25886292,pandemia-z-oprawca-centrum-praw-kobiet-apeluje-do-premiera.html> (access: 11.08.2020).

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