

Domestic Violence Against Wives and Distribution of Power: Case of Russia

In 2002-2003, the authors carried out a questionnaire survey of domestic gender-based violence in seven regions of Russia¹(1). It was the first-ever all-Russia survey totally focused on the issue of matrimonial violence against women in modern Russian families² and its major objective was to identify the scale of various types of matrimonial violence (psychological, economic, physical, sexual). The urgent nature of this survey is due to the fact that until now Russia's law enforcement bodies, institutions of social security and health service have not been engaged in systematic collection of statistical data on domestic violence, making it impossible to give even the most general assessment of the scale of this phenomenon. Domestic violence against women is not a subject for public discussion in Russia's society; this issue remains *invisible*; there is no special law dealing with prevention of domestic violence; there are a handful of crisis centers for women while shelters are practically non-existent.

1. Basic results: scale of violence

To present data on the scale of various types of violence³ we used several indicators: concrete manifestations of violence, summarized results (combining various manifestations of violence) and the so-called rough violence. The last indicator characterizes families, in which this or that type of violence is of systematic and rough nature.

Almost 80 percent of interviewed women have experienced at least one kind of **psychological violence** from their husbands: they were either humiliated, among other things by obscene swearing, or their personality was criticized in a disparaging way, or prohibition and/or threats were applied to them. More than 50 percent of women:

- believe that their husbands, at least from time to time, humiliate or try to humiliate, insult, and «put them in place» (57 percent);
- have been subject to insults in an obscene way (51 percent);
- have experienced their husbands disparagingly criticizing them as a personality (a bad wife, a bad disposition, a bad housewife, silly, etc.) (53 percent).

51 percent of women have encountered with prohibitions imposed on them and threats brought against them by their husbands. The most widespread prohibition encountered by every fifth married woman (21 percent) is the restriction of her movement (*to go someplace, to go out of doors*). The most widespread threats are those of a physical reprisal (22 percent) and that of the husband finding another woman or deserting his wife (15 percent).

Group of rough psychological violence: 13 percent women have been faced simultaneous with 1) humiliating criticism, 2) prohibitions and 3) threats at the same time.

¹ Karelia, Moscow City and Province, Stavropol Territory, Lipetsk Province, Bashkortostan, Omsk Province, and Buryatia. The purposive quota sample consisted of more than 2,200 married men and women in complete families residing in over 50 population points. The questionnaire included the following sections: the socio-demographic block, health, use of alcohol, reproductive practices, fulfillment of household chores, family budget, comparison of resources, feelings towards one's spouse, satisfaction with marriage, intercourse and conflicts between spouses, losses at divorce, conceptions about the roles of a woman/wife and a man/husband, descriptions of characteristic features of a parental family, psychological, economic, sexual pressure/violence on the husband's part, assault and battery of one's wife (description of the first and last case, consequences, reaction of the people around, consulting doctors, approaching the militia, crisis centers, etc.), conceptions about admissibility of using physical force against wives, assessment of the state's role in preventing domestic violence, etc.

² Earlier, Russian sociologists studied the diffusion of domestic violence and violence against women within the framework of large-scale surveys focused on the lifestyle and value-oriented tendencies among women (2); on the state of marriage-family relations (3); on problems of reproductive health of women (4) and on the population's awareness of the problem of violence (5).

³ The scales of violence were determined on the basis of the women's answers (N=1076).

The majority of women encounter **economic violence**, which becomes evident in the following practices:

- wives are obliged to regularly (frequently or from time to time) ask their husbands for money (30 percent); every tenth woman has to do so constantly;
- wives had to account to their husbands for most or all of their expenditures (14 percent);
- in every fifth family (21 percent) the husband always has money he can spend on himself as he wishes while the wife does not (or not always) have such money for herself;
- every fourth woman (26 percent) has encountered in her life at least one of the following forms of economic pressure (threats/prohibitions/insults) exercised by her husband:
 - saying that the wife's work is what nobody needs, that she is of no earthly use at work, and that she goes to work for tea parties only, etc. – 14 percent;
 - refusing to give money or threatening that he would not give it because of the wife's «bad» behavior – 11 percent;
 - prohibiting the wife from studying, working and seeking a career – 10 percent;
 - turning the wife out of the house – 10 percent;
 - threatening that he would turn her out of the house, leaving her «without a penny», and that he would not pay maintenance (alimony) – 10 percent.

Women subject to at least one of the above forms of violence make up 54 percent of the total number of the interviewed.

Group of rough economic violence (12 percent of women): husbands always have money they can spend on themselves the way he thinks appropriate while their wives have no such money at all or wives are obliged to regularly (frequently or from time to time) ask their husbands for money and wives must report back to their husbands about all or most of the money spent.

The probability for the woman to become subject to economic violence is largely determined by the difference between the husband and wife's level of income rather than by the material position of the family as a whole. Women from average income groups and women earning slightly more than their husbands or as much as they do are liable to the lowest degree of economic violence.

There is some discrepancy in the public opinion about the problem of husbands using physical force against their wives but on the whole the permissibility level of such violence is pretty high. The share of those answering various questions that are ready to acquit the husband who has hit his wife or has beaten her up varies from 39 to 58 percent (men answerers) and from 28 to 38 percent (women answerers).

The scope of spread of **physical violence** in families has been determined making use of several indicators:

- the share of women threatened by their current husbands with physical reprisals or treated roughly (at least one case of violence registered) is 56 percent;
- half the women (50 percent) have in fact been subject to their current husbands' physical violence at least once (the husband hit or pushed, shook, caused acute pain without beating but resorting to other methods, for example, twisting her arms) – group of general violence;
- husbands have hit at least once 41 percent of women, 26 percent of them have been given a beating repeatedly, including 3 percent of women subject to rough treatment once a month and more often.

The women putting it very clearly that their husbands have never even tried to hit constitute 45 percent – less than one half. In essence, a large section of women find themselves within

the range of a probability of their husbands using force on them: 60 percent of them have assumed that their husbands can hit them.

About half the women from the group of general violence (26 percent of the total number of the interviewed) have been subject to assault at the time of their pregnancy, breastfeeding, having a child or experiencing physical or moral sufferings, being in a state of helplessness. Ten percent of women – victims of physical aggression (3 percent of the total number of the interviewed) have sustained injuries requiring medical treatment.

Group of rough physical violence 11 percent of women subject to rough treatment once a month and more often or/and have sustained injuries requiring medical treatment.

By hitting or beating their wives up the husbands make their family relationship more suitable for themselves. The majority of them stick to the idea that battering their wives has not altered their relations with them or even has improved them while women on the whole think that family relations have thus deteriorated: 43 percent of women hit by their husbands have informed that after the first/the only incident of that sort they have started to be afraid of them at least from time to time. The number of women appealing for help after their husbands have given them a beating for the first time is negligible. About half the total number of interviewed – 44 percent of women and 52 percent of men – think that the battered wife should not call for help at all; instead she should wonder what she is guilty of.

Five percent of women falling victim to their husbands' assaults have called for medical help (3 percent of the total female data file). 19 percent of women – victims of assaults have lodged complaints against their husbands with the militia (10 percent of the total number of the interviewed women). Half the women believed to be in need of medical or law enforcement help have failed to call for it. Less than one percent of women suffering from physical violence have approached a crisis center.

Both men and women look at sexual needs of husbands as something of a priority compared to women's requirements. The majority of the interviewed respondents do not think it absolutely essential for the matrimonial sex to take into account the wife's sexual wishes and requirements. The majority of men (60 percent) and half the women (50 percent) believe that rape in the state of marriage is impossible in principle.

All in all 23 percent of women have become victims of at least one type of their husbands' **sexual violence** or pressure:

- husbands of seven percent of women always have sex whenever they want it, absolutely irrespective of their wives' wishes and their degree of preparedness for sex;
- 14 percent of women have been forced at least once to have sex with their husbands against their wish because otherwise they would give rise to a scandal, stop talking, refuse to give money, etc. (forced sex);
- 6 percent of women have fallen victim to a matrimonial rape (the husband would make his wife to have sex using force or threats when she did not want it and told him so);
- about 6 percent of all the interviewed women have emphasized that they were forced to have sex with their husbands after being battered by them (this accounts for 12 percent of women beaten by their husbands at least once).

The group of rough sexual violence (rape and/or sex after battering) constitutes 10 percent of all the women interviewed.

Lessening of sexual drive for husbands is typical among women – victims of sexual violence. Sexual violence is connected with the wives' fear of their husbands. Sexual violence is

closely connected with the physical one, it being known that the tougher the form of sexual violence is the stronger this connection is likely to be.

2. Violence against wife and power distribution in family: female and male views on the situation

While analyzing the results of the survey we used the groups of rough violence, which we had formed, with all the possible tendencies existing in them in the most explicit form. Since we proceeded from the assumption of violence as an instrument of authority and considered matrimonial violence as a consequence and manifestation of male predominance in society and family, it was important for us to trace the connection between violence and authority on the basis of our survey's data.

For the sake of analysis we used five groups in each of the male and female arrays: a group of respondents absolutely "free" of violence, in whose families we had discovered not a single possible manifestation of any type of violence (such families constitute 11 percent in the female array and 7 percent in the male one), and four groups of respondents, in whose families the husband practices rough psychological, economic, physical or sexual violence (see Table 1).

Table 1. The absolute sizes of groups

Is there violence against wife in the respondent's family?	Absolute numbers	
	Men N=1058	Women N=1076
No violence	72	122
Rough psychological violence prevails	83	143
Rough economic violence prevails	156	130
Rough sexual violence prevails	131	122
Rough physical violence prevails	62	103

We have dealt with the interface between violence and authority at two levels: the level of respondents' general conceptions about how gender relations should be built in society and family, and the level of real distribution of authority within the families of our respondents.

Violence against the wife is more likely to occur in the families where the husband adheres to patriarchal conceptions about male and female roles in the family and society⁴. In particular, the number of those believing that the husband should be the head of the family is by far greater among men included in the groups associated with violence than among men in the violence-free group (see Table 2).

Table 2. The interface between consent with the assertion: "*Husband is head of the family and he should have the last word in important decision making*" and violence against the wife (%)

Agree that husband is the family head	No violence	Types of rough violence			
		Psychological	Economic	Physical	Sexual
Men (N=1058)	50	74	77	65	69
Women (N=1076)	26	29	39	25	26

To find out how the real power is distributed in Russian families, we used several indicators. We questioned our respondents about how often they had to succumb to their husbands'

⁴ We judged the respondents' answers in more than 30 positions.

demands and who was more often to give in and succumb in their families. We also asked them about who was the decision maker when time came to decide what pregnancy should end with – birth giving or abortion. Domestic work distribution; the method of family budget building and the husbands' and wives' access to personal and family resources (*To spend free time the way one thinks appropriate; To associate with whoever one is willing; To have matrimonial sex of one's own accord; To use family money; To devote as much time and effort to one's work or studies as one thinks appropriate*) are closely connected with power and violence just as well.

Violence-free families are egalitarian demonstrating the absence of the husband's or wife's well-pronounced leadership. In such families the household work is more often (than in other groups) done by husband and wife together or in turn, while the family budget is more often distributed in the most democratic way (*All the earnings are summed up and each of them spends them as they find it appropriate*) And both spouses use equal opportunities with regard to the access to resources. Besides, the male and female points of view in this group on the family situation are often happening to be very close to each other. The existence of well-pronounced authoritative relations and considerable disharmony between male and female assessments of a situation in the family setting are typical for all the groups associated with violence.

From the position of women, in families exposed to violence the power is held by men. Table 3 clearly indicates how the number of women who have to succumb to their husbands' demands increases in the violence groups as compared to violence-free families. The misbalance of authority in the violence-associated families spreads across practically all the spheres of family life For example, women belonging to all the violence groups were forced to have abortions or give birth against their will far more often. Also, in violence groups, the number of women doing all the domestic work themselves is increasing and the number of families where such work has been shared by husband and wife equally is decreasing. At the same time, the share of women discontented with the way domestic work is distributed in their families is greater in the violence groups - women have to resign themselves to such distribution of responsibilities, which does not suit them in the least. In the violence-associated groups, between 16 and 33 percent of families are those where the husband has greater opportunities to use family money than the wife (2 percent in the violence-free group) and material deprivations cease to be equally distributed between husbands and wives.

Table 3. Peculiar features of mutual relations between wives and husbands according to the data of the female array (%)

	No violence N=122	Types of rough violence			
		Psychological N=143	Economic N=130	Physical N=122	Sexual N=103
Wife often succumbs to husband	1	26	19	21	26
Wife never succumbs to husband	66	7	16	15	10
Wife yields up to husband more often than he does to her	4	43	37	33	47
Husband yields up to wife more often than she does to him	9	10	9	14	9
Wife and husband give way to each other equally often	46	15	23	18	21
Abortions demanded by husband	11	35	36	39	39
Births demanded by husband	4	16	8	14	17
Everything or almost everything is done by wife	8	41	35	34	37

The greater part of work is done by husband and wife together or in turn	58	11	15	18	17
Wife thinks that distribution of household chores is absolutely unfair	1	31	25	28	34
Women said that they had no money to satisfy their personal needs in the recent year	22	27	60	30	27
Women think that husband had no money to satisfy his personal needs in the recent year	25	15	8	16	17

Thus, violence does not boil down to directly abusive acts – it is a whole system of relations spreading across all the spheres of family life: from making reproductive decisions to distribution of household chores. To experience violence for a woman means (apart from the sufferings she goes through because of acts of violence themselves): giving up realization of her wishes following her husband’s demand, including even her desire to give birth to a baby or, on the contrary, to avoid unwanted pregnancy; to take more household work on than she would wish to have and to give her consent to infringement of her material interests.

From the male point of view (see Table 4), the situation looks a bit different. Those inclined to violence in the family are either men positive that the power belongs to them or males believing that their wives hold greater power, though the latter are fewer in number. Husbands – aggressors talk more often about their wives making reproductive decisions without taking into account their opinions with men included in the group of sexual violence showing that their feelings were hurt most. Men from violence-associated groups acknowledge to a considerable degree that they have greater opportunities to use family money than their wives (the share of such families among violence-associated families varies from 33 to 21 percent against 7 percent in the violence-free group) but redistribution of money in favor of men, from their point of view, takes place only in the families with psychological and economic violence. In groups of physical and sexual violence, men believe that deprivations are equally distributed between them and their wives.

Table 4. Peculiar features of mutual relations between wives and husbands according to the data of the male array (%)

	No violence N=72	Types of rough violence			
		Psychological N=83	Economic N=156	Physical N=131	Sexual N=62
Husband often submits himself to wife	1	15	3	8	16
Husband never submits himself to wife	40	13	19	14	23
Wife gives way to husband more often than he does	8	21	19	22	28
Husband gives way to wife more often than she does	2	15	11	11	12
Husband and wife give way to each other equally often	54	29	46	38	31
Abortions against the will of husband	6	27	16	26	31
Berths against the will of husband	7	5	5	7	7

Everything or almost everything is done by wife	8	28	21	15	20
The greater part of work is done by husband and wife together or in turn	54	22	33	35	33
Men said that they had no money to satisfy their personal needs in the recent year	24	10	11	17	11
Men believe that wife had no money to satisfy her personal needs in the recent year	18	18	34	19	11

If to compare the female and male assessments of the situation in the family the result would be that power distribution in favor of men in families with violence is evident for women and not noticeable for men (see Table 5). There are 23 percent more women choosing this position in the group of psychological violence than men; their number is 19 percent more in groups of economic and sexual violence. The least disharmonized are the answers of men and women in the group of physical violence. It boils down to the fact that often men in the groups of psychological, economic and sexual violence simply do not notice that their wives have to act contrary to their own will. Apparently, it has to do with the fact that women perceive and endure psychological, economic and sexual violence exactly as violence, which they have to succumb to while for men the nature of their own actions and, most importantly, the result of these actions in the form of concessions unwillingly given by their wives, often happen to be hidden. In case of physical violence the way of things is more transparent for both sides: if a husband is beating his wife and as a result she succumbs to his demands, then it is evident not only to her but also to him that his wife was forced to give way. But in case the wife acts against her wish in order to avoid being beaten the husband can be already unaware of the fact that she has succumbed like it often remains unknown by men practicing other types of violence apart from battering.

Table 5. Distribution of female and male answers to the question of which one has to succumb to more often in their family (%)

	No violence	Types of rough violence			
		Psychological	Economic	Physical	Sexual
Men	8	43	37	33	47
Women	4	21	18	22	28
The difference in the share of husbands and wives "giving in more often"	-4	22	19	11	19

The comparison of data of two arrays – the male and female ones – by other indicators produces a similar picture. Though men-perpetrators speak more often about the insufficiency of their influence on their wives than men not practicing violence, the overall balance of authority is nonetheless not in favor of women. For instance, the number of those who were forced to succumb to the husband's demands while making their decision about birth giving and pregnancy is greater among women-victims of violence than the number of those men whose wives made reproductive decisions against their will among men-perpetrators. In violence-free families men also make decisions about an abortion more often. However, certain priority in decision-making about childbirth is nevertheless left for women. Also, men in violence-associated families often simply "fail to notice" that the wife does all the household work.

Though, it is especially curious to compare the answers of men and women who said that during the last 12 months they had no money to satisfy their personal requirements. If in violence-free families the share of men and women without money practically coincides, in all violence-associated groups men suffer less from material deprivations than women (see Table 6).

Table 6. Distribution of material deprivations between wives and men (said that “*Last year they had no money to satisfy their personal needs*”) (%)

	No violence	Types off rough violence			
		Psychological	Economic	Physical	Sexual
Men	22	27	60	30	27
Women	24	10	11	17	11

Thus, a clear linkage can be traced down between violence and authority. The existence of authoritative relations in the family increases the probability of violence; egalitarian relations when none of the spouses holds power over the other, on the contrary, decrease probability of violence. Violence-associated families are the ones made in a patriarchal manner. Despite the fact that the opinion of men-aggressors about power distribution in the family is contradictory, men hold power in the majority of families experiencing domestic violence. Simply it is more evident for women than for men. It is also possible that, since these men’s claims to leadership in the family are extremely high they are inclined to belittle their real power over the wife – from their point of view it is all the time insufficient, not as much as it should be.

The backbone of such redistribution of power in favor of men seems to be the fear they fill their wives with. And in this case the data collected are extremely expressive (see Table 7).

Table 7. Violence and fear felt by women (%)

	No violence	Types off rough violence			
		Psychological	Economic	Physical	Sexual
Women: said they were afraid of their husband	3	48	32	41	47
Men: believe that their wives are afraid of them	14	68	55	69	64

Using the obtained data as a basis, we can assert that violence is advantageous to men using it – even if they themselves do not realize that (or do not acknowledge). A rating of “gains” of husbands-perpetrators with regard to the access to various resources can be drawn. To do so, we have compared the difference between the share of families where the husband has a priority access to this or that resource among the violence-free families and that of the groups associated with various types of violence. According to female assessments men get the greatest advantages from violence as a possibility to spend their spare time, mix up with people and have matrimonial sex (they have more possibilities than their wives: *To spend their spare time the way they think appropriate; To associate with whoever they want to; To have matrimonial sex at his will*). According to male answers, they gain most of all as a result of violence in (getting) possibilities to associate with people, spend their spare time and have sex (psychological violence); in possibilities to use money, spend their spare time and *to devote as much time and effort to work or studies as they deem necessary* (economic violence); spare time and sex (physical violence); mixing up with people, spare time and sex (sexual violence).

It looks as if any type of violence for men is an instrument to exert influence on the wife and

make their life more comfortable. Only economic violence seems to be more or less directed at a concrete target – men fighting for the right to individually use family money are the ones to gain most of all as a result of such efforts. But, for example, the actions of sexual perpetrators in the long run happen to be directed to a greater extent at acquiring the right to dispose of one's spare time the way one wants rather than at having the right to have matrimonial sex exclusively at one's own will. Reverting to Table 6, it can be noted that men from all the violence-associated groups happen to be the gainers as to the right to have money for personal needs, even if the family as a whole cannot afford that, and not only economic perpetrators.

The instrumental nature of violence for the men using it is also confirmed by the fact that all the men practicing violence assume with a high degree of probability that they can hit their wives. While it is assumed as possible by 11 percent of men in the violence-free group, this share is 88 percent among men from the group of psychological violence; in the group of economic violence this indicator is 58 percent, while in the group of sexual violence it goes up to 86 percent. It means that the majority of men-assaulters, even if they have not resorted to battering in the past, are ready to use physical force if other methods of influencing their wives would not seem to be sufficiently effective.

The relation between violence and authority we have happened to discover proves, from our point of view, that the information we have collected is the information exactly about violence and not simply about matrimonial conflicts since a conflict can well be a confrontation of two equal sides while violence is what is connected with authority, control and fear.

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