

Running head: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: AGGRESSORS' PROFILE AND CRIME  
CHARACTERISTICS

Domestic violence: Aggressors' profile and Crime characteristics

Diana Figueiredo<sup>1</sup>, Juliana Nunes<sup>1</sup>, Máximo Colón<sup>2</sup>, Helena Gaspar<sup>2</sup> e Pissarra da Costa<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hospital Sousa Martins - ULS Guarda

<sup>2</sup>Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal e Ciências Forenses do Centro

Author Note

Diana Figueiredo, Hospital Sousa Martins – ULS da Guarda, E.P.E., Guarda, Portugal.  
Juliana Nunes, Hospital Sousa Martins – ULS da Guarda, E.P.E., Guarda, Portugal. Máximo Colón, Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal e Ciências Forenses do Centro, Coimbra, Portugal. Helena Gaspar, Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal e Ciências Forenses do Centro, Coimbra, Portugal. Pissarra da Costa, Hospital Sousa Martins – ULS da Guarda, E.P.E., Guarda, Portugal.

The authors do not have financial, personal, or professional conflicts of interests. The study was conducted according to APA ethical standards.

Corresponding author: Diana Figueiredo, Hospital Sousa Martins – ULS da Guarda, E.P.E., Av. Rainha D. Amélia, 6301-857, Guarda, Portugal. Fax: +351 271 200 305; Tel: +351 271 200 200; Email: [dianabrigadeiro@gmail.com](mailto:dianabrigadeiro@gmail.com).

### Abstract

**Background:** The actual number of domestic violence crimes is difficult to achieve. It is known that most of the cases of domestic violence remain unreported. There were several myths associated with this type of crime that have been rooted and have remained as truths over time. One of the myths was the association of the practice of domestic violence with the presence of psychopathology in the aggressor. **Aims:** To outline the socio-demographic and psychological/psychiatric profile of domestic violence perpetrators and to characterize this crime. **Methods:** Retrospective study of the forensic and social files in which the nature of the process was domestic violence crime that were examined at the Center Delegation of the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences (DC-INMLCF), dating from January 1st 2013 to December 31st 2015. **Results and Conclusions:** A total of 266 cases were analyzed. The perpetrator of the crime of domestic violence was a male, aged between 41 and 50 years old, married, spouse of the victim, employed, with no alcohol or drug use habits, no criminal record and no psychopathology. Domestic violence crime was of the physical and psychological type, lasting from 1 month to 5 years, which occurred mainly in the common residence or residence of the victim and in the absence of minors.

*Keywords:* domestic violence, aggressors, profile, psychopathology

### Domestic violence: Aggressors' profile and Crime characteristics

Domestic Violence is defined as a violent behavior or coercive control pattern exercised, directly or indirectly, on any person who lives in the same household, or who, even if not cohabiting, was a partner or ex-partner of the victim or family member (Comissão para a Cidadania e Igualdade de Género; CIG et al., 2016).

Domestic violence has serious physical, emotional, psychological and social consequences for the victim, often resulting in the loss of its highest good: life (CIG et al., 2016).

Although not exclusively, this is a crime most often exercised against female (Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima; APAV, 2015, 2016). The perpetrator is almost invariably male and is, or has been, partner or spouse of the victim (APAV, 2015, 2016).

According to the Council of Europe, domestic violence against women is the leading cause of death and disability among women aged between 16 and 44 years old, surpassing cancer, road accidents and even war (CIG et al., 2016).

There are several myths associated with this type of crime that have been rooted and have remained as truths over time. One of the myths is the association of the practice of domestic violence with the presence of psychopathology in the aggressor (APAV, 2015; CIG et al., 2016). The science showed that only five to 10% of the aggressors have some type of mental disorder (CIG et al., 2016). Other myth is the association of domestic violence with drug or alcohol consumption and abuse. This association has not been confirmed by investigations (CIG et al., 2016).

The actual number of domestic violence crimes is difficult to achieve. It is known that most of the cases of domestic violence remain unreported (APAV, 2015, 2016; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014).

### **Aims**

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: AGGRESSORS' PROFILE AND CRIME CHARACTERISTICS

To outline the socio-demographic and psychological/psychiatric profile of the perpetrators of domestic violence and to characterize the crime, by collecting the following data: sex, age, marital status, occupation, presence/absence of substance use, victim/perpetrator relationship, nature of the crime, place of crime, criminal record, presence of minors and psychiatric diagnosis.

### **Method**

Retrospective study of the forensic and social files in which the nature of the process was domestic violence crime (Article 152 of the Portuguese Penal Code – law which defines the domestic violence crime) that were examined at the Center Delegation of the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences (DC-INMLCF), dating from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2013 to December 31<sup>st</sup> 2015.

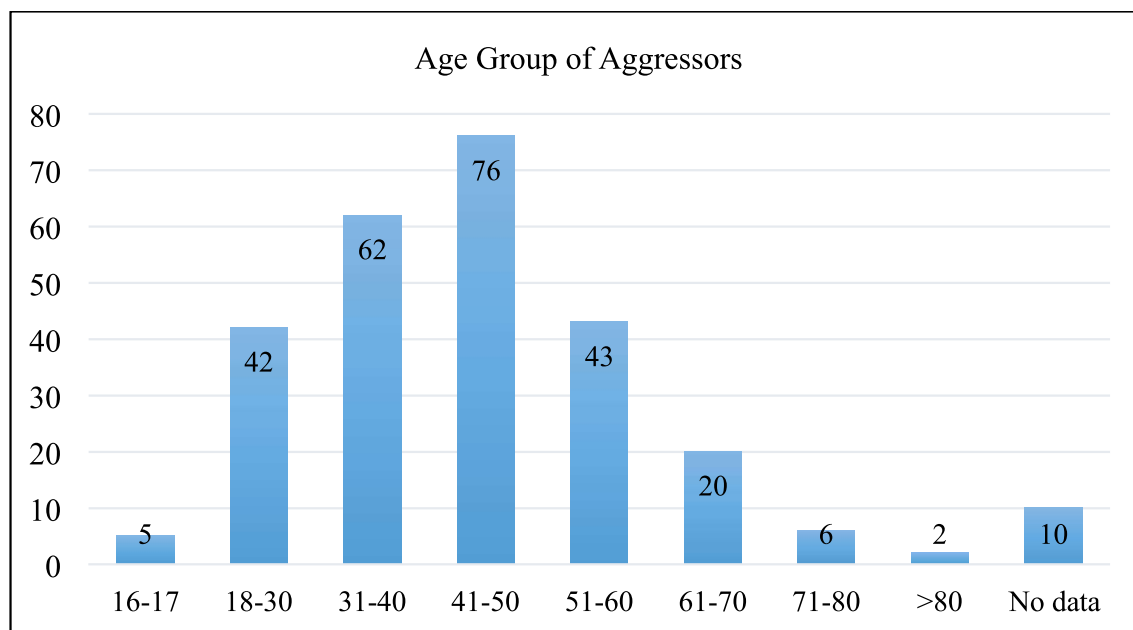
A total of 266 files were analyzed: 67 files dated of 2013, 64 files dated of 2014, and 135 files dated of 2015.

### **Results**

#### **The Aggressor**

The analysis of the aggressors profile showed that almost all were males (90%) and 52% ( $n=76$ ) were between 41 and 50 years (*Graphic 1*). Regarding the marital status, most were married (49%), 33% were single, 16% were divorced, and in 2% these data were not available. As for the occupational activity, 56% were employed, 19% were unemployed, 12% had no occupation, 8% were retired, 3% were retired due to disability, and in 2% this information was not available.

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: AGGRESSORS' PROFILE AND CRIME CHARACTERISTICS



*Graphic 1.* Distribution according to age group of the aggressors

In most cases, the offender was the spouse of the victim (45%), in 25% the offender was the partner, in 9% ex-spouse, in 7% ex-partner, in 7% the child, in 4% parents, in 1% a grandchild, in 1% another relative, and 1% other.

The majority of the aggressors (64%) did not have alcoholic or narcotic drugs habits, 26% had only alcoholic habits, 6% had alcohol and narcotic drugs habits, and 4% had only narcotic drugs habits.

Only 7% ( $n=20$ ) were submitted to forensic psychiatric/psychological examination. Of these, only six were proposed by forensic expert as Not Guilty for Reason of Insanity (NGRI) with the diagnosis of Mild mental retardation ( $n=3$ ), Moderate mental retardation ( $n=1$ ), Unspecified dementia ( $n=1$ ), and Paranoid schizophrenia ( $n=1$ ).

Most offenders had no criminal record. Only 7% ( $n=19$ ) had a criminal record, from which 52% ( $n=10$ ) had a criminal history of domestic violence. From these who had a criminal history of domestic violence, 70% ( $n=7$ ) have been convicted for domestic violence against the same victim.

### **The Crime**

The type of violence most frequent was simultaneous physical and psychological violence (80%). Physical violence occurred in 14% of the cases; simultaneous physical, psychological and sexual violence occurred in 4% of the cases and psychological violence in 2%.

The domestic violence was perpetrated continuously in most cases (90%), within a period of time between one month to five years in 38% of the cases, between six to 15 years in 27% of the cases, 16 to 25 years in 13% of the cases, 26 to 35 years in 10% of the cases, 36 to 50 years in 6% of the cases, more than 50 years in 2% of the cases, and in 4% these data were not available.

This type of crime occurred mostly in the common/victim residence (82%,  $n=219$ ), 14% ( $n=38$ ) of the cases occurred in a public place, and 4% of the cases in other place (e.g., victim's workplace, victim's vehicle).

Minors witnessed the violence acts in 36% of cases.

Violence against minors and elders occurred in four cases each. Violence against pregnant women occurred in one case.

### **Discussion**

The great majority of investigation in domestic violence refers to violence against women, mainly intimate partner violence. There are very few studies about this crime in a more wide view. The number of studies that include others types of aggressors and others types of victims, such as such as violence against elderly, child abuse and domestic violence against men are scarce.

This can be easily understood if we take in consideration that most of the victims of this crime are women. Actually, as Walker (1999) pointed out, being a women is the most powerful risk marker for becoming a victim. Accordingly, studies focus on women victims of

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: AGGRESSORS' PROFILE AND CRIME CHARACTERISTICS

intimate partner violence, the most common type of violence against them (Regueira-Diéguez et al., 2015).

Accordingly, the studies about the characteristics of the offenders are also scant when compared to the number of studies that focus in the victim. It is well established, however, that offenders are mostly males (APAV, 2015, 2016; CIG et al., 2016; Regueira-Diéguez et al., 2015; Walker, 1999).

However, the crime of domestic violence is much more than violence against women. Lately, others types of this crime have emerged such as violence against elderly, child abuse and domestic violence against men.

In Portugal, as in other countries, formal complaint on domestic violence crimes is as low as 39% in some researches (APAV, 2015, 2016). Actually, the European report of 2014 of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights about violence against women showed that only 33% of women victims of partner violence reported the crime to police or other organization, such as a victim support organization.

Thought domestic violence is now considered a public crime in Portugal, an even lesser number are analyzed in court and by forensic services.

Although this research describes only the small number of cases that has reached forensic evaluation, the results were similar to those found in other studies in general Portuguese population (APAV, 2015, 2016) and in studies which focus only on intimate partner against women (Regueira-Diéguez et al., 2015) or in fatal intimate partner against women in Portugal (Pereira et al., 2013).

Actually, in a study of intimate partner against women in Spain showed that the offenders were males aged between 30 to 50 years old, married, employed, the most frequent type of violence were the combination of physical and psychological violence and minors were present during the acts of violence in 28.3% of the cases. However, the prevalence of

alcohol consumption and abuse was higher (58%) than in the present study, as was the prevalence of illegal drug abuse (23.2%). It should be noted that, although the presence of alcohol consumption and abuse was higher, this prevalence was lower than in the general Spanish population (76.6%) (Regueira-Diéguez et al., 2015). This fact occurred also in the present study.

The presence of minors during the abuse in the Spanish study was similar (36%). However this prevalence was lower than that reported by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights about violence against women. In the latter, 73 % of the victims of violence by their previous or current partner marked that children living with them were aware of the violence. This can be explained by the differences in the methods of the researches. In the present study, the presence of the minor were considered only if it was explicitly described, in the social report, that the minor was physically present when the aggression occur and not just that child was aware of the violence.

In fact, the analysis of the description of aggression showed that this percentage was not higher because there were no minors under the responsibility of that couple. In any of the cases, the analysis of the reports showed concern by the aggressor with the presence of a minor.

The present study confirmed that the common belief that psychiatric disorders are frequent in the perpetrators of crimes, namely in domestic violence, is only a myth. The consumption of alcohol or illicit drugs wasn't either more frequent in these offenders than in general Portuguese population (61.1% and 6.2%, respectively) (Direção-Geral da Saúde, 2016). These habits are, however, associated with a higher risk of homicide of the victim (Pereira et al., 2013).

### **Conclusions**

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: AGGRESSORS' PROFILE AND CRIME CHARACTERISTICS

The perpetrator of the crime of domestic violence was a male, aged between 41 and 50 years old, married, spouse of the victim, employed, with alcohol or drugs use habits not superior to the general population, with no criminal record and no psychopathology. Domestic violence crime was, most frequently, of the physical and psychological type, lasting from one month to five years, occurred mainly in the common residence or residence of the victim and in the absence of minors.

### References

- Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima (2015). *Estatísticas APAV – Crimes de violência doméstica [2013-2014]*.
- Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima (2016). *Estatísticas APAV – Relatório Anual 2015*.
- Massena, A., Fernandes, C., Ravara, D., Ribeiro, F., Susano, H., ... Pena, S. (2016). *Violência Doméstica – Implicações sociológicas, psicológicas e jurídicas do fenómeno*. Retrieved from [http://www.cej.mj.pt/cej/recursos/ebooks/outros/Violencia-Domestica-CEJ\\_p02\\_rev2c-EBOOK\\_ver\\_final.pdf](http://www.cej.mj.pt/cej/recursos/ebooks/outros/Violencia-Domestica-CEJ_p02_rev2c-EBOOK_ver_final.pdf)
- Direção-Geral de Saúde (2016). *Portugal – Saúde Mental em Números – 2015*. Lisboa.
- European Union Agency For Fundamental Rights (2014). *Violence against women: An EU-wide survey*.
- Pereira, A., Vieira, D., & Magalhães, T. (2013). Fatal intimate partner violence against women in Portugal: A forensic medical national study. *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine*, 20(8), 1099-1107. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jflm.2013.09.015>
- Regueira-Diéguez, A., Pérez-Rivas, N., Muñoz-Barús, J., Vázquez-Portomeñe, F., & Rodríguez-Calvo, M. (2015). Intimate partner violence against women in Spain: A medico-legal and criminological study. *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine*, 34, 119-126. doi:10.1016/j.jflm.2015.05.012
- Walker, L. (1999). Psychology and domestic violence around the world. *American Psychologist*, 54(1), 21-29. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.54.1.21>