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Cultural Imbalance Between Partners Violence in Intimate Relationships and Shifting Gender Dynamics Within the Family

Abstract: The aim of the analysis undertaken in the article is a desk research of Polish and foreign data about the discourse of Intimate Partnership Violence. It was set in the context of dynamic social changes concerning contemporary relations between men and women towards their more equality and redefinition of the existing shape of gender roles in a family. The theoretical basis for these analyses is the concept of E. Stark, which assumes that changes in gender relations can arouse a kind of "cultural anxiety" among men resulting in an increase in violent attitudes toward women. I also refer to the concept of the gendered nature of violence, hence the frequent references to gender inequality, the subordination of women resulting in their victimization, the culturally shaped domination of men over women as a basis for male violence, and the men's control and power in close relationships. Combining these contexts into an overall background of analysis, I reconstruct in detail the most elusive and difficult to visualize type of partner violence, which is coercive control. In conclusions, I draw attention to the existing paradoxes arising from the analysis of the relation between increased gender equality, also in a family, and Intimate Partnership Violence, emphasizing the importance of building a culture based on bigger partnership between men and women as one of possible ways to prevent domestic violence.

Keywords: domestic violence, Intimate Partnership Violence, gendered nature of violence, coercive control, women and men's equality.

Introduction

In today's world, we are witnessing dynamic transformations in the socio-cultural landscape—particularly in the area of gender roles and relationships between women and men. For several decades, scholars have spoken of a “new gender contract” (Fuszara, 2002), understood as the ongoing redefinition of gendered social roles. This process is a response to the growing challenge to traditional divisions and understandings of gender relations in every domain of everyday life (cf. Slany, 2002; Kwak, 2022). These shifts are evident not only in evolving public narratives around femininity and masculinity, but also in the life strategies of Polish people—in their everyday decisions and, notably, in the dynamics of close family relationships.

This article is based on the premise that the ongoing reconfiguration of male–female relations in contemporary society may be one of the underlying sources of violence in intimate, marital, or partnership relationships. In adopting this perspective, the discussion aligns with the work of Evan Stark (2007), who argues that during times of rapid societal change—including changes in gender relations—violence against women tends to intensify as a result of male cultural anxiety. While there are well-established biological, psychological, and psychosocial theories that seek to explain the mechanisms behind domestic violence (Rode, 2014), the approach taken here foregrounds its gendered nature. It emphasises gender relations as a central axis of male dominance (Hunnicut, 2009), drawing from sociological frameworks and critical pedagogy. According to Stark (2007), men—historically positioned as dominant within relationships—seek to preserve their cultural privileges rooted in gender inequality. In doing so, they often develop strategies aimed at resisting or slowing down the transformation of the existing gender order. One such strategy involves the use of subtle, often invisible forms of violence—violence embedded in culturally entrenched, stereotypical notions of male and female roles. These forms of coercion are frequently expressed in the rituals and everyday interactions that characterise close family relationships. To fully understand and reconstruct these dynamics, it is essential to analyse the changing nature of gender relations within families—placing them within the broader socio-cultural context shaped by the democratisation of public life and the redefinition of gender-based social roles.

The “Equality Shift” in Society and the Family

Changes in gender relations within Polish society and family life reflect a broader trend that can be confidently described as an “equality shift”—a phenomenon

predicted years ago by scholars such as U. Beck (2004). Beck argued that these changes have progressed to such an extent that a return to traditional gender roles is highly unlikely. As he put it, “the spirit of equality” can no longer be put back in the bottle (Beck, 2004, p. 161).

It is worth outlining the nature of this shift. It does not occur uniformly across all spheres of life or among all social groups. Calls for gender equality are most pronounced among well-educated urban populations, particularly in areas such as the labour market and politics. The roots of gender equality lie in the women’s emancipation movements of the 19th and 20th centuries, and landmark events such as the granting of voting rights to Polish women in 1918. Many years later, the principle of equal rights between women and men—in family, political, social, and economic life—was enshrined in the Polish Constitution of 2 April 1997. Following Poland’s accession to the European Union, national legislation was further aligned with more progressive EU regulations promoting gender equality in employment, politics, and education. These regulations were reinforced by various international conventions and agreements ratified by Poland, including, among others, the so-called Istanbul Convention, which is important for the considerations undertaken in this article, or *the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*, ratified in 2015. This convention is a call for greater gender equality and identifies gender inequality—reinforced by patriarchal culture—as one of the root causes of violence, a point that will be further discussed later in the text.

The authors of the report entitled “Co nam daje równość? Wpływ równości płci na jakość życia i rozwój społeczny w Polsce” [What Does Equality Give Us? The Impact of Gender Equality on Quality of Life and Social Development in Poland] (Krzaklewska, 2018) emphasise that gender equality should be analysed across multiple dimensions, including its role in social policy—particularly equal civil rights and equal participation in public life. It is equally important to explore gender equality in the context of family life. This includes examining the causes, dynamics, and consequences of the “equality shift” for the functioning of modern families and their individual members. K. Szafraniec (2022), in her comparative analysis of young adults and their parents at similar life stages, describes these developments as a revolution—not only demographic, but also cultural and global in nature. The drivers of this revolution include sweeping civilisational and socio-cultural shifts: legal equalisation of the sexes in democratic countries; growing access to education for women; psychological research debunking myths of male intellectual superiority; and the declining relevance of physical strength in an increasingly technology-driven world (Pankowska, 2005; Kwak, 2022). These developments have triggered changes in fertility patterns, partnership models, the age of marriage, marital stability, and—most significantly—the traditional definitions of gender roles, responsibilities, and entitlements rooted in patriarchal family structures (Giddens, 2006; Ostrouch-Kamińska, 2017).

These shifts are also visible in studies on Polish public attitudes towards gender equality in marriage. Traditional gender roles are losing social support, while the growing awareness of equality's importance is fostering acceptance of more egalitarian models of family life, parenting, and upbringing (Lisowska, 2008; Krzaklewska, 2018). These findings are echoed by numerous scholars studying contemporary family transformations (West, 2008; Ostrouch-Kamińska, 2015; Kwak, 2022). Several recurring findings may be considered indicators of this “equality shift” in family life:

- Young adults invest heavily in their careers, often pursuing dual-career paths. Young women in particular are more burdened than previous generations by the dual demands of work and domestic responsibilities. At the same time, there is widespread agreement that the partnership model of marriage is the most fulfilling and successful, offering the greatest scope for gender equality (Szafraniec, 2022, p. 137).
- The family is recognised as a key space for socialisation and the development of egalitarian attitudes. In households where gender equality is a shared value, both parents and children report greater life satisfaction and stronger emotional bonds (Ostrouch-Kamińska, 2015; Ciaputa and Krzaklewska, 2018);
- Legal and workplace policies increasingly support the work–family balance for both women and men—for example, through non-transferable paternity leave (cf. Grabowska, Słotwińska-Roślanowska, 2017);
- Patterns of shared family roles are gradually becoming more common—especially in the form of engaged fatherhood and non-stereotypical division of household duties, including care for dependent family members such as children, elderly relatives, or people with disabilities (Dzwonkowska-Godula, 2015; Slany and Ratecka, 2018; Ratajczak and Kozłowska, 2023). Although this area—like education—remains one of the most in need of improvement, the emergence of meaningful shifts should not go unnoticed.
- Women continue to face disproportionate challenges in the labour market. They are more likely to be employed under unfavourable contracts, lose their jobs, or work in roles below their qualifications. They also receive fewer returns on their educational investment than men—reflected in lower salaries despite equal levels of education and experience, reduced promotion prospects, and more limited career pathways. Yet, it is significant that women are the group in which we now see marked increases in educational attainment, political and civic engagement, and representation in professions and positions traditionally dominated by men (Musiał-Karg, 2017).

Proponents of a democratic culture rooted in gender equality, and advocates of the so-called “equality shift,” consistently stress how much work remains before this foundational democratic value is fully realised—not just in rhetoric, but in practice. As numerous studies show, where gender equality is meaningfully implemented, it contributes to sustainable social and economic development, enhances

individual empowerment, improves quality of life, and fosters more fulfilling interpersonal relationships (Krzaklewska, 2018).

Inequality and Imbalance (of Power) in Society and Family as Sources of Violence

A substantial body of research—including studies conducted in Poland under the project “Gender Equality and Quality of Life. The Role of Gender Equality in Development in Europe on the Example of Poland and Norway”—demonstrates a clear link between inequality and violence (Krzaklewska, 2018). The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women explicitly states that “violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men” (UN, 1993). Harmful gender stereotypes, gender inequality, and male dominance as sources of violence are also addressed in the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, ratified by Poland in 2015. The Convention states that “equality between women and men is a key element in the prevention of violence against women; Recognising that violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men” (Council of Europe, 2011, p. 1). Paradoxically, as U. Beck observes, “increased equality [...] brings the continuing and intensifying inequalities even more clearly into consciousness” (Beck, 2004, p. 152).

J. Helios and W. Jedlecka (2017) emphasise that violence can arise wherever disparities in power and status exist—including within intimate partnerships. From this perspective, violence is viewed as a manifestation of relational inequality and as a conscious, deliberate act of harm that constitutes an abuse of power. It is a means of exploiting one’s advantage over another in pursuit of a personal goal or benefit. Such advantage can take many forms: physical, numerical, psychological, social, situational, or cultural (symbolic). It can also operate in various directions. Referring again to the Convention, this analysis concerns the dominance of men over women. This dominance—particularly in its cultural dimension—has been explored, for example, by R. W. Connell (2005) in the concept of hegemonic masculinity, defined as a set of norms, values, and social practices that reinforce male dominance through cultural means. Similarly, P. Bourdieu (2004), in his theory of symbolic violence, described the power to impose culturally dominant worldviews—including gender hierarchies—on others. According to Bourdieu, such violence reproduces social inequalities and legitimises direct forms of violence. Applying this framework to gender relations in the androcentric culture of the

West highlights the cultural dominance of men over women. This suggests that violence is rooted in traditional structures of male power and authority within society (Hearn, 2012; Grzyb, 2016; Melosik, 2021).

Gender inequality embedded in social structures—including disparities in status and rank—becomes an interpretive lens for understanding violence in close relationships, regardless of their legal or formal character. This is closely linked to the concept of the “gendered nature of violence”. According to K. Slany and B. Woźniak, this is reflected in the fact that “the perpetrators are primarily men, and the victims primarily women” (Slany and Woźniak, 2018), which underpins the concept of gender-based violence—violence arising from power imbalances in gender relations (Slany and Woźniak, 2018). These imbalances are culturally entrenched and perpetuated through gender role models and social norms, eventually filtering into intimate relationships within families. Drawing on the power and control wheel—a widely used analytical model in the study of domestic violence against women—the authors identify specific methods of control and expressions of male dominance within intimate relationships. These include: exercising historically established male privileges (e.g. making financial decisions without consulting a partner); economic control (e.g. monitoring spending); coercion and threats; emotional abuse (e.g. inducing guilt); sexual violence; isolation (e.g. restricting contact with family or friends); intimidation (e.g. shouting); using children against a partner; and denying, minimising, or justifying violence while blaming the partner (Slany and Woźniak, 2018, pp. 150–151). All of these controlling behaviours and expressions of dominance are rooted in a stereotypical gender order in societies structured by inequality. They violate dignity, personal safety, and freedom, and they are legitimised by a social order that normalises inequality (Pridemore and Freilich, 2005; Mandal, 2008).

It is important to recognise that this order also has a status-based dimension. Research shows that men most likely to use violence are those who occupy lower rungs on the social ladder compared to men who embody the dominant ideal of masculinity—those with access to key markers of male identity such as prestige and authority. As M. Grzyb explains: “Men who hold a better seat at the ‘patriarchal table’ do not need to resort to violence to maintain their status. [...] For men whose access to other sources of masculine prestige is blocked, violence against women may serve as a demonstration of their difference” (Grzyb, 2016, pp. 250–251; cf. Hearn and Whitehead, 2006; Hunnicutt 2009; Melosik, 2021). Thus, while violence remains rooted in inequality, it is not always inequality of gender alone—it may also stem from the perpetrator’s own disadvantaged social status. Nevertheless, such violence is always embedded in broader cultural patterns of male dominance. This only reinforces the value of an intersectional perspective in analysing social phenomena, including violence in intimate family relationships.

Two Shades of Change Toward Gender Equality in the Family – a Transformation of Male Dominance?

It might be expected that the increasing recognition of gender equality as a core value regulating social relations—in the wider spheres of cultural norms, the labour market, and politics—would significantly reduce violence in intimate relationships. However, the relationship is not as straightforward as it may seem. Undeniably, as numerous studies have shown, the reduction of gender inequality contributes to the development of less violent relationships (Grzyb, 2016; Ciaputa and Krzaklewska, 2018; Krzaklewska, 2018). These relationships tend to be characterised by greater mutual engagement from both partners—not only with each other but also in parenting, particularly in father-child relationships. They also exhibit a stronger sense of fairness and higher relational quality overall. Such partnerships are marked by greater cooperation, respect, and mutual acceptance of each other's needs, expectations, capabilities, and choices.

Yet there is another side to this shift—one that reflects gendered differences in how the changes associated with equality are perceived, and in the meanings attributed to the idea of gender equality by women and men. Research suggests that women and men often understand gender equality quite differently. Drawing on his analysis of contemporary changes in the roles of women and men in the labour market and within families, U. Beck argues that for women, equality is associated with better education—evident not only in access to more diverse fields of study and institutions but also in the numerical dominance of women among university graduates. It is also linked to enhanced career opportunities and a slightly reduced burden of domestic labour. For men, however, gender equality often translates into heightened competition as increasingly qualified women enter the workforce, the withdrawal of a traditional support system embodied by a spouse focused on maintaining the home and enabling her husband's career, and thus a retreat from the pursuit of professional ambition. It also entails a greater share of domestic duties, particularly in relationships that are moving towards more democratic dynamics (Beck, 2004, p. 162).

These divergent interpretations of equality are also reflected in assessments of the most common contemporary family model: dual-earner households. In such arrangements, women often carry a double burden—balancing work and family responsibilities—while men typically “help” with household duties. It is therefore unsurprising that women, who bear the brunt of this dual load, are more critical in their assessments and tend to express significantly more negative views than men, who often rate these relationships as successful (Szafranec, 2022, p. 137). Similarly, when men evaluate women's success in professional domains—particularly in fields traditionally dominated by men, such as business—clear patterns

emerge. Women who enjoy the highest levels of male approval are typically those who balance professional and family roles (with family taking precedence) and do not directly compete with men. The most common reactions among men partnered with professionally successful women include rivalry and aggression (Mandal, 2000, pp. 67–68).

Research indicates that some men find it difficult to accept women assuming core aspects of traditionally masculine roles—professional and social activity, career prestige—or embodying stereotypically masculine traits such as independence and achievement orientation. They also struggle with the loss of their dominant status in the family and the role of primary breadwinner (Pankowska, 2005; Fung, 2024). These men often experience a lack of validation and recognition, along with diminished self-esteem and a weakened sense of masculinity resulting from their inability to fulfil the culturally scripted male role, which is steeped in gender stereotypes (Beck, 2004, pp. 160–161; cf. Witkin, 2016). This dynamic frequently leads to what has been termed the “inadequate husband” syndrome (Balswick and Balswick, 1995). The development of this syndrome is further reinforced by traditional male socialisation, which emphasises professional success over relational or interpersonal skills—skills essential for building healthy family relationships. Among men’s responses to shifting gender relations—and the experiences associated with the “inadequate husband” syndrome—are a range of often negative attitudes. These may generate high levels of stress and, in extreme cases, lead to depression, aggression, frustration, self-destructive behaviours, addiction, premature death, and suicide (Evans et al., 2011), as well as relationship breakdowns. This syndrome may also give rise to various forms of violence against women within the family: the devaluation of women’s professional accomplishments through aggressive remarks, insults, mockery, humiliation, and constant criticism; financial control and coercive access to their income; and physical violence in response to their resistance (Duch-Krzysztozek, 2007; Ahmadabadi et al., 2020).

Like many contemporary scholars of family and domestic violence, D. Duch-Krzysztozek emphasises the importance of understanding these categories as dynamic processes shaped by ongoing socio-cultural change—particularly changes in gender relations toward greater equality. A safe family environment is now recognised as a fundamental human right, which means that domestic violence is not only a criminal offence but also a violation of basic human rights. The author highlights that socio-cultural factors are far more significant than economic ones in shaping power dynamics and equality within intimate relationships. She writes: “Men beat their wives when they have an economic basis for authority (the wife is financially dependent, the man earns the household income and ‘can do as he pleases’), and often precisely because they do not have that basis (when they earn less than the woman or have no income at all).” (Duch-Krzysztozek, 2007, p. 244). Unemployment, low income, and poverty can, in such cases, become sources of male frustration and lead to violence against women as a way of

asserting masculine status in the absence of other means—a phenomenon already discussed in this paper (Ahmadabadi et al., 2020).

Changes in Gender Relations and Intimate Partner Violence: Entrapment and Coercive Control

As written by the already-cited E. Stark (2007), in times of dynamic social change, violence against women is on the rise, rooted in men's desire to maintain their privileges due to their cultural dominance and desire to delay change in the existing gender order. Such thinking is in line with the concept of M. Kimmel (2008), who also stresses that men's use of violence against women may be a manifestation not only of the exercise of power, granted as a result of cultural domination and functioning gender stereotypes, but also of a sense of insufficient control over the female partner, especially when she seeks greater equality in the relationship. Power and control thus become the basic categories through which violence in close relationships is defined (Slany, Woźniak, 2018).

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a narrower concept than domestic violence because it emphasizes what happens within the marriage/partnership dyad. It is also sometimes called common couple violence or mutual violence (Kowalczyk and Łącka, 2011). It is defined as violence against the partner(s) in an intimate (romantic or sexual) relationship regardless of the degree of formalization and refers to physical, psychological and sexual coercion, as well as entrapment and control, including in economic areas (Smyth et al., 2021). Most often, the term IPV is used in a broad sense to denote any act of violence by a male partner against a female partner without distinguishing by type, severity, form or context. Considering all violence in intimate relationships, research indicates that compared to men, women are disproportionately more likely to be victims of IPV, including serious physical violence (e.g., beating, punching, being pushed at something; over a lifetime, it is one in four women versus one in seven men) and rape, more likely to experience various forms of psychological and sexual violence, and more likely to be killed by a partner (Hardesty and Ogolsky, 2020). IPV affects people of on all socioeconomic levels, although rates of incidence are higher in people of low socioeconomic status (Haselschwerdt and Hardesty, 2017). They are also higher in families where attachment to traditional, stereotypical gender roles is prevalent, and women who do not work outside the home are more likely to fall victim to violence by their husbands, especially psychological and economic violence (Slany, 2002; Hunnicutt, 2009).

M. P. Johnson (2008) distinguishes three main types of violence in intimate relationships according to the degree of entrapment and control (IPV):

- Coercive Controlling Violence (CCV) — previously referred to as intimate terrorism, is violence that occurs within a broader context of entrapment and

coercive control manifested in male domination, controlling, isolating and denigrating the female partner, intimidating and manipulating her, its effect is most often depression, loss of self-esteem or post-traumatic stress.

- Violent Resistance refers to short-term violence used most often by women to resist the violence and control of the perpetrator of partner terror (an example of an extreme form of violent resistance is the deprivation of life of a partner — the perpetrator of violence).
- Situational Couple Violence (SCV), which is characterized by little to no pattern of entrapment and coercive control. It is associated with specific situations in which conflict erupts and negative emotions and reactions emerge in one or both violent partners.

This first type of violence was described in great detail by E. Stark (2007) in his concept of violence called entrapment and coercive control. The author embeds it in the changing “gender contract” present in the broadly understood modern Western culture, and the gradual loss of control by men in a relationship. He characterizes in detail its manifestations, which require obedience not directly, the most important of which are various ways of exploitation, orders, demanding obedience by imposing one’s own will, limiting one’s choices, isolation, depriving support in the realization of one’s own aspirations and a sense of agency and control over the victim’s own life (Szymkiewicz, 2009; Stark and Hester, 2019). Violence, according to Stark, is not only what men do to women, but what they prevent them from doing, which also points to hidden, subtle manifestations of this type of partner violence.

Research shows that coercive control violence is generally more often perpetrated by men, as it is underpinned by patriarchal power and culturally approved male dominance (Graham-Kevan and Archer 2003; Johnson, 2006; Stark, 2007; Smyth et al., 2021). Entrapment and coercive control is a covert form of many attacks on the victim’s self-esteem, perception of reality and freedom, which enables the perpetrator to control and exercise power over the victim. Most often, it is a long-term, cumulative form, hence it is considered as a set of oppressive behaviors and a specific attitude, rather than a single act of violence (Candela, 2016; Myhill and Hohl, 2019). It can also vary from one relationship to another, and take on different faces as the perpetrator’s relationship with the victim continues over time. Unlike isolated cases of other forms of violence, in a situation of entrapment and coercive control, time is a critical factor affecting the degree of destruction of the victim’s personality, while its hidden and insidious dimension makes it difficult for further family members, friends and even representatives of institutions supporting the functioning of the family to also take measures to help the victim. Moreover, this type of violence is also used by its perpetrators to address other intersecting dominant discourses, such as disability, nationality, mental health, or religious beliefs, in order to reinforce their power (Sharp-Jeffs et al., 2018).

Coercive Controlling Violence (CCV), or as Stark calls it, entrapment and control coercive control, is nowadays one of the basic types of violence allowing to capture the specificity and diversity of partner violence in relationships. Due to its embeddedness in the socio-cultural context and changes in gender relations, it is becoming in recent years a basic category subjected to both theoretical analysis and empirical exploration in various contexts, also related to race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, partners' education, as well as the impact of its presence on other family members, including children (Stark, 2007; Nevala, 2017; Callaghan et al, 2018; Crossman and Hardesty, 2018; Stark and Hester, 2019).

“Violent side effect” of the new gender contract within the family?

The considerations undertaken in this article are part of the existing discourse on domestic violence in the field of social sciences with emphasis on several contexts. First, the focus was placed on one type of domestic violence, which is Intimate Partner Violence, which is included directly in the title. Second, it was embedded in the dynamic social changes concerning contemporary relations between men and women towards their greater equality and the redefinition of the previous shape of gender roles in the family, with its consequences for their daily functioning. Third, I remain in agreement with the concept of E. Stark, among others, that these changes may raise a kind of “cultural anxiety” among men resulting in an increase in violent attitudes toward women. Fourth, the concept of gendered nature of violence was employed, hence the frequent references to gender inequality, the subordination of women resulting in their victimization, the culturally shaped domination of men over women as a basis for male violence, and the control and power of men in intimate relationships. And fifth, combining the other four contexts, most attention was paid to analyzing the most elusive and difficult to visualize type of partner violence, which is entrapment and coercive control, characterized in detail by Stark, as mentioned above, and overwhelmingly experienced and reported precisely by women seeking help from institutions supporting families affected by violence.

This does not mean that violence in intimate relationships is one-sided in terms of the gender of the perpetrator and the victim. There are numerous studies that document various forms of partner violence used by women, or by partners mutually (cf. Archer, 2000; Kowalczyk, Łącka, 2011), including violence combined with coercive control (e.g., in transition to parenthood: Gou et al., 2019; cf. Johnson, 2006). However, this gender symmetry was more prevalent in situational couple violence, used by both men and women depending on the situation, and often less severe (cf. Hardesty, Ogolsky, 2020), rather than in cases of entrapment and coercive control.

In conclusion, it is worth returning once again to the question of whether greater equality in society will indeed lead to a reduction in violence against women in the family, or whether it will exacerbate violent behavior by men. As M. Grzyb states, “in liberal Western democracies, as in international human rights documents, the pursuit of equality between men and women in both the normative and actual spheres is a key element in preventing violence against women” (Grzyb, 2016, p. 223). So if gender equality prevails in a country, victimization rates for women should be lower. Meanwhile, a European Agency for Fundamental Rights study of 28 European Union countries found that Nordic countries with the highest rates of gender equality also had the highest rates of violence against women by both a partner and an external perpetrator, while countries with more traditional views of gender roles had the lowest rates. This fact has even become known as the Nordic paradox (Gracia and Merlo, 2016). It is explained with reference to, among other things, existing countries with the highest Gender Equality Index, as found precisely in Denmark, Norway, Finland or Sweden (Grzyb, 2016):

- high public awareness of what domestic violence is and less taboo on the issue, resulting in, greater willingness to report any acts of violence,
- more out-of-home activities for women, making them more vulnerable to more social contact of a violent nature,
- overall differences in crime rates between countries, urbanization rates, number of young men in the population, etc.,
- patterns of alcohol consumption in each country, which, i.a., in the Nordic countries affect the increase in domestic violence rates.

However, looking at the relationship between equality and violence by type of violence, and specifically in relation to violence in intimate relationships, and especially Coercive Control Violence (CCV), we find that countries with high gender equality indexes had the lowest rates of this form of violence (Nevala, 2017). This is explained by men becoming accustomed to women stepping out of traditional roles and greater equality between the genders, and as a result, men are also less “culturally anxious” and therefore less likely to use coercive control violence (Grzyb, 2016). Which does not mean, however, that women’s relations with men within the family space and intimate relationships are more symmetrical, as M. Grzyb points out, writing that “economic independence and formal equality [of women — author’s note] in the public sphere do not have a simple translation into their more equal position in intimate relationships and respect from their partner” (Grzyb, 2016, p. 249). This seems to be another step related to the development of gender equality within the family, and therefore to the greater involvement of men in daily chores, caring for children and dependents in the family, developing ways to share power and responsibility for the smooth functioning of the family and maintaining emotional balance. And thus moving beyond the stereotypical family role toward greater partnership. In Scandinavian countries, this step has already been taken, and the division of roles and tasks in the family is closer to a partnership than traditional depictions of them. In Poland,

this step is still ahead of us, although we are already on the way to making family partnerships more common, as shown by both survey research and everyday family practices (Ostrouch-Kamińska, 2015; Fuszara, 2020).

Final Reflections: Prevention of Violence in Intimate Relationships is Education to Gender Partnership and Greater Balance of Actors in Relationships

K. Slany and B. Woźniak respond in the affirmative to the question of whether there is a connection between changing gender roles and violence in Poland, formulating the following conclusions resulting from the project “Gender Equality and Quality of Life. The Role of Gender Equality in Development in Europe on the Example of Poland and Norway” (orig. “Równość płci a jakość życia. Rola równości płci w rozwoju w Europie na przykładzie Polski i Norwegii”): “the declared and practiced gender equality reduces the risk of violence primarily for women and lowers the risk of almost all of the analyzed manifestations of psychological violence (i.e., being humiliated, being insulted in a relationship, being controlled by a partner, and being restricted in terms of contacts with other people), as well as experiencing economic violence” (Slany and Woźniak, 2018, p. 158). Although, as the authors point out, no such relationship has been studied with regard to the more brutal forms of domestic violence, resulting in dramatic consequences in terms of, for example, restrictions on the victims’ freedom, dignity or quality of life.

In conclusion, taking into account all the cited research results, and referring to E. Stark’s thesis about the underlying root of partner violence perpetrated by men, their “cultural anxiety” at a time of progressive changes in gender dynamics towards the gradual loss of men’s superior status and women’s independence from them, it could be concluded that once awareness of violence and real, realized rather than declared gender equality within the family increases, this “anxiety” will decrease, and with it, as a consequence, also behaviors bearing the hallmarks of violence associated with coercive control in intimate relationships. There is still a need for extensive research conducted in various cultural and historical contexts, taking into account different forms and intensities of violence, in order to better understand these relationships. What can undoubtedly already be stated is the need to develop education in the area of gender partnership and subject balance, for a two-subject relationship based on dignity and respect for the rights of both sides of the relationship, to counter the toxic and violent scripts of masculinity present in the Western and Polish culture and upbringing (Chmura-Rutkowska and Ostrouch-Kamińska, 2018), education embedded in the broad context of cultural and social change in accordance with the UN model of understanding the phenomenon of violence, but also critical, aimed at changing social consciousness towards a more subjective and democratic culture.

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