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Albert TERELAK*

Sebastian KOŁODZIEJCZAK**

Domestic violence against seniors in rural areas of western Poland – characteristics of the phenomenon in the relations of older women, victims of domestic violence

Przemoc domowa wobec seniorów na obszarach wiejskich Zachodniej Polski – charakterystyka zjawiska w relacjach starszych kobiet, ofiar przemocy domowej

Abstract

Aim. The article presents the results of research on domestic violence (PD) against older people. The research was carried out within the framework of the West Pomeranian system

* **e-mail:** albert.terelak@usz.edu.pl

University of Szczecin, Faculty of Humanities, Institute of Sociology, Krakowska 71,
71-017 Szczecin, Poland

Uniwersytet Szczeciński, Wydział Humanistyczny, Instytut Socjologii, Krakowska 71,
71-017 Szczecin, Polska

ORCID: 0000-0003-2033-6946

** **e-mail:** sebastian.kolodziejczak@usz.edu.pl

University of Szczecin, Faculty of Humanities, Institute of Sociology, Krakowska 71,
71-017 Szczecin, Poland

Uniwersytet Szczeciński, Wydział Humanistyczny, Instytut Socjologii, Krakowska 71,
71-017 Szczecin, Polska

ORCID: 0000-0002-3642-6295

of counteracting domestic violence, and its main problem axis is the image, the perpetrators, and the consequences of the phenomenon, as revealed in older women's accounts of PD, as formulated by those experiencing it, as well as the family relations between perpetrators and victims.

Methods and materials. In order to achieve the research objectives, an approach appropriate to grounded theory was adopted, characterised by "not imposing" any conceptual categories related to domestic violence on the research participants. The study was carried out using a focus group interview technique amongst 48 elderly women who are both victims and witnesses of domestic violence. All participants in the study are residents of rural areas of one of the municipalities of Western Pomerania.

Results and conclusion. The application of the qualitative paradigm made it possible to see: 1) the complexity of relations relationships between family members: perpetrators, victims, and also witnesses of violence; 2) the multidimensionality of the forms of violence. Both of these dimensions, in the process of analysis, revealed a complex of factors creating the conditions constituting the characteristic status of the "senior-victim" in a family with a problem of violence. The cognitive space of the experience of violence is formed by nine analytical categories emerged in the procedure of coding the empirical material.

Keywords: rural areas, grounded theory, marginalization, ageism, elder abuse, qualitative analysis, domestic violence, violence against women.

Abstrakt

Cel. Artykuł przedstawia wyniki badań nad przemocą domową (PD) wobec osób starszych. Badania realizowane są w ramach zachodniopomorskiego systemu przeciwdziałania przemocy w rodzinie, a ich główną oś problemową stanowią: obraz, czynniki sprawcze oraz konsekwencje zjawiska, ujawniające się w relacjach starszych kobiet na temat PD, formułowanych przez osoby jej doświadczające, a także na temat stosunków rodzinnych między sprawcami a ofiarami.

Metody i materiały. Dla realizacji zamierzeń badawczych przyjęte zostało podejście właściwe teorii ugruntowanej, cechujące się „nienarzucaniem” uczestnikom badania jakichkolwiek kategorii pojęciowych związanych z przemocą domową. Badanie zostało zrealizowane techniką zogniskowanego wywiadu grupowego wśród 48 starszych kobiet, będących ofiarami, a także świadkami przemocy w środowisku domowym. Wszystkie uczestniczki badania są mieszkankami obszarów wiejskich jednej z gmin Pomorza Zachodniego.

Wyniki i wnioski. Zastosowanie paradygmatu jakościowego pozwoliło dostrzec: 1) złożoność relacji między członkami rodzin: sprawcami, ofiarami, a także świadkami przemocy; 2) wielowymiarowość form przemocy. Oba te wymiary w procesie analizy ujawniły kompleks czynników tworzących warunki konstytuujące charakterystyczny status „seniora-

-ofiary” w rodzinie z problemem przemocy. Przestrzeń poznawczą doświadczeń przemocy tworzą następujące kategorie analityczne wyłonione w procedurze kodowania materiału empirycznego: cechy ładu społecznego sprzyjające wykluczeniu seniorów, dysfunkcjonalne wzorce życia rodzinnego, degradacja statusowa osoby starszej, instrumentalna orientacja życiowa w pokoleniu młodych, katalizujące występowanie przemocy: sukcesja i nałogi w rodzinie, niezapewnienie koniecznej opieki, eksploatawanie osób starszych, naruszanie poczucia godności osób starszych, marginalizowanie osób starszych.

Słowa kluczowe: obszary wiejskie, marginalizacja, analiza jakościowa, teoria ugruntowana, ageizm, przemoc wobec kobiet, przemoc domowa, przemoc wobec starszych.

Introduction

In connection with the phenomenon of ageism, which is increasingly present in reflections on social problems (Dziechciaż, Filip, 2014; Szukalski, 2015), related to demographic changes in Western societies (Luzny, Jurickova, 2012), there has recently been a growing interest in domestic violence (DV [in Polish: PD – *przemoc domowa*]) against older people. The first significant publications relating to this issue appeared in the 1970s. In these, domestic violence against the elderly was referred to as granny battering, elder abuse, violence of the elderly, battered elder syndrome, battered parents, or geriatric abuse (Grunfeld, Larsson, Mackay, & Hotch, 1996; Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002; Podnieks, Anetzberger, Wilson, Teaster, & Wangmo, 2010; Brownell, 2014). As the demand for knowledge and social practice grew, research interest expressed itself in an increasing number of publications (Kleinschmidt, 1997), and institutions oriented towards solving social problems related to this phenomenon were established. This resulted in the emergence, at the end of the 20th century, of organisations and documents regulating the handling of situations of elder abuse. The US National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, established in the 1980s, and the UK Action on Elder Abuse programme, established in the 1990s, are good examples of this. An important outcome of their work was the development of The World Report on Violence and Health, an extensive section which covers DV, including violence against seniors (Krug et al., 2002). This report preceded the adoption of other international documents defining violence against older people and ways to counter it, such as the Plan of Action on Ageing (*United Nations Economic...*, 2013) and the Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Elder Abuse (2008).

Relatively extensive research on DV, focusing on the aspect of the scale of the phenomenon, usually depicts a set of different forms of violence in the form of more

or less elaborate typologies. The most basic division is a dichotomous one, distinguishing between psychological (psycho-emotional) and physical violence (including abuse of a sexual nature) (Flury, Nyberg, & Riecher-Rössler, 2010). Research also distinguishes, as a separate form, economic violence (Slabbert, Green, 2014; Gomes, 2020). There are also more elaborate methodological approaches that include more forms of DV, such as:

- physical violence – non-accidental injuries sustained as a result of the perpetrator being in a close relationship with the victim. The use of various forms of coercion, based on physical superiority, to induce decisions and actions unwanted by and harmful to the victim;
- psychological violence – humiliation and indignity, including depriving the victim of his/her autonomy, isolation, and imposing one's views. Deprivation of resources necessary for proper mental and physical functioning;
- sexual violence – abuse of a sexual nature, including rape (also marital rape);
- physical neglect – deprivation of proper care (including medical care). This particularly applies to dependent persons (minor children, elderly, disabled or those with medical conditions requiring care);
- psychological neglect – emotional rejection, emotional coldness, indifference, avoidance of showing positive feelings, disregard for the victim's mental and emotional needs;
- overprotectiveness – taking actions by the perpetrator that are oriented towards limiting the normal development of the victim by using excessive control and care (Mazur, 2002).

The definitions of the different forms of DV provide a source of validated indicators, understood as distinguished acts of these types of violence. The selection of indicators for explicitly defined forms of DV has the undeniable advantage that the research results obtained by different researchers are comparable, thus making it possible to characterise the structure of DV relatively precisely, understood as different forms of DV and not only acts. Sometimes, however, researchers do not define forms of violence, using only indicators – acts of violence. For example, an extensive study characterising the situation of seniors in Poland, in the section referring to their experiences of DV, distinguished not its forms, but nine acts – the behaviour of perpetrators towards victims (Mossakowska, Więcek, & Błędowski, 2012). Although this approach is less conducive to depicting the structure of the phenomenon, there are examples in the literature of scales being constructed to measure the level of the phenomenon with good results (Marshall, 1992a, 1992b).

Due to the complexity of the DV phenomenon, the difficulty of investigating its social scale and the still insufficient amount of thorough research in Poland focused on the authentic experiences of elderly people who are victims of abuse by their

relatives, a wide-ranging research project was developed with the aim of, on the one hand, statistically illustrating the nature and scale of DV against the elderly and, on the other hand, uncovering (in a qualitative paradigm) the cognitive representations functioning in the consciousness and daily life practices of elderly women victims and witnesses of violence.

The quantitative study (carried out using a questionnaire technique) of the research project presented in this paper used a division into five forms of DV: psychological, physical, economic, sexual and neglect, which were viewed on a total of nineteen indicators (acts of these forms of violence). Due to the wide range of results obtained and the fact that they are autonomous, the results and detailed methodology of this study are characterised in a separate paper (Terelak, Kołodziejczak, 2023).

The qualitative part adopts the theoretical perspective of ethnomethodology, placing primary emphasis on the colloquial (everyday) way of knowing and depicting the facts of the social world. In such a context, the principle of reducing the pre-conceptualisation of the research problems to the necessary minimum was adopted, formulating in the interviews only two general questions concerning: 1) what DV is in the conception of older people; 2) what they explain it with. The operationalisation of these issues was, in turn, completely omitted to obtain an authentic way of depicting and understanding the phenomenon studied, not imposed by theoretical nomenclature. It was assumed that the best methodological equipment is provided by the research procedure inherent in grounded theory.

Method

To explore the extent of DV towards older people, a questionnaire was prepared referring to the personal experiences of the respondents. It was developed in such a way as to avoid formulations that were too general and understood differently by the respondents. It therefore did not include terms such as psychological abuse or neglect and, above all, domestic violence; only terms related to actions that cause distress or harm were present. The questions addressed to the female respondents therefore referred to indicators of individual forms of DV without naming them.

Qualitative research involves the search for authentic experiences, described personally by its participants, which makes it possible to go beyond the framework of thinking set by a questionnaire that structures, as it were, the individual forms of DV from the outside. In undertaking this type of research on the phenomenon in question, the main analytical dimensions – apart from the intensity of its individual forms, which was the subject of the questionnaire research – were the socio-cultural ori-

gins of DV towards the elderly, the ways of understanding (by seniors) the variety of manifestations of this phenomenon, as well as the impact of experiencing harm from relatives on the generally understood situation of seniors in the family and their self-image and the transformation of this view.

The relation between the two dimensions of the research project is shown in Figure 1.

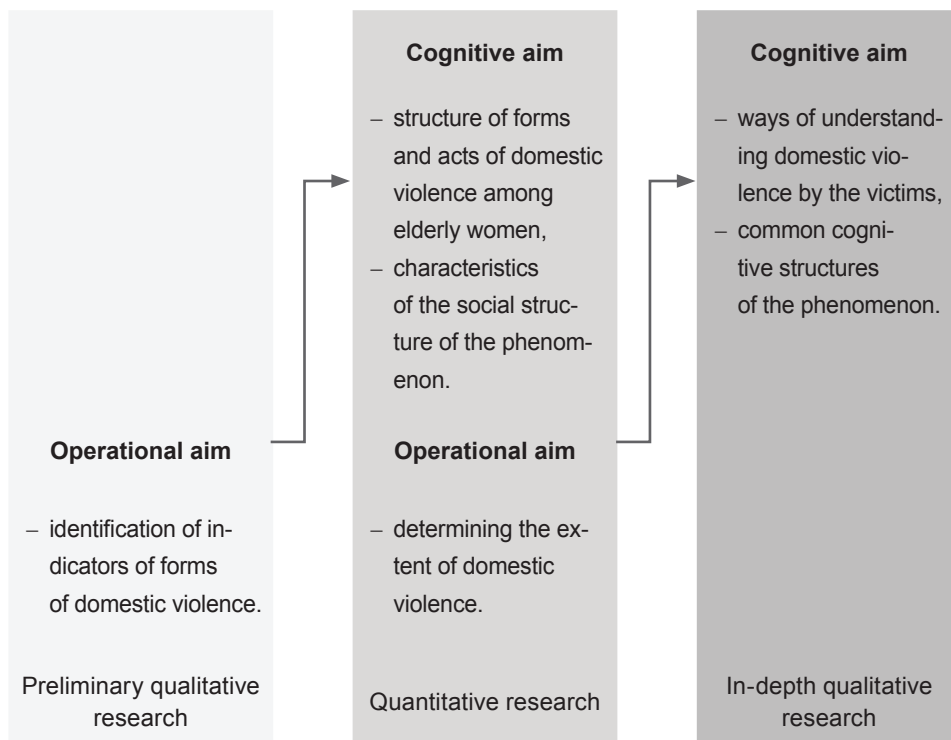


Figure 1. Structure of the research process on the DV phenomenon.

Source: Authors' own research.

Preliminary qualitative research had been carried out a few years earlier with diverse research samples, in which 65 indicators of domestic violence were identified, from which 19 indicators with the highest relevance and reliability (Pearson's C for each of them exceeded 0.7, Cronbach's α ranged from 0.673 to 0.970) were selected by statistical analysis and fed into the quantitative research questionnaire completed as part of the second block (Terelak, Kołodziejczak, 2023).

A block of in-depth qualitative research was carried out in 14 localities of a Polish municipality. A series of group interviews were conducted with a total of 48 seniors (women over 60) who consented to participate in the study.

Since the status of the “senior victim of DV” is not set once and for all (being in its essence a dynamic phenomenon, i.e., arising in the social interaction between the senior and the members of his or her family, as well as with the community in which he or she lives), the research concept developed is situated in the field of symbolic interactionism. Indeed, central to the cognitive process is the actors’ understanding of the situation in which they are involved, its course and the accompanying circumstances (Schwalbe, Mason-Schrock, 1996). They engage their lived experiences in a process of socially negotiating with others who are in the situation of being entangled in DV. As will be shown, the identities of DV victims are transformed. This qualitative context of the ongoing project was informed by the theoretical basis provided by the concept of the humanistic factor, which dictates not to impose a conceptual framework on the participants of the study, but to focus on the authentic interpretive constructs of the phenomenon studied, which have grown up in the community (Znaniński, 1927).

To the above findings, the study focused on the analysis of everyday life practices undertaken by the interviewed senior women, co-executing with their household members the reality of families with a violence problem. The culture of interpersonal relations rooted in patriarchy, which is still characteristic in Poland, especially in rural areas, provides an important feature here (Rorat, Szląg-Sikora, & Gródek-Szostak, 2016; Hoppe, 2020; Michalska, 2020). Both perpetrators and victims, as well as family members who witness/participate in violence, realise it in their everyday interactional practices. This makes it straightforward to take Harold Garfinkel’s findings on the properties of colloquial knowledge resources that people use in family settings as the direct theoretical basis of the research concept being pursued. According to Garfinkel, properties such as occasional expressions, sanctioned vagueness, pretence of agreement and retrospective-prospective sense serve to elaborate and make sense of the activities and roles undertaken and performed by the participants in the interaction (Garfinkel, 2020).

It has been assumed that the methodologically best way to implement the above findings is the procedures developed and elaborated by the founders and continuators of grounded theory (Glaser, Strauss, 2006). Above all, knowledge development in the social sciences should follow the patterns of people’s everyday thinking. The process of developing grounded theory is supposed to be as close as possible to the process of becoming a social reality, in a sense it is even supposed to imitate this process. The third fundamental issue is the postulate of limiting the pre-conceptualisation of the research idea as far as possible. Such a postulate has a certain significant advantage, although it deliberately does not take into account the existing theoretical findings in the field of the researched problem,

because it is based on the assumption that the researcher should treat the researched reality as a kind of *terra incognita*, it gives the possibility to research in the “context of discovery” characterised by Hans Reichenbach, allowing for an unlimited creative view of the researched processes and phenomena (Reichenbach, 1938).

The participant in qualitative interviews (informant) differs from the respondent primarily in that he or she shares the original experiences and knowledge previously unknown to the researcher. By providing information on matters of interest to the researcher, he or she participates in the research process as a partner on whom the researcher’s knowledge and, consequently, the results of the study depend. This basic, constitutive quality of the informant entitles him or her to be treated particularly as an equal research subject to the researcher (Terelak, Kołodziejczak, 2012). Adopting this research context makes it possible to gather empirical material flowing from the experience of informants, the form of which is not a function of the suggestive impact of the formulations used by the researcher, but results directly from their description in their own words. The critical thing here is to develop a research situation in which the interviewee speaks with a willingness to help understand what is at the core of their experiences, thoughts and beliefs, and to do so honestly and authentically enough to allow the researcher to understand something beyond the subjectivity of their perspectives.

The subject of the qualitative research approach was:

- the ways of perceiving and understanding the various forms of violence in the home environment present in the consciousness of elderly women;
- female informants’ beliefs about the sources of DV and the determinants of its occurrence.

Both of the above research objectives became the axial issues of a series of focus group interviews conducted using a procedure derived from the findings of grounded theory methodology (Konecki, 2000). In the course of the interviews, some of the informants’ statements illustrate both violence against older women and older men, constituting universal elements characterising the phenomenon of DV against seniors.

Results

The cognitive perspective of the realised study is formed by the results of the qualitative analysis, which are the effect of selective coding of the most important categories, subsequently subjected to theoretical elaboration through the application of the so-called “coding paradigm,” characteristic of grounded theory (Glaser, Strauss, 2006; Konecki, 2000). This procedure made it possible to structure

the thinking about the categories and their properties emerging from the empirical material. It was assumed that the coding paradigm would be used to identify individual categories in the space of occurrence of the central category formed by DV towards seniors. This space is determined by the individual elements of the coding paradigm (the causal conditions for the occurrence of the phenomenon, the phenomenon itself, the context, i.e., the temporal conditions, the place of occurrence of the phenomenon that the category describes, the intervening conditions, i.e., what weakens or intensifies the occurrence of the phenomenon, the actions or strategies and techniques used in social interactions, the consequences of the actions and interactions relating to the phenomenon being studied), with the modification of treating the context as an element belonging to those causal conditions that form the immediate circumstances of the occurrence of DV towards seniors.

The following categories, which emerged from a preliminary analysis of the empirical material resulting from the interviews on the elements understood by senior women as sources, causes or determinants of DV and on the manifestations of the phenomenon identified by them, were subjected to selective coding:

- features of the social order that favour the exclusion of seniors,
- dysfunctional patterns of family life,
- status degradation of the elderly,
- instrumental life orientation in the young generation,
- catalysing the occurrence of violence: succession and addictions in the family,
- failure to provide necessary care,
- exploitation of the elderly,
- violation of older people's sense of dignity,
- marginalisation of older people.

Because each of the above categories represents a signum for a range of different behaviours, they have been arranged based on grouping and emergence of types, making it possible to identify the characteristics of these categories. The following lists include the phrases used by the female interview participants, grouped because of the similarity of content they express. These individual "source entries" have been synthesised to form their specific names, thereby emerging the "properties" of the broad categories focussed by DV towards older people.

The first category, which has the hallmarks of a structural property of the social system and refers to the sources of DV towards the elderly, consists of features of the social order that favour the exclusion of seniors. From the statements of the female participants in the study emerges a certain consent to the deterioration of the situation of people (not only women but also men) entering the period of end of life. Violence by relatives appears to be somehow inscribed in this

situation. In some cases, due to its prevalence, it is treated as something natural.

Table 1

Selective coding table – category of sources and perpetrators of violence against the elderly: features of the social order conducive to the exclusion of seniors

Source records of statements by senior women	Properties
Such is the evil fate of old people... Helplessness of older people Helplessness of older people towards the aggressor Lack of consequences for victims	Inability to resist violence
Social insensitivity, lack of interest	Lack of social response to violence
Negative environmental impact Influence of environment Influence of the wife (husband) on the life of elderly parents	Negative role models in the environment
Lack of legislation	Limitations of the domestic violence prevention system
Sense of invulnerability	Perpetrators' belief in impunity
There is no home where "something" doesn't happen, but no one admits to it	Prevalence of the phenomenon
Upbringing mistakes Maltreatment, lack of good parenting Children are not taught to respect their elders Very young children learn to be treated badly by their parents Children are not taught respect for adults Indulgence of children's misbehaviour Lack of parents interested in children's problems	Dysfunctional transmission of patterns

Source: Authors' own study.

The reduced ability of seniors to resist mistreatment by family members is due to the factors described by the characteristics listed above:

1) the conviction that there is no possibility of avoiding the “bad fate of old people,” underpinned by fatalistic thinking about the position of the individual in the social world;

2) resulting from the seniors’ limitations;

3) due to the reproduction by the “young” of a family pattern with a problem of violence, previously initiated by the seniors present. If we further take into account the limitations of the capacity of the DV prevention system, the syndrome of a culture reproducing violence is revealed.

A category of dysfunctional patterns of family life, closely related to the previous one, also belongs to the specificity of the social system by having a structural character.

Table 2

Selective coding table – category of sources and perpetrators of violence against the elderly: dysfunctional patterns of family life

Source records	Properties
No money to live on	Poverty
Children have it too good	Prosperity
Lack of conversation and tolerance Lack of tolerance of the elderly towards the young	Lack of good contact within the family – a deficit of emotional bonds
Lack of tolerance of the young towards the old	Deficit of positive emotions in the family
Hate Entrenched hatred Venting anger at the weaker Envy	Bad emotions in family relationships
Living with another generation Living together with sons Young people living with adults for too long	Multi-generational living
Generational warfare	Generational conflict

Source records	Properties
Unequal treatment of family members Unequal treatment of children Use of violence out of revenge and jealousy Disrespect from children can be earned Poor, unequal distribution of property Unequal distribution of material wealth – revenge by children	Retorsions of the past
Provocation and malice by older people People get more aggressive and demanding as they get older Interference in the lives of the young	Seniors becoming unbearable with age

Source: Authors' own studies.

The set of factors that make up the category in question reveals three levels on which the causes of DV towards seniors are located: 1) the plane of emotional bonding deficits, the peculiarities of which, paradoxically, include a kind of “emotional disruption” of relations between family members. On the one hand, seniors accentuate the disappearance of positive emotions in the family, while on the other hand, there is a constant eruption of bad ones; 2) the plane of retaliations of the past generated by past situations and the treatment of some family members by others; 3) the plane of generational differences resulting from the “ailments” of old age.

Alongside the structural features of the system in which seniors live and the specifics of family relationships with emotional deficits, as well as legacies from earlier years, an important element in the area of the causes of DV towards the elderly is the instrumental life orientation adopted by the young.

Table 3

Selective coding table – category of sources and perpetrators of violence against the elderly: instrumental life orientation in the young generation

Source records	Properties
Older people are sometimes victims of the rush of the young to have more Children's rush for money causes lack of interest in elderly and sick parents	Youth orientation towards financial success

Source records	Properties
Money The desire for profit Willingness to extort money	Youth orientation towards financial success
Work – unwillingness to take it up Convenience of the young	Laziness, unwillingness of young people to take up employment

Source: Authors’ own story.

On the one hand, seniors perceive young people’s behaviour as an almost deviant rush towards financial gain. It constitutes an individualised determinant of behaviour which is acts of violence. On the other hand, they are convinced that the opportunistic attitude of youth is dictated primarily by the desire to minimise effort. According to the collected statements, this constitutes a sufficient justification for exploiting the “weaker” position of seniors in the family, and often making the pension (or other benefits received by the senior) the only source of family income. In addition, the attitude of the young is also a justification for using various coercion to transfer the evidence of ownership to a flat, farm, etc.

The discussed category of the most basic causes of the occurrence of DV towards seniors in the coding paradigm is located within the so-called “causal conditions” of the phenomenon. They all condense the specific situational context of the occurrence of DV towards the elderly –their status degradation in the family.

Table 4
Selective coding table – category of sources and perpetrators of violence against the elderly: status degradation of the elderly person

Source records	Properties
The young have the money, the old depend less and less on it Financial dependence	Seniors becoming dependent on the young
Abandoning the elderly Seniors are a burden on young people’s lives Lack of acceptance of the older person “I’ll show you who’s in charge.” The position of older people is declining	Depreciation of position in the family

Source records	Properties
Out of fear of not coping Out of fear of loneliness, the elder allows Allowing disrespect Not demanding self-respect Seniors do not seek help out of fear or shame Lack of faith in the help of other people and institutions Elderly person's sense of guilt	Self-degradation of seniors

Source: Authors' own study.

Unless the senior succumbs to the overwhelming influence of structural factors determining his or her unprivileged position in society and depreciating intra-family relations – and thus his or her position in the family is degraded – the risk of experiencing violence is lower than when subjected to the influence of these factors. Status degradation thus appears to be the sine qua non for the proliferation of the DV problem. For example, if a senior does not legally guarantee himself decent living conditions by transferring the ownership deed of a flat, house or farm to the young, he opens up the field for degradation of his position in the family.

The coding paradigm assumes the existence of specific intervening conditions that either favour or limit the occurrence of the analysed phenomenon. From the statements gathered, the category of catalysing the occurrence of violence was identified: succession and addiction in the family, the characteristics and source records of which are included below.

Table 5

Selective coding table – category of sources and causal factors of violence against the elderly: catalysing the occurrence of violence: succession and addictions in the family

Source records	Properties
As long as the children are not prescribed, peace of mind Once the house is prescribed to the children, the parents go to live in the basement	Family succession

Source records	Properties
Alcoholism Alcohol	Addictions in the young generation
New psychoactive substances (so-called “legal highs”) Drugs	Addictions in the young generation
Child abuse of alcohol and beating of parent Lack of money for stimulants and taking away from parents	

Source: Authors’ own study.

If the specific feature of a culture that undermines the position of the elderly in the family co-occurs with the instrumental life orientation of the young and depreciating family relationships, which leads the senior into status degradation and self-degradation – if, in addition, psychoactive substance addictions emerge in the young generation or an addictive succession occurs for the senior – the vision of the emergence and growth of violence against him or her is treated as certain by the participants in the qualitative interviews.

The categories of sources of DV against seniors discussed above relate to the content of the research participants’ beliefs, knowledge and experiences of the phenomenon. The following four categories, imbued with the distinguished properties – according to the coding paradigm, depicting actions, strategies and techniques used in social interactions - reveal the specificity of the perception of manifestations of violence by family members of seniors.

The first analytical category highlighted emerges as a result of and as an element of, family dysfunctionality. Older people in the family are confronted with manifestations of the failure to fulfil the essential duties traditionally ascribed to the social roles of the family, in which some family members care for others and try to meet the needs of each other (*cf.* Zwoliński, 2015).

Table 6
Selective coding table – category: failure to provide necessary care

Source records	Properties
Starvation	Restriction of food

Source records	Properties
Disconnection of utilities	Making it difficult to meet subsistence needs
Failure to assist a sick person Lack of medical care Lack of resources for treatment	Failure to provide medical care
After the house is prescribed to the children, the parents go to live in the basement. Grandfather has to climb a ladder into the room Sending an elderly person to a retirement home without their consent Lack of consent for admission to the home	Failure to provide a place to live

Source: Authors' own study.

The behaviour forming the characteristics of this category largely seems to correspond to the form of DV that is referred to as neglect. It is more often a case of failure to take action than of active violence. By creating and perpetuating inequalities between family members on the one hand, this type of situation provides a fertile ground for further manifestations of violence, depreciation of the elderly by younger family members and even self-degradation of the elderly.

A more active manifestation of DV is the exploitation of older people's vulnerability and unprivileged position for individual benefit by other, "stronger" family members. Such acts have been identified as an analytical category of exploitation of the elderly, whose properties and underlying source statements of seniors are included in Table 7.

Table 7

Selective coding table – category: exploitation of the elderly

Source records	Properties
Abuse of persons with disabilities	Exploitation of the disabled
Forcing the transcription of housing	Forced acquisition of assets (real estate)

Source records	Properties
Grandfather has to climb a ladder into a room	Stacking up of disadvantages in life
Locking in different rooms	
Restricting access to television and radio Restricting the needs of the elderly	
Extortion by threat Exploitation of dependence	Exploitation of dependency
Taking away a pension Forcing a pension (money) Withdrawal of money Extortion of money	Receiving money
Forcing parents to beg for their children	
Even a mediator ordered me to pay rent (when there is no need to do so because the flat is prescribed to the daughter with a lifetime right of use by me)	

Source: Authors' own study.

On the one hand, the natural reduction of vitality and social activity within and outside the family is connected with the generational change of social roles within the family, on the other hand, with an ostentatious push for succession or its implementation through domination expressed in the appropriation of domestic space, the exploitation of increasing dependency, up to and including poverty-stricken deprivation of financial resources. By its very nature, such exploitative behaviour is explicitly intentional, which makes it possible to see in it a downright peculiar attitude towards seniors in the family; it cannot be described otherwise than as a violent attitude.

A complex of behaviours that are highly active and at the same time extremely deeply penetrating the consciousness and that degrade seniors' sense of identity and strike at their well-being creates the category of violating the sense of dignity of the elderly. The belief that the sense of dignity is diminished or lost has gained many formulations saturating theoretically (Konecki, 2000) this category with nine properties.

Table 8

Selective coding table – category: violation of the sense of dignity of the elderly

Source records	Properties
Disregard for the elderly	Disregarding
Disregard for knowledge	Disturbing the peace
Obstruction of a peaceful life	Causing a feeling of guilt
Pointing out what is allowed and what is not allowed	Restricting freedom
Restricting freedom in one's own home	
Humiliating	Humiliation
Showing disrespect	
... you've lived too long ...	
Mocking, teasing	
Vulgarity and humiliation	Abusive language
Name-calling	
Insults	
Pushing	Neglecting
Poking	
Hostility	
Beating	Inflicting pain
Marital rape	Rape

Source: Authors' own study.

The characteristics of the above category illustrate behavioural complexes with a highly individualised, personal impact on older people's self-esteem. They are symptomatic of the degradation of the senior's subjectivity. The emergence of this type of relationship between family members forms the canvas for social degradation, which is the marginalisation of older people illustrated in the table below, forcing them away from the mainstream of family life, diminishing their importance and position, and leaving them to their own efforts.

Table 9
Selective coding table – category: marginalisation of the elderly

Source records	Properties
Ignoring the needs of older people	Ignoring needs Separation from the social environment Separation from family life
Disregard for the needs of older people	
Lack of acceptance	
Callousness/insensitivity	
Isolation	
Isolation of the older person	
Removal from shared decisions	
A belief that older people can be disruptive	
Going on holiday – parents in a care home	
Keeping out grandchildren	

Source: Authors’ own study.

Synthesising the findings so far, it can be seen that the effect of the qualitative analysis of the collected material is represented by the diagram below, which organises – based on the coding paradigm – the individual analytical categories into a system of relationships between the factors condensing the phenomenon of violence and its acts and consequences. While the causal conditions, situational context, intervening conditions, actions, strategies, and techniques used in social interactions have already been characterised, one of the consequences of actions and interactions included in the diagram, marginalisation, calls for a more detailed treatment. This phenomenon, being related to the others, is, according to the study, one of the most complex and at the same time most painful consequences of experiencing harm from relatives and living in a family with a problem of violence. Marginalisation means the senior loses his/her previous importance in the family. They experience an unpleasant feeling of being dispensable, a loss of the value of their life experience, achievements, and dignity. Such persons are excluded from participating in the process of making important decisions, from participating in some (and often even all) family leisure activities, as well as at least some family events, such as holiday celebrations (Galor, Goryńska-Bittner, & Kalinowski, 2014).

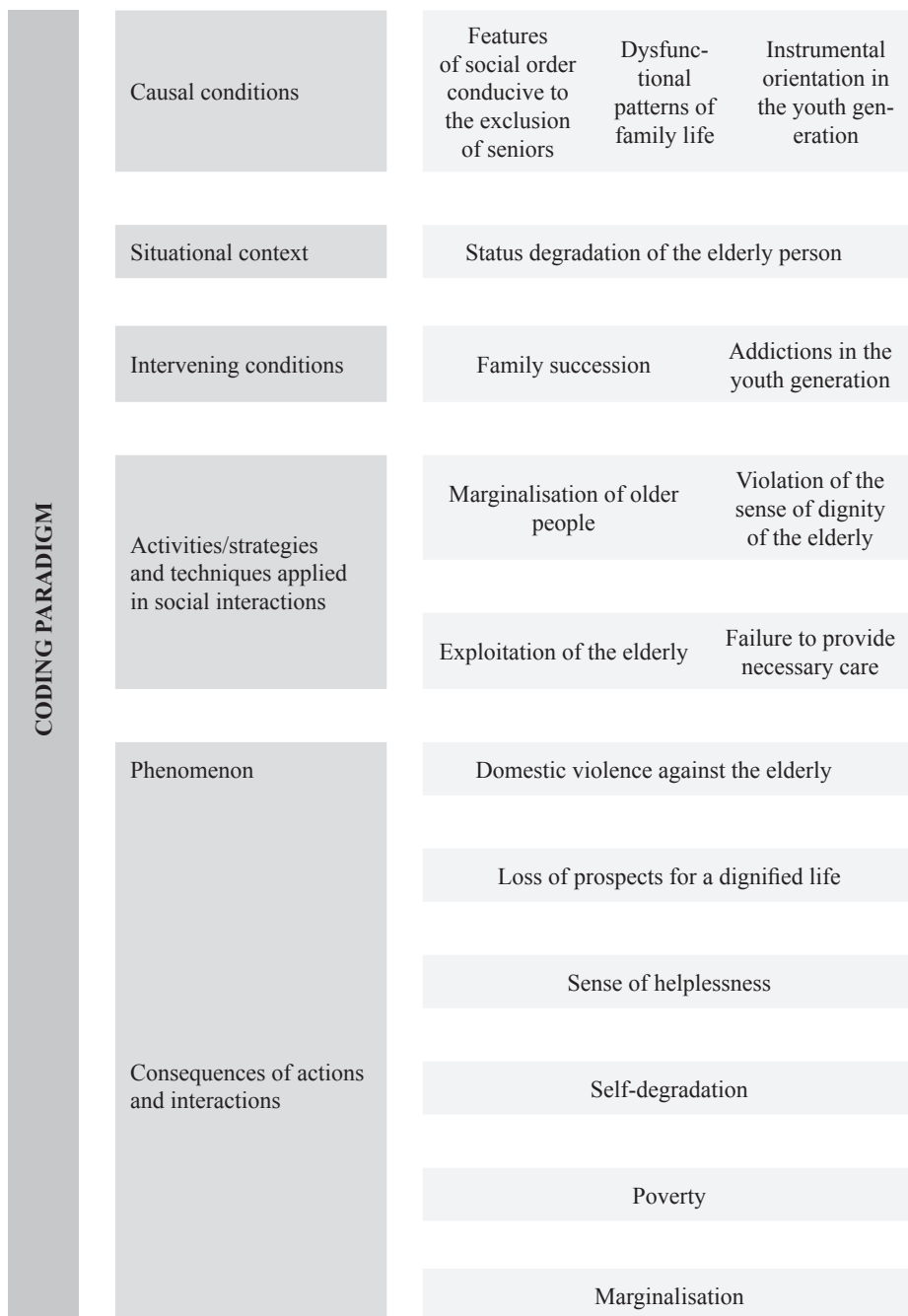


Figure 2. Domestic violence against seniors – arrangement of factors of the phenomenon.

Source: Authors' own study.

Marginalisation usually begins with some relatively permanent fact in the life of an individual, which affects his or her previous functioning in social reality in such a way that the individual gains a new face in this reality – one that is significantly different or almost completely incompatible with the previous one (Terelak, Kołodziejczak, 2014). In the case of seniors, these include, for example, the transfer of the title to a farm to the young, deterioration of health, and the addiction of the young to psychoactive substances. In the lives of some seniors, such an event takes place against the background of specific circumstances – present in their families and the broader social environment – such as the widespread belief in the “difficult fate” ascribed to the senior age, family life patterns saturated with negative emotions, the significant orientation of youth towards maximising financial benefits and, as a peculiar culmination of the aforementioned, but also constituting another causal factor, the progressive status degradation of the senior within the family. In the lives of seniors, who are trapped in a kind of limbo of the above-mentioned factors, specific actions and even specific interaction strategies, which have all the characteristics of violence, are increasingly frequent on the part of their family members. According to the analysis of the interviews, the experienced sense of limitation of previous opportunities, as well as the perceived loss of status and the experienced harm, result in a growing sense of helplessness and fear of the irreversibility of the changes taking place. The consolidation of the existing situation leads to the emergence of corresponding patterns of functioning within the family (as well as in the broader social environment), resulting in the increasingly frequent adoption of a withdrawal attitude, which is an expression of the loss of all hope of weakening or “extinguishing” of the mobilised forces of marginalisation, leading to the bankruptcy of self-confidence, belief in a change of “bad luck,” and an identity crisis.

Marginalisation, which means that the person experiencing it is not considered or even ignored when thinking about partnership, or becomes someone whose participation (or rights to participate) in the life of the family is forgotten, is “sealed,” as it were, by the lack of an appropriate response from the social environment, as well as by the loss of prospects for a dignified life and a feeling of helplessness and, finally, self-degradation and, above all, a fall into poverty that limits the possibilities for independent action or even threatens existence.

Discussion

Among the many studies on DV towards the elderly conducted worldwide, there is a clear strand of qualitative research. Much of the research focuses on analys-

ing how harm is perceived and experienced, as well as the interpretation of DV situations (Meyer, Lasater, & Garcia-Moreno, 2019). In this sense, the presented study broadens the field of describing and explaining DV against seniors in terms of the causal conditions of its occurrence, the nature and specificity of violent acts as a result of specific interactional processes between victim and perpetrator, and the consequences felt by victims.

The identified analytical categories of the situation of older people experiencing DV have the character of a multilevel system. We are dealing both with 1) interactions in the form of interactional techniques creating concrete acts of violence, and 2) patterns of behaviour of family members towards each other developed in families, transmitted intergenerationally, as well as existing systems of socio-cultural patterns organising the life of the local community (local institutions, neighbourhood relations, social organisations, support groups), 3) and finally – in the broadest sense – the features of the social system in which these communities function (legal norms, social policy, the system of social control, existing patterns of the arrangement of social gender roles, the organisation of the position of older people in the social order). The coding paradigm makes it possible to capture the relationships between the categories highlighted in the analysis so that they form a system of interrelated elements. In this regard, the configuration presented corresponds to an approach known as the Socio-Ecological Framework for Elder Abuse (Teaster, Roberto, & Dugar, 2006; Teaster, 2017).

In the dimension of causal conditions and contexts conducive to the occurrence of DV towards seniors, the analyses conducted made it possible to distinguish four categories, which were characterised by their theoretical saturation with properties revealed in the course of selective elaboration of the collected empirical material.

The category of features of the social order that foster the exclusion of seniors, signalling a kind of syndrome of a culture that reproduces violence, illustrates – as it should be assumed – the essential structural basis for the cultural and social conditions described in the literature that allow violence or the presence of social norms prescribing its concealment, such as assuming the role of victim for the good of the family (Grunfeld, Larsson, Mackay, & Hotch, 1996; Nahmiash, 2002; Buchbinder, Band-Winterstein, 2003; Zink, Regan, Jacobson, & Pabst, 2003; Band-Winterstein, Eisikovits, 2009; Band-Winterstein, 2012; Band-Winterstein, Smeloy, & Avieli, 2014; Band-Winterstein, 2015; Smith, 2015; Bhatia, Soletti, 2019). From interviews conducted with seniors, there emerges a characteristic belief in the inevitability of old people losing their former position in the family and the community as somehow a natural turn of events, which

dictates reconciliation with a “bad fate,” including living in a situation of violence (Buchbinder, Band-Winterstein, 2003). Of particular importance here are beliefs about the intergenerational continuity of the phenomenon of family violence (Pollak, 2004). It was emphasised in the interviews that it is very often reproduced (as a specific pattern of family life) in the next generation and transferred from children (former victims) to old parents. In the context of structural conditions, it is important to note the extensive sphere of relations between abused seniors and support institutions. Their lower accessibility in rural areas (Dimah, Dimah, 2003) or insufficient response to the symptoms of the violence occurring, combined with the shame and lowered self-esteem of the victims, resulted in a lack of recognition of the violence (Roberto, Brossoie, McPherson, Pulsifer, & Brown, 2013; Lazenbatt, Devaney, 2014; McCleary-Sills et al., 2016).

The microsocial aspect of the factors and determinants of DV, characterized in multiple studies, is constituted by individual and intrafamilial determinants (mainly intimate partner violence, although not exclusively) and is revealed above all in the violence-generating abnormalities of interactions between family members (Nahmiash, 2002; Roberto, Brossoie, McPherson, Pulsifer, & Brown, 2013; Lazenbatt, Devaney, 2014; Yan, 2015; Fox, Corr, Gadd, & Sim, 2016; Kolodziejczak, Terelak, & Balsa, 2019; Liu, Hu, 2021). In the study presented here, the context is expressed by the properties of the analytical category: dysfunctional patterns of family life. They refer to the dimension of emotional contact between family members, past situations present in the family’s memory, and the specificity of older age, related to the inconvenience of seniors’ functioning. The nature of these pathologised interactions is diverse enough to speak of the phenomenon of polyvictimisation (Ramsey-Klawnsnik, 2017; Teaster, 2017).

Additionally, the consumerist attitudes present in the culture of the younger generation and the orientation towards quick, effortless achievement of goals are important (Rindfleisch, Burroughs, & Denton, 1997; Stark, 2007). These contents emerged in the presented study under the category of instrumental life orientation in the young generation, expressed in the materialistic and demanding attitudes of younger household members and the perception of older family members as unattractive. This orientation of the young results in violence when circumstances related to succession and addictions in the family arise. The focus here is on factors related to substance abuse by violent offenders towards elders (Nahmiash, 2002), as well as issues related to the inheritance of wealth, which reduces the attitude of younger violent offenders (usually children, grandchildren, and/or their spouses) towards elders to attitudes based on selfish economic calculation (Nahmiash, 2002; Buchbinder, Band-Winterstein, 2003; Chane,

Adamek, 2015a, 2015b).

In the dimension of the subjective experience of acts and forms of DV, four analytical categories were generated from the statements of the female participants in the study: failure to provide necessary care, exploitation of the elderly, violation of the elderly's sense of dignity, and marginalisation of the elderly. The characteristics of these categories, emerging from the narratives of the female participants in the study, make it clear how important neglect by their family members, both passive and active, is for them (and for male seniors). This statement should be taken as a voice in the discussion on the nature of DV towards female seniors (Brownell, 2014).

Older women tend to associate experiencing DV with reduced psychophysical well-being (Band-Winterstein, Eisikovits, 2010; McGarry, Ali, & Hinchliff, 2017; McGarry, Simpson, & Hinchliff-Smith, 2011; McGarry, Simpson, & Mansour, 2010; Eisikovits, Band-Winterstein, 2015). As the analysis suggests, an important consequence of older people experiencing DV is a sense of helplessness in a situation that perpetuates the practice simultaneously. This aspect has also been described by other researchers, especially about DV towards older women (Grunfeld, Larsson, Mackay, & Hotch, 1996; Band-Winterstein, 2015; Meyer, Lasater, & Garcia-Moreno, 2019). It has such a special significance that it reduces the ability to take defensive action (Walker, 2012, 2016). As part of the broader characteristics of DV, the feeling of helplessness being a consequence of experiencing violence from relatives, is part of the mechanism of pushing seniors to the margins of family life and social life in the local environment, resulting in their permanent marginalisation (Ferreira, Lindgren, 2008), sanctioned – on the one hand – by existing cultural patterns in society degrading the position of seniors and, on the other hand, by the limited capacity of the DV prevention system (Terelak, Klepajczuk, & Kołodziejczak, 2010; Yan, 2015; Bhatia, & Soletti, 2019).

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