

## THE PRESENCE OF STOCKHOLM SYNDROME IN VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

**Kristina-Valeria Kristoff \***

School of Sociology, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, University of Bucharest,  
Bucharest, Romania

### **Abstract**

Violence against the family is a phenomenon present in all social branches, in any society, regardless of the level of development of societies, political stability, culture or religion. Family violence is a topic that has received increased attention in recent years, the foundations being laid in deviant or delinquent behaviors. In this paper, I focused on the Stockholm syndrome, wanting to highlight the causes of the development of the attachment of the victim of intimate violence to the abuser.

### **Keywords**

*Domestic violence, the dynamic victim-aggressor, traumatic symptomatology, battered woman*

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### **1. Introduction**

Women often tend to stay with the abuser for various reasons; among these reasons are their feelings for their partners, their desire to make the relationship work or their feelings related to children. Men's excuses and promises of change also put pressure on his partner's decisions to leave him, the woman being already emotionally vulnerable.

The existence of centers intended for women victims of domestic violence gives them the opportunity for them to leave the environment without fear of having nowhere to live, but many of the women prefer to stay. This behavior of staying in an abusive relationship is due to manipulation of the victim by the abuser, the victim begins to see reality through his eyes. Such behavior is found in specialized works under the name of the Stockholm syndrome.

"Stockholm syndrome is a psychological phenomenon in which hostages express empathy, sympathy and positive feelings towards their abuser, sometimes to the point of defensiveness and identification with them" (Nair, 2015).

The subject of Stockholm syndrome has generated a wealth of research and opinion. Turliuc *et al.*, (2009) states that the process of understanding the syndrome from a psychological point of view it is quite complex. The syndrome introduced by researcher Lange in 1974 as a result of his observations of the bank robbery in Stockholm, Sweden, Lange notes the relationship between aggressors and victims. Many of the victims of the attack testified that the aggressors were defending them from

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\*Corresponding Author: Kristina-Valeria Kristoff, e-mail: [kristoffkristina@gmail.com](mailto:kristoffkristina@gmail.com)

the police, did not file a complaint wanting to protect the aggressors, in their view induced by the kidnapers the police were the negative characters.

Graham (1994) also states the phenomenon of the bank attack in Stockholm, Sweden, where one of the female hostages fell in love with the aggressor and even had sexual relations with this. The aggressor managed to manipulate her so that she believed that the authorities wanted to harm them, protecting him and refuses to cooperate with the authorities.

"The syndrome is reinforced by aspects of the situation that decrease the psychological distance between the hostage and robber and this increases the likelihood that the hostage will turn to the robber and not to others, for help in treatment of traumatic experience. Note that some of the variables considered to promote the syndrome they are opposite or contradictory" (Graham *et al.*, 1994).

For this syndrome to appear in family violence there must be a form of psycho-isolation emotional, an unequal power relationship, the existence of a physical threat and an instinct to victim preservation (Clevenger *et al.*, 2018). This syndrome is the result of an unconscious decision or an irrational choice.

According to FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin (2007), psychological perspective on Stockholm syndrome is that of the ego, described by Sigmund Freud as the "core of the personality" and is responsible for providing defense mechanisms for victims to protect themselves or distance themselves from traumatic situations, unpleasant thoughts and negative feelings. So this connection with the aggressor contributes to the victims' chances of survival

Turliuc *et al.*, (2009) state that there are four conditions that lead to the installation Stockholm syndrome: the first condition would consist in forming the victim's perception of the aggressor, the second condition would be the one when the victim perceives the aggressor as a source of kindness, that of the third condition is the isolation of the victim (physical and psycho-emotional) and the last condition is when the victim does nothing to get rid of the abuser, nor does she want to.

"The tendency not to interfere in the internal quarrels of a family in the name of protecting space her intimate relationship led to a lower arrest rate of abusers married to the victim against foreign abusers, and even to lighter punishments for them compared to those applied for the same act but initiated from the position of a stranger, of a person not involved in a relationship formalized with the victim" (Turliuc *et al.*, 2009).

Graham (1994) states that many women deny men's violence against them, and find it impossible to notice that violence is an effort to maintain male dominance, female subjugation and eventually, forced love.

Muntean & Muntean (2011) record that the female victim becomes unable to withdraw from a violent relationship, reducing even the ability to benefit from the support it would, could receive.

Graham *et al.*, (1994) state that the bully will use threats for intimidation the victim by inducing fear to prevent escape. An example of a threat is "I'll kill you if you leave me". The woman who is present in an abusive relationship and physically isolated from everything contact with another human being needs attention and protection, thus having nowhere else to go fulfills these natural needs by turning to the abuser, who is the only source of relationship.

Thus, Voinea (1993) states that in general this isolation increases the risk of attachment of women towards her abuser not only for her basic needs but also depends on him for emotional support. Thus, the greater the fear, the more it clings to the

relationship it is allowed, that is, the relationship with the aggressor. Due to this isolation, the victim begins to see everything from the aggressor's perspective.

Turliuc *et al.*, (2009) show us that the victim has no other alternative than to look at the world from the perspective of the abuser in order to increase his positive feelings towards her, making everything she can to please him, thereby aiding his own preservation.

As any other syndrome, it has its symptoms, so Graham (1994) identifies the symptoms of Stockholm syndrome through a study. The symptoms are very similar with those of post-traumatic stress disorder, specifically the victim experiences insomnia, nightmares, problems with concentration, distrust. The victim is also related to abuser, specifically a two-way bond focused on the psychology of captivity, she is grateful for every act of kindness from the abuser. It goes through a constant sense of denial of violence, threats of the abuser and protects him from others by being very attentive to the needs of the abuser in an attempt to always please him, sees the world from his perspective and often does not have her own view of the world. According to the victim, the abuser is the protector her and it is hard for her to leave him psychologically, even if he is no longer physically around.

On the other hand, the long-term effects according to Graham & Rawling (1994) are: inexplicable detachments from certain situations or people, an intense "push-pull" dynamic in the relationship with others as well as temper tantrums and low self-esteem. he push-pull dynamics seen in people with Stockholm syndrome have developed because, on the one hand, victims push the person who threatens his survival, but on the other hand to survive, the victims she must approach the abuser with the hope of her own survival.

"In most such situations, women do not divorce or separate from the abuser and remain in the home, although the acts of violence are repeated with increasing frequency" (Rădulescu, 2001).

Many victims of intimate violence who have this syndrome tend to blame themselves for corrections received. Graham (1994) states that there are two reasons why victims blame themselves namely: the first reason would be to ensure survival, victims take the perspective to their abuser and the abuser believes it is justified or not by the abuse of the victim; the second reason is when victims feel guilty for the corrections received in order to stop such abuse.

"Another psychological consequence can be the development of personality disorders, especially from the category of behaviors and personality traits specific to the disorder borderline" (Turliuc *et al.*, 2009).

Graham (1994) states that many abused women have attempted suicide at least once, victims of intimate violence see suicide as a way to escape the daily abuse and corrections. Another extreme solution would be to kill the partner. Incest, mockery, rape and sexual harassment are among the most recognized forms of male violence, these forms endanger a woman's survival both physically and mentally.

"Mechanisms that make it difficult for the victim to psychologically separate from the abuser include: the fear of reprisals as a result of any evidence of disloyalty to the abuser; the loss of the only positive relationship available, given her isolation; the loss of the only identity that remains available to her - herself as she is seen through the eyes of the abuser (an image that, in the case of a victim exposed to systematic, prolonged abuse, replaced any previous sense of self)" (Turliuc *et al.*, 2009).

Normally the development of a positive relationship between the victim and the

aggressor presents several theoretical approaches and studies. These approaches show that there is a psychological change that consists in certain abnormal processes towards these positive feelings towards the aggressor. However, spending time only with the aggressor and the victim being isolated from any other means of communication and coexistence seems a normal process that develops on the basis of long-term contact between the two.

Many victims of intimate violence and isolation see the aggressor as the one that is injured and that he is the victim of the situation. Many of the abusers at first act perfectly normal, humanly, without giving the impression that he has any violent thoughts about the victim. After the victim falls into "trap" of the aggressor and he is sure that he can manipulate her, the explaining of small gestures of control are gestures of care towards the victim, so that later the total isolation begins.

Thus being a defense and survival process, for the victim to develop such syndrome, the abuser works a lot on the psychological side of the victim, traumatizing her through threats, isolation and physical violence.

Specialists have not only studied the behavior of women in violent acts, but also those of the opposite's parties, meaning the violent behavior of the aggressor. Thus, we find in several studies different typologies and characteristics of the aggressors, which helps us to understand the acts of violence and violent behaviors. Studying and understanding typologies and characteristics aggressors can improve the intervention strategy in the case of intimate violence.

"Power, in its entirety, has several meanings. To exploit, to coerce, to manipulate, to enter into competition or on the contrary, to associate with someone for the purpose of joint use of a position of power are only some of these meanings" (Rădulescu, 2001).

We are aware that nowadays a home no longer means only love, respect and understanding; unfortunately, in many cases a home also signifies fear and aggression.

Some of the characteristics of aggressors according to Turliuc *et al.*, (2009) are: aggressors have low self-esteem, dependence on the intimate partner, precipitation when it comes to build relationships, jealousy, unrealistic demands, use of isolation, use of force in a sexual relationship, male supremacy, negative behaviors, blaming others for their actions, hypersensitivity.

Control over the victim is necessary for the aggressor; this permanent control makes the victim to feel insecure and unable to run, knowing that somehow no matter where she is, he will find her, so the victim will never be able to be independent.

The lack of interest in the partner's needs and wishes is reflected in this area as well the intimate life of the couple. Often they will force intimate relationships just to reinforce their image of full master, to whom all his wishes are fulfilled, whenever he wants" (Turliuc *et al.*, 2009)

At the beginning of an abuse, the victim decides to stay, being unaware of the seriousness of the act itself if that gesture simply means a word thrown at the nerves. Those nerves that are not controlled, in time it will cause more than simple discussion, it will perhaps even cause physical injury to the woman. So in a case of violence, timely intervention must be made both through the victim's decisions to stop the abuse and authorities or social services, otherwise things will get worse for the victim.

"People don't react rationally when it comes to feelings or passions anymore between intimates there are, as is known, strong emotional ties, which can exacerbate violent situations. A marital conflict, for example, does not necessarily have a specific

reason or cause, but can be the effect primary emotions out of control" (Rădulescu, 2001).

We can thus point to some of the characteristics of Stockholm syndrome (frontal attachment by the aggressor):

- Development of positive feelings vis-à-vis the aggressor of the victim;
- Refusal of the victim to cooperate with the authorities or other people, showing suspicions or negative feelings towards them;
- The victim's perception of the aggressor's behavior, considering that everything comes from his part represents a form of goodness.

In order to establish this syndrome, it is necessary for the aggressor to gain sympathy and cooperation from the victims. Thus, it alternates periods of aggression or violence with periods of peace.

Regardless of the form of abuse manifested in the relationship of the couple, the violence has its beginning her own cyclicity from which we can understand how the woman turns into a victim. Turliuc *et al.*, (2009) identify the existence of three phases in the cyclicity of intimate violence, among them are listed: the main phase that refers to the building of tension (the first minor acts of aggression over which the woman passes through understanding, avoidance or calmness), the second phase is that of acute incidents of aggression (when tension and aggression can no longer be controlled) and the last phase of the spouse's or partner's repentance (the aggressor's regrets and remorse towards the victim appear).

There are cases in which the victim becomes excessively attached to the abuser, to whom he finds justifications of his actions. In family violence, the appearance of attachment to the aggressor is favorable in certain cases such as physical and mental abuse. Physical abuse can escalate from one form to another. Rujoiu (2016) states that the forms of physical abuse manifest themselves differently, such as slapping, hitting, punching, burning, pushing, pulling hair, using weapons, causing bruises, etc.

Psycho-emotional abuse according to Rădulescu (2008) represents any act that leads to psychological suffering of the victim and is exercised through different forms: limitation of freedom of expression and isolation social. According to Dumitrescu (2015), the victim of psycho-emotional abuse develops a defensive behavior that makes her unable to leave the relationship with the aggressor or to get help.

An explanation of the manifestation of this syndrome is approached by the evolutionary theory elaborated by Charles Darwin. The evolutionary theory explains the abuse of the wife/partner starting from the premise of heredity as representing a predisposition of the man to resort to acts of violence in certain contexts" (Rujoiu, 2016).

Turliuc *et al.*, (2009) identified that aggression is increased in sex male and has different biological factors that help increase this aggressiveness such as male sex hormones. According to Rujoiu (2016), we cannot change what is biological, but everything related to society as well as social aspects is a process of continuous change and learning, the individual will create new norms and social values and will be in a continuous transformation.

On the other hand, the ecological theory says Rujoiu (2016) that it is based on the analysis of both social and individual aspects regarding the interaction between the individual and the environment. Rujoiu (2016) also identifies four levels of the ecological model for reducing the problem of violence. The first level is represented by the macrosystem (culture, stereotypes, mentalities), the second level is that of exosystem (social networks, formal or informal), the third level is represented by the microsystem

(control from an economic and emotional point of view exercised between 8 partners) and the last level which is represented by the ontogenetic, meaning the individual aspect (research of the genealogical tree and family history).

Turliuc *et al.*, (2009) state that a prolonged exposure to situations of violence intimacy between partners resulted in a distinct set of psychological and behavioral symptoms known under the term "battered woman syndrome". An abused woman goes through different states like anger, fear, shame, sadness and helplessness. Because of states of fear and shame, they hide the abuse and thus defends the aggressor.

"Therefore, in most cases, domestic violence is a traumatic experience that affects the person deeply and on multiple levels: physical/somatic, emotional, mental, behavioral, social and economic" (Dima & Beldianu, 2015).

The woman's health is getting worse, several parts of the body being affected, and if the victim is pregnant and the physical abuse continues, it will also be felt by the fetus. Among the consequences of sexual abuse would be sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, infections or vaginal bleeding, etc. According to the study conducted by Turliuc (2009), approximately 40% of women who go through physical abuse are also sexually abused.

Victims who are abused psycho-emotionally end up with depression, anxious states, feeling of fear etc. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the syndrome represents a problem of mental health that some people develop after experiencing or witnessing an event that endangers their lives.

"Often, attachment behavior patterns and defense mechanisms persist throughout life and affects relationships with parents and family, with those of the same age, with society and with partners" (Payne, 2011).

Perhaps the most prominent psychological feature associated with Stockholm syndrome is the extent of cognitive distortions associated with it. When discussing the abuser and the abuse of a woman who exhibits the syndrome, she feels unable to establish the facts, as if the facts are slippery slopes that are forever changing. Why this? To be able to relate to an abuser involves developing cognitive distortions that reinforce and maintain connection and thus maintain hope.

Stockholm syndrome helps to understand the behavior of battered women, which, in the absence of an understanding of its context, appears irrational and self-destructive and encourages victim blaming. Stockholm syndrome explains why bonding with an abuser occurs; it comes from efforts to survive trauma and chronic abuse, inevitably and not from personality defects of abuse victims. In the absence of this understanding, there is a tendency to blame victims for their own abuse.

Unfortunately, the effects of victim blaming are likely to be cyclical and cumulative. Victim-blaming attitudes on the outside encourage more abuse and by extension, encourage the development of Stockholm syndrome, further isolating the woman and thereby making his escape more difficult.

The increased isolation and inability to escape makes the woman even more dependent on the kindness of her abusive partner. Thus, the victim-blaming attitudes of strangers promote the development of Stockholm syndrome in female victims. This is especially true when these beliefs are held, expressed and acted upon by police officers, judges, prosecutors, psychotherapists, psychiatrists and friends to whom the woman might turn for help. There is no better example of the fundamental attribution error, a denial of the power of social context in that the connection takes place, than that offered by the frequently heard attitudes of blaming the victims.

Consider the effects on the female victims of the general public who blame her for staying with her abuser when so many factors, including their attitudes, prevent her from escaping her partner's abuse. The more connected the women seem to their abusers, the better many people blame the victims because they misperceive that it's love, not incapacity to escape, is why women stay with their abusers. Thus, the cycle repeats, by each time increasing victim blaming, the conditions that lead to Stockholm syndrome and the relationship between the abused woman and the aggressor.

According to Rujoiu (2016), support services have the role of supporting the victim of violence domestic in the long-term recovery/rehabilitation process.

There are various NGOs and programs today, some even run by the police, that deal with preventing and combating domestic violence. In order to end the cycle of domestic violence, several information programs have been developed in several countries, programs that try to change certain perceptions. In order for the programs to work, the support of the authorities was necessary, as well as volunteers. I believe that the media and education in schools have the greatest impact, thus some programs have been organized in such a way as to cover these areas as well.

Thus understanding this syndrome helps victims to be informed and perceive the danger abuse by asking for help and society to be a real support by showing empathy, involvement and understanding.

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