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Cyclic Repetition of Physical Abuse*

1. Introduction

In this part we will focus on the dynamics of abuses, particularly physical abuse where victims are usually women, although this is not necessarily always the case: the data also testify to the increase in women's aggression and, accordingly, the abuse of their male partners, but these data are still very scarce.¹ Therefore, in the dynamics of cyclical repetitions of abuse

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¹ D. G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships*, New York 2007, The Guilford Press, p. 27–43 and 49–53; P. Frewen, R. Lanius, *Healing the traumatized self: Consciousness, neuroscience, and treatment*, New York 2015, W. W. Norton & Company, p. 5–23; M. L. Kelley, A. L. Braitman, *Antisocial personality disorder and physical partner violence among single and dual substance-abusing couples*, "Journal of family

(especially physical and sexual), we will focus on men which, as already said, does not mean that women do not abuse. In the case of male physical abuse, their partners experience a whole constellation of reactions; these can be completely paralyzing, especially when it comes to chronic forms known as the abusive cycle.² We speak of the progressive increase in arousal and intense tension that finally lead the violent partner to the eruption of anger and rage. This can manifest as emotional and mental abuse and violence; in our case, however, it is mostly about physical and often also sexual abuse where the partner's body becomes the most efficient receiver of these raw, dysregulated affects of rage and anger.³

In classical literature,⁴ this cycle of abuse that is chronically repeated and renewed, is described in three stages. The first stage is known as the phase of the escalation or increase in tension, the second stage as the explosion of acute abuse, and the third stage, when usually both partners but particularly the abuser try to start all over again, as the tranquil, repentant, loving interlude.

violence" 31 (2016), p. 423; *Strengthening Families*, eds. J. Stala, J. Garmaz, Kraków 2016; *The Contemporary Family: Local and European Perspectives*, eds. E. Osewska, J. Stala, Kraków 2015; J. Stala, *Der Mensch als Person: Die bestimmende Grundlage für Johannes Paul II. in seinem Bild von der Familie*, „The Person and the Challenges" 2 (2012) nr 2, pp. 41-59; J. Stala, E. Osewska, *Anders erziehen in Polen. Der Erziehungs- und Bildungsbegriff im Kontext eines sich ständig verändernden Europas des XXI. Jahrhunderts*, Tarnów 2009.

² D. G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships*, New York 2007, The Guilford Press, p. 55–61, P. Frewen, R. Lanius, *Healing the traumatized self: Consciousness, neuroscience, and treatment*, New York 2015, W. W. Norton & Company, p. 47–53; C. Policastro, M. A. Finn, *Coercive control and physical violence in older adults: Analysis using data from the National Elder Mistreatment Study*, „Journal of interpersonal violence" 32.3 (2017), p. 313–315.

³ A. R. Marasca et al., *Marital physical violence suffered and committed by men: repeating family patterns?*, »Psico-USF« 22.1 (2017), p. 101–103.

⁴ D. G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships*, New York 2007, The Guilford Press, p. 74–79; A. Schore, *Affect regulation and the origin of the self: The neurobiology of emotional development*, New York 2016, Taylor & Frances/Routledge, p. 386–389; H. A. Beydoun, M. Williams, M. A. Beydoun, S. M. Eid, A. B. Zonderman, *Relationship of physical intimate partner violence with mental health diagnoses in the nationwide emergency department sample*, „Journal of Women's Health", 26 (2017), p. 143–145; C. Peterson et al., *Short-term lost productivity per victim: intimate partner violence, sexual violence, or stalking*. „American journal of preventive medicine", 55 (2018), p. 107–108.

2. The cycle of abuse

2.1. The increase in tension

At this stage, the man begins to show that his rage and anger are rapidly increasing, which mainly manifests as angry, cynical, sarcastic, verbal criticism, sometimes as humiliation and shaming, but often as silence, which is full of unrelenting tension and anxiety. All these are accompanied by an aggressive attitude, which is increasingly indicating that the aggressive attack is rapidly approaching. The woman, frightened and terrified, is only waiting for the worst to happen. Firstly, she completely suppresses her anger, and then begins to search for the most effective survival strategies: she tries to be totally available to her partner, to suit his every desire, to understand his needs – with the only goal to avoid the inevitable in any imaginable way. Nevertheless, his anger can only intensify until the true outbreak of unstoppable aggression.⁵

Sometimes, when the woman sees inevitable aggression on its way, she even provokes her partner, only to end this terrifying, paralyzing tension. A woman who has been a victim of violence for a long time is also well aware that she can by no means stop the violence that has started to build up in her partner. In this regard, it is necessary to point out that the violent partner is the only person who can stop his aggression, if, of course, he is in touch with himself.⁶ This means that the violent partner must begin to listen to his internal signals, especially those that come from his proprioceptive sensations, where it is possible to perceive the increase in physiological, organic arousal. It is in these internal receptors where the spiral process of the escalation of anger and rage, which can very quickly lead to external violence, starts. The violent partner who physically expresses his violence usually does not stop until the very end, which means he will literally get tired from physical beating and thus lose enough energy, which will reduce the level of tension. But the most terrifying is the fact that the violent

⁵ A. R. Marasca et al., *Marital physical violence suffered and committed by men: repeating family patterns?*, "Psico-USF" 22.1 (2017), p. 103–104.

⁶ D. G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships*, New York 2007, The Guilford Press, p. 80–83; C. Policastro, M. A. Finn, *Coercive control and physical violence in older adults: Analysis using data from the National Elder Mistreatment Study*, "Journal of interpersonal violence" 32.3 (2017), p. 315–317.

partner will quickly become addicted to this method of adrenaline “energy release”.⁷ This way of relieving tension, the only one he knows, will thus become a very important part of his functioning.

Here we should mention that violent partners are often deeply marked by a disturbed personality structure with traceable psychopathic characteristics because of which they are almost completely incapable of any empathy and, consequently, any feelings of guilt and repentance.⁸ In other words, violent partners lose compassion for the victim in this vicious circle of violence and abuse; in this process they literally lose any feeling for the victim who is the target of their violence.⁹ A similar phenomenon can be seen in people with the so called narrowed tunnel vision before committing suicide. Purely destructive thinking and feeling can be traced in farewell letters and other written warnings, which a suicidal person addresses to their loved ones. They strongly resemble the language of a violent person before abusing, for example, their partner.¹⁰ The profiles of a suicidal person and an abuser are both characterized by long-standing conflicts in intimate relationships, with a typical pattern of abuse, separation and reunion of the partners. Various addictions and depressive conditions, which regularly accompany both suicidal persons and abusers, can often be observed in their relationships.¹¹

⁷ D. G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships*, New York 2007, The Guilford Press, p. 89–91; H. A. Beydoun, M. Williams, M. A. Beydoun, S. M. Eid, A. B. Zonderman, *Relationship of physical intimate partner violence with mental health diagnoses in the nationwide emergency department sample*, “Journal of Women’s Health”, 26 (2017), p. 143–144; A. R. Marasca et al., *Marital physical violence suffered and committed by men: repeating family patterns?*, “Psico-USF” 22.1 (2017), p. 103–104.

⁸ A. Schore, *Affect regulation and the origin of the self: The neurobiology of emotional development*, New York 2016, Taylor & Frances/Routledge, p. 386–389; M. L. Kelley, A. L. Braitman, *Antisocial personality disorder and physical partner violence among single and dual substance-abusing couples*, “Journal of family violence”, 31 (2016), p. 424–426.

⁹ A. Schore, *Affect regulation and the origin of the self: The neurobiology of emotional development*, New York 2016, Taylor & Frances/Routledge, p. 415–419; C. Peterson et al., *Short-term lost productivity per victim: intimate partner violence, sexual violence, or stalking*. “American journal of preventive medicine”, 55 (2018), p. 107.

¹⁰ D. G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships*, New York 2007, The Guilford Press, p. 104–107; M. L. Kelley, A. L. Braitman, *Antisocial personality disorder and physical partner violence among single and dual substance-abusing couples*, “Journal of family violence”, 31 (2016), p. 425–426.

¹¹ D. G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships*, New York 2007, The Guilford Press, p. 113–116; M. L. Kelley, A. L. Braitman, *Antisocial personality disorder and physical partner violence among single and dual substance-abusing couples*, “Journal of family violence”, 31 (2016), p. 427.

2.2. The outbreak of violence

Here we should emphasize that the abusive partner is often literally driven by extremely intense envy and jealousy. He is constantly suspicious of his partner and to such extent that, for example, his wife fears any topic that could awaken paranoid ideas in her husband. All these are in the service of inner tension, the aggression of the violent partner, who just searches for exits and consequently becomes more and more intimidating.¹² The spouse of the abuser, especially if he is depressive and suicidal, lives in constant terror; she is afraid and literally trembles at the mere thought of what she will awaken in him, if she only mentions that, for example, her company organizes a trip, party, or celebration. In all of these events, her partner may perceive the threat that his wife is going to leave him, cheat on him, and get emotionally attached to another. An invitation to participate in these events together, which the wife hopes will help pacify violent partner, can trigger even more serious complications and conflicts, as the violent partner, for example, during the celebration looks for ever new evidence of her infidelity. Any man approaching her can be seen as a potential rival to whom his wife will become attached in the future. For the violent partner, this meeting is merely a farce, only an attempt to deter him from his thoughts, as he is convinced that his wife only wants to mislead him. Thus he will keep mentioning this man in their further conversations; again and again, he will see him as a secret or disguised competitor, who is not only a threat but can even outwit him at any time.

When, therefore, the depressed violent partner, due to his distorted thoughts and feelings, especially jealousy and envy, begins to suspect that an imagined or real final separation from his wife is approaching, he becomes even more depressed and loses his sense of purpose in life, and this triggers his ideas of murder or suicide.¹³ These depressive states further stimulate obsessive musings and distorted fantasies, which can create a desire to

¹² D. G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships*, New York 2007, The Guilford Press, p. 153–162; C. Peterson et al., *Short-term lost productivity per victim: intimate partner violence, sexual violence, or stalking*. “American journal of preventive medicine”, 55 (2018), p. 108.

¹³ D. G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships*, New York 2007, The Guilford Press, p. 170–172; C. Peterson et al., *Short-term lost productivity per victim: intimate partner violence, sexual violence, or stalking*. “American journal of preventive medicine”, 55 (2018), p. 109.

destroy his partner. These desires and ideas are only deepening with time and a terrible inner struggle begins, accompanied by a completely irrational possessive idea that the wife is his property and therefore must not and cannot leave him. Other revengeful thoughts and beliefs (usually distorted with jealousy and envy) can develop - if he cannot have her, then no one else will. Envy and jealousy, which only encourage such thinking, can lead to very rough, aggressive physical attacks on his partner, which can end with murder or very serious physical injuries. In addition, children are often involved, and they literally become a prey of parental murderous ideas and extremely hateful and abusive deeds.

Interestingly, partners, as well as friends, often overlook the tension that is intensifying. It is a condensed tension, which sometimes appears even in the form of a silence before the storm, which is a reliable sign that a violent, abusive attack is inevitably approaching. Others see these violent partners as individuals who occasionally behave a little bit weirdly, they may be somewhat different here and there, and inclined to emotional instability, but otherwise nothing is truly wrong with them. That is why at first they simply cannot believe that these acquaintances or people from their surroundings are capable of such cruelty as, for example, prolonged physical and / or sexual abuse, harming another person or oneself, and murder or suicide. No one can grasp, as they sometimes say, that this man, who appeared to behave correctly to everybody, is capable of committing such criminal acts. This is especially the case when a person with very disruptive psychopathic characteristics hides these skilfully, and then they are fully revealed in criminal acts, especially in a planned, cold-blooded murder of a spouse.

In these cases we often recognize the so called double personality; a split between a private person and how this person appears outside his home.¹⁴ The violent partner is by all means capable to strictly control his behavior in public: only from time to time is it possible to notice “something strange”, which is, however, easily forgotten and can be, due to his general behavior and his approach to people, quite negligible.¹⁵ These behaviors include

¹⁴ M. L. Silverstein, *Disorders of the self: A personality-guided approach*. Washington, DC, 2007, American Psychological Association, p. 145–149; J. N. Briere, C. Scott, *Principles of Trauma Therapy: A Guide to Symptoms, Evaluation, and Treatment (DSM-5 Update)*, Los Angeles, CA, 2015, Sage Publications, p. 259–263.

¹⁵ J. N. Briere, C. Scott, *Principles of Trauma Therapy: A Guide to Symptoms, Evaluation, and Treatment (DSM-5 Update)*, Los Angeles, CA, 2015, Sage Publications, p. 264–268.

occasional outbursts of anger, louder talk, sometimes shouting, and rude, sarcastic words. All these, however, can actually be justified, because this individual can be perceived by others as having “quick temper”; in their opinion, his “rather rude reaction” was actually justified, albeit exaggerated, because his boss, for example, definitely deserved it because of his long-lasting injustices and irregularities he had committed. In this way, these “slightly weird behaviors” are not taken too seriously, they are ignored, and this individual, and his behavior in particular, are not paid any special attention to. After the cruel act is committed, however, others can gradually wake up and begin to remember all these “indicators”.

The situation is, of course, quite different at home, “behind the closed door”, where criminal acts can be committed on daily basis and are usually followed by the periods of repentance.¹⁶ After the violent partner calms down, i.e. his energy level is decreased to an acceptable level, because he has taken his rage out on his partner, the period of “grand repentance” follows. Soon after his cruel deeds which brought him organic relaxation, the violent partner begins to feel deep emptiness and loneliness, as well as more or less genuine guilt and sadness. Most importantly, he feels that now he is totally isolated, since due to his obvious terrorizing everyone avoids him. Therefore he slowly begins to seek connection with others, only to find out – to his surprise – that nobody truly trusts him anymore. This can trigger the feelings of utmost despair, so he tries even harder to relate to others. For example, if his wife left due to his violence, he is ready to summon all friends he can think of, his and her parents, as well as professionals, e.g. a doctor, a therapist, a priest etc., who are supposed to convince her that deep down he is not so evil as it looks and, especially, that he will radically change and never again commit brutal deeds that can so terribly drive them apart.

2.3. Reconciliation

At this stage, the violent partner is willing to promise everything: he will start a psychotherapeutic process, stop abusing alcohol or deal with any other addiction, finish his extramarital affair and generally do whatever it

¹⁶ *Recovering intimacy in love relationships: A clinician's guide*, J. Carlson, L. Sperry (eds.), New York 2010, Routledge, p. 269–277.

takes to bring his wife back.¹⁷ He will promise that he will try to totally stop with his jealous and envious attacks, outbursts of anger and rage, and, particularly, that he will never, ever again resort to physical force, because now he has seen his terrible guilt and has realized how totally intolerably he has behaved in this relationship. During this time, he will try very hard to be extremely affectionate and polite, buying expensive gifts, bringing flowers and begging for forgiveness. He will try to gain her back with all these approaches on the basis of guilt he will awaken in her. He will use every imaginable tactic to convince her that she is truly the only one who can help him, who can save him: only with her help he will obtain true health because love heals and conquers all. And if these tactics fail, he will start to threaten with suicide because his life without her has no purpose at all. Thus he will strongly address her feelings of pity and care. In this case, his blackmailing is entirely unpredictable, mostly because he has no proper sense of shame and guilt; in addition to that, he has not taken full responsibility of his condition, and less so for the acts he has committed. No matter what, he is willing to visit her friends, parents, anybody that might influence her, and especially use their children as an extremely powerful means of blackmailing.

In this process, the wife usually becomes increasingly vulnerable: Trapped in pity, she takes care of him, hoping that there truly is a new opportunity for their relationship which she yearns for, too. Soon, she again feels the attraction and desire to be close to him, because without this closeness, she also becomes more isolated, desperate and distant; she is increasingly noticing that she has no friends, since one by one they left her, mainly because he demanded her exclusive dedication. And now, when she sees that he is without friends, too, and that both are very much alone, on the basis of this loneliness even greater desire for closeness and intimacy can awaken in them, part of which is almost always a sexual intercourse. They extremely strongly identify with this and feel inseparable, although somewhere deep down they intuitively feel that it is only a matter of time when the next conflict will completely separate them, create a gap between them, and brutally humiliate and embarrass them. But at least temporarily they can have a good time and, therefore, they try to persuade each other with all their might that they are able to succeed - if they have one another,

¹⁷ D. G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships*, New York 2007, The Guilford Press, p. 95–103.

they can declare war to the whole world. They usually tend to express this belief to each other, and at the very least temporarily establish equilibrium, and although very weak, for them this can be a success which they love remembering.

In addition to deep unconscious forces, which are largely due to her insecure attachment, and in particular to the deeply embedded psycho-organic states and affects,¹⁸ the wife is quickly persuaded by the abusive partner that she should return to him, because she is also addicted to this relationship and, as we will see later, in spite of being a most hideous criminal act, physical abuse causes the release of energy within her, too. We also need to point out the so called traditional values that require a wife to be faithful to her husband, no matter what. And this belief goes on to say that she is responsible for their relationship and it is her duty to “keep the family together”. These relationships are governed by the belief that suffering is an indispensable part of the relationship and that an abusive husband is only part of this cross that the wife is supposed to bear. A good wife will always stand (and keep standing) by her husband.¹⁹ And none of these advocates of the male abusiveness think that not only the woman’s unjustified suffering is undoubtedly a crime, but the husband cannot grow and develop in such a relationship, either, and can never heal, because all his aggressive feelings remain completely dysregulated.

A relational therapist will therefore have to intervene in this process, this abusive cycle, with exceptional determination, and first establish the prerequisite for any therapy – that abuse ceases altogether and that there is zero tolerance for aggression. Until they accept this, it is impossible to begin with any therapeutic process, because it is deeply compromised by each new abuse, i.e. physical attack. This precondition is particularly necessary because of the fact that these partners come to a therapist after long periods of suffering, sometimes after years of severe abuse, usually after the wife

¹⁸ A. Schore, *Affect regulation and the origin of the self: The neurobiology of emotional development*, New York 2016, Taylor & Frances/Routledge, p. 405–409; M. L. Kelley, A. L. Braitman, *Antisocial personality disorder and physical partner violence among single and dual substance-abusing couples*, “Journal of family violence”, 31 (2016), p. 427–428.

¹⁹ M. L. Kelley, A. L. Braitman, *Antisocial personality disorder and physical partner violence among single and dual substance-abusing couples*, “Journal of family violence”, 31 (2016), p. 429–430; C. Greene et al., *Psychological and physical intimate partner violence and young children’s mental health: The role of maternal posttraumatic stress symptoms and parenting behaviors*. “Child abuse & neglect”, 77 (2018), p. 171–173.

seriously threatens that she will leave or she has already left and has not returned in due time, according to the abuser's assumptions. In many cases therapy is ordered by police, a center for social work or court. Because these individuals are actually forced to enter therapy, it is even more important that the therapist strictly insists on the most basic structure. Until violence absolutely stops (for which therapist needs very unambiguous evidence), the therapist cannot proceed with therapy. Also, from the very beginning it is a prerequisite that both partners attend therapy and that both commit to doing everything to totally stop physical abuse.

Here it is necessary to point out that between the violent partner and his wife who has lived several years in an abusive relationship there is an exceptionally strong bond dictated by an early developmental wound, often an early relational trauma.²⁰ Intimate partners who are connected in this way usually had very traumatic youth full of violence, so their most basic attachment to their mothers is permeated with fear and distress, sometimes even terror. This trauma can be so powerful that later, in an intimate couple relationship, an individual literally searches for, even attracts somebody with a similar history.²¹ Deep inside, these individuals yearn for an entirely different relationship, full of harmony, peace, love, tenderness and a deep sense of security and belonging. And in fact, on conscious level their desire for such relationship is much stronger than in individuals who have no history of abuse. To a much greater extent, they imagine a relationship in which they will be able to confess their wishes, dreams, and needs, and above all their fears, horrors, and negative expectations. This is of utmost importance to them, because they unconsciously want the partner to convince them that this time everything is different.

At the very beginning of the relationship, when future partners still get to know each other, they try hard to be friendly and very tolerant to each other. They share everything and are extremely compassionate to each other, because they are unconsciously very much afraid of any open conflict that could ruin their evolving relationship. That is why they try to be close

²⁰ A. Schore, *Affect regulation and the origin of the self: The neurobiology of emotional development*, New York 2016, Taylor & Frances/Routledge, p. 416–423; G. L. Schmelzer, *Journey through trauma: A trail guide to the 5-phase cycle of healing repeated trauma*, New York 2018, Avery Publishing Group, p. 76–77.

²¹ J. N. Briere, C. Scott, *Principles of Trauma Therapy: A Guide to Symptoms, Evaluation, and Treatment (DSM-5 Update)*, Los Angeles, CA, 2015, Sage Publications, p. 204–206.

in everything they do and often become completely addicted to sexuality. Hours and hours they show tenderness to each other, trying to be completely intertwined, as if they want to silence their bodies which are quietly and secretly waking up. At the same time, this awakening is unconsciously perceived as intimidating (despite of the fact that this is a period of exceptional excitement), as tension is growing in them, which, at least initially, is very cleverly suppressed and dissociated. By the intensification of the tension that can be caused by the simplest disagreements, in particular relational traumas begin to awaken in their intrapsychic and organic world, for which they have not developed efficient mechanisms to be able to successfully regulate them. These dysregulated affects of fear and anger remain unresolved, and it is only a matter of time when they will awaken to the extent that they will lead to an open conflict, which can always turn into physical abuse. However, this is only the beginning, since partners initially do not pay special attention to such events: on the contrary, they try – especially the partner who has suffered abuse – to forget everything and start again.

Here we can see true, typical pretending, deep embarrassment and humiliation, and extremely strong denial and blaming oneself, but most often the other partner. For example, a girl who at the very beginning of the relationship became the victim of abuse will try to simply forget or find an excuse for the abuse, and justify the partner saying that he had a bad day, that he was nervous, disappointed and upset, or under the influence of alcohol, and therefore reacted with violence, which certainly was not his intention. In this initial dynamics, which, however, can soon evolve into repeated abuse, elements of abuse are already hidden, which can be at least initially skilfully concealed by both partners who try to - again and again - reestablish a functional relationship. However, with growing tension, they again and again find themselves in their old behavioral patterns, which again push them to the edge of despair; but they try again to start anew, since their relationship can be so sweet, affectionate and especially attractive. In such beautiful moments that are full of excitement the partners are so strongly attached to the ideal image of each other that they feel that they cannot survive without one another. For the cycle of abuse to continue, it is crucial that when they break up, at least one of them experiences an absurdly severe abstinence crisis, a vacuum and a feeling of being rejected and abandoned, so that they are soon back together.

In this abusive dynamics, as has already been said, we have to highlight the fact that envy and jealousy always play a significant role; both spouses are extremely afraid that the partner will replace them for another, which will cause unbearable pains of withdrawal symptoms. This fear, which can at any moment turn into sheer terror, is so extremely powerful that both partners feel completely helpless. They experience this terror not only emotionally or psychologically, but primarily organically. They are so permeated by this organic component that it literally drives them into organic, physical abuse. They start to control all phone calls, messages on a mobile phone and e-mails, because they fear that the partner will fall in love with another, become attached to another person and consequently leave. In these cases, there is no way partners can trust and believe each other, so they constantly check each other. And they often react without even checking if their suspicions are justified, because in their body so many sensations emerge that they cannot handle them, let alone regulate and process them. Often they suffer genuine panic attacks, attacks of distress that cause shaking, shallow breathing, an accelerated heartbeat, sweating, the feeling of choking, anxiety and complete helplessness, and the feeling that they will not survive. In short, these are attacks of anxiety, often panic attacks, all due to the horrifying fear of loss and the abstinence crisis.²²

These individuals can be unconsciously so deeply permeated with these sensations that in close relationships they can behave in entirely dysfunctional ways. These sensations can be very deeply suppressed in one's psycho-organic structures, usually frozen, which is why they even more unconsciously try extremely hard to resolve them or express them with external behavioral.²³ Therefore, a partner who tends to be physically abusive, in his very particular way, "helps" solve these painful contents, because his physical abuse paradoxically, as we have already noted, calms down the body, even though it suffers unbearable pain. Because of these pains one withdraws, but because of the unconscious hope that the partner will save her from these rude sensations and, above all, because of insufferable withdrawal symptoms, she repeatedly returns to the abuser. In spite of the fact that the calming effect of physical violence is not long-

²² B. van der Kolk, *The body keeps the score: Mind, brain and body in the transformation of trauma*, New York 2014, Penguin Books, p. 95–97.

²³ B. Rothschild, *The body remembers volume 2: Revolutionizing trauma treatment*, New York 2017, W. W. Norton & Company, p. 57–71.

lasting, brutal physical contact is at least a temporary solution, and that is why this partner can be the victim of physical violence over and over again. The abusive partner calms down, too. He can be totally calm after abuse, because through rude physical contact he transmits to the victim his tension and terror which he once experienced when he himself was a victim of abuse. The abusive partner, too, suffers from aggressive contents and affects he is totally permeated with, and he also aspires to be solved, even though this is no excuse whatsoever for his deeds.

Here we should mention sexuality and, in this respect, sexual abuse, which causes dramatic and tragic psycho-organic changes in abuser's partner. Due to this cruel tragedy, these women will continue to be the victims of repeated abuse; they will not necessarily become victims of sexual or physical abuse, but in any case they can always become victims of severe emotional and mental abuse. It is an irresistible attraction, an absurd abstinence crisis, which literally pushes the sexually abused partner into repeated abuse which subconsciously promises her that these brutal contents will be resolved. We should point out that a sexually abused person can freeze completely in her sexuality or, on the other hand, literally throw herself into sexual activities, sometimes even in promiscuity, seeking to resolve these cruel vibrations and sensations. Again, it is possible to feel horrible organic sensations experienced by the victim in the event of sexual abuse; they can wake up in sexual as well as other contacts, as the sensations of sexual abuse can always be awakened or fully brought to life by a person who bears merely the palest resemblance to the primary abuse. The victim of sexual abuse, due to absurd withdrawal symptoms, keeps returning to the abuser, hoping that this time the outcome will be different. Of course organic, physical attraction plays an important role: it further stimulates sexual addiction, on the basis of which the victim of sexual abuse paradoxically calms down and relaxes.²⁴

However, we should emphasize that in cases of either sexual or physical abuse, it is not necessary that the partner with whom this person comes into contact or enters a relationship, re-abuses the victim of some previous abuse. For example, a partner because of his own abuse unconsciously or consciously decides that he will never abuse another person. However, since the sediments of abuse are so extremely intense and therefore these affects

²⁴ P. Ogden, J. Fisher, *Sensorimotor psychotherapy: Interventions for trauma and attachment*, New York 2015, W. W. Norton & Company, p. 564–569.

in every way try to find the solution and thus external behavioral expression, partners who meet on the basis of abuse may often be immensely emotionally and mentally abusive to each other. In cases where one of the partners was sexually abused while the other was physically abused or witnessed extremely depressive atmosphere, full of distress and bitterness, in his primary family, they can on this basis experience an exceptional mutual organic appeal. Both of them are permeated with cruel sensations of distress and terror, which feels attractive. Quite soon these depressing primary sensations start awakening between them, but they try to release them organically through sexuality. However, this quickly starts to feel very dangerous, too, as they get too close and become extremely vulnerable because the primary feelings of potential neglect and rejection start to emerge, which are always faithful companions to any abuse, especially sexual.

Consequently, subconscious feelings of envy and jealousy are always very welcome, as they constantly push them back into the world of dissociation, isolation and separation. There, however, they cannot stay for long, since they begin to organically so intensely yearn for each other that it is only a matter of time when they reunite and at least through sexuality they experience at least illusory peace and fulfilment. However, over time their relationship becomes increasingly filled with terror and conflict, as their innumerable disputes and resentments that are seriously threatening start to accumulate. Their arguments continue; they prove ad nauseam who is right and who is wrong, they savagely accuse one another and then break up, feeling powerless; sooner or later, however, they start to get closer because they miss each other so much that they do not even know how it happened that they are together again. When they finally get tired of exhausting conflicts, they start to look for new partners, but with little success, which makes them glad and sad at the same time. Again, they are usually united by sex and absurd feelings of emptiness and withdrawal symptoms, and sometimes this happens when they are already seriously discussing separation. We may say that only a serious new relationship really separates them, but even then, in the whole reawakened tragedy, they often still think about each other.

When conflicts arise in their new relationships, they begin to dream about each other again, even though consciously, on the mental level, they are quite aware that they will never really be able to live together. Therefore, the relational therapist will have to listen very carefully to their affects related

to abuse, which are not difficult to detect: they transmit these affects to each other so obviously that they are entirely transparent to the therapist. In this case, a real hopelessness might emerge in the therapist; he will experience shame, guilt, fear, and in particular, pure body sensations, especially freezing, and occasionally panic feelings of horror mixed with sadness. Firstly, he will try to feel all these affects in all their depth, and then to internally process them and to calm down. Then he will slowly try to address their borders first, to stop their constant violent accusations, criticisms and the transmission of affect, which is happening rapidly, at such a speed that in this chaos the therapist will often feel pure confusion and consequently terror. After calming them down at least a little on the basis of setting boundaries, and obtaining their promise that the violence will completely cease, he will try with all sensitivity, empathy and great compassion to individually reflect or mirror their responses and associate them with an original trauma that merely awakens. He will address envy and jealousy, which reflect the horror of being exchanged, neglected and rejected that is the result of abuse, and he will persist until they can calm down at least a little bit and recognize themselves in the other, and understand that they are afraid, not of each other but of the past which is being repeated between them.

Only then the therapist will be able to address, with great empathy and care, the abuse in all its intensity, shame, disgust and guilt, and especially its frozen state which causes terrible anxieties, perverted ways of thinking and feeling, and panic attacks caused by somatic sensations and vibrations, which the partners simply cannot resist and therefore forcefully transmit, literally imprint them into each other. In doing so, the therapist will address the violence that had been committed against them and is now being repeated in their relationship. This violence has permeated each fiber of their experience. He will explicitly address this violence and face them with their envious and jealous attacks that are full of aggression, and at the same time unearth the origin of this violence which is deeply rooted in abuse. He will have to keep an eye on the boundaries all the time, because the partners will be over and over again lost in searching for guilt and will automatically blame each other. It will be difficult for them to let go their efficient method of relaxation, the method of transmitting affects to another who is always available. It is also the only, though extremely tiring way of setting at least illusory boundaries between them.

Almost always this is a very slow, very vulnerable process that can be full of ups and downs or new beginnings. It is therefore crucial that the therapist persists with such couple. Whenever he feels despair, hopelessness and absurdity, he must know that they are experiencing the same. And when he already thinks that a little progress has been made, they will surprise him with fresh attacks that will be sometimes aimed at him, and he will again experience the avalanche of sheer body sensations. Then he will know that new wounds have opened, new areas which have been hidden and thus even more painful. At the same time, the therapist will know that their psyches or their psycho-organic structures are really being purged and that this is certainly progress; the more they become psychologically and somatically regulated, the more emotions and sensations can awaken, and the more traumatic contents can be addressed and resolved by their psycho-organic structures. It is a long-term process, full of complications and unpredictability, in which the therapist must persist, as this is the only way that the partners can finally become more functional.

2.4. Personality disorders and abuse

Here we shall speak primarily of the combination between narcissistic, anti-social, borderline and passive-aggressive personality structures. All of these personality structures carry within themselves the sediments of abuse, whether emotional, cognitive, and most often physical and sexual. All of these structures are also the result of early neglect and often open rejection, and consequently they develop insecure, unhealthy forms of attachment, which are then even more profoundly harmed by the affects of violence and abuse for the rest of their lives.²⁵ We can say that people who were neglected or abused most typically develop the elements or characteristics of a borderline and anti-social structure, which is extremely unstable in its very core, since its moods change very rapidly and drastically. There are three stages or phases of cyclical changes in mood or psycho-organic affective states. At the **first stage**, such person begins to experience that their needs for closeness and intimacy are not met. At the **second stage**, because of

²⁵ M. L. Silverstein, *Disorders of the self: A personality-guided approach*. Washington, DC, 2007, American Psychological Association, p. 164–169; J. R. Temple et al., *Childhood Corporal Punishment and Future Perpetration of Physical Dating Violence*, “The Journal of Pediatrics”, 194 (2018), p. 234–236.

the fear that the relationship is lost, they experience deep fear, terror, anger and rage, and begin, for example, to severely criticize the partner with accusations of not being compassionate, understanding, interested in them and instead rejects them. This leads to the **third stage** where this person is already experiencing a real or imagined loss of a partner and, consequently, can begin to behave in very destructive ways.²⁶

One of the central topics that permeate all these personality structures is the recurring experience of unsatisfactory intimate relationships. These stages are actually rather predictable, especially in all previously mentioned personality disorders. In particular, this can be observed in the borderline structure, where the dysphoric state always begins with the intensified tension between partners. Where violence reigns, partners enable one another to escalate this tension, to the extent that eventually they can break up without even knowing why. They are unable to have a dialogue, to verbalize their needs and desires, which mostly revolve around the problem of intimacy.²⁷ A borderline person necessarily needs another person, i.e. a partner to regulate her integrity, and for her, to lose the other person means to lose herself.²⁸ This person experiences extreme terror, for which she does not really know where it comes from, she only feels horrible, because she feels that she will remain lonely, rejected and discarded.

A person experiencing this inner terror or unbearable tension easily translates it to a violent attack or abuse of a partner, unconsciously desiring and hoping that the partner will understand, calm him down and, in particular, to regulate his dysregulated affects, which he had once expected from his parents. However, as this does not happen, his attempts or attacks quickly turn into angry responses, full of terror. This, of course, causes that partners begin to retreat from each other, which means further strengthening of the sense of being rejected and discarded. From here, the path is perfectly clear.²⁹ Both partners achieve precisely what they are most afraid of: they

²⁶ J. R. Temple et al., *Childhood Corporal Punishment and Future Perpetration of Physical Dating Violence*, "The Journal of Pediatrics", 194 (2018), p. 233–235.

²⁷ J. N. Briere, C. Scott, *Principles of Trauma Therapy: A Guide to Symptoms, Evaluation, and Treatment (DSM-5 Update)*, Los Angeles, CA, 2015, Sage Publications, p. 15–16 and 273–274.

²⁸ J. R. Temple et al., *Childhood Corporal Punishment and Future Perpetration of Physical Dating Violence*, "The Journal of Pediatrics", 194 (2018), p. 233–235.

²⁹ Z. Ahmadabadi, J. M. Najman, G. M. Williams, A. M. Clavarino, P. d'Abbs, A. A. Abajobir, *Maternal intimate partner violence victimization and child maltreatment*, "Child

are even more distant from and abusive to each other. They are not capable, however, to talk about what they really want, and thus become more and more disappointed and internally split. An increasing amount of demands and requests for survival are hidden below all this rage and despair. They accumulate until the anger and rage completely overwhelm the partner, but this is, paradoxically, always an attempt to be heard by the partner in one's hopeless loneliness.

Here we should also mention highly self-destructive behaviors, such as bingeing, overeating, taking drugs, promiscuity, and these behaviors and feelings are very similar to the criteria of the stage of repentance and getting close again.³⁰ During this period, the violent partner promises radical changes and improvements. This is over, however, when the wife, for example, starts to cautiously approach him or returns to him. At that time, the "special treatment" gradually decreases and soon the tension begins to mount up again. It is only a matter of time when a new cycle of violence will begin, possibly even worse than the previous one. The partners are often not even aware that in these cases, there is a very deep organic dysregulation of psycho-organic contents – the affects – and even though they promise themselves and each other that some time everything will change, they are simply unable to stick to this promise because their body is filled with violence and dominates, i.e. prevents all their cognitive and emotional attempts to actually improve their relationship. A therapist who really wants to help these clients therefore first addresses the organic components of their aggressive behavior. Only then a solution is possible.

These partners are neither truly psychotic nor neurotic: they are somewhere in between. These are occasional psychotic attacks, which are most often reflected in their aggressive, violent outbursts, full of emotional as well as physical terror. Their relationship is full of emotional fluctuations accompanied by organic sensations: deep inner organic distress and sometimes genuine panic attacks. That is why these partners respond to each other with constant fears that lead to manipulation and pretending, as well as feelings that they cannot survive without one another, even though

Abuse & Neglect", 82 (2018), p. 24–25.

³⁰ D. G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships*, New York 2007, The Guilford Press, p. 192–195; K. Steele, S. Boon, O. van der Hart, *Treating Trauma-Related Dissociation: A Practical, Integrative Approach*, New York 2016, W. W. Norton & Company, p. 432–437.

they repeatedly decide to leave. When making this decision, however, they are overwhelmed by deep anxiety, insufferable withdrawal crisis, and after a longer or shorter period they are back together. All this is accompanied by very strong anger, sometimes uncontrolled rage and extremely strong impulsiveness, which is often reflected in the abuse of substances and promiscuity or affairs.³¹ If they have children, they suffer most cruelly and inconsolably.

This profile of the borderline personality structure is very similar to the profile of a husband who brutally and violently physically abuses his wife. They could be adequately identified as cyclical personalities, as these people repeatedly demonstrate exceptionally rapid oscillations of feelings and behavior, while they are deeply affected by a very low frustration threshold, inability to control impulses, i.e. rude affect dysregulation, poor reality testing and an identity crisis.³² In addition, these individuals manifest very primitive defense mechanisms, most often very powerful primitive dissociative as well as projection and introjection mechanisms, which further prevent them from facing reality. Most often, therefore, they can hardly (or not at all) distinguish whether certain sensations come from outside or from within themselves, and therefore typically experience utter confusion, to which they can respond with extreme aggression; they cannot tolerate any partner's opinion, not to mention what she wants or desires. Consequently, they are more and more isolated from their partner and therefore feel even more deeply that she dislikes them. In doing so, they are not aware that they have isolated themselves and completely excluded their partner, who can deeply suffer because of this. This is not to say, however, that all violent men have a borderline personality disorder, as there are various profiles of violent men.³³ Borderline aggressive men are primarily those who are chronically violent, but especially within their own families. In the intimate circle of their family, they constantly react with violence, both to their wives and children, while they can behave quite correctly to

³¹ D. G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships*, New York 2007, The Guilford Press, p. 213–216; C. Greene et al., *Psychological and physical intimate partner violence and young children's mental health: The role of maternal posttraumatic stress symptoms and parenting behaviors*. "Child abuse & neglect", 77 (2018), p. 173–175.

³² C. Peterson et al., *Short-term lost productivity per victim: intimate partner violence, sexual violence, or stalking*. "American journal of preventive medicine", 55 (2018), p. 109–110.

³³ B. Rothschild, *The body remembers volume 2: Revolutionizing trauma treatment*, New York 2017, W. W. Norton & Company, p. 77–83.

people outside their home. It is difficult, at least at first sight, to discover their aggressive elements, because they skillfully conceal them in front of others. This is the so called split between what they do in public and what they do behind the closed doors of their home.³⁴ Also the victims of their violence, i.e. wives and children of these aggressive men, tend to deny that violence for a long time, and only when it violates all boundaries, they turn to others for help, but in most cases it is actually others who discover what is going on. Sometimes it is children who point out at domestic violence, if they behave extremely unsuitably outside home, so that school and other institutions begin to cautiously investigate the causes of mother's frequent absenteeism, notice signs of violence on her body, and sometimes, but more rarely, changes in her behavior.

These men are therefore very different from those who are antisocial, since the latter participate in violent interactions also with others in their wider surroundings and seek victims of their violence there.³⁵ Men who are violent and fall into the antisocial personality structure are not prone to anxiety and fears, are less emotional in their responses than borderline, and are not so afraid of the being rejected and discarded. At the same time, they do not necessarily need to express their anger so obviously; they can be very cold-blooded, attacking their victims without mercy and guilt. Antisocial persons do not usually suffer from depression and melancholy episodes, as they are much more prone to constant action, in particular risky and horrifying acts, which is particularly evident in their way of entertainment and relaxation, and especially in sports activities. In all these cases, they often tend to take too high and unnecessary risks that can cause harm to themselves and others. It could be said that in these adrenaline-charged situations they are completely insensitive to others as well as to themselves, they lack judgment, and in these states they are definitely incapable of controlling their impulses.³⁶

³⁴ P. Frewen, R. Lanius, *Healing the traumatized self: Consciousness, neuroscience, and treatment*, New York 2015, W. W. Norton & Company, p. 246–249.

³⁵ D. G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships*, New York 2007, The Guilford Press, p. 80–89.

³⁶ C. Greene et al., *Psychological and physical intimate partner violence and young children's mental health: The role of maternal posttraumatic stress symptoms and parenting behaviors*. "Child abuse & neglect", 77 (2018), p. 177–178.

There is another form of violent personality structure, for which we cannot say it contains borderline characteristics. Such person can be exceptionally correct and pedantic, but when external stressors sum up to such extent that he can no longer control them, or when too much anger accumulates in him because of external frustrations, he can completely lose control over his behavior, often to a great surprise of people around him who have had no idea about this facet of his personality. This is not an explicit borderline personality structure, since anger and tension in this person are exacerbated by external factors, and not by internal tensions, which cause completely unpredictable outbursts of anger and rage in the borderline partner. For bystanders, these borderline eruptions are particularly unpredictable because they do not see any real reason for aggressive attacks. However, the intensity of these outbursts often surprise the borderline partner himself, as wild, aggressive affects can emerge in him and escalate so quickly that they can immediately become completely unmanageable even for him.

3. The stages in victim's response to aggressive affects

We can say that violence between intimate partners is as old as the mankind,³⁷ it is just that we label it as such only in the modern world. Both partners can be mutually involved in these aggressive acts, and children are often included. Sometimes children are the only victims of violence by their parents. Violence, including that in intimate couple relationships, is therefore part of our everyday life and can be described as an epidemic of a global dimension. Of course, we must also mention the consequences of violence, which can be extremely disastrous both to direct victims as well for their descendants, since violence and related affects can be transmitted even through five generations.³⁸ We have only recently become aware of this, when we try to discover the reasons why even much later generations can behave altogether violently, although it is impossible to see an obvious reason for

³⁷ D. G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships*, New York 2007, The Guilford Press, p. 75–77; M. L. Kelley, A. L. Braitman, *Antisocial personality disorder and physical partner violence among single and dual substance-abusing couples*, "Journal of family violence", 31 (2016), p. 424.

³⁸ G. L. Schmelzer, *Journey through trauma: A trail guide to the 5-phase cycle of healing repeated trauma*, New York 2018, Avery Publishing Group, p. 76–79.

their aggressive behavior. The answer to this can certainly be sought in the body itself, in the psycho-organic structure of the individual, which absorbs aggressive affects; one can become literally organically addicted to violence, as it even becomes part of one's organic genetic design.³⁹

In the following, we will focus in particular on violence against women in intimate couple relationships.⁴⁰ In such relations, women are extremely vulnerable and particularly at risk, as it is a well-known fact that violent partners are most often looking for victims in their wives, to whom they transmit their aggressive affects. In other words, because of their closeness to a partner who is aggressive, women become particularly vulnerable due to extraordinary sensitivity created by their couple intimacy, and therefore they also have a high degree of risk for partner violence. Usually, such partners were both exposed to violence in their families, but they have developed opposite defense mechanisms and are therefore often trapped in the so called perpetrator-victim dynamics. On purely unconscious level, they awaken in each other the most brutal affects related to aggression; however, we should again emphasize that the torturer or aggressive partner is always fully responsible for his aggressive actions for which there is no excuse.

3.1. The victim and the circle of violence

To understand the circle of violence in which wives of aggressive partners are trapped, we shall turn to three stages according to Dutton⁴¹: an escalation of tension, an episode of acute violence and repentance, and, consequently, a repeated emotional or physical return to the aggressive partner or the phase of "amnesty and honeymoon". An increasing number of studies⁴²

³⁹ G. L. Schmelzer, *Journey through trauma: A trail guide to the 5-phase cycle of healing repeated trauma*, New York 2018, Avery Publishing Group, p. 32–37.

⁴⁰ E. M. Cummings, P. T. Davies, *Marital conflict and children: An emotional security perspective*, New York, NY 2010, Guilford Press, p. 76–83.

⁴¹ D. G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships*, New York 2007, The Guilford Press.

⁴² D. G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships*, New York 2007, The Guilford Press; P. Ogden, J. Fisher, *Sensorimotor psychotherapy: Interventions for trauma and attachment*, New York 2015, W. W. Norton & Company; M. L. Silverstein, *Disorders of the self: A personality-guided approach*. Washington, DC, 2007, American Psychological Association; J. R. Temple et al., *Childhood Corporal Punishment and Future Perpetration of Physical Dating Violence*, "The Journal of Pediatrics", 194 (2018);

have examined in detail the responses of the victims of partner violence; the authors state five main themes that are common to all victims of violence.

3.2. Increased frustration

Women in intimate couple relationships where violence prevails are exposed to a number of stressors all the time or most of the time; and despite their initial denial, they describe these stressors as growing frustration and disappointment. These are always accompanied by fear, sometimes even horror - fear for mere survival. Fear can often arise due to financial difficulties, the lack of resources necessary for living; they can certainly not talk about this with their partner because they fear that he will get too upset.⁴³ These financial problems are often related to children, but more often there are problems related to child-raising, in which the violent partner is rarely interested. A woman who is a victim of violence can also suffer quite complex health problems and also specific illnesses that can be psychosomatic and for which her partner has no true compassion. Furthermore, these victims are often dissatisfied in their emotional and sexual needs, as there is always a lack of healthy intimacy among the partners. Regarding sexuality, these women often feel that they are obliged to have sexual intercourse, even if they do not desire it or it causes problems for them. Here we often talk about genuine rape, which these women do not even perceive as such, and because of severe pain they can become completely incapable of having sexual intercourse, which, of course, can lead to even more violence in their partner.

3.3. Verbal and emotional violence

At this stage, due to the accumulation of stressors in violent partners, their ability to functionally cope with or manage the situation decreases, which can

M. L. Kelley, A. L. Braitman, *Antisocial personality disorder and physical partner violence among single and dual substance-abusing couples*, "Journal of family violence", 31 (2016); G. L. Schmelzer, *Journey through trauma: A trail guide to the 5-phase cycle of healing repeated trauma*, New York 2018, Avery Publishing Group.

⁴³ P. Ogden, J. Fisher, *Sensorimotor psychotherapy: Interventions for trauma and attachment*, New York 2015, W. W. Norton & Company, p. 66–73; A. R. Marasca et al., *Marital physical violence suffered and committed by men: repeating family patterns?*, "Psico-USF" 22.1 (2017), p. 107–109.

escalate in emotional and verbal violence.⁴⁴ At this point, which repeatedly announces a violent episode, women feel that the situation can no longer be controlled and that “something will explode”. Tension, terror and the fear of the worst are increasing, as it is more and more obvious that the violent partner is no longer in control of the situation. Some women now already feel that everything they will say or do will lead to violence. One of the most common triggers of partner’s violence is her request that something should change, which is a sad paradox. According to research,⁴⁵ these requests for help, which are most often associated with children, the home, or the wife herself, can trigger the worst forms of violence in men, since men often experience that they are accused of being guilty of everything - but in fact these very “accusations” provide an “ideal” option for their aggressive outbreak that, as we have said, begins with very frightening, brutal verbal attacks, full of insults, humiliation and vicious shaming.⁴⁶

3.4. The episode of abuse

As we have already mentioned, the episode of abuse always begins with verbal attacks, which are usually full of hatred and cruelty. Although women sometimes do try to defend themselves, they actually know that any resistance, once the man’s anger reaches this point of completely dominating him, is futile, because it stems from psycho-organic addiction.⁴⁷ Often, however, the husband wants the wife to speak or, as he sees it, provoke his

⁴⁴ D. G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships*, New York 2007, The Guilford Press, p. 77–83; M. L. Kelley, A. L. Braitman, *Antisocial personality disorder and physical partner violence among single and dual substance-abusing couples*, “Journal of family violence”, 31 (2016), p. 425–427.

⁴⁵ D. G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships*, New York 2007, The Guilford Press, p. 85–87; C. Policastro, M. A. Finn, *Coercive control and physical violence in older adults: Analysis using data from the National Elder Mistreatment Study*, “Journal of interpersonal violence” 32.3 (2017), p. 313–315.

⁴⁶ C. Policastro, M. A. Finn, *Coercive control and physical violence in older adults: Analysis using data from the National Elder Mistreatment Study*, »Journal of interpersonal violence« 32.3 (2017), p. 317–319.

⁴⁷ C. Peterson et al., *Short-term lost productivity per victim: intimate partner violence, sexual violence, or stalking*. “American journal of preventive medicine”, 55 (2018), p. 109–110; Z. Ahmadabadi, J. M. Najman, G. M. Williams, A. M. Clavarino, P. d’Abbs, A. A. Abajobir, *Maternal intimate partner violence victimization and child maltreatment*, “Child Abuse & Neglect”, 82 (2018), p. 29–31.

violent act, because then he has a reason and an apology for his actions. There are, of course, cases where the wife literally wants the husband to “just do it”, since the tension and sheer terror before the outbreak of anger is so horrible that a woman is “hardly waiting for the attack to be over.” The moments described as the “calm before the storm”, which is the time between verbal and physical brutality, are certainly the worst. This time is full of tension that causes such burning sensations in the body that the victims literally want “the attack to start as soon as possible,” as it is sometimes much more difficult to tolerate this state of waiting than to bear the attack itself.

For this reason, most women do not resist too much, but rather prefer to wait until violence is over. In addition, the violent husband with his aggressive speech tries to convince his wife in every way that he is always right, that he always has sufficient reasons, and that his reasons are more valid and, above all, more realistic than hers. His wife’s view of the situation does not count and the violent partner can always call it rubbish, nonsense and exaggeration.⁴⁸ In other words, she is completely subjected to his “brainwashing”; he awakens guilt and shame in her, making her responsible for his own violent acts, and to the extent that victims sometimes feel truly guilty, thinking that they even “deserved” rude treatment from their violent partner. They manage to convince themselves that the partner must have had his own reasons for his cruelty, and they are even willing to stand up to other people, even those close to them, who usually severely criticize the violent partner and particularly his violent deeds, and often strongly condemn him. The victims of abuse are often prepared to defend their torturer, defend him and ever find excuses for what he is doing.

During the attack, women often freeze, simply because they are so scared. Some are more afraid for others, even for the attacker himself, in case he “went too far”, but they also fear that other family members, especially children, will be attacked. In addition to that, these women report damages in the house: household appliances and personal property, such as their valuable items, or destruction and sometimes forfeiture of e.g. keys, payment and other cards, documents, etc.⁴⁹ The violent partner can damage

⁴⁸ C. Policastro, M. A. Finn, *Coercive control and physical violence in older adults: Analysis using data from the National Elder Mistreatment Study*, “Journal of interpersonal violence” 32.3 (2017), p. 325–327.

⁴⁹ C. Greene et al., *Psychological and physical intimate partner violence and young children’s mental health: The role of maternal posttraumatic stress symptoms and parenting*

or even destroy the telephone, pulling the wire from the wall, making it impossible for the victim to call for help. He often sexually abuses or rapes his wife and then mocks her that she can do nothing about it, since no one will believe that it was rape.⁵⁰ In doing so, he can deeply hurt and injure her, sometimes for life. Even more, he usually prohibits her from seeking any help because he fears his violence will be discovered. He can even blame her that his jealousy, for example, is justified, that she is the one to blame, and that she had provoked him or led him to this act.

3.5. Departure or separation

Abuse is almost always followed by the phase of separation or departure of the partner. The perpetrator leaves the house, goes out, to the cellar or garage. But most often, the woman is the one who leaves: she goes to a friend, and sometimes to her primary family. When the husband leaves, he returns soon, and after returning, he rarely speaks, ignores his wife, does not talk to her or speaks only about the most urgent matters, and mainly through children. In these cases, at least temporarily they cautiously avoid each other. By doing this, the violent partner continues to punish his wife, as by distancing from her he only tries to further consolidate her conviction that she is guilty and responsible for his evil deeds. This behavior allows him / both of them to break free at least temporarily from the stressors, i.e. pressures from each other. Some women feel peace at this stage, others hope that the perpetrator will disappear or even commit suicide. Some report that it “drives them mad” that their partners completely deny their brutal acts, as if nothing happened. There are also women who dare to extend this phase with silence on their side. However, most women know that by not following the atmosphere as dictated by the partner, they would trigger repeated abuse.⁵¹

Despite these violent acts, only a small number of women - and sometimes after many years of abuse - dare to definitely leave their violent partners. Most often, this happens when he cheats, or she falls in love with

behaviors. “Child abuse & neglect”, 77 (2018), p. 177–179.

⁵⁰ D. G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships*, New York 2007, The Guilford Press, p. 87–89.

⁵¹ D. G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships*, New York 2007, The Guilford Press, p. 93–97.

another, which enables her to finally leave. Due to genuine chemical and hormonal addictions that cause desperate abstinence crises (Fisher, 2017, pp. 219-225), the victims of these cruel abuses part from their torturers very slowly and with great pain. These victims suffer so much that they do not even dare to admit it; they suffer physically and mentally, they suffer from brutal humiliation and mocking, and in addition to that, they constantly blame themselves for all their shattered dreams and because they were not able to manage and maintain their marriage. They also suffer because of their children, who often helplessly stare at them, silently asking how long this must go on. They suffer because of their unfulfilled femininity, unfulfilled motherhood, and because they feel that time is slipping through their fingers so that they cannot catch it anymore and change anything, no matter how hard they try.

3.6. Coming back again

Over time, the period of anger, rage and resentment gradually ends, since the partners begin to miss each other after a longer or shorter period of calm, and again begin to communicate more. Victims experience this situation as if they are returning to a normal state, but in reality they were brought there because of the abstinence crisis.⁵² For many victims, however, this period is still daunting because they are uncertain about how to behave or how the partner will behave. Some of the signs that indicate this are the periods of interaction, interspersed with the phases of ignoring. The wife to whom her husband has promised that he would radically improve is therefore still afraid she will soon “wake up the sleeping giant” if she reacts in a wrong way.⁵³ Usually, they do not talk about abuse, which for the wife most often means that the husband has not yet faced his abusiveness; without this fundamental admission that he has done something wrong, the victim is justly afraid that it is only a matter of time before the abuse will recur

⁵² H. Fisher, *Anatomy of Love: A Natural History of Mating, Marriage, and Why We Stray*, New York 2017, W. W. Norton & Company, p. 228–235; J. R. Temple et al., *Childhood Corporal Punishment and Future Perpetration of Physical Dating Violence*, “The Journal of Pediatrics”, 194 (2018), p. 221–226.

⁵³ D. G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships*, New York 2007, The Guilford Press, p. 93–97; H. Fisher, *Anatomy of Love: A Natural History of Mating, Marriage, and Why We Stray*, New York 2017, W. W. Norton & Company, p. 235–243.

again. If no gesture or kindness that was offered to improve the situation was realized, the victim is rightly afraid that violence will really return, and soon. And when the stressors re-accumulate, the possibility of new abuse is very real. Thus, the vicious circle can be repeated. Violence is repeated until the victim leaves the abuser again.

The results of research⁵⁴ show that abuse in an intimate couple relationship can have a very negative impact on the well-being and the ability of living functionally of the abused woman. She experiences anxiety, panic attacks, depression, suicide attempts, post-traumatic stress disorder, sleep disorders, drug or alcohol abuse. Abuse can also be manifested through women's problems of self-care, their own health and well-being. Therefore, a relational therapist will first, as already mentioned, very specifically and decisively set up boundaries before addressing the self-image of the victim, which is definitely very low and distorted. Concerns about violence, the protection of the woman and her overall security will have to be addressed. Much attention will have to be paid to the experiences and feelings that are awakening in the very beginning of violence. Intervention at this level is very important, namely that the victim is immediately taken away from the abuser. Therefore, we repeat, the victim needs help to identify and understand the complexity of abuse, as this alone can increase her ability to protect herself.

In the continuation, the therapy should focus on the basic starting points that result from abuse, such as physical injuries, social isolation, boundary violation, lack of social and financial resources. This search comprises external sources and help, as well as victim's internal resources. Similarly, the therapist will have to seek very attentively the strategies for the abusive partner, so that he, too, will learn to listen to his internal and external sensations, which repeatedly drive him over the edge of permissible and appropriate behavior. The abusive partner will have to accept complete responsibility for all his actions, as this is the only, really the only possibility that the abuse can be completely stopped. Only after the therapist is really certain, especially due to the abusive partner's behavior, that both are truly safe, he will be able to address their early experiences that led or still lead

⁵⁴ D. G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships*, New York 2007, The Guilford Press, p. 135–137; J. R. Temple et al., *Childhood Corporal Punishment and Future Perpetration of Physical Dating Violence*, "The Journal of Pediatrics", 194 (2018), p. 218–232; H. Fisher, *Anatomy of Love: A Natural History of Mating, Marriage, and Why We Stray*, New York 2017, W. W. Norton & Company, p. 272–289.

to abuse. Particular attention should be paid to their psychosomatic design, their psycho-organic structures and affects that result from them. Only then will they really be given the opportunity to start building a new, different relationship. This is a long-term process in which the therapist must again and again return to the basics, namely basic safety, which is essential to any progress, any different, fresher and above all functional behavior.

4. Conclusion

In the end, we can say that the violent partner is largely unaware that there is a non-transferable part of psycho-organic tension in him, which he needs to release in any way in order to function. He is even less aware that with his aggression he can very deeply hurt and injure his partner, who, however, repeatedly serves as a regulator of his brutal affects by taking them on herself. When the level of arousal in the aggressive partner increases, he is no longer able to think rationally about his cruel acts and even less about his suffering victim. Because of this callous attitude, his victim, and even her life, can indeed be in great danger. Victims often do not realize this or dissociate their fear and in most cases even pain, because otherwise they could not survive. This seeming fearlessness in the victim is not in the least pleasing for the violent partner: in cases of pathological violence we can observe again and again that the violent partner even unconsciously wants his victim to suffer because otherwise his inner psycho-organic tensions cannot be released. This is especially transparent in the cruelest forms of violence, e.g. in rape, where the rapist unconsciously wants the victim to resist and, of course, suffer, because otherwise he may even lose the interest in further seeking brutal forms of sexual satisfaction. All these cases must be addressed with zero tolerance, since their purpose is always the release of the violent individual's inner tension; and as long as he does not become aware of and does not take full responsibility for his inner violence and indeed for his actions that result from it, it is impossible to break the complex vicious circle of the cyclical repetition of violence.

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