

Domestic Violence and Gender – Professional Experience, Motivation and Gender Prejudice of Female Professionals in Croatia

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Although significant legal dimensions of equality have been achieved, there are still persistent social dimensions of the inequality of women. In an attempt to examine some reasons for this, we aimed to look into the personal experience, views and stories of women working in courts (judges), social services and the police force who professionally deal or have dealt with cases of domestic violence. Our analysis is based on semi-structured dialogic interviews as in-depth in-person conversations, reached based on chain-referral or snowball sampling. This qualitative approach does not provide a basis for generalization to the population, but is an important complement to quantitative approaches if one wishes to reduce reification and provide a thick description of the situation in the field. Thematic and narrative analysis of the data gathered in interviews ($n = 21$) is conducted, with the help of NVivo software. The results focus on the professional experience of tackling domestic violence cases, gender-based prejudice in the profession and the motivation of our interlocutors, enabling us to map relevant topics and concerns. The results suggest there are culturally specific resistance strategies in both women's conduct and the reaction of the community. These strategies rely on and negotiate with traditional family arrangements, which might foster social cohesion and safety, particularly in predominantly rural regions. A theoretical background is found at the intersections of sociological and criminological theory where gender is mainstreamed into traditional perspectives.

Keywords: domestic violence, gender, interviews, safety, women, Croatia

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1 Introduction

Review studies (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005) have clearly established that domestic and gender-based violence (GBV) is not validly defined and holistically approached, that social theory perspectives³ often advise far too general perspectives that move away from the concrete experience of violence in order not to blur the focus on the fundamental systemic, structural or capitalist underlying violence, inseparable from other forms of violence, where victims or the dominated are seen as complicit (Bourdieu, 2000), although violence is under-measured, ubiquitous and gendered (Walby, Towers, & Francis, 2014). The disregard for domestic and gender-based violence has a long tradition in sociology and criminology (Walby, 2013). For example, Max Weber (1948) in his po-

litical writings defined the state as having a monopoly over legitimate use of violence in its territory, at a time when for instance rape and domestic violence were not recognized as crimes if committed by husbands against wives. Even today public records, data, and discourse in general fail to address the categories that would make widespread violent crime against women more visible. There are intense attempts to address the problem of GBV in an interdisciplinary fashion and to mainstream it (Walklate, 2004), although developing as somewhat peripheral disciplinary tendencies that point out for instance that domestic abuse is coercive (Stark, 2007), gendered, costly and global (Straus & Gelles, 1990; Walby, 2004, 2009). Criminology, unlike sociology, has traditionally seen the disadvantaged as the ones who mostly generate crime and violence, while today in the academic field focused on GBV (somewhat separate from the main tendencies, emerging in the last 30 years and interdisciplinary), violence is seen as stemming from the advantaged and as both a consequence and cause of gender inequality (Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992; Kelly, 1988; Walby et al., 2014: 193).

Daly (1997) also gives an outline of developments in criminological theory regarding the notion of gender, from the so-called realist perspectives to deconstruction and discourse.

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According to her, feminist research on what she refers to as Real Women challenged the androcentrism of criminological theory, where gaps were filled in knowledge about women law-breakers, victims and criminal justice workers. Then in the 1990s a shift to research on women in criminological or legal discourse occurred (Smart 1990a, 1992), signalling a postmodern turn in thinking about crime, courts and prisons (e.g., Bertrand, 1994, Howe 1990, Smart 1995). However, researchers in the field of violence against women were resistant to letting go of the realist perspective because their voices have only recently been named and heard (Marcus 1992; Radford, Kelly, & Hester, 1996). Finally, researchers like Smart (1995) and Brown (1991) were right to warn about our scientific desires to claim privileged knowledges or about our fears of replacing truth with politics in feminist criminology – instead they advise accepting the cacophony of voices and developing interdisciplinary hybrid knowledges. Also, Smart (1995) specifically advocates talking to actual women and turning to empirical work (though not necessarily empiricist)⁴ without rejecting the notion of discursive power to produce the categories that filter our experience, which is part of the design of the research we report on in this paper.

Moreover, criminological theory in the 1990s started to challenge white-centred assumptions (e.g., Russel, 1992) and develop intersecting perspectives. Grosz (1994), Collins (1990), and West and Fenstermaker (1995) write about interconnections as ‘interlocking’ of class, race and gender, seen as a mobius strip by Elisabeth Grosz in the sense that the ways gendered, class and racial subjectivities are formed are under the influence of discourse but not generalizable in their forms. The doing gender perspective in sociological theory (West & Zimmerman, 1987) or the so-called performative perspective also communicated with criminological perspectives. Messerschmidt (1993) suggested that doing gender also produces multiple forms of masculinity and crime, focusing on the problem of conceptualizing crime as a gendered line of social action without establishing boys and men as the norm. In applying the doing gender perspective to criminological research, one has to abandon thinking about gender or class as attributes of persons and look into how situations and interactions produce qualities and identities associated with membership in a certain social category. Some other criminological perspectives include Carol Smart’s (1990b) on the production of sexed bodies in legal discourse and Howe’s (1994) investigation of women’s bodies as objects of penalty, warning that seemingly gender-neutral policies are tied to specific male bodies.

⁴ Sandra Harding (1987) wrote about feminist empiricism, while it would be far more suitable to use the term empirical as one can do empirical work without assuming empiricist epistemology.

According to Walby et al. (2014) there are several problems with mainstreaming gender into criminology, such as the construction of public knowledge in the sense that the official count of violent crime has no categories in which to capture domestic violence or gender-based violence (with the exception of some sexual offences). Because of that violent crime against women is routinely made invisible in the public sphere. Most of the empirical analyses of inter-personal violence in the social sciences now takes place in the field of criminology, though this overlaps with sociology and other disciplines, and within a relatively segregated field of ‘violence against women’. Criminology is internally diverse, being subdivided into several competing and overlapping schools of thought (Maguire, Morgan, & Reiner, 2012; McLaughlin, Muncie, & Hughes, 2003; Newburn, 2013), but gender is remarkably absent from them and appears as a separate chapter not well integrated into the rest of the disciplinary text (e.g., Miller & Mullins, 2008). There is an emerging field at the intersection of sociology, gender studies, criminology, social policy and social statistics that investigates and analyses domestic and gendered violence. This field includes debates as to the extent to which: domestic violence is gendered (Archer, 2000; Dobash et al., 1992; Straus & Gelles, 1990); domestic abuse is violent (Stark, 2007); and frequent repetitions of domestic violence can be counted (Johnson, 1995, 2008).

The challenge with the definition of domestic and gender-based violence arises from the fact that the mainstream crime field deploys a set of specific categories built up over years of development of nationally based criminal law, while the gender violence field, through developments in international policy (United Nations General Assembly, 1993) and research methodology (Dobash et al., 1992; Straus, 1979) has developed a very broad definition. The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (United Nations General Assembly, 1993) defined violence against women as: “Any act of GBV that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”. It recognizes physical, verbal, socio-economic, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, within the general community, and violence perpetrated or condoned by the State. GBV is seen as a global issue of human rights, development and health. In this paper domestic violence is seen as a category of violence that can be a combination of all five aforementioned forms of violence and as a phenomenon helping support structural gender inequalities. In order to do research on it, we need to deal with cultural norms that instigate violence as part of the patriarchy. This insight does not refer to the individual level, which means that an individual supporter of violence would not be seen as commit-

ting acts of violence. Rather, the aim is to widen the focus to wider cultural beliefs as deep structures of long duration that keep reproducing social and cultural conditions for violence. Anyone can be a victim, but the focus is on Violence Against Women (VAW) because of the predominance of the number of women victims, making gender a strong predictor of rape, sexual harassment and intimate partner violence (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2020; United Nations, 2000).

In the gender field the relationship between offender and victim is very important; indeed in the field of domestic violence it is part of the definition, so this information is essential. The almost invisible gendered relationship between offender and victim in police recorded crime statistics, since the relationship between offender and victim is not recorded there, is thus a problem for the gender field. The argument here is that if gender-based violence and domestic violence are to be mainstreamed into criminology and into sociology, then there must be a unified set of categories in which violence, both gender-based and otherwise, is measured.

To provide a thicker description of the post-socialist Croatian context as the framing of the interviews we conducted, it is useful to look into the research by Tomić-Koludrović and Kunac (2000), who speak of the risk-imbued and triply burdened position of women⁵ (among other reasons due to re-traditionalizing, unemployment etc.). A more recent publication (Tomić-Koludrović, 2015) speaks of a shift towards modernity, particularly in the private sphere, although the majority of housework and care still rests on women. Premodern, modern and postmodern typology (Tomić-Koludrović, 2015) applied to the social position of women in Croatia established several types of women: premodern, (14.44%) traditional (22.8%), indecisively modern (27.9%) and transitionally reflexive (23.81%). This source is to be consulted for detailed elaboration of factors and variables together with indicators, because the length and scope of this paper are limited to the personal narratives and experience of professional women. The studies conducted by Tomić-Koludrović (2000, 2015) provide a valuable insight into the socio-cultural context

and the social position of women in Croatia, which serve as a framework to position narratives collected in interviews discussed in this paper. The sample of professional women in our study dealt with cases from the region of Dalmatia, where the ideal type of rural or premodern and traditional women prevails according to Tomić-Koludrović's typology. The premodern type includes women aged on average 58 with the lowest degree of education, living in multiperson households with no computer, where there is frequently only one employed person. The majority of women comprising this type (80%) lived in rural areas till the age of 15. The group of traditional women is on average 53 years old, a quarter has secondary education, their husbands are more educated than them and they mostly grew up in rural areas. Compared to the results published in *Risks of modernization* (Tomić-Koludrović, 2000) fewer women are triply burdened compared to the 1990s. Women still do most of the housework and childcare, there is more partnership than before, and it can be said that the social position of women has relatively modernized.

The primary objective of this research was to obtain direct insight from women working professionally with cases of domestic violence, who express additional personal motivation to solve cases, which includes the experience of personal engagement and taking additional risks, which are not necessarily required by the professional service but are also not explicitly forbidden. Of course, this does not mean that there are no additionally motivated or engaged men in these professional settings, but only that our sample is all-female and that our aim in this paper was to collect the personal experience and narratives of women. A comparison of male and female perspectives is the goal for one of the articles coming in the future. An additional objective is to look into the personal experience of interviewees related to how they deal with gender-based stereotypes and prejudice in the professional setting, which is particularly present in the work of senior law enforcement officials. In this way, the paper aims to contribute to the critique of current theoretical frameworks in which domestic violence and gender-based violence is marginalized, and identify the professional experience-based complexity of the problem in Croatia.

⁵ The study is entitled *Risks of modernization: women in Croatia in the 1990s*. It compares political and cultural aspects of the social position of women in Croatia with that of post-industrial societies. The monograph presents the results of quantitative research on a sample of 3,200 women in the four largest Croatian counties. The study concludes that strong patriarchal relations were visible in Croatia in the 1990s and that women comprise a specific social group, marginal in relation to men and with a triple burden of work: in the labour market, at home and in the grey economy. All these empirical facts are operationalised and verified, with the conclusion that the behaviour of women in Croatia in that period is still under the strong influence of traditional socio-economic patterns.

2 Methodology

In an attempt to explore the reasons for the existing division between the given development of awareness about the unequal social position of women (in the sense of their being exposed to socially structured injustice, discrimination, violence and gender-based prejudice) and the inertia of developing an adequate institutional response, we aimed to discover personal experience, attitudes and stories of women working

in the courts (judges), social services and the police force, all dealing professionally with cases of gender-based violence.

Qualitative methodology proves to be useful in cases where a quantitative approach and statistical analyses fail to address the deep-rooted social causes of the problem of gender-based violence and social prejudice (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007). This qualitative empirical research has been conducted based on the method of semi-structured interviews for the purposes of data collection. The sample included 21 interviewees, eleven female police officers from the Ministry of the Interior, eight female professionals who are employed in the criminal justice system as judges or trainees

– those features and descriptors of participants are elected that better enlighten a certain strategically selected characteristic of the studied phenomenon. This approach enables a direct insight into the perceptions and values of persons comprising the foundation of professional structures in state and public institutions. Although the described sampling strategy does not allow for probabilistic-based generalisation to the population, we aimed to focus purposefully on the sample that enables an insight into professional engagement extended to borderline possibilities of legally allowed action. The solutions suggested from this perspective can serve to direct improvement of such a framework of action. Verbatim selected quotes of the interlocutors were cited in the results section.

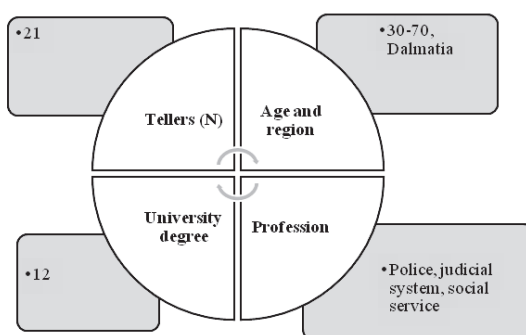


Figure 1: Structure of the sample

and two from social services. All interviewees are female, aged 30 to 70, all come from the region of Dalmatia (coastal area of Croatia), twelve hold a university degree (Figure 1). The average age in the sample is 53 and 8 interviewees are retired. A relevant criterion for the selection of participants was their personal motivation. It was evaluated based on over twenty years of professional experience of one of the authors of this text, who conducted the interviews (alone). The interviewer worked in the police force and in police education, and today deals professionally and scientifically with the topic of police as a social institution, from the sociological perspective. The interviewer is directly acquainted with many interviewees and is directly aware of the motivation of these persons. The interviewees that the interviewer did not know directly were recruited based on chain referral (recommended by the persons the interviewer knew and contacted first).

The sampling strategy consisted of non-probabilistic purposive sampling, whereby recruitment was performed based on the snowball principle, which enables direct focusing on relevant characteristics for the objectives of the research (Gobo, 2008: 206). Interviewees are thereby selected strategi-

cally – The guide questions we used in the semi-structured interview protocol referred to individual professional experience of dealing with domestic violence, personal motivation for this issue, personal family experience (from the families of orientation and procreation), facing prejudice in the professional setting and personal opinions about the existence of and ways to overcome the discrepancy between development of an awareness of the unequal position of women and inertia in developing adequate institutional responses.

The interlocutors were presented with an informed consent. The conversations were not recorded but notes were taken directly, and participants in the research had the opportunity to review and authorise the notes. Ethical approval from the institution was obtained beforehand and the authors ensured the anonymisation of responses.

As can be inferred from this section, throughout all study phases the authors tried to acknowledge the eight key markers of quality in qualitative research developed by Tracy (2010): worthy topic, rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics and meaningful coherence.

3 Results

After the notes taken during interviews had been re-typed and authorised by the interlocutors, iterative thematic analysis of the text was conducted. Each author performed thematic coding individually and the codes were then compared and discussed. This intercoder-test procedure was followed in order to increase coding reliability and validity. The leading principles thereby were the guiding questions from the interview protocol. There were two parts of the interview questions, the first one dealing with professional experience of tackling domestic violence cases, and the second one to do with gender-based prejudice in the profession and the motivation of our interlocutors for their jobs.

After having conducted a thematic iterative analysis of narratives gathered by interviews, it was possible to single out several topics that the majority of our tellers expressed (see Table 1). The following topics were recognised as relevant: changes and continuities in the profession in the last several decades, reporting, status of misdemeanour/criminal offence, hostage situation, vicious circle, loss of trust in institutions, bureaucratic indifference, alcohol abuse connected with domestic violence, prejudice in the professional setting and physical intervention by women (in self-defence and during arrest). Changes in the profession in the last several decades expressed by tellers include the increase in reporting, awareness raising, forms of GBV recognized as criminal offences, family and domestic violence spread as terms, relative though not full change of gender-based prejudice in the professional setting. Our interviewees saw these changes as resulting from the general feminization of the police force and the judiciary and of course from general social value shifts and increased importance of topics connected with this theme in the last several decades. Some constants in the profession discussed by some interviewees are Stockholm syndrome affecting the victims, and the futility of believing that the perpetrator will change (or waiting for it).⁶ Additional topics stressed as relevant are inadequate institutional response, e.g. bureaucratic disinterestedness, and additional engagement and risk taking of motivated professionals in order to compensate for it (and motivations for extra effort to help the victims). When cultural factors are taken into consideration, revealed by the topics of the vicious circle (socialization models), alcohol abuse and men victims – our results reveal complex realities.

⁶ Two interviewees (one judge aged 53 and one police officer aged 36) used the precise notion ‘Stockholm syndrome’ and we are quoting it here. It refers to fervent reactions of defending and justifying the perpetrator, and not to the perspective of analysing objective structural barriers to leaving, such as economic issues. The opinion that it is futile to expect the perpetrator to change was expressed by our interviewees (professionals), not by the victims.

Table 1: Relevant topics and factors of GBV emerging from narratives of interviewed women professionally involved with cases of GBV (VAW and domestic violence)

Changes in the profession in the last several decades	The increase in reporting of cases of GBV Awareness raising Forms of GBV recognized as criminal offence Family and domestic violence spread as terms Not complete but relative change concerning gender-based prejudice in professional setting
Continuities in the profession in the last several decades	Patriarchal social structure Stockholm syndrome affecting the victims Futility of believing that the perpetrator will change (or waiting for it)
Additional relevant topics	The vicious circle of the socialization model Loss of trust in institutions Bureaucratic disinterestedness and ineffectiveness of institutional reaction Alcohol abuse Physical intervention by women (in self-defence and during arrest) Role models of physically able women skilled in fighting Risk taking and personal motivation of professionals to help victims crucial in providing timely help (usually due to their childhood or youth experience) Men also victims, though far less frequently

3.1 Reported Experienced Changes in the Professional Setting

As an introduction to illustrating concrete advancements of the judicial system when tackling the forms of social deviance recognised as domestic violence, we can start from the

experience of a judge (aged 55). She has recognized significant changes in the cognitive and professional area when it comes to the social position of women and violence in relationships between men and women.

When I started working in judicial practice there were very few cases of reported domestic violence, while today there are at least ten reports weekly. Neighbours report frequently, while it used to be the case only if they were affected or also in danger. Two or three cases out of ten are today reported by neighbours. Of course, everyone wants to remain anonymous. It also needs to be said that people report all sorts of things, at least 20% misreported or there was no violence, but we have to react and diligently approach every reported case, although we often find some kind of revenge or malice or permanently unstable marital relations... The attitude of the police has also changed significantly in the last twenty years, they respond to every report and then call people as witnesses. (Judge, 55)

The interlocutor also further explained the basic practical difference between misdemeanour and criminal offence, most frequently based on visible traces on the body.

If there is a visible injury, even the slightest redness or bruise, we direct the case to the municipal court and the criminal procedure is initiated. We deal with all other cases, including verbal offences. (Judge, 55)⁷

When asked about the number of cases of violence reported by a husband, our interlocutor says:

It was unimaginable previously, but it is ever more frequent today... for verbal violence and insults mostly... (Judge, 55)

Our interlocutor singles out as one of the more interesting the case in which a husband reported his wife for verbal violence he experienced when he brought his friends home for socializing.

It would not be strange if it were not for the fact that he and the neighbours, and the wife herself, witnessed and knew that she used to bring her friends over almost daily, which she

considered to be her right, and she made a scandal the one time he did the same... (Judge, 55)

The interviewed professional was not evaluative (negative or positive) about this evolution, but they evidently felt that these reports were worthy of attention in order to avoid stereotyping and to grasp the complexity of the situation in the field. They expressed concern regardless of the gender of the victim.

A retired judge aged 64 discussed the complexity of the phenomenon of domestic violence and how hard it is to overcome the personal prejudice that male family members are the sole perpetrators:

The majority of the cases I worked on followed the expected pattern in which the husband was the bully and the perpetrator of violence, but there are situations when the wife leads to problems... I remember the case in which the wife played out the role of the victim marvellously, whereas the reality was completely different... In yet another case there was a wife who was maybe the most manipulative person I have ever met in my entire life... This experience helped me enormously to understand the complexity of the reality, even though this example was more an exception than a rule...

It is a welcome notion to bring complexity into the view by showing, based on their experience, that men can also be victims, even if in a small number of cases, as this quote shows. However, the expression of this judge's own position – that she would not play the victim – to an extent disregards other possible complexities, such as the situation of economic dependency and not being able to walk away.

3.2 Enduring Challenges: Inertia of Institutional Reaction, Vicious Cycles of Suffering, Alcohol Abuse, Patriarchy

All respondents share the opinion that so far adequate mechanisms of timely recognition of the increasing incidence of violence against women have not yet been established. This particularly refers to the lack of an effective institutional reaction which would prevent the escalation of violence and the worst-case scenarios. It is necessary here to differentiate between subjective and objective levels of possibility and responsibility.

The subjective level is well illustrated in the following quotes.

I have only recently realised that many women, especially elderly, honestly think that it is almost a rule to be a victim of

⁷ The Family Act of 1998 recognizes for the first time domestic violence as a specific form of violence and forbids violent behaviour of spouses or any family member older than 18 years of age (Article 118) (Obiteljski zakon, 1998). Violation of this stipulation was treated as a misdemeanour (30 days in jail, Article 362). However, the Act was difficult to enforce in practice (there was no definition of who is considered to be a family member and of violent behaviour in the family too). The version of the Act of 2003 brings stipulations on protecting children (Obiteljski zakon, 2003) (Obiteljski zakon, 2003; Grozdanić, Škorić, & Vinja, 2010; Radić & Radin, 2014).

violence if you are a woman, that there is hardly any woman who had not personally experienced or suffered it... This made me deeply sad and made me think. (Police officer, 53)

It is of utmost importance that a victim decides to protect herself and to realise that waiting for the bully to 'calm down' is not only a waste of time but a dangerous game where one's life is at stake. (Judge, 55)

The visible level present here is relevant, but the entire research process would be amiss were we to stop at the responsibility of the victims. There is a series of factors leading to the seemingly hopeless 'hostage situation' or the aforementioned Stockholm syndrome. A conversation with a judge (55) illustrates this well enough – she told us about her male colleague, a judge, who asked an abused woman: "Have you thought about leaving?" and the wife replied: "Tell me please, where to exactly?" It would in this sense be extremely hypocritical, although fully in line with the deep level of the causes of the problem – a patriarchal social structure – to deem the victim responsible. What particularly needs to be taken into consideration is that there is the issue of not only responsibility, but also ownership, as many wives do not have housing and/or sufficient economic resources to separate from the abusive spouse.

An objective level of responsibility for early recognition, protection and a relatively advantageous resolution, is described in the following quote:

I think it is among the most absurd professional experiences to allow for undoubtedly a high-risk threat and let the bully return to the family!

Another judge, retired (64), comments on a case of life-long heavy physical abuse followed by long medical treatments and disability of the victim, which concluded with the murder of the bully:

None of us understood how it was possible that so many years passed, I remember us discussing for days in court what to do, but every conversation ended in our desperate conclusion that this was the case of common disgrace and that no one should dare try to be clever...

All tellers also confirm that if there is something that can help turn the situation in the victim's favour – it is unfortunately not institutional activity, but to a far greater extent the readiness and motivation of one or several persons from the professional services – to be persistent and not to give up.

In my career, I gave support to wives exposed to violence maybe more uncompromisingly than many of my colleagues, sticking up for their accommodation and help, after they had

decided to end their suffering, which often does not end in a desirable but in a tragic way... (Retired social service worker, 67)

I have never failed to impose a restraining order, and on several occasions I would, during the proceedings if the measure had been broken, instantly order jail detention... (Retired judge, 64)

All our interlocutors say that the common denominator in the dominant number of cases is accepted suffering or patient endurance, which with time becomes resistant to even the slightest idea of exiting the hostage situation. A judge interviewee (53) enumerates several typical situations to illustrate the variety and complexity: when children are inappropriately and undeservingly manipulated against their mother who is in that case a victim, or when actually the children are direct or sole victims, or thirdly that wives as victims of violence are additionally endangering their children by tolerating violence or closing their eyes to it.

Since I started working in the justice system, I have been trying to understand what this situation is about and the simplest conclusion is that there is a form of the Stockholm syndrome involved. One's incapacity to exit the victim status, or even a form of dependency on it/addiction to it... My experience also includes situations in which, despite a completely clear picture, the fiercest resistance is built up by children – they typically blame the mother, often fuelled or caused by the father's manipulation... Unfortunately, we have seen that children can be direct or sole victims of violence and both parents molesters... Also, mothers sometimes decide to put up with the violence, closing their eyes to the fact that their children are endangered... (Judge, 53)

In addition to the vicious circle of endless suffering, which frequently results in transmission of the model to and its acquisition by younger generations, a retired judge (64) recollects the violent end of a 50-year long marriage in which the wife obviously suffered daily abuse by the husband.

It seems that apart from a few neighbours nobody knew anything about it, although she kept persuading those who knew not to speak about it to anyone, up until one day, when his usual aggression was intensified by bigger than usual amounts of alcohol... It was around 11 pm, the wife called the police and said she had killed her husband. (Retired judge, 64)

The judge pointed out that customarily the tragic outcome is for the victim and that this experience had a "sobering effect" on everyone. The interviewee had empathy and understanding for the wife who suffered 50 years of violence and was not judgemental, even though she would work towards avoiding fatal outcomes in general.

Some of us were extremely shaken up and we would not let go of such cases in the ensuing time, until we examined thoroughly all the evidence...

A judge (48) retold similar cases but with a more favourable ending:

The wife opted for a quite risky move – to document his aggression, and she managed to record one of the worst incidents while the children were away for several days. (Judge, 48)

Video recording turned out to be a good choice, because the molester was forever removed from the family and had to pay regular alimony.

The other case I witnessed also included the decision of the victim to record her violent husband, but at the same time she laid an ambush, which led to his immediate arrest and quick conviction. (Judge, 48)

Our interlocutor concludes that it is of utmost importance that the victim decides to protect herself and to admit herself that waiting for the bully to calm down is not only a waste of time, but a dangerous gambling with one's own life. This statement, given by a younger participant, shows more openness and less prejudicial thinking.

Also, the majority of tellers from the justice system emphasize alcohol consumption as a regular companion to domestic violence. This was confirmed by tellers from the social services. A social service retiree (67) feels she almost could not choose her profession, as it was a result of a truly tragic childhood event in which she lost her mother to an alcoholic father who ended up in prison, and she grew up in an orphanage.

The decision to help children like me ripened each day of my life in an orphanage, because we do not choose what family we are born into.

Also, this experience encouraged her to move beyond official job requirements.

In my professional career I provided uncompromising support to wives exposed to violence, frequently helping them and finding them a place to stay after they had decided to put an end to their suffering, which can often lead to tragic outcomes. I still often think about this terrible responsibility, loyalty, upbringing, habit, patriarchal consciousness etc. that keep so many women in a state of lifelong and, I do not exaggerate when I say self-chosen, hostage situation, just like the one my mother paid the highest price of all for. (Social service retiree, 67)

The problem of alcoholism was stressed by another teller from the social services (56), claiming it was predominantly a problem on the man's side.

If I were to name one common denominator of the problems I encountered in my entire professional career, I would say it is alcohol. This is not to say that without alcohol all these families would be functional, but I think it would be easier to keep other causes under control. I can hardly remember a violent incident in which alcohol was absent. (Social service retiree, 56)

3.3 Motivational Structure for Women in Professional Settings

The motivation for working in the justice system was for our interlocutors often based in early childhood or youth experience. A retired judicial officer (70) retells her childhood experience with a violent father. She and her sister were saved owing to her mother's courage and decisiveness prior to any tragic outcomes. She remembers many cases in which a victim would, after having suffered lifelong violence, injure the bully, with the case recognizing domestic violence that led to it rather than focusing on the result.

I know the judges were at the time (the 1970s and 80s) quite stiff, there was not much understanding when it came to overstepping legitimate self-defence. Still, I am happy to have witnessed before retiring that even such cases are referred to as domestic violence, as they adequately should be called, and that there are mechanisms to defend women victims of violence, which were non-existent and unimaginable at the beginning of my professional career. (Retired judicial officer, 70)

A judicial officer (52) also says that it is precisely due to the circumstances from her childhood that she chose her profession – the experience of order and sense of justice she felt in her quite traditional family:

My grandfather was person number one. But I cannot remember any fight or conflict, because everybody somehow assumed that 'house order' needed to be respected and, interestingly enough, my grandmother had absolute authority. (Judicial officer, 52)

Personal experience from youth guided the professional interests of a judicial officer (45) too, who talks about her time as an intern trainee in the judicial system, when despite her formal education, she was deceived by her fiancé, who manipulated her and lied to her, and she luckily avoided what promised to be a risky and dangerous marriage. This experience made our interviewee, she claims, more attuned to cases with domestic violence and more ready to help female vic-

tims, but it cannot be generalized. It serves here to indicate also the potential role of the romantic love code in tolerating some forms of partner violence.

Almost all our interlocutors have a personal story about their preference for police work, which includes the need to fight for justice from an early age.

I remember my brother persuading me after watching Lethal Weapon. Rene Russo appeared in part three and there were scenes of her spectacularly fighting a bunch of bad guys all by herself. My first serious intervention (laughing) was early in high school when I prevented three older kids from molesting younger students. Although I had to put up with a public reproach from the principal and class master, I could see they tacitly approved of what I had done, which encouraged me and defined my interest in the topic of domestic violence. (Police officer, 40)

The basic motivation for a career in the police was the need to help and protect those who cannot do it themselves. I grew up in a family where my parents always provided me with support and protection, but I had a friend in school who was not that lucky. I wanted to help her badly, I even got into a conflict with my parents, who advocated a more cautious and restrained approach – but I convinced them we should act. When they admitted I was right – I knew for sure what profession I should choose. The main problem is the lack of an effective social strategy of intervention before evil heats up. (Police officer, 37)

I had no doubt whatsoever, my father worked in the police, uncle and grandfather too, I have known since I was a child that this is the profession for me. There was a school situation when I defended my current husband and his friend from bullies. He avoided me for years because I embarrassed him (laughing), but I cannot stand when anyone weaker suffers because of the ill will of somebody stronger. I am not sure if I am entitled to it, but whenever I have the chance to talk to women suffering domestic violence, I try to share this conviction with them. Some women are encouraged by that, while others unfortunately cannot wait to return to their 'normal world' where they remain victims. (Police officer, 34)

All interlocutors say that despite their strong motivation they experienced 'crises' at some point. They wondered how to help someone who rejects help. A police officer (36) admits there is nothing more disheartening for her than women refusing to break free from their shackles.

During an intervention I was physically assaulted by a woman who called for help. When we arrived, we found her lying on the floor, but when we overpowered the bully and headed towards the car with him, she jumped up and attacked me, com-

pletely beside herself, screaming: do not take him away, do not take my man, I will kill you. I know what addiction to the bully is, Stockholm syndrome, in theory, but this episode almost made me give up this job. I wanted to quit, but my senior colleagues gave me a lecture and taught me a life lesson. (Police officer, 36)

It is useful to convey their direct quotations because thickness of description is thus achieved. The same interviewee continues to wonder about the reasons for remaining in a violent relationship.

I wondered why these women chose to remain trapped in suffering. But my senior colleagues told me to stop whining because in that way I was actually mocking that woman and all others in similar situations. They told me: you cannot imagine what they are going through, and all they really want is just like you and us, to have a normal life and a normal family. She did not have any luck, maybe she contributed to that situation and you are highlighting that by retelling her attack on you. You think she attacked you, but she was actually screaming for help in her way. She was actually saying: who are you to meddle with my life, if you really want to help me you can always try and then give up and disappear, and I collect pieces of my illusion of happiness between beatings, and then you show up and destroy my only life and order. You took her husband down with one hand and you showed her all her weakness in one moment, everything she hates about herself. You open the door and offer hope for a second, but then you immediately turn the light off and slam the door. (Police officer, 36)

Our interviewee admits that after these words she was completely reset:

I decided to take that woman's statement and do whatever it takes to resolve the situation.

The woman then thanked her, apologised and started fully cooperating, which was interpreted as a sign of readiness to cooperate.

A police officer (45) also had a clear desire to work for the police:

Honestly, I had not thought about domestic violence a lot up until several years ago. I was on duty then later in the night when a woman appeared at the police station door. I had lost my mother not long before that and this woman reminded me of her. This is usually not professional, according to the procedure, you should first listen and write down....and I didn't stick to the procedure, approached and hugged her, I told her not to worry and that I would look after her. Of course, the police do not regularly speak that way, especially not at the station, but I saw my mother in her and I just wanted to protect her.

The interviewee then described what she did to arrest the bully and that she used the video recording showing how he attacked her during the arrest to place him in custody right away, and finally help the former victim get a divorce and a physical restraining order.

3.4 Gender-based Prejudice in Occupational Settings

The second big section or code dealt with in this research, in addition to the above-discussed experiences with direct involvement with the victims and perpetrators of violence, refers to confronting prejudice in the professional setting, and the situation is particularly accentuated by our interlocutors with longer service and by retired tellers.

Considering my age, my early experience in the police includes attitudes of suspicion and disbelief of women being able to do police work, which is why I had to fight on two fronts from the very beginning. The first is connected with the powers of police officers and my professional responsibility, and the second is prejudice against women in the police. When it comes to a professional approach to the problem of domestic violence, I admit to often have exceeded professional boundaries if I thought it necessary. I have never hesitated to directly suggest to the victims, regularly women in my cases, what to do, and some suggestions were so to speak 'borderline' or on the edge, which I can admit today... (Retired police officer, 69)

In addition to prejudice connected with gender roles in society and the police alike, more experienced interviewees mention cases in which the lack of coherence and harmonisation of the legal framework on the one hand and actual activities on the other led the victim to take matters into their own hands. A retired police officer (60) retells the case of a family in which the bully was the ex-husband, who already lived with another woman for a while, but was frequently violent to his first wife, and he would also attack the children, who lived with their mother. She herself testified in court several times about what was going on, but nobody was able to protect her effectively despite restraining orders. On one occasion she said, while begging us to stop him, she would have no choice next time he came near to them. Our interlocutor suggested that a standby police unit watch in front of their house, because it seemed certain he would appear again and repeat his deeds, but nobody seemed to have heard her. And it happened, what our interviewee thought based on her experience was "bound to happen". The wife heard he was back in town and she was expecting his arrival, sitting in the car in front of the house. When he parked the car and started walking towards the house, holding some kind of bat in his hand, she drove the car into him, causing him multiple fractures, he was in hospital for a long time and had difficulty moving because

of massive injuries, but the interviewed police officer concluded that she was glad he never again threatened them... We can see based on this paraphrased part of the interview that there is empathy with the victim, which is understandable and generally desirable, but one should however be careful not to support additional violence, which is something police officers should make aware it seems based on this interview quote.

Today, after many years of experience, she concludes:

I believe many cases of domestic violence can be easily prevented, because they are predictable and the bully does not hide the intention of repeating violent deeds... but I think that despite legal acts and some improvements everything is still very rigid, especially bureaucratic disinterestedness which still dictates the tempo of the promptness of institutional reaction, active approach and prevention. Situations unfortunately repeat themselves or end up tragically, when the victim is hurt or killed and decides to say 'that is enough', with no hope that the rule of law can protect her effectively. (Retired police officer, 60)

This view is less bitter with younger generations, which can be seen through the lenses of legislative changes. legislative changes (Radić & Radin, 2014; Grozdanić, Škorić & Vinja 2010).

Another interlocutor (60), retired, told us about prejudice from the beginning of her career in the police, and about cases from police practice which were never made public, in which the victims decided to fight back. Our interviewee understood why the woman acted violently towards her bully, with anger and despair putting her in a trance, but warned that such actions do not fall under self-defence customarily.

I remember a girl who suffered several assaults calling the police, but the bully only earned a misdemeanour report and that was it. Once she simply got mad, she said she was in a state of trance, she grabbed him and threw him like a toy. Then she kept beating him to a pulp, and called afterwards the ambulance and the police. Everyone was utterly confused. The same judge who had previously convicted him was judging her, I think the ruling was that it exceeded necessary self-defence. (Retired police officer, 60)

A retired police officer (64) says she experienced little prejudice in her professional setting, because she had met most of her future colleagues as a PE teacher. She singles out as the most interesting episodes of interventions and overcoming bullies:

who sadistically enjoy the feeling of supremacy up until the moment when they are thwarted, when the sides change, a terrifying and humiliating moment for the bully. The victims,

wives, confess later on that witnessing these scenes helped them do something for themselves.

All other interviewees from the police force point out that skills of defence and overcoming the bully were useful in many ways, because they shock the perpetrator and leave a good impression with colleagues, who would afterwards respect and even praise them, even if they held prejudice against women prior to that moment.

Police officer (52):

Back then, 25 years ago, the police service was not only a 'male profession', but still dealing with prejudice, especially from senior colleagues, was more challenging than the job itself.

However, everything changed for her after one intervention where she was supposed to demonstrate her self-defence and perpetrator-overpowering skills. When the offender saw that a woman was to arrest him, he rushed at her immediately. She says:

I think it is out of the question that there is more violence today, but total awareness is significantly different.

Junior interlocutors regularly point out that they are aware that they face less prejudice at work today thanks to their senior colleagues who broke the ice.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

Mainstreaming domestic and gender-based violence into sociology and criminology makes a difference to social theory. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to overcome several major divergences in methodology between the mainstream and gender fields. These include: the definition of violence; the conceptualization and measurement of the repetition of violence; and making visible the relationship between offender and victim. Violence against women is almost invisible in police recorded crime statistics, which have traditionally been the most authoritative account of crime, since crimes other than the sub-categories of rape and sexual assault are not disaggregated by the gender of the victim. The conclusion for criminology is that gender is more important in the patterning of violence and its theorization than currently occurs. Criminological theory should more systematically address the gendered patterns of violence. The gendering of violence is not a marginal special issue but should be central to the field.

This qualitative study conducted an iterative thematic content analysis of data gathered via in-depth in-person interviews with professional women from the police, the justice sys-

tem and social services who professionally deal or have dealt with cases of gender-based violence in their careers. Lengthy citations of their opinions and experience provided in this paper allow for a so-called thick description in social sciences, bear witness to the complexity of the phenomenon and point to the need for adjusting theoretical approaches to violence in sociology, which need to consider the concrete actual visceral experience of victims and not only wider structural power constellations that disregard the bottom-up approach.

The results reveal relevant topics, including several changes and continuities in the profession in the last several decades (increased reporting, status of misdemeanour/criminal offence, hostage situation, the vicious circle, loss of trust in institutions, bureaucratic disinterestedness, alcohol, prejudice in the professional setting and physical intervention by women – self-defence and of professionals). Topics particularly stressed as relevant are inadequate institutional response and additional engagement and risk taking of motivated professionals in order to compensate for it. When cultural factors and patriarchy are taken into consideration as cross-sectional dimensions, our results reveal complex realities and are comparable to a significant body of international research.

The data collected through interviews and the analysed content provided us with insight into the valuable experience of professional women dealing with domestic and gender-based violence, mostly against women. The interviewees for our sample were reached, as already stated, based on the "snowball" strategy, and the sample is intentional, fulfilling the following criteria: our tellers come from the background of the judicial system, the police and social services, and they all have lifelong experience of dealing with and working on cases of gender-based violence, violence against women and domestic violence. Moreover, a relevant criterion in addition to expertise was high personal motivation to solve specific cases of domestic violence and help the victims, as well as to take additional risks to achieve that, undertaking tasks that were not in their usual workload, but were also not explicitly forbidden. All women narrated about this kind of motivation and willingness to take additional risks to help the victims. This finding can be compared to research literature on the importance of childhood socialization and experience in generating the conditions for GBV as well as of role models, of women arresting offenders for example and of attitudes being important (compare to Hindin, Kishor, & Ansara, 2008). The second part of our conversations included questions about our interlocutors' experience with gender-based prejudice in the professional setting. Prejudice turned out to be most pronounced in statements of senior interviewees from the police. The reason is among other things that the police force was until recently a predominantly male world. Our findings can be compared to the study and guidelines on fighting gender

stereotypes, education and introducing gender-sensitive statistics in the police force (Zveržhanovski & Balon, 2012). The first woman police officer was Alice Stebbins Wells, in 1910 in the Los Angeles Police Department. In 1917 Isabelle Goodwin became the first detective, and in 1918 Mary Sullivan a detective on blood delicts. In the Republic of Croatia women entered the police system in the Secretariat of Internal Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Croatia, first on administrative jobs and during the 1970s on police officer duties. In 1976 there were only four women employed (Mersija Grujić, Nada Iveković, Drina Drempetić and Stanka Saraja). The secondary school for police officers was established in 1972 and it admitted only men, while women could enter the police force only with a higher education degree. In 1970/1971 when the Internal Affairs Academy was founded, the first woman was enrolled (Marica Marić), and she is the first woman to have graduated. By 1978 there were two more women graduates (Ljubica Jelić and Branka Ledić). During the 1980s more women were employed as police officers and a significantly more intense inclusion of women in the police force and the Police Academy took place in the 1990s. Since 2003 there has been an option of further adult education and occupational retraining. In 2009 the force was 13.5% women, in 2010 (in December) out of the total number of 20,925 employees in the police force in Croatia, there were 3,361 women or 16%, and in 2015 women accounted for 17.6% of employees in the police force. Finally, in 2020 (also December) there were 4,089 women out of 20,585 employees, which amounts to 19.8%. We can see that the ratio of women is increasing, although the disproportion is still significant.

The opinion shared by all our respondents is that until today no adequate mechanisms of timely recognition of increasing incidence of violence against women have been established. This includes the lack of effective institutional reaction which would prevent the escalation of violence and fatal scenarios. It is necessary here and useful to differentiate between subjective and objective levels of possibility and responsibility

All tellers also confirm that if there is something that can help turn the situation in the victim's favour – it is not institutional activity, but to a far greater extent the readiness and motivation of one or several persons from the professional services – to be persistent and not to give up.

When it comes to the topic of gender prejudice in the professional setting, our assumption was corroborated – that experience with prejudice is primarily retold by police employees, because working for the police has traditionally been considered a male profession, especially when it comes to operational field activities related to special police skills and facing various safety risks. However, it is visible from the results that narratives of gender-based prejudice are dominantly

detected in stories of senior women, pointing to a relative temporal change.

This does not mean that our tellers from the justice system or the social services have no experience of prejudice when it comes to women's abilities, but in comparison to police officers it is almost negligible, and mostly referring to early days of employment in stories of now already retired women. The reasoning is here obviously based on the fact that the police officer's job depends most definitely on the officer's physicality, which is not the case for a social worker or a judge.

All interviewed women from the police stress their personal inclination for police work and its connection with childhood experience and the need to fight for justice. This can be compared to research on the relevance of childhood experience and socialization (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000).

Additionally, self-defence skills and fighting skills in general should be mentioned as highly relevant in smashing prejudice and the effective overcoming and arresting of suspects, who can get irate when they see it is women in uniform who are about to arrest them. These findings can be compared to Delsol, Margorlin and John (2003) on wider attitudes and community reaction in relation to GBV. The skills police officers demonstrate have multiple effects. In addition to surprising and often paralyzing or even embarrassing the perpetrator, especially if there are witnesses, they would also impress their colleagues. All senior interlocutors point out that their first years with the police required double working hours, because besides work tasks they had to be careful about every word they say and every step they take, even after proving themselves in a special intervention or a solved case. Finally, and interestingly, what happens after prejudice barriers are removed is positive 'overreaction' where colleagues praise their most reliable partners or exaggerate stories about police achievements and feats, especially in cases when senior colleagues mentor novices.

Other relevant comparisons of our findings with the existing body of research include the topics of alcohol abuse, patriarchy, and relevance of cultural specifics in dealing with complex phenomena like GBV. The connection of alcohol abuse with domestic violence was underlined by our results as omnipresent, which group our study among the so-called 'second generation' approaches to GBV, in that it considers there to be several different factors which can cause violence (including, for example, alcohol as well as patriarchy). Research confirming this along similar lines is abundant (Delsol et al., 2003; McKenry, Julian, & Gavazzi, 1995). Cultural specifics and patriarchy are relevant dimensions when discussing GBV, which was narrated by our interlocutors and relies on sociological research on modernization and types of gender equality regimes

in regions of Croatia (Tomić-Koludrović, 2015). International research confirming the relevance of cultural specifics and discussing GBV as a result of patriarchy should be compared (e.g., the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW). The results are in line with the appeal to deal with not only systemic aspects of violence but also with concrete local empirical cases of GBV in sociology as a discipline (Walby et al., 2014).

All younger tellers accentuated that they are aware that in the last several decades there has been a significant change of the general climate (increased reporting and awareness, recognition of GBV as a crime, spread of terminology related to GBV) and that they deal with less prejudice in the profession today thanks to their more experienced colleagues who broke the ice. There are resilient constants, including a patriarchal social structure and the Stockholm syndrome, but there is also the immense personal motivation of concerned professionals to compensate for a slow institutional response and loss of trust due to bureaucratic procedures.

The research conducted by Walby (1990) and Tomić-Koludrović (2000, 2015) shows that gender-perspective was lacking from classical sociological theories of modernization, which comprises its androcentrism.

Some limitations of this research approach on the other hand include the lack of verifiability procedure, inability to make generalizations to the population and the potential appearance of desirable answers and perspectives during interviews.

One of the central concluding remarks suggests a gap between visible shifts in awareness and public discourse on the unequal position of women and their exposure to socially structured injustice, discrimination, violence and gender stereotypes on the one hand, and inertia of developing adequate institutional responses on the other.

Lastly, possibly the most relevant contribution of this research is the finding, based on shared experience of professional women, that most positive outcomes, especially in cases of domestic violence, are to a lesser degree enabled by existing institutional possibilities and practices, and to a greater degree by professionals' personal engagement and commitment beyond and outside of the framework defined by the social role and the position in the professional structures, pointing to the role of community response in achieving safety.

Finally, the authors make a general concluding appeal for intense education as a remedy to patriarchy and GBV, awareness raising, research-based guide to policies, working on resistance and prevention, creating and propagating through the media positive role models, working through women's

groups, local, national and international organisations, and giving choices and voices to victims themselves.

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Nasilje v družini in spol – poklicne izkušnje, motivacija in spolni predsodki strokovnjakinj na Hrvaškem

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Čeprav so bile dosežene pomembne pravne razsežnosti enakosti, še vedno obstajajo vztrajne družbene razsežnosti neenakosti žensk. Da bi raziskali nekatere razloge za to, smo preučili osebne izkušnje, poglede in zgodbe sodnic, socialnih delavk in policistk, ki se profesionalno ukvarjajo s primeri nasilja v družini. Naša analiza temelji na delno strukturiranih dialoških intervjujih kot poglobljenih osebnih pogovorih z izbranimi osebami, do katerih pridemo na podlagi verižne napotitve ali vzorčenja snežne kepe. Ta kvalitativni pristop ne daje podlage za posploševanje na populacijo, ampak je pomembno dopolnilo kvantitativnim pristopom, če želimo zmanjšati popredmetenje in zagotoviti podrobnejši opis razmer na terenu. S pomočjo programske opreme NVivo je bila izvedena tematska in narativna analiza podatkov, zbranih v intervjujih ($n = 21$). Rezultati omogočajo preslikavo ustreznih tem in skrbi ter kažejo, da obstajajo kulturno specifične strategije odpora tako v vedenju žensk kot v odzivu skupnosti. Te strategije temeljijo na tradicionalnih družinskih ureditvah in se pogajajo z njimi, kar bi lahko spodbudilo socialno kohezijo in varnost, zlasti v pretežno podeželskih regijah. Teoretično ozadje najdemo na stičišču sociološke in kriminološke teorije, kjer je spol vključen v tradicionalne perspektive.

Ključne besede: nasilje, družina, spol, intervjuji, varnost, ženske, Hrvaška

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