
POLICE OFFICERS ATTITUDE TOWORD DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: IS IT CHANGING?

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Abstract. 9 years after the adoption of the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence, its implementation has been constantly improved, Nevertheless, subjective obstacles to the effective prevention of domestic violence remain. This paper examines the peculiarities of the attitude of Lithuanian police officers towards domestic violence against women and their activities in domestic violence situation. The paper aims to, to identify and to compare the attitude of officers and students toward various aspects of domestic violence; to analyse the dynamics of such attitudes in nine year since 2011 and to compare the results in terms of gender and work position.

In the research 390 subjects, including 146 students of Lithuania Police School, 244 police officers participated. Results show that legal regulation is well advanced compared with law situation in 2011. The rights of victims of domestic violence are clarified and more widely regulated in law, police officers are more specialized in preventing domestic violence, and the rights of victims are better implemented and protected in practice. Observing the attitudes of police officers towards the domestic violence during the years, it can be stated that there have been positive changes in attitudes and ability to help victims of violence, but at the same time police officers' notes that working with domestic violence frustrates them with the recurrence of domestic violence and there is a lack of support from managers and the wider system (courts, prosecutors, communities) for their initial intervention.

Keywords: domestic violence, violence against women, police officers, gender stereotypes.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of domestic violence in Lithuania is studied from various aspects - from the point of view of cultural gender (Michailovič, 2014, Vaigė, 2013), legal problems (Urbonas, 2011, Jakštienė, 2014, 2017), interinstitutional cooperation (Bučiūnas, Velička, 2017) However, there are few studies examining the attitudes of police officers towards domestic violence (Ruibytė, Velička, 2008, 2012). Comparing the results of the 2007 and 2011 researches, the authors state that changes in police officers' attitudes towards domestic violence

change relatively slowly (Ruibyte, Velička, 2012), which may lead to an insufficiently effective response to the domestic violence cases. Whereas attitudes determine the way of responding to situations, knowing them would give an idea of what measures should be taken to change the inappropriate beliefs.

Therefore, in this work we **set the goal** to further investigate the dynamics and changes in the attitude of Lithuanian police officers towards violence and assistance to a woman experiencing violence. To achieve this goal, the following tasks were set: to review changes in legislation governing the prevention of domestic violence; to identify the specificities of attitudes of police officers and students, future police officers towards domestic violence against women; to compare the results in terms of gender and work position.

OVERVIEW OF LEGISLATION ON THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE IN CLOSED ENVIREMENT

2011 May 26 The Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania adopted the Republic of Lithuania Law on Protection against Domestic Violence (hereinafter LOPADV), which entered into force at the 15th of December in 2011. The adoption of this law is associated with fundamental changes in the regulation of legal protection against domestic violence in Lithuania (Jakštienė, 2019).

The law states that domestic violence is a violation of human rights and freedoms. This law aims to protect individuals from domestic violence. The law defines the concept of domestic violence, establishes the rights and responsibilities of the subjects of domestic violence, the implementation of prevention measures, the provision of assistance in the event of domestic violence and the application of protection measures to a person who has experienced violence. In order to implement this law, the Government of the Republic of Lithuania adopted a resolution “On the Implementation of the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Protection against Domestic Violence” at the 14 th of September in 2011. Pursuant to the following legal acts, the Lithuanian Police Commissioner General issued orders regulating the actions of police officers.

The Government of the Republic of Lithuania paid great attention to the prevention of domestic violence and adopted Resolution no. 485 “On the Approval of the State Program for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Provision of Assistance to Victims for 2014–2020” issued on 28th of May 2014. The program sets 2 goals for prevention and comprehensive

assistance to victims of violence, the tasks to achieve these goals, provides an analysis justifying the goals and objectives, set out the evaluation criteria and their meanings. Other programs and strategies also contribute to the implementation of the Program: the Child Welfare Program for 2013–2018, approved by the Minister of Social Security and Labour on the 3th of December 2012 by order no. A1-547 “On the Approval of the Child Welfare Program for 2013–2018”, Mental Health Strategy, approved by the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania in 2007. April 3 by resolution no. X-1070 “On the Approval of the Mental Health Strategy”, Alcohol and Tobacco Control Program (Interinstitutional Action Plan), approved by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania in 2011. September 14 by resolution no. 1080 "On the approval of the Alcohol and Tobacco Control Program (Interinstitutional Action Plan)".

In the fight against domestic violence, the European Parliament and Council Directive 2012/29 / EU should be mentioned as an important piece of legislation of the European Union. This document establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime and which replaced Council Framework Decision 2001/220 / JHA. The purpose of this Directive is to ensure that victims of crime in all Member States receive adequate information, support, protection and are able to participate fully in criminal proceedings. It is important to note, that victims of domestic violence, gender-based violence, sexual violence and abuse are identified as being in a particularly high risk of harm and therefore need specialized assistance, specialist support and legal protection. It is necessary to ensure supportive environment for victims of violence in case they would make decisions and where victims of such crimes would be treated with dignity, respect and sensitivity. This Directive recognizes that women, who are victims of gender-based violence, as well as their children, often need special support and protection due to the high risk of secondary and repeat victimization, intimidation and retaliation. The Directive sets out an individual procedure for assessing the protection needs of victims of crime (Jakštienė, 2017). Later the provisions of the Directive were transposed into the legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania. LOPADV was improved and changed. In total, the law has 8 amendments. Taking into account the above-mentioned amendments, the Lithuanian Police Commissioner General issued orders and instructions regulating the actions of police officers. In order for police officers to be properly trained on how to respond appropriately to domestic violence, the qualification improvement program was prepared and approved.

Also, we must mention about the draft law, which is prepared and submitted for consideration. The Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania has

prepared and registered the draft Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Protection against Domestic Violence and Violence against Women (registered in Register No. 20-6276) on the 28th of April 2020. The draft law contains provisions related to the application of the Protection order against violence. This is a new legal preventive protection measure. The purpose of a protection order against violence is to protect a person from possible violence by instructing a potential abuser to temporarily move out of the place of residence where he or she lives with the person who may experience violence and / or not to approach him or her, communicate or seek contact with him or her. The draft law includes provisions on the use of personal data and assistance in helping victims of domestic violence or violence against women.

Summarizing the changes in the legal regulation in the fight against domestic violence, we would like to single out the European Union legislation - the European Parliament and of the Council Directive 2012/29 / EU, issued on the 25th of October 2012, which is establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime. The implementation of this Directive and its transposition into national law have led to significant changes in national legislation on the protection of the rights of victims of domestic violence.

Legal regulation is well advanced compared with law situation in 2011. The rights of victims of domestic violence are clarified and more widely regulated in law, officials are more specialized in preventing domestic violence, and the rights of victims are better implemented and protected in practice.

POLICE OFFICERS' RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

As can be seen from the reviews since the adoption of the LOPADV, its implementation has been constantly improved, training of law enforcement officers on how to act more effectively in situations of domestic violence constantly going on. Naturally, police officers enforcing this law face increased workload, new challenges and problems. Various aspects of police work with domestic violence can be found in the scientific literature (Gover, Pudrzynska, Dodge, 2011, Sun, Li, Yuning, 2011, Logan, Shannon, Walker, 2006, Sun, Chu, 2010). Gaps in the implementation of law and insufficiently accurate and detailed documentation of incidents are analysed - it is noticed that police officers do not always respond successfully and adequately in situations of domestic violence, thus reducing trust in them and increasing the likelihood of recurrence of violence. (Shtelmakher, 2010). Women who have been victims of violence often do not trust the police, afraid to call police because they feel they will not be

taken seriously or will receive help. Studies have shown that confidence in the police encourages victims to seek help, report violence, cooperate with the police (Kautt and Tankebe 2011, Davis et al., 2003; Stover et al, 2010). On the contrary, negative experiences prevent victims from the contact with police, increase their mistrust and helplessness and deter attempts to leave the perpetrator (Fleury et al. 1998; Johnson 2007). Barrett, Peirone and Cheung (2019) note that despite twenty years of policies in Canada to improve police response to spousal violence, negative attitudes towards police on the part of victims persist. Similar research conducted in Lithuania in 2019 shows that domestic violence victims still do not have enough trust in police assistance - 24% of women experienced domestic violence, of which only 24% turned to the police. Women with migrant or refugee status are particularly unlikely to contact the police because of their particularly sensitive situation, fear of being deported, lack of language skills, and no information on where to turn.

The analysis of the scientific literature emphasizes that in order to ensure an appropriate response of police officers to domestic violence there is a clear need to develop policies that restrict or guide police discretion while avoiding the problems inherent in mandatory arrest rules (Diemera et al., 2017). The survey in USA (Farris, Holman, 2015) show that strong connection of sheriffs' attitudes and actions on violence against women. It reveals important relationships between office policies and sheriff attitudes: sheriffs who believe in violence against women myths are much less likely to have mandatory arrest policy.

At the same time there is a need for collaborative, problem-solving approaches to crime prevention that emphasize working in partnership with the community and more decentralised decision-making (Clement et al. 2009; Murray, 2002). Finding a balance between compulsion and discretion is emerging as a significant challenge in policing domestic violence (Hageman-White et al. 2015).

Changing police practice in this way can change the police culture. The culture of the police organization is one of the important factors in determining the effectiveness of their reaction to interpersonal violence and their ability to assist victims of domestic violence (Murray, 2002).

Factors shaping the culture of a particular country's police organization in relation to the domestic violence are cultural and legal differences, including police officers' attitudes toward interpersonal violence, the levels of tolerance for violence, and holding gender inequality beliefs (Sun et al., 2012). Police attitudes toward the domestic violence affect the assessments

and responses to abuse cases (Gracia et al. 2011), or as well as the attitudes of victims of violence to the police's ability to assist in crises situation.

In many countries, the police are still a male-dominated institution that is not sensitive enough to dealing with women who have been victims of violence (Farris, Holman, 2015, Gölge, Sanal et al. 2015.) Logan's (2006) analysis of the International Crime Survey states that victims of sexual and violent crime are less satisfied with police work than victims of theft, and female victims are often treated with insufficient respect.

Research shows that even with the right legislation to combat domestic violence, its implementation depends to a large extent on the prevailing police and public culture, the attitudes of police officers towards gender equality and the violence perpetrated. It is emphasized that the stereotype of a woman as a subordinate to a man among police officers influences policing practices and that attitudes towards domestic violence and its harm need to be changed at the national level.

METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

Participants. 390 subjects, including 146 (37.4%) students of Lithuania Police School, 148 (37.9%) patrols, 81 (20.8%) investigators, and 15 (3.8%) specialists participated in the study. Of all study participants, 126 (32.3%) were women and 264 (67.7%) were men. The mean age of the study participants was 27.55 years \pm 7.6 years.

Methods. Two questionnaires were used to implement the purpose of the investigation. One of them was for police officers, the 12-question questionnaire we used in the 2007- and 2011-year survey (Ruibyte, Velicka, 2008, 20012). The second 7-question questionnaire was for students. The purpose of the questionnaires was to identify the main aspects of the attitude of future and working police officers towards domestic violence against women, that is knowledge, feelings about and behaviour or readiness to act in a certain way in situations related to domestic violence.

Also students and police officers were asked about their sociodemographic: gender, age, and position at work (only for police officers).

Document analysis method was used to examine the changes in the legislation of domestic violence.

Procedure. The survey was conducted in 2019. Police officers were interviewed during refresher courses and students during lectures. The questionnaires for participants were

anonymous. SPSS 22.0 package was used for statistical analysis and empirical data (paired samples t test and Chi-square test).

RESULTS

The results showed that 50% of surveyed police officers face domestic violence quite often (several times a day or a week) when a man is violent., 42.5% of all students face with domestic violence at work or in practice, 34.9% of all students heard about domestic violence from the media, and 32.9% heard about it from friends or acquaintances.

Nearly half of the police officers (46.7%) after assistance has been provided later learn about situation in the family. However, as many as 42.2% not interested about situation in a violent family after assistance has been provided.

About the readiness of police officers to respond appropriately to cases of domestic violence we can judge from officer's knowledge of the law itself and its application. evaluates it positively and knows how to apply it in practice, 28.7% of police officers indicated that they had read the law, assessed it positively and knew how to apply it in practice, and 27.9% indicated that they had read the law, assessed it positively, but they did not know how to apply the law in practice. In the 2012 survey, 56.9% of surveyed police officers did not know how to evaluate the law because they are unfamiliar with it, 26.3% read and evaluate positively, but did not know how to apply it in practice, 7.8% read, evaluate negatively and did not know how will need to apply it.

Compared to the previous study, the results of this study showed more subjects (89%) knows where to direct victims of domestic violence (68.9% of police officers and 67.5% of students in 2012).

The results revealed that 91% of police officers base their decision to open a pre-trial investigation on domestic violence cases on a visual assessment of the victim's condition, and 57.8% on the victim's oral testimony. As many as 77% of officials say that the main reason for avoiding a decision to open a pre-trial investigation is that cases of this nature often do not reach court because the victim withdraws the statement. However, 66.4% indicate that in their practice, cases of violence against the perpetrator were frequent.

Half of the police officers involved in the investigation (53.3%) arrived on a family call, sometimes trying to reconcile the conflicting parties, 84.4% inform the abuser that he will be punished if the violence continues. 93% inform the woman what legal steps she needs to take

to protect themselves from violence, 77.5% support the woman psychologically, advise where to turn for help and encourage her to write a statement.

The attitude of students and police officers towards the phenomenon in question is revealed by their own attitude towards aggressive actions towards various manifestations of domestic violence. The responses of both groups of respondents revealed that the attitude towards such actions is generally negative (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparison of students 'and police officers' attitudes towards the manifestations of domestic violence against women

Question		N	mean ± standard deviation	Results of the comparison model
I think it is possible to slap a wife	Students	146	1.15±0,44	F (388)=11,27 p=0.68
	Policemen	244	1.26±0,65	
If the wife thinks of another, she earned a slap	Students	146	1.42±0,81	F (388)=0.19 p=0.53
	Policemen	244	1.48±0,76	
If a wife behaves flirtatiously with another man, she may be slapped	Students	146	1.43±0,73	F (388)=0.608 p=0.44
	Policemen	244	1.49±0,77	
Women who experience violence often provoke their partners themselves, so they beat them	Students	146	2.30±1,07	F (388)=3.58 p<0.0001
	Policemen	244	2.74±1,01	
If women behaved differently, men would be less violent	Students	146	2.09±1,19	F (388)=0.236 p=0.01
	Policemen	244	2.37±1,07	
	Policemen	244	1.97±1,43	
Nothing terrible if a furious husband throws a slipper at his wife	Students	146	1.75±0,95	F (388)=0.80 p=0.59
	Policemen	244	1.81±0,96	
If the violence were really brutal, the victim would leave the perpetrator	Students	146	2.84±1,40	F (388)=0,349 p=0.09
	Policemen	244	3.08±1,35	
The main cause of male domestic violence is alcohol	Students	146	3.65±1,15	F (388)=0,791 p=0.74
	Policemen	244	3.69±1,09	
I don't think domestic violence is a big issue	Students	146	1.42±0,81	F (388)=6,45 p=0.008
	Policemen	244	1.72±0,94	
There are cases where violence is justified	Students	146	1.48±0,81	F (388)=3,57 p=0.006
	Policemen	244	1.74±0,94	
Male violence against women has little effect on children	Students	146	1.24±0,74	F (388)=1,96 p=0.30
	Policemen	244	1.32±0,74	
Only weak women become victims of domestic violence	Students	146	1.53±0,82	F (388)=1,61 p=0.004
	Policemen	244	1.80±0,94	
Women themselves are often violent against men	Students	146	3.19±0,94	F (388)=0,061 p=0.64
	Policemen	244	3.15±0,89	
Domestic violence is a serious crime	Students	146	1.64±0,90	F (388)=2,44 p<0,0001
	Policemen	244	2.32±1,01	
Domestic violence is not a priority area for a police officer	Students	146	1.92±1,05	F (388)=0,118 p<0,0001
	Policemen	244	2.51±1,00	
The police must not interfere in private life	Students	146	1.67±0,93	F (388)=0,147 p<0,0001
	Policemen	244	2.23±0,95	
	Students	146	2.88±1,27	F (388)=0,13

Domestic violence is most common in lower social and antisocial families	Policemen	244	3.27±1,25	p<0,0001
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Note: scores for each question from 1 to 5 points, where 1 - strongly disagree, 5 - strongly agree

The understanding of the phenomenon of domestic violence is shown by the knowledge of the subjects about the causes of this phenomenon. The results of the survey revealed that students and police officers rate the impact of alcohol and drugs on domestic violence as particularly important and most important among all the factors listed (95.4% and 90% consider these factors important and particularly important). According to almost half of the participants, domestic violence is influenced by both innate male aggression (45.9% of respondents), jealousy (47.7%) and family conflicts (52.8%). One third of the respondents believe that domestic violence is influenced by childhood violence (39.7% of respondents), the desire to demonstrate masculinity against a woman (34.6% of respondents), the feeling of inferiority of a man (36.4% of respondents) and the desire for control (41% of respondents).

Police officers' views on the dangers of violence to society can be deduced from the results presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Assessment of the danger of a crime to society

	Answer options	percentage of responses from survey participants
The danger of theft crime to society	little important	33 (8,5%)
	important	225 (57,7%)
	very important	132 (33,8%)
The danger of violence in public to society	little important	3 (0,8%)
	important	97 (24,9%)
	very important	290 (74,4%)
The danger to society of indecent behavior in a public place	little important	83 (21,3%)
	important	221 (56,7%)
	very important	86 (22,1%)
The danger of domestic violence to society	little important	9 (2,3%)
	important	75 (19,2%)
	very important	304 (77,9%)

The results revealed that when evaluating crimes according to their danger to society (Table 3), a larger proportion of study participants (57.7%) theft and indecent behavior in public place (56.7%) considered as an important and dangerous crime to society, violence in public place (74, 4%) and in the family (77.9%) as a very important and dangerous crime for society. In the 2012 survey, meanwhile, 69.4% of students and 62.9% of officials rated domestic violence as very important.

Table 3. What should be changed to make it more effective to help a women victim of domestic violence

	percentage of responses from survey participants
Do not change anything as it is a private matter	17 (4,4%)
Amend the criminal law to make police more effective, as now police officers have little power	189 (48,5%)
More knowledge and training on how to deal with domestic violence is needed to make police assistance more effective	206 (52,8%)
More managerial attention is needed for this work	41 (10,5%)

Note: the percentages in the questions do not add up to 100%, as some study participants chose not one but several answers.

In response to the question, “What needs to be changed to make police assistance more effective for women who have experienced violence?” (Table 3), the survey revealed that 52.8% of all respondents believe that more knowledge and training is needed on how to deal with domestic violence. In order to make police assistance to a woman more effective (27.5% in 2012). 48.5% of respondents believe that the criminal law needs to be amended to make police assistance in case of domestic violence more effective, as under current law, officials have little power. 10.5% of respondents believe that managers need more attention to this work (6.0% in 2012).

A comparison of the results of officers and students revealed that police officers have a statistically significantly ($p < 0.0001$) more favourable attitude towards domestic violence against women than the students (they rate domestic violence against women as a less favourable phenomenon) (Table 1).

A similar number of police officers and students know where to turn for help a woman who has experienced domestic violence (the answers to this question did not differ statistically significantly, $p = 0.06$). The police officers and students participating in the study similarly assessed the danger of the crime to society in public. Statistically significantly more police officers and students rate the risk of violence in public ($p = 0.008$) and theft ($p = 0.004$) as a serious crime to society than an insignificant or very important one (differences differ statistically significantly). A statistically significantly higher share of police officers and students in the study rated the danger of domestic violence to society as a very important crime rather than a significant or insignificant crime against society ($p = p < 0.0001$). Thus, it can be said that domestic violence is perceived by both groups as very important in the context of other crimes;

Police officers and students rated alcohol ($p = 0.22$), congenital male aggression ($p = 0.07$), and familial conflict ($p = 0.56$) masculinity ($f = 0.09$) and male inferiority ($p = 0.10$) influence on domestic violence against women (the answers of police officers and students to this question did not differ statistically significantly). Statistically significantly more police officers and students rated drug use ($p = 0.01$) as a particularly important factor influencing domestic violence against women (the impact of these factors was assessed as particularly important compared to other response categories).

A similar number of police officers and students in the study believe that in order to provide more effective police assistance to women who have experienced domestic violence, more managerial attention is needed for this work ($p = 0.34$). Statistically significantly more police officers than students believe that the criminal law needs to be changed ($p = 0.04$) and that more knowledge and training is needed on how to deal with domestic violence ($p = 0.001$) in order to be more effective in helping women in domestic violence cases.

Comparing the attitudes of men and women to the domestic violence, it was found that men in the study had a statistically significantly more favourable attitude towards domestic violence against women than women (they rated domestic violence against women as a less favourable phenomenon) (Table 4).

Table 4. Average assessment of manifestations of violence against women

			Results of the comparison model
Assessment of manifestations of violence against women	male (264)	40,21 ± 7,80	F (388)=3,51
	female (126)	33,85 ± 6,79	p<0,0001

Note: The higher the score on the scale of attitudes towards violence against women in the family, the more favourable the participants in the study rate violence against women as an acceptable thing.

Significantly more men than women in the study agree with such statements as: a) I think you can slap a wife ($p = 0.001$), b) If a wife thinks of another, she earned a slap ($p = 0.001$), c) If a wife behaves flirtatiously with another a man, she can be slapped ($p < 0.0001$), d) Women who experience violence often provoke their partners themselves, so they beat them ($p < 0.0001$), e) If women behaved differently, men would be less violent ($p < 0.0001$), f) nothing terrible if a furious man throws a slipper at his wife ($p = 0.001$), g) If the violence were really brutal, the victim would leave the abuser ($p < 0.0001$). Also, significantly more men than women do not consider domestic violence to be a major problem ($p = 0.001$), men significantly more

than women agreed with the statements that a) there are cases when violence is justified ($p < 0.0001$) b) Male violence against women has little impact on children ($p = 0.004$) c) Only weak women become victims of domestic violence ($p = 0.004$) d) Women themselves are often violent against men ($p = 0.001$) e) Domestic violence usually occurs in lower standing and antisocial families ($p = 0.001$).

However, there was no statistically significant difference between men and women on all other issues related to the assessment of domestic violence. A similar number of men and women in the study knew where to turn for help for a woman who had experienced domestic violence (statistically the answers of men and women to this question did not differ significantly, $p = 0.54$). Respondents, both men and women, similarly assess the danger of theft ($p = 0.41$), indecent behaviour in public ($p = 0.23$) and violence in public ($p = 0.28$) the danger of crime to society (statistically male and female answers did not differ significantly). Statistically significantly higher share of men than women considers domestic violence to be an important and very important crime for society ($p = 0.008$).

Men and women in the study similarly assessed the impact of alcohol ($p = 0.66$), drugs ($p = 0.19$), jealousy ($p = 0.51$), and family conflicts ($p = 0.65$) on domestic violence against women (statistically men and women's responses to this question did not differ significantly). A statistically significantly higher proportion of men than women in the study believe that innate male aggression ($p < 0.0001$), childhood violence ($p = 0.001$), demonstration of masculinity against a woman ($p = 0.001$), feeling of inferiority of a man ($p = 0.01$) and the aim of control ($p = 0.01$) are insignificant, not very important or moderately important factors for domestic violence against a woman.

A comparison between officers (patrol responses versus investigators responses) showed that patrols and investigators have very similar understandings of various aspects of domestic violence, as statistically investigators and patrols responses to all questions did not differ significantly.

DISCUSSION

Compared to the results of the previous survey in 2012, there have been positive changes in the attitude of police officers towards the activities in the domestic violence situation. More police officers and future police officers see domestic violence as a very important and dangerous crime for society, know, where to refer woman for help, support the woman

psychologically, advise and encourage her to write a statement, inform the abuser that he will be punished, if the violence continues, inform the woman what legal action she needs to take to protect herself from the violence, ie take the actions necessary to ensure the prevention of domestic violence. There is a growing number of officers who sometimes check up on families after assistance has been provided. The results showed that both patrols and investigators have very similar understandings of various aspects of domestic violence.

However, some results suggest that there are still operational aspects to be corrected. One-third of police officers, similar to those in the 2012 survey, said they rated the LOPADV positively, but they did not know how the law would need to be applied in practice. Although most officers report that in their practice, cases of violence against the abuser have been frequent, the main reason for avoiding a decision to open a pre-trial investigation is that cases of this nature often do not reach court because the victim withdraws the statement. Research shows that such a situation reduces job satisfaction and motivation to help (Horwitz et al., 2011) and to prevent this appropriate measure could be taken, such as debriefing, feedback and continuing domestic violent education.

Although, in general, respondents' perceptions of various forms of domestic violence are negative, it can be argued, as in the previous survey, that women's attitudes towards domestic violence against women are more negative and less influenced by stereotypes than men's, e.g. about the role of a woman in the rise of violence, her life with the abuser, and so on. Statistically men have a significantly more favourable attitude than the women in the study (they view domestic violence against women as a less favourable phenomenon). It can be assumed that differences in attitudes towards violence against women are still affected by existing gender stereotypes in society that attribute greater power to men in their relationships with women, as well as prejudices that justify violence against women. Similar differences are found in other studies (Sun, 2007, Toon & Hart, 2005). It should be noted that students view domestic violence against women as a less favourable phenomenon than police officers, so it can be assumed that students' attitudes are also influenced by their learning and the acquisition of up-to-date and modern views on domestic violence. Gover, Paul, and Dodge (2011) research data shows that younger officers and those with a college education less likely to underestimate situations of domestic violence.

It can also be assumed that it is easier for men to assess the external causes of SAAs, such as alcohol and drug use, family conflicts, than with "traditional masculinity" (demonstration of

masculinity against a woman, desire for control) or inferiority, childhood violence as the main reason for domestic violence. This misconception that alcohol and drug abuse cause domestic violence is quite common myth (Gover, Paul, and Dodge, 2011). While substance abuse does not cause domestic violence, it is a significant risk factor for escalation of intimate partner violence. Nevertheless, in many other aspects of domestic violence (other causes, danger to society, perception of helping a woman), the opinions of men and women surveyed did not differ significantly.

Officers are increasingly realizing that more effective police assistance to women in domestic violence situations requires more knowledge and training on how to deal with domestic violence, and that greater leadership attention is needed for this work. And these provisions are much more pronounced than in the previous study. At the same time considerable number of police officers say the criminal law needs to be improved.

Thus, in order to improve the implementation of the law on domestic violence, both the attitudes of police officers towards domestic violence should be changed, as well as their training and the improvement interinstitutional cooperation in domestic violence cases. As police officers are part of society, society itself must be educated about domestic violence, its perception and prevention.

CONCLUSIONS

9 years after the adoption of the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence, the legal regulation in Lithuania has changed significantly, which has made it possible to better ensure the protection of victims of violence and the prevention of domestic violence. Legal regulation is well advanced compared with law situation in 2011. The rights of victims of domestic violence are clarified and more widely regulated in law, police officers are more specialized in preventing domestic violence, and the rights of victims are better implemented and protected in practice. Observing the attitudes of police officers towards the domestic violence during the years, it can be stated that there have been positive changes in attitudes and ability to help victims of violence. Experience in Lithuania and various countries shows that criminalizing domestic violence makes police officers more empowered to deal with the problem, but at the same time they note that working with domestic violence frustrates them with the recurrence of domestic violence and there is a lack of support from their managers and the wider system (courts, prosecutors, communities) for their initial interventions. More training, counselling,

case studies of domestic violence and closer cooperation between professional groups is needed.

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