

Diagnosis and opinion on the phenomenon of violence in the perception of the elderly

Diagnoza oraz opinia na temat zjawiska przemocy w percepcji osób w podeszłym wieku

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Abstract

Introduction. In the European Union countries, the problem of an aging society has been present for many years. Due to the increasing number of older people, the problem of violence appears more and more frequently among this group of people, especially on the part of carers. **Aim.** The aim of the study was to analyze the occurrence of the phenomenon of elder's abuse. **Material and methods.** The study was conducted among 150 people aged from 60 to 90 years. Respondents were hospitalized in the Department and Geriatrics of Antoni Jurasz University Hospital No. 1 in Bydgoszcz. In the conducted study, the method of a diagnostic survey was used, and the research tool was the author's questionnaire. All calculations were performed in the PQStat program (version 1.6.6). **Results.** The use of violence against the elderly is a fairly common phenomenon. Marital status, with chronic diseases diagnosed, did not affect the incidence of violence against older people. People who experienced violence themselves more often witnessed violence. ($p < 0.001$). It also turned out to be statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) that people who themselves experienced violence more often declare that they knew the victims who also had experienced that act. The percentage of cases of violence reported by the victims was small (6.7%). **Conclusions.** Violence against the elderly is not a new phenomenon, but the interest in studying aspects of violence against older people is relatively new. However, there is a real need to conduct more research of this type because so far its insufficient number has been carried out in a limited scope. (Gerontol Pol 2018; 26; 265-271)

Key words: violence, elderly people, epidemiology

Streszczenie

Wstęp. W krajach Unii Europejskiej problem starzejącego się społeczeństwa występuje już od wielu lat. W związku ze zwiększającą się liczbą osób starszych coraz częściej wśród tej grupy społeczeństwa pojawia się problem występowania przemocy, zwłaszcza ze strony opiekunów. **Cel.** Celem pracy było dokonanie analizy dotyczącej występowania zjawiska przemocy wśród osób w podeszłym wieku. **Materiał i metody.** Badania przeprowadzono wśród 150 osób w wieku od 60 do 90 lat. Respondenci byli hospitalizowani w Katedrze i Klinice Geriatrii Szpitala Uniwersyteckiego nr 1 im. dr Antoniego Jurasza w Bydgoszczy. W przeprowadzonym badaniu wykorzystano metodę sondażu diagnostycznego, a narzędziem badawczym był autorski kwestionariusz ankiety. Wszystkie obliczenia wykonano w programie PQStat (wersja 1.6.6). **Wyniki.** Stosowanie przemocy wobec osób starszych jest zjawiskiem dość powszechnym. Stan cywilny, zdiagnozowane choroby przewlekłe, nie wpływały na częstość występowania zjawiska przemocy wobec osób starszych. Świadcami przemocy częściej były osoby, które same jej doświadczyły ($p < 0,001$). Istotnie statystycznie ($p < 0,001$) okazało się również to, iż osoby, które same doświadczyły przemocy częściej deklarują, że znają ofiary, które także doznały tego aktu. Odsetek przypadków doznanej przemocy zgłaszanej przez ofiary był niewielki (6,7%). **Wnioski.** Przemoc wobec osób w podeszłym wieku nie jest nowym zjawiskiem, natomiast zainteresowanie badaniem aspektów przemocy wobec osób starszych jest stosunkowo nowe. Istnieje jednak rzeczywiste zapotrzebowanie na prowadzenie więcej tego typu badań, ponieważ dotąd przeprowadzono ich niewystarczającą ilość o ograniczonym zakresie. (Gerontol Pol 2018; 26; 265-271)

Słowa kluczowe: zjawisko przemocy, osoba starsza, epidemiologia

Introduction

For many years, the European Union countries have been struggling with the problem of an aging society [1,2]. The aging process of the society is articulated by the progressively increasing percentage of older people. The development of this phenomenon is also observed in Poland [3]. In 2016, the total population in Poland was 38.4 million, moreover 9 million were older people aged 60 and more. It is estimated that by 2035, the percentage of older people aged 65 and over will have amounted to approximately 29% of Polish society [4,5]. Due to the increasing number of older people, the problem of violence appears more and more frequently among this group of people, particularly on the part of care givers. This issue is still a taboo subject. There are also few scientific studies aimed at elderly victims of violence. As a consequence, undefined and undirected preventive actions are taken in relation to this phenomenon [6].

The Act of 29 July 2005 on counteracting domestic violence defines the concept of domestic violence: “domestic violence – a single or repeated intentional act or omission violating the rights or personal rights of family members, in particular exposing those persons to the danger of losing one’s life, health, violating their dignity, physical integrity, freedom, including sexual abuse, causing damage to their physical or mental health, as well as causing suffering and moral harm to those affected by violence” [7]. Violence against an elderly person is often defined as a single or repeated action, resulting in the appearance of suffering, harm and stress in the victim [8]. One of the most common forms of violence against elderly victims is neglect. This problem is sometimes difficult to diagnose. However, there are some symptoms and behaviors that may indicate the possibility of its occurrence, such as inadequate housing, malnutrition, dehydration, and hygienic negligence [9,10].

Aim

The aim of the work was to analyze the occurrence of the phenomenon of violence among the elderly. An important aspect was also presenting the opinion of the surveyed population on the phenomenon of violence.

Material and methods

The study was conducted among 150 people aged 60-90 years. The research group consisted of 98 women, i.e. 65.3% and 52 men, which made 34.7%. Respondents were hospitalized in the Department and Geriatrics of Dr

Antoni Jurasz University Hospital No. 1 in Bydgoszcz. In the conducted study, the method of a diagnostic survey was used, and the research tool was the author’s questionnaire. Participation in the study consisted in filling in the self-help questionnaire only. Surveys were presented in a publicly accessible place in the Department and Geriatrics of Dr. Antoni Jurasz University Hospital No. 1 in Bydgoszcz, from where interested patients could download and fill them in. Then, anonymous questionnaires filled in by respondents were cast into a specially prepared ballot box. The questionnaire consisted of 6 questions from sociodemographic field. The next 10 questions referred to the characteristics of the phenomenon of violence and concerned, inter alia, experience of violence by the respondents themselves and their families as well as the environment in which they lived. The questionnaire also raised the issue of opinion on the prevalence of this phenomenon.

The verification of the hypotheses was based on the following tests: chi-square test, chi-square test with correction for continuity and Fisher test. The level of significance was $p < 0.05$. All calculations were performed in the PQStat program (version 1.6.6).

Results

Among the respondents participating in the survey, the majority were people aged 60-65 (66.0%), followed by those aged 66-70 (29.3%). The largest percentage of participants, i.e. 37.3%, declared vocational education. Among the respondents, the most numerous group were married persons (50.0%) and subsequently those being in a civil partnership (18.0%). 68.7% of participants lived in urban areas. 67.3% of respondents were diagnosed with a chronic disease. The most frequently mentioned chronic diseases included: hypertension, diabetes and coronary disease.

Table I. Opinion of the studied population on the prevalence of domestic violence against the elderly

Do you think that the occurrence of domestic violence against the elderly is a common phenomenon?			
		n	%
	Yes	90	59.7%
	No	60	40.3%
	Overall	150	100.0%

Table I presents the opinion of the surveyed population on the prevalence of domestic violence against the elderly. The highest percentage of respondents, i.e. 59.7% (90 people), claimed that the occurrence of violence against senile people was a common phenomenon.

The remaining 60 respondents (40.3%) declared that they did not think that violence was common in the group of older people. In the surveyed group of 150 respondents, all agreed that the use of violence was always a form of crime and should be subject to penalties.

Nearly one third of the surveyed population experienced violence, while only 6.7% of victims decided to report this to the relevant services. All respondents reported the existence of police violence. 25.3% did not report violence in their home (table II).

Table II. The percentage of cases of violence reported by victims

Have you ever reported any cases of violence against you?			
		n	%
	Yes	10	6.7%
	No	38	25.3%
	Not applicable	102	68.0%
	Overall	150	100.0%

Respondents were also asked about the incidence of violence against other family members. They agreed that violence against family members was not applied (98%). Only 3 people declared the occurrence of violence against their family.

Table III shows the impact of marital status on the incidence of acts of violence. The statistical analysis carried out showed that it cannot be concluded that there was a dependency between variables ($p = 0.109$). Violent acts comparatively often affected lonely people (20.8%) and people in a relationship (35.3%).

The results obtained in our work also indicated a lack of dependence between chronic diseases and the phenomenon of violence ($p = 0.564$). Among people who were diagnosed with a chronic disease, 32.7% were the people who had ever experienced violence in their place of residence. Among persons not suffering from chronic diseases, the percentage was 26.5%. The results in both groups were therefore similar.

Table III. Determination of the impact of civil status of respondents on the occurrence of violence

A lonely person A person in a relationship			Marital status		Score test
			A lonely person	A person in a relationship	
Have you ever experienced violence in your place of residence?	Yes	N	10	36	$\chi^2 = 2.566$ df = 1 $p = 0.109$
		%	20.8%	35.3%	
	No	N	38	66	
		%	79.2%	64.7%	
Overall		N	48	102	
%		100.0%	100.0%		

Table IV. Determining the impact of the occurrence of chronic diseases on the phenomenon of violence against older people

People who have been diagnosed with a chronic disease People who have not been diagnosed with a chronic disease			Have you been diagnosed with a chronic disease?		Score test
			People who have been diagnosed with a chronic disease	People who have not been diagnosed with a chronic disease	
Have you ever experienced violence in your place of residence?	Yes	N	33	13	$\chi^2 = 0.332$ df = 1 $p = 0.564$
		%	32.7%	26.5%	
	No	N	68	36	
		%	67.3%	73.5%	
Overall		N	101	49	
%		100.0%	100.0%		

Table V. The experience of violence and being a witness to the use of violence

People who have experienced violence People who have not experienced violence			Have you ever experienced violence in your place of residence?		Score test
			People who have experienced violence	People who have not experienced violence	
Have you witnessed violence?	Yes	N	32	32	$\chi^2 = 18.070$ df = 1 $p < 0.001$
		%	69.6%	30.8%	
	No	N	14	72	
		%	30.4%	69.2%	
Altogether		N	46	104	
%		100.0%	100.0%		

Table V shows the relationship between the experience of violence and being a witness to the use of violence. The witnesses of violence were more often people who experienced it themselves (69.6%). The p-value was $p < 0.001$, which means that there was a dependency between these variables. The persons who did not experience violence themselves, however, witnessed it accounted for only 30.8% (table V).

Also, people who experienced violence more often (76.1%) declared that they knew victims of domestic violence than people who did not experience violence themselves (31.7%). Between these variables, A statistically significant relationship was also recorded between these variables ($p < 0.001$) (table VI).

The influence of gender on the form of violence against the elderly was also analyzed. Data on the most common forms of violence are presented, including arrogant, vulgar language, as well as insults, criticism and ridicule, especially in the presence of others. Also there are presented data on the incidence of sexual violence against 11 women and 3 men as well as economic one against 24 women, and 12 men. The results obtained allowed to conclude that gender in no case affected the form of violence (table VII).

Discussion

Carrying out a completely real and reliable assessment of this phenomenon is difficult and even impossible to make. The main reason being a large percentage of unidentified events. This problem is considered to be a taboo subject [11]. Violence against the elderly is a fairly common phenomenon all over the world, having a devastating effect on its victims. Although this is not a new phenomenon, the interest in studying aspects of violence against older people is relatively new. However, there is a real need to conduct more research of this type, because so far insufficient studies have been carried out within a limited scope [12]. The report presented by the World Health Organization in 2015 showed that in high and medium-developed countries, violence against the elderly ranges from 2.2% to 14% [13]. In the research carried out by Molinelli et al. [14], the data of the Criminal Court were analyzed. Only 85 out of 4028 court verdicts regarding the phenomenon of violence were related to older people. The authors also observed the difference between the number of crimes reported by victims and the estimated predominance of this phenomenon in the literature. In turn, in the studies conducted by Sooryanaray-

Table VI. Experience of violence and knowing other victims of violence

People who have experienced violence People who have not experienced violence			Have you ever experienced violence in your place of residence?		Score test
			People who have experienced violence	People who have not experienced violence	
Do you know the victims of domestic violence?	Yes	N	35	33	$\chi^2 = 23.562$ df = 1 $p < 0.001$
		%	76.1%	31.7%	
	No	N	11	71	
		%	23.9%	68.3%	
Altogether		N	46	104	
		%	100.0%	100.0%	

Table VII. Sex and the form of violence used

	Gender			Score test	
	Woman		Men		
Which of the forms of violence presented below were applied to you?	Arrogant, vulgar taunts	N	25	13	$\chi^2 = 0.000$ df = 1 $p = 1.000$
		%	25.5%	25.0%	
	Offense, criticism	N	23	12	$\chi^2 = 0.000$ df = 1 $p = 1.000$
		%	23.5%	23.1%	
	Mocking, especially in the presence of others	N	14	7	$\chi^2 = 0.000$ df = 1 $p = 1.000$
		%	14.3%	13.5%	
	Sexual violence	N	11	3	$\chi^2 = 0.637$ df = 1 $p = 0.425$
		%	11.2%	5.8%	
	Economic violence	N	24	12	$\chi^2 = 0.000$ df = 1 $p = 1.000$
		%	24.5%	23.1%	

ana et al. [15], among 2112 people over 60 the incidence of violence was estimated at 4.5%. Most often, there was mental abuse, followed by financial and physical one, neglect and sexual violence. In the research carried out by Wu et al. [16], the phenomenon of violence concerned 36.2% of those above 60 years of age surveyed. In Ireland, the rate of elderly people who experienced violence is 2.2%, and in Croatia respectively – 61.1% [17]. In Canada, it is estimated that nearly 4-10% of elderly people experience violence [18]. In Chicago, the rate of victims among older people experiencing violence is reported at 13.9-25.8% [19].

In the group I studied, 150 elderly people – 64 of them, i.e. 42.7% were witnesses to violence in their lives, and 45.3%, i.e. 68 people got to know victims of domestic violence in their lives. The highest percentage of respondents, i.e. 59.7% (89 people), claim that the occurrence of violence against the elderly is a common phenomenon. The results obtained in a study conducted by Tobiasz-Adameczyk et al. [11] indicate that, according to the opinion of 33.9% of employees in the social welfare sector and the medical sector, the occurrence of violence against the elderly is a common problem. In turn, according to the opinion of seniors, 28.1% of older people are ill-treated. In the report presented by the Polish Academy of Sciences of the Institute of Psychology [20], more than a half of respondents, i.e. 58.77%, declared that at the turn of the last few years they had not witnessed physical aggression towards the elderly. On the other hand, in the economic aspect, nearly 45.1% of respondents know the victims of such use of violence. It is also important that the indicators relating to the non-family environment were much higher than the exponents regarding violence in relation to their own family. In my work, 98% of respondents also agreed that violence against members of their family was not applied. In the study conducted by Grzanka-Tykwinska et al. [21], in the opinion of 70% of seniors, older people were more vulnerable than other age groups to the experience of violence.

In the results presented by me, the percentage of reported cases of violence used by victims was 20.8%. All respondents reported the existence of police violence. It often happens that such situations are not reported due to embarrassment and inability to report victim's illness or disability. Similar results were obtained in the Rudnik study [23] among 314 people aged 60 and more. It was shown that 52.3% of seniors experiencing violence from non-relatives did not report this fact anywhere. 27.3% informed relevant services about the event, and 20% decided to solve the problem themselves. In turn, in the research conducted in the United States, it was pointed

out that nearly 80% of violence phenomena remained undisclosed. Of the 4.5 million incidents, only nearly 16% were reported to the services and institutions involved in counteracting violence [24]. Then, in studies by Czabanski et al. [6], the occurrence of violence against the elderly was most often reported by social workers – 41.7% of cases, then by the victims themselves – 33.3%, as well as by neighbors – 25%. In turn, in studies conducted in the Opolskie Voivodeship in 2009, according to the opinion of the directors and managers of social assistance centers, 61.4% of existing acts of violence were reported by the police and neighbors themselves. Often, a social worker also intervened in this case – 40.9% and family – 34.1% [25]. Very often, the first symptoms of violence are not noticed. According to Austin et al. [26], among 400 health care professionals (doctors, nurses), nearly 95% of respondents claimed that domestic violence against seniors was a common occurrence. It is important that only approximately half of the respondents can recognize the symptoms of acts of aggression in their daily work among their elderly pupils. Daly et al. [27] stress in their research the fact that there are no trainings among environmental and clinical nurses concerning the recognition of violence against the elderly. In turn, in the project implemented by Rudnik [23], nearly 43.2% of respondents did not react to aggressive behaviors among family members. In order to solve the problems of violence occurring among the elderly, relevant institutions should cooperate. It is also important to create interdisciplinary teams consisting of all members of the therapeutic team, including social workers.

Conclusion

1. The use of violence against the elderly is a rather common phenomenon.
2. Marital status, diagnosed chronic diseases, did not affect the incidence of violence against older people.
3. People who experienced violence themselves more often witnessed it.
4. People who had experienced violence themselves more often declared that they knew victims who had also experienced this act.
5. The percentage of cases of violence reported by victims was small (6.7%). All respondents reported this fact to the police.
6. Most respondents claimed that the occurrence of violence against older people was a common phenomenon.

Conflict of interest

None

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