

# Domestic violence in families of the Roma: barriers to recognition and treatment

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## Background:

Domestic violence remains a significant social and public health concern despite various efforts to reduce its prevalence. In recent decades, certain segments of the population have been recognised as especially vulnerable in domestic violence research (e.g. migrants, ethnic minorities, older population, individuals with various impairments). Nevertheless, a significant research gap in addressing domestic violence among one of the most disadvantaged groups – the Roma ethnic minority - still remains.<sup>1</sup> The Roma frequently experience discrimination and culturally incompetent reactions of professionals in social and health sectors. This can be attributed to various structural, economic, cultural and psychological factors and influences the recognition and treatment of domestic violence in families of the Roma.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

## Aim:

To identify the main specifics and barriers to recognition and treatment of domestic violence in families of the Roma.

## Method:

content analysis of 30 expert interviews with professionals involved in domestic violence work (NGO workers, social workers, health care professionals – doctors and home care nurses)

## Results:

Two main factors acting as barriers to recognition and treatment of domestic violence among the Roma were identified in the interviews:

- Cultural factors: general perceptions that among the Roma tolerance for domestic violence is greater than among the majority population; that patriarchal social structures prevail in families of the Roma; a perception that violence is »a part of the Roma culture«; view of domestic violence, rape and contraception as taboo subjects among the Roma. These factors not only prevent victims of domestic violence to leave a violent relationship but can also influence reactions of professional workers (e.g. tolerance for forced marriages of Roma minors) and contribute to normalisation of domestic violence among the Roma.
- Structural factors: relate to social and economic exclusion of the Roma population. Among these factors, illiteracy, low education levels, unregulated citizenship statuses, lack of alternative accommodation, early marriages, poor social networks, lack of trust in professional services and their low accessibility to the Roma were most frequently mentioned in the interviews.
- The collocutors acknowledged the multiple inequalities that influence the recognition and treatment of domestic violence in families of the Roma and were generally aware of the importance of a culturally sensitive approach.

## Conclusions:

Reactions of professional services to the Roma are frequently inadequate and ethnically and culturally insensitive. This causes a significant amount of stress, problems in communication with professional services and lack of trust in those services among the Roma. Together with lack of access to such services due to various institutional factors this widens health inequalities among the Roma and the majority population and has negative effects on their physical and mental health. Isolation of especially female Roma in their communities and a lack of social networks as its direct effect further contribute to their disempowerment and marginalisation. Future research on domestic violence among the Roma should address these issues in more detail, examining the interplay of these factors. At the same time, differences among the Roma that are generally perceived as 'cultural others' which directs attention from wider structural factors of their marginalisation, should be taken into account.

## References:

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