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EDITORIAL

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Violence in family relationships is a serious problem that has ceased to be a private affair, turning instead into a social problem. Family and domestic violence has always existed, but there is no doubt that in the past 15 years it has become no longer an exclusively internal matter inside the family but a society-wide problem. As soon as family violence appears in the media, the awareness is raised that violence is a social problem due to its incidence in our population and the seriousness of both the physical and psychological after-effects in the victims.

Family violence can only be addressed from a multidisciplinary approach, and indeed it is a phenomenon that is unfortunately both repetitive and chronic. Violence rarely appears as an isolated, accidental episode, rather it happens time and time again.

When we talk about family violence, we can divide it into three different kinds: violence in which parents abuse their children; senior violence in which the victims are grandparents; and couples violence, in which gender plays a key role. And lately, more and more incidents are emerging that involve violence from an adolescent child towards their parents or grandparents.

Despite the fact that child-directed violence in the guise of negligence is still the most common type of violence in families, institutional campaigns focus on violence in couples, and more specifically on gender violence.

The two most common kinds of family abuse are psychological and physical. Emotional abuse always comes with and often precedes physical abuse. Direct, repeated psychological abuse can severely affect the victim's opinion of both himself or herself and their environment. The consequences of this kind of abuse do not necessarily manifest themselves in the short term, rather many of these behaviours have severe repercussions in subsequent psychological development. Contrary to the belief that physical aggression brings a greater risk to the victim's psychological health, it has been shown that psychological coercion without physical injuries can be equally or even more incapacitating and harmful for women. One of the chief characteristics of domestic abuse is that despite the seriousness and frequency of the problem, the victims stay in the violent relationship for a long time, more than ten years on average. Likewise, in many cases they return to the same situation as before even after psycho-social intervention. It is important to identify the factors that influence the decisions of many women who decide to remain in abusive relationships despite the risk of suffering from injuries or even dying.

Many women continue to live with their partner despite their suffering, ignoring the advice from the people around them. It is typical in situations of abuse to ignore what is happening, to close one's eyes to the evidence. Why don't they leave? How can we explain the fact that a woman can withstand brutal abuse for years on end? Why do they not just not reject it but indeed seek justifications for it?

Some researchers tell us that the variables that predict that a woman will remain in an abusive relationship include: 1) unemployment, 2) length of the relationship, 3) economic need, 4) being in love with the aggressor and 5) not being sure where to go. The longer and more severe the domestic abuse, the lower the likelihood that the relationship will be ended. The women become more and more fearful and dependent, and they develop feelings of guilt, low self-esteem and passivity towards the problem. As the abused woman becomes more socially isolated, situations of abuse are more likely to rise. Domestic violence is a complex phenomenon that takes time to come to light,

meaning that it is hard to take purely preventative actions from the start. Still, we must promote preventative and educational interventions that facilitate communication of the abuse suffered and to prevent, to the extent possible, the victim from having to endure this situation again. In terms of care, the victim must feel listened to and supported; a relationship of trust and cooperation must be created. However, victims must also be aided in discovering how, emotionally speaking, they have forged a tie of psychological dependence on their partner that robs them of their independence to think for themselves. Generally speaking, it seems urgent that we promote educational and psychotherapeutic programmes that prompt a change in women's attitudes towards these circumstances and contribute to helping them adopt strategies and prevent the onset of submissive behaviours and the acceptance of the situation of physical and/or psychological aggression. Learning how to handle conflict is a key factor in maintaining satisfying intimacy in adult relationships. If there is a clear deficit in this skill, the understanding that profound mechanisms take part in the exercise or acceptance of violence can help us to eradicate it from the sphere of couples and the family.

All of these considerations spurred around 400 clinics and researchers, including psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers, to gather together in July 2008 at the 3rd international congress organised by the International Association of Couple and Family Psychoanalysis (IACFP) and the Universitat Ramon Llull, Blanquerna Faculty of Psychology, Education and Sports, in conjunction with the Vidal y Barraquer Foundation and the Spanish Psychoanalysis Society. In the more than 150 papers presented, the issue that inspired the title of the congress, "Violence in Couples and Families: A Challenge for Family Psychoanalysis", was intensely debated.

The common denominator of violence inside the family is the denial that it generates in its environment, and even in therapists' psyche, to the extent that this might be considered the prime obstacle for recognising the profound, disturbing psychological effects both within the victim and in their interpersonal relationships. More than a common denial, it constitutes a defence that particularly favours the repetition and cross-generational transmission of violence.

Eiguer, Losso and Packciarz Losso, Loncan, Tisseron, Nicolò, Morosini, Thorstensen, Tosta Berlinck and all the authors who have worked on the second part of the journal (devoted to violence and society) keep asking themselves: “How can we grasp and intervene in situations of violence in the couple and family? How can we deal with its denial, taking into account the unconscious group processes of family ties in the present and their cross-generational dimension? How can we depict with the family group certain violent expressions and account for the repetition that is tied to a cross-generational perspective as the source of these situations? What phantoms, what myths, what hallucinatory returns underlie violent passages as they are being played out? What are the intimate and shared effects in these clinical configurations? How can we think about and treat the psychological traces of social and cultural violence either in the present or transmitted as an inheritance?”

Based on the intense work at the congress and the authors’ consequent profound re-thinking, each one has reflected on the questions and contributions by the audience and other participating experts when revising their articles. The outcome of this second reflection appears in these two monographs devoted to family and couple violence. We hope they prove to be of interest for all our readers.