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## **Teenage Violence Toward Parents – in Search of the Theoretical Bases of a Research Tool**

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### **Abstract**

The article contains an analysis of results of the available research on the phenomenon of children's violence toward their parents. The main purpose of this interpretation is to search for the theoretical structure of a prepared research tool, initially called the Teen Violence Scale Toward Parents (TVSTP). The subject of the analyzes were works and research reports as well as police statistics containing information on the phenomenon of domestic violence, including teenage violence toward parents. As a result of the analysis, the theoretical function of the proposed research tool was distinguished, referring to types of violence possible to diagnose within this area. The proposed tool was positively evaluated by the Scientific Research Ethics Committee of Opole University in Poland and subsequently submitted for further elaboration with the aim to diagnose its relevance and reliability in conducting research.

**Key words:** youth, domestic violence, parent as a victim, diagnosis of violence.

### **Introduction**

Aggressive and violent behaviors in children and school youth constitute one of the gravest problems of contemporary society (Markiewicz-Matyja, 2007).

Violent behavior, beside abuse of psychoactive substances and sexually risky conduct, belongs to this category of risk behaviors which is fought with the use of most intensive prophylactic actions in the systems of education, social care and assistance (Dobrychłop et al., 2017). All over the world can we encounter numerous social campaigns whose aim is to minimize the effects of aggressive behaviors displayed by children and youth. Prophylactic actions intend to prevent situations in which young people cannot cope with the surrounding reality, physically assault others, in extreme cases even depriving their victims of life. In face of the dramatically growing incidence of this problem, a variety of actions are being undertaken, such as all-Polish campaign *Szkoła bez przemocy* [Violence-free School] whose range has covered schools all around the country (Tracz-Dral, 2012).

The research conducted in 2011 allowed finding out that the problem of peer violence in school concerned almost 63% of the schoolchildren (Tracz-Dral, 2012). Subsequently obtained results of the research carried out by the Institute of Educational Research revealed the scale of victims of peer aggression, which included the various types of it: the phenomenon related to nearly 50% of the school youth population, independent of the type of attended school (Przewłocka, 2015). Today, we can also observe a growing level of aggression among young people, the scale of which is increasingly difficult to measure, since it is more and more often transferred from the real space to the virtual one (Pyzalski, 2012; Kania, 2017). Thus, the problem of aggressive behaviors in children and youth offers an important and still current object of studies.

Research on youth aggression is most frequently conducted in the perspective of relational violence, that is violence linked to peer relationships (Rodochoński, 2007), less often as violence toward adults of importance to the young – teachers and educators. Nevertheless, apart from peer violence, a very important issue is posed by domestic violence which is difficult to diagnose. The lack of an unambiguous definition of this phenomenon is one of the basic reasons why eliminating it from the family life is greatly obstructed. This also impedes carrying out the process of proper recognition of the very phenomenon itself and taking suitable intervention measures (Weissbrot-Koziarska, 2016a). Because of the lack of clearly defined criteria of diagnosing domestic violence and – in particular – that applied by teenage children toward their parents, there is a strong need for working out reliable tools which can help determine the scale of incidence of this phenomenon.

Interpersonal relations, both in the family environment and outside it, are not devoid of the so-called risk behaviors, including mainly aggressive and

violent behaviors. However, the analyses of the phenomenon of violence in families presented to date have concentrated almost exclusively on diagnosing and describing acts of aggression and violence committed by parents or guardians toward children. It is more and more often, though still to a limited extent, that the need for conducting research on violence in the family, especially in its new areas such as violence toward elderly family members, is perceived (Weissbrot-Koziarska, 2016b). Similarly, there is little research done, which would be devoted to the phenomenon of teenage violence toward parents, and this means not only studies reported in the literature available in Polish, but also in foreign publications. This again strengthens the necessity of analyzing these areas where violence occurs in different forms.

### **The adolescents as perpetrators of domestic abuse**

American researchers were among the first ones to present the results of their analyses relating to adolescent violence toward parents. As a result of their studies, they established that teenagers who committed acts of violence against their parents were characterized by greater awareness of their impunity and more frequent relations with other teens who also perpetrated violence toward their own parents. They came to deal, too, with social beliefs which approved of this kind of behavior (Agnew et al., 1989). Other case studies which made use of police reports dealing with domestic abuse in which minors were involved, allowed establishing certain dependences. It was observed that this type of violence is closely correlated with sex (77% of the victims were women, while 87% of the perpetrators were adolescent boys). The authors of those analyses pointed to the fact that between 9% and 14% of the parents experienced physical oppression from their adolescent children who had had the experience connected with domestic abuse (Cottrell & Monk, 2004). In turn, Australian research conducted with the use of diagnostic survey method proved that as many as 51% of the surveyed mothers experienced all kinds of abuse from their adolescent children (Edenborough et al., 2008). Then, a Canadian report on the scale of violence revealed that the occurrence of teenage abuse of their parents was not tied to the economic, social class or ethnic status of the family. The conducted assessment was based on the conclusion that this kind of violence can occur nearly in every family (Nancarrow et al., 2012). The Australian establishments concerning violence perpetrated by adolescents showed that the most severe to the parents was emotional abuse which – in comparison with physical violence – is characterized by a longer-lasting effect. The surveyed parents declared also

that psychic abuse affected the functioning of the family as a whole in a decidedly stronger way than other forms of violence (Haw, 2010).

European studies conducted in the sphere of violence show greater precision in the context of both quantitative and qualitative research. For instance, examination carried out in Great Britain (with the use of interviews) of parents of aggressive teenagers showed that the former – beside psychic pain – had to cope with living under heavy stress, which caused a strong sense of controlling their own behavior so as not to provoke the adolescent to display abusive behavior in return. The parents' use of the so-called evasive strategy did not lessen the level of violence at all, as physical and verbal violence was a common occurrence. Additionally, in-depth interviews allowed merely stating that the causes behind such a behavior did not possess any common factors. Teenage violence toward parents took place also in families where teenagers did not display aggressive behaviors within the space of social life (Information guide, 2015). In turn, analyses offered by French researchers, dealing with adolescents' aggressive behaviors toward parents, showed that there are substantial disproportions visible in the intentionality of actions. In 45.5% of the cases, minors attacked mothers only and in 9% of them – exclusively fathers. The remaining 45.5% of the assaults were related to acts of violence that were directed against both parents (Laurent & Derry, 1999).

The international research to date has also allowed concluding about a certain dependence connected with the perpetrator's age: the younger they are, the more often mothers are the victims. The scale of violence towards fathers rises along with the advancing age of the offender. Most probably this state is caused by the decreasing physical proportions between sons and fathers, with time – to the advantage of the former (Paterson et al., 2001). Families in which this kind of abuse takes place often decide to stay isolated from other relatives and the closest local community (Estévez & Góngora, 2009).

The scale of the phenomenon of acts of teenage violence toward parents in Poland is only poorly recognized. In particular, there is a shortage of reliable scientific studies based on standardized research tools. The only available data which we have at our disposal with reference to this area of knowledge come from the statistics provided by the police, which cover statistical analyses of facts that occurred in reality; however, this can hardly be regarded as scientific research, the data merely presenting a general index of revealed occurrences of acts of minors' violent behavior in the family. Moreover, the broadly – conceived notion of the minor in the criminal procedure obscures the scale of occurrence of adolescents' violence toward their parents. The term “minor” in

Polish criminal law is applied to a person whose age ranges between 13 and 17 years, yet it can be 18 years old in the case of incidents of demoralization, and still – in the case of application of corrective means towards such a person – the upper age limit is 21 years. This gives rise to the existence of a wide interpretative area and, simultaneously, distorts the picture of this phenomenon. The police statistics do not take into account the direction of abuse in the family, either, and this can vary greatly, for instance violence can be directed at siblings, grandparents or legal guardians. This only augments the difficulty in imaging this type of crime with reference to the above-mentioned statistics, while the very analysis of them permits solely to elaborate certain general introductory regularities in order to move on to obtaining more detailed data. In the case of teenage violence in the family, specifically adolescents' abuse of parents, the police statistics can hardly be accepted to be a picture of real acts of violence, since they contain exclusively acts which were revealed and confirmed by the law enforcement authorities. Below there is information on the number of adolescents' abusive behaviors in concrete time periods as presented on the basis of the available data from the police statistics.

Table 1. Number of perpetrators of domestic violence in the years 1999–2004

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Total number of cases of domestic abuse	56,847	70,457	69,138	76,991	83,330	91,920
committed by: women	1,838	2,571	2,361	2,903	2,861	3,501
men	54,669	67,309	66,376	73,759	80,233	88,180
minors	340	577	401	329	236	239

Source: Statystyka: Przemoc w rodzinie [Statistic: Violence in the Family] from <http://statystyka.policja.pl/st/wybrane-statystyki/przemoc-w-rodzinie/50863,Przemoc-w-rodzinie.html>.

The earliest statistical data concerning the total number of cases of violence in the family come from the police statistics for the year 1999, where it was indicated that perpetrators of registered domestic abuse in 340 out of 57 thousand cases were adolescents. The statistics do not provide information, though, on whether the victims of the domestic abuse were adult members of the families, not to mention whether they were the parents. It is easy to notice, on the other hand, a drop in the registered cases of acts of violence in the family committed by minors, since the highest number in the period under analysis amounted to 577 cases (in the year 2000) and the lowest – 236 cases (in the year 2003).

Table 2. Number of perpetrators of domestic violence in the years 2005–2011

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Total number of cases of domestic abuse	97,142	96,775	81,743	86,568	81,472	83,390	71,914
committed by:							
women	4,153	4,074	3,632	3,942	3,926	3,981	3,471
men	92,776	92,526	77,937	82,425	77,326	79,204	68,248
minors	213	175	170	201	220	205	195

Source: Statystyka: Przemoc w rodzinie [Statistic: Violence in the Family] from <http://statystyka.policja.pl/st/wybrane-statystyki/przemoc-w-rodzinie/50863,Przemoc-w-rodzinie.html>.

In the years 2005–2011, the statistics show that the downtrend as regards the number of adolescent perpetrators of domestic violence continued, the year 2007 recording the lowest index – 170 cases. The police statistics reveal, however, that in the year 2011, in 195 out of 72 thousand cases of this type of abuse the offenders were minors, which again points to a certain growing tendency towards the end of the analyzed period.

Table 3. Number of perpetrators of domestic violence in the years 2012–2017

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total number of cases of domestic abuse	51,535	61,450	78,489	76,034	74,155	76,206
committed by:						
women	3,522	4,440	5,301	5,244	5,461	5,878
men	47,278	56,755	72,791	70,484	68,321	70,035
minors	281	255	397	306	373	293

Source: Statystyka: Przemoc w rodzinie [Statistic: Violence in the Family] from <http://statystyka.policja.pl/st/wybrane-statystyki/przemoc-w-rodzinie/50863,Przemoc-w-rodzinie.html>.

In the years 2012–2017, there was recorded an increase in the number of acts of domestic violence perpetrated by minors in comparison with the preceding period under analysis. The highest number of acts of this type of violence on the part of adolescents occurred in 2014 and 2016, respectively.

Summing up, the scale of domestic abuse in the years 1999–2017, in which active offenders were minors, amounted to an average of about 285 cases annually. Still, it needs underlining again that we come to deal here with registered cases of domestic abuse only. Thus, it is a lot if we take into account the fact

that our society holds on to the firmly rooted stereotype of keeping family secrets at home in the name of the principle of “not washing dirty linen in public”. Additionally, the picture of violent behaviors that occur, especially those where perpetrators are children or adolescents, is blurred by the fact that parents do not report cases of domestic violence, being directed by an ill-conceived paternal responsibility.

Table 4. Total domestic violence in the year 2018

Number of filled-in forms of “Blue Card”	(including 59,829 initiating the procedure and 13,324 concerning subsequent cases in the course of a procedure)
Total number of victims of abuse:	88,133
– women	65,057
– men	10,672
– minors	12,404
Total number of those suspected of violence committed by:	73,654
– women	6,045
– men	67,306
– minors	303
Total number of those suspected of violence while under the influence of alcohol, committed by:	43,182
– women	1,903
– men	41,257
– minors	22
Number of children placed in safe facilities (e.g. with a foster family, distant relatives, in care institution)	427

Source: Statystyka: Przemoc w rodzinie [Statistic: Violence in the Family] from <http://statystyka.policja.pl/st/wybrane-statystyki/przemoc-w-rodzinie/50863,Przemoc-w-rodzinie.html>.

As it can be seen, the latest police statistics show that the average tendency toward occurrence of acts of violence perpetrated by adolescents toward others remains on the same level, which means that either all kinds of corrective programs that are run in this sphere do not function effectively or the system of registering abusive behaviors is faulty. Consequently, in order to obtain a better picture of the scale of the phenomenon of domestic violence, other documents dealing with this problem area were analyzed. The documents were provided by *TNS Ośrodek Badań Opinii Publicznej* [Public Opinion Polling Center] (TNS

OBOP) and *Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej* [Centre for Public Opinion Research] (CBOS).

The first experts' reports which contained mentions of this phenomenon in Poland were publicized in 2003, 2005 and 2009 by CBOS. The research of 2005 was conducted with a representative group, who were asked questions about domestic violence perpetrated by adolescents (the age of the adolescent was accepted to be 16 years and over). There were altogether 562 answers given to this questions by adult respondents, 3% of whom admitted that this phenomenon concerned them. The question related exclusively to physical violence and was narrowed to the parent-offspring (son/daughter) relationship. The respondents were also asked about the frequency of this kind of act taking place at home and 2% of the questioned declared more than one of them to have occurred in their case. There was no time criterion contained in the question, that is the respondents were not asked about the period of time in which such acts took place. The research carried out in 2009 also took into consideration teenage violence toward their parents and applied the same age category (16 years and more). However, the wording of the question was slightly changed and the issue of frequency was not raised, either. The respondents were only asked to declare if such an act had occurred at all. As regards this question, 2% of the examined (n=504) pointed to the fact that as parents they had experienced being beaten by their adolescent children. The obtained results testify to a small scale of the phenomenon of adolescent domestic abuse and point to some stability with respect to the analyzed scale.

None of the research carried out by CBOS pointed to whether it was mothers or fathers who more frequently fell victim to their adolescent children's abuse. Neither did it examine whether it was sons or daughters who more often perpetrated acts of violence toward their parents. Still, the authors draw attention to the fact that the obtained results can be underreported due to considerable unwillingness on the part of parents to declare the occurrence of violence toward themselves.

The report released by TNS OBOP in 2007, on the other hand, analyzing the phenomenon of children's violence toward their parents, revealed that about 4% of adolescents qualified as domestic aggressors. The research conducted by this polling center was based on analyses with reference to the variety of types of violence and differentiated between the psychic abuse (4%), economic oppression (2%), physical violence (1%) and sexual abuse (0%) committed by sons and the psychic abuse (2%), economic oppression (1%), physical violence (0%) and sexual abuse (0%) perpetrated by daughters. The survey was carried



out among the sample of  $n=3,000$  respondents, with the use of phone-based interviewing CTAI. Still, the above-mentioned research did not differentiate between violence toward parents and that toward siblings, which hampers making specific analyses. The said report did not indicate the age range of the perpetrators, either.

As it follows from the analyses mentioned above, there has been published relatively little research dealing with the occurrence of domestic violence involving adolescent perpetrators. Since this phenomenon needs examining to a broader extent, an attempt was made at constructing a reliable and effective tool which would allow conducting survey research among the population of youth in their teens, that is those attending secondary schools.

### **Theoretical foundations of the tool**

It was accepted for the needs of the constructed tool that violence means “actions intended to subordinate to oneself individuals or social groups against their will. This is aggressive manipulation aiming to direct others in such a way as to achieve one’s own goals” (Szyszkowa, 2000, p. 57). A characteristic feature of abusive behaviors is their intentionality, purposefulness (Surzykiewicz, 2000) as well as conscious harmfulness of actions toward the victim (Szymański, 2010). Violent conduct is directed against the dignity of other people and results from the perpetrator’s advantage over the victim and also from the sense of impunity (Pospiszyl, 2008). Violence, thus, is an intentional action which always damages different spheres: physical or psychical, or both of them simultaneously.

Abusive behaviors are not uniform actions and can take on different forms. One of them is physical violence that includes acts of using physical strength with the intention to do physical harm to the victim. There are two forms of physical violence that can be distinguished: the first is directly connected with an assault on the victim, whereas the other form means indirect physical abuse connected with application of force directed at objects belonging to the victim. Both forms can be externalized in child-parent relations. A different form of violence, which is diagnosed in such a relationship, is psychical abuse. In the case of physical forms of violence, an attack on the victim is based on physical strength, while in the case of psychical abuse, this consists in verbal psychological disintegration of another person (Ożóg, 2013). Psychic violence is connected with actions that bear the character of emotional humiliation of the victim by the offender, imposition of the sense of lack of safety, fear of not sat-

isfying the need of love, instilling sadness, as well as the feeling of shame and loss of the sense of one's dignity. Psychological abuse can manifest itself in threats, including that of using physical violence toward the intimidated person (Stożek, 2009), abusive words, invectives and ostracism, public humiliation, as well as spreading false information about the victim (Klimek, 2013). Diagnosing domestic violence, especially the psychic abuse, is an unusually hard task, since we often come to deal with situations in which psychic abuse co-occurs with acts of physical violence or they are used alternately. Still, it is possible to diagnose psychic abuse as an autonomous form of personal abuse (Ruszkiewicz, 2007). A particular form of psychological violence is manipulating the sense of guilt (Tracz-Dral, 2009). This is an exceptional type of psychic abuse, since the perpetrator aims to raise sorrow, psychic pain and a feeling of being responsible in the victim. Strengthening the sense of guilt is based on the offender's striving to monopolize attention (Widera-Wysoczańska, 2010), magnifying his/her own losses, revealing wrongs done to them and their own grief, or even a purposeful putting themselves in dangerous situations in order to evoke concern and a sense of guilt in the victim.

Physical violence and psychic abuse belong to the most frequently diagnosed forms of violence, which have already been settled in legal regulations (Weissbrot-Koziarska, 2016b). However, in the case of economic oppression – another form of abuse which occurs in families – the range of its harmfulness has not been dealt with by Polish law. Economic violence, also called material (Koral, 2007), can be associated with a specific kind of psychological violence, where the perpetrator makes references to their own and the victim's economic needs. In the opinion expressed by the Bureau for Analyses and Documentation of the Chancellery of the Senate, specific behaviors of this type of psychic abuse include, among others, increasing the financial dependence between the offender and the victim, limiting the possibility of satisfying the basic needs directly linked to material situation, but also stealing, destruction of valuable property owned by the victim and manipulating the victim in order to meet the perpetrator's own financial needs (Tracz-Dral, 2015).

Pointing to the possible types of violence, which can occur in child-parent relations, seems insufficient, since in this situation it appears crucial to present the typology of violence due to the victim's social role (Mazur, 2002), that is mother's or father's, accordingly. This is justified by varying properties of violence towards females and males, where statistically the role of the victim more often falls to women than men. The divergence also appears in the forms of applied violence: violence-prone men more frequently manifest physical violence

toward women, whereas women more readily resort to using psychic abuse toward men (Nowakowska, 2007).

While studying the phenomenon of domestic violence, it also needs taking into account the fact that the abuse is conditioned by the kind of behavior on the part of the perpetrator towards the victim, that is direct and indirect violence which should be distinguished here (Widera-Wysoczańska, 2010). The former is connected with acts resulting from direct contact with the victim. Here, the following acts of physical violence mentioned earlier belong: kicking, beating, but also instances of psychic abuse linked to a direct verbal contact, that is invectives, swear words, humiliation of the victim or financial manipulation. On the other hand, indirect violence targets the victim's nearest environment in such a way as to make effects of these acts cause the feeling of sorrow, upset and psychic pain. Acts of this type include, among others, intentional destruction of items belonging to the victim, stealing, manipulating the sense of guilt or spreading injurious opinions.

### **The principles applied in the constructed tool**

Based on a Spanish version of abridged CPAQ questionnaire and making use of the reconstruction strategy, it was possible to finally elaborate on statements with a four-index response scale. The intention was to construct a new tool which would broaden the diagnostic area of adolescents' violence toward parents, which was applied in the abridged CPAQ. The questionnaire under analysis diagnosed solely areas of violence containing, in its structure, the following four subscales: physical aggression toward mother, physical aggression toward father, psychical aggression toward mother and psychical aggression toward father. Coefficient alpha for the individual scales obtained on the sample of  $N=2,700$  adolescents, amounted to 0.76 and 0.75, respectively, for psychical aggression toward mothers and fathers and also 0.76 and 0.73 in the case of physical aggression toward mothers and fathers, respectively. The questionnaire to be proposed will contain new items generated on the basis of analyses of definitions of particular forms of violence occurring in domestic conditions of family life, as well as on the basis of studies consisting in analyzing entries accessed on the Internet forum of mothers affected by violence from adolescents (Kania, 2014). The questions included in the questionnaire will take into account the theoretical perspective of violence, thus also – in the construction of the questions – the index of purposefulness of adolescents' behaviors toward parents. The accepted scale of answers will allow determining the general fre-

quency of occurrence of the listed acts of violence in the family. Similarly, as in the original version of CPAQ, a spatial system of statements was applied in the tool, where each statement makes reference both to mother and father. The constructed tool was elaborated for the needs of survey research.

## Conclusion

The sphere of adolescent-to-parent violence has made a rather narrow research area in Poland so far. One of the reasons for this state of things is the lack of effective tools which can help measure and analyze the phenomenon, being a necessary phase before application of reliable therapies aimed at eliminating this social problem. The proposed tool will be subjected to a control procedure which will allow checking its helpfulness in carrying out relevant studies. Standardization will be executed on a randomly selected sample of youth attending secondary schools and will include examination of reliability and aptness, as well as normalization. The procedure will be carried out with respect to ethics of research work. The project has already obtained a positive opinion of the Scientific Research Ethics Committee of Opole University. In order to secure high standards, each of the respondents will be given a form to acknowledge their voluntary and conscious agreement to participate in the research based on YOUTH questionnaire. It is planned to prepare a publication containing results of the research work, norms and construction of the questionnaire, as well as the manner of using it. It is assumed that the final results of the project will be published in the form of a handbook.

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