

# CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLENCE EXPERIENCED IN CHILDHOOD

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**Abstract.** A family is an institution where a person acquires all social roles and behaviour patterns. One of the main factors destroying a family's harmony is domestic violence. Violence against children is a relevant issue in all countries. The extent of this problem is increased by the established opinion of society that the family's problems are only its business. They are not made public, and the family itself must solve the problems within its environment. Empirical data were analysed after conducting qualitative research based on a semi-structured interview, which allowed a better understanding of an individual, delving into her problems and clarifying the need for assistance and its importance in her personal life. Content analysis was applied after conducting the research. The research involved 8 women who experienced various punishments as a means of upbringing in childhood. The research revealed that the causes of violence against children in a close environment often do not depend on children's behaviour or other characteristics related to them. Violent families often live below the poverty line and have alcohol addiction or other social problems. Parents are usually violent because they were abused as children, and they consider it an acceptable way of communication and parenting. The consequences of violence against children are obvious and range from low self-esteem to self-harm and suicide. Children who have experienced violence in their close environment often become abusers themselves. It has been determined that in their childhood, the respondents who participated in the research experienced all four forms of violence distinguished in the scientific literature: physical, psychological, sexual, and neglect. However, it has been revealed that the majority of the respondents did not seek help because, at the time when they were children, there was little talk about children's rights and methods of raising children. If corporal punishment occurred, it was considered to be one of the generally used and acceptable methods of raising children.

**Keywords:** family, domestic violence, close environment, cycle of violence, consequences

## Introduction

Domestic violence is not a new phenomenon. It has existed since time immemorial and still exists today. It is increasingly discussed nowadays; society has begun to recognise that domestic violence is a social problem. It is easy to define the concept of violence, but the most difficult thing is to measure the extent of this social problem. The reason for this is very simple: most cases of domestic violence happen at home behind closed doors, and they are rarely reported. In most cases, only the events that end tragically, cause serious health problems or even result in death become public. The main reason for such violence is that families in crisis isolate themselves from the outside world and are reluctant to interact with the community around the family.

Domestic violence remains a latent (hidden) phenomenon, the exact extent of which lacks research data. According to survey data, 60 per cent of people who have experienced domestic violence did not seek help (the 2022-2023 Action Plan for preventing domestic violence and providing assistance to victims).

According to Bučiūnas et al. (2017), the concept of domestic violence includes various forms of violence, from psychological to physical violence, from threats to murder. Sometimes, the concept of domestic violence is used only in cases of child abuse, but it usually reflects a long-term relationship between the abuser and the victim. Domestic violence includes violence by a husband against his wife, by a wife or partner against a husband, by parents against children and vice versa, and violence between brothers, sisters, grandparents, partners, etc. The Law on Protection from Domestic Violence of the Republic of Lithuania defines violence as intentional physical, mental, sexual, economic, or other effects caused to a person by action or inaction, because of which a person suffers physical, material, or non-material damage.

Violence is considered to be a criminal act, which, according to Čaplikienė et al. (2017), differs from other acts because the violent person and the victim have a close relationship. For these reasons, acts of domestic violence are more complex, based on many emotions, and often they are irrational and unpredictable. To curb the problem of domestic violence, many countries have prepared various acts and laws. The Basic Law on the Protection of Child Rights, which entered into force in July 2018, prohibits any violence and physical punishment towards children. This decision was made considering the sad statistics of Lithuania. Although statistical data reveal that the scale of domestic violence is slightly decreasing, the decreasing numbers may be related to the decrease in the population in Lithuania.

The object of the research is the consequences of violence experienced in childhood.

The aim is to analyse the consequences of violence experienced in childhood.

The objectives are to characterise violence theoretically; identify the types of the violence experienced; and investigate adults' attitudes towards violence experienced in childhood.

The methods include scientific literature analysis, qualitative research, a semi-structured interview, and content analysis.

### **Theoretical aspect of violence in the close environment**

The World Health Organization defines violence as the intentional use or threat of physical force or power against oneself, another person, or a group of people or society, which causes or is likely to cause injury, death, psychological harm, developmental disabilities, or harm of any kind. In the Law on Protection from Violence in the Close Environment of the Republic of Lithuania (2011), violence is defined as intentional physical, mental, sexual, economic or other effect on a person through action or inaction, as a result of which the person suffers physical, material or non-material damage. The close environment is treated as an environment that consists of people related or previously related by marriage, partnership or other close ties, as well as people living together and managing a joint household.

The online publication of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania states that childhood is a special period of life when a young person is vulnerable and dependent on adults. According to the laws in force in Lithuania, a child is any person under the age of 18 (unless the legislation provides otherwise). A child needs additional protection and support while growing and developing. Childhood should be happy and safe for children to become as good adults as possible in the future. Although children's rights are the same as human rights, children are distinguished as a separate group, as they need special protection.

An online publication by the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2017) identifies and describes four main types of violence:

Physical violence is the act intended to cause physical pain or other harm to a person or group of people. As with other forms of violence, the main goal is not only to cause physical pain but also to limit the freedom of decision of the other person. The abuser uses violence to highlight differences in social power or forcefully satisfy his specific needs. The physical trauma experienced can vary from the slightest stabbing to broken bones, concussion, and injury to internal organs. Physical abuse also occurs when corporal punishments such as kneeling, beating with a belt, and other ones are applied.

Psychological violence. Verbal attacks are often taught to be ignored, believing that words cannot hurt. However, when they become regular and are deliberately directed at a person's sensitive issues, it is appropriate to consider these attacks as psychological or verbal violence. The abuser is especially trying to impress with words and tone. Psychological violence includes isolation, ridicule, humiliation, name-calling, and controlling whom a person can meet and what to wear. These can include threatening actions (without elements of physical or verbal violence), recalling episodes of previous violence, or deliberately ignoring or neglecting the person.

Sexual violence includes all forms of coercive sexual intercourse that involve the use of violence, including coercive, habitually repeated, and undesirable sexual acts, sexual assaults, verbal abuse, etc. These include intimidation or taking advantage of the fact that a person cannot give consent, purposefully violating a person's personal boundaries, sexual neglect for the purpose of punishment, forcing another person to watch, and sometimes imitate, elements of a sexual nature, i.e., pornography. Sometimes, sexual abuse uses a child for profit, e.g., child pornography.

According to Bulotaitė et al. (2001), neglect is defined as the long-term failure to satisfy the physical and mental needs of a child when there is a threat to a child's full development and functioning. The concept of neglect includes many facts: neglecting the child's nutrition, clothing, safety, health, hygiene, and socialisation, i.e., neglecting the formation of skills that are necessary for successful adaptation in society.

In the publication Child and Family Welfare (2021), Adonteng-Kissi (2020) notes that Article 18 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that the primary responsibility for raising and educating children rests with parents and states that children have the right to good parents. This means that parents should take full responsibility for this.

The Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania (2000) provides for the parents' right and duty to raise and look after their children (Law on Approval, Entry into Force, and Implementation of the Civil Code, 2000). Continuous and purposeful parenting has a lasting effect on the child, both during the formation of his/her personality and when the child becomes an adult. Due to established stereotypes and the legacy of the once prevailing systems of a different order, punishments that humiliate the child's dignity or cause physical pain

were not only tolerated for a long time but also considered methods of upbringing. Children are harmed not by outside abusers but by the child’s parents, the people who should ensure the child’s safety.

The Law on Protection from Domestic Violence came into effect on 15 December 2011. It stated that a criminal act against a family member is intolerable and is of social significance. This Law fundamentally changed the approach to domestic violence. The Criminal Code, which was supposed to prevent domestic violence, was rather an ineffective tool, which was well illustrated by the additions and amendments to the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence, as the newly issued Law also had an endless number of flaws.

On 1 July 2023, the Order on Domestic Violence Protection came into effect. This document aims to reduce violence in the close environment and provide assistance to the person experiencing or having experienced violence in the close environment more efficiently at the state level. 20 organisations providing specialised comprehensive assistance to victims of violence throughout Lithuania have been accredited.

### Research on consequences of violence experienced in childhood

Empirical data were analysed after conducting qualitative research, a semi-structured interview that allowed a better understanding of individuals, delving into their problems, and clarifying the need for assistance and its importance in their lives. After the research had been conducted, content analysis was performed. The research involved 8 women who had experienced various punishments as a means of upbringing in childhood. Based on the principles of professional ethics, not to violate the rights of the subjects, the principles of respect, benevolence, security, and confidentiality were followed (the names of the subjects were changed). The ages of the research participants ranged from 26 to 40 years.

**Table 1.** Socio-demographic data of respondents

Name	Age	Marital status
Vita	27	She has been married for 5 years and has 2 children, 2-year-old and 8-month-old boys, currently on maternity leave.
Aušra	30	She is married for the second time. She and her husband raise two boys; the first son from the first marriage is 8 years old, and the second son with the current spouse is 2 years old. Aušra returned to work only a few months ago after maternity leave.
Gintarė	38	She is married and has 2 children, 12-year-old and 6-year-old boys. She is currently working and must often take care of her children alone because her husband works abroad.
Sabina	29	She is married and has 2 children, 8-year-old and 4-year-old boys. Due to the serious illness of the younger son, she had to give up her work.
Jurgita	36	She is unmarried but has been living with her partner for 17 years, raising 2 children, 15-year-old and 13-year-old sons. She works under a business license.
Kristina	26	She is married and has 2 children, a 6-year-old girl and a 3-year-old boy. She returned to Lithuania from Norway, where they had lived with her husband a year ago.
Aida	40	She is divorced; the marriage lasted only a few years. They divorced when the child was one year old; now, her daughter is 18 years old. She is currently working.
Daiva	38	She is married for the second time. She has two children from her first marriage, a 17-year-old daughter and a 12-year-old son; she currently works.

The data show that two research participants got married for the second time; one of them never created a family; the other 5 are married and live a family life. One woman divorced as soon as she got married and did not marry again, so she was left to live alone with her daughter. All the women who took part in the research confirmed the punishments they had experienced in childhood, and they were described as physical, psychological, neglect, and even sexual abuse (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Childhood punishments as a means of upbringing

Category	Subcategory	Confirmatory statements
Punishments	Use of physical force	“After my father passed away, my drunken mum beat me constantly...” (Aušra) “Most of the time, it was physical punishment such as blows from a belt and even an extension cord after which marks were left on the legs...” (Jurgita) “They had me kneeling in a corner on peas, and I got a belt or a whip for the pranks I did...” (Aida)
	Psychological violence	“I lived with my grandmother, who threatened to send me to a foster home for any misdeed. That was what I feared the most because it seemed terrible to me...” (Aušra) “Most often, I experienced various repeated humiliations that I was a loser and could not do anything properly...” (Kristina)

Category	Subcategory	Confirmatory statements
Punishments	Neglect	“Go to bed hungry...” (Sabina)
	Sexual abuse	“I had to experience physical, psychological, and sexual violence. And these punishments accompanied me all the time until I left my parents’ home. When I was sixteen, I went to vocational school. I tried not to return home even on weekends”. (Vita)

It has been determined that the respondents experienced physical punishments as a means of education. The punishments were extremely painful: blows with a belt or cable, several hours of kneeling and going to bed without dinner.

The traditions and stereotypes prevailing in society are the prerequisites for domestic violence. They support the opinion that the victim is to blame for domestic violence. Therefore, educational programmes should be implemented that familiarise the public with the problem of domestic violence and its consequences not only to the victim but also to modern society as well. Very frequently, when individuals experience violence in a close environment, they do not tell anyone about it and do not seek help, so the research participants were asked whether they had sought help for domestic violence experienced in the close environment (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Search for assistance

Category	Subcategory	Confirmatory statements
Search for assistance	Friends	“I had a friend who knew everything, I always told her. Conversations with my friend were the only relief for me...” (Aušra) “I only told my friends. I think just talking helped me a lot; I felt that I was not alone...” (Sabina)
	Professional assistance	“I once tried to speak to the school’s social workers. Then, there was a conversation with my parents, and I realised I had made a mistake. I had to take back many insulting words that I was messing everything for them, and I had to experience painful blows from the belt...” (Kristina)
	Thinking that it is normal	“No, at that time, there was not a single thought about the fact that you can apply for help somewhere and be heard...” (Gintarė) “Corporal punishments seemed to be normal; I always thought that parents could punish misbehaviour with a whip. I always thought that my parents and the parents of all my friends have that right because they gave birth to us...” (Aida)
	Fear of seeking assistance	“I was afraid to go to institutions because I was scared that no one would care about me there and if I was sent to a foster home, I wouldn’t get food, and I would be sexually abused...” (Vita)
	Ignorance and lack of information	“No, when I was growing up, the child’s rights and various children’s lines were not a place where you could apply or call and get help and be understood...” (Jurgita)

The research revealed that two respondents tried to apply for help but were punished even more after asking for assistance. Other respondents claim that they did not seek help. Three women who took part in the research noted that they did not seek help because, at the time when they were children, information about children’s rights and ways of upbringing children was insufficient. Then, physical punishment was one of the universally used and acceptable ways of raising a child. At that time, the victims could only tell their friends about the pain they had experienced, and this made them feel better. Alas, it was not professional assistance that could provide the children experiencing violence in a close environment with psychological, social, legal, and other comprehensively necessary information about the violation of their rights. The respondent Aida claimed that she thought that it was the parents’ right to punish their children because they gave birth and raised them.

Violent behaviour not only damages the development of a child’s thinking. Physical punishment has a direct impact on long-term mental health and happiness, and it encodes the child about the family’s model and the way of communication in it. The girls who have seen violence in their parents’ family accept it as a norm of communication and behaviour and are unable to notice the manifestations of violent/inappropriate behaviour when creating their own families. This is how the cycle of violence develops from generation to generation, without realising that the home should be the safest environment and that the love, care, and upbringing of a child are completely unrelated to violent behaviour. The conducted scientific research reveals the connection of physical punishments with various psychological problems, depression, lack of self-esteem, difficulties in psychological adaptation, etc., so the research aimed to find out whether physical

punishments left long-term consequences that are felt even today. While analysing the data obtained, it has also been noticed that all respondents felt the consequences (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Consequences of the violence experienced

Category	Subcategory	Statements
Consequences of the violence experienced	Suicidal acts	“I wouldn’t have had outbursts of anger, I wouldn’t have tried to kill myself. I might have learned to trust people...” (Vita)
	Diseases	“I really think that I would not have had many years of depression and long treatment for it...” (Vita)
	Fear	“Now, I could be psychologically stronger...” (Sabina) “I would have been more decisive, I would have had fewer fears, I would not have been afraid to defend myself and my opinion in front of strangers...” (Gintarė)
	Inability to express feelings	“It took me a long time to understand what love is and that the loving ones are not violent. I realised this thanks to professionals and a loving husband...” (Aušra) “I think I could have achieved even more in my life, and would not be just a grey mouse, maybe I could be an example for my children...” (Gintarė)
	Disrespect to parents	“I could respect my parents, but unfortunately, now I only have cold feelings for them. They destroyed trust and respect for them, and I don’t think I will ever be able to communicate openly with them...” (Kristina) “I would have a warmer relationship with my parents, and I would have trusted them more, lied less to avoid punishment...” (Aida)
	No consequences	“I don’t think that anything would change because I think completely differently. There was no impact on me. Maybe it didn’t affect me because physical punishments were seldom experienced...” (Jurgita)

It has been revealed that only one research participant had doubts about whether her life would have been different if she had had a safer childhood. All other participants expressed very painful thoughts about their possibly more beautiful life than they have now. The respondents pointed out the inability to enjoy life and defend themselves in the event of sexual abuse, unawareness of what love and a loving family are, long-term depression, suicide attempts, lack of determination, and inability to represent their interests and opinions as long-term consequences. They believe that they could have achieved much more in their lives.

Scientific sources state that violence harms physical health (injuries, scars), the development of cognitive processes (language, learning, academic achievements), emotional development (anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, low self-esteem), behaviour (aggression, alcohol, tobacco, use of narcotic substances, self-harm, criminal acts, disobeying rules), and interpersonal relationships (inability to establish contact, communicate warmly and friendly). Some difficulties do not end in childhood; they damage an adult individual as well. Therefore, it is extremely important that a child experiencing violence receives help immediately, sees a different pattern of behaviour and receives effective complex help in time so that he can successfully overcome the consequences of the trauma and become a full-fledged member of the community.

Studies have shown that individuals who have experienced violence in childhood tend to continue the cycle of violence. 70 per cent of children who have experienced violence become violent adults to get rid of helplessness and fear. Such children grow up as fathers and mothers with poor parenting skills, thus perpetuating the history of violence.

The last question asked the respondents for their opinions on the amendment of the Law (Law No. XIII-643 amending Article 1 of Law No. XIII-643 dated 26/06/2018 No. XIII-1296, Vilnius). The purpose of this Law is to ensure the implementation and protection of the child’s rights and freedoms, strengthen the responsibility and opportunities of parents and other representatives to take care of the child following the Law, considering the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, to define the mechanisms for ensuring and protecting the rights of the child, the institutions of the child rights protection system, the legal bases of their activities, and the general provisions of responsibility for violations of the rights of the child (<https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/5a6c9100-adc011e79d87b6f526384a70>) (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Evaluation of the Amendment of the Law

Category	Subcategory	Statements
Evaluation of the Amendment of the Law	Assess positively	“I am against any kind of physical punishment. I can say that from my own experience...”(Kristina) “We have to grow and not go down. I can definitely say that I am one hundred per cent against violence...” (Daiva) “In my opinion, this Law is very good and properly adopted. I am strictly against violence and corporal punishment...” (Aida) “This Law may not help many children because even now I think that children are afraid to talk to someone...” (Aušra) “So, I think it is good because our children are the mirror of our family, and every family is a reflection of the nation...” (Daiva)
	Justify in exceptional cases	“The Law is very erratic and imprecise ...” (Gintarė) “But sometimes when disciplining a child, slapping the nails is not the end of the world...” (Jurgita)
	See flaws	“I wonder who will watch all this...” (Vita) “It’s great that such a Law has been adopted. However, in families where there is violence, the violence will never end, and if the parents are alcohol abused and don’t care about the child’s interests, they will beat them, no law will help...” (Sabina)

All research participants positively evaluated the Law of 2018, which states that no violent behaviour towards children is tolerable. However, one respondent doubts whether it is possible to implement and control it.

It can be said that all of the women experienced physical and psychological punishments as a means of education. The punishments were extremely painful: blows with a belt or cable, several hours of kneeling or going to bed hungry. The violence they experienced caused all of them to feel inferior. They felt unloved, rejected, needed by no one, lonely and had nobody to comfort them. The research participants did not apply anywhere to help them survive the violence. The remaining long-term consequences of violence they indicate are the inability to enjoy life and defend oneself in the event of sexual abuse; unawareness of what love and a loving family are; long-term depression; suicide attempts; lack of determination, etc. The available life experience in childhood made the respondents think and not make the same mistakes that their parents did. All of the women say that they do not use violent parenting for their children and try to control themselves under any conditions. In their opinion, this Law is very good and properly adopted because parents have to work more with the child, talk, and explain everything.

## Conclusions

Most authors similarly define the concept of violence and claim that it is the inappropriate and criminal use of force in a close environment, which has a negative psychological, physical, sexual, or economic impact on another person. It is the intentional use or threat of physical force or power against oneself, another person, a group of people, or society. Violence is defined as an effect on a person through action or inaction which causes a person to suffer physical, material, or non-material damage. A close environment is treated as an environment consisting of persons related or in the past related by marriage, partnership, or other close relationships, as well as persons living together and running a joint household.

It has been determined that the women who participated in the research experienced all four forms of violence distinguished in the scientific sources: physical, psychological, sexual, and neglect. However, it has been revealed that the majority of respondents did not seek help because, at the time when they were children, there was little discussion about children’s rights and methods of upbringing children. Physical punishment seemed to be one of the generally used and acceptable methods of raising children.

The research revealed that the participants do not justify the violence experienced in their childhood in the close environment and do not use it as a means of upbringing their children because they feel the long-term consequences by pointing out the inability to enjoy life, experiencing long-term depression, suicide attempts, lack of determination and the inability to represent their interests and their opinions.

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## VAIKYSTĖJE PATIRTO SMURTO PASEKMĖS

### Santrauka

Šeima yra institucija, kurioje žmogus įgyja socialinius vaidmenis ir elgesio modelius. Vienas iš pagrindinių veiksnių, griaunančių šeimos harmoniją, yra smurtas šeimoje. Smurtas prieš vaikus yra aktuali problema visose šalyse. Šios problemos mastą didina visuomenėje susiformavusi nuomonė, kad šeimos problemos yra tik jos reikalas, jos nėra viešinamos ir pati šeima turi spręsti problemas savo aplinkoje. Empiriniai duomenys buvo analizuojami atlikus kokybinį tyrimą – pusiau struktūruotą interviu, leidžiantį geriau suprasti žmogų, išgylinti į jo problemas, išsiaiškinti pagalbos poreikį, svarbą jo gyvenime. Atlikus tyrimą buvo pritaikyta turinio analizė. Tyrime dalyvavo 8 moterys, vaikystėje patyrusios įvairias bausmes kaip auklėjimo priemonę. Tyrimas atskleidė, kad smurto prieš vaikus artimoje aplinkoje priežastys dažnai nepriklauso nuo vaikų elgesio ar kitų su jomis susijusių savybių. Smurtaujančios šeimos dažnai gyvena žemiau skurdo ribos ir turi priklausomybę nuo alkoholio ar kitų socialinių problemų. Tėvai dažniausiai smurtauja, nes vaikystėje buvo skriaudžiami, jiems tai priimtinas bendravimo ir auklėjimo būdas. Smurto vaikams pasekmės yra akivaizdžios – nuo žemos savigarbos iki savęs žalavimo ir savižudybių. Smurtą artimoje aplinkoje patyrę vaikai dažnai patys tampa smurtautojais. Nustatyta, kad tyrime dalyvavusios respondentės vaikystėje patyrė visas keturias mokslinėje literatūroje išskirtas smurto formas: fizinį, psichologinį, seksualinį smurtą ir nepriežiūrą. Paaiškėjo, kad didžioji dalis respondenčių pagalbos nesikreipė, nes vaikystėje apie vaiko teises ir auklėjimo būdus buvo mažai kalbama, o jei buvo taikomos fizinės bausmės, tai buvo laikoma vienu iš dažniausiai naudojamų ir priimtinių vaikų auklėjimo būdų.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** šeima, smurtas šeimoje, artima aplinka, smurto ciklas, pasekmės

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