

# **Woman's Attitude as a Victim of Violence: Extending or Narrowing the Gender Gap?**

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## **Abstract**

This paper discusses the findings of a European Project DAPHNE III in the Cyprus context. Its twofold aim regards: a) the uncovering of the woman's attitude as a victim of violence in relation with her feelings and her conscience on the indirect impact of violence against her upon her children if exposed and b) the extracting of an elaborate understanding on the way gender gap is either extended or narrowed by the woman's attitude. What the research points out is that: a) violence against women mostly results in survivor behavior focused only on ensuring survival and not on leaving from the abusive relationship and b) the predetermined gendered roles for men and women contribute to the dynamic of violence against women and to the formation of their attitude as victims. The main methodology performed is based on the Project's initial phases: a) Data collection from women's written testimonies and b) Data Collection from semi-structured interviews with women; both cases concern women who have suffered violence and are mothers. So, 28 women's written testimonies and 17 transcribed interviews with women have been analyzed using content, thematic and discourse analysis techniques. Results indicate that the woman's attitude as a victim of violence is mainly determined by the discourses of powerlessness, of tolerance, of denying, of blaming self and of compassion. Findings are discussed in the light of Domestic Violence and Gender Studies debate and frameworks.

**Keywords:** violence, victims, attitude, gender

## **Introduction**

What was up until 1970s a hidden problem is now the subject of an open discussion (Berns, 2004) for finding solutions and implementing practices and public policy initiatives (Osofsky, 1995) that could help the victims of domestic violence. This is adequately supported by the argument that domestic violence should not only be perceived as a victim's problem but also as a public and a social one (Caralis & Musialowski, 1997; Berns, 2004) or even as an all-embracing women's issue in case that women are the direct victims of violence (Stenson, Saarinen, Heimer & Sidenvall, 2001). Some would argue though that socially accepted solutions have already been found: perpetrators must be punished according to the legal system and victims must have the chance to leave and be protected. But, does it always function that way? The answer is simply negative.

There are cases of battered women victims who choose to stay and fight for their family without adopting a "leaving" attitude. Others may feel so desperate that choose to deny the whole problematic situation and act as powerless and helpless victims (Alexander, Moore & Alexander III, 1991). Therefore, as Berns (2004) asserts, there are several frames of victims also presented by the popular media. Such may be for example the celebrated model of a woman victim who had the courage to leave the problematic relationship and, conversely, the blamed model of a woman victim who preferred to stay and tolerate violence (Berns, 2004). But, what happens in cases that women have also children exposed to violence against them? Is their attitude as victims affected by their mothering role? According to researches, there are women mothers, victims of violence, who do not even recognize that

their children's exposure to violence against them has negative effects on their children (Baker & Jaffe, 2007; Osofsky, 1999).

Thereby, the woman's attitude as a victim of violence cannot be one-dimensional since women's behavioral characteristics the time suffering violence, which define their attitude as victims, are controversial (Berns, 2004). However, these behavioral characteristics can be affected by various factors, such as tolerant attitudes towards violence (Grama, 2000), learned within a given cultural and social context.

In addition, the woman's attitude as a victim of violence may also be connected to factors such as gender inequality, and gender gap or discrimination in the society. Whatsoever, some strict ideas about what means to be a man or a woman might affect how people see their roles in a society (Stark & Flitcraft, 1992; Kendall-Tackett, 1993; Berns, 2004) and consequently how they see themselves either as perpetrators and/or victims. Reversely, by eliciting the woman's attitude as a victim of violence, we can determine whether the gap between the predetermined gendered roles is either extended or narrowed.

So, the present study aims in uncovering the woman's attitude as a victim of violence mainly in relation with her feelings and her conscience on the indirect impact of violence against her upon her children if exposed. The study is part of the broader Interdisciplinary European Project VI.C.T.I.MS entitled "*An Indirect Harmful Effect of Violence: Victimized the Child and Re-victimizing the Woman-mother Through Her Child's Exposure to Violence against herself*" which is co-funded by the European Commission (2008 DAPHNE III programme action grants) and coordinated by the University of Cyprus - UNESCO Chair in Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. The particular project builds on the idea that a problem on the domestic sphere, i.e., domestic violence, becomes automatically a social one (Berns, 2004), which consequently may affect the whole social ground in which the victims are socialized.

## **Theoretical Background**

In their study, Caralis and Musialowski (1997) defined domestic violence as either an injury (from being hit, punched, or slapped or from other trauma) or stress (from threats or violent behaviour or from fears) to a woman caused by a boyfriend, husband, partner, ex-partner or relative. In their definition, the connection made between domestic violence and the female subject is not at all coincidental. On this account, many researches have dealt with women as the main informants regarding their experiences with domestic violence (Caralis & Musialowski, 1997; Stenson *et al.*, 2001) and/or their awareness on their children's exposure and its negative effects (McFarlane, Groff, O'Brien & Watson, 2003). Nevertheless, few researches have worked on figuring out the discourses defining the attitude of a woman mother as a victim of violence especially in relation with her feelings and her conscience on the impact of violence against her upon her children, if exposed.

While attributing behavioural characteristics to the woman mother suffering domestic violence may be complicated, defining her attitude as a victim of violence is even more complicated. This occurs since the domestic violence is caused by various factors (Eastman, Bunch, Williams & Carawan, 2007), such as tolerant attitudes toward domestic violence (Grama, 2000), which consequently may be reflected on the woman's attitude as a victim. Among others, the cultural and structural factors, such as societal attitudes and gender role socialization are considered to be responsible for causing the problem of violence (Berns, 2004). The same factors can affect both the woman's feelings and her conscience on the indirect impact of violence upon her children which in turn can influence her attitude.

International researches show that domestic violence is directly related and expresses the power relations between the two sexes (Stark & Flitcraft, 1992; Kendall-Tackett, 1993), and ownership relations e.g., man towards woman and children. Therefore, it is not surprising that in most of the cases, violence in the family or domestic violence refers to violence against women (Straus & Gelles, 1990). Thereupon, this form of violence is obviously

gendered. In Cyprus Laws and Policies (119(I)/2000, 212(I)/2004), there is still a reference to 'family violence' and not 'violence against women.' The gender neutrality of the language does not recognize women as the primary victims of such violence although over 80% of victims of 'family violence' are female. So, since governmental and non-governmental services work within the framework of "family violence," a critical gender perspective is lost. Consequently, the portrayal of the woman's attitude as a victim of violence defined by cultural and structural factors, such as societal attitudes and gender role socialization is turning out to be hard and yet, not convincing enough.

But, simultaneously there is also broad agreement that domestic violence or better violence against women affects and victimizes both women mothers and their children (Osofsky, 1999) even if children are not themselves the target of violence and women are assaulted instead (Osofsky, 1995; Kitzman, Gaylord, Holt & Kenny, 2003). This occurs since during the violence incidents, children most of the times are at home (Fantuzzo, Boruch, Beriama, Atkins & Marcus, 1997) and are in many ways exposed or witnessed to violence against their mothers (Osofsky, 1999; Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999). Their exposure is tantamount to their psychological maltreatment and victimization (Holden, 2003) which differs according to their age and type of exposure (Osofsky, 1999; Holden, 2003). Another point that needs to be stressed is that children's exposure to violence against their mothers is mostly linked with negative behavioral and emotional consequences across all children's age ranges (Osofsky, 1999; Fantuzzo & Fusco, 2007; Øverlien, 2010), consequences that the woman as a mother is called to deal with. Some of these negative consequences can be translated in low performing at school (Osofsky, 1999; Fantuzzo & Fusco, 2007), in increased emotional problems such as depression and/or anxiety (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999) and in adopting of violent and aggressive behaviour (Osofsky, 1999; Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999; Fantuzzo & Fusco, 2007).

So, the focus on the woman's attitude as a victim of violence is important because women who are suffering violence and have children become victims in both ways, firstly as women and secondly as mothers, especially when realizing that the violence they suffer brings negative effects on their children. In addition, the inequality of women and men in different levels namely the gap between their predetermined gendered roles becomes a factor that contributes to the dynamic of violence against women and to their passive attitude as victims (Baker & Jaffe, 2007). One of the findings that Alexander *et al.* (1991) came up with was that women who were being abused did describe themselves as more abusive when perceiving their partners as having more conservative attitudes towards women, regarding for example their nurturing role in the domestic sphere.

Therefore, violence against women mostly results in the adopting of a survivor behaviour focused only on ensuring survival (Baker & Jaffe, 2007). This behavioural characteristic defines the woman's tolerant attitude as a victim of violence, which, as Berns (2004) reckons, is learned within a given cultural and social context. That is the reason why many women in abusive relationships may come to evince a learned behaviour of helplessness towards violence actually espousing more traditional views (Alexander *et al.*, 1991) with which they were raised. Some women's attitude as victims of violence may also be defined by the feelings of fear and denying. In accordance to that, more than half of the abused women respondents in the study that Caralis and Musialowski (1997) conducted did not tell anyone about the violence they were suffering or go to the doctors because of fear or ignorance. Nevertheless, the woman in a violent relationship may indeed see herself as highly assertive in reaction to a violent partner or husband but this liberal view of herself may paradoxically help her justify her staying in the relationship even though it is abusive (Alexander *et al.*, 1991).

Moreover, the way popular media that belong to the greater social context present perpetrators and victims may affect the woman's attitude as a victim of violence. Studying various media stories about domestic violence, Berns (2004) concluded that through these, victims are held responsible for getting in the abusive relationship in the first place and for provoking the abuse. In addition, denial, minimization, and victim-blaming, which seem to

be common among domestic violence perpetrators presenting for treatment (Levesque, Velicer, Castle & Greene, 2008) can affect woman's attitude as a victim of violence in terms of denying violence and blaming self.

Taking into consideration all the aforementioned, the predetermined gendered roles for men and women and/or for perpetrators and victims contribute to the dynamic of violence against women and to the formation of their attitude as victims.

## **The Study**

The present study is part of the Interdisciplinary Project VI.C.T.I.M.S entitled "An indirect harmful effect of violence: Victimizing the child and Re-victimizing the woman-mother through her child's exposure to violence against herself - *Sensitizing and creating awareness through research-product material, both transnational and differential according to the partner-context,*" selected for co-funding by the European Commission (2008 DAPHNE III action grants) and coordinated by the University of Cyprus - UNESCO Chair in Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. The particular project has started on December of 2009 and it is expected to close in two years. Its aim is a) to address the problem of the indirect harmful effect of violence against women-mothers upon their children if exposed to it in the domestic sphere, as well as mothers' conscience of that effect and b) to address the problem of lack of research based information on the issue as well as of sensitization and awareness.

In particular, the present study concentrates on discussing the Project's findings in Cyprus' context so far according to the outcomes of the Project's two initial phases: a) Data collection from women's written testimonies and b) Data Collection from semi-structured interviews with women; both cases concern women who have suffered violence and have children who witnessed violence with one way or another.

### *Research Aim*

The aim of the present study was twofold and regarded:

- a) The uncovering of the woman's attitude as a victim of violence in relation with her feelings and her conscience on the indirect impact of violence against her upon her children if exposed
- b) The extracting of an elaborate understanding on the way gender gap - the gap between the predetermined gendered roles is either extended or narrowed by the woman's attitude as reflected in testimonies and interviews.

### *Research Questions*

This study intended to give answers on the following:

- a) How do women feel as victims of violence? Which are the behavioural characteristics determining their attitude?
- b) How do women as victims indicate their conscience and awareness on the indirect impact of violence against them on their children, if any?

### *Research Hypotheses*

Taking into account results obtained in previous research studies dealing with the subject of domestic violence and with the way gender as a factor contributes to the dynamic of violence against women, the following two research hypotheses are put forward:

- a) In Cyprus context, the woman's attitude as a victim of violence in relation with her feelings and her conscience on the indirect impact of violence against her upon her children if exposed is determined by tolerance, helplessness, and powerlessness and denying behaviours.

- b) Thereby, the woman's attitude as a victim of violence extends the gender gap in terms of power relations between the man and the woman defined by their predetermined gendered roles.

### **Research Methodology**

The present study's methodology was based on the methodology applied for the broader Interdisciplinary European Project VI.C.T.I.M.S. The study was conducted following two consecutive and interrelated phases, since each phase took into consideration the outcomes of the previous one.

#### *Phases*

The study's first phase included the analysis of written testimonies and reports, available in the offices of GOs and NGOs of Cyprus associated in this project, with respect to the law for the protection of personal data.

The second phase consisted of semi-structured interviews with a number of women victims of violence. The place that the interviews were carried out was neutral so as to avoid the problem of reliability of the collective data. Anyhow, the research team did not visit women for interview in their homes or do the interviews with the presence of others, i.e., women's children and friends. What's more, the researcher had to give verbal and written explanations to the subjects, emphasizing their voluntary participation in the study. Therefore, though these two phases a small-scale, though high in significance, qualitative research was planned to have taken place.

#### *Data Collection Procedures*

There were two rounds of Data Collection. Firstly, data were obtained through the analysis of women's written testimonies and reports. The second round of data collection took place over two months. Data received during the first round were codified into thematic units and questions that were used alongside semi-structured individual interviews with women. The main thematic units included in the interviews were a) demographic data, b) violence against woman, c) children's exposure and behaviour, d) mother and child and e) child and school. Both cases concerned women who have suffered violence and have children being exposed to violence against them. Permission was granted both from the relevant authorities in Cyprus, the Police Criminal Investigation – Domestic Violence and Child Abuse Office (Nicosia, Cyprus), for the study of the collected testimonies and reports and from the women for their participation in the interviews.

Regarding the testimonies data collection, 28 women's testimonies dated from 2006 onwards were provided by the Police Criminal Investigation – Domestic Violence and Child Abuse Office (Nicosia, Cyprus). So, the quality of Data collected stands on a common axis. We are referring to Police Reports which are specific and quote the woman's words directly, as they are legally-binding documents and can be used in court.

Regarding the semi-structured interviews data collection, 17 interviews were carried out. 12 were carried out in an office in the Department of Education of the University of Cyprus and 5 were carried out in a hotel's lobby. Women were firstly identified by the Police Criminal Investigation – Domestic Violence and Child Abuse Office (Nicosia, Cyprus) and by the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence (Nicosia, Cyprus) who made the first contact with women telephonically, informing them about the Project and asking if they wanted to participate in the interviews. The next step done was the communication of the research team with all women potential participants so as to arrange the date, the hour and the place of the interviews. The procedure of the interviews' organization took a lot of time since the date and time of the interviews had to be customized to the participants' possibilities and preferences (some of the interviews took place during weekend or in evening hours). What is worth mentioning is that, access to women-mothers victims of violence

willing to participate in the interviews was a difficult task given the fact that Cyprus is a very small society and most of the people superstitiously deal with the subject of violence in general. According to the information provided, eventually the women who accepted to be interviewed represent less than 50% of the contacted persons with the percentage of refusal being very high. At the end, women participants were informed regarding the Project's aims, their voluntary participation and the scientific, anonymous and confidential use of data. In addition, they were interviewed in privacy, and the interview was conducted in a confidential manner.

### *Data Analysis*

Both groups of data from the testimonies and from the interviews were transcribed for qualitative analysis. Regarding the transcription of the testimonies, the researcher had to visit the Police Criminal Investigation – Domestic Violence and Child Abuse Office (Nicosia, Cyprus) several times over a month (for approximately 3-4 hours each time) with respect to the law for the protection of personal data. Regarding the interviews, tape recording was used but not in all cases since some women denied it after being asked, so notes were taken instead.

Transcripts were analyzed using content, thematic and discourse analysis techniques. Initially, the researcher read the open-ended portion of five transcripts and met to identify and discuss a common set of thematic units/categories from which a codebook was developed for each group of data (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Emphasis was given in underlying the important words/phrases through which the main thematic units could be identified. Those were: a) verbs and actions indicating forms of violence, b) adjectives describing the perpetrator's profile, c) phrases indicating the causes of violence, d) phrases indicating the effects of violence, e) phrases indicating the woman's feelings/emotions/perceptions, f) verbs indicting the reaction of the children being witnessed, g) phrases indicating mother's conscience and awareness on the indirect impact of violence against herself on her children and h) logical contradictions, correlations, included and excluded words. Emphasis was also given to the content and form of discourses emerging in the women's narration; functions and effects of each discourse were sought (Gee, 2005). Transcripts were coded independently both for the testimonies and for the interviews.

### **Results**

The analysis of data from both the testimonies and interviews was an ongoing process, open to the researcher's interpretations; the main directions were given though by the Research Questions. The main Thematic Units arising from data analysis were: a) Background information – Causes of violence, b) Description of the incident(s) of violence – Forms of violence, c) Perpetrator's profile and behaviour, d) Direct effects of violence towards the woman-mother, e) *Woman's Attitude as a victim of violence*, f) *Mother's feelings and emotions*, g) *Woman's conscience of the indirect impact of violence against her on her child/children*, h) Description of the child's exposure to violence – Child's Reaction, i) Indirect effects of violence against the woman-mother on children and j) Woman's forms of resistance to violence. According to the present study's aim, focus will be given only in the woman's attitude as a victim of violence in relation with her feelings and her conscience on the indirect impact of violence against her upon her children if exposed. The main discourses coming to light from data analysis determining the woman's attitude as a victim of violence were those of powerlessness, of tolerance, of denying, of compassion, of blaming self and of dependency.

Detailed results according to the research questions being set up for this study are subsequently presented separately for each group of data. In each group, woman's attitude as a victim of violence is elicited.

### *Testimonies' Data Analysis*

Age, education and financial wellbeing of women vary. With regard to the testimonies' sample, women were aged between 24 and 45 years. There were both Cypriot (n=21) and foreign women (n=7, from Ukraine, Moldova, Greece and 4 women from Romania) married to Cypriot people sustaining violence. 15 of the women are still married when testifying, 7 of them are separated from their husbands but without a divorce and 6 of them are divorced whereof 1 is still living under the same roof with her ex-husband. Regarding the forms of violence, women referred to the physical, psychological and emotional violence and less to the economic one.

Women's feelings as those expressed in the testimonies can be divided in two categories: a) women's feelings as coming up when sustaining violence and b) women's feelings as coming up when giving the testimony. Women's feelings as coming up when sustaining violence stand on a common axis. Most of the women indicate the feelings of fear, stress and insecurity when experiencing violence (e.g., "...I realized that he was hot-tempered and he would kill me, I was so scared I left the house..." [T.26], "...that moment I was so confused and lost ...from fear that he would start again pushing me... I don't remember what else he told me..." [T.24], "...I was scared and tried not to make him more aggressive..." [T.14]). Women's feelings as coming up when giving the testimony vary. Not all of them express their feelings when testifying indicating what they would like to occur so as to be protected and the problematic situation to be ended. Only 20 out of 28, approximately 71%, express their feelings when testifying: a) Others feel confused because even if they suffered violence, they do not want to visit the doctor or/and they do not wish their family in general (including their husband) to have problems with the Police (n = 1), b) others say that they feel complained from their husband's behavior without indicating whether they are willing to tolerate violence in order to protect their children or not (n = 8), c) others feel scared from their husband's possible reaction declaring that they do not want the Police to intervene (n = 3), d) others are turning up to be determined to solve their problem and impeach their husband, to come in front of the Police and/or of the Law (n = 6) and e) others seem to feel so aggrieved that makes them appear revengeful and want their husband "to pay" for all the pain he caused to them and their children (n = 2).

Regarding the woman's conscience and awareness on the indirect impact of violence against herself on her children, three levels of conscience can be detected: a) Level 1 (low): Mothers mention that their children are present to the violent incidents without expressing their feelings on that though (e.g., "...my son was present..." [n = 11], b) Level 2 (mid): Mothers mention that their children are present to the violent incidents and describe their reactions (e.g., "...my daughter was crying and shouting to his father to stop...", "...the time he was trying to straggle me, my son intervened to stop him from beating me..." [T.27]) [n = 8] and c) Level 3 (high): Mothers both mention and describe their children presence and reaction to violence, expressing their feelings and thoughts directly about the indirect effects of violence to their children (e.g., "...I want all this violence to finally stop in order to protect my son's sanity; he is psychologically injured..." [n = 9]). The surprising part is that 7 of these 9 testimonies include situations where children are also direct victims of violence. This fact makes the degree of the woman's conscience of the indirect impact of violence against her on her children even lower since it cannot be clearly detected whether she refers to certain negative effects on children as results of the violence she or her children suffer.

Along with all the aforementioned regarding women's feelings and conscience, woman's attitude as a victim of violence is defined. In most of the testimonies, specifically in 15 out of 28 that is approximately 54%, women referred particularly to the attitude they had during the period they were sustaining violence. The particular attitude specifies them as victims and is defined by certain discourses appearing in the women's words which are those of powerlessness, of tolerance, of denying, of compassion and of blaming self. There are testimonies that the woman's attitude is defined by more than one discourse, two and/or three; the most frequent combinations are those of powerlessness along with tolerance (in

three testimonies) and that of tolerance along with denying (in three testimonies). In 10 testimonies, the discourse of powerlessness is appearing since the woman feels powerless and afraid (e.g., “...I was living in phobia...I’m afraid for my life..” [T.26], “...I left the house terrified and went to hide...” [T.23], “...I am afraid that he can carry out his threats since he was a prisoner for three years...” [T.22], “...he made us terrified with his screams...” [T.16]). In 9 testimonies, the discourse of tolerance is appearing since the woman tolerates violence and doesn’t decisively react (e.g., “...I wasn’t reacting or say something to anyone...” [T.28], “...always, for the sake of my kids, I had to compromise and tell him to come back...” [T.19], “...I was patient thinking that he would change...” [T.17]). In 4 testimonies, the discourse of denying is appearing since the woman seems to be unable “to see” the violence and denies the whole situation (e.g., “...I didn’t want to go to the Police or ask for a divorce...” [T.21], “...I wasn’t reacting or say something to anyone...” [T.28]). In 3 testimonies, the discourse of compassion is appearing since the woman feels sorry for the perpetrator and tries to protect him in a way, hoping that he would change behaviour (e.g., “...I was patient thinking that he would change...” [T.17], “...I didn’t go to the doctor because I didn’t want to expose neither him nor me...” [T.26], “...I didn’t accuse him before in the Police because I didn’t want to have troubles...” [T.3]). In 2 testimonies, the discourse of blaming self is appearing since the woman blames herself for the violent behaviour of the perpetrator (e.g., “...I was staying with him undergoing all this burden thinking that it was my fault...” [T.21], “...It tried not to provoke him and make him more aggressive...” [T.14]).

#### *Interviews’ Data Analysis*

Age, education, family situation and financial wellbeing of women vary. With regard to the interviewees’ sample, there were both Cypriot (n=13) and foreign women participants (n=4) from Cuba, Russia, Greece and Romania. 5 of the women (4 Cypriots and 1 Russian) are still married when being interviewed, 10 of them are divorced and 12 of them are separated waiting for their divorce. The physical abuse is the form of violence most frequently reported from the women participants.

Regarding women’s feelings as those were expressed in the interviewing part, they can be divided in two categories: a) “Women’s Feelings Now” namely the time being interviewed and b) “Women’s Feelings Then” namely when women were sustaining violence. In 5 out of 17 cases, women’s feelings “now” and “then” coincide since these women are still married with the perpetrator. Thereby, they are trying to save their marriage for the sake of their children; they tolerate and do not dynamically react (e.g., “...I need to be very careful with him because I do know that he could send me to the hospital with a broken head...” [I.4], “...I need to save my marriage to prove to my parents that I am happy, because my father weren’t agreed with my marriage at first place...” [I.10], “...I don’t want to get a divorce, what will the people think and say?...” [I.15]). Therefore they remain victims because they are not yet convinced that there is a way out. In 12 out of 17 cases, women feel hopeful and they are determined to take their lives in their hands. These women took the decision to get a divorce from their husband so as to ensure a peaceful life both for them and for their children. In these 12 cases, “Women’s Feelings Then” stand on a common emotional axis in terms of how women felt: desperate and depressed, incapable of reacting, afraid and tolerant, obliged to sustain violence for the sake of marriage and children hoping that something in the future will change (e.g., “...I was turning in on myself in my room or in the bathroom and I was crying or I was leaving the house for a walk...” [I.14], “...I was always living in fear, I didn’t have a voice, I was in silence...” [I.14], “...he was beating, I was trying to get away to ask for help, I couldn’t...” [I.16]). On the contrary, “Women’s Feelings Now” are ambivalent but positive since women feel hopeful and determined, conscious of what they’ve been through and lucky to have coped with it and guilty for the traumas they caused to their children being exposed to violence with their tolerance (e.g., “...Now I am decided, there are days that I am not but I said to myself that I have to win what happened...” [I.16], “...The traumas I made to my daughter are so big, I feel

*responsible...but when you are hurt, you cannot understand that you are hurting others too...*” [I.7]).

Regarding the woman’s conscience and awareness on the indirect impact of violence against herself upon her children, that is a point overly elicited through the interviews since there were certain relative questions. So, in the interviews, women have been purposefully asked to reflect upon the indirect impact that violence against them has on to their children when exposed. Therefore all women had de facto stressed some negative effects as observed in their children’s behaviour. Some of these negative effects stressed were: a) their child’s adoption of antisocial and violent behaviour both at school and at home (e.g., “...my son is very aggressive at school, he always had problem with the headmaster of his school...” [I.16]), b) their child’s low school performance (e.g., “...my son doesn’t care about his lessons or his homework, he has many difficulties and all he cares about is football...” [I.10]), c) their child’s tolerant behaviour towards violence (e.g., “...I suddenly went to school and I saw my son to be beaten by some of his classmates without reacting, I was shocked...” [I.17]), d) their child’s low self-esteem (e.g., “...she is always complaining about herself, she doesn’t love herself...” [I.1], “...she was very self-contained, you could see the sadness in her eyes...” [I.8]), e) their child’s feelings of depression and isolation (e.g., “...my daughter was isolated, she wanted to take pills so as to kill herself...” [I.15], “...I started to realize that my daughter wasn’t smiling, she was feeling lonely, she didn’t want anyone else to approach her, and she didn’t have any friends...” [I.1]) and f) the child’s alteration of feelings towards mother (e.g., “...my daughter is more closed with her father, she always blames me for being separate with his father, she doesn’t want me...” [I.16], “...my son wants to know where I go and he always tries to be with me feeling that he needs to protect me...” [I.13], “...my daughter tries to do all her homework at school so as to spend all her free time with me at home...” [I.12]).

Along with all the aforementioned regarding women’s feelings and conscience, woman’s attitude as a victim of violence is defined. In all interviews, women referred particularly to the attitude they had during the period they were victims. Their attitude is defined by certain discourses appearing in their narration; those of tolerance, of powerlessness, of denying, of compassion, of dependency and of blaming self. What is worth mentioning is that in the interviews women seem to justify their attitude as victims of violence thus some discourses coexist and/or become interrelated. For example, all 17 women admitted being tolerant because of many reasons, of feeling powerless, of feeling blameworthy, of still being in love with the perpetrator, of being unable to see the violence, of being dependent from their husband (“...I was afraid, I was trying to keep a balance at home not to irritate him...” [I.11], “...I was blaming myself, I was trying not to irritate him thinking that I was wining something...” [I.14], “...I was alone in Cyprus, my family was always my dream, I had to hold on...” [I.13], “...I am depending on him, he is threatening me that he would take away my children...” [I.4]). In 8 interviews women indicated they were feeling powerless to react whereas in 7 cases women confessed that the time they were suffering violence, they were unable to realize how problematic this was and were thinking that this is how reality should be. In the same extend, women felt sorry for the perpetrator and would repeatedly gave him chances hoping that he would change his violent behavior. But, women expressed their compassion to the abuser in two ways: a) by protecting him from suffering negative consequences (i.e., jail) and b) by “protecting” the abuser’s image and model to the children. Thereby, the emotional complexity of the relationship between the victim and perpetrator/abuser was evident in the interviews. Lastly, the discourses of dependency and of blaming self were the less frequent in the women’s words.

## **Discussion**

This research study permitted an investigation of the woman’s attitude as victim of violence in relation with her feelings and her conscience on the indirect impact of violence

against her upon her children when exposed, in Cyprus context. This was reached through the analysis of some women's testimonies - police reports and some women's interviews transcripts. Emphasis was given in their attitude as victims the time actually being victims in the abusive relationship and sustaining multiple forms of violence. Based on the results, the two research hypotheses put forward for the present study are confirmed.

In considering the results, it is important to underline that the present study did not reach any conclusive evidence regarding the woman's attitude as a victim of violence in Cyprus society that could permit for generalisations. It gave though a hint about the main discourses that determine the woman - victim's attitude. So, it is not surprising what came to light, that the woman's attitude as a victim of violence is mainly shaped by the discourses of powerlessness, tolerance, denying, and compassion to the perpetrator, blaming self and dependency. Even if there isn't any observed hierarchy in the aforementioned discourses, neither in the testimonies nor in the interviews, the most frequent ones are those of tolerance and powerlessness. Most of the times, these two are interrelated whereas the feeling of powerlessness is giving the ground for the woman's tolerant behavior, since that is a characteristic mainly attributed to women within the cultural and social context they live.

In addition, it seems that in most of the cases women victims of violence sustain and "internalize" violence exactly because of their powerlessness, fear and insecurity, and dependency. The latter are empowered by the dominant ideas regarding the predetermined gendered roles for men and women which women either consciously or not enclose to the action of violence. For example, the man is the one who works and contributes economically to his family whereas his wife and children depend on him. This argument is well reinforced through women's words both in the interviews and in the testimonies: "...we were four persons, me and my children, but we had set ourselves against one who was though the powerful, powerful in all levels...", "...I didn't have my own money, he was controlling me and not letting me go anywhere without knowing...", "...my husband is a police officer, I cannot accuse him for violence, no one would believe me, he is more powerful than me...".

Comparing testimonies' and interviews' analysis results with regard to the woman's attitude as a victim of violence in relation with her conscience on the indirect impact of violence against her upon her children if exposed, women are talking about the latter mostly in the interviews. This happens because in the interviews women are encouraged to report possible negative effects that violence against them brings on their children when exposed. However, when pointing out all these negative effects women, especially the divorced ones wonder whether their attitude as victims of violence affected their children's current behavior. At this point, it's not trivial to mention what Holden (2003) says, that "seeing a passive mother being beaten may have different meaning for a child than watching a mother actively defending herself" (p.156).

Although it remains unclear whether certain other factors such as women's profession or supportive network of friends affected the woman's attitude, the present study's findings with regard to the woman's attitude as a victim of violence in relation with the predetermined gendered roles, are consistent with other work done in the field. It is demonstrated that woman's feelings relate to her attitude as victim of violence – she feels fear thus she remains silent and tolerant, she feels despair thus she tries to escape, she feels inferior and powerless thus she tolerates – which in turn is determined by cultural and structural factors, such as societal attitudes and gender role socialization (Berns, 2004).

Concluding, gender gap is extended in women's narration both in testimonies and in interviews. Woman's attitude as a victim of violence is molded to accord with the perspectives of the dominant societal attitudes. As it revealed though mostly in the interviewing part, women long after they've suffered violence decide and are determined to change circumstances in their lives and stop being victims. What needs to be altered is the interpretation latent in some woman's words: "...he was violent, I think he was provoking violence, all the fights, maybe I am to blame also since I wasn't reacting...I wanted to be the victim so I was...because I wanted to...".

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