

## EDUCATIONAL EMPOWERMENT OF BATTERED WOMEN: WHAT KNOWLEDGE DO THEY REALLY NEED?

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**Abstract.** *When most women seek independence, self-realization and responsibility for their own destiny, battered women tend to be dependent, passive and seek for emotional and physical support. To achieve positive changes in private lives of battered women, providing social, legal and psychological help is not sufficient. Helping women to reject the position of a „victim“, educational empowerment is needed as well.*

*One of educational empowerment dimensions – empowerment by education, underlines that educational empowerment takes place by providing a person with knowledge, meanings, abilities and competences that are necessary to build one's life. In a case of battered women, educational aim could be as follows: to empower battered women „to live differently“, by providing knowledge, meanings, abilities and competences needed to „break free“ from a situation of abused victim.*

*Educational assistance is usually provided for women at intervention centres that are governmental organizations or NGOs. However, following question has not been adequately discussed: what knowledge the battered women really need? This question define the research problem of the article. In order to reveal what kind of education for battered women takes place at support institutions, a qualitative study with in-depth interviews of 10 employees from support institutions (educators) and 4 interviews of battered women was conducted during March, 2016 – January, 2017.*

**Keywords:** *battered women, educational empowerment, educational environment, intervention centres.*

### Introduction

Domestic violence is commonly referred to as a hidden phenomenon. Its prominent latency is manifested when violence victims are liable to suppress the experienced domestic violence and its harmful effects. Even if women are ready to terminate the relationship with violent men, they consequently face economic difficulties, problems of residence and child care, broken social relations, public pressure as well as emotional difficulties due to the separation with the violent men (Boeckel, Blasco-Ros, Grassi-Oliveira, & Martinez, 2014; Yamawaki, 2012; Dirsiene & Reikertiene, 2008; Adams, Greeson, Kennedy, & Tolman, 2013). The outcomes of experiencing violence caused by a person with whom they were/are

in close relationship resulted in suffering from fear in public spaces: they are unable to control their personal lives, they limit their public relations and communication because they trust themselves less and less (Berry, 2000; Oliveira, Cardoso, Almeida, Cardoso, & Gutfilen, 2014; Ali & Naylor, 2013; Gelbūdienė, 2018a, b).

Thus comprehensive help and prevention must help women refuse the position of ‘a victim’ or avoid becoming victims. Helping women to reject the position of a ‘victim’ and educational empowerment is needed as well (Berry, 2000). As Kasturirangan (2008) points out, a wide range of institutional support means for battered women has been developed. Although developed social programmes mention the term empowerment, it is sometimes identified with the provision of social, legal and psychological support, actions taken for the benefit of the victim so that to ensure her security. The methods of support are standardised, the partnership between the specialist and the woman is replaced by a defined support model regardless of the unique characteristics of the victim, the environment and expectations (Goodman et al., 2014). The true meaning of empowerment is lost; to the contrary, the opposite process of the victim’s disempowerment takes place (Kasturirangan, 2008). Empowerment is not the result of provided social, legal and other services. It does not take place with provision of service only. Engaged in the process of empowerment, women can themselves feel that they have control over their lives. Empowerment of women means not only access to resources, but most importantly, acquiring skills to more effectively solve the problem of violence in future (Gelbūdienė, 2018b).

One of educational empowerment dimensions – empowerment by education, underlines that educational empowerment takes place by providing a person with knowledge, meanings, abilities and competences that are necessary to build one’s life. In a case of battered women, educational aim could be as follows: to empower battered women „to live differently“, by providing knowledge, meanings, abilities and competences needed to „break free“ from a situation of abused victim (Gelbūdienė, 2018b).

The aspects outlined above comprise the research *problem* of this paper: *what knowledge battered women really need? The aim of the research is to outline the necessary knowledge for battered women in the process of educational empowerment.* In order to reveal what kind of education for battered women takes place at support institutions, a qualitative study with in-depth interviews of 10 employees from support institutions (educators) and 4 interviews of battered women was conducted during March, 2016 – January, 2017.

### **Educational empowerment of battered women**

Empowerment of battered women as empowerment in general, can be understood as both a process and a result (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010). For example, a woman-victim could take up certain actions to ensure her security. Having evaluated her efforts, she could notice that to ensure her security, certain resources (financial means, residence and other) are needed. Then a battered woman will put efforts to obtain those resources and with progress assessment will set further goals. Within this scenario recurring steps of needs assessment and action planning takes place. Nonetheless, during this process, one could pose a question: to what extent does a woman-victim feels empowered (what is the result of each stage)? (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2015).

Kasturirangan (2008) notes that in seeking for empowerment of battered women, firstly it is necessary to emphasize empowerment as a process in which women themselves take part. Empowerment cannot be treated as a result of social, legal and other services provided. Women involved into the process can feel that they can control their own lives. The process may differ depending on the individual features of each woman and the context. It is necessary that during the process there was access to all needed resources.

Educational empowerment is the process which is performed by an individual who is entitled with power and shares it with others and also seeks to provide these others with opportunities to increase knowledge, abilities, and competence of lifelong learning and to participate in the decision making processes that relate to their current and future professional performance and to the control and creation of their own personal lives (Jucevičienė & Vizgirdaitė, 2012).

Jucevičienė et al. (2010) characterise empowering educational environment of this kind of learning by the following parameters:

1. Educational aim;
2. People's needs for the fulfillment of the educational aim;
3. Learning capacity of the learners;
4. Educational content relevant to the educational aim;
5. Educational content as presented information, methods of its communication and means (material and virtual);
6. Physical space and its objects corresponding to the educational aim and conditions of its fulfillment;
7. Unpredictable factors.

In the case of battered women, the *educational aim* could be as follows: to empower the battered women 'to live differently' by providing knowledge, meanings, capacities and competencies needed to 'break free' from the situation of the abused victim.

*Educator* has a great importance in creating an educational environment. Educator not only helps to solve the problems, but also creates a climate of respect, trust, cooperation, support, and engagement in the process of creating common goals. According to Jucevičienė (2013), educator is a person who creates educational impact and provides purposeful information related to educational aim. He is a learning consultant who helps battered women to try out the various variants of the information and the channels for receiving it. As Fantini (2001) maintains, by personalising educational content, the educator is no longer a provider of knowledge; rather, he becomes an assistant and intermediary supporting battered women to reach resources needed. In other words, s/he becomes a case manager. *In general, personalisation becomes a key principle in the whole process of educational empowerment of battered women, for successful learning of every woman* (Gelbūdienė, 2018a, b).

Battered women are not a homogeneous group. However, institutions providing support to battered women operate by a standard manual of services. The latter most often corresponds to the mission carried out by the organisation and does not meet unique circumstances of battered women and future objectives. Thus, in the process, the priority should be on the needs of a victim and not on the services of an institution (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2015). The educational content should correspond to the educational aim and be suitable for each participant of that environment. *The educational content should be adjusted to the educational level of the battered women, their needs and the educational aim.*

Thus one could maintain that, for the sake of successful learning of each battered woman, it is essential that *the educational content is personalised with regard to each individual case.* In general, personalisation becomes a key principle in the whole process of educational empowerment of battered women when seeking successful learning of each woman. Therefore, one could state that educational empowerment of battered women has to be case-based educational empowerment.

Battered woman will actively engage in the learning process when she is encouraged to control her own learning process, and choose *different learning methods* that are adjusted to her educational level. Educational content should be presented in an interesting, involving different activities. In the process of educational empowerment, it is recommended to rely on authentic real-life contexts to adapt knowledge and skills to real life situations.

When it comes to the physical space of working with battered women, at least a minimally comfortable environment that meets the needs of the learner and the educator is essential to ensure content availability. The modernity of the necessary tools is important. The environment should be learner-centered, women should be able to choose and pursue their individual learning goals. The physical space must not contradict the fundamental principles of working with battered

women (Berry, 2000; Dugan & Hock, 2006; Kurst-Swanger & Petcosky, 2003): security, respect, privacy, accessibility and equality.

As Jucevičienė, et al. (2010) has noted, the educational process is not absolutely "purified" and does not work under "closed lab" conditions. It takes place in a variety of life factors in an open environment. These factors can be predetermined or unforeseen. Naturally, all these factors can also affect the battered women's educational empowerment process: inappropriate, uncomfortable rooms; strangers can hear a private conversation; calls and messages from violator, children's needs, and many other predicted or unforeseen factors.

### **Research methodology**

A qualitative research study was conducted in March, 2016 – January, 2017 in five support institutions for battered women in three Lithuanian cities: Vilnius, Kaunas and Klaipėda.

Partly structured interviews were conducted with ten employees from support institutions, five of which were managers and the rest were consultants, psychologists and social workers. The first six research participants were selected by the principle of convenience, improbability sampling, and the remaining four were selected by using "snow ball" method.

Partly structured interviews were also conducted with four women, who live in Intervention center. The research participants were selected by the principle of convenience, improbability sampling.

Research participant were asked structured questions, which were supplemented by specific questions, or by changing their sequence, depending on answers provided by a respondent. The questions were based on parameters describing empowering educational environment. The duration of interviews was from 19 minutes to one hour and 38 minutes. Principles of ethics were respected during the research: goodwill, respect to person's dignity, fairness, confidentiality and right to get accurate information.

Interview data analysis was carried out by using MaxQDA software. The software enabled to compile matrixes of categories and subcategories, the frequency of subcategories recurrence was distinguished in the answers of respondents, i.e. which research aspects were given most focus. Next, research data were analysed by content analysis and were divided into categories and subcategories and illustrated with supporting statements.

## Knowledge provided to battered women

Based on the answers from research respondents (**employees from support institutions**), the knowledge provided to battered women could be divided into (see Figure 1):

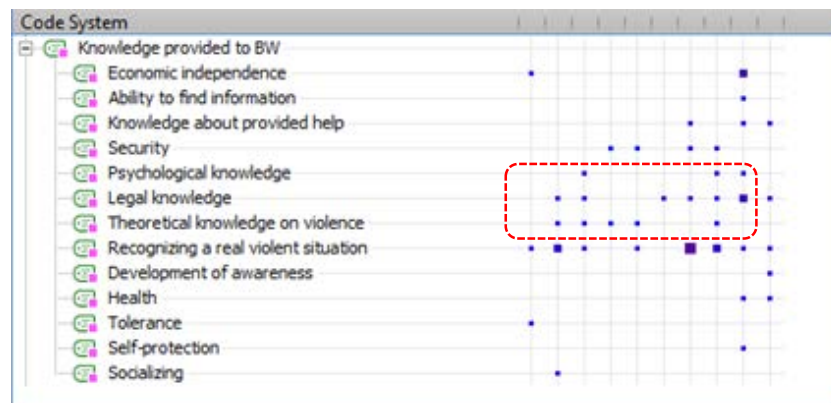


Figure 1 Frequency of subcategories recurrence in category “Knowledge provided to BW”

The most emphasis was given to the *knowledge of identifying a real violence situation, theoretical knowledge about domestic violence and legal knowledge*. In addition, there is a significant aspect of *economic independence*.

The key knowledge that was emphasized by the respondents during interviews – identification of a real domestic violence situation: “... *during the first meeting we are dealing with the question: explaining to them that they are being abused. We take them through this process of discovering it together, in particular, together, that this is not a conflict, this is violence, and they are physically abused...*” (7).

As the research participant state, it is very important to stress to women that having identified violence, they can look for ways to avoid it: „*To find out in what situation they are, where they are, in what condition they are..*“ (1). When a battered woman recognizes a violent situation, a battered woman stops blaming herself: „*And when she can see and read that this can really be experienced, then they have no doubts – yes, that was violence! As sometimes they think and blame themselves: me!*“ (2). Battered women have to understand that violence in intimate environment will repeat again: „*...of course, during the conversation we already warn them, that this will not end. As they think this has happened only once or twice and will stop. We know from our experience that it will not.*“ (5).

Alongside with practical knowledge about domestic violence, the women get theoretical knowledge – what domestic violence is, what kinds of it exist, how dangerous it is: („*What violence is, what of that, that it is not safe to be in a*

*relationship like this, to bear with it... “ 8); how to identify different kinds of violence: „...to help, that what happens to you is psychological abuse, which is penal as well... “ (3). Another group of knowledge indicated by the respondents – security of battered women. It has to be emphasized to them that when a threat of violence occurs, they have to call police: „...we always encourage them to call police if something starts developing. This is a thing that we repeat over and over again, that the first your action is a call to the police. That they must come... “ (4); Knowledge needed to guarantee the security of battered women is closely related with knowledge about possibilities of provided help to battered women. Battered women must know that they can turn to organizations of specialized support, what kind of help they can get there and what help they can get in other institutions that support organizations can help them to get in touch with: „...our principle is to provide help, not to pat on the shoulder, but to name to her what is taking place, to say explicitly that this is a danger to her, her health, her children, and what particular services we can provide. It happens, we do say that we do not provide accommodation, but we can be intermediaries, we do not pay any benefits, we cannot represent them in the court of law, but we can provide the initial consultation...“ (7). Among the key knowledge emphasized by the respondents is legal knowledge – “...the woman has to know how the Law on Domestic Violence works. What will happen to that man... “ (6); what the rights of a battered woman is, if she decided to divorce or not to with the abuser: „... women don't know many things, they think that children support can be received only in the case of divorce.. “ (2); „ Most often it is better than may seem, our laws are not that bad, after all... “ (7). Battered women are informed that psychological abuse is also prosecuted: „...what is done to you by psychological abuse. It is also prosecuted. Yes, it is difficult to prove it, but you can make a complaint, a talk with a lawyer, who answers all concerns in the light of her situation, it gives a lot of strength. “ (10).*

To be empowered to independently solve a domestic violence situation, battered women have to learn to find needed information themselves and to use it: „... to teach them to find information and to be able to use that information in life. And we sometimes make our clients so super socially active, who consult others and bring other clients to us, one says I am working and I can see that this is your client, they becomes a sort of experts. Not only in a sense of problem identification, but also in a sense of solving it.“ (10).

As much important aspect for the respondents was developing economic independence in battered women: „...how to survive with little money, how to shop at a low cost, how to cook at a low cost... “ (9), „...perhaps a person needs education, many of them have basic or secondary education. They go to get vocational training as well. A person has to be independent in the labour market... “ (9).

The respondents also distinguish the development of battered women's awareness – the woman has to understand why she experiences certain feelings, why she feels like this when she is around the abuser, and so on: „...to expand that knowledge so that she knew why she had certain emotions, why she feels like this, why she cannot recall something, if she is viewing herself as an object, why she is experiencing those feelings, or why she gives that power to the abuser, that he is so powerful, if she is building her relationship in the right way, why she cannot build relationships with other people. Education is very wide here you just keep talking about it and illustrate with the facts from her own experience...“ (10).

**Battered women** claimed they have acquired a lot of knowledge on domestic violence: “There is a lot of about domestic violence. When we were back here for the second time, there was no physical abuse anymore ... Oh God, just try to hit me – you will go to the prison!” (4), learnt to communicate: “I am still learning to communicate...Because I was afraid of people. And now I learn to rely on people...” (3) and make decisions: “I have learned to make decisions: that you have to think before you do something ... because I have made so many mistakes... Yes...to think about all your steps...” (1) Acquired certain practical skills: “...here are very good attitudes: how to manage your everyday life...” (4), parenting skills: “Parenting classes are held here...” (2). However, respondents emphasize that the essence of all the gained knowledge is to empower them.

Respondents revealed a few approaches that were adopted. As far as individual and group consulting is concerned, the women emphasised that individual communication with the educator is more acceptable for them: “Well, better individual. Because there is still something to say from your heart when the other people are sitting and you don't know them - you can just superficially say something, and what's inside you is still better individually...” (1). However, at the same time respondents also stressed the value of group sessions. Research participants distinguished between the following methods: reading literature on violence, watching educational broadcasts.

### **Discussion of the Research Results**

Therefore, two entities (the empowerer and the empowered) clash in the battered women empowerment process prior to the problem situation and try to solve it through the equal interaction, in the space of horizontal relationship (Jurevičienė & Šapelytė, 2011). Considering the unique manner of each situation, new knowledge has to be created and new solutions have to be sought. Empirical research revealed that the equal relationships between the educator and women victims of domestic violence, individual attention to each woman and to the uniqueness of their situation, creation of the conditions that enable women to



learn, the aim to restore battered women's power, autonomy, self-confidence, commonality with other people and control over their lives in the context of life changes are the main "axes" of the educational empowerment of battered women (Gelbūdienė, 2018a).

Summarising results of the interviews it is difficult to distinguish the specific need for knowledge provided for battered women in individual cases. It is critical to mention the diversity of women. Each of the respondents had different life experience and resources. Each of them pursued different personal goals. The findings confirm the results of the scholarly literature analysis, which stated that each case of domestic violence required an individual approach (Berry, 2000; Dugan & Hock, 2006; Hamby, 2014; Wiemann et al., 2009). So the essential criteria determining the amount and nature of the knowledge becomes woman's individual goals. Certain elements of the educational content may be common, but each unique case of a battered woman is bound to bring changes in the content – it will have to be individualised depending on the typology of the battered woman and her educational abilities (Gelbūdienė, 2018b).

It is important to take into consideration that knowledge provided for battered women must be both – theoretical (understanding of the concept of violence, the dynamics of violence) and practical (women must be able to recognize the violence in a real life situation, and know that there are ways to avoid it). Woman must be aware that domestic violence will recur, so living in a violent environment is unsafe for her and her children. It is important to emphasize that by recognizing the violent situation, woman stops blaming herself. However, if battered woman chooses to live with an abuser, a special security plan must be organised: the woman must be prepared in advance to respond quickly to the emerging threat of violence. The woman should also know that she can contact the specialized institutions at any time.

It is important to note that during the interviews, battered women emphasized their personal inner changes: growing self-confidence, courage to make decisions, and taking responsibility for their own lives. It is also important to take into consideration that battered women mentioned and recognized the different types of domestic violence, recognized the dynamics of violence, which leads to the conclusion that women are really mastering the essential theoretical knowledge.

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