

Child Sexual Abuse: Social and Socio-cultural Aspects

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Abstract

Background: The implementation of the Lanzarote Convention ratification by Russia in 2013 entails a number of issues that cannot be resolved without the help of socio-humanitarian sciences. Sociocultural specificity is an important element of this process. **Materials and Methods:** Information from sociology, psychology and jurisprudence has been used to create a concept for empirical understanding of the problem of child domestic violence in order to improve the implementation of the Convention in Russia. **Results:** the concept considers three aspects of the problem – social and sociocultural, and national monitoring. **Conclusion:** the article may be useful in dealing with the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention, as well as the problems of child sexual abuse and domestic violence. The article also acquaints readers with the Russian experience of how the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse are being implemented in the Russian Federation.

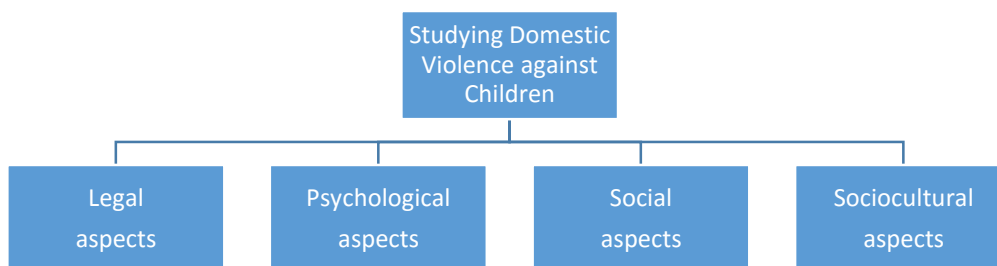
Keywords: violence; children; PTSD; victimology; public opinion.

1. Introduction

It is estimated that one in five children fall victim to sexual violence – a serious human rights violation the Council of Europe has decided to combat through: 1. legislative harmonization – The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention) is the most advanced and complete standard in this field (Kleinsorge,2011). One of the most important ways of putting the policy and regulatory documents in terms of child protection into action is the implementing the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS N 201), adopted in Lanzarote (Canary Islands, Spain) on October 25, 2007 (The Lanzarote Convention. Council of Europe). Russia has ratified the document with reservations (Federal Law of 7 May 2013). Russia supports most of the provisions, but it is important to implement them taking into account the norms of current legislation and customary law, based on the principles of reasonableness and expediency. In addition, there are a number

of problems in this matter that require addressing not only jurisprudence, but also other socio-humanitarian sciences (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Scheme of socio-humanitarian research on domestic violence against children



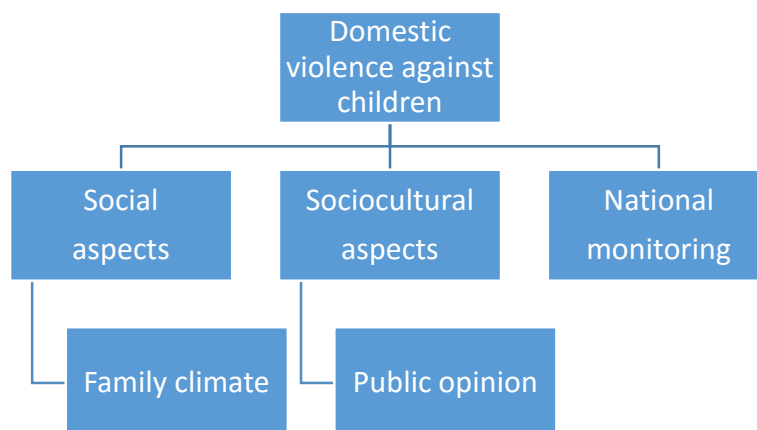
1. Materials and methods

Socio-humanitarian studies, methods used – public opinion polls (monitoring), projective test.

2. Results

We suggest the following concept of empirical research on child domestic violence (see Figure 2):

Figure 2: Scheme of empirical research on child domestic violence



2.1. Social aspects

Domestic violence is defined as behavior carried out with deliberate or unconscious intent of the aggressor to harm a family member.

Factors that determine the development of domestic violence are:

- violence due to the stereotypes of family education adopted in a certain population group;
- violence conditioned by such factors as social and economic situation, low income, unemployment, growth in the number of domestic conflicts leading to family disadvantage, in which parents take away at their children the anger caused by the inability to fully perform their role in the family (Popova, 2014).

Let us note a separate branch – juvenile victimology, which examines such issues as the identity of a minor as a victim of criminal acts, the causes and conditions of victimization of minors, as well as adolescents in order to prevent and reduce crimes of this nature (Oganesjan C. A, 2019).

Victim traits can be subdivided into:

General: naivety, trustfulness, curiosity, physical weakness, submission and helplessness to the authority of the adult, impressiveness;

Individual: psychological – violence, anxiety, aggressiveness, conflict, emotional instability; social – self-affirmation, the need to communicate, social relationships, family conditions. Victimization of children in families is also an important issue. One of the factors increasing the possibility of committing a criminal offense against a child within a family is low income. Most often people committing a crime against minors have themselves been victims of parental abuse in the past and therefore, later on they try to transfer the aggression to their own and others' children. In this regard, it can be concluded that victimization of a child, thus, determines the criminalization of an adult.

The situation of children living in dysfunctional families is particularly dangerous, namely, alcoholism, drug addiction, unemployment, poor housing conditions, and large families, among others. According to studies conducted in Russia, cases of domestic violence account for 1/3 of all cases of violence against minors (Shikula, 2014).

Victimization factors include both internal (personal and behavioral characteristics of victims) and external environment characteristics, in particular, pre-criminal situations (circumstances that occur at the moment of the crime, unrelated to the victim's behavior). Internal victimization factors are closely related to the victim's personality, they are those types of victimization which in themselves determine the process of victimization (gender and age, victimhood-pathology and role one), as well as those types of victimization that are realized in the victim's behavior (victimization personality deformation, stressful victimhood) (Zyrjanova, 2013).

Related to victimology in this context is the term PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).

Child victims of sexual and physical abuse are more likely to experience frequent behavioral changes, underestimate themselves, they are emotionally unstable and prone to immediate response, have difficulties in expressing positive emotions and return to the psychologically traumatic situation through intrusive reproduction (Gamila Muhammad Nasser Ahmed, 2010).

Children who experience domestic violence between their parents, or other adults at home, are not just passive observers. They are profoundly impacted by violence and coercive behavior at home, and they find complex, creative ways to manage and cope with these experiences. Children's experiences of domestic violence is a little like a double helix, with the twin strands of coping and damage very closely interlinked. Children's capacity to be strong, to be agentic, to be resilient can only be read in the context of the actions that function to

undermine their development of agency and resilience, forms of relating that characterize violence, abuse and coercive control (Callaghan, 2015).

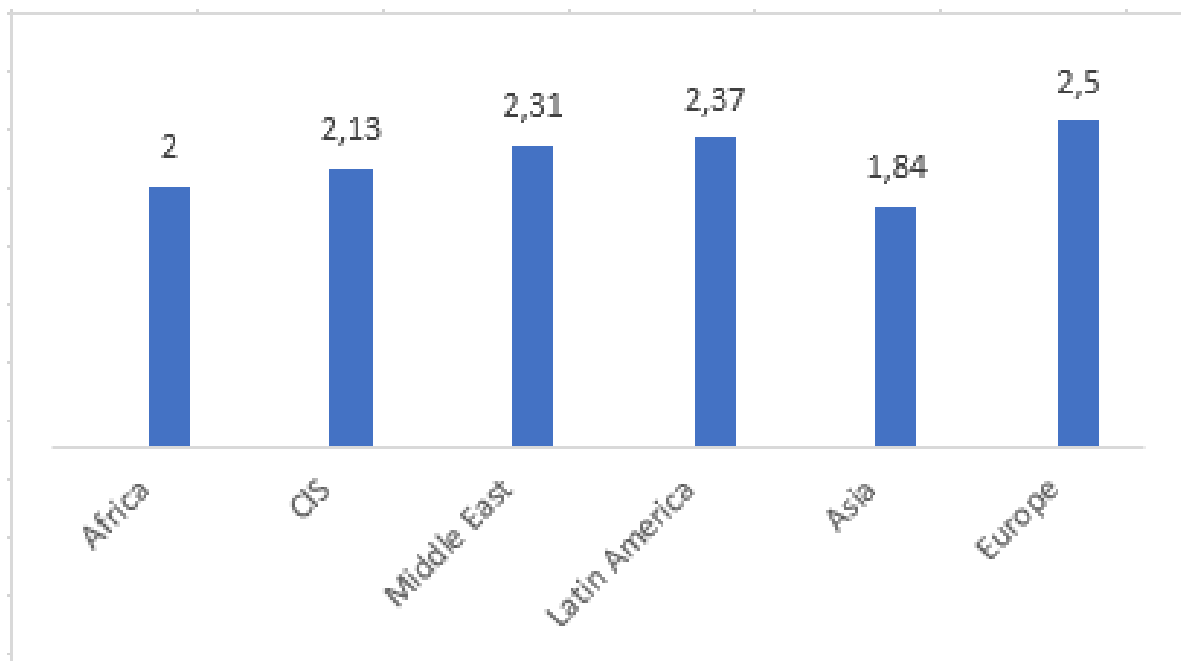
All these aspects are subject to consideration within each specific culture, but the primary consideration of domestic violence should start with the cultures themselves, specifically the sociocultural characteristics of societies.

2.2. Sociocultural aspects.

Looking at the attitude towards people with disabilities in Russia, you can see that legislative acts cannot always guarantee the progress of a particular issue without addressing public opinion and the study of social concepts about a particular phenomenon. The attitude to certain issues varies from one culture to another.

Thus, for example, in RUDN University study conducted in 2017, 416 people were interviewed representing the main faculties and institutes of RUDN University, taking into account the quotas – course and arrival region of foreign students (Middle East, Europe, East Asia, CIS, Africa, Latin America). They were asked a question: "What is your attitude towards the situation when a parent shouts at a child in a public place, on a scale from 0 to 5, where 0 – I find it difficult to answer, 1 – I consider it completely unacceptable, 5 – I consider it completely acceptable"? (see figure 3).

Figure 3. Answers to the question: «What is your attitude towards the situation when a parent shouts at a child in a public place?»



European students turned out to have a calmer attitude towards this phenomenon than students from Asia, despite the fact that such social action is generally not approved. This example is not a vivid one, but even in such a simple situation cultural differences can be seen.

When talking about domestic violence and its study and application of legal measures with respect to child protection, a number of sociocultural characteristics must be considered:

1) Mentality. Personal relationships are more important than laws for Russian people: we are ready to forgive our friends things that would never forgive other people (Kozlov, 2013).

There is also an informal rule – "do not rat on another", which has its roots in Soviet times. The authors from St. Petersburg state: "In Russia it is as follows: tricking a teacher is considered a valiant act, and passing all exams without attending any lectures is an achievement. But telling on someone means losing authority in the group. Since childhood, we are taught that it is bad behavior and it is not only about the university, but also about adult life" (Dyachenko et al., 2018).

Opinion polls that work at the level of social perceptions can reveal such details. In Russian culture, everything that happens in a family is not brought to public view and discussion. Stereotypes firmly rooted in the Russian national mentality (proverbs such as "foul one's own nest", "lovers' tiffs are harmless" are commonly used, there is also a Russian proverb that literally means "if one hits you, then one loves you") (Popova, 2012). Projective tests can help here.

Trying to present themselves in a favorable light, people often say not what they *really think*, but rather how it is *accepted to talk* about something in society. Often, in order to help in the research, respondents give answers that they think the researcher "expects to hear from them". If the research is not aimed at obtaining such answers, the results may be, so to say, not quite accurate. To level out the number of such insincere, socially sanctioned responses, researchers use a combination of several methods within a single study. Also, to avoid falling into the trap of fake "right answers", sociologists use methods developed in psychology, psycholinguistics, and psychosemantics.

An important feature of using projective tests in sociological research is "emphasis on the image (object of study) created under the influence of social factors, rather than the personal variable that aims at the projective stimulus" (Melnikova, 2003).

Unlike the use of psychological projection techniques, in market and social research, incentives are transformed to address specific research tasks, which are, in most cases, to determine attitudes towards a particular subject of study rather than to identify the personal characteristics of respondents (Gureev, 2013).

2) Distrust of the authorities, but giving the President the highest significance. The direct question about trust to Vladimir Putin was answered positively by 71,5% of respondents (24,2% do not trust) (VTsIOM, 2020) on March 13, 2020 in VTsIOM¹ poll and these results have been stable for a long time. However, in general, the state and the authorities do not have the people's trust; in Russian culture there has long been a proverb which is close to: "One law for the rich, and another for the poor". Lev Gudkov states: "It is a pity that we have lost the vision of how the country will develop and what awaits people in the near future, and the assurances and declarations of the country's authorities are unfortunately not convincing enough. People hope that the authorities will fulfill at least part of their promises, but experience tells them that this is most likely not going to happen. Therefore, the distrust towards the institutions of power is very high" (Sarkisian & Gudkov, 2018). This conflict also shows that there is a trend towards a critical perception of laws in Russia, which do not take into account social details.

¹ VTsIOM (Russian: Всероссийский центр изучения общественного мнения – ВЦИОМ, [tr. Vsyerossiiskii tsentr izucheniya obshchestvennogo mneniya – VTsIOM](http://tr.Vsyerossiiskii-tsentr-izucheniya-obshchestvennogo-mneniya-VTsIOM)) – Russian Public Opinion Research Center

3) Multiculturalism. The Russian Federation is a multinational state. Traditional societies in the Caucasus (priority of family, clan, *teipa*², traditions) differ from the more European-oriented metropolises. The classic concepts of F. Tennis Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft are well illustrated here.

In 2018, there were no cases of child abuse in ten regions. Four of them are in the North Caucasus Federal District: Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia. Most of them have no statistics on child abuse from year to year – RBC reports (RBC, 2019).

It would be incorrect to judge the situation in each particular region by absolute numbers – in some regions specialists are trained to detect abuse – [so there are] many cases, while in other regions there are no cases and they may be required not to specify the reason.

Experts generally refer to statistics on the Caucasus as a "weak spot". The roots of this phenomenon can be found in the communities of traditional societies in the Caucasian regions and in the fact that these informal rules are often set higher than the law. Raising children is an area where external influences will never be allowed in the Caucasus. There is still a mentality towards children that can be described by the formula "my child – my rules".

4) Non-acceptance of European values and the principles of juvenile justice, which are derived from the above points. Russian society and its value structure are transforming nowadays, but still remain within the framework of tradition, as can be seen from the attitude towards LGBT people.

According to a study carried out at RUDN University³ in 2018, the attitude towards homosexuality varies significantly depending on the values that each culture has. The most tolerant regions are countries where personal freedom and the so-called liberal values are highly appreciated. The CIS countries, Russia, and the countries of the Middle East, where they mostly profess Islam, remain within the framework of a conservative attitude. This fact is well illustrated by the notion of Overton window (the window of discourse), which specifies the framework of a range of opinions acceptable in public utterances in terms of public morals. In Europe and Latin America, the discourse on homosexuality is perceived as normal. In the CIS countries, Russia, the Middle East and a number of other countries, the topic of homosexuality is no more unconceivable, but the idea of a same-sex relationship is still perceived as radical.

2.3. Monitoring in Russia.

Monitoring is a specific tool for studying domestic violence, which makes it possible to identify formal compliance of activities with the Convention. Monitoring in 2020 consists of an analysis of how the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse are being implemented in the Russian Federation, it is covering 83 of 85 subjects.

Monitoring consists of three parts – one statistical and two substantive. The first statistical part is represented by the following indicators: the number of abortions and childbirths of minors; the number of mediation services; the number of rehabilitation procedures carried out on minors; the number of minors held in correctional colonies and other correctional facilities; and the availability of a "child helpline" in the territory of the subjects; implementation of

² **Teipa** (Vaynakh тайпа *taypa* ['təjpə]: *family, kin, clan, tribe*) is a Chechen and Ingush tribal organization or clan, self-identified through descent from a common ancestor or geographic location.

³ Peoples' Friendship University of Russia

training and professional development for people working with children on programs which aim to prevent and protect children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse; information on organizations that have adopted new programs and technologies for the protection of child victims of sexual violence during the reporting period; the number of specialists trained under the program for the protection of child victims of sexual violence who provide assistance to families and child victims of violence; number of families with a child who has been sexually abused; information on programs to provide assistance to families and child victims of violence; information on families with a child who has been sexually abused and who has received comprehensive assistance; number of social service organizations for families and children; number of organizations providing psychological, pedagogical, medical and social assistance; number of multidisciplinary centers providing assistance to families and child victims of sexual violence; number of specialists (full-time psychologists) in the Russian Federation accompanying minors in conflict with the law at all stages of investigation and court proceedings; number of specialized "green" rooms to carry out the tasks of investigating crimes involving minors of various procedural statuses.

In addition, there were substantive parts that covered the subject's experience in implementing the Convention provisions. The monitoring also included expert visits to the subjects, which made it possible to take into account the specifics of each region and study existing methods deeper. In addition, there were substantive parts that covered the subject's experience in implementing the Convention provisions. The monitoring also included expert visits to the subjects, which made it possible to take into account the specifics of each region and study existing methods deeper. In general, such a tool is a basic one and should be supplemented by other elements of the concept (surveys with projective tests, etc).

3. Conclusion

Lanzarote Convention for the Protection of Children is an excellent example of the implementation of a socially important idea, but it will only be effective if the sociocultural specifics of the countries in which it is implemented are taken into account. The reason is that legislation cannot be rigid; it must be adapted to the specific society. In addition, global developments are also changing the world and making adjustments to social reality. This must also be taken into account when analyzing the implementation of the convention. Thus, reportedly, many domestic violence victims are trapped in their homes with a violent perpetrator during coronavirus global pandemic (Shivam, 2020).

The concept of studying child violence must be developed taking into account the social and sociocultural aspects and may be based on the traditional element of monitoring, which will record the formal compliance of the situation with the Convention. Additional visits by experts on the subjects, as well as opinion polls and special psychological techniques will make it possible to record specifics.

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