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SOCIAL, SPATIAL, AND ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. THE CASE OF THE WIELKOPOLSKIE VOIVODESHIP (POLAND)*

Introduction: Research into domestic violence within the socioeconomic and spatial context remains underdeveloped despite the significance of this phenomenon.

Research Aim: This study aimed to identify social, economic, and spatial risk factors for domestic violence in the districts of the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship between 2018 and 2022.

Research Method: The study utilized data from the Blue Card procedure. The analyses were grounded in Spearman's rho correlation coefficient, with the number of initiated procedures as the dependent variable.

Results: The results indicate significant relationships between domestic violence and socioeconomic and spatial factors, including the level of urbanization, the level of feminization, the number of marriages, and indicators of disorganization related to the economic condition of the family.

Conclusion: The referenced research contributes to existing knowledge on the determinants of domestic violence, which is crucial for planning effective preventive measures.

Keywords: domestic violence, socio-economic risk factors, spatial risk factors, Blue Card procedure, Wielkopolskie Voivodeship (Poland)

INTRODUCTION

Despite domestic violence being a polyetiological phenomenon, most researchers predominantly focus on individual risk factors in their analyses, considering variables such as age, gender, ethnicity, or victimization experiences. It is considerably less common for studies to consider social, economic, or spatial determinants (Beyer et al., 2015). The research presented in this text arises from recognizing the need to balance and complement knowledge of individual risk factors for violence with the environmental aspect. The selected social, economic, and spatial factors of domestic violence were analyzed based on data from the Blue Card procedure implemented in the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship between 2018 and 2021.

By the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, domestic violence is delineated as "any act of physical, sexual, psychological, or economic violence occurring within a family or household, irrespective of biological or legal family ties, or between former or current spouses or partners, regardless of whether the abusers shares or has shared the same residence as the victim" (Council of Europe, 2011). Despite multifaceted and systemic interventions, it remains a significant social problem far from resolution.

In Poland, the development of systemic and interdisciplinary strategies to combat violence began with the enactment of the Act on Counteracting Violence in the Family in 2005 (Journal of Laws 2005 No. 180, item 1493). This model is based on the collaboration of various institutions that address violence, including social assistance, police, courts, healthcare providers, educational entities, commissions dealing with alcohol-related issues, and non-governmental organizations. This collaborative approach allows for a comprehensive examination of the problem from multiple perspectives and levels. The primary tool for implementing this model is the Blue Card procedure, as outlined in the Regulation of the Council of Ministers dated September 6, 2023, regarding the Blue Card procedure and the specimen Blue Card forms (Journal of Laws 2023, item 1870). This procedure offers assistance and protection to individuals experiencing violence and disseminates knowledge about avenues for obtaining help and its various forms. Moreover, it provides an opportunity for corrective and educational interventions with perpetrators of domestic violence. The Blue Card procedure facilitates the collection and analysis of data about the formulation of

intervention and prevention measures. It also enables a qualitative assessment and description of the phenomenon's scale. While other European countries collect data on domestic violence, they do not have a specific and unique procedure like the Blue Card.

While domestic violence has been identified since the earliest stages of human history, it has only recently garnered significant attention from researchers. In the initial contemplative phase of this phenomenon, the focus was primarily on delineating the course of a violent situation and its short- and long-term consequences. Interdisciplinary research has subsequently facilitated the identification of risk factors for domestic violence, with researchers predominantly concentrating on individual factors over many years (Table 1).

Table 1.
Risk factors for domestic violence

Nature of risk factors	Categories
Individual	young age, low self-esteem, low levels of school achievement and success, low income, involvement in violent or criminal behaviour at an early age, substance use, early victimization, experience of social isolation, poor social networks, lack of work, but also high levels of frustration and extraversion
Relational	marital conflicts, marital instability, the traditional division of roles in the family, dependency of one of the partners, need for control and power in one of the partners, tolerance of aggressive behaviour in the relationship
Cultural	patriarchal family model, gender stereotypes, and acceptance of violent behaviour expressed in low social and legal sanctions for such actions, but also low level of social capital
Economic and social	poverty, low enrolment, level of urbanization, and high population density, but also spatial isolation and disorganization

Source: (Beyer et al., 2015; Farhall et al., 2020; Garbarino & Crouter, 1978; Logan et al., 2021).

The correlation between the socioeconomic environment and the phenomenon of violence was acknowledged in the 1920s. Sociologists from the University of Chicago discovered that the risk of domestic violence escalates in disorganized areas characterized by unfavourable social conditions (such as migration and the accumulation of people in complex crises), housing instability (including low-quality housing and tenancy), degraded public spaces, normative chaos disrupting social bonds, and limiting collective activity, including the operation of social control (Siemaszko, 1993). In these areas, violence becomes normalized by not eliciting a response; it is an accepted means of conflict resolution or even a method of interacting with others. Beliefs, behaviours, and their justifications are transmitted through the socialization process to subsequent generations (McQuestion, 2003), fostering the reproduction and dissemination of violent behaviour on one

hand while diminishing the willingness of victims to disclose violence and intervene to help the victim (Browning, 2002). Building on the concepts of the Chicago School, Sampson and Laub (1993) highlighted the role of informal social control in the prevalence of domestic violence. The risk of violent behaviour increases when the community cannot impose and enforce routine activities on individuals, which is crucial for keeping them in the social network and subject to informal control (Muskała, 2019). Challenges with informal control typically stem from family and community dysfunction. The environmental perspective supported Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory. In this context, it is also relevant to mention the feminist concept of "action space" by Kelly (2003), where she notes that the risk of experiencing domestic violence rises in areas where women are constrained in their choices (including spatial choices, expressing their inability to move freely), due to their dependence on men in the social, material, and communication spheres.

These theoretical insights laid the foundation for researching violence in a socio-spatial context. Initial research in the 1970s primarily focused on identifying environmental risk factors for child maltreatment. Drawing from social disorganization, researchers identified poor social and physical environment quality as significant risk factors for violent behaviour (Garbarino & Crouter, 1978). Belsky (1980), influenced by Bronfenbrenner's system concept, developed a four-level scheme for analysing risk factors for violence against children. This scheme considered individual (ontogenetic development) and family (microsystem) factors, alongside characteristics of the local community (exosystem) and the broader socio-cultural system (macrosystem), emphasizing their interrelationship. One of the pioneering studies examining environmental factors was conducted by O'Campo's team (1998), confirming the links between high levels of unemployment and low per capita income in the community and an increased risk of violent behaviour. Similar findings were replicated by Weir (2019), whose study on risk factors for violent behaviour at home identified reduced or low income, high population density, and low levels of social capital.

Heise (1998) adapted Belsky's analytical model to the study of partner violence and identified critical risk factors for domestic violence, including low socioeconomic status, high unemployment levels, conditions fostering isolation, and the availability of subcultural patterns promoting violent behaviour. Reports from Indian studies suggest that low levels of empowerment, high fertility rates, limited opportunities for free movement (communication exclusion), and the presence of marginalized groups in the community are also risk factors for domestic violence (Kothari et al., 2023). Studies indicate that a specific risk factor for experiencing violence is a childhood spent in a disorganized community. Irrespective of gender, individuals who grew up in such communities were more likely to become both abusers and victims of domestic violence compared to their counterparts

in more privileged neighbourhoods (Logan et al., 2021; Yakubovich et al., 2022). These findings are supported by a meta-analysis conducted by Beyer et al. (2015), confirming associations between violence and high unemployment, lower per capita income, higher proportions of single female households, low enrolment levels, high deprivation indices, high social mobility, low social activity, low social control, high acquiescence to disorder, norm violations, and violent behaviour with low levels of social integration. In other words, the higher the level of community disorganization and deprivation, the greater the risk of violent behaviour. These factors appear to be universal. Some studies link the scale of violence to the level of urbanization (Farhall et al., 2020; Logan et al., 2021). The studies above underscore the importance of socio-spatial factors in the genesis of domestic violence behaviour.

RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTION

In domestic literature, the socio-spatial factors of the violence phenomenon have scarcely been the subject of structured theoretical reflection and research. Consequently, this study aimed to identify social, spatial, and economic risk factors for domestic violence in the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship. The research question is: What social, spatial and economic factors are associated with the phenomenon of domestic violence?

RESEARCH METHOD AND SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The research was conducted based on desk research, with data on violence obtained from the provincial coordinator of the National Programme for Counteracting Violence in the Family based in Poznań, operating under the auspices of the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship Office in Poznań, the Observatory of Social Integration of the Regional Social Policy Centre in Poznań, and the Provincial Police Headquarters in Poznań. Notably, the data on violence is derived from the implementation of the Blue Card procedure, a tool ensuring the safety of individuals suffering from domestic violence. The Blue Card procedure triggers cooperation among institutions and entities obligated to react upon obtaining information about domestic violence. It collects information not only on the incidents but also on the nature of the violence, the gender and demographic characteristics of abusers, victims, witnesses, and the actions taken against them. Data on the socioeconomic characteristics of the districts were extracted from the Local Data Bank.

Statistical Data Analysis Procedure, Due to the internal solid variation of the data and the absence of the condition of straightness of correlations, Spearman's

rho correlation coefficient was employed to determine the relationship between the level of violence and the factors mentioned above. The dependent variable in the analysis was the number of Blue Card procedures initiated by authorized entities. Independent variables were categorized into two groups. The first group related to the socioeconomic characteristics of the county, including 1) urbanization rate, 2) unemployment rate, 3) average gross salary level, 4) population density, 5) enrolment level, and 6) feminization level. The second group comprised indicators related to social disorganization, such as 1) the number of social assistance benefits, 2) the number of indebted dwellings, and 3) the number of marriages and divorces. The variables in the second group indirectly described the condition of families in the surveyed counties.

A general characterization of the phenomenon of violence in the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship was conducted based on data from 2018 to 2022. Notably, an unprecedented event occurred during the years covered by the analysis, namely the global pandemic. Examining the relationship between variables in 2021 resulted from data aggregation, differences in reporting, and gaps in other years.

RESULTS

In Poland, approximately 90,000 Blue Card procedures are initiated annually as a consequence of interventions by authorized services, suggesting that around half a million people may experience domestic violence. About 40 thousand Blue Card procedures are suspended or terminated due to the cessation of domestic violence (MRPiPS, 2021). It is important to note that these figures pertain to disclosed violence, and the actual extent of the domestic violence phenomenon remains undetermined.

Based on the analysis of statistics on the Blue Card procedure in the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship, an increase in the occurrence of domestic violence has been observed in recent years. In 2018, 6,634 Blue Card procedures were initiated, and in 2022, the number rose to 7,262, indicating an almost 10% increase. During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, 7,616 interventions resulted in the establishment of a Blue Card. Approximately 80–85% of the procedures were initiated by the Police. As the number of Blue Cards increased, so did the number of families involved in interventions. In 2017, there were 5,416 families; in 2018 – 5,811 families; in 2019 – 6,018 families; and in 2020 – 6,476 families, representing an almost 20% increase compared to 2017. The number of families remaining in the Blue Card procedure also rose. MRiPS staff data indicate 8,145 families in 2017, 8,394 in 2018, 8,922 in 2019, 9,391 in 2020, 9,289 in 2021, and 8,826 in 2022, signifying an 8% increase over the period 2017–2022.

The analysed data shows that the number of people experiencing domestic violence, regardless of the victim's gender, steadily increased until 2020 before decreasing by almost 30% in 2022. More than half of those experiencing violence in Wielkopolskie Voivodeship are women (52–58%), men account for 13–18%, and children make up 25–35%. Predominantly, abusers in Wielkopolskie Voivodeship are men (85% of all). It is noteworthy that the share of women and children among abusers has been dynamically increasing in recent years. For instance, between 2018 and 2022, there was a threefold increase in the number of child perpetrators of violence. Their victims are mainly parents, but also siblings and grandparents.

The collected data reveals that in Wielkopolskie Voivodeship families subject to the Blue Card procedure, psychological violence dominates, followed by physical violence. Sexual and economic violence were recorded the least frequently. While the scale of physical and psychological violence remains relatively stable, the scale of sexual (from 96 cases in 2018 to 196 cases in 2022) and economic violence is increasing.

Domestic violence has implications for the situation of children in the family. Although the number of children placed in various forms of foster care decreased between 2018 and 2021, the number of interventions undertaken in situations of direct threat to a child's life or health as a result of violence was almost 30% (from 67 in 2018 to 94 in 2022).

The phenomenon of domestic violence exhibits diversity in terms of settlement units. The most significant number of families subject to the Blue Card procedure resides in cities and urban areas. However, it is worth noting that the number of families subject to the Blue Card procedure in rural and urban-rural areas increased between 2018 and 2022. This observed change may be linked to solid migration tendencies in Wielkopolskie Voivodeship towards suburban and rural areas.

In counties, Gostyń County recorded the highest rates of Blue Card procedures launched per 10,000 population (93), followed by Chodzież County (83), Kalisz City County (84), Kępno County (74), and Ostrzeszów County (70). The lowest rates were observed in Gniezno County (22), Leszno City County (23), Międzychód County (27), Czarnków-Trzcianka County (29), and Koło County (31).

The research presented in this article aimed to identify socioeconomic risk factors associated with domestic violence in 35 counties within the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship. The study found significant associations between various socioeconomic indicators, such as the level of urbanization and the feminization coefficient (see Table 2). In contrast, factors such as enrolment rates, unemployment levels, population density, and salary levels did not correlate with instances of violence. Furthermore, among the factors related to social disorganization, the number of marriages was positively associated with domestic violence. Additionally, the level of social support – measured by the number of individuals receiving assistance and the benefits provided to them – was linked to the problem, as well as a higher level of housing indebtedness.

Table 2.

Spearman's rho correlation coefficient values between analysed variables for 2021 data

		Level of urbanisation in %	Feminisation rate in %	Marriages concluded at 10,000	Social assistance beneficiaries per 10,000	Debt-ridden housing per 10,000	Number of social assistance services provided for domestic violence	Number of housing allowances paid to users per 10,000
Number of Blue Cards per 10,000	Correlation coefficient	.542**	.421**	-.442*	.437**	.496**	.413**	.652**
	Relevance (bilateral)	<.001	.012	.008	.009	.002	.014	<.001
	N	35	35	35	35	35	35	35

*Correlation significant at the 0.05 level (two-sided).
**Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (two-sided).

Source: Authors' own study based on data for 2021 provided by the Department of Social Policy of the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship Office in Poznań and the Local Data Bank.

DISCUSSION

In the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship, higher levels of violence are recorded in districts with higher levels of urbanization. The questions of the relationship between urbanization and violence have not yet been clearly resolved. In the literature, we find results indicating that the risk factor is as high (Balogun et al., 2012; Farhall et al., 2020; Logan et al., 2021; McIlwaine, 2013) as well as low (Antai, 2011) levels of urbanization. This state of affairs is related, on the one hand, to the still insufficient number of studies in low-urbanised environments and, on the other hand, to their nature (McIlwaine, 2013). Commenting on the results obtained, it is worth recalling that the scale of violence was estimated based on Blue Card procedures activated, i.e. disclosed violence. The urban environment is conducive to the disclosure of violence due to more liberal social attitudes about gender roles and the rules of functioning of relationships, including marriages, but also less tolerance of violent behaviour. Its developed network of support institutions and more significant opportunities for employment and securing subsistence needs are not insignificant. On the other hand, however, social relations in urban spaces are more distanced and individualized, which is also associated with weaker social control. The urban lifestyle, the weak connection to the local community, the focus on one's own family, and the experience of professional and existential problems can increase the risk of domestic violence.

As far as the Wielkopolskie Voivodeshipis concerned, higher levels of domestic violence were found to be associated with a high feminization rate, understood as the ratio of women to men. In other words, a gender imbalance in numbers is a risk factor here. The explanation for this relationship is to be found in cultural conditions, in particular, the still strongly present patriarchal view of relationships and gender roles. A woman's position here is primarily determined by having a partner who complements her social status. Even if the partner engages in violent behaviour, which is somehow inherent in the patriarchal set-up, the loss of the partner may represent a more significant cost to the woman than remaining in a toxic relationship (Grzymała, 2024). Women, therefore, stay in a relationship for fear of losing their social position. The scarcity of men in the matrimonial market may reinforce such decisions.

Refereed studies have confirmed the link between domestic violence and progressive disorganization, expressed in the weakening socioeconomic condition of the family and the need for social support (Beyer et al., 2015; Caetano et al., 2009; Renzetti, 2009). The unfavourable socioeconomic situation of families affected by violence loosens social ties, leading to isolation while closing off the possibility of social support. The focus on ensuring the survival of loved ones results in increased tolerance of violent behaviour, with a decreased sense of collective efficacy. Insufficient social control leads to acceptance of violence and increased feelings of impunity for abusers.

The relationship between low marriage rates and increased levels of violence is interesting, although somewhat challenging to interpret. The literature provides contradictory findings on whether marriage is a risk or protective factor. If we refer to Polish studies on the phenomenon of violence, they indicate that marriage is a risk factor (MRiPS, 2010; *Ogólnopolska diagnoza…*, 2019). Thus, the results obtained in the referenced study are discrepant with the findings at the national level. Studies with opposite results are also found in the literature, explaining the higher incidence of violence in partnerships by their nature and social perception (Stets, 1991; Yllo & Straus, 1981). However, it should be stressed that these are from the late 20th century, and in the context of ongoing social change, their relevance may be limited. Of interest from the point of view of this relationship are the findings of the most risky period of life in terms of the phenomenon of violence. Recent research findings suggest that the peak in risk of domestic violence occurs relatively early in late adolescence and early adulthood (Capaldi et al., 2012) rather than in later adulthood, as was assumed in the 20th century (Stets & Straus, 1989). Perhaps experiences of violence are another factor that delays the decision to marry – a hypothesis that needs to be verified.

In conclusion, the results of the statistical analyses mostly confirm the regularities noted earlier regarding the social, spatial, and economic determinants of violence. An interesting thread that requires further research is the question of the

relationship between the feminization rate and the issue of relationship formalization and the phenomenon of violence.

CONCLUSION

Domestic violence remains a phenomenon conditioned not only by individual factors but also by social, economic, and spatial factors. In the referenced studies, variables such as the level of urbanization, the feminization rate, the marriage rate, the number of social assistance beneficiaries, the number of indebted dwellings, the number of social assistance benefits provided for domestic violence, and the number of housing allowances paid to users were found to be related to domestic violence. The findings are mostly consistent with those in the literature. The inclusion of the feminization factor in the research seems unique.

Research into the factors mentioned above appears to be crucial for the design of effective preventive interventions. They should not only be based on up-to-date, evidence-based knowledge but also consider the characteristics of the communities to be turned into spaces of change. Considering the results presented, anti-violence activities should be based on local diagnoses, considering socioeconomic variables to tailor programs to local needs. It is essential to build and maintain community links and thus develop local support networks. This can be one of two ways of reducing the dysfunctionality of the living environment. The work of institutions set up to counter violence also needs to be strengthened, especially in addressing family problems. Although the presented research did not directly show the relationship between income and the extent of violence, the revealed relationship between violence and support from social welfare institutions indicates that material security is also essential for counteracting violence.

In conclusion, recognizing the determinants of violence, not only in the context of universal findings but, above all, in the context of local findings, is crucial today to reduce the extent of this phenomenon.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

Based on desk research and secondary data, the study on the social, spatial, and economic determinants of domestic violence in the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship has limitations. The analysis of a single year does not account for long-term trends, and domestic violence is a dynamic phenomenon, particularly in the context of events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have influenced the results. Variability in the methods of reporting data in a given year, such as changes in the definition of domestic violence, can complicate comparisons with previous years.

Researchers should complement this analysis with qualitative studies and long-term trend analyses to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

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SPOŁECZNE, PRZESTRZENNE I EKONOMICZNE CZYNNIKI PRZEMOCY DOMOWEJ. PRZYPADEK WOJEWÓDZTWA WIELKOPOLSKIEGO (POLSKA)

Wprowadzenie: Badania nad przemocą domową w kontekście społeczno-ekonomicznym i przestrzennym pozostają niedostatecznie rozwinięte, pomimo znaczenia tego zjawiska.

Cel badań: Celem niniejszego badania było zidentyfikowanie społecznych, ekonomicznych i przestrzennych czynników ryzyka występowania przemocy domowej w powiatach województwa wielkopolskiego w latach 2018–2022.

Metoda badań: Badanie wykorzystało dane z procedury Niebieskiej Karty. Analizy przeprowadzono w oparciu o współczynnik korelacji rho Spearmana, z liczbą wszczętych procedur jako zmienną zależną.

Wyniki: Uzyskane wyniki wskazują na istotne zależności między przemocą domową a czynnikami społeczno-ekonomicznymi i przestrzennymi, takimi jak stopień urbanizacji, poziom feminizacji, liczba zawartych małżeństw oraz wskaźniki dezintegracji związane z kondycją ekonomiczną rodziny.

Wnioski: Przeprowadzone badanie wnosi wkład do istniejącej wiedzy na temat uwarunkowań przemocy domowej, co ma kluczowe znaczenie dla planowania skutecznych działań prewencyjnych.

Słowa kluczowe: przemoc domowa, społeczno-ekonomiczne czynniki ryzyka, przestrzenne czynniki ryzyka, procedura Niebieskiej Karty, województwo wielkopolskie