

Gender-based violence and social work: An analysis of the discourse and approaches adopted by social work professionals when it comes to gender-based violence

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to set out the results of a qualitative study on the discourse produced in the field of social work concerning gender-based violence. It is a study that aims to identify and reflect on the implications of discourse in the development of professional practice. The aim is thus to contribute to a reflection on theoretical foundations and discourses, highlighting the reality of interventions by social workers in the province of Barcelona.

To this end, we conducted and analysed 20 interviews with social workers in depth, addressing conceptualisation and approaches to gender-based violence. The results reveal: 1) the lack of a consensus on the conceptualisation of the phenomenon; and 2) the incoherence between understandings and professional approaches. Together with the other elements identified and set out in this research, this illustrates the difficulties existing in terms of the attention to and transformation of this reality.

Keywords: Gender-based violence, social work, discourses and professional practice

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Introduction

Gender-based violence (hereinafter G-BV) is a social and cultural phenomenon whose origin stems from “the prevailing gender-based relations and definitions in a given society” (Espinar, 2007, p. 40). The phenomenon gives rise to various forms of violence, inequality and discrimination, which is why it is deemed to be a crime, a public health issue and, at the same time, a violation of human rights (Almendros, Munilla and Bernabeu, 2015, p. 205; Gálligo, 2005, p. 85). Accordingly, the profession of social work (hereinafter SW) takes on great importance since it strives to promote healthy human bonds, ensure respect for human rights and foster social changes (IFSW, 2014, p. 1). Indeed, Santana (2010, p. 92) states that it is a target of intervention that goes back almost as far as the profession itself.

Nevertheless, authors such as Fernández (2015, p. 35-36) suggest that social workers often unconsciously act more as a mechanism to perpetuate the inequalities the gender system causes. They elaborate that this is due to the fact that: 1) the professional is socialised under patriarchal principles and values; and 2) said professional investigates and intervenes in a manner conditioned by the institution in which they work and according to prevailing power structures (Elboj and Ruíz, 2010, p. 226; Fernández, 2015, p. 32, 35-36). It is for this reason that we ventured to ask social workers who provide social care services to victims of G-BV in Barcelona province about the following questions: What discourse exists in relation to gender-based violence in the professional practice of social work?; and, What effects does the discourse bring about in the development of professional practice and in transforming the problem?

Towards an understanding of the concept of gender-based violence

After an extensive search for references, we became aware of the difficulty that has been, and indeed still is, entailed by the conceptualisation of the term G-BV. This is due to: 1) lack of clear consensus regarding what G-BV is (Coll, García-Romeral, Mañas and Navarro, 2008, p. 199-200; Zurbano, Liberia and Campos, 2015, p. 841-843); 2) open debate surrounding the suitability of the term *gender* (Coll et al., 2008, p. 189-191; Velando, 2005, p. 108-122); and 3) the widespread presence of several terms which are sometimes lent synonymous meanings (Fernández, 2004, p. 156-157; López, 2013, p. 62-64; Peris, 2013, p. 177-180,183-184).

Using the classification put forward by Coll et al. (2008, p. 199-200), we have regrouped the discourse about the understanding of the phenomenon of G-BV into three approaches. The classification mentioned is governed by identifying the parties involved, the role they perform and the goals sought.

The extreme case approach

This is currently one of the most criticised and counterbalanced approaches by the theoretical work conducted. It is a single-cause model of explanation for the origin of G-BV, deeming that the problem arises owing to the personal factors of the individuals involved (López, 2013, p. 67). The justification is often made on the basis of psychological and biological theories² (Álvarez, Sánchez, Bojó, Zelaiaran, Aseguinolaza, Azanza and Caballero, 2016, p. 15, 17; Alencar and Cantera, 2013, p. 117-119; Miguel, 2003, p. 139; Ramírez, 2002, p. 28-29). The common link in these theories is the individualisation of the origin of G-BV, the exclusive figure of the man as the aggressor, a strong patriarchal bias with regard to gender stereotypes and gender distinction in terms of biological characteristics and/or psychological traits.

The social group approach

This is currently the most supported approach in terms of theoretical work. It is most widely shared by institutions and various parties within society (Fuente, 2012, p. 371; Miguel, 2003, p. 139-142; Piedra, Rosa, Muñoz, 2018, p. 198-201; Maqueda, 2006, p. 2-3). This is because the expression “gender-based violence” began to emerge during the 1970s, a time when feminism was on the rise and spousal abuse –the role established according to gender– was beginning to be placed in the spotlight, among other issues that reveal the patriarchy as a means of social organisation (Miguel, 2005, p. 238-240). The identification of a clear distinction between values and expectations that is symbolically built by a society in relation to the genders –where the man establishes an unequal power relationship over the woman– will firmly strengthen the perspective of the woman as the only potential victim of G-BV (Maqueda, 2006, p. 2).

The gender-based approach

This approach differs from the others due to two main reasons. The first relates to the theoretical strands used, the most broadly used of which is generally a critical perspective of post-feminism (Cantera, 2004, p. 95-102). It is characterised for envisioning the whole range of unequal interpersonal relationships of domination, outweighing the binary notion of sex-gender and heteronormativity (Cantera, 2004, p. 95-97).

In keeping with the above, the second difference is based on the fact that the man-woman pairing is not associated with that of aggressor-victim, respectively (Coll et al., 2008, p. 200; Solá, 2011, p. 41). This makes it possible to steer away from objectifying the position of men and women, working against current patriarchal discourse and thereby not reproducing or lending any legitimacy to it (Trujano, Martínez and Camacho, 2010, p. 351-352; Coll et al., 2008, p. 200).

² It should be clarified that there are various positions within both biological and psychological theories. Nonetheless, we are referring to those theories that take on a single-cause approach and deem that the origin of G-BV lies solely in personal factors.

Facio and Fries (2005, p. 261) consider that, despite starting from a privileged position, men can also be victims of the sexism, values and stereotypes established in relation to masculinity. This is why the focus is on interpersonal relationships of domination, associated with the gender position, regardless of sex (Coll et al., 2008, p. 200; Solá, 2011, p. 41). This does not mean it is believed that the same number of cases occur which affect men and women. Nevertheless, it is considered that this minority of cases also calls for acknowledgment and visibility (Herrero, 2013, p. 110).

Furthermore, it should be pointed out that there is increasing demand for care from the LGBTQI+ community. It is a reality that has been made invisible due to factors such as homophobia, discrimination and sexism (Rodríguez, Rodríguez, Lameiras and Carrera, 2017, p. 65). This latter aspect gives rise to distinguished stances and debate within the same approach (Bravo, 2014, p. 3). On the one hand, there are stances that deem G-BV as being able to take into consideration relationships between individuals of the same sex (Mujika, 2012, p. 11-13). Zurbano et al. (2015, p. 830) indicate that “gender is at the origin of the formation and reproduction of various types of violence against all behaviours, feelings and beliefs that fall outside the sexual and generic ‘normality’”. On the other hand, others deny this, given that they deem that different structural and cultural factors come into play, which are not solely based on sexism (Bravo, 2014, p. 5; Rebollo and Gómez, 2011, p. 7-8).

Social work and gender-based violence

Despite the acknowledgment of the impact of G-BV on various aspects of social and personal development, the guidance and interventions largely focus on the violence stemming from heterosexual affective relationships (Reina, 2010, p. 34). This is mainly due to the fact that existing resources and approaches are subject to the Organic Act on Comprehensive Protection Measures against Gender-based Violence (LOMPIVG)³ (Santana, 2010, p. 93-94).

The LOMPIVG marked a watershed in terms of G-BV (Ortubay, 2015, p. 3). Even today it is still a benchmark Act based on which the various care and prevention actions are implemented. Nonetheless, it is an Act that causes some ambivalence within the community. Along these lines: 1) there are incoherencies between the name and the content; 2) it is a sexed and heterosexist Act; and 3) it promotes paternalistic, care-based measures that encourage the de-politicisation of the issue and the victimisation of the female figure (Bolea, 2007, p. 22; Coll et al., 2008, p. 189-192, 201; Ortubay, 2015, p. 11-16; Solá, 2011, p. 40-46; Trujano et al., 2010, p. 340).

³ Organic Act 1/2004, of 28 December, on Comprehensive Protection Measures against Gender-based Violence. *Official State Gazette* issue 313, 29 December 2004.

In addition to this, it is an Act that uses a theoretical perspective that falls in line with the social group approach. Moreover, in developing measures where the responsibility of the man is overemphasised and the instrumentality of the woman fades, the approach becomes diluted and adopts a perspective more akin to the extreme case approach (Coll et al., 2008, p. 201-204). Accordingly, the criticisms often made are also reflected in the interventions and resources engaged within the field of SW.

With regard to **prevention**, this is envisaged within the framework of the LOMPIVG through measures such as raising awareness, prevention and detection by the public authorities. This is also considered in the focus on supplementary training and retraining of the professionals who are intervening (article 3 of the LOMPIVG, of 28 December). Nonetheless,

despite the statement of intent and the significance that seems to be placed to the matters of prevention, raising awareness, etc., the Act pursues the route it embarked on in the late 1980s which swings the response to gender-based violence in the criminal system (Ortubay, 2015, p. 3).

Fernández (2015, p. 31) and Ríos (2003, p. 80-81) indicate that the same logic takes place in the practice of SW. They state that interventions are not so heavily centred on having an impact on cultural and structural factors, but rather intervention is conducted in a palliative manner upon the problem arising. They point to the scarceness of studies surrounding G-BV, the lack of in-depth theoretical understanding, the shortcomings in training undertaken by professionals, bureaucratisation and pressure on care as the primary causes (Alcázar, 2012, p. 104-106; Fuente, 2012, p. 388; Fernández, 2015, p. 31; Jovaní, 2014, p. 264-265; Ríos, 2003, p. 84; 2010, p. 135; Santana, 2010, p. 95-97; Tobías, 2018, p. 142-143).

With respect to **intervention**, Mullaly (1997, p. 24-25) states that there are two philosophies for intervention in SW which steer the course of action and means of adopting the approaches. There is the traditional standpoint, which centres on the individual deeming that the issue lies in their failure to adapt to the social system; or there is the progressive standpoint, which acknowledges the existence of segments of the population that are more disadvantaged owing to an unfair and unequal social order. This would imply going beyond individual care.

Authors such as Fernández (2015, p. 31) and Ríos (2003, p. 80-81) state that actions are based primarily on merely individual aid with a perspective focussed on the shortcomings and needs exhibited by a woman victim of G-BV. This aspect is ultimately reduced to offering one-off grants in order to address the most pressing problems, rather than placing attention on other cultural or structural aspects (Ríos, 2003, p. 84). This becomes clear if we read certain documents on the topic relating to Barcelona province, such as the protocolisation of individualised intervention with women

who are experiencing or have experienced gender-based violence (2007)⁴ or other framework documents such as the protocol for the approach to male violence in the field of health in Catalonia (2009)⁵ or the protocol for assessing the risk of violence against woman carried out by their partner or ex-partner (RVD-BCN) (2011).⁶

In parallel, Alcázar (2012, p. 113-115) identifies other inertias and difficulties hindering the performance of an efficient, effective intervention; to be precise: 1) the tendency to homogenise the figure and circumstances of the woman suffering abuse, giving rise to services and programmes that do not completely meet the needs she exhibits; 2) the implementation of success targets set by the professional and the institution, which may not be shared with the person receiving assistance; 3) the application of resources and programmes with highly defined procedures and goals, which deprive the victim of instrumentality and reinforce her victimisation; and 4) the tendency to conduct individual rather than group-based interventions, thereby causing women to experience the phenomenon as an individual failure.

In addition, there is the aforementioned lack of training undertaken by certain professionals. Since they are not aware of or trained in the gender perspective, they engage in actions guided by intuition and good intentions, thereby hindering smooth, effective and efficient management (Jovaní, 2014, p. 264-265).

The inclusion of the gender perspective in the social work intervention

Several authors highlight the need to incorporate the gender perspective (hereinafter PG) as a cross-disciplinary interpretive framework of social intervention (Fuente, 2012, p. 388; Fernández, 2015, p. 31; Fidalgo, 2005, p. 21, 25; López, 2013, p. 81; Tobías, 2018, p. 142-143).

The GP is an analytical category formed by several currents of feminism which

approaches reality taking into consideration the existence of various genders and their power relationships, which overlap with other elements that trigger inequality, such as ethnicity/race, social class, national origin, etc. (Alcázar, 2012, p. 99-100).

4 An initial document intended to combine and set out a protocol for the individualised care offered to women victims of G-BV in Barcelona city: <https://bit.ly/2Clge0e>.

5 A document published by the Ministry of Health of the Autonomous Government of Catalonia intended to serve as a practical instrument to steer interventions in the field of male violence in any sphere of health in Catalonia: <https://bit.ly/2Nux4ju>.

6 The RVD-BCN is a protocol promoted by Barcelona Circuit to Combat Violence against Women, which was conducted in order to produce a tool for assess the risk of violent acts in the short term with respect to women in a context of male violence: <https://bit.ly/2PXa26E>.

The first time that this perspective was mentioned as a strategic component to achieving equality was during the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 (Alonso-Fernández, 2016, p. 3; Tobías, 2018, p. 144). Even so, Berasaluze (2009, p. 138) and Fernández (2015, p. 33) argue that the application of it is currently in the early stages. Consequently, it is advisable to channel and encourage the incorporation of this perspective from the point of training. Several authors state or even lay testimony to the lack of or optional nature of gender- and violence-related content within the training programme of the Bachelor's Degree in SW (Elboj and Ruíz, 2010, p. 230-231; Rubio, Gil, Paz, Peralta, Alcázar and Gila, 2009, p. 7; Santana, 2010, p. 95-97).

The justification for its relevance lies in: 1) the need for awareness surrounding the power relationships occurring owing to gender and its effects regardless of sex, because every social intervention is not neutral; rather, it has a gender impact; 2) the importance of introducing this perspective in order to foster social transformations that champion equality between people; 3) the requirement to identify practices and interventions that reproduce and prop up sexism and inequalities (Alcázar, 2012, p. 104-106; Fernández, 2015, p. 31; Tobías, 2018, p. 142-143).

Indeed, it is a perspective that encourages prevention, thinking around more collective approaches and does not exclusively envisage the woman as the subject of intervention (Alcázar, 2012, p. 100; Alonso-Fernández, 2016, p. 4-5). With regard to this latter element, Alonso-Fernández (2016, p. 7) reflects on the need to think “about whether women should be included solely in the quest for gender equality or whether it would also be possible to assume that men may have their own needs and vulnerabilities”.

Methodology

This research conducted falls within the interpretive paradigm and is based on a phenomenological theoretical-methodological perspective. Behar (2008, p. 45) states that “the phenomenological method may prove especially useful for interpreting the events and processes studied; in order to capture the sense of the phenomena and the intention of social activities”.

Taking the goal into consideration, along with the theoretical-methodological perspective and the emerging, exploratory approach of this research, we envisaged using a qualitative methodology. We reached this decision owing to the lack of a defined theoretical framework, and also because the search for narrative data may offer a more in-depth insight (Vivar, McQueen, Whyte, Canga, 2013, p. 224).

Sample

It is a theoretical sample formed by a total of 20 social workers. It is characterised by an equivalent proportionality index between both biological genders. Given that G-BV is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that is identified and addressed from a broad range of services, a sample was chosen involving professionals within varying spheres of social care, as defined below.

Table 1. Sample composition

Not real name	Field	Experience in SW	Biological gender
Javier	Health/primary care	23 years	M
Sonia	Health /primary care and specialised service for transsexuals	5 years	W
Teo	Health /primary care	+ 20 years	M
Noemí	Health /primary care	14 years	W
Jacinto	Health /hospital care	7 years	M
Mireia	Health /mental health	18 years	W
Yoali	Health /drug addiction	18 years	W
Ignacio	Basic social services	20 years	M
Laia	Basic social services	13 years	W
Alan	Basic social services	10 years	M
Elsa	Basic social services	22 years	W
Jandro	Basic social services	9 years	M
Roc	Basic social services	3 years	M
Edna	Information and care services for women	12 years	W
Juan	SW teacher	30 years	M
Antón	SW teacher	27 years	M
Carlos	SW teacher	10 years	M
Natalia	3rd sector-male violence and G-BV	12 years	W
Mónica	3rd sector-HIV	20 years	W
Maya	3rd sector-sexual abuse	10 years	W

Source: Compiled by the authors

It should be pointed out that, in keeping with the Barcelona Circuit to Combat Violence against Women,⁷ the sample is formed by acknowledged professional forums when it comes to their involvement in the diagnosis of and means of addressing these realities. It should be clarified also that the composition was not probabilistic and was arranged according to the following inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Holding a SW qualification	Currently not in work as a social worker
Possessing 3 or more years of experience in the field of SW	Working outside Barcelona province

Source: Compiled by the authors

Instruments

We used the one-on-one interview technique, which enabled us to compile information on subjective aspects and events relating to people, to gain an acquaintance of the stance of individuals in relation to the events and to build meanings based on their behaviours (Behar, 2008, p. 55; Palou, 2013, p. 3). The interview model used was the semi-structured individual method and lasted around 30 to 45 minutes. Since it is a phenomenon of such broad scope, we deemed it pertinent to set a minimum script to enable us to secure the most relevant information to be explored according to our aims. It is necessary to clarify that we sought to assure the confidentiality of the individuals interviewed; accordingly, they were informed about the scope of confidentiality protection by means of informed consent.

Analysis

A thematic analysis was conducted on the content extracted from the interviews. Initially they were transcribed and subsequently the text corpus was fragmented into various units which were coded according to the basic content of interest to the purpose of study (intervention models; contextual, institutional and personal areas of potential and limitations; definition of the gender perspective and vocational training). The coding was largely inductive owing to the exploratory nature of the object of study and the resulting lack of validation of the subject areas in similar previous studies. Nevertheless, the theoretical framework was taken into account

⁷ Inter-institutional project jointly led by Barcelona City Council and Barcelona Health Consortium. As they point out, the goal is to “forge a system shaped around networking, involving cooperation between the various agents in the healthcare, social, police, judicial and educational fields” (Barcelona City Council, undated).

frequently in order to designate excerpts that were of specific theoretical interest to the researchers. To be more precise, when it comes to defining the phenomenon of G-BV, the classification by Coll et al. (2008) was taken into consideration, consequently identifying the distinguishing elements among the various approaches (the parties involved, the relationship and role they engage in, and the cause or causes and origin of G-BV).

It is important to specify that in order to lend the study greater internal validity, the information secured was triangulated with the theoretical framework. This enabled dialogue between the results and current specialist literature on the subject, giving rise to another source for building knowledge and reflections (Cisterna, 2005, p. 69-70).

Limitations to the research

1. The sample of social workers is limited and does not assure all discourse in relation to G-BV is compiled. We also wanted it to be characterised by an equivalent proportionality index between genders (understood in binary terms). Nonetheless, since it involves a limited number of professionals we were unable to explore in depth as to whether or not certain trends exist; hence, no further examination is carried out in this respect. It is worth highlighting that it is a study shaped by a small sample, although that does not mean it is any less pertinent to begin to reflect on the reality illustrated by a host of professionals.

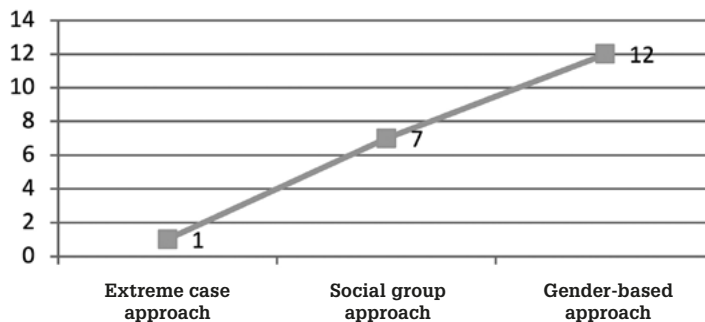
2. It is not a uniform sample in terms of the fields of intervention in SW. We sought to ensure it was as diverse as possible to gain a more holistic overview of the understandings and approaches. However, we subsequently thought that it would have been interesting to have the same number of professionals according to fields of intervention, since this would have enabled us to identify certain trends and characteristics in each field.

Results

Conceptualisation of gender-based violence

Below, the results obtained are shown in relation to a classification of the discourse on G-BV from the social workers interviewed.

Figure 1. Classification of the discourse on G-BV



Source: Compiled by the authors

– The **extreme case approach** is the least widespread, as we only identified one case and indeed with certain nuances. The individual states that the victim may belong to any sex, which is not a characteristic aspect of extreme cases. Nonetheless, the individual emphasised that by and large it occurs in women due to a number of mainly biological differences, whereby the physical superiority of men is given as an example.

– When it comes to the **social group approach** there has been broader consensus. However, within this same approach several highly differing standpoints coexist. For instance, of these 7 people, 2 envisage and assert that the woman can only be the victim of this phenomenon.

It is the violence of a man towards a woman simply due to being a woman. A brief, clear and concise definition [...]. There are many types of violence; grandparents are subjected to violence, children are subjected to violence, but this is a different kind of violence. If we talk about gender-based violence we are referring to the violence of a man towards a woman (Natalia).

A third individual points out that G-BV should also include LGBTQI+ couples as they are not treated in the same way. This person reveals that the specific roles of heterosexual couples are fulfilled, deeming that they take on feminine and masculine roles.

The remainder consider a broader concept in which they deem that all gender identities may suffer G-BV, although they reiterate that they

do not wish to encompass everything within the same phenomenological category.

Men are also victims of male chauvinism, though I would not place them in the same category to avoid casting a veil over the broader reality in the case of women (Edna).

– The **gender-based approach** turns out to be the most broadly accepted among professionals. Even so, it should be noted that 4 of the people interviewed produced their own definition of social groups and subsequently ended up backtracking, refraining from assigning a specific gender to the figure of aggressor/victim. Some of them raised various queries and highlighted the need to reflect further on the issue.

Gender-based violence is suffered by women even though the gender system is highly abusive also for men. Of course, it would consist of violence on the part of the gender system towards men, I'm not sure. The fact is that often I am not very clear about these terms; I see much discourse doing the rounds (Ignacio).

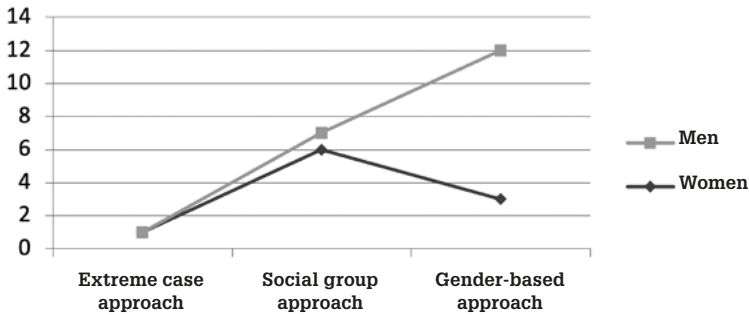
They reveal that the social group approach has become dominant, and subsequently there has been very little reflection and doubt cast over the issue.

As professionals it is necessary to have a critical perspective. Even when we manage to get the critical discourse to be accepted and end up being hegemonic, we need to still be critical to avoid once again slipping into reproduction (Carlos).

Moreover, they state that it is a phenomenon where the woman shows a greater willingness to put up with it and, accordingly, the number of cases occurring is greater. Nevertheless, they suggest that leaving out potential victims may give rise to invisibility and situations of inequality and vulnerability. Indeed, they think fewer cases than those that actually exist are discovered due to: 1) the scarce acknowledgment of the problem among other groups; and 2) the specific functioning of current gender constructs presently used. As a result, they largely promote the idea of including everything within the same phenomenological category, subsequently modulating the specific circumstances of each case.

Below these same results are set out and classified according to the gender of the persons interviewed.

Figure 2. Classification of the discourse on G-BV according to gender



Source: Compiled by the authors

In parallel, with regard to the term G-BV and the scale of the phenomenon, it is necessary to point out that:

– 35% of the sample disagreed with the use of the expression G-BV. Specifically, one individual suggested the expression *domestic violence* believing it to be more descriptive. Another two people considered it to be just violence, stating that it should not have “surnames”. They do not believe that the concept of gender is ideal, as they believe it lessens the scope of the phenomenon and has ended up being used as a synonym for woman. Whereas, in the remaining cases they prefer to use the expression *male violence*, since the expression itself points to the structural source of the violence and its connotations carry greater strength and visibility within the present-day context.

Likewise, it is necessary to specify that two people also criticised the concept of violence. They suggest that it is a concept with always negative connotations, as it is an intrinsic issue in human beings and it is not always used to inflict damage on another. Furthermore, they state that often violence may take on a reductionist perspective, envisaging only physical or verbal aggression.

– 35% of the people interviewed consider that G-BV is solely framed within affective relationships. At the same time, the remaining 65% state that it goes further, including other parties (individuals, institutions, etc.) who may infringe upon the specific gender identity of the subjects.

There are various categories: from the most social issue in which violence stereotyped in gender exists to a situation more closely linked to coexistence when an individual causes abuse to another owing to their gender [...]. Even individuals who do not identify as either men or women. Trying to confine these individuals within a duality is also abuse owing to gender in my view (Jandro).

The approach to gender-based violence in social work

With regard to prevention, they underline that few tasks have been executed from the sphere of SW. They deem one conditioning factor in this to be the shortfall in the commitment from the institutions in which they work. They believe it is due to the difficulties in proving the effectiveness of these interventions as it is more difficult to measure and demonstrate the outcomes achieved.

Also, they describe shortcomings in terms of secondary prevention owing to difficulties in the diagnosis of the phenomenon. This is due, they say, to the heavy socialisation of the professionals and lack of training. They largely identify the phenomenon in the face of express verbalisation from the victim.

When it comes to intervention, the discourse broadly used is related to the gender-based approach. Nevertheless, when asked about interventions, they largely only refer to the heterosexual woman victim within the framework of affective relationships. This is a contradictory element if we consider that: 1) only 35% of the people interviewed considered G-BV to fall within the framework of affective relationships; and 2) 60% include other gender identities as potential victims. What is more, most actions and resources mentioned focus solely on the woman as the subject of intervention. This is surprising when we consider that 95% of the sample emphasise the structural origin of the problem.

We are not working for the whole population, but rather for those groups whose needs have been legitimately determined as needs. At this juncture, it is necessary to debate whether or not this consists of social work. We may not like the answer because we are more associated with order and control rather than with transformation and emancipation (Juan).

We also observe that the interventions mentioned are individual by and large and there is broad consensus surrounding how to act in the case of heterosexual women. However, when actions are planned with regard to other gender identities the difficulties and lack of consensus become more pronounced. Some consider that the approach should be the same regardless of the sex and sexual orientation of the subject. Others believe that they can adapt the tools, for instance the RVD-BCN, to other G-BV cases, although they raise doubts when it comes to referrals and acting in the face of specific circumstances. By extension, there is also a case in which they directly show lack of knowledge when it comes to how to address those situations.

Lastly, they refer particularly to the task of coordination because oftentimes it is not established. They claim that this is not due to a lack of protocols or communication channels, but rather because the professionals do not have enough time in order to coordinate themselves or engage in the transfers of cases. With regard to this latter aspect, they point to the high pressure on care, the lack of security in employment conditions and

the shortage of time available for interviews, which give rise to difficulties in completing the transfers.

The gender perspective and social work

In the research respondents were asked about the definition and application of the GP in SW. It should be pointed out that 60% of the sample know what the GP consists of. The remaining 40% lie within the following situations: 1) they literally express lack of knowledge about what the GP consists of; 2) they define it as having an awareness of the social constructs and inequalities that solely affect women; 3) they understand it to mean applying the same treatment regardless of sex, overlooking basic cultural and social differences. Indeed, they appear more content talking in terms of the “person perspective”; or 4) they consider the GP solely as consisting of those influences of the professional stemming from said individual’s specific process of socialisation.

They were also asked about whether they apply this in their daily practice. Excluding those cases where respondents were unable to define what the GP consisted of, we can report that: 57.14% consider that they use the GP in their day-to-day duties; 28.57% believe that they endeavour to apply it but do not manage to do so fully; and the remaining 14.29% specify that they do not work under the umbrella of the GP although they would like to.

They underline that several institutions are committing to the incorporation and promotion of GP-based practices. Nevertheless, they point out that there is a need to foster greater training along these lines on a continual basis to ensure its comprehensive incorporation.

I think that a personal task would be necessary going from the training component, the component of self-awareness in order to be able to dismantle and break up the discourse we have and which has actually trained us. No matter how critical we say we are, our socialisation has unfolded on the context of this discourse and a component of this male chauvinism we criticise is held within us (Carlos).

In relation to the latter, when respondents were asked whether they had received training on the GP, 55% of them had indeed received such training. With regard to those that had received training, in most cases it should be noted that: 1) they had only completed one course on the GP and it had been during the 2018-2019 year; or 2) they had addressed the GP in various courses as a cross-disciplinary component but not exclusively. Only six cases relate to individuals who stated they had been trained exclusively on the GP.

To conclude, a huge emphasis has been placed on the importance of training and the integration of the GP in SW. It should be pointed out that when three teachers were asked about how they introduce it in their Bachelor’s level training they indicated that there is an explicit instruction

for its integration into the syllabuses, although ultimately it depends on the wishes of the teaching staff. They indicate that the GP was accepted into the university environment just a few years ago, and indeed for this reason they state that there is a long way to go still as with any other social discipline.

In other words, not being sure is not being sure, because I have always been wary of the ideologisation of professional readings [...]. Among other aspects, because I consider ideology as a means of legitimising social dominations. So I am worried that it is that or whatever (Antón).

Conclusions

- There is not a homogeneous discourse or a minimum consensus surrounding the conceptualisation of the phenomenon among SW professionals. The affective relationship, biological sex and sexual orientation have been identified as the primary components leading to disagreement and differences. There has been a manifestation of the existence of numerous terms to refer to a single reality (G-BV, male violence, domestic violence) and the emergence of debates surrounding the suitability of the term *gender*. These components impact on the process of conceptualisation and reveal the need to examine more closely into the frameworks of reference established, particularly given the difficulty encountered when it comes to integration and clarity from the various social work professionals. Indeed, I would like to specify that two people interviewed cast doubt on the connotations surrounding the work *violence*, expressing its intrinsic nature in the human being. It is pertinent to underline this aspect given that violence is not inborn, but rather an intentional cultural outcome and, thereby, avoidable (Dahlberg and Krug, 2003, p. 3; OMS, 2002, p. 2-4).
- It has been possible to establish that the prevalent discourse tends to relate strictly to the gender-based approach, in contrast to the prevailing theory. They underline the inclusion of the host of unequal relationships of interpersonal domination as being G-BV, because focussing the spotlight on the heterosexual woman as the potential victim reproduces and lends legitimacy to sexist, heteropatriarchal logic. They underscore the pertinence of fostering forums for reflection and criticism surrounding the frameworks of reference, practices and goals of intervention by professionals, all with the aim of going beyond a conservative, reproductive concept of social work that often steers it far from the inspiring principles of the profession.
- The conceptualisations of SW professionals have very little in common with the interventions they conduct with regard to G-BV. Accordingly, we find that the processes of socialisation, the prevailing power structures and the institutions in which they work ultimately condition their

endeavour. As indeed Santana (2010, p. 93-94) points out, SW interventions are intimately tied in with the LOMPIVG and, accordingly, to current theories. Along these lines, the practices exposed with regard to G-BV have generally been characterised by: 1) focussing solely on the figure of the heterosexual woman victim; 2) using a depoliticised and, thus, individualist framework, engendering feelings of responsibility and guilt on the part of the victim; 3) acting upon the occurrence of the problem and not in a preventive manner; and 4) being paternalistic and care-based in nature with scant transformative effect. These aspects have already been alluded to by authors such as Alcázar (2012, p. 113-115), Fernández (2015, p. 31) and Ríos (2003, p. 80-81, 84).

What has been stated in the foregoing text means that a large body of the professionals interviewed work subject to a system that does not fully fall in line with the way in which they view and understand the problem. Nevertheless, instead of transforming that logic, they immerse themselves in it and act accordingly. This begs the question as to whether the professional role is more associated with order and control rather than strictly with transformation and emancipation.

- The results obtained point to scant training, meager study programmes and lack of resources for reflection/criticism in relation to the hegemonic discourse and the specific categories of thought as the primary difficulties for the professionals. In order to overcome and strive to transform these realities, emphasis should be placed on the importance of training and incorporation of the GP (Fuente, 2012, p. 388; Fernández, 2015, p. 31; Fidalgo, 2005, p. 21, 25; López, 2013, p. 81; Tobías, 2018, p. 142-143).

In relation to this latter aspect, we have been able to determine that the incorporation of the GP is still an emerging process, given that the lack of knowledge, the scant training and the difficulty to apply it in professional practice have become apparent. Some of those interviewed claim that it is a new issue and calls for time; however, it is necessary to question whether the time factor is the single reason or whether it is due to the fact that academia operates under the continued existence of a patriarchal ideology.

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