



Potkanski-Palka, Monika

Domestic Violence and COVID-19 in Austria. Increased vulnerability and risk for children and young people

SIAK-Journal - Zeitschrift für Polizeiwissenschaft und polizeiliche Praxis (2/2021), 53-65.

doi: 10.7396/2021_2_E

Um auf diesen Artikel als Quelle zu verweisen, verwenden Sie bitte folgende Angaben:

Potkanski-Palka, Monika (2021). Domestic Violence and COVID-19 in Austria. Increased vulnerability and risk for children and young people, SIAK-Journal - Zeitschrift für Polizeiwissenschaft und polizeiliche Praxis (2), 53-65, Online: http://dx.doi.org/10.7396/2021_2_E.

© Bundesministerium für Inneres – Sicherheitsakademie / Verlag NWV, 2021

Hinweis: Die gedruckte Ausgabe des Artikels ist in der Print-Version des SIAK-Journals im Verlag NWV (<http://nwv.at>) erschienen.

Online publiziert: 9/2021

Domestic Violence and COVID-19 in Austria

Increased vulnerability and risk for children and young people

Domestic violence includes all forms of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence and affects people of all genders and ages. It usually takes place within the family and the household. Domestic violence during pandemics such as the current COVID-19 pandemic is associated with economic stress, disaster-related instability, increased exposure to exploitative relationships, and reduced options for support (Usher et al. 2020, 549). Social isolation and reduction of social contacts in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19 aggravate the living conditions of vulnerable groups such as (young) children and teenagers. Despite a statement by Karl Nehammer (ÖVP) the Federal Minister of the Interior and Susanne Raab (ÖVP), at the time Federal Minister for Women and Integration claiming that the number of cases of domestic violence has not increased in Austria during the COVID-19 pandemic, the following study, as well as other similar international studies, paints an entirely different picture. The ten teachers interviewed for this study all share the belief that the lockdowns have led to an increase in violence in certain families, in particular families with a low socio-economic status and in which violence was already prevalent before the pandemic started.



**MONIKA
POTKANSKI-PALKA,**
Sociologist and Lecturer.

PREFACE

The present contribution is as an attempt to reflect the potential challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis in Austria in connection with domestic violence. On the one hand, it discusses violence within the family from a theoretical viewpoint, with a particular focus on the legal framework. On the other hand, vulnerable groups such as children and adolescents (with and without migration experience) are highlighted in order to discuss the short and long-term consequences of the measures taken by the Austrian government to contain the corona virus in Austria since March 2020. Ten education experts were

asked to detail their experiences during the three strict lockdowns that took place in Austria in March/April and November/December of 2020, as well as in January/February of 2021 and included, among other measures, the closure of kindergartens, daycare centres, schools and youth leisure facilities. This expert group consisted of educators and teachers from Austrian schools and teaching institutions. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and evaluated, and served to give this article practical relevance as well as insight into the actual work and challenges of teaching staff in Austria during the three lockdowns.

I. DEFINITIONS

The home should be a place of safety and security. However, close relationships can also be a breeding ground for psychological, physical and sexual violence. The following article deals with domestic violence in relation to the COVID-19 crisis in Austria. While the theoretical section discusses different aspects of domestic violence as well as the legal framework, the empirical part presents the results of a qualitative study carried out for this article. Ten educators and teachers from Austria were surveyed on their observations as education experts; however, they acted as private persons in the context of the survey. The objective was to bring to light facts and figures, as well as the personal experiences of educational staff, and to embed them in the theory.

In this article, “domestic violence” is used as an umbrella term for all forms of violence that affect both children and adults within the family as listed below:

Neglect

Neglect is the persistent or repeated failure to provide caring action by persons responsible for care intended to ensure the mental and physical health of the child. Parents or guardians can perpetrate neglect actively and intentionally, or passively due to insufficient insight or knowledge. Neglect causes a chronic undersupply of the child’s vital needs, affects or damages their physical and mental development, and can lead to serious permanent damage or even death.

Mental and physical abuse

Physical child abuse is defined as all actions of parents or other caregivers carried out through physical force or violence causing significant, non-accidental injuries to the child, physical and mental damage and impairment of further child development. Mental child abuse can be

understood as repetitive or extreme behaviour patterns by caregivers or parents, which lead children to believe that they are worthless, defective, unloved, unwanted or just there to meet someone else’s needs.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is defined as all sexual activity that is undertaken towards or in front of a child against their will, whether the child expresses their resistance verbally or in any other form or not. The perpetrator usually uses their position of power and authority over the child.

Violence “in the name of honour”

This term includes all actions that take place within traditional patriarchal families where close male relatives exercise violent behaviour in the belief that the family’s honour needs to be protected from damage or restored. While this form of violence mostly affects post-pubescent girls or women (as in traditional patriarchal families, the family honour is linked to female members of the family), boys and men can likewise become victims. Honour-related violence includes various forms of violence such as oppression, threats, extortion and abuse.

Female Genital Mutilation

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a form of gender-based violence, which, according to estimates by the WHO, affects approximately 200 million girls and women worldwide and is particularly widespread as a cultural custom in West Africa, East Africa and Central Africa as well as in countries such as Yemen, Iraq, Indonesia and Malaysia. In half of the 29 countries where it is practiced, genital mutilation is carried out before girls are 5 years old, and in the other half between the ages of 5 and 14 (Nestlinger et al. 2017, 6).

In response to studies finding cases of

FGM in Austria, the Federal Ministry for Health and Women's Affairs in 2017 published a guide for victims of FGM, their relatives and institutions, which lists important resources and contact points (Potkanski-Palka 2018, 3).

Domestic violence

Domestic violence is defined as physical disputes between parents or life partners. In many cases, children and youth are directly or indirectly affected as victims, an experience that has a significant impact on their individual development. Observed and experienced violence can lead to impaired emotional, social, physical and cognitive development and affect or even endanger the child's well-being.

II. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence includes all forms of physical, sexual and psychological or economic violence and affects people of all genders and ages. It usually takes place within the family and the household, but it can also affect people connected to current or former relationships who do not live in the same household. The health and social consequences are often severe as, in addition to individual suffering, domestic violence also causes high social costs.

According to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against women and domestic violence (Council of Europe 2011b, Article 3), domestic violence includes all violent acts

- ▶ containing physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence
- ▶ within a family or household, or between past and present spouses or partners
- ▶ regardless of whether the perpetrator shares or used to share the same apartment/house as the victim.

Domestic violence occurs in different relationship constellations, regardless of

biological or legally recognised family ties, and regardless of gender, age, social status, race or sexual orientation. Furthermore, it should be noted that violence is common after a relationship has ended (Council of Europe 2011a, paragraphs 41–42).

Domestic violence includes different relationship constellations, forms and patterns of violence. However, there are certain characteristics of domestic violence that differentiate it from experiences of violence outside the home:

- ▶ The acts of violence take place mostly, if not exclusively, within the home.
- ▶ The victim's physical, sexual or psychological integrity is threatened or violated by someone they share a close bond with, often a family member.
- ▶ Separation, divorce or the dissolution of the household may exacerbate the harmful emotional relationship between the victim and the perpetrator.
- ▶ There is a close connection between dominance/controlling behaviour and violence in a relationship, especially regarding violent behaviour towards children, romantic partners or elderly persons in the household. The acts of violence are rooted in this imbalance of power between victim and perpetrator.

III. LEGAL FRAMEWORK IN AUSTRIA

a. Protection against Violence Act

The first "Federal Act on the Protection against Domestic Violence" came into force on 1 May 1997. It created the legal prerequisites for a swift and effective protection of victims from domestic violence and enabled police for the first time to ban persons threatening violence (endangering persons) from entering the apartment where the threatened person lived. In addition, perpetrators of violence can now be turned away if they refuse to leave the

home voluntarily. The principle of “Wer schlägt, der geht” (“the one who does the hitting has to go”) thus enables the endangered person to remain in their familiar environment. Since the introduction of this Act, numerous legal improvements have been achieved.

Another protective instrument was introduced as recently as last year: Since 1 January 2020, in combination with the entry ban, the perpetrator can be banned from approaching the victim within 100 meters. This prohibition of approaching the victim protects them wherever they are, and no longer solely in their apartment or house.

If long-term protection against the perpetrator person proves necessary, the endangered person has the option of applying to the court for a temporary injunction. Depending on the nature of the violent and/or dangerous situation, this injunction can be aimed at ensuring that the perpetrator:

- ▶ may not enter the apartment/house and its immediate surroundings for a specified period of time (“Protection against violence in apartments”, Section 382b Enforcement Code) and/or
- ▶ is prohibited from staying in certain places for a set period of time, nor approaching these places or the endangered person, nor are they allowed to contact the endangered person (“General protection against violence”, Section 382e Enforcement Code) and/or
- ▶ has to refrain from encroaching on the privacy of the person at risk (“Protection against encroachments on the private sphere”, Section 382g of the Enforcement Code).

A temporary injunction can be issued independently from a police ban and vice versa.

b. Entry or approach bans to protect against violence and eviction by the police

The regulation of approach and entry bans, as well as expulsion, can be found in Section 38a of the Security Police Act. The police are authorised to forbid the perpetrator from entering an apartment or house, including the surrounding area within a radius of 100 meters. An entry ban is always linked to a ban on approaching the endangered person within the same radius. If necessary, coercive violence can be used to enforce the ban.

A precondition for imposing an entry or approach ban is the imminent danger of a violent attack on the life, health or freedom of a person or persons living in the same apartment or house.

An entry or approach ban is issued for a period of 2 weeks and police carry out a compliance check within the first 3 days. If a temporary injunction according to Sections 382b or 382e Enforcement Code is requested from the court within these 2 weeks, the ban is extended to 4 weeks. This gives the court time to decide on the application and provides continuous protection for the person or persons at risk. During the time the ban is imposed, the banned person may not enter the apartment/house or other defined protected area, not even with the consent of the person at risk. If the perpetrator tries to do so regardless, they thereby commit an administrative offence and are required to pay a fine of up to EUR 2,500. In the event of continued disregard, arrest may follow.

c. Longer-term protection through court injunction

The relevant regulations can be found in Section 382b, Section 382e and Section 382g of the Enforcement Code. If the endangered person requires longer-term protection from the perpetrator person, the

law offers possibility of applying to the district court of the place of residence for an injunction according to Section 382b or Section 382e.

d. Temporary injunction “Protection against violence in homes”

If it is unreasonable for a person at risk to continue living with the perpetrator due to a history of physical attacks or threats or their suffering from considerable psychological stress, they can apply for a temporary injunction in accordance with Section 382b Enforcement Code for the “protection against violence in homes”. As the apartment is assumed to be urgently needed by the person at risk, the court can order the perpetrator to leave the apartment and its immediate surroundings and ban them from returning. This injunction can be issued for 6 months at most. If, however, during this time one of the proceedings listed in the law (such as i.e. divorce proceedings) is pending, an interim injunction can be applied for until the proceedings are closed.

e. Temporary injunction “General protection against violence”

If it is unreasonable to allow meetings between the person at risk and the perpetrator due to previous instances of attacks or threats or a significant strain on the victim’s mental health, an injunction in accordance with Section 382e Enforcement Code for “general protection against violence” can be applied for. It is not a prerequisite for the person at risk to have ever lived under the same roof as the perpetrator. In this case, the court can issue a ban that prohibits the perpetrator’s entry to the designated places (e.g. place of work of the person at risk, school or kindergarten of their children), in order to prevent contact with the person at risk. This temporary injunction can be issued for one year at

most and, in the event of a violation by the perpetrator, it can be extended for another year. If an interim injunction for “protection against violence in homes” is applied for at the same time, the interim injunction for general protection against violence can also take effect. It ends when one of the legally stipulated proceedings (e.g. divorce proceedings) is initiated.

f. Temporary injunction “Protection against invasion of privacy” (Stalking)

Under certain conditions, an interim injunction in accordance with Section 382g Enforcement Code to protect against encroachment on privacy, the so-called Stalking, can also be considered. However, if a Stalking is only applied for after an entry and approach ban has been imposed, the ban cannot be extended to 4 weeks. If the perpetrator disregards an injunction to protect against violence in the home, they are committing an administrative offence and required to pay a fine of up to EUR 2,500. The same applies in case if the perpetrator does not adhere to the order to avoid certain places or meeting the person at risk and or to refrain from personal contact or persecution. In the event of continued disregard, they may be arrested.

g. Criminal offence “continued violence”

The “Second Protection Against Violence Act” introduced the criminal offence of “continued use of violence” (Section 107b of the Penal Code), defined as acts of violence, such as abuse, physical violence and dangerous threats, that occur over a prolonged period of time, as is typically the case with domestic violence. The basic penalty is up to 3 years of imprisonment; qualified offences such as continued violence against children and adolescents younger than 15 or against the frail and people with disabilities and the infliction of sexual violence, as well as violence in-

flicted over a particularly long period of time or having particularly serious consequences, are punished significantly more severely.

IV. FIGURES ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN AUSTRIA

Reliable figures on domestic violence are difficult to obtain due to the high number of unreported cases. According to the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), every fifth Austrian woman aged 15 or older has experienced physical and/or sexualised violence, while every third woman has experienced some form of sexual harassment (FRA 2019). According to the Vienna Intervention Center against Violence in the Family, 8,748 of the 10,836 police reports filed in 2019 related to entry bans according to Section 38a of the Security Police Act (Wiener Interventionsstelle gegen Gewalt in der Familie 2020, 47).

When looking at the long-term statistical data on domestic violence in Austria, numbers rise between 2011 and 2017. A lower number of entry bans pronounced in 2018 may explain the sudden decline in cases that year (Wiener Interventionsstelle gegen Gewalt in der Familie 2020, 48); these numbers increased again in 2019.

There is no single cause of domestic violence, but rather multiple risk factors, some

of which are interrelated. Riskfactors are differentiated at the level of the individual, relationship, community and society. Trying to find simple linear causalities usually does not help with understanding the actual causes and is of little use when dealing with violence. This approach often leads to an oversimplified perpetrator-victim model and ignores the circularity of relationships.

V. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE COVID-19 CRISIS IN AUSTRIA

Domestic violence during national emergency situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, is associated with economic stress, disaster-related instability, increased exposure to exploitative relationships, and reduced options for support (Usher et al. 2020, 549). Social isolation and the reduction of social contacts in order to reduce the spread of the coronavirus aggravate the living conditions of vulnerable groups such as, inter alia, children, women in general but particularly those with migration experience, people with disabilities, or people who live in relationships where there is a history of violence.

According to a statement by Karl Nehammer (ÖVP) the Federal Minister of the Interior and Susanne Raab (ÖVP), at

Source: Potkanski-Palka

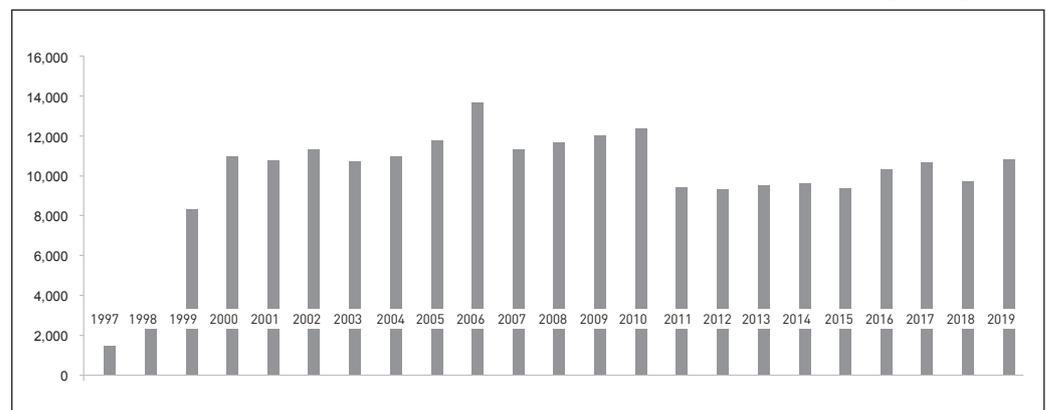


Figure 1: Police reports of domestic violence recorded across Austria (1997–2019)

the time Federal Minister for Woman and Integration, published in September 2020, the number of cases of domestic violence had not increased in Austria since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. Since the start of the first lockdown in March and April, no increased case numbers had been reported. After the loosening of the restrictions in April, women's shelters and other care facilities reported a slight increase in consultations provided by and admissions to the facilities.

With the closure of daycare centres, schools and youth leisure facilities, many children not only lost their only contact person in case of emergency, but the reporting chains for child protection were likewise broken without replacement; for victims, the possibilities for reporting domestic violence or reaching out for help became very limited.

As for approach and entry bans imposed during the first lockdown, their numbers have increased from 886 in February to 1,081 in April; after the lockdown had ended, the numbers remained high in July and August, at 1,085 and 1,055 respectively. Although the statistical data for the first lockdown does not show a significant increase in the number of approach and entry bans issued in Austria, it is safe to assume that changes in living conditions, reduction of social contacts, exit restrictions and a major increase in the time spent together in confined spaces have exacerbated conflicts and tensions within families. In particular, the closure of schools, kindergartens, after-school care centres and educational institutions completely upended everyday life for families.

A second strict lockdown started on 17 November and lasted until 2 December. Again, schools, kindergartens, after-school care centres and educational institutions were closed; however, schools

offered emergency care for students who could not stay at home or who did not have laptops and thus could not participate in distance learning from home. Just like during the first lockdown, a 24/7 curfew was introduced, and people were only allowed to leave their homes to cover the basic needs of daily life (food, medication), for doctor's appointments, official or judicial appointments that could not be postponed, averting an immediate danger to life, limb and property, professional purposes or individual outdoor sports or walks. A third strict lockdown was announced on 26 December and lasted until 7 February (status: 21 February 2021).

Children and teenagers suffering during the pandemic

International research is increasingly showing that the tough restrictions during the so-called first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic harmed children more than they may have benefited society as a whole. According to the German paediatrician survey "Homeschooling and Health 2020," carried out in June and July 2020 on behalf of social insurance provider pronova BKK as part of an online survey, children from socially disadvantaged families suffered particularly from school and daycare closures (pronova BKK 2020). Paediatricians in hot spots reported an increase in diagnoses of health problems, which they attributed to the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the study, 44 % of paediatricians from practices in socially disadvantaged areas noticed more worrying physical symptoms in children and adolescents (pronova BKK 2020). Above all, paediatricians increasingly observed sleep disorders, abdominal pain, headaches and concentration problems, particularly in children from socially disadvantaged areas, while cases of depression were on the rise among all young

people. Thirty-four percent of paediatricians in socially weaker areas and 30 % of all paediatricians also reported an increase in developmental delays in motor skills, which they attributed to closing playgrounds and other restrictions imposed during lockdown (pranova BKK 2020). Other recent international studies arrived at similar conclusions (see Ghosh et al. 2020; Usher et al. 2020; Campbell 2020).

Confinement at home and school problems exacerbated by homeschooling made life particularly difficult for children from socially disadvantaged homes (pranova BKK 2020). “For children, school is not only an educational hub, but also a home outside the home with plentiful free space. Schools offer a window of freedom, a scope of interaction with fellows and seniors and psychological solace besides providing pedagogy and scholastics.” (Gosh et al. 2020, 228) When it comes to homeschooling, many parents are overwhelmed by the double workload coupled with a lack of contact with the teachers (pranova BKK 2020). Lorenz et al. conclude that the closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic had far-reaching consequences, not only for children and their parents, but also the economy as a whole (Lorenz et al. 2020). In Austria, approximately 1.3 million children under the age of 15 were affected by school closures. A partial or temporary closure of childcare facilities forced parents to reorganise their everyday and working lives. While many parents cut back on their work hours and devoted themselves to educating their children at home, many others parents were either unable or unwilling to provide homeschooling to their children.

Due to uneven distribution of educational capital among parents, some families were better equipped to provide assistance than others, and children and teenagers from migrant and socially disadvantaged

families in particular faced major challenges. Their parents were often overwhelmed due to their lack of language skills, their own poor educational background or other social reasons, and were unable to help them with their classes. Social conditions likewise play an important role: Being unable to afford the technical equipment needed to follow online lessons and the lack of a quiet place to study in often cramped living conditions are among the most common and important factors that prevent children benefitting from homeschooling. It can therefore be concluded that, under the current circumstances in Austria, homeschooling widens the social gap and diminishes the chances of children who are already inherently disadvantaged. In short, COVID-19 exacerbates injustice in education.

As schools, kindergartens, sports clubs and other facilities for children and young people provide social participation, their closure during lockdown means that children are confined to their parents' home and may no longer receive the support they need. In addition, the closure of public institutions means that, in a certain sense, state control as well as social control is lost. Usually, if children experience violence at home, trained educators and teachers can often recognise particular signs and indications and take action. School and other care facilities offer a certain degree of protection against the hidden violence that takes place behind closed doors at home. Teachers can also directly intervene, up to and including contacting the child welfare office.

VI. QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

a. Selection of experts

For the following study, qualitative interviews were conducted with ten educators and teachers who acted in their capacity

as education experts at eight Austrian schools.

For this purpose, an interview guideline was created and adapted depending on the course of each individual interview. Since the expert interviews served as supporting data for the theoretical discussion of violence in the family in relation to the restrictions due to the lockdown (closing schools, kindergartens and other care facilities for children and adolescents) in Austria, the respondents were recruited and interviewed as private persons and coordination with school boards, etc., was not required.

The respondents were recruited through personal contacts and recommendations, and the data they provided was anonymized and treated as confidential. In addition, due to the prevailing restrictions in order to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus in public spaces and when contacting official bodies, the respondents were contacted via phone or e-mail and informed of the procedure for the study. In all cases, they agreed to participate in the interviews. The interviews themselves were then carried out either via phone or videocall using Zoom or Skype, recorded and transcribed. The evaluation was based on a qualitative content analysis.

b. Experts' profiles

The teachers recruited for this study were a decidedly heterogeneous group: some already had many years of experience in the school system, while others were young teachers who had only been working for a short time. Six are from Vienna, one from Burgenland, two from Lower Austria and one from Carinthia. The sample also shows a bias with regard to gender: only two male teachers could be persuaded to participate in the qualitative interviews, the remaining eight were female. Half of the respondents work in elementary

Source: Potkanski-Palka

Gender	Federal State	School type
Female	Vienna	Volksschule
Female	Vienna	Volksschule
Female	Vienna	Volksschule
Female	Vienna	Neue Mittelschule
Female	Lower Austria	Volksschule
Female	Lower Austria	Volksschule
Female	Lower Austria	Gymnasium
Female	Carinthia	Gymnasium
Male	Vienna	Neue Mittelschule
Male	Burgenland	Neue Mittelschule

Table 1: Sample overview by gender, federal state and school type

schools (Volksschule), three in secondary schools (Gymnasium) and two in Neue Mittelschule, a new form of secondary school (see Table 1).

c. Field research

The interviews took place between September 2020 and February 2021. During this period, lockdowns were tightened or lengthened, then loosened again. This mainly happened in December 2020 and January/February 2021. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and evaluated using qualitative content analysis.

VII. RESULTS

a. Excessive demands on parents

All experts confirm that the closure of schools and daycare centres to curb the spread of the coronavirus has hit families hard. Working parents in particular were faced with the challenge of reorganising care for their children and reconciling it with their own work obligations. The restrictions related to the pandemic continued to affect family life and the economic situation of parents and children. However, experts also could observe significant differences in relation to the socio-economic status of the parents. Those with a higher socio-economic status had more contact with schools and teachers than parents

with a low socio-economic status. In addition, parents of high socio-economic status were more likely to approach teachers of their own accord, while parents with low socio-economic status did so very rarely.

During the three hard lockdowns and the closure of schools and kindergartens, the Austrian government ensured that parents – especially parents working in positions of systemic importance – had an opportunity to use “emergency care” provided to children both at schools and kindergartens. According to the interviewed educators, this offer was mainly taken up by parents with low socio-economic status who were entitled to this care due to their employment in sectors such as health care, catering, public transport and retail. However, one expert reported a difference between the individual lockdowns and the school’s procedure with regard to eligibility for emergency care: during the first lockdown in March and April 2020, only students whose parents worked in jobs of systemic relevance were allowed to take advantage of the offer. This approach was abandoned during the second and third lockdown in order to also reach students from socially disadvantaged families or families where violence might occur or was already prevalent; instead, teachers actively contacted these parents. The number of children in emergency care increased significantly during the latter two lockdowns compared to the first, in accordance with a decision deliberately taken by the schools in order to support children from socially disadvantaged families and provide them with a safe space.

Some experts mention that many of their students talk about violence within their families in general, regardless of the pandemic. In most cases, the perpetrator of psychological or physical violence are the parents, but sometimes also other family members. Since teachers had no direct

contact with their students during lockdown, “emergency care” was the only way to take students out of a harmful family environment. The emergency care at schools therefore became not only a space to learn, but also a place of refuge.

b. Increased risk of violence within families

Poverty, precarious housing conditions, unemployment, financial worries and quarantine measures increase the risk of falling victim to violence. All expert studies confirm this trend, emphasising that a higher risk of increased violence predominates in particular in families already affected by domestic violence before the start of the pandemic. Despite it being difficult to detect cases of domestic violence in general, experts agree that the closure of schools makes it even harder to spot certain signs of increased domestic violence. Unusual behaviour may turn out to be a sign that something is amiss with the child’s situation; however, it is not necessarily always connected to domestic violence.

In addition, violence is not only expressed in the form of physical attacks leaving visible traces on the victim’s body: psychological violence likewise causes serious long-term damage in children. However, according to the experts, the loss of daily, direct contact with students due to lockdowns and school closures has led to a significant reduction in opportunities to detect an increase in violence in children’s families. Experts assume that the levels of violence may have increased during the lockdowns in particular within families with low socioeconomic status and in restricted housing conditions with little space for privacy or studying. The same is true for families living under unstable circumstances or with family members who have a violent past. A German study conducted by the Technical University

of Munich in cooperation with RWI – Leibniz Institute for Economic Research and the Geneva School of Economics and Management yields similar results (Steinert/Ebert 2020). The authors conclude that the risk of violence against women and children increased significantly if women and children were in home quarantine and the family experienced financial worries due pandemic-related job loss or economic recession. In addition, violence was more common in households with young children under the age of 10 (ibid., 2 f).

c. Short-term and long-term consequences for children and adolescents

The experts report they have noticed children having increased difficulties in concentrating and paying attention, as well as significant setbacks in learning. They have also observed an increase in accompanying health problems, such as obesity.

Looking at the socio-economic stratification, one sees that children of parents with high educational qualifications seem little affected; however, there is an increase among children of parents with only a secondary school qualification (Hauptschulabschluss). It is to be expected that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic chronic physical and psychological diseases might become more common. Some experts highlight the risk of depression, psychological and behavioural problems.

According to the experts' observations, children and teenagers feel more stressed and lonely as a result of the pandemic. Their students reported worsening mental health problems and stress-related physical complaints such as headaches and abdominal pain. These observations were particularly relevant for children from dysfunctional families, with parents with a low socioeconomic status or a migration

background, as well as living in cramped housing conditions. Therefore, schools made an active effort to contact these families in particular during the second and third lockdown and to inform them of their eligibility for "emergency care".

VIII. CONCLUSION

Domestic violence during the current COVID-19 pandemic is associated with economic stress, disaster-related instability, increased exposure to exploitative relationships, and reduced options for support in Austria. Social isolation and reduction of social contacts in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19 aggravate the living conditions of children, especially in families where violence was already present before the pandemic and in families with a low economic background.

As schools, kindergartens, sports clubs and other facilities for children and young people provide social participation, their closure during lockdown meant that children were confined to their parents' home and no longer received the support they needed. In addition, the closure of public institutions meant that, in a certain sense, state and social control was lost. Usually, if children experience violence at home, trained educators and teachers can recognise certain signs and indications and take action. School and other care facilities offer a certain extent of protection against the hidden violence that takes place behind closed doors at home. In addition, it can be concluded that, under the current circumstances in Austria, homeschooling widens the social gap and diminishes the chances of children who are already inherently disadvantaged. In short, COVID-19 exacerbates injustice in education.

Moreover, the interviews with experts show that teachers faced major challenges in their professional and private lives by

the restrictions mandated to contain the pandemic: on the one hand, the burden of continuing to teach students via home schooling; preparing, revising and improving their homework; and planning lessons suited to learning at home. On the other hand, many teachers were also parents themselves and busy looking after their own children. Some of the teachers felt they were twice as burdened while not receiving enough support. One expert mentioned that she would have appreciated psychological support in the form of a school psychologist. However, the resident psychologist left the school shortly before the start of the first lockdown and the vacancy could not be filled during the crisis. Teachers agree that they would appreciate more psychological support in general, regardless of the pandemic.

Sources of information

- Campbell, Andrew (2020). *An Increasing Risk of Family Violence during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Strengthening Community Collaborations to Save Lives*. April 2020, *Forensic Science International Reports* 2(3), Online: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsir.2020.100089> (25.01.2021).
- Council of Europe (2011a). *Explanatory Report to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*, Council of Europe Treaty Series – No. 210, 11.05.2011, Istanbul, Online: <https://rm.coe.int/16800d383a> (25.01.2021).
- Council of Europe (2011b). *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*, Council of Europe Treaty Series – No. 210, 11.05.2011, Istanbul, Online: <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e> (25.01.2021).
- FRA (2019). *Fundamental Rights Report 2019*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2019/fundamental-rights-report-2019> (25.01.2021).
- Ghosh, Ritwik et al. (2020). *Impact of COVID-19 on children: Special focus on psychosocial aspect*. *Minerva Pediatrica*, 72(3), 226–235.
- Lorenz, Ramona et al. (2020). *Unterricht während der Corona-Pandemie: Erste Ergebnisse der bundesweiten Lehrkräftebefragung*, Institut für Schulentwicklungsforschung (IFS), Dortmund, Online: http://www.ifs.tu-dortmund.de/cms/de/Home/Pressematerialien/Pressematerialien/UCP_Kurzbericht_final.pdf (25.01.2021).
- Nestlinger, Jann et al. (2017). *Eine empirische Studie zu weiblicher Genitalverstümmelung in Deutschland. Daten – Zusammenhänge – Perspektiven*, Freiburg.
- Potkanski-Palka, Monika (2018). ... *da war keine Liebe. Zwangsheirat und geschlechtsbezogene Gewalt in Österreich*, Unabh. Veröffentlichung.
- Pronova BKK (2020). *Homeschooling und Gesundheit 2020. Ergebnisse einer Kinderärztebefragung*, August 2020, Leverkusen.
- Steinert, Janina/Ebert, Cara (2020). *Gewalt an Frauen und Kindern in Deutschland während COVID-19-bedingten Ausgangsbeschränkungen: Zusammenfassung der Ergebnisse*. Technische Universität München, RWI – Leibniz-Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung, München.
- Usher, Kim et al. (2020). *Family violence and COVID-19: Increased vulnerability and reduced options for support*, *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing* (29), 549–552.
- Wiener Interventionsstelle gegen Gewalt in der Familie (2020). *Tätigkeitsbericht 2019*, Online: <https://www.interventionsstelle-wien.at/download/?id=taetigkeitsbericht-2019.pdf> (25.01.2021).