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THE DYNAMICS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: A MULTI-FACTORIAL ANALYSIS OF THEORETICAL MODELS AND THE SOCIO- CULTURAL CONTEXT OF NORTH MACEDONIA

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Abstract

This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the causes and theoretical frameworks surrounding domestic violence, with a specific focus on the socio-cultural context of North Macedonia. By moving beyond outdated one-dimensional models that attribute violence solely to social class or individual pathology, this study utilizes the multi-factorial socio-ecological model to explore how individual, relational, community, and societal factors intersect to perpetuate abuse. The research evaluates several scientific theories - including social learning, learned helplessness, and the psychopathological approach - while critiquing the myths of "loss of control" and "reciprocal violence." Central to this analysis is the Duluth "Power and Control Wheel," which identifies violence as a deliberate pattern of behavior intended to maintain dominance rather than an isolated outburst of anger. In the context of North Macedonia, the paper examines how a prolonged period of societal transition, economic fragility, and deeply rooted patriarchal traditions contribute to the subordinate position of women. The study concludes that domestic violence is an expression of historically unequal power relations and argues that effective prevention requires simultaneous intervention across all levels of the social-ecological framework. By shifting the focus from victim behavior to the perpetrator's intent and the broader social climate, this paper advocates for a systemic approach to fostering a culture of non-violence and gender equality.

Keywords: *Domestic Violence, Socio-Ecological Model, Power and Control, Patriarchal Traditions, Gender Inequality*

1. Methodology: Integrative Conceptual Analysis and Case Synthesis

This study adopts a qualitative, theory-driven synthesis to examine the interplay between criminological models of domestic violence and the socio-cultural context of North Macedonia. The research critically evaluates and synthesizes established explanatory paradigms to build a more comprehensive analytical framework.

The analysis proceeds in two main stages. First, it contrasts early individualist explanations - such as psychopathological approaches, learned helplessness, and reciprocal violence models - with systemic frameworks like the Duluth Power and Control Model (Pence & Paymar, 1993) and the Socio-Ecological Model (Krug et al., 2002). This comparison serves to highlight how older models often overlook the perpetrator's deliberate intent to establish coercive control. Second, the study uses the socio-ecological framework to examine how macro-level factors in North Macedonia - including post-socialist economic shifts, traditional gender roles, and community dynamics - interact with relational and individual risk factors.

The criminological, legal, and sociological literature analyzed in this paper was selected for its foundational contributions to domestic violence theory, its insights into intimate partner coercion, and its relevance to transition economies in the Western Balkans. By synthesizing these theoretical and regional sources, the paper bridges conceptual models with the practical realities of domestic violence in North Macedonia, providing a grounded basis for prevention strategies.

2. Factors Influencing the Exercise of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a pervasive and universal phenomenon occurring in all countries and societies worldwide. Naturally, there are variations from country to country and society to society regarding its prevalence levels, the causes influencing its occurrence, and the normative frameworks regulating it. What remains constant and immutable across all nations is the consequences of violence, which are devastating not only for the victims themselves but for society as a whole (Metaj-Stojanova, 2016). Domestic violence has deeper impacts and consequences than the injuries following violent episodes; most frequently, it is triggered and influenced by the desire for power and control over another person. Various authors hold differing opinions regarding the causes of violence within the family or social circles. However, the prevailing idea is that only multi-factorial approaches are suitable for adequately explaining and analyzing this phenomenon.

In the early stages of researching this phenomenon, one-dimensional models dominated the explanation of domestic violence. Thus, for a long time, it was believed that belonging to a lower social class was the most significant factor in the manifestation of domestic violence. In fact, even to this day, this dimension carries great weight in explaining physical violence. However, the current dominant view is

that a series of influencing factors exist - intertwined with one another - which must be considered collectively to explain the causes of domestic violence.

Indeed, today no one can claim to explain the phenomenon of domestic violence based on a single influencing factor. Domestic violence can by no means be attributed to a single factor, as no individual factor can explain why some individuals behave violently toward others or why violence is more prevalent in some communities than in others. Violence results from a complex interplay among individual, relational, social, cultural, and environmental factors. Its causes are complex and occur at different interacting levels. To represent this complexity of relationships and influences, the so-called **socio-ecological model** is often utilized (Krug et al., 2002). The primary goal of this model is to prevent violence before it occurs. Preventing domestic violence necessitates an understanding of the factors that influence its emergence.

The socio-ecological model was first introduced in the late 1970s and was initially used to explain violence against children. Recently, researchers have been utilizing this model to understand intimate partner violence and elder abuse. This model explores the relationship between the individual and contextual factors, viewing violence as a product of multiple levels of influence on an individual's behavior.

The socio-ecological model examines the complex interaction between individual, relational, community, and social factors. This model allows us to understand the range of factors that put people at risk of experiencing violence or protect them from experiencing or exercising violence. The overlapping rings in the model illustrate how factors at one level influence factors at the next level.

In addition to clarifying these factors, the model also suggests that in order to prevent violence, it is necessary to act simultaneously across multiple levels of the model. This approach is more likely to support prevention efforts compared to interventions targeting only a single link in the model.

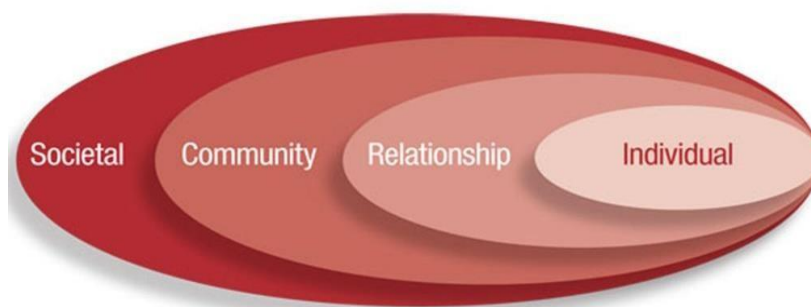


Figure 1.2. The Social-Ecological Model: A Framework for Prevention

2.1. Individual Level

The first level of the socio-ecological model aims to identify biological and personal history factors that influence an individual's behavior and increase the likelihood of them becoming a victim or a perpetrator of violence. In addition to biological and demographic factors, other influential elements include impulsivity, low educational attainment, low income levels, substance abuse, and previous histories or experiences of abuse (Krug et al., 2002).

Prevention strategies at this level are often designed to promote attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that prevent violence. Specific approaches may include conflict resolution training, life skills education, and empowerment programs for safe dating and healthy relationships.

2.2. Relational Level

The second level of the socio-ecological model explores how social and familial relationships - such as those with peers, intimate partners, and family members - increase the risk of experiencing violence as either a victim or a perpetrator. In cases of partner violence and child abuse, daily interaction or sharing a common residence with the abuser increases the likelihood of recurring violent episodes. Because individuals are bound together in an ongoing relationship, victims in these cases are likely to be repeatedly abused by the perpetrator. Regarding interpersonal violence among youth, research indicates that young people are much more likely to engage in violent behavior when such actions are encouraged and approved by their friends. Peers, intimate partners, and family members have the potential to shape the behavior and range of experiences of every individual (Krug et al., 2002).

The family, as the fundamental unit of society, is a significant factor in the education, personality formation, and development of the child. Since a child spends the majority of their time within the family, the behavior and upbringing provided by parents and other family members - along with family dynamics and the role models children grow up with - influence the child's intellectual, personal, and social development. Within the family, the child forms their first life experiences, learns to interact with others, gains experience and new responsibilities, and becomes involved in the family's functioning (Metaj-Stojanova, 2017). Healthy families, where relationships are based on love, respect, and mutual assistance among members, typically best fulfill the primary functions of the family, including the proper upbringing and education of children.

Dysfunctional families, on the other hand, are characterized by:

- broken family relationships;
- parents being overburdened with work/business or prolonged stays abroad;
- the existence of conflicts;
- parental divorce;
- drug addiction of any family member;

- the presence of violence;
- neglect of children or the elderly;
- difficult economic conditions within the family, etc.

Parental emotional distance, lack of sensitivity to children's needs, and failure to provide support, attention, and interest can lead to children becoming undisciplined, aggressive, and manifesting violent behavior.

Another factor influencing the emergence of violent behavior in children is emotional and physical abuse by parents or caregivers. The presence of domestic violence is a risk factor for the manifestation of aggressive behavior and results in the child's violent behavior in the community or within the family in the future. Emotional abuse and the presence of domestic violence are also risk factors for the child continuing to be a victim of violence in the future, even into adulthood, when they form their own family. In fact, abused children often have low self-esteem, suffer from depression, and frequently manifest feelings of fear. This can lead to withdrawal from peer groups and isolation, which greatly increases the likelihood of the child becoming a victim of violence. According to several studies, children who have grown up under hardship, for various reasons, exhibit problematic behavior. Life stressors such as parental divorce, parental alcoholism, or chronic illness of parents or other family members can result in increased aggression. Children raised in difficult circumstances are often impatient in their interactions with others and develop insecure attachments with their parents and unstable connections with others.

Prevention strategies at this level may include prevention programs focused on parents or the family, as well as mentoring programs designed to:

- strengthen parent-child communication;
- promote positive behaviors among peers;
- foster problem-solving skills;
- promote healthy relationships.

2.3. Community Level

The community consists of individuals, groups, and institutions that share the same spaces and have common interests. The third level of the socio-ecological model examines community contexts - or various environments such as schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods - in which social relationships develop. It aims to identify the characteristics of these environments that are linked to becoming a victim or a perpetrator of violence. High levels of mobility and frequent changes in residence (i.e., cases where people do not stay in a specific residence for long but move often), population heterogeneity (a highly diverse population with few social ties within the community), and high population density are characteristic examples of communities where violence exists (Krug et al., 2002). Furthermore, communities facing issues such as drug trafficking, high unemployment levels, or widespread social isolation (for example, people who do not know their neighbors or are not

involved in the community at all) are more likely to experience violence. Research on violence indicates that the opportunities for violence are greater in some community contexts than in others - for instance, in impoverished areas or where there is little institutional support.

Victims of community violence often come from the most vulnerable groups of society: those who stand out due to their color, name, religion, etc.; children who are distinguished by their style of dress; children of divorced parents; or children abandoned by their parents. Victims of community violence are also frequently children who are new to the environment, or those who are quiet, passive, insecure, and have low self-esteem. Additionally, children with low socio-economic status, children from different ethnic groups, children with disabilities, children without parents or parental care, and children who are victims of domestic violence are at higher risk.

Prevention strategies at this level focus on improving the physical and social environment (e.g., by creating safe places where people live, learn, work, and play) and by addressing other conditions that cause violence in communities (e.g., neighborhood poverty, lack of economic stability, high density of alcohol outlets, etc.). Prevention strategies are typically designed to improve economic and housing opportunities, as well as the climate, processes, and policies within school and work environments.

2.4. Societal Level

The fourth and final level of the socio-ecological model examines the broader societal factors that influence the creation of a climate in which violence is either encouraged or inhibited.

Major societal factors include:

- cultural norms that support violence as an acceptable way to resolve conflicts;
- norms that prioritize parental rights over the well-being of children;
- norms that entrench male dominance over women and children;
- norms that support the use of excessive force by police against citizens;
- norms that support political conflicts, etc. (Krug et al., 2002).

Other major societal factors include health, educational, economic, and social policies, which contribute to maintaining economic or social inequalities between groups in society. We otherwise refer to these as macro-level factors, which include: the influence of culture, the economy, politics, major demographic shifts, etc.

Social norms refer to the values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors shared by a group of people. They are often based on what people believe to be normal, typical, or appropriate. Social norms can act as unspoken rules or guidelines for how people behave and how they are expected to behave. Generally, people follow social norms because they want to fit in with those around them. Social norms can have positive or negative outcomes. Sometimes, social norms help people maintain healthy and

safe behaviors. At other times, social norms can have the opposite effect and influence people to engage in harmful behaviors.

Prevention strategies at this level include efforts to raise public awareness regarding respect for human values and positive social norms, efforts to strengthen the financial security of families, efforts to bolster education and employment opportunities, as well as other policies that improve the overall quality of life.

3. Theories Explaining Domestic Violence

Understanding the causes of the occurrence of domestic violence can assist communities in developing more effective responses to violence and in avoiding contradictory measures that may undermine efforts to protect victims and sanction perpetrators. Several scientific theories have attempted to explain the drivers of domestic violence.

3.1. Psychopathological Theory of Domestic Violence

At the onset of the early movements for the protection of abused women in the United States in the early 1970s, the prevailing theory as to why men committed violence was based on psychopathology. According to this theory, men who abused their wives were mentally ill and could be cured through medication or psychiatric treatment. Initial studies also characterized abused women as mentally ill.

However, the results of these studies were biased because they were primarily based on the examination of women who were hospitalized in psychiatric wards. Perpetrators - who appeared calm and credible in contrast to their wives - were questioned about the causes of their partners' conditions, thereby granting them the opportunity to minimize and deny their partners' accounts of the abuse they had endured (Zorza, 2002). According to psychopathological theory, personality disorders or early experiences of trauma predispose certain individuals toward violence. To be physically abusive is seen as having significant emotional problems. Parental abuse, rejection, and the failure to meet a child's needs can serve as the psychological source of the impulse to strike out. Individuals with these issues may choose partners with whom they reconstruct the dysfunctional relationships their own parents had.

3.2. Social Learning Theory

Subsequently, a theory was developed suggesting that violent behavior is learned. This theory explains violence by the fact that violent men learn such behavior within their families during childhood, while women tend to seek out abusive men if they witnessed their mothers being abused as children. Women who were physically or sexually abused in childhood are statistically more likely to become victims of violence in adulthood.

Although research indicates that boys who witness domestic violence are seven times more likely to become perpetrators when they grow up, many men who witnessed violence in childhood vow never to use violence and never become abusers themselves. Men also learn from society that it is "acceptable" to control a wife and that this control can be enforced through the exercise of violence. As emphasized in batterer intervention programs, boys who witnessed domestic violence and became abusers in adulthood learned more than just violent behaviors within the home. They learned specific gender roles for men and women, which contributed to their violent behavior as adults. However, these learned behaviors can be unlearned. This pattern is explained by Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes the role of imitation, reinforcement, and internalization of gender roles, in the development of violent behavior (Sellers, Cochran & Branch, 2005).

3.3. Loss of Control Theory

This theory, suggesting that violence is a result of losing control, is closely linked to Social Learning Theory. For instance, many believed that men abuse when they drink because alcohol causes them to lose control. Others explained male violence as an inability to control anger and frustration. Societal expectations of men were thought to prevent them from expressing these feelings, which would then accumulate and layer until the man lost control and released his negative emotions through the use of violence.

However, the loss of control theory is contradicted by the actual behavior of perpetrators. The violence they exercise is directed toward specific people, at specific times, and in specific places. For example, abusers choose not to strike their bosses or police officers, regardless of how angry or "out of control" they may feel (Klein et al., 1997). Furthermore, abusers follow their own internal rules and regulations regarding abusive behavior. They often choose to exercise violence against their partners only in private, or they may take steps to ensure they leave no visible evidence of the violence.

Abusers also carefully select the tactics they employ - some destroy property, some rely on threats of abuse, and others threaten the children. Through these decisions, perpetrators make choices about what they will or will not do to the victim, even when they claim they "lost it" or were "out of control." Such decision-making indicates that they are, in fact, in full control of their violent behaviors (Ganley & Schechter, 1995). Indeed, many abusers become more controlled and calmer as their level of aggression increases.

3.4. Learned Helplessness Theory

This theory was developed by Lenore Walker, a prominent American psychologist who studied the behavior of women remaining in violent relationships. Walker hypothesized that women stay in abusive relationships because constant violence strips them of the will to leave (Walker, 1979).

However, the theory of learned helplessness failed to account for the numerous social, economic, and cultural reasons that force a woman to remain in an abusive relationship. Women often have very rational reasons for staying - they may fear retaliation against themselves or their children, they may be unable to support themselves or their children financially, or their family and community may ostracize them if they leave.

Furthermore, the theory of learned helplessness is contradicted by the fact that women who survive abusive relationships make numerous attempts to leave and act very deliberately in an effort to minimize the violence directed at them and to protect their children. Women are typically persistent and often tenacious in their efforts to seek help; however, they seek help through channels that have proven most useful and reject those that have been unhelpful.

According to opponents of this theory, abused women do not live their lives in a state of "learned helplessness." On the contrary, they are often engaged in a process of "staying, leaving, and returning." During this process, women make active and conscious decisions based on changing circumstances. They may leave for short periods to escape violence and emphasize their dissatisfaction, hoping this will stop future violence. Initially, women generally do not try to end the relationship but rather negotiate to rebuild it on non-violent grounds (Dobash & Dobash, 1992).

Additionally, the theory of learned helplessness was based on characteristics presumed to be held by abused women, such as low self-esteem, a tendency toward withdrawal and isolation, or a loss of control. However, proponents of this theory failed to consider that these "characteristics" may, in fact, be the physical and psychological effects of violence. The static model of "learned helplessness" is further challenged by the fact that violence - and a woman's reaction to it - often changes over time. The first episode of violence is generally minor; victims may be shocked and cannot predict that the violence will recur. Instead, they believe in the possibility of change and remain committed to the relationship.

Victims may begin to analyze their own actions to find an explanation. This is unsurprising in societies that burden women with the responsibility for maintaining "happy husbands" and "happy families." It is expected that women ask themselves how their behavior "caused" their spouse's violence. Eventually, women realize that the solution to their husbands' violence does not lie in changing their own behavior. Some realize this very quickly, while other women require more time to overcome such socially constructed notions (Dobash & Dobash, 1992).

The theory of "learned helplessness" was accompanied by a resurgence of psychopathological theory. Theorists argued that women stayed in abusive relationships because they suffered from personality disorders that led them to seek abusive relationships as a means of self-punishment, or that they were "addicted" to abusive relationships. Others claimed that women were co-alcoholics with their husbands and could thus be "treated" through addiction programs. These theories failed to align with the fact that women may have very rational reasons for staying

in a violent relationship. Additionally, while abused women may be subject to an increased risk of substance or alcohol abuse, this is a *consequence* and not a cause of the violence.

3.5. Reciprocal Violence Theory

According to this theory, both the husband and the wife contribute to the violence within an intimate relationship. This theory assumes either that the relationship is characterized by mutual violence, or that in many cases, a woman "provokes" her husband with arguments that trigger a violent response. The woman's behavior is seen as contributing to the escalation of tension in the husband until he explodes in a violent rage, which is then followed by a period of calm (Straus, 1979). The theory based on "reciprocal" violence fails to account for the different ways in which men and women utilize violence in intimate relationships. Furthermore, any theory that describes violence as a response to "provocation" from the other partner is simply a form of victim-blaming. This theory also fails to account for cases where a spouse explodes over trivial matters or begins to beat his wife while she is asleep (Paymar, 1994).

3.6. Power and Control Theory

What was absent in all previous theories was the recognition of the perpetrator's intent to gain control over their partner's actions, thoughts, and feelings. The current understanding of abuse, represented by the "Power and Control Wheel," evolved from extensive discussions with abused women and perpetrators through the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (in Duluth, Minnesota). The Power and Control Wheel describes the various tactics an abuser employs to maintain power and control over their partner (Pence & Paymar, 1993).



In an abusive relationship, the perpetrator utilizes the pattern of tactics described in the Power and Control Wheel to reinforce the use of physical violence. Violent incidents are not isolated cases of loss of control, nor are they cyclical expressions of anger and frustration. On the contrary, each instance is part of a larger behavioral pattern designed to exert and maintain power and control over the victim. The Power and Control Wheel is based on the assumption that the goal of violence is the exercise of power and control over the woman.

Elements that formed the basis of previous theories - such as a boy witnessing violence in childhood or substance abuse - may be contributing factors, but they are not the "cause" of the violence. The abuser consciously uses these tactics to ensure the submission of his partner and to guarantee that he achieves his objective. Perpetrators of domestic violence bring specific expectations to their intimate relationships regarding who is in charge and what the acceptable mechanisms are for enforcing that dominance. It is these attitudes and beliefs, and not the behavior of the victim that determine whether or not perpetrators will exercise domestic violence (Ganley & Schechter, 1995).

Some of the tactics used by the abuser include:

- *Intimidation*: Scaring the victim through looks, actions, or gestures; smashing things; destroying the victim's property; abusing pets; displaying weapons, etc.
- *Emotional Abuse*: Humiliation; eroding the victim's self-esteem; name-calling; making the victim think she is crazy; mind manipulation (gaslighting); and making the victim feel guilty.
- *Isolation*: Controlling what the victim does, who she talks to, who she meets, what she reads, and where she goes; limiting the victim's outside engagements; using jealousy to justify actions.
- *Minimizing, Denying, and Blaming*: Not taking the violence or the woman's concerns about the violence seriously; claiming the violence didn't happen; shifting responsibility for the violent behavior; blaming the victim.
- *Using Children*: Making the victim feel guilty about the children; using children to relay messages; using visitation to harass the victim; threatening to take the children away.
- *Using Male Privilege*: Treating the victim like a servant; making all important decisions; acting like the "master of the house"; rigid definition of husband and wife roles (according to traditional gender roles).
- *Economic Abuse*: Preventing the victim from working or maintaining employment; forcing the victim to ask for money; giving the victim a mere allowance; taking her money; not allowing her to know about or access family income.
- *Coercion and Threats*: Making threats to do something to hurt the victim; threatening to leave her; threatening to commit suicide; forcing the victim to drop charges; forcing the victim to do illegal things, etc.

3.7. Social Context Theory of Violence

Over time, it was observed that even the theory suggesting perpetrators use violence solely to gain power and control did not fully explain the phenomenon of domestic violence. While the Power and Control Wheel (i.e., the coercive behaviors that establish power and control) described the experiences of women, perpetrators in batterer intervention groups did not always articulate a conscious desire for power and control when discussing their use of such behaviors.

Consequently, violence began to be conceptualized within a broader social context. According to this theory, violence is a logical outcome of relationships defined by dominance and inequality - relationships shaped not merely by personal choices or the individual desires of some men to dominate their wives, but by the way we, as a society, construct social and economic relations between men and women, and within marriage or the family. Our task is to understand how our collective response to violence creates a climate of either intolerance or tacit acceptance of the force used in intimate relationships (Pence, 1999).

3.8. Causes of the Occurrence of Domestic Violence in North Macedonia

Some of the primary causes influencing the occurrence of domestic violence in North Macedonia include cultural norms, social class, education levels, the economic dependence of women, jealousy, the country's prolonged period of transition, and others. All these factors are closely interrelated.

North Macedonia is a multi-ethnic state inhabited by Macedonians, Albanians, Roma, Serbs, Bosniaks, Turks, Vlachs, and other minority groups. These distinct ethnic groups live together across various cities and regions of the country. Each ethnic group possesses specific cultural norms, from which different beliefs and worldviews regarding the roles of men and women emerge. In the past - and in certain areas even today - strong traditional norms have imposed the role of the man as the head of the household and the primary breadwinner responsible for supporting other family members. Women are expected to care for children, elderly family members, and the home.

This state of affairs resulted in a subordinate position for women and their economic dependence on men. In some communities where women are primarily dependent on their husbands, the attitude that they must respect and obey men is common. Unfortunately, this practice in North Macedonia is not entirely in the past. Remnants of these traditions still exist, such as the view that a man may punish his wife if he believes she has erred. However, women do not have the same recourse. These cases are particularly characteristic of small communities and villages where the population's average education level is very low (Netkova et al., 2007).

While the aforementioned factors may contribute to or be primary causes of domestic violence in specific instances, they are by no means the only factors contributing to its prevalence. It must be noted that perpetrators and victims belong to all ethnic groups and all strata of society. Furthermore, alcoholism and narcotics use are frequently cited as causes of domestic violence. Although this view may be justified

by the fact that many victims report being mistreated by their spouses while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, studies indicate that alcoholism and drug use are not, in themselves, the root causes of domestic violence (Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, 1998).

The societal transition is also mentioned as a factor influencing the spread of domestic violence in North Macedonia. The fragile economic situation also impacts the familial relationship between husband and wife. Men are often under stress because they are unable to secure sufficient financial means to maintain the family. This frequently leads to an escalation of violence, where men often release this tension through attacks on women (Netkova et al., 2007).

Another factor influencing the emergence of domestic violence is the psychological state of the perpetrator, who presumes to commit physical violence or emotional and psychological torture against other family members, primarily the wife (Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, 1998).

However, as discussed above, domestic violence is primarily caused by the desire for control and power and is fuelled by societal norms and traditions that encourage relationships of dominance and inequality between men and women. Domestic violence is a manifestation of historically unequal relationships between men and women and a key mechanism through which women are placed in a position subordinate to men.

To systematically operationalize these theoretical paradigms within the national context, Table 1 synthesizes how each level of the socio-ecological framework interacts with specific risk factors in North Macedonia, mapping them to their corresponding criminological theories and coercive mechanisms.

Table 1: Synthesis of Socio-Ecological Levels, Criminological Theories, and Contextual Factors in North Macedonia

Socio-Ecological Level	Contextual Risk Factors in North Macedonia	Primary Theoretical Frameworks	Coercive / Explanatory Mechanisms
Individual Level	Economic stress, low educational attainment, internalized traditional gender norms.	• Social Learning Theory • Psychopathological Approach (Critiqued)	Violence reinforced through generational transmission, early exposure to abuse, or false assumptions of

Socio-Ecological Level	Contextual Risk Factors in North Macedonia	Primary Theoretical Frameworks	Coercive / Explanatory Mechanisms
			loss of anger control.
Relational Level	Co-habitation with extended family, economic dependency on male breadwinners, conflict dynamics.	• Duluth Power and Control Model (Pence & Paymar, 1993) • Learned Helplessness Theory (Walker, 1979; Critiqued)	Perpetrators use non-physical tactics (economic abuse, isolation, threats) to enforce domestic authority; active negotiation by victims under constraint.
Community Level	Social stigma in rural/small communities, low institutional trust, social isolation.	• Social Context Theory of Violence (Pence, 1999)	Community normalization of male privilege and pressure to preserve "family honor" suppress reporting and protect perpetrators.
Societal Level	Post-socialist economic transition, persistent patriarchal	• Socio-Ecological Framework (Krug et al., 2002)	Historically unequal power relations between men and women

Socio- Ecological Level	Contextual Risk Factors in North Macedonia	Primary Theoretical Frameworks	Coercive / Explanatory Mechanisms
	traditions across diverse ethnic groups (Netkova et al., 2007).	• Structural / Macro- Level Gender Inequality Models	structurally incentivize male dominance and restrict economic exit routes for victims.

As illustrated in Table 1, domestic violence in North Macedonia is not an isolated phenomenon driven merely by individual anger or substance abuse. Rather, it functions as a multi-layered system where macro-level patriarchal structures and economic transition factors reinforce relational tactics of control. Addressing this requires moving beyond reactive, single-level interventions toward synchronized policy across all four ecological domains.

Conclusions

By integrating multi-factorial criminological paradigms with the specific socio-cultural context of North Macedonia, this study demonstrates that domestic violence cannot be reduced to simple individual psychopathology, impulsive outbursts of anger, or isolated economic stressors. Rather, domestic abuse operates as a structured, deliberate system of coercive control reinforced by broader institutional and societal structures.

A critical finding of this synthesis is the rejection of passive and individualist explanations of abuse. Contrary to early models - such as the loss of control, reciprocal violence, or psychopathological approaches - the analysis underscores that domestic violence is an intentional behavior designed to establish and maintain dominance over an intimate partner. As highlighted by the Duluth Power and Control Model, perpetrators employ a deliberate array of non-physical tactics, including economic restrictions, isolation, and emotional degradation, to enforce compliance. Furthermore, evaluating survivor responses refutes the static concept of "learned helplessness". Rather than remaining passive due to psychological inertia, survivors make calculated, active decisions within severely constrained circumstances, often balancing the financial dependencies and safety risks associated with leaving.

In North Macedonia, these relational dynamics intersect directly with macro-level societal conditions. The interplay between a prolonged post-socialist economic transition and persistent patriarchal norms across diverse ethnic communities creates a climate where male authority remains culturally and economically incentivized. Economic vulnerability, coupled with traditional expectations surrounding family roles, limits women's exit options and reinforces their subordinate position. In small or tightly knit communities, social stigma and expectations to preserve family honor further act as informal barriers to reporting and seeking protection. Consequently, domestic violence in North Macedonia is not merely a private interpersonal conflict, but a logical outcome of historically unequal power relations between men and women.

These findings carry important implications for theoretical application and crime prevention policy. Because domestic violence operates across multiple interacting tiers, single-level interventions - such as anger management or individual counseling - remain fundamentally insufficient. Effective prevention strategies in North Macedonia require a synchronized approach structured around the socio-ecological framework. Institutional responses must move toward coordinated community models that hold perpetrators accountable while addressing the structural barriers facing survivors. On a broader level, state policies must prioritize women's economic empowerment and challenge deep-rooted gender norms to dismantle the structural dependencies that fuel domestic abuse. Grounding policy in these multi-layered dynamics offers the most viable path toward breaking the cycle of domestic violence and fostering a culture of gender equality.

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