

‘Don’t Throw Your Trash Outside the House’ Russian Discourses on Domestic Violence (2016-2020)

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COVID-19 Disruption

This thesis was initially intended to be based on fieldwork conducted in Russia looking at discourses on domestic violence among different societal actors. Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus in 2020, the research focus had to be slightly changed and based on desktop related research.

Abstract

Domestic violence is the most common form of violence against women. The last decades has seen a plethora of academic work dedicated to explaining its occurrences, causes and consequences. Additionally, it has become institutionalized as a global human rights issue. Despite widespread efforts to combat domestic violence, national policies and legal frameworks vary greatly between countries. In Russia, domestic violence is believed to be highly prevalent and widespread, yet little has been done to address this on a national level. The aim of this study is to narrow down on Russia as a case study to understand how domestic violence is discursively constructed in different cultural and social environments. Utilizing a discourse analytical toolkit and the creation of a typology based on previous theories on domestic violence, this study looked at different societal actors in Russia and how they understood and constructed domestic violence. Five overarching discursive themes were discovered, pointing to the existence of different understandings and constructions of domestic violence. Among these the most prominent explanations related to feminist work and patriarchy, to ideas about heritability/learned behavior and to Soviet and Russian Orthodox ideas about gender and domestic violence.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Russia, Discourse Analysis

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1 Introduction

Domestic violence is the most common form of violence against women. Globally one in three women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime (WHO, 2016). Over the last decades a plethora of academic work and theories have emerged dedicated to researching domestic violence – its causes, consequences and how to combat it.

Domestic violence as a social phenomenon is interesting to study, not only because it is widespread and prevalent in societies all over the world, but because today it is denoted as a universal social justice issue and proclaimed a question of international human rights and equality. International organs like the United Nations (UN) have stated that domestic violence is caused by historical and structural inequalities between women and men and that it should be the goal of every country to fight it (CEDAW, 1993). Yet, domestic violence, understood as different forms of violence (physical, psychological, economical) that takes place between members of a household, and primarily targets women is a topic (and framed as a problem) which initially was advocated for by North American and Western European feminists. As a result, it has gained much of its vocabulary and meaning, as well as certain models of explanations from Western feminist discourses (Hunnicutt, 2009, Grabowska, 2012, Muravyeva, 2018).

The fact that most theories and research done on domestic violence - as well as its epistemological framing - stems from a Western context, has certain implications for our understanding of the matter. Looking at previous literature, feminist and intersectional explanations of domestic violence has centered on the patriarchal world order, inequalities and female subordination. Explanations of its origins have also been sought within the fields of biology, psychology and sociology: for example, making connections between perpetrators of domestic violence and head injuries, hormones, personality disorders (Ali & Naylor, 2013a), poverty, religion, childhood trauma, as well as a means by which to balance power or control feelings of helplessness (Isdal, 2017).

The scientific approach underpinning this study is that domestic violence as a phenomenon is discursively created by different ideas and understandings connected to the human body, human behaviors, social rules, structures and norms as well as to gender. This is not to say that violence - or domestic violence is not real, but that how we understand and explain it is dictated by language, which in turn dictates our thoughts and actions.

Historically, the act of slapping someone for disciplinary reasons, be it a child, a wife or servants has been thought of differently, and given different meanings and legitimacy in different cultures, societies and religions (Boethius, 2015:15). Despite global efforts to raise awareness about domestic violence, and how to combat it, we cannot get away from the fact that domestic violence is a practice that is given different meaning and met with different attitudes depending on where you are.

However, when the UN, as one of the most influential supranational organizations in the world, defines domestic violence as a human rights issue connected to gendered inequalities and injustices, this narration of domestic violence is given precedence over other (competing) narratives. With the Istanbul Convention - a European framework for combating violence against women and domestic violence, the Council of Europe (CoE) have been sending similar signals for the past decade (CoE, 2011).

Out of 193 UN member states, 189 have ratified or acceded the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), theoretically obliging them to undertake legal measures to prevent and eliminate domestic violence. Yet national efforts to criminalize and work towards eliminating domestic violence vary greatly between states. With regards to the Istanbul Convention only 34 of the 45 member states have ratified the treaty.

Claiming that it promotes a dangerous ‘gender ideology’ several European countries now seem to perceive its core message as a threat to national traditions and family life, signaling the emergence of counter narratives to that of domestic violence as an international human rights issue (Kováts, 2018). The trend to oppose international human rights systems based on Western liberal and egalitarian values is in part also driven by different religious institutions and groups like the Catholic Church, American Evangelists and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) (Stoelck:2016:144).

For the purpose of this study, I have chosen to take a closer look at Russia as a country that appears to be at a junction regarding perceptions and understandings of domestic violence. A factor that in turn appears to be reflecting on its national and international commitments.

Due to a lack of coherent statistics, its high latency and a lack of mechanisms for clearly defining and working with domestic violence, the prevalence of domestic violence in Russia is not known. However, experts believe that it is widespread (Gorbunova, 2018:43). Despite this, Russia as a country has failed to build a national machinery (including legal structures) to deal with domestic violence. While it is a crime that can be prosecuted under more general articles of assault (articles 109-116), domestic violence is not legally defined in the Russian

administrative or criminal code and falls under private prosecution rather than public (Muravyeva, 2018:28). Making it a potentially costly, labor intense and psychologically draining process for those who wish to take their cases to court (CEDAW, 2015).

While Russian scholars, activists and feminists have recounted how increasing interest from North American and Western European feminists in the early 1990s led to new discussions, imported terminology¹, and financial possibilities to create organizations focused on women's rights and domestic violence (Temkina & Zdravomyslova, 2003; Muravyeva, 2018). They have also argued that this was built on the assumption that women from the former Soviet Union both needed and wanted to 'catch up' with the West (Muravyeva, 2018:11).

Since the 1990s, Russian activists and lawmakers have presented the Russian State Duma with a number of draft law proposals aimed at criminalizing domestic violence i.e., to make it a legally defined term and article in Russia's criminal code in order to make it easier to prosecute abusers and protect victims of domestic violence (Gorbunova, 2018:22).

In 2016 an amendment to criminalize domestic violence was accepted by the State Duma. This amendment only lasted for six months, before it was revoked and changed so that violence within the family that does not result in lasting harm should be decriminalized and classified as a misdemeanor for first time offenders (Muravyeva, 2018:29). Since then, a couple of particularly grizzly cases of domestic abuse have reached the public, sparking public debate and media attention². In 2019 a new draft law proposal criminalizing domestic violence was handed into the State Duma for consideration, a process which at the moment of writing, has stalled. (The Moscow Times, 2020).

The aim of this study is to narrow down on Russia as a case study for how domestic violence is discursively constructed in different social and cultural contexts. Through the last century, Russians have lived through 70 years of state socialism. This was followed by the 'dashing 90s' and the development of a conservative, authoritarian³ state structure under the tenure of President Vladimir Putin. Looking at domestic violence discourses in Russia might

¹ On a similar note Roldugina argues that the early post-Soviet LGBT+ scene as a consequence of (only) receiving American activist support became dominated by its specific discourse on identity politics and did not have time to grow and rely on its own genealogy before the general course in Russian politics during the 2000 changed, becoming increasingly homophobic (Roldugina, 2018).

² Two famous cases in recent years have been that of Margarita Grachyova, who got her hands chopped off by her boyfriend in 2017 (Usanova, 2020). As well as the persecution of the Khachaturyan sisters, who after suffering years of abuse, killed their father Mikhail Khachaturyan in 2018. Their case has sparked protests all over the country, with thousands of Russians calling for their release (The Guardian, 2019).

³ As per the definition of the Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU) in their 2019 ranking, in which Russia scored 3.11 on a scale from 1-10 (Full democracies 10-8.01; flawed democracies 8-6.01; hybrid regimes 6-4.01; authoritarian regimes (4-0) (www.eiu.com, 2019).

help us understand the current ambivalence regarding Russia's (lack of) national as well as international policies on domestic violence.

1.2 Purpose

By studying discourses on domestic violence in Russia, the overall aim of this study is to contribute to a broader understanding of how domestic violence is understood and constructed by actors engaging with this question. The focus on domestic violence is highly relevant not only because it is an under-researched topic in Russia, but because it is a social phenomenon which to a large extent has been formulated and advocated for by Western oriented feminists and scholars. Occurring on a global scale, but in different local contexts, global explanations and solutions such as those proclaimed by the UN, risk excluding nuances and layers of local development and struggles. By looking at how domestic violence is discursively created and understood in Russia today, it will be possible to further our understanding of this social phenomenon in a local context, which in turn might help us understand Russia's national and international standing on this matter.

1.3 Research Questions

RQ1: *How is domestic violence discursively constructed and understood by different societal actors in Russia?*

RQ2: *Can existing discourses on domestic violence in Russia be better understood by taking into account the local context in which they occur?*

1.4 Definitions and Demarcations

Domestic Violence

The term *domestic violence* denotes violence that happens within the household and among the members of that household. As such, the term does not indicate who the perpetrator(s) or victim(s) are (men, women, children, elderly). By experts, it is often divided into five different sub-groups: physical, sexual, material, psychological and latent violence (Isdal, 2017:54). As a term, domestic violence is often used interchangeably with *intimate partner violence* - a term that denotes violence which occurs in a romantic relationship. Other terms that might be used are *violence against women*, *family violence* etc. While the aim of this study is to examine men's violence against women, the empirical material that was studied revealed a certain focus on heterosexual men, children and elderly as victims as well. Thus,

moving forward, domestic violence will be understood not only as men's violence against women, but as violence against any member of a household. It should be noted that due to widespread homophobia and Russia's law on 'gay-propaganda' (Knight and Bochenek, 2018), it is highly unlikely that references to domestic violence denotes any other intimate relationships than heterosexual relationships.

Societal Actors

The focus of this study will be on the discursive understanding and construction of domestic violence by certain societal actors active in Russian civil society. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), civil society can be defined as:

a space for collective action around shared interests, purposes and value [...] civil society includes charities, development NGOs, community groups, women's organizations, faith-based organization [...] social movements, coalitions and advocacy groups. However, civil society is not homogeneous and the boundaries between civil society and government or civil society and commercial actors can be blurred. (WHO, 2007)

The study will focus on actors vocal in debates on domestic violence over the last decade. These actors are Russian women's organizations, the ROC and a couple of advocacy groups labelling themselves as oriented towards traditional family values. The material, which includes tv-debates and interviews, additionally involve comments and interviews with working professionals such as psychiatrists, psychologists and sociologists, as well as with a handful of victims of domestic abuse.

1.5 Thesis Outline

Before the above outlined research question can be addressed, providing a contextual background to the topic of domestic violence in Russia is needed. In the upcoming chapter 2, previous studies that have looked at domestic violence policies in Soviet Russia, statistical evidence of the phenomenon in modern day Russia, post-Soviet women's activism and legal developments will be provided. This will be followed by a short section on the ROC and domestic violence. The focus on domestic violence in Russia from a historical and societal point of view provides a framework that serves to enhance our understanding of the studied material and what conclusions can be drawn from it. Yet, the contextual background only represents one of the tools in a discourse analytical toolkit.

This brings us to chapter 3, in which the theoretical framework underpinning this study will be laid out. The theoretical chapter is divided into two different parts. The first part is focused on discourse analysis; what it is and how to utilize it in a social science study. Additionally, the specific discursive ideas related to this study are narrowed down. The second part gathers the most common theories and discourses that have been and are continuously used by academics and experts to explain the occurrence of domestic violence. As this stretches over four different academic disciplines; gender studies, sociology, psychology and biology, the overview has been synthesized into a typology which serves two purposes. First, it provides an accessible overview of the most common theories and discourses from the four different fields, and second it provides a certain demarcation and framework for analyzing the data.

In chapter 4 the methodological approaches and choices underpinning the study will be discussed, followed by the results of the study in chapter 5. Chapter 5 features an analysis of the collected data and addresses the two research questions posed in this chapter (chapter 1). The structure of the analysis is divided into five sub-chapters and sorted based on discursive themes. These are analyzed in relation to the theoretical framework and Russian social, historical and local contexts.

Finally, in chapter 6, the results will be synthesized in order to provide an answer to what discourses and understandings of domestic violence exist in Russia and if these are better understood by taking into account the local context in which they occur.

2 Contextual Background

As mentioned above, this chapter will give a contextual overview, providing details about historical, social, legal and religious issues connected to domestic violence in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. It lays the foundation for how and by what existing discourses and understandings of domestic violence in Russia has been shaped. Except for providing a necessary framework it will also be used as a point of reference for the analysis in chapter 5.

2.1 Domestic Violence in Soviet Russia

In order to understand how domestic violence is understood and constructed in modern day Russia, a few aspects of the country's historical development need to be taken into account; especially the Soviet regime's view on gender, equality and how it dealt with and explained domestic violence.

While the pre-revolutionary criminal code of the Russian Empire included a law on domestic violence which explicitly mentioned husband's violence against their wives, the early Soviet state revoked this as part of a larger scheme to reform the family unit, based on Marxist ideology. One of the Bolsheviks' main goals was to make both the private and public sphere equal in order to create a truly socialist state. Laws, such as the one on domestic violence, which had made a distinction between women and men, became viewed as a reinforcement of the capitalist system and therefore had to be removed. Early on it was also believed that equality between the sexes would make domestic violence disappear. This idea was additionally reinforced by the theory that freeing both women and men to participate in the labor force would extinguish the family as an institution (Muravyeva, 2014:94-97).

The fact that women became economic and political subjects in the Soviet Union did not only serve the purpose of trying to dismantle traditional family structures, but it also became a sign of socialism's superiority. The Soviet leadership even prided themselves on having solved the 'woman question' (Temkina & Zdravormyslova, 2003:52). To the extent that political and economic inclusion is perceived as important hallmarks for equality, the Soviet state was indeed progressive in its attitudes towards women. Yet, previous research has indicated that the early Bolsheviks never managed to rid themselves of the old pre-revolutionary belief that women and men were inherently different (Attwood, 1996:118; Turton, 2018:72). Some have even argued that the solution to the 'woman question' reflected a reformulation and re-categorization of individuals in relation to the state in which women were attributed two primary roles; that of being a worker and a mother (Ashwin, 2000:2).

According to Soviet ideology total equality could not be reached by only reshuffling the roles and relationships of and between women and men, but the family unit as such came under scrutiny. An important aspect of the Soviet family structure - especially in relation to domestic violence - which is conceptualized as a phenomenon that takes place within the private sphere - was the idea of public versus private (Attwood, 1999).

Previous scholars have argued that the Soviet family was perceived as part of the public sphere - a microcosmos, reflecting the macro state. It was institutionalized as such by Soviet law, aimed at making sure that the family functioned according to socialist standards (Attwood, 1999). This is not to say that a private realm of intimate family relations did not exist, but that this was a secluded and secret space in which individual behavior and ideas might differ from the required public ones. An important aspect of this was not only the creation of a gender-neutral law (Muravyeva, 2018:24), but that society made no distinction between relatives and

other citizens, everybody was related to each other to the extent that blood kinship should not matter over social connections.

Ideas about the family as part of the public sphere and equality between all its subjects was reflected in the Soviet state's efforts to combat domestic violence - which despite socialist ideology, had not disappeared (Muravyeva, 2014:96).

To summarize some of the most important efforts that were made to stifle domestic abuse, 'hooliganism' - defined as 'disruptive and disorderly behavior' was used from the 1920s and onwards to prosecute domestic abusers. It was a convenient motive as it needed no additional explanation; hooliganism was perceived as being committed without any obvious reasons and seen as a senseless and irrational act. Later the essences of hooliganism changed from being viewed as irrational and senseless, to behaviors breaking with the rules of socialist society. As such it was perceived as an offense against public order - which included the family, and it became widely used by the state to control the intimate sphere of its citizens. Additionally, the accused were given a summary justice trial and sent off to prison or forced to pay a fine within two days of the trial (LaPierre, 2006:192).

Two of the most popular explanations as to why domestic violence continued to be a problem in the socialist state, saw it as a consequence of tight living quarters and alcohol consumption. The most popular explanation, however, was the framing of 'problem families' (Muravyeva, 2014:102).

'Problem families' was broadly defined as families in which alcohol abuse was present, in which children were mistreated or where there was a high frequency of quarrels. It could also be families in which children were not given enough love and attention, where parents were too self-centered or relied too much on schools to educate their children. Additionally, single mothers as well as too large, too young or divorced families were defined as 'problem families'. Research has also shown that in the 1970s tentative connections were being made between women's double burden as mothers and workers and the contradiction of official gender equality, as a factor causing dissatisfaction and conflict. Yet, the framing of 'problem families' remained the most popular explanations for the continued existence of domestic violence in Soviet Russia (Muraveyva, 2014:101).

2.2 Statistical Evidence of Domestic Violence in Russia

One of the main obstacles for understanding the occurrences and prevalence of domestic violence in Russia, is due to a lack of reliable statistics. While Russia's Federal State Statistical Service (Rosstat) has been collecting statistics on family violence since 2012, they provide no

definition or conceptualization of family violence in their statistics. (Rosstat, 2020). Other official data also exists, but it is often fragmented, missing or outdated, which limits what conclusions can be drawn⁴. In modern day Russia a number of social surveys have been conducted among the public in order to investigate public perceptions and experiences. However, as various methodologies and approaches have been applied in different surveys, the results are not directly comparable and cannot be viewed as a true reflection of the problem. Because of these methodological difficulties, available data can only give us a hint about the spread and perception of domestic violence in Russia (Duban, 2020:10).

In 2019 the Ministry of Internal Affairs reported that around one third of all murders take place within the family or in domestic relations and that every fourth family experiences acts of physical, psychological or sexual violence (Valyaev, 2019:19). Data gathered by law enforcement authorities between 2012-2018 indicate that women are the primary victims of crimes committed within the family, consistently over 70% of the victims were women, a majority being the wife of the perpetrator (Duban, 2020:9).

According to a study from 2012 including over 10 000 women from all over Russia, over one third of the respondents indicated that they had been verbally abused by their partners, while one fifth reported that they had been physically abused. 4% indicated that there had been incidents when they had been forced to engage sexually with a current or former partner (Gorbunova, 2018:14). In a general opinion poll from 2016 it was suggested that a third of the respondents know of families in which violence occurs but only a small number admitted to having experienced it themselves. Another poll from 2020, showed that 36% of Russian women and 19% of Russian men knew of cases of men's violence against their wives (Levada Centre, 2020). In two separate polls from 2019, more than half of the female participants reported that they had suffered domestic abuse by a family member. For most women, the violence was perpetrated by their husband, followed by their partner or cohabitant (Duban, 2020:37).

⁴ To compare with some other countries, the United Kingdom's Office for National Statistics regularly compiles statistics over domestic violence in England and Wales (www.ons.gov.uk). In the Scandinavian countries, Finland's National Statistics Agency, Statistics Finland offers national statistic on the prevalence on domestic violence for the Finish state (www.stat.fi), while Brottsförebyggande Rådet (www.bra.se) and the National Center for Knowledge about Men's violence against Women (www.nck.uu.se) (Sweden) and Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (www.nkvts.no) (Norway) both compile statistics, offer helplines and give expert advice to their respective governments on the topic. In the United States, the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, is the country's leading grass-root movement, collecting statistics on domestic violence in all 50 states (www.ncadv.org).

2.3 Domestic Violence Activism in Russia

Early post-Soviet research has indicated that domestic violence as a topic engaging a small number of Russian scholars and activists, was discursively constructed as a problem in meetings with Western feminists, right after the disintegration of the Soviet Union (Hemment, 2004:824). Contrary to this perception, domestic violence was a crime in pre-revolutionary Russia and a topic that the Soviet authorities, despite their vision of gender equality, had to engage with. While tentative connections were made between women's position in society and domestic violence, the most prevalent understanding did not view it as a phenomenon related to gender (Muravyeva, 2014).

Nonetheless, the early 1990s saw the arrival of Western based organizations and donors to Russia. Pushing for democratic values and ideas, they started to invest money in different women's projects (Johnson, 2009). This led to the adoption and creation of new terminology, frameworks and the opening of a handful of non-governmental crisis centers and shelters, first in Moscow and Saint-Petersburg and then in provincial cities (Hemment, 2004). In Moscow, the ANNA Center for the Prevention of Violence (Center ANNA) opened the first crisis telephone hotline for victims of domestic violence in 1993, which has been functioning as a national hotline ever since (Gorbunova, 2018:64).

The successful adoption and translations of feminist explanations and terminology to a Russian vernacular, coupled with alliances between large international donors and global feminists were efficient in raising awareness and state reform (Johnson, 2009). By the early 2000s, domestic violence - and especially men's violence against women went from being an unrecognized phenomenon by the public - to gaining increasing acknowledgement. With approximately 130 women's organizations working to promote better legal protection and social services, it became possible to talk about a small crisis center movement. This in turn created new opportunities for collaborations between social services, law enforcement and women crisis centers, ultimately aimed at enhancing the state's response to domestic violence (Johnson et al, 2016:298).

Looking at statistical evidence, we can see that the general perception of domestic violence has changed a great deal over the last decade. In a study from 2008, it was reported that less than half of the respondents, 44,5% thought of domestic violence as a serious problem (Stickley et al, 2008:451). In 2020, a survey asking the same question showed that 61% of Russians think that domestic violence is a serious problem (Levada Centre, 2020b).

This development can in part be attributed to the hard work by Russian activists throughout the last two decades (Johnson, 2009; Johnson et al, 2016). As well as an increasing media attention given to domestic violence over the last few years. Beyond the traditional activism that shelters, and women's centers have been dedicating themselves to, debates about a potential domestic violence law, and more cases being covered by Russian media has contributed to rising awareness (Levada Centre, 2020b).

Two events that have popularized the topic over the last two years is the case of the Khachaturyan sisters and a far-reaching social media campaign. After having suffered from severe abuse throughout their whole lives, the case of three sisters who killed their father, Michael Khachaturyan in 2018 have garnered massive media attention, debates and protests. In response to the sisters being charged with premeditated murder in 2019, a petition calling for their release managed to collect almost 400 000 signatures (www.change.org, 2019).

In 2019, the launch of the social media campaign 'I don't want to die' by one of Russia's most famous domestic violence activists, Alena Popova and a couple of feminist oriented influencers became widely spread both inside and outside of Russia (BBC, 2019). The goal of this campaign was not only to spread awareness about domestic violence, but to collect signatures for a petition to change the law on domestic violence in Russia. Behind the petition were not only Alena Popova, but also chairwoman of the Federation Council Valentina Matviyenko and chairman of the State Duma, Vyacheslav Volodin. While the most popular social media post received over half a million likes, the petition has collected approximately one million signatures (www.change.org, 2020).

2.4 Legal Development

In a report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) from 2018, Russia's legal framework on domestic violence is summarized as follows:

Russia does not have a federal law on domestic violence, and it is not recognized as a standalone offense in either criminal or administrative code. Russian law does not provide for protection orders, that is immediate or longer-term measures to protect a potential victim from domestic abuse, including by barring contact between an alleged perpetrator and victim. Domestic violence prosecutions occur mostly if brought by private prosecution, placing the burden of investigation and prosecution on survivors of domestic violence. (Gorbunova, 2018:21)

Russian law follows Soviet legislation in the respect that it does not specifically mention domestic violence. Individuals who want to prosecute a partner must use more general articles on assault, kidnapping and rape, found in the administrative and criminal codes. (Muravyeva, 2018)

Between 2012 and 2014 a group of Russian lawyers and lawmakers discussed and drafted a federal law introducing a definition of violence within the family, which included proposed preventive measures, the introduction of protection orders and a suggestion to make it a subject of public rather than private prosecution. Upon introducing the proposed amendments to the State Duma in 2014, nothing happened. In 2016 the group made an attempt to once again present it to the State Duma, which refused it referring to procedural errors (Gorbunova, 2018:22).

Separate from the abovementioned proposed law on domestic violence, the Russian State Duma in 2016 made a push to ‘humanize’ Russia’s criminal justice system i.e., to decrease criminal penalties for lesser offences to lighten the burden of the criminal justice system. One of the proposed changes within this push was to make cases of assault and violence that did not result in injuries or lasting harm an administrative offence. The move was countered by a group of lawyers who in opposition to the proposed lessening of the law, advocated for an explicit criminalization of domestic violence.

In July 2016 they won and amendments including explicit references to assault against a family member was for the first time introduced in the Russian criminal code. Violence against a ‘close person’ (spouses, parents, children, etc.) was made a criminal offence together with aggravated violence and became subject to private-public prosecutions, making it punishable with up to two years in prison. (Muravyeva, 2018:27). This was deemed a step in the right direction by experts and a sign that the State Duma was willing to prioritize violence prevention among family members (Gorbunova, 2018:18).

Six months later, after furious campaigning and mobilization of Russia’s conservative forces, led by politician Yelena Mizulina, a new amendment was introduced, which removed the explicit mentioning of domestic violence from both criminal and administrative code. Non-aggravated acts of violence committed by first-time offenders were decriminalized and only if the offence was repeated more than once within a year was it to be dealt with under Russia’s criminal code (Gorbunova, 2018:26).

Experts have concluded that the 2017 amendment not only weakened the protection of women by reducing the penalties for abusers, but also that it sent a signal to society that it is alright to use violence against a family member as it is not a criminal offence. Women’s rights

groups and crisis centers have noted an increase in complaints since 2017. While some have stated that they believe this to be a direct effect of the decriminalization i.e., that violence has increased because abusers are less afraid of being caught. Others see a connection between increasing public awareness due to public debates and receiving more complaints; victims have become more sensitive and aware of their rights (Gorbunova, 2018:35).

In 2019 a new draft law aimed at granting victims protection and a framework for prosecuting abusers had been developed by activists, lawmakers and politicians together and introduced to the State Duma. After being reviewed by the parliament it was sent back with amendments that according to its authors and area experts rendered it useless. At the time of writing this thesis, the decision on whether the new proposal will be adopted or not has stalled (Duban, 2020).

2.5 The Russian Orthodox Church and Domestic Violence

It has been argued that because religious teachings promote and institutionalize certain ideas and behavior, they are relevant for furthering our understanding of gender relations and domestic violence both on macro- and micro-levels (Ellison and Anderson, 2001; Chernyak and Barrett, 2011).

In the 30 years that have passed since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the ROC's influence as a social and political actor has expanded significantly (Petro, 2018:4) along with its number of followers (Levada Centre, 2020a). According to the latest poll on religious beliefs in Russia conducted by the Levada Centre at the beginning of 2020, 65% of Russians identified themselves as belonging to the Russian Orthodox faith⁵ (Levada Centre, 2020a).

In December 2019, the Patriarchal Commission on Family Issues and the Protection of Motherhood and Childhood announced that the ROC had decided to formally oppose the new draft law on domestic violence. The commission argued that the bill “disregards universally recognized legal principles of common sense, justice, and equality” that if implemented could lead to “grave and mass violations of the rights of individuals and families” and that it has a “clear anti-family focus”. (Meduza, 2019)

Looking at Russian orthodox teachings about gender and family and how the ROC positions itself in relation to the international human rights system promoted by international organs like the UN and the CoE, the announcement that the ROC was against a law on domestic

⁵ According to the same poll however, only 9% self-identified as very religious. The most common self-assessment was 42% who considered themselves as 'somewhat religious' (Levada Centre, 2020)

violence might help explain this statement. Previous research has suggested that widespread social acceptance of domestic violence in Russia has been heavily influenced by the traditions and principles of the ROC (Chernyak and Barrett, 2011:13).

Russian orthodoxy prescribes distinct gender roles in the context of the Church, family and society based on conservative interpretations of the Bible that not only support patriarchal family and social structure but reinforce both the celebration and degradation of women. These conservative attitudes towards women assigns them an inferior position within the family and society, as men's servants (Chernyak and Barrett, 2011:6).

The promotion of marriage as a sacred bond, of the divine right of the husband over family and virtues such as humility as well as the acceptance of suffering and endurance in individual lives, makes it hard for women to complain or challenge the use of violence (Chernyak and Barrett, 2011:4).

The ROC's statement in 2019 indicated active participation and positioning with regards to the law on domestic violence in Russia. Looking beyond that of its teaching on gender and family, opposing a law on domestic violence seem to be in line with the ROC's position on international human rights issues.

For the last ten years, the ROC has gone from a total rejection of the international human rights values that international organs like the UN and CoE promotes, to utilizing the concept in order to create its own alternative version focused on traditions, morality and community (Stoeckl, 2016). "The traditional values agenda is the conservative flipside of the progressive human rights system" (Stoeckl, 2016:143) meaning that the ROC's response to the liberal and egalitarian evolution of international human rights norms (like women's rights and LGBT-rights etc.) is to create and negotiate 'traditional values' as a counterweight to this narrative. The development of these counter-narratives has been based on and/or furthered international cooperation and exchanges of ideas between different religious communities, creating a growing alternative to the liberal human rights system and women's rights movements. (Stoeckl, 2016)

3 Theoretical Framework

Based on a review of previous literature on domestic violence, it can be established that there exists no single theory that can explain or help us fully understand domestic violence as a phenomenon. Taking a closer look at what has been said on the topic, four academic disciplines stand out: gender studies - based on feminist theories and frameworks, sociology,

psychology and biology. Each of these fields have yielded a number of different theories and studies trying to explain and understand why domestic violence occurs and how to best combat it. As the focus of this study is to understand how domestic violence in Russia is discursively constructed and understood, the ideas and language underpinning previous theories and studies are of primary interest. From a discourse analytical point of view discourses are understood to constitute and reproduce both our knowledge and ideas about domestic violence, as well as what can be said on the topic and by whom.

As mentioned in chapter 1, the following chapter will outline the theoretical framework on which this study is based. Firstly, the ideas underpinning discourse analysis as a theoretical tool will be dealt with. While there are different approaches to discourse analysis, the primary focus of this study will be on a Foucauldian understanding of discourses, focusing on the power of ideas and language in shaping and reproducing global and local understandings of domestic violence.

Following this discussion, a typology (Table 1) outlining the main ideas underpinning scientific studies related to domestic violence has been created. The creation of a typology serves two purposes; first, it gives an easy and accessible overview of existing theories and second, it provides a framework and point of references for sorting and analyzing the data.

Following after the typology, the main theories and discourse from within each of the four academic disciplines will be further elaborated on in four separate sub-chapters. Based on the fact that an influx of Western ideas and theories at the beginning of the 1990s assisted in creating a Russian women's shelter movement, the focus on Western oriented ideas and discourses was deemed relevant for understanding contemporary discourses on domestic violence in Russia. All in all, this makes up the theoretical framework that will be used as a point of reference for analyzing the data in chapter 5.

3.1 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is influenced by different traditions of thoughts. While it is not one theory or method but many, it is rooted in ideas about reality⁶ which focuses on thoughts, ideas and meaning as constructed and changing over time and dependent on context (Bergström & Boréus, 2012). According to some academics who have built theories around discourse

⁶ Critical discourse analysis differs from discourse analysis in a few regards, for example in relation to ideas about reality, therefore it should be viewed as a separate category within discourse analysis and is not taken into account in this study (Börjesson & Palmblad, 2013).

analysis, language should be viewed as a borderline for our thoughts and actions. This makes it scientifically relevant to study text - including multimodal text i.e., images and video material. A core principle in discourse analysis is that language is not neutral. Language expresses, reflects and reproduces thoughts and ideas - but can also be used to put these into question (Bergström & Boréus, 2012).

While different scholars have put different focus on and built different methods for analyzing text, this thesis will focus on a Foucauldian understanding of discourse. According to Foucault discourse can be described as a system of rules which legitimizes certain fields or types of knowledge, but not others. Additionally, it dictates who has authority to speak about a certain topic (Gutting, 2005:109). Discourse analysis can thus be used to study interpersonal as well as structural hierarchies and power.

Foucault has also questioned why it is that certain phenomena are problematized while others are not (Gutting, 2005:70). Coming back to domestic violence, the relatively recent framing by Western oriented feminist of domestic violence as a problem not only for those who are subjected to it, but as a global health issue which national governments are urged to put resources into solving, is a good example of how discourses on this type of violence has not only changed but is being framed as a problem.

According to Foucault, the creation of different discourses results in the control of human beings. Additionally, Foucault theorized that established knowledge is close to power. Power is developed in relationships between people - while this offers opportunities for some, it restricts others. An example of this would be to look at what is defined as normal/not normal behavior in a society. Foucault also refutes the idea that a homogenous independent subject acting rationally, autonomously and independent of surrounding discourses exists. Instead, he states that both individuals and organizations need to be viewed within the borderlines created by discourse, and that this space is restricted by a number of already existing positions (Bergström & Boréus, 2012).

Applying a Foucauldian understanding of discourses on domestic violence brings awareness to the fact that all theories on domestic violence yielded by previous research, are also part of and reproducing certain ideas about domestic violence. The fact that a majority of these studies have focused on men as perpetrator and women as victims in a heterosexual setting can for instance be viewed as an expression of already existing discourses on male vs. female behavior. The tendency to avoid naming men as aggressors in public conversation or referring to violence against women as a 'family problem' (Åkesson et al, 2018:17) can be viewed as an expression of power, which diminishes the importance of already existing (gender) structures

and hierarchies connected to violence. Similarly, framing perpetrators as abnormal or mentally ill, also creates and recreates ideas about normal/abnormal behavior. Just as we for different reasons refrain from always naming abusers or give them certain labels, there are also existing ideas and discourses on the characteristics of victims and how such a person should behave. These ideas not only affect how victims make sense of their experiences but how they are being perceived by society and how support is designed to help them (Åkesson et al, 2018:22).

In conclusion, discourse analysis is a useful tool for analyzing ideas and language norms as well as to how this relates to power. These are all aspects that are important to take into account in order to get a deeper understanding of domestic violence as a social phenomenon in global and local contexts.

Table 1

| Discipline | Focus | Explanations | Conceptualization |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|--|---|
| Gender Studies/ Feminism | Structural | Patriarchy Masculinity Power and Control Local and cultural peculiarities Gender/class/ethnic identities | Domestic violence as caused by men's structural and privileged position in society. As a product of men's need to have power and control over women. Violence as something normative – all men are potential perpetrators and all women victims. As sanctioned by cultural and societal norms and institutions. As a social justice issue. Oppression and thus domestic violence as shifting over time and space, which can take different forms dependent on local and cultural peculiarities. |
| Sociology | Individual/Structural | Environment Resources Power Community Family | Domestic violence as caused by social environment and upbringing – family and community. As a learnt behavior that differentiate between women and men. As hierarchical and dependent on attained resources and/or as a result of power dynamics between individuals. Domestic violence as caused by a mix of everything from personal experiences and community to norms and structures. To a large extent focused on individuals/families but also points to certain structures. |
| Psychology | Individual | Mental Illness Personality disorder Childhood trauma Powerlessness/loss of control Anger | Domestic violence as result of mental illness and/or personality disorders. As something inherited. As caused by childhood trauma - often stemming from the family. As a coping strategy for regaining control when feeling powerless caused by previous experiences, unfulfilled expectations, stress, oppression, pain etc. As a result of strong emotions like anger. Domestic violence is mainly connected to the individual and seen as a biological or inherited deviance. |
| Biology | Individual | Head injuries Hormones Neuropsychological problems Genes | Domestic violence as a result of biological differences between women and men, as an abnormality and individual trait caused by either external factors, hormones, poor intellect or genetics. |

3.2 Gender Studies/Feminist Theories on Domestic Violence

Within feminist theory, domestic violence is constructed as a consequence of societal structures that are linked to power and control, and connected to patriarchy and gender as well as to racism, class and other potential expressions of discrimination (Hunnicut, 2019).

Framing domestic violence as a global social justice issue has proven both successful and unsuccessful in instigating state reform and increasing accountability on national levels. (Johnson, 2009:8). With the development of intersectional thinking, the idea that patriarchy is universal and thus targets all women in similar ways independent of class, ethnicity, sexuality and history have become heavily criticized. Academics have struggled to undo the universalizing assumption that all women are equal in the face of patriarchy. Instead, intersectional feminists promote the idea that women and men carry different identities as members of different oppressed and sometimes privileged groups. Patriarchal expression of power and control occurs in different shapes and forms based on what context and place it occurs in and connected to whom it is directed at. Accordingly, different cultures and societies are privy to a range of different patriarchal manifestations (Hunnicut, 2009).

Theorizing on domestic violence, intersectional feminist thinkers argue that the existence of different patriarchal structures must be taken into account. If we don't understand how men are situated within their own scheme of domination and how patriarchy is inextricably intertwined with other forms of hierarchies and domination, domestic violence can't be fully analyzed or understood (Hunnicut, 2009:554).

Following postmodern thinking, patriarchy and gender systems provide interesting perspectives on social arrangements as fluid. According to this logic, the patriarchal order along with power and traditions are constantly shifting and being modified, revealing the instability of patriarchy over time. This prevents us from essentializing and universalizing gender systems and the domestic violence that occurs within these systems (Hunnicut, 2019).

On a more practical level, feminist thinkers and scholars have developed a couple of popular concepts and frameworks for understanding the mechanisms of domestic violence; how it occurs, who it concerns and why it is difficult to end.

The *cycle of violence* is often referred to when explaining how violence manifests itself in a relationship. According to this theory, domestic violence is cyclic rather than random in its nature and can be explained by three different phases that repeat themselves over and over again. It starts with rising tensions, characterized by psychological abuse and threats as well as minor acts of violence, this eventually culminates into a violent outburst that is followed by a

‘honeymoon’-phase in which the abuser might either deny what happened, try to put the blame on the victim or is filled with regret and promises repentance. According to this theory, the length required to complete the phase becomes shorter over time, simultaneously the violence often grows more severe, indicating another type of escalation (Wilson, 2019:1-5).

Another concept which has been developed in order to try and explain domestic violence is the *normalization process*. Focused on power, the *normalization process* simply describes a woman’s effort to adjust to her male partner as he is trying to maintain and broaden his control over her. According to this theory, there are three crucial elements that over time result in women tolerating abuse and violence: the displacement and removal of personal space; isolation; and being treated with a mix of violent and tender behavior. Over time this erases the victim’s sense of self and identity. For the perpetrator, violence is necessary as a means to gain both short- and long-term control. According to this theory, the more time passes, the need to use violence will decrease as both individuals know that if she does not do what he wants, she will be physically punished and/or potentially killed (Lundgren, 2001:74).

As a consequence of intersectional feminist work on domestic violence, emphasis have been put on challenging the heterosexual dichotomy that prescribes men as perpetrators and women as victims. The *cycle of violence* and the *normalization process* as two concepts are gender-neutral to the extent that they can be extended to include same-sex relationships as well (Holmberg et al, 2008).

All in all, a post-modern and intersectional approach to power, control and domestic violence, can mean exploring local patterns and structures, moving away from ideas that universalize all women’s experiences and recognize local fights and victories. This also makes it possible to explore how applicable potential solutions and established systems of support are, considering that they predominantly have been developed based on the experiences of white, heterosexual, middle class women (Ekström, 2012:52).

3.3 Sociological Theories on Domestic Violence

The sociological perspective on domestic abuse examines societal norms and people’s attitudes towards violence, as such it is a very broad perspective that includes a variety of approaches to domestic violence. More concretely, it is a field that to a large extent has focused on social contexts and living conditions, and on the places in which domestic violence occurs. Some of the most popular theories from this field are *social learning theory*, *resource theory*, *exchange theory* as well theories on *socioecology* (Ali and Naylor, 2013b:373).

The main idea of *social learning theory* is that both perpetration of violence and acceptance of it is learned behavior. As such some scholars have highlighted the gendered differences in domestic abuse based on an idea that men learn to use violence against their wives, because as young boys they witness their fathers hitting their mothers, while women are victimized because as young girls, they watch their mothers withstand being abused. While this theory omits women as perpetrators and men as victims, *social learning theory* on the whole is focused on the family as a place in which individuals are exposed to violence and in which they learn to accept it. Based on these ideas and theories, domestic violence can be understood as an intergenerational phenomenon; children who are exposed to violence in their families, risk becoming perpetrators or victims of violence in the future (Ali and Naylor, 2013b:615).

Two other similar theories developed by sociologists are resource theory and relative resource theory. These theories are based on the idea that all social systems to some degree rely on the use of force or threat to use force. According to resource theory, participants in a particular system or in a family may or may not use violence depending on what resources they are in command of within that system/family. (Gelles, 1985). Power and resources are here understood as money, social status and education. Based on this idea, scholars focused on resource theory theorize that the more force a person can employ (depending on how powerful/resourceful he/she is), the less is actually being used. Instead, most violent behavior can be found among those with the fewest resources - both within a family or relationship and in society (Gelles, 1985:366). This understanding of violence seems to suggest that violent behavior is a question of class - rich and educated individuals are less violent than poor/marginalized individuals - without taking into account structural factors like poverty, discrimination and racism.

In relative resource theory, the focus is explicitly gendered (Atkinson et al, 2005) theorizing that women's relative income to men's is a predictor for violence. According to this theory, the same goes for women with higher educational levels and/or better occupational status (Atkinson et al, 2005).

In social exchange theory, scholars have theorized that the use of violence should be understood as a consequence of costs and rewards of certain behaviors. Violence will then be used in situations or settings where the reward is higher than the cost. The cost of using violence against a household member will be reduced by the private nature of the family and the disinclination of social institutions and agencies to intervene. Because violence is viewed as both expressive (violence as part of literature, movie, art etc.) and instrumental behaviors

(protection, attacks) in most societies, this can be viewed as raising the general rewards for using violence (Gelles, 1985:366).

Socioecological theory conceptualizes domestic violence as a multifaceted phenomenon focusing on the interactions between the personal, situational and sociocultural explanations, which combined explains the likelihood of violence to occur. (Heise, 1998; Hagemann et al, 2010) This is by far the broadest understanding of domestic violence as it includes both personal experience and societal structures (Heise, 1998:289).

3.4 Psychological Theories on Domestic Violence

Most psychological theories on domestic violence focus on the individual rather than on structures. A number of studies have focused on the psychological traits of both perpetrators and victims. Overall, these studies have centered on mental health issues and personality disorders, social heritage and childhood trauma as well as on anger management problems (Ali and Naylor, 2013a:373-374). Seeking explanations for domestic violence by focusing on psychological and/or psychiatric conditions and disorders, implies a connection between abusers/victims of domestic violence and non-normative or sick behavior.

Within this sphere, some psychologists have sought to connect domestic violence with feelings of powerlessness - a broader scope including both women and men as perpetrators and focused on early life experiences and development of control behavior, which later might result in the use of violence. According to this theory, learning this type of behavior can be a consequence of both societal structures and personal experiences (Isdal, 2017:60). Such theories have also pointed to the 'secondary victimization' of children who grow up in families where one spouse is abusive towards the other. According to this theory, witnessing abuse is equally traumatizing as directly suffering from it (Isdal, 2017:68).

Other types of research have sought to establish links between both women and men's mental health - focusing on mental illnesses - and domestic violence (Edwards et al, 2003). While others have sought to connect domestic violence with anger and/or aggressive behavior (Baron et al, 2007). Additionally, theories have been developed which are focused on low self-esteem (Papadakaki et al, 2009), such as individual traits like excessive or weak assertiveness and poor communication and problem-solving (Holtzworth-Munroe et al, 1997). Theories on early experiences/childhood have focused on the development of disturbed attachment caused by parent's conditioned or insufficient attention/love as well as on experiences of offences, traumatic separations and rejections (Boethius, 2015:15).

3.5 Biological Theories on Domestic Violence

Historically, gender and differences between women and men have been attributed to the sphere of medicine, which has developed theories on attraction and sexuality that defines clear behavioral differences and social interaction between women and men, based on ideas about testosterone and estrogen for instance (DeLamater and Shibley Hyde, 1998; Romero-Martinez et al, 2013). The focus within biology on heritage, nature and body (DeCecco and Elia, 1993:1-2) can be labelled as essentialist and deterministic not only because it illuminates biological gender differences, but also because it focuses on particularities and abnormalities within individual human beings.

Previous studies attempting to understand why domestic violence occurs from a biological perspective, are often intertwined with ideas about biological gender differences. The body and brain as well as genetics are never far away (Ali and Naylor, 2013a:374-375). The focus of these studies has been on individual men and women who have experienced domestic violence. The main focus has been on men as perpetrators from a biological point of view, and not so much on women as victims (Boethius, 2015:16). While not outspoken, this signals certain ideas about perpetrators and victims. The same goes for the four main areas of biological processes linked to studies on domestic violence; psychophysiology; neuropsychology; physiology; and genetics (Pinto et al, 2010) meaning that scientist have studied and tried to link domestic violence to individual differences based on gender, genetics and brain functioning (Greene, 1999; Pinto et al, 2010).

One popular theme has sought to explain domestic violence as an outcome of hormonal differences between women and men. An existing popular misconception describes testosterone as a male sex hormone and “a potent hormonal essence of competitive, risk-taking masculinity” (Fine, 2018:8). The idea that levels of testosterone can explain why some men become abusive is a good example of how ideas about masculinity and femininity, affect our ideas about different forms of violence. While testosterone is a male steroid hormone, it is found in both women and men. High levels of testosterone have been linked to aggression; however, it appears to have the same effect on both sexes, yet both testosterone and aggression are typically associated with men and masculinity (Greene, 1999).

Studies conducted on twin couples have tried to establish links between genetics and domestic violence (Pinto et al, 2010). Just like the above-mentioned theories, linking violent behavior and abuse to genetics put individual human beings in focus by trying to establish links between certain behaviors and heritability.

Another popular theme has been to try and connect the occurrence of domestic violence with externally imposed brain injuries, learning skills and poor intellect (Ali and Naylor, 2013a). Focusing research on brain malfunction and/or injury seem to underscore the idea that violent behavior is exercised by individuals who, for different reasons are deviant.

4 Methodology

In this chapter, the methodological approach and choices underpinning the study is discussed. This includes defining the time period of the study as well as a detailed description of how the dataset was compiled and the research conducted. Finally, questions of validity, reliability and research biases are discussed.

4.1 Methodological Approach

This study on domestic violence in Russia approached the topic from a qualitative and interpretative angle precisely because the aim of the study is to understand how domestic violence in Russia is discursively created and understood. Based on previous theories and discourses on domestic violence, a typology (Table 1) was created. The main purpose of this typology, along with the presentation of different theories was to create a discursive framework that would be used for sorting and analyzing the data. Together with the contextual background (chapter 2) this would help answer the two research questions: How is domestic violence discursively constructed and understood by different societal actors in Russia? and Can existing discourses on domestic violence in Russia be better understood by taking into account the local context in which they occur?

The study was based on primary data through the collection of written and video material from different actors, based on the criteria that they represented Russian civil society and had been vocal in the ongoing debates about domestic violence in Russia.

The choice to use discourse analysis as a theoretical and methodological toolkit to approach the data, as well as the choice of data, was based on the fact that it offers an approach which enables one to at a close range examine how domestic violence as a social phenomenon is constructed and understood by representatives of society. While this study did not focus on sender and recipient, an otherwise common focus within text/discourse analysis (Bergström, & Boréus, 2012:30), studying public material such as organizational websites, blog posts, interviews and video material in which different actors both construct and communicate their ideas can be viewed as a factor that provided added value.

Based on their positions as representatives of certain groups or communities, or as working professionals, it can be argued that these different actors enjoy certain power in ascribing meaning to phenomena such as domestic violence. The material collected was aimed at informing readers and viewers as well as raising opinion and debate. Studying both written and video material offered different opportunities for understanding the construction of domestic violence. Written material aimed at providing information for victims as well as working professionals meant that they were formulated in a specific way, which resonated with the overall beliefs of the organizations that had published them. Interviews and video material featuring debates and discussion offered more direct and dynamic constructions of domestic violence. It should be noted however, that most of this material was given a certain frame or direction by the tv-hosts who led the discussion or because of a certain theme (ranging from general discussion about domestic violence, to the case of the Khachaturyan sisters and the new law proposal in 2019).

4.2 Time Period

This study was initially intended to focus on the years on the years 2016-2019. The former, 2016 was chosen because this was the year in which the State Duma accepted an amendment to the criminal code, which criminalized domestic violence. As mentioned in chapter 2 this sparked a counter reaction by some of Russia's more famous conservative politicians, which led to another amendment being accepted only six months later, removing domestic violence from the administrative and criminal code.

Reviewing the sources chosen for this study, only a few of them dates as far back as to 2016⁷, instead most of the material dated back to 2018 and 2019. With a proposed amendment of the law being handed in to the State Duma in 2019 and published at the end of 2019, the debate has once again picked up speed. Consequently, this study also includes some material from 2020.

⁷ Most of the material featured on the ANNA Centers webpage, as well as Nasiliu.net and Kitezh did not include a date of publication. Being part of their organizational documents and statements, as well as working material this material represents their core identities and values and are therefore unlikely to have changed during the period of this study.

4.3 Data Collection Method

In order to decide on how to approach the topic of domestic violence in Russia for this thesis, a small pilot-study was conducted (Aspers, 2011:15). This included researching and reading articles about domestic violence in Russia produced by Russian media. By following this procedure, knowledge about which actors and organizations were vocal in the ongoing debates about domestic violence was acquired. Based on that knowledge, a general search for material produced by these different actors, looking for content on domestic violence was conducted. The pre-study confirmed that material in which these different actors defined and elaborated on their understanding of domestic violence existed and that it would be suitable for answering the research questions.

While the initial search produced a broad range of actors and organizations working on questions related to domestic violence, a deeper study of their documents and material later revealed that not all were as relevant as initially believed. After narrowing down on a handful of actors, the material at hand resulted in the creation of a dataset based on two different kinds of material: written and video material. The written material consisted of organizational documents, blog posts, interviews, campaign material and policy analysis published on the identified actors' websites and social media. The video material consisted of tv-interviews, debates and campaign material.

4.3.1 Sources

For this study, material produced by a number of non-governmental organizations was included. Namely: the ANNA Center, Hasiliu.net, Kitezh Shelter for Women in Crisis (hence forward labeled as 'Kitezh'), Profamilia and For the Right of the Family. Additionally, a number of tv-debates and interviews produced by SPAS TV, Stalingrad and Ivan-Chay were studied. These featured a mixture of societal actors, victims and experts on the topic, who were interviewed and/or debating the question among each other.

Reviewing a number of organizations working with women's rights and gender-based violence in Russia, the ANNA Center, together with Hasiliu.net and Kitezh were chosen because of their specific focus and work on questions related to domestic violence. Each of these three organizations offered well-developed platforms for information spreading and advocacy work on domestic violence. Additionally, key representatives from Kitezh and Hasiliu.net were also present in a number of the tv-debates chosen for the study.

The ANNA Center is one of Russia's oldest and most prominent organizations working with domestic violence. Except for advocacy work, they coordinate a national helpline for

victims of domestic abuse. Furthermore, they have provided the CEDAW with a number of alternative reports explaining the overall workings and concerns related to violence against women in Russia.

Hasiliu.net is a more recent creation, founded in 2015 the goal according to its founder Anna Rivina, is to provide Russian women with information and practical advice on what to do when faced with domestic violence.

Finally, Kitezh is a shelter for victims of domestic violence which is run by the Novospasskiy Stavropol monastery at the outskirts of Moscow. As such, they offer a number of services to women and children who seek protection from their abusers, including housing, counselling and assistance in finding work and a new place to live.

While the ROC is a vocal player in debates about domestic violence in Russia, the initial search did not reveal any written material or documents relevant for the study. Finding that SPAS TV, a federal TV-channel mainly owned by the Moscow Patriarchate of the ROC had produced a number of tv-shows and debates on the topic of domestic violence, a few of these were added to the data set. In the tv-shows chosen for this study, a number of survivors of domestic violence were interviewed or asked to tell their stories. They also feature debates and conversations between civil society activists, public figures, academics and representatives of the ROC. In its capacity as a platform for debate between different actors representing different views, as well as victims of domestic abuse, it was deemed a suitable material to analyze.

Reading Russian news articles about domestic violence, and especially about the proposed law on domestic violence, some organizations, labelling themselves as promoters of traditional family values were often mentioned. For this study, written material produced by the organizations Profamilia and For the Right of the Family were included, along with video material from YouTube channels from the organizations Stalingrad and Ivan-Chay. None of these organizations solely focuses on the topic of domestic violence, however, they have generated some written and/or video material on the topic, ranging from information spreading material to conversations with experts. While Profamilia and For the Right of the Family as opposers to the law on domestic violence, reviewing their web platforms revealed only a few sources dedicated to domestic violence which were included in this study.

4.4 Data Analysis

For the data analysis, the following steps were taken: 1) A pilot study was conducted for the purpose of finding and defining which societal actors to include in the study 2) Collecting written material from the defined actors within the given time frame of the study.

This step included a preliminary scanning of the material in Russian, which was then translated from Russian to English through a web translator. The selected articles were verified by the help of two fluent Russian speakers who reviewed the original text and the web translation. An overview of the articles collected and translated was sorted into a separate file (Appendix 1).

With regards to the ANNA Center, Hasiliu.net, Kitezh, Profamilia and For the Right of the Family's web platforms, all material on domestic violence except for Hasiliu.net's daily news section, featuring global news on women's rights and domestic violence was translated and included into the dataset. With regards to Kitezh webpage, material published on their 'Director's Blog', which included seven reposted articles that other news media had written about them were included 3) Identifying video material produced by SPAS TV, Stalingrad and Ivan-Chay. Reviewing the video material, six videos/tv-programs were chosen to be included in the study based on their content⁸. These were transcribed verbatim by a Russian speaker and then translated to English using a web translator 4) Following the creation of the dataset, the material was coded (Appendix 1) for the purpose of making it easier to reference in the analytical chapter. 5) The material was read and reread several times for the purpose of detecting discursive patterns. Based on the notes taken during these readings, the material was sorted into categories loosely following the previously created typology (Table 1) 6) Five overarching themes occurred. Three that could be linked to the themes provided by previous research and two that went beyond these theories. While writing the analytical chapter, the material was once again reread to ascertain that no discursive themes or patterns were missed.

4.5 Justifying Methodological Choices

Given the current circumstance with an ongoing global pandemic, the undertaken study was limited by the fact that researching domestic violence in Russia could not be done through actual fieldwork but was narrowed down to desktop research. Following the same or similar research criteria's as the ones laid out in the above-mentioned chapter, interviewing different societal actors in Russia about domestic violence would have been another valid and interesting way to approach local discourses on domestic violence.

The main strength of the undertaken study was that by focusing on official material and public discussions, the analysis became focused on existing public discourses and constructions

⁸ For instance, SPAS TV produced at least three different programs dedicated to the 2019 law proposal. One of these shows were transcribed and translated following the rationale that the all three programs were based on a similar model (debates/discussion between different societal actors) and discussing the same topic (the law) which was of secondary interest for answering the research question.

of domestic violence rather than on individual perspectives. The themes and discussions broadcasted on TV shone a light on broader constructions and understandings of domestic violence that exist in Russian society today.

4.5.1 Validity and Reliability

The validity of the research was limited by the size of the study as well as the time at hand. While more time and space would have made it possible to include more actors and thus more material, the current study includes statements and opinions by actors, who throughout the time period of the study were vocal in public debates on domestic violence and provided different and sometimes even opposing views. How they understand and construct this phenomenon, is deemed to have impacted the discourses.

Studying the material, there exists a certain discrepancy between different actors, what material could be accessed and how they formulate themselves with regards to domestic violence. Because a certain number of organizations exclusively work with questions related to domestic violence, their views and opinions were often more stringent than by those who were engaged in broader or more general questions on issues such as family, tradition and religion. Additionally, the actors working with domestic violence had produced more material on the question, representing another discrepancy. However, a majority of this material only reaffirmed their discursive constructions and understandings of domestic violence.

To ascertain that existing language barriers would not result in faulty conclusions, the complete dataset was carefully transcribed verbatim and/or translated to English. While the quality of the web translation was deemed to be an accurate and useful tool, a number of fluent Russian speakers were consulted on matters of translation and understanding throughout the research process.

With regards to reliability, a thorough description of all the steps taken in creating this study, and the rationale guiding the choices of theory and methods as well as discussions on limitations and difficulties encountered will hopefully serve the purpose of showing the extent to which the research was conducted in a reliable and rigorous way.

Finally, reflecting upon my own biases, my standpoint is that science is never neutral, what we chose to study and how we chose to approach a given topic is affected by different conscious or unconscious biases. This being said I have tried to approach the topic carefully, aware of the fact that I'm studying different social and cultural contexts than my native one and in a language that is not my own.

5 Analysis

Following up on the outline elaborated on in the first half of this study, this chapter will deal with the different discourses and understandings of domestic violence in Russia related to the collected and analyzed data.

The overall aim of this study is to look at domestic violence in Russia to try and better understand how domestic violence is discursively created and understood in different social and cultural contexts. As previously mentioned, the framing of domestic violence as a problem and a global issue that needs solving on local levels, have to a large extent relied on Western academic work, theories and discourses.

Upon studying the material, a number of discursive themes occurred, that were possible to connect with previous theories on domestic violence and to local, historical and social context. The following chapter has been divided into five different sub-chapters, each dealing with five main themes that were discovered. In three of these sub-chapters, connections will be made between theories, concepts and discourses presented in chapter 3, and synthesized in the typology (Table 1). The other two sub-chapters will deal with Russian Orthodox discourses on domestic violence and other discourses that were found, which interestingly appear to concur with the social and historical contexts presented in chapter 2.

5.1 Feminist Discourses on Domestic Violence in Russia

This sub-chapter gathers all the data that make up the first of five different discursive themes of domestic violence in Russia: feminist constructions and understandings of domestic violence. It was found that the three organizations working with survivors of domestic abuse or with advocacy/information spreading i.e., Kitezh, the ANNA Center and Hasiliu.net, all rely on either explicit feminist or de facto feminist and/or intersectional explanations of domestic violence. Considering that the ANNA Center is one of the oldest and most prominent organizations dedicated to domestic violence founded during a time when Western feminist ideas were introduced in Russia, their construction of domestic violence based in feminist and intersectional ideas was not very surprising. As an organization founded by young urban women, Hasiliu.net's goal to provide Russian women with information about domestic violence also conferred with feminist discourses on the matter. Kitezh understanding of domestic violence to a large extent conferred with feminist discourses on domestic violence. As a Russian orthodox organization however, they at times appeared to be negotiating feminist ideas with narratives and understandings to fit into to more traditional and/or religious ideas.

In the video material reviewed for this study, feminist constructions of domestic violence were articulated by Kitezh's director Alena Yeltsova and Hasiliu.net founder Anna Rivina. Additionally, three out of five victim's stories in the SPAS TV-shows followed a de facto feminist pattern of explaining the development on their relationships and the mechanisms of domestic violence.

Except for the general framing of domestic violence using concepts as *power and control*, *normalization process* and the *cycle of violence*, a pattern of understanding domestic violence as an inherited behavior is present. This will be further elaborated on in chapter 5.2.

5.1.1 Domestic Violence as a Consequence of Patriarchal Structures

From the data collected, it became clear that both the ANNA Center and Hasiliu.net understand and construct domestic violence as a result of patriarchal societal structures. (ANNA 9, Hasiliu 3). Additionally, domestic violence is fitted into the larger scheme of gender-based violence (ANNA 9). In the data collected from the ANNA Center it is stated that:

[...] male violence against women, gender-based violence, which is so vividly manifested in the situation of domestic violence – is not the result of some mythical innate aggressiveness of men. This is not a derivative of the physical weakness of women in relation to men. This is a product of the culture of gender-based violence that prevails in our society. (ANNA 9)

This quote does not only frame domestic violence as a gender-based and cultural issue, but it simultaneously discards themes touched upon by those seeking to understand domestic violence as a phenomenon connected to biology - as a gendered issue connected to ideas about men's inherent aggressiveness and physical strength.

By the ANNA Center the existence and reproduction of domestic violence is understood to depend on a number of factors such as violent fathers, early exposure to dating violence and living in a socio-economic cultural space that promotes gender-based violence as a pillar of masculinity (ANNA 9). This construction of domestic violence does not only resonate feminist constructions and theories but, but the ideas presented in social exchange theory: i.e., to live in a social and cultural space where the rewards for using violence are higher than the costs produce and reproduces violence. Furthermore, a significant factor distinguishing domestic violence from general violence according to the ANNA Center and Hasiliu.net, is that it disproportionately targets women (ANNA 2, Hasiliu 2).

Domestic violence is constructed as an “epidemic” (ANNA 2) and as a problem that concerns the whole society and not just one family (Hasiliu 2). It is grounded in “society’s patriarchal views on women’s place in society and in the family” (Hasiliu 3) and stated that “crimes against men are rarely attributed to the fact that they are men”. (Hasiliu 3) This points to an understanding of domestic violence as gendered actions and crimes based on patriarchal structures, where women are the victims and men are perpetrators.

Pointing to another structural and gender specific aspect of domestic violence, all three organizations explain that one of the reasons as to why women stay in abusive relationships is because they are economically dependent on men and/or that they have children in common (ANNA 2, Hasiliu 3, Kitezh 7).

While Kitezh does not explicitly construct domestic violence as a result of patriarchy, feminist terminology and concepts like power, control and the *cycle of violence* are persistently used to explain the specific patterns and mechanisms of domestic violence (Kitezh 6, 7, 15). Additionally, Kitezh’s construction of domestic violence can be interpreted as a structural feminist understanding of the phenomenon based on their portrayal of women as structurally targeted and vulnerable, which they connect to economic dependence and additional vulnerability during pregnancies and maternity leave, understood to be a common starting point for physical violence (Kitezh 4).

In the data collected from Kitezh, the often-vulnerable position of migrant women in Russia, is highlighted in what can be interpreted as a de facto feminist/intersectional understanding of how domestic violence target and affect women differently. (Kitezh 2) They state that:

All women can be subjected to violence, neither age or income, nor personal qualities and characteristics can serve as a guaranteed protection against it, nor justify its use. (Kitezh 10)

At the same time, they highlight that migrant women and children often live under precarious conditions, where they are made extra vulnerable by sometimes conflicting cultural traditions (exemplified by non-acceptance to divorces and the justification of honor killings) and structural issues like economic dependence on their spouses. Illegal migration and difficulties in getting registered by the Russian state, renders many women and children invisible to the state, which according to Kitezh, adds to their already vulnerable position, as it makes it almost impossible for those who need to get help and/or support (Kitezh 3). The fact

that Kitezh points to how domestic violence targets women and children differently depending on life situation resonates with feminist intersectional ideas about the fluidity of patriarchy. To some extent this too points to the importance of recognizing the different shapes and forms that patriarchal structures can take and how more than one expression of patriarchy can exist in the same place at the same time.

5.1.2 Feminist Terminology

As briefly mentioned above, the concepts of power and control and the *cycle of violence* is recurrently referred to in the material produced by Kitezh. These two concepts also appear at the core of the ANNA Center's and Hasiliu.net's construction and understanding of domestic violence (ANNA 2, Hasiliu 2). In the data collected from the ANNA Center's website, a "basic definition" of domestic violence is constructed as: "[...] a recurring cycle of physical, sexual, verbal, psychological and economic abuse and pressure on loved ones to gain power and control over them." (ANNA 2) The *cycle of violence* explains the core mechanisms of domestic violence according to all three organizations. Thus, this constitutes an important part of how it is being constructed and understood.

According to Kitezh, the *cycle of violence* operates on two levels. The first level is the development of a romantic relationship that moves through different phases; starting innocently, followed by jealousy and possessiveness, which at the final stage result in the use of physical violence. The second level is described as following the three cyclic phases of tension, violence and honeymoon, which over time occur with shorter intervals (Kitezh 7, ANNA 2). Except for the reference to the three phases, Hasiliu.net constructs domestic violence as a phenomenon that is "following its own laws, principles and dynamics". (Hasiliu 2)

The systemic nature and the occurrence of a pattern explains what distinguishes domestic violence from other types of violence (ANNA 2, Video 1). Contrary to what all three organizations explain as a stereotype of domestic violence in Russian society i.e., as a result of alcohol consumption, provocation, or a loss of self-control (ANNA 2, Hasiliu 3, Kitezh 7) "serious violence does not occur out of the blue, it is often preceded by certain signals, and in many cases, perpetrators communicate their intentions". (ANNA 8) Physical violence is used to make a woman feel constant fear, to suppress her self-esteem, weakening her ability to resist, which ultimately exhausts her (ANNA 7). Once again, this construction of domestic violence points to a structural understanding of domestic violence, based on the idea that society is built on a patriarchal social order.

By Kitezh, domestic violence is distinguishable by five different types of behavior that confers with the concepts of *power and control* and the *normalization process*: 1) to put pressure on someone; 2) to blur the lines between yourself and the other person's personality; 3) to deliberately lower that person's self-esteem; 4) to manipulate and 5) to beat the other person. These different behaviors all represent different aspects of abusers' efforts to establish power and control over their partner (Kitezh 6).

Domestic violence is further differentiated from 'family conflict', the crucial difference being that: to establish power and control over another person is not present in family conflicts (Video 1). However, family conflict can transform into domestic violence if/when two partners fighting are not equally involved in the conflict (Hasiliu 2). This explanation seems to suggest that there is a difference between couples who are fighting and potentially using violence if it is an equal relationship/on equal terms, vs. couples with one dominant and one subordinate. How one is to determine if a family conflict is a regular couple's fight or domestic violence remain elusive.

It is interesting to note, that while no other social actor or organization in the studied material adhered to feminist explanations or analysis of domestic violence, the concepts of power and control, the *normalization process* and the cyclic nature of violence exists as 'unidentified' core elements in domestic abuse survivors recount of their experiences on the SPAS TV-channel (Video 2).

In the weekly talk-show I Love You on SPAS TV, hosted by Natalya Moskvitina and Archpriest Artemiy Vladimirov, one episode is devoted to discussing domestic violence. Moskvitina opens the show by stating that every day, thousands of Russian women silently suffer from violent abuse by their partners. Presenting the topic of the show - domestic violence, the hosts define it as not only physical but psychological. This statement is followed by the recount of three victims' stories of both physical and psychological abuse, which is commented on and debated by members of the clergy, as well as by psychologists, psychiatrists and the audience (Video 2).

It is among the stories of the victims that the patterns of power and control and the *cycle of violence* can be identified. The first victim begins her story by stating that "we never know who we have in front of us, what kind of person" (Video 1) she tells the story of how she had known her ex-partner for five years before they got romantically involved. During this time, she had never seen any indication of violent behavior. She then talks about how everything started out great, how he indicated his seriousness by soon introducing her to his family and introducing the topic of marriage and children. The first blow came unexpectedly, and she made

sense of it by thinking that he was jealous, and she had somehow done something to provoke him. The violence escalated over time; he purposely tried to ruin important work events for her, he started beating her more frequently and at one point he almost suffocated her. She recounts her acceptance of his violence, how she did not understand why he mistreated her and the only explanation she could find was that it was her own fault. Even though he almost killed her, it did not occur to her to contact law enforcement, nor did she tell anyone else because she felt ashamed.

A similar story is told by the second victim; what started out as a passionate and romantic relationship ended with her being hospitalized with several severe injuries to her body. In hindsight she could see that there were some warning signs: that he did not treat his mother with respect and that he was cruel to animals:

Then I was sometimes confused by the treatment of our dog, but I did not project this on myself. That is, it seemed to me that the dog is a dog, and I am a woman. (Video 2)

Once he started beating her, the violence eventually also spread to the daughter that she had from a previous relationship. Living in a village and with her husband working from home, she became completely isolated and controlled by him.

First of all, he is very patriarchal or something... That is, he completely subdued me to his will. Completely. First of all, I was working remotely. I was always at home. (Video 1)

The violence continued throughout her two pregnancies and while she was on maternity leave. Except for hitting her continuously, he insulted her, telling her that she was useless and pathetic. She finally found the strength to leave when she realized that her children were starting to take after their father's behavior (Video 2).

The elements of normalization and power/control: jealousy, manipulation, isolation and violence as well as the escalations of violence over time can be viewed as a de facto feminist narrative in that while it is not explicitly constructed as such, both women's understanding of what they experienced, at least in hindsight follows the trajectory of some of the most popular feminist theories on domestic violence. Additionally, similar patterns can be discerned in a third survivor's story. While her partner never physically abused her, he was pathologically jealous

and controlling over her and she felt completely dependent on his mood swings and opinions (Video 2).

By telling their stories, these three women want to make sure that other women who find themselves in similar situations are not to blame, and that they should leave these relationships. At the end of the show, the third victim's states:

I would like to tell you that this program is designed for women who find themselves in the same situation [as we did] but who are keeping quiet for now [...] We did not come here to be pitied. We have already experienced this situation [an abusive relationship] We came here to show other women that there is another way, and that they need to get out of the relationships that are destroying them. (Video 2)

The three victims' stories all follow the same trajectory. As previously mentioned, this can be interpreted as a de facto feminist construction of domestic violence, retold in a manner that prompts other women to recognize similar patterns in their own relationships, and to make them understand that they can and should leave. Considering how ROC formally refutes Western oriented/feminist ideas about domestic violence (chapter 2.5) and that SPAS is owned by the Moscow Patriarchate; these victim's stories are noteworthy. Especially since their explicit aim appears to have been to inform other women about how to recognize and get out of an abusive relationship. Additionally, the focus in these stories are that domestic violence can happen in any 'normal' family or relationship and that its use can never be justified.

Another point to note, is the conceptualization of domestic violence as both physical and psychological violence, both by the tv-hostess at the beginning of the show and by featuring a victim's story which is solely focused on the psychological aspects of domestic violence. (Video 2)

5.1.3 Who is a Victim?

Following a feminist and structural approach, the ANNA Center, Hasiliu.net and Kitezh all construct domestic violence as a phenomenon that targets anyone regardless of social strata, education, age, ethnicity, religion etc. Additionally, they all share the view that domestic violence disproportionately targets women (ANNA 2, Hasiliu 3, Kitezh 10).

Both the ANNA Center and Kitezh describe a tendency among victims to develop 'Stockholm syndrome' as a strategy for survival which entails identifying with the abuser. This in part explains women's reluctances to go to the police and/or to cooperate with law

enforcement (ANNA 8, Kitezh 2). Hasiliu.net understands women's unwillingness to go to the police as in part driven by a wish to make the violence stop without having their partner end up in jail. It might also be motivated by financial and social factors; many Russian women are financially dependent on their partners. Additionally, there is strong pressure on parents to live together, and the idea that children need to grow up with both a father and a mother (Hasiliu 3, Kitezh 2), but also the prospect of losing one's social connections and social status (Kitezh 2).

Kitezh describes women who suffer from abuse as losing their sense of self, their personality and that they eventually end up in a state barely knowing the purpose of their existence. Domestic violence is constructed as something that takes years to recover from, and that these women need to 'reprogram' themselves. Being a victim of domestic abuse is not something that you can fake (Kitezh 1). Interestingly, Kitezh makes a connection between women's previous experiences and their possibilities to get a normal life. According to Kitezh, it is easier for women who come from resourceful and loving families to bounce back, while women who have suffered from abuse as children or been orphaned have a much harder time recovering. While domestic violence is constructed as a phenomenon that targets women independent of social status, it is also understood that depending on previous experiences and resources, might give different outcomes and tools for dealing with their trauma (Kitezh 2). While this touches upon a de facto intersectional understanding of domestic violence, it is a construction of victims that aligns with some of the most popular sociological and psychological theories as well. The focus on family can also be interpreted as alluding to the Soviet understanding of 'problem families'; that growing up under certain circumstances or in certain family or social constellations serves as a prerequisite for becoming either an abuser or abused (Kitezh 2).

In fact, there is a strong tendency to view violence as inherited over generations not only by these three organizations but by other societal actors. This tentatively suggests that the modern-day construction of domestic violence in Russia to a large degree confer with already existing ideas about inheritability and early exposure to violence. Ideas about violent behavior as heritable or as learned behavior over generations/in families resonates with themes presented in chapter 3 but also with the Soviet framework of 'problem families', presented in chapter 2. This theme will be further elaborated on in the following chapters.

5.1.4 Who is an abuser?

According to the ANNA Center men become perpetrators because of harmful gender stereotypes and socio-cultural upbringing and/or because they have witnessed abuse or been

abused in their childhood (ANNA 9). All three organizations make clear that contrary to what they view as societal stereotypes in Russian society, which tend to view domestic violence as a phenomenon that only occurs in low status families, alcohol abuse and/or poor self-control, most domestic abusers are often considered respectable people in society (ANNA 2, Hasiliu 3, Kitezh 6). Just as victims of domestic abuse exist in a layer of society, so do abusers.

Abusers are described as taking extra care to cultivate their external image of being a good colleague and employee, a dedicated father and husband. According to Hasiliu.net the upholding of a perfect surface can help explain why it is difficult for women to get support by friends and relatives (Hasiliu 5).

Hasiliu.net describe typical abusers as controlling, pathologically jealous and as regularly shifting blame for their actions on others. They can be abusive towards children and animals, display rude behavior and change mood very abruptly. They make threats and can be rude during intercourse, they might even threat to commit suicide if you leave them. Finally, there is a high probability of your relationship to develop abusive tendencies if they have a history of abusing former partners or have grown up in a violent family (Hasiliu 2). “If a man’s behavior combines several of these features, there is a high risk that he will become abusive.” (Hasiliu 2)

While all three organizations agree that any man can be an abuser, they are all pointing to certain types of behavior or characteristics that, according to their perspectives, are more commonly featured among abusers. To some extent the naming of certain groups, characteristics and/or behavior appear paradoxical against the argument that anyone can be an abuser. At the same time, the aim of all three organizations (as mentioned in chapter 4) is information spreading and prevention work in order to help potential victims/future victims differentiate between equal and unequal relationships. Finally, the construction of abusers as anyone, on the one hand, and as more likely to have experienced violence on the other, point to both a structural and situational understanding of who is and becomes an abuser - following feminist constructions of domestic violence.

5.2 Sociological Discourses on Domestic Violence in Russia

This subchapter will draw on the discourses and understandings of domestic violence that was found in the studied material and which correlates with ideas and theories of domestic violence as connected to learned behavior and inheritability. Among all the different societal actors, heritability and being socialized into using violence was a more or less recurring theme.

Additionally, it was also a factor that a majority of the participants in SPAS TV-shows would agree on (Video 1, 2, 3).

As previously mentioned, the construction of domestic violence as learned and inherited behavior corresponds with the ideas guiding *social learning theory* and the other sociological theories mentioned in chapter 3. It also resonates with psychological theories (chapter 3) as well as with the Soviet conceptualization and legal framework, connecting the prevalence of domestic violence to ‘problem families’ (chapter 2).

5.2.1 Inheriting Domestic Violence

A persistent and recurring theme that runs like a red thread through all of the studied material is the construction of domestic violence as an inherited behavior caused by social upbringing and early exposure to violence. Looking at previous theories on domestic violence, both sociological and psychological theories have constructed domestic violence as inherited behavior.

As mentioned in the theoretical chapter, one of the most popular theories within the sphere of sociology is that of *social learning theory*, which constructs domestic violence as learned behavior that takes on a gendered form and is based on children witnessing and learning to accept violent behavior. Psychological theories have put more emphasis on the individual trauma suffered by children who witness or are subjected to abuse, as a factor that reproduces domestic violence over generations. Because these two theories on domestic violence are overlapping, they are treated simultaneously in this subchapter.

In explaining domestic violence, ANNA states that “Domestic violence is a complex problem that is transmitted from generation to generation.” (ANNA 2) In accordance with feminist constructions of domestic violence, the ANNA Center understands the transmittance of violence over generations both as a product of family socialization and societal structures.

Explicitly relying on what both Western and Russian studies have shown about abusers’ behavior, the continuation of domestic violence over generations is understood to be linked to traumas suffered in childhood (ANNA 2). This construction of violence is echoed by a participant in one of the SPAS TV-shows, who see domestic violence as inherited over generation, which if not stopped will have serious consequences for children’s future, based on the likelihood of children to adopt the same behavioral patterns as their parents (Video 1).

The ANNA Center paints a broad picture, in which children can be the primary object of aggression and violence or targeted for the purpose of subduing the main victim, the woman. Additionally, the ANNA Center explains the mechanism of ‘secondary victimization’, echoing

theories presented in the theoretical chapter on psychological factors, which explains how witnessing domestic abuse causes similar traumas to that of being a primary victim:

It is necessary to take into account that even if the violent actions are directed at only one person, all other family members are also exposed to what is referred to by some researchers as 'secondary victimization'. Its essence is that people who have witnessed violence receive the same psychological trauma as people who have been directly subjected to violence. For example, children experience particularly difficult experiences when they watch their father abuse their mother. (ANNA 2)

According to the ANNA Center, witnessing domestic abuse is something that has a negative impact on children's mental development and their abilities to communicate and control emotions:

The problem here is that domestic violence harms the child not only when he is the direct object of violence by the father, but even when he is simply watching the cruelty towards the mother. [...] Incidents of violence become a kind of lesson for teenagers. They draw certain conclusions from what they have seen, and then build their own behavioral strategies. (ANNA 9)

The construction of socialization by society as a factor that contributes to reproducing domestic violence draws heavily on ideas about gender and masculinity. Echoing both sociological and feminist theories, domestic violence is constructed as something that affects boys and girls differently; from watching their fathers' behavior, boys are more likely to become abusers, while girls develop passivity and low self-confidence (ANNA 9).

Early sexual relationships and dating violence is constructed as a contributing factor for the reproduction of domestic violence, becoming sort of a testing ground for violent behavior, which is confirmed by the approval of peers and the silence of victims - who are blamed by society or met with silence. Justification of violence as well as the silence of victims is explained by referring to patriarchal structures which also includes sexualizing female bodies and fostering dismissive attitudes towards women (ANNA 9).

The ANNA Center explains that adolescent men are more vulnerable when establishing certain behaviors, as they are guided by an acute desire to conform to gender norms and masculine and/or macho ideals that promotes aggressiveness. The approval of their behavior

by friends' further functions as a surrogacy for broader social acceptance of masculine behavior, which in addition is broadcasted by popular culture and mass media (ANNA 9). According to the ANNA Center a broad trend in popular culture is to always portray men as aggressors and women as the object for this aggression:

This pattern in media underlines the fact that violence against women is still not considered by the majority population as a serious problem that needs to be addressed (ANNA 9)

While this construction of domestic violence reaffirms the ANNA Center's already confirmed feminist understanding of domestic violence, the construction of domestic violence as inherited social behavior also follows the patterns of *social learning theory* as well as the *socioecological* model. This constructs domestic violence as a consequence of personal, situational and sociocultural experiences, which combined explains the likelihood of violence to occur. Additionally, the emphasis on violence's prevalence in society promoted by media and culture reflects *exchange theory*, which focuses on the costs and rewards of using violence; that societies with high impunity for offenders as well as widespread acceptance of violence through media lowers the costs of using violence.

Both Hasiliu.net and Kitezh construct a similar understanding of domestic violence as a behavior and phenomenon that is inherited over generations and within the family. As well as a social problem that goes beyond single families and that to a certain degree is accepted and promoted by society. Hasiliu.net states:

If a child sees how the 'head of the family' establishes his power by beatings year after year, they may in the future fall into a violent relationship themselves, becoming an aggressor or a victim (Hasiliu 6)

Society is responsible for reproducing domestic violence because of an existing culture of silence, because men are taught to solve problems by physical means, because of widespread victim-blaming and the lack of a legal framework, which grants most aggressors impunity (Hasiliu 6).

Kitezh emphasizes the normativity of domestic violence as an inherited behavior that is further emphasized by language norms:

We had a girl who told the women working at the shelter that she had not suffered from domestic violence. 'I'm fine, it's just that my husband is in prison'. Then she began to change her clothes and her legs were all covered with monstrous scars. They asked her: 'What is this?' And she answered: 'My husband wanted to cut my legs off with an axe when I wanted to leave him' - and she is not a victim of domestic abuse! [...] If he beats you, he loves you? Yes [...] They simply do not know that it is wrong. Women over three generations have suffered from domestic abuse. It is normalized. (Kitezh 2)

The emphasis on domestic violence as normal behavior is a recurring theme in Kitezh's constructs of domestic violence. While it is stated that domestic violence is something that is prevalent in all layers of society, it simultaneously echoes both Russian Orthodox views on the sanctity of marriage and the Soviet understanding of violence as connected to certain family constellations like single parenthood:

It seems to me that this is not about individual problems of people who do not know how to cope with their anger. This is a global problem in our society. There is also a loss of educational traditions and continuity. It's no secret that many current spouses grew up in single-parent families. When a girl doesn't have a dad, she just doesn't know – how should a husband behave? (Kitezh 4)

A similar view is constructed by one of the participants in one of the SPAS TV-shows, who understands domestic violence as a consequence of growing up with violent parents or in loveless, cold families, where the upbringing of children has been taken over by institutions or orphanages (Video 2).

In another SPAS TV-show, a social activist constructs domestic violence in a similar way, as the product of being unwanted and unloved. According to his understanding, the proverb 'to beat is to love' means learning to get pleasure out of being beaten, because in families where violence is common, this is the only moment that anyone pays attention to you (Video 1).

In the SPAS TV-show - I Love You, psychiatrist Yuriy Vyalba constructs domestic violence as a consequence of the unconscious transference of certain male and female behavior through family life:

[...] to prevent family tragedies it is very important to look at where the husband comes from and what family he belongs to. Moreover, it is important for men to look at what family his wife comes from, if her mother is a horse in a coat so to say, who controls the family, then they will have problems. (Video 2)

Once again, domestic violence is constructed as an inherited behavior, but with an emphasis on individual family constellations. Additionally, what we see here appears to be specific expectations related to gender norms, where the existence of a dominant mother or female family figure means (future) problems. A tentative explanation to the occurrence of domestic violence then seems to be that it is a consequence of women not conforming to patriarchal and Russian Orthodox female gender stereotypes and values like being quiet and submissive.

It can also be interpreted as following the logic of the Soviet idea that domestic violence occurs in certain families. Seeing that these families were identified based on the display of certain behavior like alcohol abuse and lovelessness, but also on factors like growing up with separated parents, a single mother etc. to some extent echoes previous research focus on socioeconomic factors like poverty and alcohol abuse as explanatory factors for domestic violence.

5.3 Psychological and Biological Discourses on Domestic Violence in Russia

In this subchapter, explanations referring to domestic violence as a consequence of psychological and biological malfunctions will be examined. As mentioned in chapter 5, a recurring pattern for explaining domestic violence among the different societal actors examined in this study, see it as an inherited behavior and/or as an issue that is transferred from one generation to the next. As previously mentioned, sociological and psychological explanations constructing domestic violence as inherited tend to overlap. However, while sociological theories tend to focus more on the social environment in individual families and society at large, psychological theories have focused more on victimization and trauma as prerequisite for future violence.

One of the themes discovered in the studied material was the referral to stereotypes of domestic violence as a consequence of antisocial personalities, alcohol abuse, anger management problems or low self-control (ANNA 2, Hasiliu 3, Kitezh 7). On a few occasions, vague and conflicting references to biology as a prerequisite for domestic violence occurred.

For this reason, the results of the finds that connect domestic violence to psychology and biology have been merged into one subchapter.

5.3.1 Psychopaths and Antisocial Behavior

As mentioned in previous chapters, the ANNA Center, Hasiliu.net and Kitezh use what they see as widespread stereotypes in society to explain what domestic violence is not. These include viewing abusers as anti-social and/or alcoholic, who suffer from anger management problems and low self-control. (ANNA 2, Hasiliu 3, Kitezh 7) These are all stereotypes that to some extent appear to resonate with how domestic violence was constructed in the Soviet Union: as a result of alcohol consumption and/or as acts of irrational behavior. Classifying these behaviors as connected to abusive behavior and widespread stereotypes in Russian society, reproduces them as domestic violence discourses. While none of the other actors or organizations really use alcohol, anger or low self-control to construct their understanding of domestic violence, abusers are sometimes referred to as madmen or psychopaths.

A participant in one of the SPAS TV-shows suggested that we need to recognize a psychopath when we see them and refuse further contact (Video 3). This seems to imply that abusers are recognizable based on them displaying psychopathic or potentially anti-social behavior by just looking at them or after briefly acquainting them.

On a similar note, psychiatrist Yuriy Vyalba argues that you can see in a person that he is an abuser:

There is an old saying that to know a person, you need to eat two pounds of salt with them, which takes two years. Well, such a quick acquaintance with a person, when the relationships are built on sexual desires and there is no rationality, everything is based on feelings, we can miss some personality features that characterize that person. For long-term relationships, as it was in the old days, before you married, you need to let a period of time pass, to truly recognize the other person. (Video 2)

Several of the other participants on the same show refuse this explanation (Video 2). This seems to confirm that while a few of the studied societal actors want to connect domestic violence to mental problems and psychological issues – or inappropriate behavior - a majority does not agree with such explanations or understandings of domestic violence.

Other than this, abusers are occasionally referred to as a beast, a demon, tyrant or a Siberian tiger (Video 2). While these epithets are not really related to psychological or

biological conditions, it can be argued that such labels construct abusers as abnormal or sick people. This also reflects the tendency in both psychological and biological theories to construct domestic violence as connected to personality and/or mental disorders and as a deviant behavior. As pointed out in the theoretical chapter, this can also be interpreted as moments in which the use of language help diffuses the meaning and focus on a certain topic. Framing abusers as beasts and demons help reproducing domestic violence as an abnormal behavior and as something that only truly evil people are guilty off.

5.3.2 Hormones and Diseases

Except for a rather specific referral to female hormones by Kitezh, biology theories and discourses are not really present in the studied material. While the theoretical chapter showed that scientists have theorized that there is a connection between the hormonal makeups in women and men, hormones are never mentioned as a cause for domestic violence. However, in explaining the difficulties for an abused woman to leave her abuser, Kitezh constructs this process as similar to rehabilitating from a drug addiction connected to female hormones: leaving an abusive partner sets in motion very strong hormonal and emotional processes that are difficult to deal with:

And she won't come to us, because over the years she has developed a serious addiction that can't be turned off with a toggle switch. It's like a drug withdrawal, there are hormonal processes that are so complex that they can break a person. (Kitezh 2)

This explanation of domestic violence reoccurs a few times (Kitezh 2 and 8).

Another understanding of domestic violence that echoes the theme of abusive behavior as a consequence of injury or disease is provided by a participant in one of the SPAS TV-shows. Here, a story is told of a normal, happy Orthodox family with many children. Then something happened which triggered the husband to become abusive towards his wife: "Apparently it was some kind of illness, apparently, he just left, he started drinking [...] you can get sick, or something can break you". (Video 2)

While the referral to hormones by Kitezh occurs on a few occasions, the story about the man who suddenly got sick and started beating his wife is rather elusive and sounds more like an excuse/justification for the (sudden) use of violence. To some degree this is a story that confirms what the ANNA Center, Hasiliu.net and Kitezh establish as stereotypes about domestic violence i.e., as a consequence of alcohol and/or some mental problem.

5.4. Domestic Violence and the ROC

Based on the fact that the ROC is an important and powerful societal actor in Russian society and because it has taken a clear stand in relation to domestic violence (chapter 2.5), this sub-chapter will focus on constructions and understandings of domestic violence in relations to the societal actors representing or affiliated with ROC in the studied material. Looking at the construction of violence by members of the clergy and by Kitezh, three somewhat conflicting constructions and understandings of domestic violence occurred. On the one hand, violence is understood to be irreconcilable with Christian values, and as the antithesis of love. On the other hand, it is also understood to be a cross that you sometimes have to carry.

5.4.1. Violence as Irreconcilable with Christian Values

A reappearing idea voiced by both Kitezh and members and actors affiliated with the Church is that violence is irreconcilable with Church values and that the ROC needs to clarify this (Video 2, Video 3, Kitezh 4). Christians who use violence or members of the clergy who defend the use of violence are understood to either be confusing the message of the Bible or as not being true believers. In one of the SPAS TV-shows, Archpriest Vasiliy Gelevan states that:

On the way here, I found an interview with a very famous archpriest of our Church. He openly defends violence, including domestic violence. But I want to say that as honest as his opinion is, even for this very famous father, this is his private opinion [...] You know, sometimes priests or blessed lay people use examples from the Old Testament to politicize violence [...] It is written that you should not allow your wife to wear colored clothes [...] Next to it, it says that you should stone your son if he does not listen to you. It is obvious that this is irreconcilable with today's society. (Video 3)

Similarly, Father Serafim Simonov who runs the Novospasskiy Monastery and work with women staying at Kitezh say:

This is a story about permissiveness and impunity. Sometimes men think that they control other people - their wives, their children. But this is savagery, we don't have a slave system! Where do they get this example from? The main problem is a fundamentally wrong understanding of what a family is [...] Unfortunately, even in the Orthodox environment, sometimes there are incorrect interpretations of the Holy

Scriptures: both women and men do not understand what obedience, patience, and humility really is about [...] People justify their behavior by misinterpreting Orthodox dogmas, and then it comes back to us as some kind of Church idea - mainly at the expense of neophytes. But Domostroy⁹ is not a Church idea. Our idea is the gospel, and it doesn't say: 'Take your wife by the hair and put her to the radiator.' It says, 'let a man love his wife, but let the wife fear her husband.' And she will be afraid not as a terrible tyrant who beats her, but as a loved one who does not want to offend. This is what the Church and Christ are calling for. (Kitezh 4)

While this quote confirms the ROC's patriarchal family structure, it also shows that the use of violence is unacceptable according to the Orthodox Christian logic. In another SPAS TV-show, host of the show Archpriest Artemiy Vladimirov, at the end of the show exclaims:

I think dear friends, that it is also useful for men to watch this show, because courage and strength does not consist in asserting themselves at the expense of the fragile, weak and beautiful. Courage is not about causing pain and getting pleasure. To hit a woman is a great meanness, which is difficult to find anything equal to. A man who raises his hand against a woman is a scoundrel, let them hear me say it to all of Russia. (Video 2)

Similar ideas, about the irreconcilability of violence and Christian belief, are also voiced by Father Stakhiy Kolotvin (Video 2) as well as by social activist Konstantin Krokhmal (Video 1) and Orthodox publicist Sergey Khudiev (Video 3).

While it might appear as contradictory that members of the clergy take such a firm stance against the use of violence against a partner, this does not necessarily contradict the official statement made by the Church - who first and foremost opposes a law on domestic violence.

While the focus of this study is not on the law on domestic violence, but on how different actors construct and understand domestic violence, the law proposal is often the starting point off and/or a recurring topic of discussion. Archpriest Vasiliy Gelevan is the only one who openly states that Russia needs a law on domestic violence, but he also argues along with

⁹ Domostroy is a 16th-century Russian set of household rules, instructions and advice pertaining to various religious, social, domestic, and family matters of the Russian society (Johnston Pouncy, 1994).

Orthodox Publicist Sergey Khudiev and Professor in Sociology Aleksandr Sinelnikov, that every case of domestic violence needs to be dealt with individually, that society should refrain from making any generalizations (Video 3). This seems to suggest that while domestic violence is recognized as a social issue that needs to be dealt with and that should not be accepted by society, none of these societal actors/members of the clergy understand domestic violence as a structural issue. Rather they see it as an issue that needs to be dealt with on an individual basis. It is a discursive understanding of domestic violence that constructs it as a private matter rather than as a public one. Rather than recognizing patriarchal and gendered aspects of women's subordinate position in society as a factor that leads to violence, the ROC celebrates these structures.

5.4.2 God is Love

If one core element of the Christian understanding of domestic violence is that this is unchristian behavior, another core element is the focus on God and love. The main construction here is that God is love, and that if you truly love God you won't use violence. More love is suggested as a solution to decrease violence in society (Video 3).

In one segment of the SPAS TV-show - I Love You a group of children are asked to retell the life story of Prince Vladimir, who was a cruel and violent ruler up until the point when he became baptized in the Orthodox Christian faith. By becoming a Christian, Vladimir was transformed into a kind and just ruler (Video 2). Becoming a true Christian, just like Prince Vladimir, any violent or aggressive tendencies will disappear because love and God, which are the same thing, is irreconcilable with violence.

In the same show, loving God follows the Christian logic, as presented by father Stakhiy Kolotvin. He explains that love is not duplicitous but threefold, meaning that two people can only truly love each other by loving God first (Video 2). From a theological point of view, not loving God before loving another human being opens up the possibility of transforming the subject of your romantic love into an idol and idolizing someone makes abusive relationships possible. This is a core understanding Russian Orthodox violence, which ties into domestic violence as irreconcilable with Christian values.

5.4.3 Violence is a Cross You have to Carry

A third core element is the idea that domestic violence is connected to (women's) humility, patience and endurance. That violence and the violent behavior of husbands will disappear if women just humble themselves enough and remain patient. Violence is a cross for

the victim to carry and by enduring, they will reach the heavenly kingdom (Kitezh 1). Because of this, Kitezh argues that many religious women accept violence or think that it is their fate. This is not only true for Orthodox women. Kitezh specifies that the Koran is also against violence, but that in traditional Muslim societies, religious believes are confused with traditions.

In the SPAS TV-show - I Love You Father Stakhiy Kolotvin, in a follow up discussion to one domestic violence survivor's story states that:

Real life and real love [...] is built on overcoming difficulties [...] there is a method that has been working for a very long time, while I am very young, many priests before me and after will always recommend it: that if a person is a candidate for both hand and heart and becomes the father of children of a beautiful girl, then this girl should really try to pass with him. (Video 2)

While the wording here is a bit elusive, this could be interpreted as while life can be difficult and hard at points, a woman in choosing her husband, should accept and endure - even if this means being subjected to violence - and that by doing so, she/they will reach true love and happiness.

In another SPAS TV-show Priest Grigoriy Geronimus states that domestic violence needs to be clearly defined, because today it is applied to two different situations: on innocent conflicts in a loving family on the one hand, and on "criminal horror stories" (Video 1) on the other. According to Geronimus, these are two separate things, and they need to be dealt with differently. The first thing you should do, it to consult a priest:

And the priest must respond to and try to understand the situation. In some situations, the priest should say "this is a crime, you are being beaten, this is absolutely not necessary to tolerate, you should go to the police immediately [...] This is not a way to live, it is wrong, you are ruining yourself and this is not a family, but a profanation of what can be called a family. In another situation, the priest will say: look, well, it's your own fault, because you did something completely wrong. (Video 1)

This statement not only reaffirms the understanding of domestic violence as an issue that should be dealt with individually/separately within each different family. It also suggests that a third party - in this case, a member of the clergy (rather than the state), should act as both

judge and jury in deciding if the use of violence was appropriate or not. Against the above quoted condemnations of violence, this reflects a very interesting ambiguity among the Russian Orthodox clergy itself - sometimes justifying the use of force against a loved one, sometimes condemning it.

Later on, father Geronimus is asked whether violence destroys the family, to which he answers:

[...] I think that in every conflict, both sides are to blame, maybe not equally, but still, both sides are to blame and there is such an important ascetic principle that in any situation, a person should first think about themselves, what they can improve in order to improve this situation. What if we talk about guilt, what am I guilty of, what can I do? And about the fault of the other person, to demand a lot from another person is probably not very correct. Each of us should be stricter with ourselves. If we talk about conflicts, it means that we should not give any reasons for these conflicts to exist, we should think about how to change the family situation so that conflicts are minimized. What can I change? Both men and women. Therefore, think first of all about yourself and be as lenient as possible towards the other person in a conflict. (Video 1)

While stating that domestic violence needs to be properly defined, Father Geronimus's understanding of domestic violence is yet another example of the elusiveness that make it difficult to understand whether or not using violence is right or wrong according to Orthodox Christian teachings. Answering the question about whether the use of violence can destroy a family, his reply is about conflict. Family conflict is constructed as something that both men and women are to be blamed for and that what each individual needs to concern themselves with is self-examination. Coming up with ideas about how to better oneself is the solution. This seems to be in line with the religious theme of humility and patience.

Later however, he explicitly comments that retorting to violence is an absolute impossibility for a Christian (Video 1). Still, it remains difficult to make sense of where the line between self-examination, as well as patients, endurance and domestic violence should be drawn.

Another theme that is present is the different view on women and men's position in families and relationships. As men's servants, women are supposed to accept her husband's superiority and behavior. However, in one of the SPAS TV-shows, two of the victims name their faith in God as something that made them realize that their relationships were not right,

and as something that gave them the strength to leave the relationship (Video 1). Additionally, all three women's accounts further reflect the ambiguity within the Church, as they clearly state that their purpose for participating in the SPAS TV-show - I Love You, is to tell their stories (following a de facto feminist trajectory) to help other women get out of abusive relationships (Video 1).

5.5 Other Discourses on Domestic Violence in Russia

In this last sub-chapter of the data analysis, discourses and understandings of domestic violence that constructs domestic violence as the victim's responsibility and/or fault and/or as a fake or problematic (Western) concept will be discussed. Typically, such constructions of domestic violence are brought forward by the societal actors who label themselves as traditional and for traditional family values. To a large extent these constructions of domestic violence appear to confer with the growing global counter-narrative of dangerous 'gender-ideologies' (mentioned in chapter 1) as well as the ROC and other religious institutions opposition to Western liberal and egalitarian human rights values (chapter 5).

5.5.1 Victim's Responsibility

As previously mentioned, in explaining the specific nature of domestic violence, the ANNA Center, Hasiliu.net and Kitezh refers to general stereotypes about domestic violence in Russia as a way to challenge common perceptions. Some of these stereotypes; violence as a consequence alcohol abuse, anger management problems, low-self-control and the family's socio-economic status have been dealt with in previous chapters. According to the three organizations other common stereotypes are that women are guilty of provoking the violence themselves, that it is a private matter and that it is more important for the family to try and stay together. Another stereotype is that women are equally as abusive as men, consequently, men's violence against women as a concept does not exist. (ANNA 2, Hasiliu 3, Kitezh 7). These understandings of domestic violence in one way or another resonate with those among the societal actors who label themselves as traditional.

A recurring theme in the studied material is the tendency to give abused women more agency than their abusers. According to Hasiliu.net, this is a double burden that victims of abuse in Russia have to carry. First, society blames them for choosing the wrong man, and then they are blamed for staying with that man (Video 1).

A general attitude towards women who live with abusive men is that once you've made your choice (of man), you have to live with it. This construction of victims' blame seems to

resonate with the Christian message of patience and endurance, which confers with what Father Kolotvin says about choosing a man in chapter 5.4.3 as well as the ROC's view on women's position in the family. This view is further confirmed by one of the victims in one of SPAS TV-shows, who stated that once she told her mother about the abuse, she replied that her daughter, just like everyone else had to endure (Video 1).

Overall, there is a continual referral to specific 'language norms', that justifies the use of violence. The already mention proverb 'to beat is to love'¹⁰ (Video 1, 2, 3), and 'don't throw your trash outside the house' (Video 1 and 3) as well as jokes about how Russian women always settle for the worst loser that they can find to marry (Video 2). While these language norms are used to question the use of violence by some (Video 1 and 2, Kitezh 2, ANNA 9), they are referred to as norms, as part of Russian culture - by others (Video 1, 2, 3). Whether or not they are used to question the practice of domestic violence, or for justifying it, these language norms appear as an important aspect of general constructions and understandings of domestic violence among the societal actors studied. Additionally, the point to how deeply ingrained the gender norms and stereotypes that degrade, and ridicule women are.

Another recurring theme, which ties into the overall understanding of women's agency is what role women play in "attracting violence to her address" as Social Psychologist Nailiya Birarova states in one of the SPAS TV-shows (Video 2). While the material from Kitezh show that there is a tendency to judge victims of abuse if they don't confer with an image of victims as "beautiful, crying angels dressed in rags" (Kitezh 3) a common perception also seems to be that women who are too good, too kind or too meek, are the ones that attract abusive men. On SPAS - I Love You, Social Psychologist Birarova states that:

But I can say as an expert psychologist, [...] that only a woman who broadcasts the trauma of the victim attracts a man with the trauma of the abuser. He is abusive with her because of how she positions herself in the relationship. A man is not the same man in two different relationships. This is not about male behavior. If a woman is convenient and pleasing and kind, then on the contrary she attracts aggressors. (Video 2)

In a similar manner, another participant state that:

¹⁰ 'To beat is to love' is often referred to as a Russian proverb (Video 1, 2, 3) but originates from the Bible and is used in many different countries.

It is clear that every victim is looking for their own abuser. [...]. To not become a victim, you need to find your own realization, to find freedom from this sacrificial position. If you find the strength to feel like a person and not an object, then in the end you will feel like a subject. (Video 2)

And Psychiatrist Yevgeniy Fomin makes a parallel between Chekov's novel *Darling* and real life

Chekov's *Darling* is about a woman who constantly gives herself to love and relationship and gets completely dissolved. It is very important to preserve your identity, your interest, guidelines in life. Passive aggressiveness [...] humility accumulates until an explosion happens. (Video 2)

In another reference to Russian literature, Psychologist Roman Volkov states that women suffer from the Sonya Marmeladova¹¹ syndrome:

They often talk about the so-called victim syndrome. I call it the syndrome of Sonya Marmeladova. When a woman tries to save her husband, she tries to make him different. (Video 2)

From the studied material it is clear that a majority of the actors engaging with the question of domestic violence view it a widespread problem in Russia. Most seem to agree that men generally are abusers and that women are victims, yet the focus on women's responsibility - of being too kind and good nature, or to lose themselves in their relationships, is part of a construction of domestic violence that blame women for the violence that they are subjected to.

Another version of this theme is presented by a participant in one of the SPAS TV-shows. She recounts a story from the early days of her marriage, when her husband became aggressive. Realizing that his wife was ironing clothes and holding a hot iron and would beat him back if he touched her, he retreated and never behaved that way again (Video 2). A similar story is told by a woman in another SPAS TV-show. A short while after getting married, her husband beat her up severely, allegedly out of jealousy. When asked about how she survived

¹¹ A character in Fyodor Dostoevskiy's *Crime and Punishment*.

in the relationship, she argued that the incident was never repeated again because she made it clear to him that she would not accept such behavior (Video 1).

Another such story is presented by another participant in one of the SPAS TV-shows, who argues that women do not dare to fight back or be aggressive if the couple have children together (Video 2).

What these different stories seem to suggest is that one way to make domestic violence stop, is for women to toughen up and to show that they won't accept being mistreated. This is a construction of domestic violence, that both shifts blame and agency to change the relationship onto the victim (the woman). As such it is constructed as a structural and gendered issue, but contrary to feminist discourses the victim rather than the abuser is to blame.

5.5.2. Real Violence vs. Domestic Violence

Another construction of domestic violence found in the studied material constructs it as a question of definition and differentiation. It is possible to break down this understanding of domestic violence into two core elements: 1) There is a difference between real violence and educational/disciplinary violence 2) Psychological, economic and/or threat of violence is not violence, it is a fake construction of violence imposed on Russia by the West and/or the state.

5.5.2.1 Educational Violence

What is interesting to note is that in constructing domestic violence, the organization For the Right of the Family actually mirrors the pattern of explanation used during the Soviet times. According to their understanding, there is a difference between violence that constitutes a public danger and violence that does not cause harm to health. A man who goes out to get drunk, comes back home and then beats his wife and children just because he feels like it constitutes a public danger and is guilty of a crime (For the Right of the Family).

As mentioned in chapter 2, domestic violence was prosecuted as an act of hooliganism that constituted public danger in the Soviet Union. Hooliganism was understood to be irrational behavior. Additionally, the Soviets connected violence to alcohol consumption. Looking at how For the Right of the Family understands 'real' domestic violence as an act committed by someone just because he felt like it can be interpreted as following the pattern of irrational behavior, fueled by alcohol consumption.

The focus on differences between real violence and violence that does not cause any harm to health i.e., educational and/or disciplinary violence, is a recurring theme in the material produced by Profamilia, For the Rights of the Family, Stalingrad and Ivan-Chay. It should be

noted that all of these organizations are against instituting a law on domestic violence and that most of the material studied is framed around this theme.

The distinction between what they construct as ‘real’ domestic violence and educational/disciplinary violence is at the core of their understanding of domestic violence. Women as victims are of secondary focus here. On the contrary, all of them argue that women are as culpable as men, if not more:

The vast majority of cases do not concern actual cases of beating. These are cases of psychological and economic violence. Understood so vaguely, they can easily be blamed on anyone. In practice, these laws are almost always applied against men, although it is proven that in 60% of the cases, domestic violence is mutual and unilateral violence is committed by women twice as often as by men. (Video 4)

A similar idea is expressed by Professor Sinelnikov in one of the SPAS TV-shows:

Given the world statistics, there is no confirmation of the opinion that husbands beat their wives more often than vice versa [...] Let’s say that in about one case out of four, the husband beats the wife [...] In one case out of four, the wife hits the husband, and in the other two cases, that is, in half of the cases, both hit each other” (Video 3)

In arguing against a domestic violence law, they all seek to defend the use of educational beatings of children, which they understand to be a social norm, and a practice that can be related to the group-identity of a people (For the Right of the Family).

The idea to separate what these actors see as two different kinds of violence tie into the other core element of how they construct domestic violence: as a fake concept aimed at destroying the traditional family. The kind of behavior that constitutes a public danger, or “medium to severe beatings” (For the Rights of the Family) are already punishable by Russian law (For the Rights of the Family), which renders a separate law that follows the definition provided by international organs like the UN and WHO unnecessary, and a threat to family life.

5.5.2.2 Domestic Violence is a Fake Concept

Economic and psychological violence as well as the threat to use violence is constructed as tools for vengeful wives, children and potentially neighbors, to be used as a pretext for taking over property or placing children in orphanages. Both Ivan-Chay and Stalingrad paint a picture

of men being prosecuted for not buying the right lipstick or flowers for their wives. Another scenario concern not giving proper compliments or scolding a child who has misbehaved. These different situations represent what domestic violence will be if the law is accepted, according to their constructions (Video 4, 6, 7). Following the same pattern as in the previous chapter, this construction of domestic violence can be viewed as part of a gendered discourse that constructs women (and children) as untrustworthy and driven by alternative motives. As such it diminishes and downplays the stories and experiences of those who suffer or have suffered from abuse.

In a video by Ivan-Chay it is stated that: “According to these laws, almost anyone can be persecuted for reason of personal hostility, for selfish and even political motives” (Video 4) they will be used to “incite a war between the sexes in society and in the family.” (Video 4)

Interestingly, emphasis is put on the subjective judgement of law enforcement officials and social services in determining potential crime scenes and victim’s accounts (Video 3 and 4). Domestic violence is constructed as a tool that will be used by the state to increase state power of citizens (Video 3). In a society that already suffers from trust issues, this will serve to further break the bond between people (Video 3 and 6).

“Men will be criminalized on the basis of verbal reservation without evidence.” (Video 4) As mentioned in chapter 2.1, previous research about domestic violence in the Soviet Union has indicated that the legal instruments used to curb domestic violence also were used to gain access to family life in order to affirm that the values of the family reflected the values of the state. Additionally, citizens accused of domestic violence were given quick summary justice trials that did not demand the collection of evidence. While it is possible to make a connection between the Soviet construction of domestic violence based on the use of concepts such as ‘public danger’, a tentative connection can be made between the framing of domestic violence cases as threatening to family life, based on how the Soviet legal system seem to have used and punished those accused of beating a family member.

Memories of how the Soviet state operated with regards to its citizens appear to be an obstacle to potentially changing current discourses on domestic violence. In one SPAS TV-show a participant exclaims that “It is not in our culture to talk about these things. You are considered a snitch if you call the police on your neighbor.” (Video 3)

A similar view is expressed by the Orthodox publicist Sergey Khudiev who makes a comparison with the Soviet propaganda about fascist spies:

There are two problems actually, the problem of domestic violence and the problem of using domestic violence as an excuse to increase pressure on the family. [...] I will give this analogy. In the 1930s there were probably fascist spies in the USSR. But absolutely most of the people who suffered for being alleged fascists spies, were not involved at all. Here, in reality, the threat of fascist spies was used to launch a campaign of persecution, by which innocent people suffered in the majority (Video 3)

Overall, the main construction of domestic violence according to the abovementioned actors is that it is a fake concept that is being introduced in Russia in order to destroy Russian core values. It will be misused by the state to get access to people's lives and it will be misused by citizens to get back at each other. According to Ivan-Chay it is part of a radical ideology and will lead to "violations of real human rights". (Video 6) This is an interesting argument which tentatively ties into the ROC's efforts to reframe the international human rights concept into something that confers with traditional values, morality and community (chapter 2) As mentioned above, another aspect of this construction of domestic violence is how it confers with gender stereotypes and norms that tend to shift blame onto women (and children).

6 Discussion

This study has focused on discourses on domestic violence in order to answer the research questions *How is domestic violence discursively constructed and understood by different societal actors in Russia?* and *Can existing discourses on domestic violence in Russia be better understood by taking into account the local context in which they occur?*

Based on the results of the data analysis, it was found that a majority of the different societal actors saw domestic violence in Russia as a problem that needs to be addressed in one way or another.

Following the outline of the typology (Table 1), there was strong support for feminist discourses and understandings of domestic violence among the three organizations who worked with information spreading and victim's support. The ANNA Center and Hasiliu.net both constructed domestic violence as an explicit consequence of patriarchal social and family structures, further imposed by gender norms and stereotypes that prescribes different roles and behaviors to women and men. Kitezh did not specifically mention patriarchy or gender norms. Based on their analysis of domestic violence as a gendered issue and how they utilize concepts

like the *normalization process* and *cycle of violence*, their understanding of domestic violence can be viewed as *de facto* feminist. In part, similar feminist constructions of domestic violence was echoed by some of the victims who participated in the SPAS TV-shows. Based on their feminist and structural understanding of domestic violence, the ANNA Center, Hasiliu.net and Kitezh saw domestic violence as a societal problem that targets women independent of social strata. On a similar note, they saw all men as potential abusers. In order to combat domestic violence in Russia, gender norms and stereotypes must be addresses and changed. As a Russian Orthodox organization, Kitezh also constructed domestic violence as irreconcilable with Christian values.

With regards to sociological and psychological discourses on domestic violence, a main theme that was echoed by a majority of the different societal actors was the construction and understanding of domestic violence as a socially inherited and/or learned behavior from within the family and society. This in part echoed *social learning theory* and ideas about childhood trauma and early exposure to violence as a prerequisite for domestic violence. Additionally, the focus on heritability and learned behavior echoed the Soviet construction and understanding of domestic violence as a result of ‘problem families’. The construction of ‘problem families’ in its essence means any other family constellation than that of the orderly and loving nuclear family.

In the SPAS TV-shows domestic violence was constructed as an issue related to growing up in unloving families, without proper father figures or with strong-minded mothers/wives. This was constructed as issues that potentially could lead to future problems (domestic violence). This to a large extent appeared to tie in with Russian Orthodox ideas about family, gender norms and domestic violence.

Analyzing the different views expressed by the actors affiliated with the ROC, the main understanding of domestic violence appeared to be that it is irreconcilable with Christian values. However, Russian Orthodox ideas about the family rests on patriarchal and gendered structures which assigns the wife a subordinate position in relation to her husband. To be a woman and to be married means to be patient, to endure and show humility. Reading between the lines of what was stated by some of the clergy members, it appeared that violence can sometimes be justified, in cases where wives have not conferred with these values and/or gender norms. While the societal actors affiliated with the ROC constructed domestic violence as a problem and as unchristian behavior, they did not appear to view it as a structural issue. Rather, they saw it as an issue that should be dealt with privately and/or as an issue that could be solved by consulting the Church.

All in all, the ambiguous views on domestic violence among the different clergy members was interesting to observe. Tentatively, the result point to conflicting constructions and understandings of domestic violence, despite the ROC's formal opposition to introducing a law on domestic violence in Russia.

Among the actors who defined themselves as traditional and family oriented, domestic violence was constructed as a problematic and foreign concept aimed at destroying Russian families. Interestingly, the organization For the Rights of the Family's construction of domestic violence appeared to be following the exact same construction of the phenomenon as during the Soviet times i.e., as a question of behaviors that resulted in 'public danger'. According to their construction of domestic violence, violence that results in 'public danger' should be viewed as real violence, while violence that does not cause any harm to health and/or educational/disciplinary violence was not understood as real violence.

Another aspect of how these organizations constructed domestic violence focused on how psychological and economic violence are fake concepts that will be misused by women, children, vengeful neighbors and/or the state to destroy men's lives and families. According to this understanding, men will be prosecuted for not giving their wives compliments or proper gifts or for correcting their children. Introducing a law on domestic violence would mean that the state is given a tool to interfere in people's private life. Interestingly, this idea at least tentatively seems to resonate with how the Soviet state used the law on hooliganism and public danger to control Soviet families. Domestic violence is constructed as a concept that will be used as a pretext for state interference into private matters. Additionally, this can be viewed as a gendered discourse on domestic violence, constructing women (and children) as untrustworthy and driven by alternative motives.

Finally, a reoccurring construction of domestic violence was that it is something that women are guilty of bringing on themselves. Among the feminist-oriented organizations this was understood to be part of the problem: that society view women as responsible for the abuse; for choosing the wrong man and for staying with him. According to how some members of the clergy understood domestic violence, it seemed like using violence was sometimes justified. While not precise example was given, one priest argued that violence as a consequence of couple's quarrel was sometimes justified (and that this should be decided by a member of the clergy). Based on the ROC's view on family structures, a possible interpretation might be that violence can be justified if a person (woman) has been patient or showed enough humility. Interestingly, some of the participant in the SPAS TV-show seemed to understand women's position and victimization as a consequence of not being able to set boundaries or because they

were too meek. This too constructs domestic violence as an issue for which women are responsible.

Except for the feminist discourses on violence which were constructed by ANNA Center, Hasiliu.net and Kitez, a conclusion that can be drawn is that men's position and responsibility related to domestic violence to a large extent remained unquestioned and/or problematized.

Following the abovementioned, this study has shown is that discourses on domestic violence in Russia are influenced by local historical and social developments. In the studied material it was possible to draw connections between the Soviet construction of domestic violence and contemporary understandings. Furthermore, it appeared like the patriarchal structures and gender norms, heavily represented by the ROC has influenced different societal actor's understandings of domestic violence, which they either opposed or endorsed.

Looking at the theoretical framework and the typology, one of the most well represented discourses on domestic violence in Russia appears to be that it is a social problem that is inherited over generations and/or as learned behavior. This understanding of domestic violence ties into feminist, sociological and psychological theories on domestic violence, as well as with Soviet ideas about 'problem families'. In general, the data analysis showed weak support for the existence of discourses related to psychological diseases and/or biology related issues. Finally, discourses constructing domestic violence as a fake and problematic concept exist among organizations who values family and traditions.

The relatively broad focus of the study meant that less focus was given to going into more specific details within each of the discursive themes. For future studies, it would be interesting to dive deeper into the different themes that were discovered. In order to get a better understanding of domestic violence as a global phenomenon, it would also be interesting to further explore local and global discourses on domestic violence – and how these contrasts and/or intermingle. Finally, this has been an attempt to build on established knowledge about existing discourses on domestic violence and domestic violence in Russia - and to further this knowledge by mapping out and connecting different discourses.

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Appendix 1

| Title | Social Actor | Date | Code |
|---|--------------|---------------|----------|
| Alena Yeltsova – We are the Last Shelter Алена Ельцова: мы -последний приют | Kitezh | August 2019 | Kitezh 1 |
| "It's Your Own Fault?" Questions and Answers About Domestic Violence «Сама, дура, виновата?» Вопросы и ответы о домашнем насилии | Kitezh | August 2019 | Kitezh 2 |
| Why There are More Victims of Domestic Violence in Russia Than We Think Почему жертв домашнего насилия в России больше, чем мы думаем | Kitezh | August 2019 | Kitezh 3 |
| There is No Point in Asking a Victim of Domestic Violence: Why Did You Not Run Away? Жертве насилия бессмысленно говорить: что ж ты не сбежала? | Kitezh | July 2019 | Kitezh 4 |
| From Childhood Родом из детства | Kitezh | February 2019 | Kitezh 5 |
| All of This is Violence Всё это насилие | Kitezh | November 2018 | Kitezh 6 |
| About Domestic Violence and the Most Commonly Asked Questions О насилии в семьях и самых распространенных вопросах | Kitezh | November 2018 | Kitezh 7 |
| "Suffocating love": Director of a Shelter for Women on Where Violence Comes From «Удушающая любовь»: директор убежища для женщин о том, откуда родом насилие | Kitezh | May 2018 | Kitezh 8 |
| Victims Without a Voice - How to Combat Violence Against Women in Russia Жертвы без голоса - Как в России борются с насилием над женщинами | Kitezh | February 2017 | Kitezh 9 |

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|--|-------------|------|-----------|
| Help Yourself Помоги себе | Kitezh | N.d. | Kitezh 10 |
| About Us О нас | ANNA Center | N.d. | ANNA 1 |
| Domestic Violence Against Women Домашнее насилие в отношении женщин | ANNA Center | N.d. | ANNA 2 |
| The Situation in Russia Ситуация в России | ANNA Center | N.d. | ANNA 3 |
| Nationwide Network Against Violence Общенациональная сеть против насилия | ANNA Center | N.d. | ANNA 4 |
| Educational Campaign Against Violence Образовательная кампания против насилия | ANNA Center | N.d. | ANNA 5 |
| Interagency Cooperation Межведомственное сотрудничество | ANNA Center | N.d. | ANNA 6 |
| Training of Psychologists and Social Workers Подготовка психологов и соцработников | ANNA Center | N.d. | ANNA 7 |
| Training of Employees of the Judicial System Подготовка работников судебной системы | ANNA Center | N.d. | ANNA 8 |
| Early Prevention Ранняя профилактика | ANNA Center | N.d. | ANNA 9 |
| Working with Men Работа с мужчинами | ANNA Center | N.d. | ANNA 10 |
| About Us О нас | Hasiliu.net | N.d. | Hasiliu 1 |
| What is Domestic Violence Что такое домашнее насилие? | Hasiliu.net | N.d. | Hasiliu 2 |
| About Domestic Violence - Myths and Reality Домашнее насилие – мифы и реальность | Hasiliu.net | N.d. | Hasiliu 3 |
| Domestic Violence – Questions and Answers Домашнее насилие – вопросы и ответы | Hasiliu.net | N.d. | Hasiliu 4 |

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| How to Determine if Someone You Know is Being Subjected to Domestic Violence? Как определить, что кто-то из ваших знакомых подвергается домашнему насилию? | Hasiliu.net | N.d. | Hasiliu 5 |
| Men Against Violence Мужчины против насилия | Hasiliu.net | N.d. | Hasiliu 6 |
| Legal Analysis of the Draft Law "On Prevention of Domestic Violence in the Russian Federation" «Правовой анализ законопроекта о профилактике семейно-бытового насилия в Российской Федерации» | Profamilia | December 2019 | Profamilia |
| "Until the Fact of the Committed Offense is Established, Forced Intervention in the Family Should Be Impossible" «Пока не установлен факт совершенного правонарушения, принудительное вмешательство в семью должно быть невозможно» | For the Right of the Family | May 2017 | For the Right of the Family |
| Live Broadcast - Family Beatings – Accept it or Leave it? Прямой эфир. Побои в семье -смиряться или уходить? | SPAS | July 2018 | Video 1 |
| I Love You - Domestic Violence Я тебя люблю – домашнее насилие | SPAS | March 2019 | Video 2 |
| To the Core – Guilty or Victims До самой сути – убийцы или жертвы? | SPAS | July 2019 | Video 3 |
| The Truth About the Law on Domestic Violence Правда о законе «профилактика семейно-бытового (домашнего) насилия | Ivan-Chay | September 2019 | Video 4 |
| Law on Domestic Violence: Commented by Lawyer Nadiezhda Goltsova Закон о «домашнем» насилии комментирует адвокат Надежда Гольцова | Ivan-Chay | October 2019 | Video 5 |
| Husband - A Wife's Pet Муж - Домашнее Животное жены | Stalingrad | January 2020 | Video 6 |