

## TRAINING ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. LESSONS LEARNED FROM UKRAINE

**Gediminas BUCIUNAS**

*Vytautas Magnus University, Law faculty  
Jonavos str. 66, LT-44318 Kaunas,  
Mykolas Romeris university, Academy of Public Security  
Maironio str. 27, LT-44211 Kaunas,  
E-mail: gediminas1967@mrni.eu  
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1826-0527*

**Jukka LARKIO**

*Helsinki Police Department (Finland)  
Violence Crime Unit  
Detective Chief Inspector  
ORCID ID: 0009-0005-8183-4203*

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**Abstract.** *The authors of this article analyze some aspects of delivering training on domestic violence designed mostly for Ukraine's National police first response teams, namely: how to approach potential places of commission domestic violence actions for which can be apply a criminal act or an administrative offense according to article 126<sup>1</sup> of a Criminal Code of Ukraine, and article 173<sup>2</sup> on an Administrative Offences of Ukraine. The authors of this research paper share their personal experiences, remarks on issues related to the selection of participants for such type of training, the structure of the training, the main moto of this training, adoption of a training module on domestic violence to the needs of practitioners. Also, the authors present in this paper remarks observed during training, especially during the practical part provided by them in Ukraine. It allows to identify main mistakes done by police first response teams during improvised domestic violence scenes with usage of actors, dogs, fake light guns, stiletto knife, and fake grenade toy and take proper measures to improve the readiness of police first response teams to cope with challenges during performance assigned duties.*

**Keywords:** *training, domestic violence, police first response team, personal safety*

### Introduction

*Fools learn from experience. I prefer to learn from the experience of others*  
Otto von Bismarck

The main **topic** of this article is training on domestic violence and lessons extracted from it. The aims of this paper are:

- to present the objective, structure, main moto of this training and methods in usage to achieve the objectives of such specialized training.
- to overview and present methods used during theoretical and practical parts of training.
- to present ways to improve a curriculum of the training on domestic violence designed for police cadets and for police officials who are dealing with domestic violence as first response team.

The authors of this article used **research methods** to achieve the aims of the article such as observation, anonymous verbal interviews of participants and discussions with them during training, analytical research, and logical analysis to explore the topic.

The presentation of this topic will allow:

- to have a broader and deeper understanding of importance psychological tools and techniques for communication in different environments to include them into a curriculum, and the training programs on domestic violence for police cadets and police officials.
- to improve already existing a curriculum and a program on domestic violence through extension or/and adding some topics and subtopics related to personal security of police first response team.
- to improve the selection procedures of participants for advanced training on domestic violence.

## Main part

*“I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it.”*

Pablo Picasso

Any person regardless of sex, social status, age, education or economic status can experience domestic violence also called "intimate partner violence". Domestic violence is a serious threat for many women. According to the national statistics on average, nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States. During one year, this equates to more than 10 million women and men. According to Global Database on Violence against Women lifetime physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence experienced at least once in their lifetime since age 15 - 26 % women. according to the Ukrainian police recording tables, in 2019 there were 141 814 applications, reports on offences and other events related to domestic violence; 72 834 perpetrators were put on file – 72 722 adults (65 720 men and 7002 women) and 112 minors (100 boys and 12 girls).

One of the main tasks of the criminal justice system while addressing the violence against women and domestic violence is to contribute to transforming a culture of impunity into a culture of accountability of abusers, the states and the criminal justice system itself (Combating violence against women and domestic violence. A practical guide for police officers, p. 37). The quality of the reception of victims within the police services is a determining factor in relation to their satisfaction with the handling of the acts of domestic violence they report. It is important to prevent police intervention from generating secondary victimisation. Studies in the United States<sup>25</sup> indicate that victim satisfaction ranges from positive assessments of active listening by police who strive to understand the situation and provide the best possible guidance to victims, as well as negative assessments that police approach violence against women cases in a dismissive and judgmental manner. When the first contact with the police has been negative, victims tend not to contact the police again with new incidents (Combating violence against women and domestic violence. A practical guide for police officers, p. 39-40). The improvement of police officials performance during domestic violence incidents was one of the triggers for the authors of the paper to share their experience obtained during service at law enforcement agencies, their remarks and notices during the trainings on domestic violence.

**Aims** of the trainings on domestic violence were several. **First**, to prepare the police first response team members for challenges occurring in Ukrainian society due to the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine. **Second**, to decrease the risk of serious injury or even death in the line of duty among police officers. **Third**, to improve conflict management skills required to handle dangerous situations. **Fourth**, to improve the communication skills of police first

response teams. **Fifth**, to improve practical skills in documenting administrative offenses, collecting evidence in criminal cases.

**Target audience** of the trainings on domestic violence were police officials of the first response teams (staff and chiefs of units) of National Police of Ukraine in regions and regional capital cities Patrol Police, Training Centres' trainers, academic staff of University of Internal Affairs (including chiefs of departments). Each training group consisted of 18-20 participants. Based on the authors of this paper's opinion it is the best amount of participants from educational point of view. It allows effectively manage time, distribute tasks, provide discussions in groups, perform practical exercises during the training.

Nine training sessions on domestic violence have been delivered at the request of National Police of Ukraine in the West part of Ukraine at the premises of high education institution (The University of Internal Affairs in Lviv city) and at the training Centers of National Police of Ukraine in different regions during 2022 - 2023. Duration of one iteration was four full days (32 academic hours). Trainers were international and national experts. Local experts represented the Patrol police and Preventive police of the National Police of Ukraine, a K-9 or police dog unit, a judge, and non-governmental organizations registered in Ukraine (social workers, psychologists). As the premises for conduction the practical exercises, very close to the real situations were used: specially designed places at the territory of regional national police training centers, at the University of Ministry of Internal Affairs and also other places which meet the requirements and standards of the designed training. The scenarios for the practical part were prepared by the authors of this paper and were object for frequent changes during each training session. The scale of changes the scenarios also depended on level of preparedness of the main part of the participants. The main idea during the preparation stage of training was to adopt practical scenarios closer to real-life situations. Also, the authors of prepared scenarios left enough space and freedom for actors for improvisation with the frame of the scenario.

**Methods used to achieve the present above aims were:** mixing theoretical and practical parts, performing scenario-based exercises, filling in police reports, assessing risks, and preparing protocols on administrative offenses. Each training day starts by repeating the main things from previous days. The purpose of such an approach was to allow for participants of training to refresh previously learned material and memorize once more obtained knowledge, and skills obtained the day before. Duration of such activity – approximately 10-15 min. and if there are questions – to answer. Participants had opportunity remotely watch some scenario-based practical exercises and discuss between themselves what kind of mistakes were made by colleagues during the exercises.

The formula of success in such training is based on synergic efforts of participants, actors and experts to present the topic, share skills, experiences, establish feedback from participants' side, premises, and surrounding environment which should be subject to changes within one iteration. The most valuable gem during such type of training namely during performance practical exercises are selection of the actors-players who performed different assigned scenario roles with the usage of weapon replicas, fake grenade toys, stiletto knives, empty bottles from champagne, improvised explosive devices, booby traps etc. Scenarios varied from the peaceful, calm environments to the most dangerous actions. Actors were selected for performance roles of offender, victim, bystander, offender's or victim's family members and friends from police cadets, and police training centers officials.

**The main motto of training on domestic violence: personal security first.**

All participants passed the assessment test at the end of training. Game-based learning platform **Kahoot** was used to check participants' knowledge, to identify the weak and strong

parts of knowledge, and skills of participants, and to have additional information of on ways to improve the training program. All test questions were split into three parts covering the main topics and subtopics of the program on domestic violence. Each of part contains ten questions and 4 possible answers. For example, legal grounds to enter into private premises according to the Law on National Police of Ukraine.

**Special considerations:** Some of the participants will be deployed to **the liberated areas** to restore the operations in local police stations. This training is of specific importance for first responders in those areas given the impact the occupation has made on the population there – significant distress and low subsistence levels due to loss of property and jobs might subsequently lead to an increase in the levels of domestic violence. This situation can be aggravated by higher circulation of weapons resulting from military presence in the areas.

**Challenges:**

Target audience's experience in dealing with domestic violence cases, tactical preparations were different and included the following reasons:

- different service times in police;
- different tactical skills – some of the participants serving in special police units within region and patrol police structure while others had less experience;
- some of the participants had already passed several trainings arranged by international actors and national institutions on domestic violence before the war and therefore did not match the desired group with limited experience.

The above mentioned different level of experiences partially affected the participants „expectations“.

**Suggestions:** The training should be cascaded to the regions and involve the trainers from police training centers and officials in charge of advanced training at NPU and Patrol Police in the regions, academic staff of the Universities of Internal Affairs. A separate Training-of Training component could be introduced here.

The officials in charge of nominating police officers to participate in the training should be more scrupulous in selecting the participants based on the following criteria:

- nominee's duration of service in police,
- experience in the field of domestic violence,
- number of trainings received on handling domestic violence cases,
- level of tactical skills.

**Structure of training on domestic violence.** The training was divided into two parts, i.e. theoretical and practical. The trainers followed the training curriculum on domestic violence. **The theoretical part** included the definitions of domestic violence, theories of domestic violence, forms of domestic violence, legislation concerning domestic violence, restraining orders, elements of a crime, factual and legal grounds to enter the premises through case law studies, analysis of judgments of Ukrainian courts and the European Court of Human Rights, Istanbul convention, conflict de-escalation techniques. **The practical part** was delivered in the form of different scenario-based real-life situations at domestic violence scenes. Before the practical part, the trainers introduced the participants to the main tactics for approaching the domestic violence location, entering the premises, and first steps inside the premises of conflict. Also, participants watched training movies (ones in use in Police Scholl of the Republic of Lithuania, US, Canadian police for training police cadets, and police officers) on approaching and entering the premises, as well as tactics inside the premises.

**The main focus** of training were on the personal safety and security of the police officers, and the identification of risks and threats. For example, booby traps and dog attacks. Through a broad series of real-life simulations, police officers practiced different first responder tactics to address domestic violence cases based on international standards. This included proper response to a victim during an emergency call, entering the premises, and ensuring the security of police officers and people inside the scene.

Exercisers were conducted indoors during the second afternoon and outdoors on the third day of the training. Different scenarios centered around police tasks to be performed on the spot of domestic violence cases, which included assessing various aspects of risks for the safety of police officers. Each scenario was different to ensure that groups could not pass information about the task to the following groups yet to enter the premises. Even if pistols, guns, hand grenades, knives, or bottles were visible in the scenario apartment, the scenarios resembled features tailored to domestic violence cases. One of the scenarios included a booby trap in the doorway.

K-9 units or police dogs were also involved in the outdoor scenarios. For example, a loose dog in the yard, a leashed dog next to the entrance to the premises, or a dog placed inside the premises together with the actors who perform roles prescribed by the trainer. Min. 2 and max. 6 actors took part in the scenario-based situations.

The use of force was not included in the training. Police officers have already received this training by Ukrainian legislation, allowing this training to focus solely on entering domestic violence premises.

The participants were divided into groups of three officers for the implementation of the tasks of the practical part. Two entered the premises, while the third one was assigned as an officer in the emergency/call center; the third one also had to observe and note down all relevant information. **The task of** the exercise was presented to the participants, but they were not given any details of what they would face in the scenario. They were provided with some general information only: what happened, where it happened, what kind of help was needed, who was calling, how many persons were inside, and sometimes info on weapons, etc. Sometimes information on weapons or grenades was given indirectly. Therefore, the quick response team should have interpreted the vital information in the hidden message.

To increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the training, and to better explain the essence of working in pairs, task and duty distribution among the members of the first responder teams, and involve all participants in action, the following steps were taken. Scenario-based exercises were conducted in different places and environments. The first part of the practical exercises was conducted at the University of Internal Affairs premises in a room specifically designed for domestic violence training. All participants were divided into teams of three – 2 members of the quick response team and one call centre officer. While one team was performing a task, the rest were able to directly watch the scenario-based exercises on the TV screen in the classroom, where the footage from the training facility was transmitted through video cameras and microphones. One trainer was with the larger group in the classroom and gave tasks to the group to monitor the performance of their colleagues and identify strong and weak points of performance. Another trainer monitored the performance of the quick response team in the training room from the point when they received information about a domestic violence case until the point where the abuser was detained. During exercises, actors used weapon replicas, grenades, different types of knives, and stilettos based on the prepared scenarios (not in all of



them). Some scenarios included situations where the quick response team was required to provide first medical aid, for example, to stop bleeding from an injured leg and use bandages by the procedures, etc. In addition, after the exercise, the quick response team received a task to prepare a police report or fill in a protocol on administrative offense. When the task was completed, immediate feedback/debriefings from trainers were given to each team who had entered to premises. After each team took part in the scenario-based exercises the trainers gave an evaluation of practical exercises, held discussions on some issues, and received feedback from all participants.

The second part of the scenario-based model was done in a different environment, close to real life, with the involvement of dogs (without informing the participants in advance). All participants were divided into two groups. One trainer delivered to one group training material consisting of theoretical and practical parts on entering the premises and conducting security checks. Another trainer provided instructions to actors and monitored the performance of the quick response team. The main task of this practical part of the exercise was to deal with stress when the dog/dogs appeared, to communicate with the dog owner and other actors involved in scenario-based exercises using de-escalating language, and to conduct personal checks of those involved in domestic violence events. When the task was completed, immediate feedback/debriefings from the trainer were provided to each team who entered the premises. Upon completion of the exercise, the teams received a task to prepare a police report or fill in a protocol on administrative offense. After the training day, overall feedback was given collectively to all participants.

### **Some examples of scenarios**

1. Police officers receive a call to a possible crime scene (a house). There are two people in the yard with dogs running loose. What will be their actions?
2. Police officers receive a call to a possible crime scene (a house). There are two people in the yard with a dog on a leash. What will be their actions?
3. Police officers receive a call to a possible crime scene (a house). When they enter the premises there is a person inside cutting a fat (salo) with a knife. What will be their actions?

### **Key findings resulting from the training:**

Overall, the actions demonstrated by the police were proper, however, there is a crucial need for development when it comes to police officers handling personal security and safety risks.

- Entering the premises was mostly conducted professionally. The officers were patient and requested to open the door when it was locked. Entering is a very risky situation and all patrols entered slowly, stopping on the doorway to see how many persons were inside and how they were positioned while also assessing if there were any weapons visible. Many patrols checked the “+1 rule” (plus one or more person(s) than visible in the apartment) before entering.
- If people in the apartment were noisy and aggressive, many patrols couldn’t get the situation under control. For example, giving orders or taking persons to different rooms/staircases.

- The central cause of risk during the exercises derived from officers not ensuring that no one was left behind their back when in the apartment – this happened several times increasing the risk.
- Security check was not conducted in many scenarios.



(Photo from the authors personal collection)

- It was positive to observe that one officer was holding the conversation with the people inside and the other one was observing and securing the environment, but there was a lack of communication between the partners.
- The participants were highly motivated and the discussion concerning risks and threats was reflective and fruitful.

**Proposals to Police Training Centres, State Universities of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, and others to whom it may concern drafted based on:**

1. The trainers' observations during practical exercises,
2. The feedback from participants during and after practical exercises,
3. The feedback from participants during informal communication during breaks and after the training,
4. The evaluation forms filled in by the participants,
5. Observations of other involved persons.

**The proposals are to conduct further training on the following topics:**

- Tactics for approaching and entering the premises,
- Legal and factual grounds to enter the premises, different scenarios,
- Assessment of the mental status of persons in an aggressive environment,
- Communication while handling cases in an aggressive environment. Use proper verbal commands dealing with potential abusers, other persons in the place of the event,
- Security checks/personal search,

- Analysis of Ukrainian case law (acquittals in criminal cases, terminated administrative cases on domestic violence),
- Documentation of domestic violence cases, preparation of police reports,
- Risk assessment,
- Inter-agency cooperation (Police - non-governmental organizations - local administration),
- Support to victims of domestic violence.

It is also recommended to involve a prosecutor as a local speaker on the application of the provisions of criminal law.

## Conclusions

Main motto of training on domestic violence: personal security of police officials first.

Selection procedure for training on domestic violence should be based on the following criteria: nominee's duration of service in the police, experience in the field of domestic violence, number of trainings received on handling domestic violence cases, and level of tactical skills.

The adoption of curriculum, and training program on domestic violence have to include topics and subtopics on approaching potential venues of domestic violence, entering into premises, communication with offenders, security check/personal search, inter-agency cooperation (Police-non-governmental organizations - local administration).

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