

Characteristics and Prevalence of Adult Children Violence against Parents in Slovenia

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This paper focuses on the characteristics and causes of violence committed by adult children against their parents. The aim is to identify how common these crimes are in Slovenia, which forms of violence are dominant, and what has been the trend in this field in the period 2010 to 2020. We analysed the statistics obtained by the Slovenian Police, including the following criminal offences where perpetrator and victim were in an adult child-parent relationship: manslaughter, murder, actual bodily harm, aggravated bodily harm, grievous bodily harm, sexual abuse of a defenceless person and family violence. Furthermore, we present the share of these acts compared to all such crimes in a specific year. The factors that can contribute to violence against parents by adult children are related to their mental state, their addiction to alcohol or illicit drugs, financial dependence on the parent, abuse of the perpetrator as a child by the parent, and health condition of the parent, and along with this the (un)related stress of the perpetrator and victim. The results of analyses show that such cases are relatively rare in relation to all crimes. The most common crime dealt with in this context was cases of family violence (11%), followed by actual and aggravated bodily harm, and the lowest number of cases was for those related to sexual abuse of defenceless persons and grievous bodily harm (2%). The share of cases of violence against parents in relation to all crimes (excluding sexual abuse of a defenceless person) ranges between 4% and 7% per year. The authors conclude that despite the relatively small number of such cases, the topic is important for our ageing societies, in which the population of older people will increase in the future.

Keywords: violence against parents, adult children, victimisation, prevalence, police statistics, violent criminal offence

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1 Introduction

Throughout history, social attitudes towards certain behaviours and acts have changed, and some taboos from the past have even become acceptable or at least understood as objects of common social concern in many societies (e.g., suicide, euthanasia). On the other hand, some taboos remain strongly ingrained, and thus also subject to denial, concealment and ignorance. Violence against parents by adult children is one such phenomenon⁴. In the past, this act was fol-

lowed by harsh and brutal punishment (see Foucault, 1991: 3–6, description of the punishment and *amende honorable* to which a man was subjected in 1757 because he committed parricide). Dekleva (2002) states that it is almost taboo to express hostility to your own parent(s) or to have motives for physical violence towards one's parents. In our culture this is also a taboo subject for families, because it leads to stigmatisation of victims and can be understood as a sign of bad parenting (Edenborough, Jackson, Mannix, & Wilkes, 2008; Wilcox, 2012). The culture of tabooisation results in "powerful intrapersonal and interpersonal psychosocial and socio-cultural processes of silencing, /.../ which make it hard for family members as well as professionals to effectively raise and then challenge parent abuse" (Wilcox, 2012: 227), and thus this type of violence remains one of the least addressed and researched forms of family violence (Holt & Shon, 2016; Wilcox, 2012). Furthermore, silence and stigmatisation lead to a high level of underreporting (Aas, 2017; Amstadter, Zajac, Strachan, Hernandez, Kilpatrick, & Acierno, 2011; Dow, Gahan, Gaffey, Joosten, Vrantsidis, & Jarred, 2019; Hsu, Huang, & Tu, 2014; Kageyama, Yokoyama, Nakamura,

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⁴ The social unacceptability and tabooisation of violence against parents by children, especially extreme cases, such as murders, is also evident in literature. The most famous example is probably the classic work of Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, which addresses two taboos – incest and parricide (Sophocles & Kitto, 1994). A simi-

lar depiction can also be found in more recent works, e.g., Camus (1946: 59), describes such a crime in his novel *The Stranger* as "... that most odious of crimes, the murder of a father by his son.")

Kobayashi, & Fujii, 2018), which also causes difficulties for crime investigators and other services.

Pečar (1984) argues that family violence is not a new phenomenon, but studies of this topic, which began mainly in the USA⁵ in the 1960s, first focused on violence against children, and in the 1970s feminist activists and researchers started to reveal and deal with cases of violence against women (Kanduč, 2001; Korbin, Anetzberger, & Eckert, 1989; Wilcox, 2012). Then in the 1980s research started to focus more on violence against the elderly (Anetzberger, 2005; Kosberg, 1988; Payne & Berg, 2003), with comparisons being made with the areas of child abuse and spousal abuse (e.g., Korbin et al., 1989; Pillemer & Finkelhor, 1988). Parallels can be found between cases of elder abuse, violence against parents by children and family violence. These show up in cases where the perpetrator is an adult child and the victim is her or his parent over the age of 65. Thus, as Klun and Frangež (2019) concluded from the literature review, violence against parents by adult children often (but not always) coincides with elder abuse. It is also not surprising that the most common perpetrators of elder abuse are their adult children (Naughton et al., 2012; Powell & Berman, 2006). Holt and Shon (2016) examine violence against parents by children, and find that adolescent children are more likely to be the perpetrators. Possible explanations for this can be found in research trends in criminology (e.g., a focus on juvenile offenders), trends in research in the field of violence against parents by adult children, the media, and double or multifaceted stigmatisation of parents or the whole family (Holt & Shon, 2016; Klun & Frangež, 2019).

A detailed literature review of violence against parents by adult children shows that this phenomenon has not been studied in Slovenia (Klun & Frangež, 2019). Research conducted abroad focuses on the sociological (Johnson, Richert, & Svensson, 2018; Smith, 2015; Stratton & Moore, 2007; von Heydrich, Schiarnberg, & Chee, 2012) and psychological aspects of this problem (Band-Winterstein, 2015; Band-Winterstein, Avieli, & Smeloy, 2015a; Kageyama et al., 2018). Thus, it is not surprising that several authors (Holt & Shon, 2016; Klun & Frangež, 2019) warn that we lack findings and theories that would explain this issue and present typologies of the perpetrators' personalities. Furthermore, research focusing on stereotypes and aspects of the related criminal investigations (detection, investigation and proving of family violence) is also lacking. There is no data on the share of adolescent and adult offenders (Holt & Shon, 2016), and there is also a lack of data on how many adult children abuse their parents (Payne, 2011). Very few studies have examined the

relationships between older victims of abuse and their abusers (Iborra Marmolejo, 2008). Some studies carried out in the UK and US show a higher share of the victims' adult offspring among perpetrators (38–53%), whereas other studies carried out in Canada and the US revealed the victim's partners as the most common abuser (42–48%) (Iborra Marmolejo, 2008). It is in this context that the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2021) argues it is not yet clear whether spouses or adult children of older people are more likely to perpetrate this kind of abuse. With demographic changes and the ageing of Western and many other societies the relevance of this phenomenon and the need to understand it increases, as it is likely that in the near future we will probably see an increase in violence against the elderly (Dong, Simon, & Evans, 2012; Klančnik & Pavšič Mrevlje, 2013; Podnieks & Thomas, 2017).

In the following parts of the article, we present the research questions and methods used to examine them, and then discuss the key factors that can be related to violence against parents by adult children. In the empirical part we focus on the analysis of police statistics on violent victimisation of parents by adult children over the 2010 to 2020 period in Slovenia.

2 Research Questions and Methods

Violence against parents by adult children is a topic that has been underexplored in Slovenia, and thus we started with a thorough literature review. This enabled us to gain insights into the basic characteristics of this type of violence. Furthermore, our research focused on the official police statistics for eight different forms of crimes in the period 2010–2020, where the victims and perpetrators were in a parent-child relationship. The data for these offences was provided to us by the Slovenian Police upon formal request (Generalna policijska uprava [GPU], 2021). Our understanding of the violence of an adult child against her/his parents derives from the concept of harm. We see it as a single, multiple or continuous behaviour(s) or act(s) of an adult child who physically or psychologically harms a biological, foster or adoptive parent. We consider that a person is an adult after she/he turns 18 years old and full criminal responsibility starts. Thus, our study includes perpetrators aged 18 and over with at least one living parent (grandparents are excluded from the study). When applying our perspective to the Criminal Code (Kazenski zakonik [KZ-1], 2012), we recognise the following types of crimes as possible forms of violence of adult children against parents: manslaughter (Article 115), murder (Article 116), actual bodily harm (Article 122), aggravated bodily harm (Article 123), grievous bodily harm (Article 124), sexual abuse of a defenceless person (Article 172) and family vio-

⁵ In Slovenia, family violence only began to be investigated at the end of the 20th century (Eman & Hacin, 2017).

lence (Article 191). All these forms of violence were included in our analysis.

With the use of the above-mentioned research methods, we address the following research questions: What are the basic characteristics of violence committed by adult children against their parents? What are the causes of these crimes? How common are these crimes in Slovenia? Which forms of violence are dominant, and what has been the trend in this field in the last 11 years?

3 Basic Characteristics of Violent Victimization of Parents by Adult Children

Violence against parents by adult children occurs in various forms: physical, psychological, sexual and financial/economic violence, property crimes (theft, burglary) and neglect (Band-Winterstein, 2015; Band-Winterstein, Avieli, & Smeloy, 2015b; Holt, 1993; Hsu et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2018; Ramsey-Klawnsnik, 2004; Stratton & Moore, 2007). Naughton et al. (2012) found that in cases of elder abuse several forms of violence are often observed at the same time, with psychological violence often accompanying other forms (e.g., physical violence) (Lachs & Pillemer, 1995).

While there is a lack of research on forms of violence against parents by their adult children, we can gain some insight into this situation through research on elder abuse. Pillemer and Finkelhor (1988) found that around 3.2% of elderly persons in Boston suffer from elder abuse, with physical violence occurring more often than psychological violence. Biggs, Manthorpe, Tinker, Doyle and Erens (2009) estimated that in the UK 2.6% of older people were victims of abuse in 2008. In Mexico, the prevalence of psychological violence against the elderly was reported to be 6%, and the prevalence of physical violence was estimated at 3% (Giraldo-Rodríguez & Rosas-Carrasco, 2012). Von Heydrich et al. (2012) examined a sample of 203 elderly people and found that 6% reported being victims of physical abuse by an adult child. Johnson et al. (2018) examined a specific population, parents of adult children with drug problems, and found that about half of the parents reported being a victim of property crimes (burglary, theft) by an adult child.⁶ Kageyama et al. (2016) stated that a

third of parents reported violence by an adult child in the previous year, while Kageyama, Solomon and Yokoyama (2016) found that 58% of parents reported psychological violence committed by their adult children in the previous year, and 35% reported physical violence.

As we stated earlier, research on this topic is scarce in Slovenia. The study done by Klančnik and Pavšič Mrevlje (2013) found approximately 140 cases a year in Slovenia in which elderly people were victims of crimes against life and body. A year later Pavšič Mrevlje (2014) conducted a victimological study focusing on the elderly population in Slovenia, and found that the prevalence of victimisation of the elderly in Ljubljana is almost 20%, and the incidence of victimisation of the elderly due to physical abuse is about 3%. The study's participants reported that their own children (whose age is not reported in the study) were often the perpetrators of harassment, theft and physical abuse, although in 79% of cases the perpetrators were strangers (79%).

Pillemer and Finkelhor (1988) claimed that an accurate estimate of the prevalence of elder abuse cannot be determined, and that the same is true for cases of violence against parents by adult children. This is because older parents often do not report such cases for various reasons, such as feelings of shame, guilt, fear, responsibility and love for their child (Aas, 2017; Dow et al., 2019; Hsu & Tu, 2014; Kageyama et al., 2018; Kanduč, 2001; Smith, 2015). Aas (2017) also noted that feelings of shame affect older victims, especially if the perpetrators are their adult children or grandchildren. Due to this shame parents may manipulate the truth about the origin of their injuries (e.g., saying that they fell down a flight of stairs) (Kageyama et al., 2018), or simply do not admit that their child was violent (Hsu & Tu, 2014). Such parents think that they are to blame for the child's violent behaviour due to failed parenting or because they are dependent on the perpetrator (Kosberg, 1988; Smith, 2015). Moreover, they not only blame themselves, but society also often condemns them, as children's mistakes are generally attributed to their parents and bad parenting (Smith, 2015). Podnieks and Thomas

such crimes. If such crime is reported to the police, despite the suspect being known, the official procedure stops with the recording of the event in the police records based on the Police Tasks and Powers Act, the victim is informed to proceed with private action and the public prosecutor is informed (according to paragraph 10, article 148 of the Criminal Procedure Act) (Zakon o nalogah in pooblastilih policije [ZNPPol, 2013]). The crime in question would not be put into *ex officio* prosecution. We can assume this can have an influence on the victim's future cooperation with law enforcement and reporting of a crime even in cases of violence and other *ex officio* crimes, although the precise impacts should be closely investigated in a separate study.

⁶ Slovenian legislation is quite specific when property crimes are committed among closely related relatives. Article 224 of the Criminal Code of Slovenia (KZ-1, 2012) defines that prosecution of various forms of property crimes (e.g., larceny and grand larceny, misappropriation, joy riding, fraud, disloyalty, damaging of another's object) committed by a perpetrator closely related to a victim are initiated upon a private action. In these cases, the state (police and public prosecutors) do not investigate and prosecute

(2017) concluded that such violence is also often not detected or reported due to prejudices about the elderly or ageism. Parents may feel unable to resist a child's violent behaviour because they fear escalating it or suffering from retaliation, or the fact that they may be forced to go into a nursing home (Kageyama et al., 2018; Kanduč, 2001). Violence can also be disguised out of love for the perpetrator, as parents do not want to cause problems and expose their children to formal sanctions (Kageyama et al., 2018).

However, a lack of willingness to report these forms of behaviour is characteristic not only of the victimised parents, but also of the immediate social environment. Jackson and Hafemeister (2015) stated that family members and neighbours are reluctant to get involved in cases of suspected elder abuse, and often do not report them even though they know what is going on. Reporting violence against the elderly thus often depends on the quality of the relationship with the perpetrator. Other family members are more willing to report such cases when the perpetrator is part of the family and the relationship between him/her and the victim is characterised by a lack of emotional attachment.

4 The Risk Factors for Violence against Parents by Adult Children

The review of research presented in the following paragraphs shows that the risk factors for violence against parents can be divided into five main categories: 1) psychological factors or mental illness of the children; 2) the child's addiction to alcohol and/or illicit drugs; 3) the child's low financial status and financial dependence on parents; 4) abuse of the perpetrator as a child by the parents; 5) the health condition of parents and the (un)related stress of the perpetrator (and victim).

Johnson et al. (2018) found that parents who reported that their adult child has attention deficits or autistic disorders were more likely to be victims of property crimes by their adult children than parents who reported that their children did not have such problems. Smith (2015) noted that all the mothers in her study who were victims of violence by an adult child spoke about the latter's mental health problems. Gallagher (2004) gave a number of specific health problems of children associated with violence (Asperger's syndrome, learning disorder or a diagnosed condition such as ADHD). Benbow, Bhattacharyya, & Kingston (2018) analysed parental homicides by adult children and found that these crimes are also related to the mental health of the child (e.g., schizophrenia).

Von Heydrich et al. (2012) concluded that abuse of and addiction to illicit drugs contribute to the financial problems

of adult children, which can lead to financial exploitation of their parents. Similarly, Johnson et al. (2018) stated that parents of adult children who have problems with drugs are at high risk of becoming victims of property crimes by their adult children. Frequent use of illicit drugs is difficult to finance with legal income, which means that theft and other property crimes are often committed by adult children who have serious problems with such substances, with parents often becoming victims. In the same vein, Benbow et al. (2018) found cases of physical violence against parents were related to refusing to give money to adult children to purchase illicit drugs and/or alcohol. Anetzberger, Korbin and Austin (1994) noted that perpetrators of physical violence against parents are twice as likely to have problems with alcohol as children who care for their parents and do not abuse them.

Another set of risk factors for this kind of violence relates to the financial dependence of adult children on their parents. Von Heydrich et al. (2012) stated that the financial problems of adult children worsen the quality of their relationship with their parents, thus increasing the likelihood of physical violence. Similarly, Peterson et al. (2014) found that the financial problems of the perpetrators are one of the factors for violence. As such, it is not surprising that the most common perpetrators of financial abuse against the elderly are the victims' adult children (Lowenstein, Eisikovits, Band-Winterstein, & Enosh, 2009), and that victims themselves perceive the perpetrators' financial dependence as a risk factor for violence (Primc & Lobnikar, 2019). Smith (2015) notes that all the mothers in their study reported that verbal and physical violence by their adult children occurred when the children lived with them, while Mukherjee (2013) found that some adult children rely on the financial support of their parents when they lose their jobs, and concluded that unemployment can lead to children returning to live with their parents, which in turn can lead to financial and other forms of violence.

Violence against parents can also be influenced by their abuse of their children in childhood, leading to the subsequent use of violence against the former abuser, who now takes on the role of a victim. This represents a clear confirmation of the well-known saying from victimology, as coined by Meško (1997) in his book *Family Ties Before the Court* (orig. Družinske vezi na zatožni klopi?): "victims victimise". Dong, Li and Simon (2017) found that violence against a child under the age of 18 is statistically associated with a higher likelihood that the child will go on to abuse his or her elderly parent, although the authors focused more on verbal rather than physical violence. Korbin, Anetzberger and Austin (1995) stated that one third of adult children who abuse their parents were abused by their parents in childhood. At the same time they find that the concept of a "cycle of violence" is more useful

for explaining violence against children than violence against parents by their adult children. Benbow et al. (2018) linked cases of parental homicides with previous child victimisation. The violence against parents by adult children may therefore be a continuation of long-standing patterns of physical or emotional abuse in the family (Korbin et al., 1995; von Heydrich et al., 2012). However, as Gallagher (2004) noted, it is wrong to conclude that all violent children have been victims of abuse in childhood.

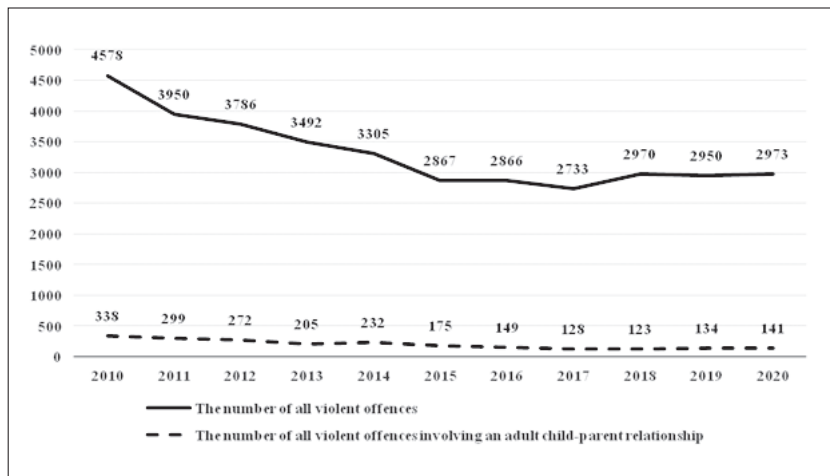
In addition to factors on the part of the perpetrators, victimisation is also influenced by factors related to the victim, i.e. the parents. Von Heydrich et al. (2012) placed the health condition of the parents among the factors that can also contribute to physical violence. They found a statistically significant connection between a parent's physical and mental health and an increased likelihood of physical abuse by an adult child. For instance, symptoms of neurological diseases can lead to behavioural and personality changes, cognitive decline (difficulties with speech and decision-making) and aggressive parental behaviour, which, however, are often associated with greater stress for the children and physical violence against the parents. The chronic medical conditions (e.g., arthritis or diabetes) of a parent can be related to psychological concerns that can lead to physical violence by their adult children, including stress, and feeling overwhelmed and socially isolated. Pillemer and Finkelhor (1989) noted that the term "caregiver stress" has a negative connotation as it indirectly shifts the blame onto the victim, indicating that elder abuse is understandable because it is difficult to care for the elderly. Steinmetz (1990) added that the likelihood of parent abuse by adult children may be more related to the perception of care stress than to the actual amount of care provided. Thus, it is not surprising that Filipčič (2002) included the theory of stress among the theories that could explain elder abuse. This refers to the fact that providing care for an elderly family member is stressful and can create many challenges (e.g., financial problems in the family, disruptions to daily routines). Because the caregiver is torn between two generations, a hostile attitude toward the elderly parent may develop. Benbow et al. (2018) added that providing care can be stressful for both the provider and recipient, which affects the dynamics of the relationship between them and includes dependence and loss of autonomy.

5 Police Statistics on the Violent Victimization of Parents by Their Adult Children in Slovenia

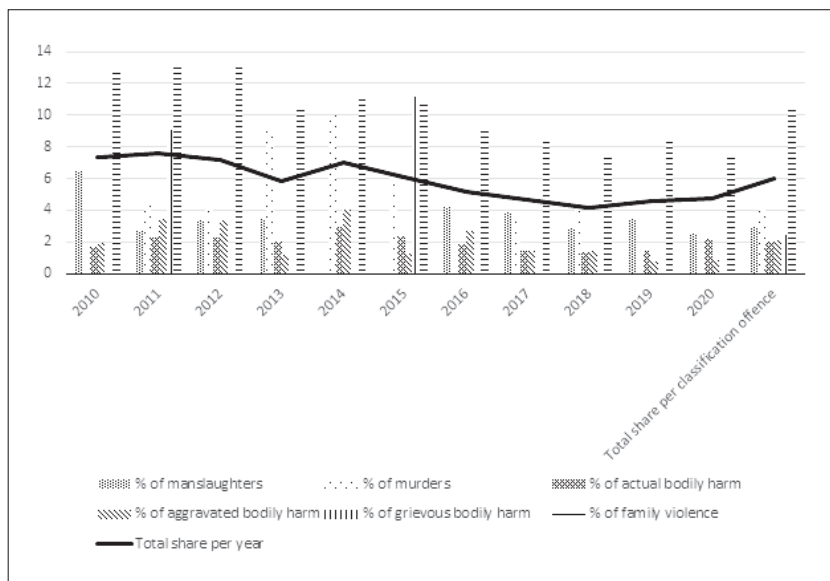
Police crime statistics have many drawbacks and are far from being perfect data on crime, but they have specific advantages and are often used by researchers (Adler, Mueller, & Laufer, 1991; Hagan, 2003; Meško, 1998). The most noted problem is the so-called dark figure of crime, which refers to unreported or undetected crimes. Therefore, we have to bear in mind that official police data on violence against parents committed by their adult children represent only the tip of the iceberg. As concluded by Aas (2017) and Dow et al. (2019) many such crimes remain unreported. However, in specific types of crime, especially in extremely violent ones (e.g., murders), police data are quite reliable and accurate. In the following sections, we analysed the police data on the number of cases of violence against parents by their adult children in Slovenia for the period 2010–2020, as presented in Table 1. We calculated the share of adult children violence compared to all specific crimes by the use of official police data presented in the annual reports (GPU, 2021; Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve, Policija, 2011–2021). We analysed statistics on criminal offences against life and body and crimes against marriage, family and youth. We used statistics from the annual police reports, which usually include data on crimes from the previous year. The statistics on the criminal offences of murder and manslaughter also include cases without a legal basis for prosecution (e.g., cases in which the perpetrator committed suicide), and these have been presented in the police annual reports since 2018.

Table 1: Number of cases of violence against parents by adult children compared to the number of all cases dealt with in the period 2010–2020 (GPU, 2021; Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve, Policija, 2011–2021)

Description of the crime offence classification	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Manslaughter (all cases)	31	37	30	29	27	31	24	26	35	29	40	339
Manslaughter (adult child-parent relationship)	2	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	10
Murder (all cases)	21	22	22	22	20	29	27	28	23	17	17	248
Murder (adult child-parent relationship)	0	1	1	2	2	2	0	1	1	0	0	10
Actual bodily harm (all cases)	1,966	1,787	1,817	1,677	1,476	1,376	1,338	1,255	1,394	1,425	1,312	16,823
Actual bodily harm (adult child-parent relationship)	34	40	41	34	44	32	25	18	19	21	29	337
Aggravated bodily harm (all cases)	206	176	207	166	174	155	149	143	142	137	123	1,778
Aggravated bodily harm (adult child-parent relationship)	4	6	7	2	7	2	4	2	2	1	1	38
Grievous bodily harm (all cases)	10	11	8	6	7	9	4	8	8	6	4	81
Grievous bodily harm (adult child-parent relationship)	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Sexual abuse of a defenceless person (all cases)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Sexual abuse of a defenceless person (adult child-parent relationship)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Family violence (all cases)	2,344	1,917	1,702	1,592	1,601	1,267	1,324	1,273	1,368	1,336	1,477	17,201
Family violence (adult child-parent relationship)	298	250	222	166	179	138	119	106	100	111	110	1,799
Total (all cases)	4,578	3,950	3,786	3,492	3,305	2,867	2,866	2,733	2,970	2,950	2,973	36,470
Total (adult child-parent relationship)	339	299	272	205	232	175	149	128	123	134	142	2,198



Graph 1: The number of all violent offences compared to cases with an adult child-parent relationship in the period 2010–2020⁷ (GPU, 2021; Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve, Policija, 2011–2021)



Graph 2: The proportion of adult child-parent crimes in relation to all violent offences in the period 2010–2020⁸ (GPU, 2021; Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve, Policija, 2011–2021)

⁷ The statistics of the following crimes are presented: manslaughter, murder, actual bodily harm, aggravated bodily harm, grievous bodily harm and family violence.

⁸ The statistics of the following crimes are presented: manslaughter, murder, actual bodily harm, aggravated bodily harm, grievous bodily harm and family violence.

According to official police statistics, in the period 2010 to 2020, 10 manslaughters of parents were committed by adult children. Each year the number of these crimes is small (1 or 2), and in some years no such offence was committed (see Table 1). The number of all manslaughters in the analysed period is 339, so the share of parental manslaughters is almost 3%. Despite the high prevalence of manslaughters in the family among all manslaughters in Slovenia, the number of such cases where the victims are parents and perpetrators adult children is low, and represents a very small share of all such killings in the country. This leads to the conclusion that a high share of manslaughters is committed by perpetrators connected to victims by other types of family relations aside from adult children-parents. Past studies (Podreka, 2014; Voglar, 1997) showed that partners and/or ex-partners represent the biggest share of such perpetrators in Slovenia.

Table 1 shows that the Slovenian Police dealt with a total of 248 murders in the analysed period, among which in 10 cases the perpetrator was an adult child and the victim a parent. The number of such crimes does not change significantly in the 11-year period, and in four years – 2010, 2016, 2019 and 2020 – the Police did not record any such homicides. One murder a year was recorded in 2011, 2012, 2017 and 2018, and two murders a year in the period 2013 to 2015. The share of such cases is 4% of all homicides in Slovenia, a slightly higher share than seen for manslaughters.

The Police statistics in Table 1 show that between 2010 and 2020, a total of 16,823 cases of actual bodily harm were investigated.⁹ Of these, the Police dealt with 337 cases where the perpetrator was an adult child and the victim a parent, giving an average of around 30 cases each year. The highest number (44) of cases was handled in 2014, and the lowest (18) in 2017. Actual bodily harm where the perpetrator and victim had an adult child-parent relationship was found in 2% of all such cases. In the analysed period a total of 1,778 cases of aggravated bodily harm were investigated by the Police, of which 38 were cases in which the perpetrator was an adult child and the victim a parent. Police statistics show that the number of such cases is decreasing in the years examined, and the Police have reported just one or two such cases per year in the last four years. The highest number of such offences (7) was in 2012 and 2014. Cases in which the perpetrator was an adult child and the victim a parent accounted for approximately 2% of all aggravated bodily harm crimes in the analysed period

(see Table 1). The statistics in Table 1 show that between 2010 and 2020 the Police reported a total of 81 offences of grievous bodily harm. Of these, in two cases the victim and perpetrator were in an adult child-parent relationship, with one offence in 2011 and one in 2015. These cases represent 2.5% of all grievous bodily harm crimes recorded in Slovenia during the focal period. We did not find data in the annual reports on the number of cases of sexual abuse of a defenceless person in the period 2010-2020, but official data from the Slovenian Police show that two such offences were investigated in the context of violence against parents by adult children. One such case was reported in 2010, and another in 2020 (see Table 1). In the analysed period, the Police recorded a total of 17,201 criminal offences of family violence. Of these, there were 1,799 cases of violence against parents by adult children. In the period 2010 to 2020, on average 164 such cases are dealt with per year, the most (298) in 2010 and the least (100) in 2018. Such crimes represent almost 11% of all family violence cases recorded within this period.

In Graph 1 we present the scope of the violence against parents by adult children. It is evident that the number of all violent crimes is decreasing, and that the trend is the same for violent crimes committed by adult children. In Graph 2 we present the proportion of adult child-parent crimes in relation to all violent offences in the period 2010 to 2020. It is evident that the share of violence against parents by adult children ranges between 4% and 7%, and over the period 2010 to 2020 they accounted for around 6% of all crimes. Among all crimes recorded by the Police, family violence took the biggest share of violent offences committed by adult children against their parents (from 4% in 2018 to 13% in 2012). Crimes in the context of violence against parents which also stand out are murders (from 0% in 2016, 2019 and 2020 to 10% in 2014). The smallest share of investigated crimes in which the perpetrators were the victims' adult children compared to all such crimes were actual and aggravated bodily harm.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

Violence against parents by adult children is not a new phenomenon, though it is still neglected among researchers. One of the factors in the unexplored nature of this phenomenon is the stigma, which keeps the problem hidden and away from wider attention. Additionally, the Slovenian characteristic that we do not involve ourselves with the lives of our neighbours and prefer to keep things behind closed doors, also leads to underreporting and under-research. However, studies show that this type of violence takes many forms, which are usually intertwined.

⁹ The prosecution of actual bodily harm is initiated upon a complaint. The victim has to report the crime within six months of learning of the criminal offence and its perpetrator (see Article 122, paragraph 4 of Criminal Code and Article 52, paragraph 1 of Criminal Procedure Act) (KZ-1, 2012; Zakon o kazenskem postopku [ZKP], 2021).

Police statistics show that in the period 2010 to 2020 an average of 200 cases of violence by adult children directed towards their parents were investigated by the Police each year in Slovenia. The share of this type of crime is small in relation to all the considered crimes, and specifically in relation to the criminal offence of family violence (almost 11% of the total). The highest number of cases, after family violence, was found for actual and aggravated bodily harm, and the lowest number for cases of sexual abuse of a defenceless person and grievous bodily harm. The reason why family violence was the most reported crime can be attributed to the fact that in Slovenia we are facing the problem of high real estate prices and high rents, which leads to a quite common situation in which children and parents live in the same household (Statistični urad Republike Slovenije [SURS], 2018). Accompanied by other challenges, such as unemployment (SURS, 2021a) and an extended period of schooling (SURS, 2021b), this situation can lead to conflicts within families.

The few cases of sexual abuse of a defenceless person raises the question as to whether this is a clear example of a dark figure in official police statistics, or if such crimes really are this rare in Slovenia. There is thus a clear need for further research in this field and inclusion of various institutions working with potential victims in such approach (e.g., Social Work Centres, primary care doctors, NGOs working with senior citizens). The small number of cases of grievous bodily harm that were reported could be explained by the fact that according to the text of the penal code (KZ-1, 2012), there may be in practice a thin line between (attempted) murder or manslaughter and the infliction of grievous bodily harm, and here the legal question arises as to when to file a criminal complaint against the suspect of attempted murder, and when of causing grievous bodily harm.

The number of cases of violence in which parents have been victimised by their adult children in the last ten years is decreasing. This can be attributed to the economic crisis in 2009–2015, when the recession peaked in Slovenia, the unemployment rate rose, people were under stress, and often lived in the same households as other family members (SURS, 2015). After that we experienced economic recovery, higher employment, less stress. A second explanation could be the impact of passing the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (Zakon o preprečevanju nasilja v družini [ZPND], 2008) and the greater awareness of this issue at the time. The fewest cases of violence against parents by adult children were reported in 2018, and this could be explained by the living situations of the perpetrators and victims.

The results and interpretations set out above require a great deal of caution. When presenting police statistics, it is

necessary to consider that such a picture of crime is underestimated (Meško, 2008; Pavšič Mrevlje, 2014), whereas under-reporting is even more significant in cases as sensitive as those of violence of children against their parents. One weakness of the presented results is that they are based on criminal offences, which means that in the pre-trial proceedings these cases led to a criminal complaint. Thus, those cases that ended just with a Police report to the Public Prosecutor under Article 148 (10) of the Criminal Procedure Act (ZKP, 2021) and no further legal procedures were taken are excluded. As such, our analysis is limited to criminal offences, including acts that pass strict legal criteria but exclude many harmful and violent acts that do not contain all the elements or signs needed for classification as a crime. In other words, even if the act itself does not meet all the criteria of a criminal offence, it does not mean that a person was not victimised. The subjective aspect and consequences of such actions are also important.

Since the statistics of criminal offences of violence against parents by adult children represent only reported and investigated crimes, the question arises as to the determination of the actual prevalence of such cases. Filipčič (2002) noted that in the past, there was greater social tolerance for violence against women, as well as child abuse, but there has never been such tolerance with regard to violence against the elderly. As a result, the dark figure of crimes of violence against parents by adult children could be lower than the dark figure for violence against women and child abuse. However, we must not neglect the often present fear of revenge among witnesses, who consequentially turn a blind eye to such abuses and do not report it. Furthermore, the police statistics of criminal offences do not give us the information on how many perpetrators and victims are actually in our society (e.g., it is possible that some perpetrators committed multiple offences), how long these victimisations last, how severe are the consequences, the previous convictions or victimisations of perpetrators, if there is any significant impact according to where the parents (victims) live (e.g., at home, nursing home), mental health problems of perpetrators, alcohol or drug addiction, etc. These are all important challenges for future research.

We found out that violence against parents by adult children represents only a small share of the total violent crime in the analysed period, although this remains an important topic, especially if we consider the demographic changes in our ageing societies. The present paper, therefore, presents a starting point for further research into violence against parents by adult children, and enables the acquisition of new dimensions of knowledge in the fields of criminology, sociology and the science of criminal investigation, which may be implemented in the future in the practice of detecting, investigating, proving and preventing such crimes.

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Značilnosti in prevalenca nasilja odraslih otrok nad starši v Sloveniji

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Prispevek se osredotoča na osnovne značilnosti in dejavnike nasilja odraslih otrok nad starši. Cilj prispevka je ugotoviti, kako pogosta so tovrstna kazniva dejanja, katere oblike nasilja so prevladujoče in kakšen je trend na tem področju v zadnjih 10 letih v Sloveniji. Analizirali smo statistične podatke slovenske policije za naslednja kazniva dejanja, pri katerih sta bila storilec in žrtev v odnosu odrasel otrok – starš: uboj, umor, lahka telesna poškodba, huda telesna poškodba, posebno huda telesna poškodba, spolna zloraba slabotne osebe in nasilje v družini, ter določili delež naštetih kaznivih dejanj v omenjenem kontekstu v primerjavi z vsemi navedenimi obravnavanimi kaznivimi dejanji. Dejavniki, ki lahko prispevajo k nasilju odraslih otrok nad starši, so povezani z duševnim stanjem otroka, otrokovo odvisnostjo od alkohola in prepovedanih drog, finančno odvisnostjo od starša, zlorabo povzročitelja v otroštvu in zdravstvenim stanjem starša ter z njim (ne)povezan stres povzročitelja in žrtve. Analize kažejo, da so deleži tovrstnih kaznivih dejanj majhni. Najpogosteje obravnavano kaznivo dejanje je bilo nasilje v družini (11 %), sledijo mu kaznivo dejanje lahke telesne poškodbe in hude telesne poškodbe, najmanj pa je bilo obravnavanih primerov spolne zlorabe slabotne osebe in posebej hude telesne poškodbe (2 %). Delež kaznivih dejanj nasilja odraslih otrok nad starši (izključujoč spolne zlorabe slabotne osebe) v primerjavi z vsemi obravnavanimi kaznivimi dejanji v posameznem letu znaša med 4 % in 7 % na leto. Avtorji zaključujejo, da je kljub majhnemu deležu kaznivih dejanj v kontekstu nasilja nad starši tematika pomembna za našo (starajočo) družbo, v kateri bo populacija starejših ljudi v prihodnosti narasla.

Ključne besede: nasilje nad starši, odrasli otroci, viktimizacija, prevalenca, policijska statistika, nasilna kazniva dejanja

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