

## **The role of interdisciplinary teams in the context of solving selected social problems: the case of Poland**

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**Abstract:** Social problems are a phenomenon characteristic of all societies at each stage of development. They are the result of the heterogeneous nature of needs declared by various social groups that constitute society as a whole. It is rare to encounter a coherent and uniform etiology of social problems, as in most cases there are multiple causes, additionally pertaining to various areas of functioning of both individuals and entire social groups. Social problems often coexist, where some facilitate the emergence of others, and importantly, distinguishing the primary problem from the secondary one is not a simple task. Efforts to resolve these issues to achieve the best outcomes should occur in a holistic manner, and therefore, in the context of professional assistance - interdisciplinary. The aim of this study is to illustrate the essence of actions taken by interdisciplinary teams in Poland and when and for what purpose they are established.

*Keywords: interdisciplinary teams, social assistance, social problems, family violence, social work.*

## **Introduction**

In the face of growing awareness of the complexity of contemporary social problems, such as family violence, alcoholism, helplessness in caring and raising children, poverty or social exclusion, among others, an approach that pushes beyond traditional disciplinary and institutional boundaries is becoming necessary. In Poland, an important role is played by the interdisciplinary teams, which combine the knowledge and skills of professionals from different field areas to respond more effectively to the needs of families experiencing domestic violence. The integration of the actions of representatives of social welfare, education, health services, the police, members of the municipal committee for solving alcohol problems, NGOs and other institutions allows for a holistic approach to this problem, which not only focuses on mitigating its effects, but also on identifying its causes and co-occurring issues. This paper aims to present the role of interdisciplinary teams in Poland in the context of counteracting domestic violence and actions aimed at mitigating the negative effects of concurrent issues. The first part of the paper characterises the mode of functioning and legal conditions concerning the interdisciplinary teams. Then, the issues of co-occurrence of many social problems and possibilities of working on their solution was described. The third part of the study presents the role of institutions whose representatives compose the interdisciplinary teams in identifying and counteracting selected social problems.

## **Characteristics of the functioning and legal arrangements of the interdisciplinary teams in Poland**

The bringing into existence of interdisciplinary teams in Poland is the response of the territorial authorities at the municipality level to the disorganising factor in the harmony of family life in the form of the occurrence of the problem of intra-family violence. These teams undertake a range of integrated actions aimed at preventing and minimising the negative consequences of violence in the family environment, with particular emphasis on children as victims. Taking this type of remedial action aimed at counteracting risk factors in the family environment appears to be of importance from the perspective of both individuals, and society as a whole. For individuals, as the family is for most people the basic living environment, a kind of refuge and safe haven in everyday life. In the context of children, the functions of the family aimed at meeting material and welfare needs, providing a safe upbringing environment and preparing for independent living are significant (Szczepański, 1963, p. 114). The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society. This nature of it was already pointed out by Aristotle. Contemporarily, as the natural and fundamental group unit of society entitled to protection by society and the State, the family is considered by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNO, 1948, Art. 16, clause 3). From the point of view of society as a whole, it can therefore be considered that the family is the foundation for the entire social structure, the transmission of values, behavioural norms and cultural heritage. Underestimating and failing to respond to common problems within the family can determine the expansion of social problems negatively affecting the broader population.

The counteracting of domestic violence is one of the statutory responsibilities of local authorities at the municipal level. Each municipality implements its obligation in this field area by, inter alia, setting up an interdisciplinary team. As of January 1, 2024, Poland's administrative division includes 2477 municipalities (see [www.gov.pl](http://www.gov.pl), 2024), so the number of interdisciplinary teams operating in Poland should be exactly the same. Under the Polish law, the detailed scope of actions aimed at counteracting violence is laid down in the Act of 2005 on Counteracting Domestic Violence. The scope of these actions was extended by the amendment of the aforesaid Act of 10 June 2010. Currently, the amended Article 6 of the Act on Counteracting Domestic Violence (2010) specifies that the own tasks of the municipality include: 1) development and implementation of the municipality programme for preventing domestic violence and protecting its victims; 2) counselling and intervention on preventing domestic violence in particular by means educational measures strengthening caretaking and upbringing skills of parents in families at risk of domestic violence; 3) providing places in support centres for victims of domestic violence; 4) establishing interdisciplinary councils.

As highlighted by S. Spurek (2012, cit. per: Krajewska, 2014, p. 93) in her commentary to this amendment, the indication of the necessity to establish interdisciplinary teams was supposed to be a catalyst to integrate the actions of representatives of various services and institutions involved in the prevention of domestic violence. Attention was drawn to the need for an entity to function in each municipality responsible for preventing and counteracting the negative effects of domestic violence, with particular attention to those who experience such violence.

The voyt, the mayor or president of a city is responsible for the establishment of the interdisciplinary team. The clue to the interdisciplinarity of the team is its composition, which is made up of representatives of various public welfare entities and control institutions, as well as the composition and set of actions undertaken by the diagnostic and support groups, which will be further characterised in the following part of the paper. The interdisciplinary team should include representatives of 1) organisational units of social assistance; 2) municipality committees for solving alcohol problems; 3) the Police; 4) education institutions; 5) healthcare institutions; 6) non-governmental organisations. According to the Act, the team should also be composed of court probation officers, prosecutors, in some cases soldiers on active military service and representatives of other entities than those specified above acting to counteract domestic violence (Act on Counteracting, 2005, Art. 9a).

Members of the interdisciplinary team are obliged to undergo a training course for persons implementing tasks related to counteracting domestic violence, organised by the provincial self-government no later than 12 months after their appointment. The first meeting of the interdisciplinary team is convened by the voyt, mayor or president of the city. During its term, a chairperson is elected, whose responsibilities include, in particular, the meticulous management of the work of the team, the organisation of the work of the team and representing it externally. It is worth emphasising that ‘the interdisciplinary team is not an auxiliary body of the voyt, mayor, president of the city or an internal body of the municipal council or a municipal organisational unit, but is an entity separate from the municipal bodies, performing the statutorily defined municipal tasks related to counteracting domestic violence’ (Ważny, cit. per: Krajewska, 2014, p. 93).

Each member of the interdisciplinary team operates according to the rules of the institution in which he is employed and observes the dynamics and scale of the problem of domestic violence from its perspective. The individual point of view of each institution is important in terms of the quality of the implementation of the tasks of the interdisciplinary team provided for in the law, since different perspectives form a measurably complete picture of the negative implications of domestic violence for society. Team members exchange insights and specialized knowledge, from their respective fields, at interdisciplinary team meetings. This provides an opportunity to efficiently diagnose problems and design how to carry out their tasks. The aforementioned multi-institutional perspective facilitates later evaluation due to the broad optics in many target groups of prevention activities.

Under the Art. 9b of the Act on Counteracting Domestic Violence (2005), the interdisciplinary team is obliged to fulfil certain tasks. These tasks largely come down to actions of a preventive, educational, informational, diagnostic or monitoring nature. The team should make every effort leading to the creation of the most favourable conditions possible for the implementation of tasks in the field area of counteracting domestic violence, as well as integrating and coordinating actions undertaken by entities whose representatives are a part of the interdisciplinary team. Information on specific actions leading to the implementation of the aforesaid overarching task is provided in the section 2 of the Art. 9b, which include: 1) diagnosing the problem of domestic violence at the local level; 2) initiating preventive, educational and informational actions aimed at counteracting domestic violence and entrusting their implementation to relevant entities; 3) initiating actions towards persons experiencing domestic violence and persons perpetrating domestic violence; 4) developing a municipal programme for counteracting domestic violence and protecting persons experiencing domestic violence; 5) dissemination of information on institutions, persons and possibilities of providing assistance in the local environment; 6) appointing diagnostic and assistance groups and ongoing monitoring of their tasks; 7) monitoring the ‘Blue Card’ procedure; 8) directing a person perpetrating domestic violence to participate in a correctional and educational or psychological and therapeutic programme for persons perpetrating domestic violence (Act on Counteracting, 2005, Art. 9b, section 2); 9) filing a report on the perpetration of an offence by a person perpetrating violence

concerning a failure to comply with the obligation to report to the programme specified in the previous section and/or a failure to provide the related relevant documentation (See the Code of Administrative Offences, 1971, Art. 66c).

While analysing the specific tasks listed above, it is worth noting words such as: ‘initiating’, ‘entrusting’, ‘monitoring’, ‘appointing’ or ‘directing’. In the light of these, the interdisciplinary team can be regarded as a kind of manager among actors preventing the occurrence of domestic violence. The interdisciplinary teams do not themselves take instrumental action against perpetrators or victims of domestic violence in a direct contact. Their task is to organise and direct the actions carried out by other actors. Particularly important in this context is the functioning of diagnostic and assistance groups established by the interdisciplinary team no later than three days after receiving a report of a suspicion of occurrence of domestic violence. The group is composed primarily of a social worker of a social welfare organisational unit and a Police officer. In addition to the aforementioned entities, the group may also include social workers employed in a specialised assistance centre for persons experiencing domestic violence, family assistants, medical professionals, including physicians, nurses, midwives or paramedics, representatives of the municipal committee for solving alcohol problems, and classroom teachers of a minor or other teachers familiar with the home situation of such a person. Furthermore, pedagogues, psychologists or therapists representing entities whose representatives are members of the interdisciplinary team may also be included (Act on Counteracting, 2005, Art. 9a, sections 11, 11c, 11d).

In exploring the Art. 9b (8), it can be recognised that the specific task of the diagnostic and assistance group is the implementation of the 'Blue Card' procedure in the broadest sense. Starting with diagnosing and assessing the domestic situation in a family experiencing the problem of domestic violence by applying to the interdisciplinary team to refer the person perpetrating domestic violence to participate in corrective and educational or psychological and therapeutic programmes to monitoring the situation of persons experiencing domestic violence and also at risk of domestic violence, also in the period after the completion of the ‘Blue Card’ procedure (Act on Counteracting, 2005). Detailed information on the course and manner of the above procedure was included in the Regulation of the Council of Ministers on the 'Blue Card' procedure and 'Blue Card' form models (2023). On the basis of the broad and detailed description of the 'Blue Card' procedure contained in the legal act, it can be synthetically defined as a set of chronologically undertaken actions aimed at comprehensive mitigation of the consequences of domestic violence and prevention of its occurrence. They consist mainly of diagnosing the problem, meeting the basic needs of the persons suffering domestic violence, including providing medical care, with special attention to minors, providing assistance and counselling, therapeutic action with regard to the victim as well as the perpetrator of violence, and monitoring the domestic situation (Regulation of the Council of Ministers, 2023, § 3, 4).

The task of a social worker belonging to the diagnostic and assistance group is, in particular, to work with the person experiencing domestic violence by providing help and support according to his/her needs. A police officer, on the other hand, is supposed to work with the person perpetrating violence. Both the social worker and the police officer in the course of professional activities care about the subjectivity of all members of the family, do not make value judgments, but try to thoroughly learn the perspective of both the perpetrator and the victim of violence. It is important that the assistance provided does not take the character of “art for art's sake”, simply depreciating the perpetrator, but trying to get to the root of the problem and solve it at the source. In practice, it often turns out that families experiencing domestic violence also face other social problems, which become apparent through conducting an environmental diagnosis and interviews with family members. As a result, social workers carry out assistance actions also in the period long after the completion of the ‘Blue Card’ procedure itself, which should result in the elimination of barriers and deficits hindering the ability to fully and independently realise one's own needs and fully integrate into the social environment (Act on Assistance, 2004, Art. 3).

The diagnostic and assistance groups are an extension of the metaphorical hand of the interdisciplinary teams, which reaches the target recipients of assistance interventions in the context of working directly with the person. Despite their name, it cannot be denied that both their composition and the actions carried out by their members bear the hallmarks of interdisciplinarity. The adjective ‘interdisciplinary’, defined as ‘composed of researchers representing various branches of knowledge’

(Dictionary of the Polish language, clause 3) can be used to describe both the interdisciplinary teams themselves and the diagnostic and assistance groups, whose range of actions, due to the scientific interest of those who undertake them, can also be described as interdisciplinary.

## **Co-occurrence of social problems and planning of remedial measures in Poland**

Social problems are a specific type of issues. Everyone experiences certain obstacles and barriers to the full fulfilment of their needs. These may have endogenous sources, i.e. resulting from individual predispositions and character, or exogenous sources, i.e. resulting from the shape and specificity of the living environment and its impact on the individual. When the same problems begin to affect a large number of individuals or families belonging to one society, we may call them social problems. The approach to solving or mitigating the negative consequences of social problems can be twofold in terms of the scale of the remedial impact. A systemic approach can be applied through policy and legislative actions, trying to influence a whole group of people experiencing specific life difficulties. Such actions have a broad scope, but they ignore the individual's predisposition, and it should be noted that the same problems may be experienced in very different ways by different people. It is also possible to take an individual approach by organising assistance and support actions separately for each individual, taking into account their individual needs and limitations. In Poland, there is a kind of network of governmental and non-governmental institutions and organisations aimed at preventing social problems. The most important government body after the institution of the President and the Prime Minister is the Ministry of Family Labour and Social Policy. Superiorly directed and organised by it, 'Social assistance is an institution of state social policy aimed at enabling persons and families to overcome difficult life situations which they are unable to overcome using their own entitlements, resources and possibilities' (Act on Assistance, 2004, Art. 2). The identification, diagnosis and creation of strategies to solve and prevent social problems is delegated to individual levels of local government (at the level of the region, *poviat* and municipality).

Social problems represent a significant threat to the order and harmony of society. Piotr Sztompka (2012, p. 21) defines a society as a certain creation, between whose individual units there must exist some links, dependencies and relations connecting individual people into a certain whole. Referring to the founders of sociology, the author draws attention to the fact that the founders of sociology - August Comte and Herbert Spencer - used a certain analogy when explaining the concept of society. They compared society to a living organism. They claimed that 'Just as a biological organism is not a simple sum of cells, tissues, organs, but a cohesive and jointly functioning whole, so too a society is not a simple sum of people, but an integrated and functioning social organism' (Comte, Spencer cit. per: Sztompka, 2012, p. 21). In today's sociology, such an analogy can be used when describing the family as the smallest and basic social group that is part of a larger one, such as a nation (Sztompka, 2012, p. 21). A social problem is a phenomenon that emotionally and intellectually engages the wider collective, triggering a social readiness to take collective action to fight, or at least limit, the extent and effects of such a problem. Social problems are an immanent part of considering social reality in general (Kudlińska, 2014, p. 138). Remaining still with society as a metaphorical organism. If an element of the organism ceases to function properly, the result is a certain destabilisation and imbalance of the whole organism. This effect will be stronger the greater the number of constituent elements that lose their capacity. Social problems can be compared to diseases, which, in their effect, attack and embed themselves in individual particles of a larger whole and affect the whole system negatively. However, unlike diseases, social problems usually cannot be solved comprehensively by affecting the whole structure, because the social fabric in its characteristics does not resemble a polymer in which each element is exactly the same as all the others. Each social group is made up of smaller elements, where the ultimate unit is the individual, who has his or her individual characteristics, nature, experiences, past, competences and life aspirations. For this reason, in addition to comprehensive measures at a systemic level, individual work with each individual experiencing difficulties is also required. A non-pecuniary benefit responding to the need to undertake assistance and support actions for individuals and families is social work. It is one of the specific tasks of social work included in the Act (See the Act on Assistance, 2004, Art. 15, clause 2). In the literature, social

work is defined in broad and narrow terms. According to Józef Młyński (2013, p. 160), social work in the narrow sense is a certain form of support for individuals who have lost their way in the field of their own existence. In the broad sense, it encompasses work for social support in the broadest sense, particularly those areas where individuals and families are not coping with their own problems and meeting their needs at the economic, social and cultural level.

With regard to the consideration of the necessity to treat each individual in an individual way taking into account his/her unique character, one of the methods of social work - the individual case method - seems to be particularly relevant. Apart from it, social work is also provided using the group work method and the method of organising the local environment. Ewa Kantowicz (2001, p. 91) indicates that, work with a case is a method of assistance carried out by a social worker in which, through an analysis of the situation of an individual experiencing a social problem, a diagnosis of the case and a plan of assistance is developed and preventive, compensatory and therapeutic actions are undertaken. An indispensable element of the work is to involve the individual in the process of assistance, to create in him/her a sense of responsibility for his/her fate and to take into account the environmental context of the actions carried out.

The first stage of actions aimed, generally speaking, at improving the life situation of an individual or family in which the need for institutional assistance arose is the diagnosis of the situation. 'Diagnosing social problems is a fundamental action for solving human problems. It affects not only the overcoming of difficulties in life, but also the improvement of the quality of human existence' (Młyński, 2021, p. 115). Identifying social problems in social work is not an easy task and requires the use of complex diagnostic tools. In turn, social problems themselves, of which people are the subjects, are not static in nature but are subject to dynamic processes and can be explored in different ways. Social workers most often diagnose problems in groups of people at risk of various types of exclusion, for example: people who are homeless, people on low incomes, permanently orphaned children, the mentally ill, those affected by violence, alcohol and drug addicts, families with many children showing pathological phenomena or people leaving penal institutions (Młyński, 2021, p. 115). The full list of reasons for which assistance is provided under the social assistance system is included in the Article 7 of the Act on Social Assistance (See the Act on Assistance, 2004, Article 7). Diagnosis can be considered as an element of recognition of the clients' life situation. It boils down to understanding the difficulties faced by the client, determining their extent, nature and the degree of intensity of their disorganising impact on life. In the context of a person's or family's life situation, it can be said that the social worker, as a part of the diagnosis, operates in the area of the paradigm of threats.

The subsequent, or in a sense parallel, stage is assessment. The social worker assesses the quality of the problems and the potential of the person or family. Within the assessment, three aspects can be distinguished: entitlements, resources and capacities.

Entitlements derive from the law and code that the social worker follows when carrying out the assessment. Resources refer to different areas of the functioning of the person or family. Among them, it is necessary to distinguish between own resources and those of the local environment, and to refer to tangible and intangible resources. Capacities, on the other hand, are the abilities of an individual to use powers and resources (Młyński, 2021, p. 116).

In pursuing the potential and possibilities for a person or family to overcome life's difficulties, the social worker uses the paradigm of opportunities. As Helena Radlinska (1961, p. 335) put it, social work is 'bringing out and multiplying human strengths'.

Once the social worker conducts a diagnosis and an assessment of the life situation of the people under his/her care, the planning and implementation of remedial measures follows. The social worker first makes every effort to enable the people under his/her care to meet the basic needs of life. This usually takes the form of assistance in kind, for example by donating necessary clothing, monetary assistance by helping to prepare and then accepting applications for the benefits to which they are entitled, or service assistance by referring applications for care services for the elderly and people with disabilities. These actions are compensatory, but do not affect the source of the problem. It is challenging to plan and implement actions that tackle social problems at their source. It is relatively rare for a family to have only one social problem. There are usually several of them, which reinforce each other and generate new ones, having a destructive effect on the whole family and preventing it from fulfilling its basic functions. As a result, such a family becomes dysfunctional or pathological. It

is worth emphasising that it is not appropriate to use these terms interchangeably as dysfunctionality does not necessarily equate with pathology.

The issues of co-occurrence of social problems are largely about the difficulty of distinguishing primary from secondary problems, of answering the question, which problem was the former? How do cause and effect relationships develop? It may also be the case that the problems occurring in the family do not have a cause-and-effect relationship, but only a correlative one, and that the cause of each problem should be sought in different areas of the individuals' lives. In order to counteract social problems effectively, a holistic approach involving professionals from different disciplines should be applied to the clients, which can be described as interdisciplinary interaction. The task of a social worker is to provide various forms of support. The latter should be guided by an empathic approach, not valuing or passing judgement on the other person - emotional support. If necessary, help to draw up and complete the necessary documentation - instrumental support. Take care to respect the dignity, subjectivity and self-determination of the person under care - spiritual support. The monetary and material support already described is also relevant. The social worker should also be familiar with the range of assistance offered by the many institutions in the local environment that collaborate with the Social Welfare Centres to be able to provide informative support. Finally, he or she should carry out monitoring of the family experiencing problems.

The problem of domestic violence, against which remedial action is organised by the interdisciplinary teams, is in its specifics extremely destabilising for society. The behaviour of the perpetrator of family violence not only infringes legal and criminal standards, but also leads to the disintegration of the family, which, as a reminder, is the basic unit of society. Countering this phenomenon is extremely important also because the consequences of children experiencing domestic violence are direct and long-lasting and may result in problems in the adult life of such an individual. What is also important is that the effects of problems and dysfunctions in people experiencing domestic violence can have a negative impact on their families, acquaintances and friends. They also have a negative impact on the performance of certain social roles, resulting in negative social and economic implications for the state (Wilanowska, 2020, p. 112). It is worth pointing out that the problem of domestic violence, apart from its broad negative impact on many dimensions of the health of family members, on social life in general and the intergenerational consequences in the context of the adult lives of the children experiencing violence, is a problem that co-occurs particularly often with alcoholism, poverty, helplessness in matters of childcare or social exclusion. In the light of this information, the establishment of interdisciplinary teams composed of representatives of many disciplines seems to be particularly important in view of the possibility of a holistic impact.

## **Role of interdisciplinary teams in solving selected social problems**

In the light of legal acts, interdisciplinary teams are a tool for systemic cooperation between different actors, local institutions and control services as a part of the municipal programme for counteracting domestic violence. This cooperation should be based on a multifaceted approach, allowing a broad look at a social phenomenon and initiating a social change. The objective of interdisciplinary teams is to plan and implement measures aimed at counteracting and preventing the consequences of domestic violence. From a practical point of view, the interdisciplinary team as a whole or individually, the chairperson, upon a prior consultation with the team, appoints a diagnostic and support group, which takes actions at the executive level in cases of specific families (Piechocki, 2012, pp. 5-7). The totality of the remedial measures taken for the prevention of domestic violence apparently also has an impact on the problem of alcoholism and helplessness in matters of care and upbringing.

Usually, when thinking about the impact of alcohol on the human body and behaviour, it is considered to be one of the main causes of violence in the context of loss of control over one's behaviour. The popularity of this way of thinking is confirmed by a survey conducted by the Women's Rights Centre, in which 'among the judges of the criminal departments of the Masovian Voivodeship, as many as 77% of the respondents answered that domestic violence is very often linked to alcohol abuse by the perpetrator. Only less than 2% of respondents were of the opinion that there is no significant relationship between alcohol abuse and violence' (Potocka, 2005, p. 59). A number of

prosecutors are also convinced of the existence of a connection between alcohol abuse and domestic violence. In 2004, the Deputy Chief Public Prosecutor of the Republic of Poland identified alcohol as one of the main factors responsible for domestic disputes (Potocka, 2005, p. 59). Nevertheless, there are grounds that do not indicate the validity of such a belief. Studies conducted by Straus and Gelles in 1990 indicate that the majority of alcohol addicts are non-violent. Other studies have shown that in 76% of cases, violent acts occurred while sober. Alice Walker's, based on her research, indicated that in 1 in 5 cases of violence, the perpetrator was under the influence of alcohol (Potocka, 2005, p. 62).

People experiencing domestic violence are very frequently convinced that their partner's alcohol addiction is the main cause of their difficult situation. (...) This illusory conviction often gives hope for a change in the situation in the family only by solving the alcohol problem (...) at the same time seeing hope for a change in their partner's attitude in their promises to improve or participate in addiction therapy (National Team For Victims, 2021, p. 3).

All the same, even if we exclude alcohol abuse from the catalogue of direct causes of domestic violence, its destabilising effect on family functioning cannot be denied. In the context of both the sense of security and the risk factor of a child's upbringing being a negative role model, the preventive actions taken by the interdisciplinary team through the Municipal Commission for the Solution of Alcohol Problems should be assessed unequivocally positively. Alcoholism is one of the most common co-occurring problems with domestic violence. The leading tasks of the Municipal Commission for the Solution of Alcohol Problems include applying to the Regional Court for an obligation to undergo detoxification treatment, participating in the 'Blue Card' procedure, providing psychological and legal support and organising an access to therapeutic assistance, as well as cooperating with the family of an alcohol addict in providing information on possible forms of support (Piechocki, 2012, p. 8).

Parental helplessness in care and upbringing terms refers to a situation in which parents or guardians do not adequately care for a child, where they are unable, incapable or unwilling to fulfil their care and upbringing functions towards children in a socially acceptable manner. In the light of the literature on the subject, it can be considered that the problem of helplessness in matters of care and upbringing is specific. Its peculiarity lies mainly in the fact that it co-occurs among many other diverse problems such as violence, addictions, unemployment and poverty, social and economic exclusion or living in an environment with a high risk of violence. The situation of families suffering from carelessness in care and upbringing terms is therefore one that requires support that is adequate to the needs of all family members, interdisciplinary and multisectoral ones (Kudlińska, 2014, pp. 37 – 44). Education is one of the institutions whose representatives feed into the interdisciplinary team and it is often teachers or school counsellors who are the first to identify worrying symptoms in students that may indicate problems in their homes. It is not uncommon for children living in a threatening environment to suffer from peer aggression, reduced academic performance, high levels of absenteeism or apparent neglect. By neglect I mean here, for example, a lack of clean or weather-appropriate clothing, necessary school supplies or food. It is worth pointing out at this point that neglect is one form of violence usually perpetrated against the elderly, people with disabilities or just children. The actions of educational institutions performing the tasks of the interdisciplinary team include supporting upbringing actions, providing pedagogical, psychological and educational assistance, conducting workshops on upbringing and parenting skills, notifying the relevant authorities of a suspected crime against a child and participating in the 'Blue Card' procedure (Piechocki, 2012, p. 8).

The most specific actions of the interdisciplinary teams and diagnostic and assistance groups concern the prevention of domestic violence. Counteracting this problem takes place primarily through the implementation of the 'Blue Card' procedure, which has already been mentioned many times in this text. This procedure may be initiated by any of the 5 institutions whose representatives are part of the interdisciplinary team (a police officer, a social worker, an education worker, a health care representative or a member of a municipal commission for solving alcohol problems). The procedure is carried out using four standardised forms, hereinafter referred to as the 'Blue Cards' (Blue Card - A; Blue Card - B; Blue Card - C and Blue Card - D), each of which is used for specific stages of the procedure. The procedure starts with one of the above-mentioned persons filling in a 'Blue Card - A' when there is a reasonable suspicion of the possibility of domestic violence in the family. It is filled in



to collect basic information about the person experiencing violence and their situation. The 'Blue Card - A' is forwarded to the chairperson of the interdisciplinary team who, within 3 days, appoints a diagnostic and assistance group with the determination of its composition depending on the needs of the person experiencing violence. The 'Blue Card - B' is a collection of legal and practical information for the person experiencing violence, which the latter receives from the person filling in the 'Blue Card - A' or at the latest at the meeting with the diagnostic and assistance group. The diagnostic and assistance group invites the victim of violence to a meeting after the information on the person experiencing violence and a possible background survey conducted by a social worker. The objective of the meeting is to obtain precise information about the needs and expectations of the victim in order to develop a diagnosis and an individual assistance plan recorded in the 'Blue Card - C'. The subsequent step is for the perpetrator of the violence to be called in for a meeting by the diagnostic and assistance group. The objective of the meeting is to influence the perpetrator in order for the latter to stop using behaviour that harms other family members and to motivate the latter to work on changing his or her behaviour. During the meeting with the perpetrator, a 'Blue Card - D' is filled in, which includes a diagnosis of the situation of the person perpetrating violence, a description of the actions taken towards him or her and the commitments made by the latter. The final stage is the monitoring of the home situation of the family with a problem of violence, in particular by a social worker and a police officer, and supporting the violent person in the actions included in the individual assistance plan, for example through social work, psychological consultations or providing psychological and pedagogical assistance to the child. The 'Blue Card' procedure is terminated as a result of a reasonable suspicion that domestic violence has ceased (See the Regulation of the Council of Ministers, 2023).

It is not possible to clearly define how long assistance to families experiencing domestic violence lasts because, it is provided as long as there are indications of the existence of this problem. Depending on the individual case, the situation of violence may cease after a few months, a year or even longer.

While drawing up an individual assistance plan for a victim of violence, the diagnostic and assistance group also takes into account other problems in the individual's environment besides the domestic violence itself. The planned assistance actions, in addition to working on eliminating the negative effects of experiencing violence, may also include counteracting alcohol problems, poverty, educational problems, unemployment or other problems identified at the diagnosis stage. An important role is then played by the social worker who, in addition to simply monitoring the environment, can continue to work with the family to support and assist in solving the remaining problems hindering the family from fully meeting its needs. The interdisciplinary team itself organises actions aimed primarily at counteracting domestic violence, but the implementation of these actions often brings to light other social problems against which specialists from all the institutions whose representatives make up the interdisciplinary team should take remedial action. The role of interdisciplinarity is indispensable in this context, as helping only in the area of one problem would be akin to treating the symptoms without considering the actual source of many problems. The basis for effective assistance is therefore, in the first place, an effective diagnosis.

## **Ending**

The challenge faced by interdisciplinary teams concerns not only responding to crisis situations, but also, and perhaps above all, prevention and education actions aimed at preventing violence and building public awareness of its consequences. Such prevention requires involvement at many administrative and social levels, as well as continuous improvement of working methods and intervention tools. Interdisciplinary teams play an extremely important role in solving complex social problems, of which domestic violence is at the core. Effective diagnosis and prevention of domestic violence itself and other co-occurring social problems would be impossible or significantly hindered in the absence of inter-institutional cooperation and isolated and mono-disciplinary actions. Thanks to the cooperation of specialists from various fields, from social welfare, education, police, health care, institutions supporting the solving of alcohol problems to non-governmental organisations, a holistic approach to the problem of domestic violence is possible, taking into account both the needs of the victims and the need to work with the perpetrators of violence. The possibility of observing the

problem of domestic violence from the perspective of many institutions allows for a more accurate observation of changes in the characteristics and scale of this phenomenon. In recent decades there has been an increase in the number of reports of cases of domestic violence in Poland, which should be evaluated negatively, however, this is most likely due to an increase in public awareness and availability of support systems. Data from police reports and statistics show a gradual increase in the number of interventions related to domestic violence. Interdisciplinarity, despite being the basis for multidimensional exploration and attempts to combat social problems, can also generate some communication limitations due to the lack of a consistent and efficient communication system between members of the interdisciplinary team. Effective tools to enable communication and reduce the complexity of administrative procedures, which also pose some problems, are the key to quick and effective action. In summary, the work of interdisciplinary teams in Poland addresses the complex social challenges facing a contemporary society. This work requires commitment, empathy, professionalism and openness to change, which is essential to building a stronger, safer and more supportive community where every member feels protected and respected. Interdisciplinary teams in Poland carry out very socially relevant tasks, and their activities cannot be overlooked or marginalized in the discourse on counteracting domestic violence, but they are not an ideal creation and, despite the noble idea, should be evaluated and improved all the time.

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