

PhD-project
Domestic Violence – Men’s violence against Women

By

Mariekathrine Poppel

Ilisimatusarfik, University of Greenland

E-mail: mapo@ilisimatusarfik.gl

Introduction

The aims and objectives of the research – *Domestic violence – violence against women by men* is to describe and analyse men’s violence against women and masculine practices related to violence, social conditions, social relations, understandings and concepts of violence against women, the societal reactions to as well as attitudes and actions for the prevention of violence against women.

The occurrence of violence has been analysed in the Greenland Health Profile¹. The analyses show that 47% of the women and 48% of the men have been subject to violence at least once in their lifetime². The number of reports to the police concerning the Criminal Law in 2001 amounted to 5.575 of which 772 were related to violence³ (the total population is 56.500). This was until then the highest number of incidents reported in a single year and it is still increasing.

The causes and interpretations of men’s violence against women within the family have varied in the different periods and have been viewed in relation to rapid social changes (Larsen 1990, 1991) and gender control (Sørensen 1994).

The general opinion has been, and still is, that alcohol is the main cause of domestic violence. It is a fact too that most incidences of violence (as well as murders and suicides) occur in circumstances where alcohol is involved. It is, however not my understanding that alcohol is the sole cause. This understanding is supported by the fact that despite a decline in total, as well as average, consumption of alcohol the number of incidences of violence has been

¹ T. Curtis, F.B. Larsen, K. Helweg-Larsen, P. Bjerregaard: Omfanget af vold og seksuel vold samt voldens sundhedsmæssige konsekvenser (Afdeling for Grønlandsforskning, Statens Institut for Folkesundhed, 1994, 2000).

² M. Poppel, Ed ”Gender and violence in Greenland” (in progress).

³ Annual police report 2001

increasing. On the other hand domestic violence seems to hang together with certain social and structural societal relations. Gender and violence is often analyzed from the women's perspective, in this project, the focus is on men, masculinities and men's power practices⁴.

The domestic violence is not a new phenomenon. In *Aron from Kangeq*⁵ you find narratives on domestic violence in the pre-colonial and the colonial period. The scope of the domestic violence in Greenland in a longer historical perspective is only partly illuminated, as is the scope about causes and character in the different periods.

My provisional analysis of the stories by Aron from Kangeq shows that the acts of violence were very often related to powerlessness. At the same time the analysis shows that acts, that at that time were not considered violent and were socially accepted, today are considered violent incidents. It supports the hypothesis that the concept of violence has changed over time.

My assumption is that the concept of violence has been judged and interpreted differently at different times. The concept of violence has a history and it has changed in an interaction with societal developments.

The concept of violence can – in accordance with my assumptions - be categorized as follows:

- the old concept of violence – which is the pre-Christian and pre-colonial concept of violence;
- the Christian concept of violence – which is the Christian of colonial concept of violence;
- the secular concept of violence – which is a non-religious, modern concept of violence – including symbolic violence.

The description and analyses will focus on three distinct periods in the history of Greenland:

- the pre-colonial period (before 1721),
- the colonial period (1721-1953)
- the postcolonial period (after 1953).

⁴ R.W Connell. *Masculinities* (Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 1995). C. Haywood, M.M. Ghail. *Men and Masculinities* (Open University Press, Berkshire, 2003).

⁵ Aron (1822-1869) lived in Kangeq in the Nuuk area. He made drawings and collected narratives. Some of those were published first time in 1858 in Nuuk (Thisted 1999)

Methods and analyses

Men's violence in the domestic sphere is mostly a hidden, silenced, and invisible form of violence. Silence is one of the first methodological challenges in my study of violence. The strategy of the analyses is deconstructions (Derrida in Gasché 1994:26) of the sources as *storylines*⁶, from the perspective of everyday lives. Gender is regarded as socially and culturally constructed (Løvkrone 2001: 9).

In the Greenlandic narratives the stories are told in certain patterns, and there is a considerable reuse of the story elements from one storytelling to the next. Knowing still more narratives one gets acquainted to the different types of sequences and how they fit together, which kind of conflicts following a given presentation, and which solutions one can imagine (Thisted 1999: 49).

From the introduction to the story the actual situation in which the violence develops is described: who is the violent? Who is the victim? How was the violence perpetrated? What is the situation in which the violent behavior develops? The manner in which domestic violence is narrated also depends on who is telling it and when.

The sources of the project contain: Songs, stories, reports, studies and surveys

The qualitative studies until now include transcriptions of:

- Drum songs from East Greenland from the pre-colonial period, and stories from the pre-colonial and colonial period.
- Police reports on domestic violence in 2001. The reports are constructed as stories.

The quantitative study:

- A population analysis of 23 convicted men; collected from the police reports in 2001 as variables in a statistical framework, some of the preliminary results will be presented in this paper.

The police made interviews (extended police reports) with the group of violence offenders in 2001. I have had access to all these interviews. After having read all the interviews I worked out a questionnaire with both closed and open-ended questions. This questionnaire includes all the information that was contained in the extended police reports. The total data set consists of variables within - among others - the following categories:

Demography, socio-economy, health, childhood/adolescence, sanctions/measures, victim

⁶ Søndergaard, Dorte Marie (2000): *Destabiliserende diskursanalyse*: Haavind Hanne (red) (2000).

Some of the sources are:

The pre-colonial period

The collections of drum songs (Thalbitzer 1911)

The purpose of drum singing is to get rid of one's emotional pains, to get relieved – and that was not only for the drum dancers, but for the audience too (Rosing, 1970: 88). In the drum songs violence is represented as “verbal violence”⁷. Verbal violence is regarded as psychological violence or violation of personal integrity.

In the pre-Christian society the community consisted of families living off the land and the sea. Norms and indisputable rules existed in the community to avoid the risk of conflicts (H.C. Petersen. Unpublished paper (?)). The existing social norms and the social networks established a consensus in the social space. Communication took place from one person to another, as there was no written communication.

The colonial period

The collections of narratives (Rink (1866-1871), (Thisted 1999)

The colonization and baptizing of the West Greenlanders began in 1721 in the Nuuk area. During that period Aron from Kangeq collected narratives by request from the South Greenland Inspector H.J. Rink, and illustrated the narratives with his own drawings (Thisted 1999)

In the works of Aron and his contemporaries we can study how the meeting of two norm systems became manifest and is sought to be dealt with. (Thisted 1999:49).

It is my hypothesis for further investigation that the introduction of Christianity to the Greenlanders meant a shift in the attitude towards conflicts, conflicts resolution and violence although not necessarily a parallel shift in behavior.

The postcolonial period

The police reports on domestic violence in 2001

In 1953 Greenland became a part of Denmark, and got a Home Rule Government in 1979, but still today the administration of justice, including the court system and the police force in Greenland is under the authority of the Danish Ministry of Justice. The criminal code of 1954 is based on the "principle of the offender" and not on the "principle of the act". The resocialization of the offender is a primary goal (Brøndsted 1996). The offenders that are considered to be dangerous to other people can be sentenced to imprisonment in Denmark. In this project the police reports on domestic violence are constructed as stories from the perspective of everyday lives.

This following represents some preliminary results from the quantitative analyses of police reports on men convicted for domestic violence from 2001.

⁷ (Asîneq i Kûngmîn. Rosing, 1970. P. 11). *The word is the greatest power of human beings. With words you can hurt people or make them happy- for life*

Some preliminary results

Table 1

Persons convicted for violence against women in 2001 and the total male population 20 and older, born in Greenland - Distribution by age

	Men convicted for violence 2001		Male population > 20; born in Greenland, Jan. 1. 2002 *	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
20-24	2	8.6	1.770	10.8
25-29	2	8.6	1.415	8.6
30-34	7	30.6	1.847	11.2
35-39	3	13.0	2.757	16.7
40-44	8	34.9	2.404	14.6
45-49	0	0	1.806	11.0
50-54	0	0	1.332	8.1
55-59	1	4.3	1.049	6.4
60 +	0	0	2.081	12.6
Total	23	100	16.461	100

* Source: Statistics Greenland

Comments:

As mentioned earlier the survey among the 23 convicted for violence against women is a population survey. The only way of having the group extended is to include other data sources and data from other years.

Comparing the age distribution for the convicted and the whole adult male population, it is especially striking that there is an over representation in the age groups: 30-34 and 40-44 among the convicted, while there is no convicted at all in the age groups: 45-49, 50-54 and 60 and above.

Apart from striving to get further data on not convicted offenders and eventually include police reports for more year the last observation might lead to questions and hypotheses on the reasons why men born in the late 1950'ties and the late 1960'ties are overrepresented.

Table 2

Unemployment among persons convicted for violence against women in 2001 and the total male population 15 - 62, born in Greenland.

	Men convicted for violence 2001	Male population 2001 *
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	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Employed	15	65.2	**	
Unemployed	8	34.8		6.7
Total	23	100,0		

* Source: Unemployment statistics 2001, Statistics Greenland

** Note: There are no corresponding data on the total labour force.

Comments:

There is an ongoing registration of the unemployment whereas the number of persons employed is not systematically registered. Despite this lack of actual registration it seems obvious that the unemployment rate among the offenders is considerably higher than that among the workforce in general.

Table 3

Men convicted for violence against women in 2001 and the total male population 18 and older, born in Greenland in the labour force - Distribution by vocational training

	Men convicted for violence 2001	Male population in labour force, 1994 *
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	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Valid No information	4	17,4		0
Vocational training	2	8,7		42.6
No vocational training	17	73,9		57.4
Total	23	100,0	333	100,0

* Source: Statistics Greenland: Living Conditions Survey 1994.

Table 4

Men convicted for violence against women in 2001 and the total male population 18 and older, born in Greenland. - Distribution by primary school attendance (highest level)

	Men convicted for violence 2001	Male population 1994
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	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Valid No information	4	17.4		4.4
< 7 years	10	43.5		24.5
> 7 years	9	39.1		71.1
Total	23	100,0	404	100,0

* Source: Statistics Greenland: Living Conditions Survey 1994.

Comments to tables 3 and 4:

There is a significant difference between the educational profiles that concerns school attendance. Even though the Living conditions data gives a picture of the 1994-situation the proportion of the general male population having attended school more than 7 years is considerably larger than that of the persons convicted for violence in 2001.

Though the Living Conditions data from 1994 concerns the male labour force and the 2001-offenders are characterised by a higher degree of unemployment it seems reasonable to suggest a lower level of vocational training among the group of offenders.

Concluding remarks

Some preliminary concluding remarks (and hypotheses to further research) on the basis of the first findings from the 2001-police reports on men convicted for violence, the circumstances and the sentences:

- The group of offenders has an overrepresentation of younger men (born in late 1950'ties and late 1960'ties) and uneven distributed compared to the general male population.
- The group seems to be underprivileged according to school education and employment.
- The offenders have a number of problems apart from the mentioned to a higher degree than comparable groups.
- Alcohol is involved in most cases of violence.

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