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## **Masculinity without violence – the application of NVC in the upbringing and education**

### **Męskość bez przemocy – zastosowanie komunikacji bez przemocy (NVC) w wychowaniu i edukacji**

#### **Masculinity Without Violence: The Application of NVC in Upbringing and Education**

The world of human relationships, the ability to create lasting bonds, and the skill to find solutions in conflict situations remain significant challenges,

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despite the rapid development of science and the growing public awareness in many areas of life. While much is said about constructive ways of expressing emotions, violence remains firmly embedded in the landscape of Polish reality and constitutes an ongoing social challenge. As research shows, in the vast majority of cases, men are the perpetrators and aggressors in domestic violence situations.

Against the background of general communication theories, including Peirce's concept (Fleischer, 2009), the NVC method finds its special place due to its multifaceted application and effectiveness in various areas of social life. The theoretical foundations of NVC refer to Carl R. Rogers' humanistic psychology (1951), who emphasized the importance of empathetic listening as the foundation of healthy interpersonal relationships. Rosenberg (2003) developed these ideas, focusing on four key elements of NVC: observation (without judgment), expressing feelings, identifying needs, and making requests in a way that does not violate the autonomy of the other person.

The aim of this article is to attempt to answer the question of how the Nonviolent Communication (NVC) method can contribute to solving the issues faced by contemporary society. Another goal of the publication is to present specific proposals for implementing NVC in the upbringing and education of men, with the aim of promoting adaptive methods for regulating emotions, meeting needs, and interpersonal communication.

## **Violence in Poland and Its Contexts**

Recent years have been characterized by rapid advancements in science, technology, and media, which have led to an increase in knowledge, changes in values, and actions among Poles in various areas of social life. Despite the popularization of social science research findings, the rise in educational standards in Poland, the promotion of personal development, psychoeducation, and constructive communication and mediation patterns, the phenomenon of violence remains a current problem, disrupting the atmosphere of many domestic and professional relationships (Kantar, 2019). According to research results and statistics, the male element dominates in this area (Makaruk et al., 2023, p. 6). According to the definition of the Polish Penal Code, "domestic violence is a single or repeated intentional act or omission that violates the rights or personal goods of close family members as well as other individuals

living together or sharing a household, especially putting them at risk of death, harm to health, violating their dignity, bodily integrity, freedom, including sexual freedom, causing physical or psychological harm, and causing moral suffering to those affected by the violence” (Ustawa z dnia 29 lipca 2005 r. o przeciwdziałaniu przemocy domowej- Dz.U. 2005 nr 180 poz. 1493 ze zm.).

Violence can take various forms. The first is physical violence, which includes any actions that cause harm to the victim’s body. Examples include beating, kicking, pulling, choking, and using tools to inflict pain. This is the most noticeable form of violence, as it leaves visible marks on the body. Psychological violence, which does not leave physical traces but has a profound impact on the emotional and intrapsychic state of the individual, is harder to observe. It may take the form of continuous insults, humiliation, criticism, manipulation, or intimidation. Victims of psychological violence often experience anxiety, depression, feelings of worthlessness, and their sense of safety and emotional stability can be severely disrupted. This phenomenon becomes particularly problematic when violence is ongoing, based on repeated acts by a parent, teacher, or another adult in a caregiver or superior role over a child, as well as when it occurs between adults. These types of acts often lead to complex trauma, which is difficult and demanding to treat (Maercker et al., 2022, p. 60–71).

Emotional violence is similar to psychological violence, but it mainly involves manipulating the victim’s emotions. It usually occurs in partner relationships, where one person tries to control the other’s emotions by instilling feelings of guilt, shame, or fear. It often takes the form of emotional blackmail, with the perpetrator assuming the roles of accuser, punisher, martyr, or seducer, leading to the devaluation of the other person’s worth, invalidation of their needs, ignoring their voice and opinion in discussions, and various forms of passive aggression (Forward & Frazier, 2020, p. 38–59). This can lead to emotional dependence on the manipulator, with victims feeling unable to defend themselves, leave the relationship, or seek help. This type of violence can involve various actions that are hard to measure or quantify. It is worth noting that it can include both derogatory or dismissive attitudes as well as behaviours such as love-bombing or gaslighting (Klein et al., 2023, p. 11–34). The emotional dimension of violence is incredibly rich, yet it is not always easy to recognize by those who experience it or their environment.

The next form of the described phenomenon is sexual violence, which refers to any form of coercion with a sexual character. This violence can take various forms: physical, verbal, or nonverbal, and each dimension is associated with the violation of boundaries in the sexual sphere, which may include rape, attempted rape, sexual harassment, exploitation of disabled individuals, trafficking, child exploitation, forcing someone into prostitution, unwanted sexual comments, coercion to undergo abortion, refusal of protection against sexually transmitted diseases, or marriage to a minor (Jedlecka, 2017, p. 19–21). Sexuality is the most intimate area of human functioning, which is why violence in this domain leaves deep wounds, not only violating the physical integrity of the person but also their intimacy, sense of self-worth, and agency. Unfortunately, statistics indicate that the perpetrators of sexual exploitation of children are most often men (Makaruk et al., 2023, p. 6).

Economic violence is another form, which involves controlling and restricting access to financial resources of a spouse, partner, child, or even an employee, leading to the loss of dignity, self-worth, and dependency on the perpetrator. It may include taking money, limiting work opportunities, forbidding the use of one's own income, and controlling the victim's spending. The goal of this form of violence is to dominate the other person, leading to control over their life and forcing them to earn or provide material goods. Although this article focuses on male violence due to its broad scope, it is important to add that women are also perpetrators of violence, mainly in the economic and relational aspects (Kędzierska, 2017).

Violence can also occur within institutional frameworks, where the state, organizations, or other entities engage in actions aimed at marginalizing, persecuting, or excluding specific individuals or social groups (Omyła-Rudzka, 2019, p. 12–13). This may include, for example, discrimination based on gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, or social status. Reports on peer violence are also concerning, as the scale of this phenomenon in Poland is very broad (Szewczyk-Firek, 2021; Tłuściak-Deliowska, 2018, p. 46–63). Institutional violence can take various forms, including physical, psychological, sexual, and bullying, and may involve actions aimed at intimidating, excluding, or controlling employees. It is also worth noting that public perception of morally reprehensible phenomena prominently identifies the exploitation of employees (95%), giving or receiving bribes (over 90%), violence against children (89%), and abusing one's professional position for personal gain (89%) (Boguszewski, 2021, p. 1–7).

Police statistics reveal that domestic violence continues to be a serious social problem in Poland. Data shows that men make up the vast majority of perpetrators of domestic violence. To illustrate, in 2022, of the 71,631 individuals suspected of committing violence, 51,935 were men, accounting for about 73% of all perpetrators (Komenda Główna Policji, 2023). The results regarding gender discrepancies in the context of perpetrators of violence have remained at similar levels since 2012. It is also significant that alcohol continues to be one of the most frequently identified factors contributing to the escalation of domestic violence. According to data from 2023, men in Poland consume alcohol nearly three times more often than women, which is linked to the fact that they commit three times more suicides than women. Alcoholism is a major trigger for aggression in domestic and social contexts (Malczewski & Jabłoński, 2023, p. 7–9; Witkowska, 2021, p. 27–30). Furthermore, approximately 60–70% of perpetrators of violence were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the act (Komenda Główna Policji, 2023). Although the number of drunk perpetrators of crimes has decreased over the years, alcohol not only acts as a catalyst for aggression but also hinders timely intervention (Fal, 2020; Frąckowiak & Motyka, 2015; Zgliczyński, 2016).

As the data indicates, the COVID-19 pandemic period contributed to an increase in domestic violence, both in Poland and globally. Due to restrictions associated with lockdown, the closure of schools and educational institutions, as well as limited social contact, many individuals found themselves in a situation of isolation, which had negative consequences for safety within homes. Increased time spent in confinement, in the presence of perpetrators of violence, as well as stress related to health and economic uncertainty, deepened the problem of difficult family relationships. Statistics show that the number of reports of domestic violence significantly rose during the pandemic (Ławska & Makara-Studzińska, 2023; Sarnowski & Dominiak, 2021; Zin-Sędek, 2021). A notable increase in the number of completed “Blue Card” forms was recorded. Data shows that the number increased to 85,575, marking a clear difference compared to previous years (Komenda Główna Policji, 2023); Ławska & Makara-Studzińska, 2023). It is also worth mentioning the issue of violence in relationships where both partners are perpetrators. Although the text focuses on the male element in the context of violence, it should be noted that women sometimes trigger or maintain the violent dynamics in the family (Dutka, 2014).

The establishment of this procedure has contributed to combating violence, but it still requires improvement in order to enhance the standards of victim safety (Witkowska-Paleń, 2023, p. 189–205). The pandemic presented a huge challenge for both law enforcement and organizations dealing with violence prevention, as it simultaneously reduced access to interventions in cases of reports, and isolation made it difficult to solve problems at the local level (Bebel, 2022; Guessoum et al., 2020; Kasiak et al., 2022). While men are not always perpetrators of domestic violence, they constitute the overwhelming majority among those suspected of committing it. Therefore, the need for anti-violence actions, preventive measures, and the promotion of psychoeducation and NVC to improve social well-being seems justified.

### **The power of Nonviolent Communication (NVC)**

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is a method aimed at fostering mutual understanding, respect, and empathy between people, even in difficult and conflict-laden situations. It was developed by American psychologist Marshall Rosenberg, who noticed that communication styles based on accusations, judgments, and criticism often lead to the escalation of conflicts and the breakdown of relationships. NVC, on the other hand, offers an alternative, teaching how to express one's feelings and needs in a way that fosters constructive solutions (Rosenberg, 2022, p. 11–29). To illustrate different communication styles, the theory's author used the symbols of the giraffe and the jackal to represent the language of dialogue and conflict, respectively (Mol, 2015, p. 8–29). There are several key elements of NVC theory that help to understand its principles.

1. All people have the same needs, but different preferred ways of fulfilling them. Feelings inform us about whether our needs are being met or unmet.
2. The needs of all people are equally important and can at least be taken into account if they cannot be fully satisfied. People are willing to contribute to the good of others, as long as they do so voluntarily.
3. People do not act against us but towards fulfilling their own needs. Every criticism, judgment, and anger are maladaptive attempts to meet their own needs.

4. Conflicts arise from the belief that there is only one way to fulfill a given need.
5. Establishing contact with the other person is the second step in conflict resolution; the first step is connecting with one's own feelings and needs (Dermont-Owsińska et al., 2019, p. 18–20).

The NVC method is based on four key steps: observation, identifying and expressing feelings, defining needs, and making requests. A fundamental principle of NVC is to avoid judging or accusing the other person, which is often the cause of tension in relationships. Instead, the parties focus on their own emotions and needs, which allows for more open and secure dialogues. NVC is especially effective in conflict situations because it facilitates communication that does not escalate tensions but instead allows for understanding and cooperation.

The application of Nonviolent Communication in the family can significantly improve the quality of relationships between spouses or partners, as well as between parents and children. NVC helps in expressing feelings and needs openly, which reduces the risk of growing aggression and tension within family systems. Parents can learn how to talk about their emotions in ways that do not blame but strengthen the bond with their children. Particularly in the case of fathers, who often have difficulty expressing their emotions, NVC is an excellent tool for developing empathy and sensitivity. Children who learn to communicate in this way are more likely to resolve conflicts without aggression, which can have a positive impact on family well-being (Islam & Naher, 2017, p. 69–75).

In a professional context, the model proposed by Rosenberg can be a tool for improving relationships between employees and employers. The communication type discussed does not impose compromise or the abandonment of expectations regarding the employee or employer but instead allows for a clear and accessible presentation of one's needs and expectations. Empathy-based communication supports the creation of teams where cooperation can be established more easily, and team members can assist each other. Recent years have seen a growing appreciation for psychology and communication sciences, which has led to the promotion of leadership based on empathy, as such communication forms can contribute to the better well-being of employees, which in turn improves team efficiency (Berendt et al.,

2018, p. 81–98). The education sector also provides a space where NVC can be helpful in resolving conflicts and building bonds. It can serve as a practical guide for children and adolescents, but also for teachers, education workers, parents, and other individuals involved in the education sector (Hildebrandt, 2024, p. 23–26). As Marshall Rosenberg emphasized, “When we listen to our own and others’ deep needs, according to NVC, human relationships appear to us in an entirely new light” (Rosenberg, 2022, p. 13). As an educational, professional, and social tool, NVC has the potential to bring about real changes in the way people communicate with one another, improving the quality of life for individuals and communities.

### **Proposals for applying NVC in the upbringing and education of men**

The description of the context of violence in Poland and the presentation of the key principles of Nonviolent Communication in this article serve to highlight how the application of NVC can contribute to raising or adapting men to safely resolve conflict situations. Research shows that over 60% of men declare they have no one to talk to about their emotions, and in the group of young respondents (19–25 years old), this percentage increases to nearly 79% (Gedeon Richter Polska, 2024). Insufficient contact with one’s own emotional states and receiving destructive scripts for expressing emotions in the home, peer environment, or online environment serves as a “recipe” for engaging in violence. When substances like psychoactive drugs and addiction problems come into play, it becomes even easier to inflict harm in families and relationships. Learning to fulfil key needs is one of the pillars of counteracting the destructive mechanisms that men, in particular, use. NVC can serve as a useful method for self-discovery, uncovering a new path for expressing feelings and fulfilling needs.

To successfully implement Nonviolent Communication as a tool in upbringing and education, actions must be taken at various levels – from working with parents, teachers, to professionals engaged in violence prevention. A key starting point is raising parents’ awareness of the importance of psychoeducation in the emotional development of their children. When implemented in family or school life, this method allows for the ongoing resolution of tensions, reducing the risk of peer and domestic violence.



Psychoeducational workshops and courses, as spaces for teaching parents how to use the “giraffe language” instead of the “jackal language,” can become a breakthrough in implementing healthy parenting patterns (Mol, 2015, p. 46–63). NVC can be a valuable tool for addressing conflicts and destructive emotional regulation scripts that children and adolescents may observe in society. Particularly for growing boys, the four pillars of “giraffe language” can serve as tools for expressing true feelings without the need to suppress or manifest them aggressively.

An important aspect of implementing NVC in education is its promotion at every stage of learning – from kindergarten to universities. Even at the youngest ages, children can learn to recognize their emotions and translate them into concrete actions, avoiding aggression in relationships with peers. Pilot studies in elementary schools show the effectiveness of implementing this communication method in reducing interpersonal difficulties (Suzić et al., 2018). NVC has instructional potential, showing how to communicate with feelings, recognize one’s needs, and fulfil them in relationships, instead of resorting to alcohol, other substances, or destructive behaviours. Educators, school psychologists, and teachers equipped with the proper knowledge about NVC can effectively introduce this method into their daily work with children and youth, promoting dialogue, respect, and empathy. At the stage of high schools and universities, NVC can help to develop the ability to listen to others, negotiate, and reach a consensus. It is crucial that teachers are well-trained in this regard, so they can confidently and systematically implement the principles discussed during educational hours, shaping young people who will be able to handle difficult emotions in adult life. Pilot studies among nursing students indicated significant improvements in communication skills, increased self-esteem, and reduced aggression due to the incorporation of NVC elements into study programs (Sung & Kweon, 2022). Similarly, studies on male student groups have confirmed the effectiveness of reducing aggression levels through the application of empathic communication (Najafabadi et al., 2024).

NVC can also be quite useful in the context of combating domestic violence. Workshops and education implemented by educational institutions, local governments, and non-profit organizations can inspire work with men who use violence in their families. NVC provides tools for more conscious and responsible expression of feelings. Moreover, this communication method not only changes the way men can respond in conflict situations, but it also

helps other family members – wives, children, in-laws – learn how to express their emotions without the fear of escalating the conflict. Family workshops can lead to the creation of new, healthier bonds. It is, therefore, beneficial for organizations working with domestic violence victims to promote NVC as an effective complementary method to professional psychotherapeutic help. It is important to emphasize that empathy-based communication does not replace crisis intervention and legal anti-violence actions, but it can contribute significantly to social change.

NVC, as a communication method, also finds its application in a broader social context, especially in situations where tensions can lead to violence escalation. NVC can be used not only in the face of major social crises but also in daily interactions, which are often tense, especially in large cities or diverse environments. Examples of such tensions can include protests by specific professional or social groups against new legal or tax regulations, opposition to job reductions, or policies of a given company. While these situations require mediation and professional negotiations, NVC can help to lower the “temperature of the conflict,” enabling the exchange of opinions and arguments. Introducing “giraffe language” in training for social leaders, activists, or organizations involved in andragogy can assist in building structures based on respect for people’s dignity and the common good. This method has its limitations, and its application does not guarantee agreement, but it creates the best possible conditions for mediation and negotiation (Islam & Naher, 2017; Norman et al., 2023). As the renowned Italian psychiatrist and writer V. Andreoli states, cooperation, rather than competition, seems to be the proper direction for development and functioning in the 21st century (Andreoli, 2023, p. 22–30). One of the key elements in supporting dialogue and social cooperation is fostering more empathetic styles of building contact, managing emotions, and conflicts. In this and many other areas of upbringing, education, and shaping modern individuals, empathy-based communication is essential – requiring little effort, but having the potential for real change.

## Conclusion

Although the scale of violence in Poland has decreased in recent years, it remains a phenomenon that should be fought against and completely eradicated. The application of NVC can become an effective tool in promoting

an empathetic and safe model of action in the face of conflicts and interpersonal tensions. The analysis of the violence issue in relation to men has shown the need for educational intervention in the process of upbringing and raising awareness, providing tools from the earliest stages of life to meet needs in a way that does not harm others. The conclusions presented in the article point to the necessity of continuing work on reducing aggression levels and popularizing the practical application of NVC in the context of the educational system, family environments, and local communities. Nonviolent Communication has the potential to influence men, helping them to understand themselves, communicate their needs, and meet them without harming others, but with sensitivity to the other person.

**Abstract:** The article presents the proposal to apply Nonviolent Communication (NVC) as a strategy for reducing the phenomenon of violence in Poland, with particular focus on men, who continue to dominate in the role of perpetrators. Despite advancements in technology and growing public awareness, violence remains a significant challenge, including in the Polish context. Nonviolent Communication, based on empathy and understanding the needs of all parties involved in an interaction, can serve as an effective method for reducing aggression and fostering constructive, nonviolent forms of dialogue. The article also presents suggestions for incorporating NVC into parenting and education, as an important element for improving the quality of relationships within families, schools, and local communities.

**Keywords:** Nonviolent Communication (NVC), masculinity, domestic violence, conflict resolution, empathy

**Streszczenie:** Artykuł przedstawia propozycję zastosowania komunikacji bez przemocy (ang. Nonviolent Communication, NVC) jako strategii w redukcji zjawiska przemocy w Polsce, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem mężczyzn, którzy wciąż dominują w roli sprawców. Mimo rozwoju technologii i rosnącej świadomości ludzi, przemoc pozostaje poważnym wyzwaniem także w polskim kontekście. Komunikacja bez przemocy, bazująca na empatii i zrozumieniu potrzeb wszystkich stron zaangażowanych w interakcję, może stanowić skuteczną metodę zmniejszania agresji i budowania konstruktywnych, nieprzemocowych form dialogu. W artykule zaprezentowano również propozycje wdrożenia metody NVC w wychowanie i edukację, jako istotny element poprawiający jakość relacji w rodzinie, szkole i lokalnych społecznościach.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Komunikacja bez przemocy (NVC), męskość, przemoc domowa, rozwiązywanie konfliktów, empatia

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