

Mapping of Existing Information on Domestic Violence in Albania

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Executive Summary

The situation of Albanian women, and especially the incidence of domestic violence, has worsened in the last ten years, but there are still no reliable official statistics showing the precise trends. Domestic violence in Albania remains behind closed doors and is supported by the traditional and patriarchal attitude attendant to the Kanun (Code of customary laws used in the northern part of Albania).

This report first,

gather existing research analysing the extent, frequency and nature of the problem, identifying vulnerable groups of domestic violence, its causes and consequences, statistics, legal provisions, policies, programs, research and services. Violence occurs notwithstanding religion. Women with high education tend to be better empowered and prepared to encourage communication with their spouse, and therefore are less likely to suffer from domestic violence. Women who are unemployed and living in rural areas are more likely to be physically abused. Young women aged between 20-30 years old are more likely to experience physical and sexual abuse and seek help. There is no simple explanation for the causes of domestic violence. Alcoholism, jealousy, unemployment, poverty are among the main causes. The higher level of economic dependency of women, the absence of law enforcement and the fact that Albanian legislation lacks certain dispositions to protect women inside and outside the home, also contribute to a reinforcement of the cycle of violence. The Albanian Civil Code has no provisions to ensure that a person who is believed to be in danger, has the right to demand a temporary court decision to prevent the violence. Only 5% of cases of domestic violence are brought to court. Women's reactions to violence depend on their level of awareness, education, capability to fight to protect themselves, support received from their parents, economic situation, support from their children, and information they have on existing social services. Children who are affected by violence become isolated at a very early age and run the risk of being further marginalised in society.

Second,

it identifies position of key actors. For many reasons, including lack of trust in the authorities, shame and fear of retaliation from the abuser, women who are victims of domestic violence, do not report abuse to the Police. NGOs cannot respond to all the needs of the victims of domestic violence. The University of Tirana only publishes a handful of academic publications on social sciences issues every year. Domestic violence is a social issue that attracts much of attention from journalists nowadays, but many reports victimise the abused woman and reinforce existing prejudices and stereotypes.

Third,

it is mapping existing networks and initiatives to combat domestic violence in Albania. There are an increasing number of women organisations involved in lobbying for women's human rights, organising public awareness campaigns on the issue and offering services and support to the abused women, girls and children. These services include: counselling, legal advice, shelter, employment.

Fourth,

it makes recommendations on how to involve different actors in the follow up of the study in terms of design and implementation of future activities. Need to

organise training for health professionals, police staff, lawyers and journalists, vocational courses to facilitate women employment. Conduct nation-wide survey. Sensitisation of elementary and high school students. Organise community-based projects: men's groups, shelters, linja etc.

Table of contents

<i>Executive Summary</i>	2
<i>List of acronyms</i>	5
<i>Introduction</i>	6
<i>Part I- Existing Information on Domestic Violence</i>	7
A-Extent, frequency and nature of the problem	7
B-Identification of vulnerable groups of domestic violence according to different factors	9
<i>Religion</i>	9
<i>Education</i>	9
<i>Geographie</i>	9
<i>Profession</i>	10
<i>Age</i>	10
C-Causes	10
D-Legal framework	12
E-Consequences: Who suffer from domestic violence?	13
<i>Impact on women</i>	13
<i>Impact on children</i>	14
<i>Part II- Positions of Different Actors</i>	16
A-Civil servants	16
B-Member of Parliament	17
C-Members of academic community	17
D-International organisations	18
<i>Part III- Mapping of existing networks and initiatives to combat domestic violence in Albania</i>	20
Schema 1 National Council Of Albanian Women	21
Schema 2 Albanian Coalition Against Gender Violence and Trafficking	23
Schema 3 Network Against Gender Violence and Trafficking	25
<i>Part IV- Recommendations</i>	26
Training	26
Government	26
Police force	27
Research	27
Awareness Campaign	28
Community-based projects	28
<i>Conclusion</i>	28
<i>Bibliography</i>	29
<i>Endnotes</i>	30

List of acronyms

ICMC: International Catholic Migration Commission

ICITAP: International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (United States Department of Justice)

IOM: International Organisation for Migration

MAPE: Multinational Advisory Police Element

NCWF: National Committee on Women and Family

NPA: Norwegian People's Aid

NOVIB: The Netherlands Organisation for International Development Co-operation

ORT: Organisation for Rehabilitation and Training

OSCE: Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PHARE: Poland and Hungary Aid for the Reconstruction of the Economy

SNV: Netherlands Development Organisation

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

UNOHCHR: United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

UNOPS: United Nations Office for Project Services

USIS: United States Information Service

Introduction

The situation of Albanian women, and especially the incidence of domestic violence, has worsened in the last ten years. During communism problems of domestic violence, were considered taboo. Nobody dared to make them public. They were considered non-existent, or in the best case the problem was dealt with by the Party organisation. Today, Albania still does not have a legal framework to protect women from domestic violence, but there is no co-operation between police, lawyers, social workers and health workers in support of battered women. Violence against Albanian women is worsening because of the high prevalence of trafficking and prostitution in the country and throughout the Balkans.

In this paper, we refer to domestic violence as violence perpetrated by intimate partners and other family members, and manifested through:

Physical abuse such as slapping, beating, arm twisting, stabbing, strangling, burning, choking, kicking, threats with an object or weapon, and murder. It also includes traditional practices harmful to women such as wife inheritance (the practice of passing a widow, and her property, to her dead husband's brother).

Sexual abuse such as coerced sex through threats, intimidation or physical force, forcing unwanted sexual acts or forcing sex with others.

Psychological abuse which includes behaviour that is intended to intimidate and persecute, and takes the form of threats of abandonment or abuse, confinement to the home, surveillance, threats to take away custody of the children, destruction of objects, isolation, verbal aggression and constant humiliation.

Economic abuse includes acts such as the denial of funds, refusal to contribute financially, denial of food and basic needs, and controlling access to health care, employment, etc.¹.

The aims of this report are as follows: **first**, gather existing research, analysing the extent, frequency and nature of the problem, identifying vulnerable groups of domestic violence, its causes and consequences, statistics, legal provisions, policies, programs, research, services; **second**, identify position of key actors; **third**, “map” out existing networks and initiatives to combat domestic violence in Albania; and **fourth**, make recommendations on how to involve different actors in the follow up of the study in terms of design and implementation of future activities. We hope that this study will bring momentum to the issue of domestic violence and will raise public concern.

Part I

Existing Information on Domestic Violence

A- Extent, frequency and nature of the problem

Violence against women in Albania must be analysed in the context of Albanian culture and traditions. The study of domestic violence is complicated, because it is a phenomenon that happens behind closed doors. People prefer not to speak about the issue because they consider it a private matter and a source of shame. Also, this issue is supported by the traditional and patriarchal mentality that is deeply rooted in Albanian culture². The roots of continued maltreatment of Albanian women from men are old and deep and are connected with lack of respect. It seems contradictory the fact that Kanun (Code of customary laws used in the northern part of Albania) includes acts that declare women as being untouchable³. Sala and Miria attempted to explain this by writing:

Based on its acts and contra acts on women, the question rises: Why was woman considered untouchable? Because she was needed to give birth to children, to serve to children and to other members of the family and for housework. From this point of view, it was difficult to accept equality of women with men. According to Kanun the woman is a breathing object, "it" is a property and as such she can not be respected by the male members of the family⁴.

The Kanun mentions that men have the right to beat and publicly humiliate their wives if their wives disobey them. If the wife does not "*conduct herself properly toward her husband⁵*" the man may "*cut a ribbon from her belt or a lock of her hair⁶*" and leave her. The man is expected to cut his wife's hair, strip her nude, expel her from the house in the presence of relatives and then drive her with a whip through the entire village. The Kanun further provides:

If a husband beats his wife, he incurs no guilt ... and her parents may not make any claims on him because of the beating. If a man beats his wife bloody, and she complains to her parents, the men must give an explanation⁷.

The Kanun also provides that, under certain conditions, a man may kill his wife with impunity for two acts, (she can be shot in the back or be left), for adultery and for betrayal of hospitality⁸. For these two acts of infidelity the husbands kills his wife without requiring protection or truce and without incurring a blood feud, since the parents of his killed wife received the price of her blood, gave him a cartridge and guaranteed her conduct on the day of her wedding.

Fifty years of communist rule did not eradicate the patriarchal attitude attendant to the Kanun. Many women still view their social position under this framework of

customary laws.

Very often the Kanun is mentioned as the main source for the discriminated position of women in the Albanian society, an argument that needs to be discussed and analysed as it is founded on a speculative basis. The issue of the history of the underestimated position of women in the Albanian society during the last century requires a deeper analysis, taken in consideration other factors such as the very low level of socio-economic development ... high level of poverty, lack of political stability, the fact that the identity and Albanian territorial integrity issue overwhelmed the life of the country and its political movement, the lack of a democratic culture, the low level of education, the lack of emancipating movements, etc. The Kanun is only one of the factors and it was enforced only in some parts of the country. For example the Kanun was not known in the southern part, but customs of early pre-arranged marriages was also common in this area⁹.

Such an analysis is not made in the existing research, that is why we feel obliged to present the need for a thorough analysis of the phenomenon of the situation of women in that time.

Other authors have also tried to analyse the nature of this phenomenon in Albania. S. Gjipali and L. Ruci in their study, *The Albanian woman: Hesitation and perspectives*, attempted to explain the influence of economic difficulties in the subordinate position of women:

One must understand that the situation of the Albanian women over the last half century and the progress which they have made ... Albania was and still is and overwhelming peasant population (64% of the population currently live in the countryside) ... The resulting intellectual and material backwardness provided the grounds for the underestimation and ill-treatment of women (suffice it to say that wife beating was considered a normal and proper action)¹⁰.

For a long time research and statistics on domestic violence were totally missing. In 1996 the women's NGO Refleksione organised the first national wide research on domestic violence, financed by PHARE Democracy Program.

In this research S. Miria offers the first data indicating that 64% (out of 849 females) of surveyed women revealed that they experienced physical, emotional, sexual abuse.

64% of the women interviewed admitted they were feeling physically and spiritually violated either by their partners, or other family members ... 35% of the people interviewed had witnessed serious physical and psychological violence in their family of origin¹¹.

The extent of this problem could be understood by taking in consideration other data from the Counselling Centre for Women and Girls. In less than five years of existence, the Centre has received more than 5,000 registered calls. From 1996 to 2000, more than 400 women have received face to face counselling. The clients come from all regions of the country. Another evidence of the frequency of the phenomenon is the number of clients treated in the Shelter for Abused Women and Girls in less than two years of its existence. This Tirana-based shelter is the only of this kind in Albania and depends on

international funding. 32 women and 40 children received treatment in this shelter. The demand for shelter is much higher than its capacity. The shelter hosts almost every month one or two clients beyond its capacity. The number of cases turned down is almost equal to the number of the clients served by the Shelter. These data help us to understand that violence against women does not happen incidentally, but it is a widespread phenomenon in Albania. It includes all strata and social groups, all ages and religious ones.

B- Identification of vulnerable groups of domestic violence according to different factors

Religion

According to the survey conducted by Refleksione, in which 1035 people were interviewed in 1996: we have the following data: among 37% of women of Muslim religion answering the questionnaire, only 9% of them admitted witnessing repeated violence in their families. From 31% orthodox women and 27% catholic women, the same response was received. Violence occurs notwithstanding religion¹².

Education

The study of the cases treated in the Shelter shows that violence occurs despite the level of education of women. From 32 cases, 3 women (or 10%) had a University degree, 10 women (or 31%) had higher education, 14 women (or 43%) had eight-grade education and 5 women (or 15%) had elementary education¹³. The recent experience of the Shelter does not differ much from the situation presented by S. Miria in her 1996 study. She observes that from the interviewed women who admitted that they had experienced violence, 7% of them had elementary education, around 10% had eight-grade education, 6% had higher education and only 3% had higher education¹⁴. The most endangered categories of women are those with lower level of education, as trends show that figures of domestic violence tend to decrease when women have higher level of education. Women with higher level of education are psychologically abused. A need for more research in this field is evident. The impressions of the authors of this report is that women with high education are better empowered and they are better prepared to encourage communication with their spouse, but this remains to be proved.

Geography

Most research work carried out reveal a geographic element of domestic violence.

For example, a survey conducted in 1996 by B. Kaci, showed that 46% of women living in rural areas admitted physical abuse compared with 36% of women living in the cities¹⁵. 28% of the interviewed women living in rural areas admitted having experienced sexual abuse in comparison with 16% women in urban areas. The fact that rural women admitted living with an abusive spouse shows that they are increasingly becoming aware of their situation, but also underlines the harsh life of women living in rural areas. Extreme forms of violence against women are not characteristics of certain areas. Among women who admitted having experienced extreme violence, 5% live in the countryside and 5% in the cities¹⁶.

Profession

Other data show the relation of violence against women and their professional status. Both S. Miria and B. Kaci founded that among interviewed women who admitted living with an abusive spouse, about 50% of them are housewives and unemployed.

Age

Another important variable is that of the relation between level of abuse and age of women. Experience from the cases treated in the Shelter show that violence is a phenomenon that prevails at all ages. Nevertheless some differences are observed among different age groups. 12% of women who came to the Shelter were under 20 years, 50% were between 20-30 years old, 33% over 30 years¹⁷. The data collected by the Counselling Centre confer that young women are more likely to experience physical and sexual abuse and seek help. In fact 76% of the total number of calls received in the five years experience, were from women and girls under 30 years. The Counselling experience of the Shelter shows that this age group is more sensitive and aware of the problem of violence and its consequences. The fact that women over 30 years old are less inclined to report violence does not mean that they are experiencing less violence. This fact shows that they either learned to “tolerate” or to “accept” living in abusive relationships. Future research needs to verify and prove the correlation between age and the level of abuse experienced by women.

C- Causes

There is no simple explanation for the causes of domestic violence. Research indicates that domestic violence is rooted in the subordinate roles women have traditionally held in private and public life. The UN, in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, recognised domestic violence as “a manifestation of historically unequal power relationships between men and women” and condemns the violence as one of the “crucial social mechanisms by which women are

forced into a subordinate position compared with men¹⁸". Different scholars give different explanations of the causes of domestic violence in Albania. Virtually all agree, however, that there is a pervasive mentality in Albania that men have the right to control women's behaviour by any means. Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights in their 1996 study on domestic violence in Albania underlines that "*the majority of women are of the opinion that the male mentality of the women as a property is the basis of violence*". The report explains that physical and psychological violence against women and often against children stems from "*the men's desire to control at any cost the life of the other members of the family*"¹⁹.

Based on different studies we can divide the causes in two main categories. First, causes related to the characteristics of the individual who exercises and experience violence. Second, causes related to the general atmosphere of the society such as mentality and socially accepted behaviours. For the first category of causes, according to S. Miria, in her study "Violence against women and psycho-social taboos favouring violence", the results of the survey are as follow:

Alcoholism in 80% of the cases,

Jealousy in 76% of the cases,

Unemployment in 52% of the cases,

Poor living conditions in 50% of the cases,

Stress in 43% of the cases,

Sexual impotence 22% of the cases,

Various inferiority complexes within the couple in 16%,

Intellectual, educational, professional rivalry within the couple 19,620%,

Professional incompetence in 9% of the cases,

*Unwanted pregnancies in 10% of the cases*²⁰.

Other scholars will add more individual characteristics to this list. Haxhiymeri and Kulluri, in their study on women living in the Shelter, underline the abusive experience that both partners bring in their new family. The fact that they have experienced violence themselves makes them easily abusers in the new environment. They do not know better experiences and continue to behave according to models they experienced in their families of origin. Another cause mentioned by these authors is the lack of proper communication among partners. As such they learn that the easiest way and tool to control the situation is through the use of violence, forgetting or ignoring its consequences. They also mention problems of mental health on the part of the husband. The percentage of this case is not high but still important to be considered. There is lack of data on the psychiatric service in Albania. For the second category we will report the results of the study made by Sala and Miria on this issue:

The Albanian cultural tradition and mentality reserves an inferior position to women.

The Albanian legislation lacks certain dispositions to protect women inside and outside the house and sometimes the existing laws are not enforced.

The economic and social conditions are less favourable for women because the current situation has caused a higher level of economic dependency for women.

The political situation on the last ten years ... has created a discouraging environment for women not only to participate in the decision-making processes, but in other aspects as well.

Community sometimes encourages certain forms of violence against women.

For a long time domestic violence was considered only the problem of the couple that was experiencing it.

High level of unemployment especially among women, emigration and migration in the country ... condition a period of social exclusion for women, a process that begins with economic exclusion and marginalisation, but do not end here²¹.

In this context the authors of this report will add three more causes: First, investment of men in criminal activities such as smuggling, trafficking, which has increased their level of everyday stress and which makes women objects of men's anger. Second, involvement of men in gambling as a result of unemployment, lack of better opportunities, vacuum in their social and spiritual life, which at the end, increase the level of tension in the family and causes violence. Third, increasing number of people sharing the get rich quick mentality has affected the level of social stress, which on its part indirectly causes violence in the family.

D- Legal framework

Domestic violence has an institutional background as well. It is true that the individual's characteristics and social norms "fuels" violence, but these are not the only causes. Individuals or groups who exercise violence are favoured by lack of legal framework or law enforcement that will make them responsible for their behaviour. A. Fullani, the director of the Advocacy Centre for Women carried out a research, *Women's Legal Rights*, in 1999 and a *Comparative Study of the Albanian Legislation and that of Developed Countries on the Issue of Violence Against Women* (1995):

... domestic violence is a topic of discussion among women themselves and is becoming a field where many non-governmental organisations are offering their qualified and useful services. This at a time when the topic of violence is almost totally missing in the Albanian legislation. According to the actual law, domestic violence does not make a special penal act. It is prosecuted the same as a common, ordinary insult or battering caused by stranger, unknown people in the street, when the reality of the domestic assault is quite different from that of violence experienced outside the family context²².

A. Fullani brings to our attention different stages of dealing with this issue. The first stage occurs before the violent attack happens against the victim of domestic violence. Theoretically there is a legal possibility to protect the victim from the expecting violence. This possibility is often included in the Civil Rights. The Albanian Civil Code needs to have some specific provisions, according to which every person who believes to be in danger, has the right to require a temporary court decision to prevent or halt the violence. The second stage occurs when violence is happening against the victim of domestic violence. In most cases of domestic violence the victim is alone when the assault happens. The victim has three choices: to live with it, to try to escape or to stay and try to fight. In every case she must be aware of the consequences of her behaviour. In Albania, there is no law allowing arrest of the perpetrator of violence. If a woman commits a crime of legitimate defence she will be charged with crime, if she does not have a qualified witness. The third stage occurs once violence has been committed. Under the Code of Penal Procedure, domestic violence is prosecuted when the victim files a complaint. A case is close when the victim withdraws her complaint. This means that the case is only brought if the victim files a complaint. From indirect sources of information we learned that only 5% of cases of domestic violence are brought to court²³. Based of what we presented above regarding the legal situation in Albania considering domestic violence, we come to the conclusion that “... *the Penal Legislation and the Code of Penal Procedure are far from the desirable level in the case of domestic violence*²⁴”. A group of non-governmental organisations that offer support to the victims of domestic violence, have set up a group of experts, who are working to prepare a law project for the problems of domestic violence. This group aims at filling the gap that exists in the national legislation.

E- Consequences: Who suffer from domestic violence?

Impact on women

There is no doubt that the first victim of domestic violence is the woman who experiences it. The studies on this issue show that women react in different ways against domestic violence. The majority of them react by blaming themselves for the violence at home. They always believe that they could have avoided upsetting their partner. They say: “if only I could have cooked dinner in time, if I could have only spoken in lower voice etc”. They forget or do not want to believe that the violent husband will always find a reason to violate her. They carry a lot of stress to try to control their behaviours and satisfy their husbands. Another group of abused women feels hopeless with their situation, because they think that domestic violence is part of the marital life. They have seen the same model with their mothers and heard that their grandmothers were not

better. So, they take it as a component of their lives. The third group of abused women begin to underestimate themselves and think that they are not good for their husbands, they believe that they have no values, they are worth nothing, are not capable of doing anything and subordinate themselves. Other women react by complaining about their husbands' behaviours first among family members and later on, in the case of repeated attacks, seek support of specialists. Other women will leave home and seek refuge to their family members or to shelter. Some begin to have mental problems and become dependent on other family members aggravating the situation further more. In any case, every abused woman finds her own way of reacting against violence, which depends on their level of awareness, level of education, capability to fight to protect herself, support received from her family of origin, economic situation, support from the children, the information she has on existing social services.

When asked how they feel about their experience, they give different answers to try to explain their feelings. *“45% felt filled with hatred, 32% felt ashamed for their situation, 21% felt pity for their situation, 35% of the cases felt depressed and scared, 26% of the cases felt guilty and 20% think to commit suicide²⁵.”* It is not hard to understand that women filled with such negative feelings do not function properly for themselves. They are not able to take proper decisions in the difficult situations, they can not think properly, they are not able to direct themselves to the right resources for support, they can not take care of their needs, and they become perpetrators of violence towards their own children.

Impact on children

Children are affected from violence as much as their mothers, and sometimes more. Their level of psychological development does not allow them to understand the painful situation at home. They undertake important roles in the family like caring for their younger siblings, they take the responsibility of keeping parents happy and doing things that will make them feel better. They are most likely to cut contacts with their friends because they are afraid violent incidents might happen in their presence. They become isolated at a very early age of their lives and run the risk of being further marginalised in society. Abused children experience the dilemma whether to love or hate the perpetrator of violence against their mothers. Children who grow up living in violence are more likely to turn to violence themselves as a method of problem solving. And last, but not least, these children very soon begin to expose difficulties in the learning process. They lack attention, do not study enough, lose the desire for education, become passive in class, miss classes, have a very limited and vulgar vocabulary until they come to the point of dropping out of school. Characteristics of abusive children and consequences that

violence have over them are drawn in a study made on the cases of children treated in the Shelter (April 2000), in the thesis on domestic violence from E. Haxhiymeri (January 1996), and in the 1997 study of Refleksione Association:

Violence in the family is a phenomenon that affects the life of each of us. If you are not the abuser or the victim of domestic violence, there is always a possibility that your friend, your cousin, your colleague or somebody else round you suffers from it. This violence is a danger for each of us, among all, for the reason that a person that abuses his wife, can do the same with his children, neighbours, friends and people near him²⁶.

For these reasons and many others, violence is considered a dangerous phenomenon for the community as well. Fear, instability, tense situation, social isolation, lack of activities in the community, lack of investments are only some components characterising a community which is experiencing violence.

Part II

Positions of Different Actors

Due to time and space constraints, the interviews were summarised. In order to avoid duplication, all recommendations made by the different actors are gathered in section IV.

A- Civil servants

Lavdie Ruci, Director of the National Committee of Women and Family (NCWF)

One of the responsibilities of the Committee is to propose new legislation and/or amendments to existing legislation on the rights of women and children. The Committee together with the Association of women lawyers discussed ways to improve the Law against violence against women to be included in the new Family Code, which is in the process of being approved by the Parliament. Currently, the NCWF is engaged, together with Council of Europe, in preparing the law on “equal opportunities”. The NCWF considers important to study ways to ensure law enforcement. The Committee organised several seminars in different cities to discuss women rights, including domestic violence and legislation to support these rights. The Committee is running, in co-operation with Italian Government, a project aimed at women empowerment.

Engjell Hysi, Director of the Department of Public Relations at Ministry of Public Order

One of the responsibilities of the Department is to co-operate with women’s NGOs. Up to now the Department of Public Order has co-operated with the Women Centre and the NCWF (especially on trafficking issues). For many reasons, including lack of trust in the authorities, shame and fear of retaliation from the abuser, women who are victims of domestic violence, do not report abuse to the Police. When the Police is informed of domestic violence, the Police has the obligation to arrest the abuser. Cases of domestic violence are not treated as criminal ones, but as penal ones. Policemen are not trained to deal with cases of domestic violence and do not know how to assist an abused woman, and where to refer women.

B- Member of Parliament

Merita Ndreko, Member of Parliament, Member of the Committee of Social Affairs.

Social services for abused women are important and in dire needs. The few existing services represent a great achievement, but they cannot respond to all the needs. The national and local governments must support these services. The decentralisation of the local government might offer a window of opportunities. The revision of the Family Code, includes sanctions for the abusers. This will create a solid ground for the Police to intervene. There is also a need to consolidate government collaboration with civil society. The law for the NGOs will regulate the relations among them. While women NGOs are doing a great job in the field of services, more NGO attention is needed to improve legislation.

C- Members of the academic community

Ylli Pango, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tirana

It is a very positive to observe that many professors of the Faculty are engaged in projects aimed at assisting victims of domestic violence. Gender perspective is offered in some courses, such as Gender Studies, Mental Health, Social Policy, Social Problems, Human Behaviour and Communication, in the Social Work Department. Problems of domestic violence are mostly looked at in the Social Work programme, but this is not enough, students need an enhanced formation in this field. The opening of the Gender Institute planned for this academic year 2000-2001 will make this possible by ensuring that course curricula include a gender perspective, conducting national-wide studies and setting up a Gender Master's programme.

Gjergj Sinani, Professor of Sociology in the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Tirana University.

Domestic violence is not Albanian specific. The reasons must be different. Aggressiveness in any society, is directed towards the weaker. The burden of problems outside of the family affects the atmosphere in the family. Poverty is an umbrella for many other problems. At the moment, the University of Tirana has little impact in the social life of the country. Only a handful of academic publications are published every year. There is a need for more scientific research that look at the problem of domestic

violence from sociological, psychological, and philosophical perspectives.

Bashkim Gjergji, Journalist, Head of the School of Journalism at the University of Tirana.

Domestic violence is a social issue that attracts much attention from journalists nowadays. The fact that this issue is present in the daily press must be considered as an achievement of our free press. Few years ago, report on domestic violence was a taboo. Cases of domestic violence were still considered as private issues, where nobody had the right to interfere. The negative aspect of many reports on domestic violence however, is that many journalists use sensationalism that victimises the abused woman and reinforces existing prejudices and stereotypes.

Rubena Moisiu, Professor at the Faculty of Medicine at the University Medical Centre and Obstetrician at Maternity Hospital.

Doctors at the University Medical Centre are in daily contact with abused women. They come for medical reasons, which are often direct consequence of the violence they have experienced. Many of them have bruises and scars on their bodies, but they very rarely admit to have been abused or raped. Many doctors, including myself, feel of being helpless to abused women. We cannot offer them proper psychological support, as we are not trained for this. Referral to the Counselling Centre for Women and Girls depends on personal knowledge. There is a social worker in our hospital, but she mainly deals with abandoned babies. The experience of multi-disciplinary training for abused children could repeat for women who are victims of violence. Whereas awareness campaigns have been developed in the media, community-based work to address the problem of domestic violence remains almost untouched. Involving family doctors in community-based projects could contribute to change.

D- International organisations:

Penny Martin, Liaison Officer and Gender Adviser (OSCE)

Reliable, official statistics do not exist about the phenomenon of domestic violence in Albania. OSCE and its Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights have worked with a UNOHCHR Human Rights Training specialist to develop a police training course entitled: “Policing the Rights of Women: Domestic Violence. Prostitution. Trafficking.” This course will be included in the curricula of both police training missions in Albania, the WEU Multi-Advisory Police Element (MAPE) and the United States Department of Justice International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Programme (ICITAP)

The training course is intended to sensitize police to the human rights of women who have been abused through domestic violence, forced prostitution, or trafficking. The course materials will include information about NGOs who can support these victims, such as the domestic violence hotline and shelter. OSCE is also organising a Women's Rights and Anti-Trafficking Education Project, that will empower Albanian trainers to conduct training about the rights of Albanian women, under international conventions and domestic law, and about how those rights are abused when women are victims of domestic violence or trafficking. These trainers will organise district trainings for target groups such as journalists, NGOs, civil servants, prosecutors, young people, and teachers.

Valli Corbanese, Co-ordinator of the project for the advancement of the Albanian Women, funded by the Italian Government, UNDP and UNOPS.

In order to address the problem of domestic violence, it is important to understand the nature of family relations between the spouses, parents and children, and the other siblings. There are not enough actors in this field. The actual NGO network active in this field is overwhelmed with demands and lacks fund. Exact data on the phenomenon is missing. NGOs talk about 70% of Albanian women being abused, but there is no national survey that supports this figure. Domestic violence is presently losing ground due to the acuity of problem of trafficking of human beings. The government does not have a programme in this field that ensure the co-operation of different actors in the field such as the Police force, health workers, the social workers. More job creation projects must be set up to improve and help the economic independence of women.

Part III

Mapping of existing networks and initiatives to combat domestic violence in Albania.

From the study of the existing materials and information on this issue, it is easily observed that a considerable number of women's NGOs have tried to understand the problem and then, deal with it in the most concrete and realistic way. These studies make up the foundations for a better understanding of the phenomenon, an understanding that will influence the decisions on the effective ways of combating it. After ten years of transition, there are considerable achievements and failures both on the side of government institutions and civil society.

Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights in their 1996 report on Domestic Violence in Albania mentioned that:

The Albanian government failed to meet any of the international standards. ... crimes of domestic assault are not adequately prosecuted and women are not provided adequate protection from further acts of violence. ... The delegation found no evidence of any effort to ensure that law enforcement officers and public officials responsible for investigating and punishing violence against women are receiving training to understand the unique and complicated issues involved in domestic assault²⁷.

Four years later, the situation has not changed. At the same time there are more and more women organisations involved in lobbying for women's human rights, organising public awareness campaigns on the issue and offering services and support to abused women, girls and children. Following are three schemas of different NGO groupings, which were presented to the public for the first time by Mrs. Miria at the regional conference on violence against women, held in Tirana from 24-25 June 2000.

The first schema shows the schema of the Keshilli Kombetar i Gruas Shqiptare, (National Council Of Albanian Women) that encompasses 38 networks and coalitions of women NGOs in Albania. They have different goals and objectives in their work, but their common goal is the empowerment of Albanian women in different fields of life.

Skema 1 – Këshilli Kombëtar i Gruas Shqiptare

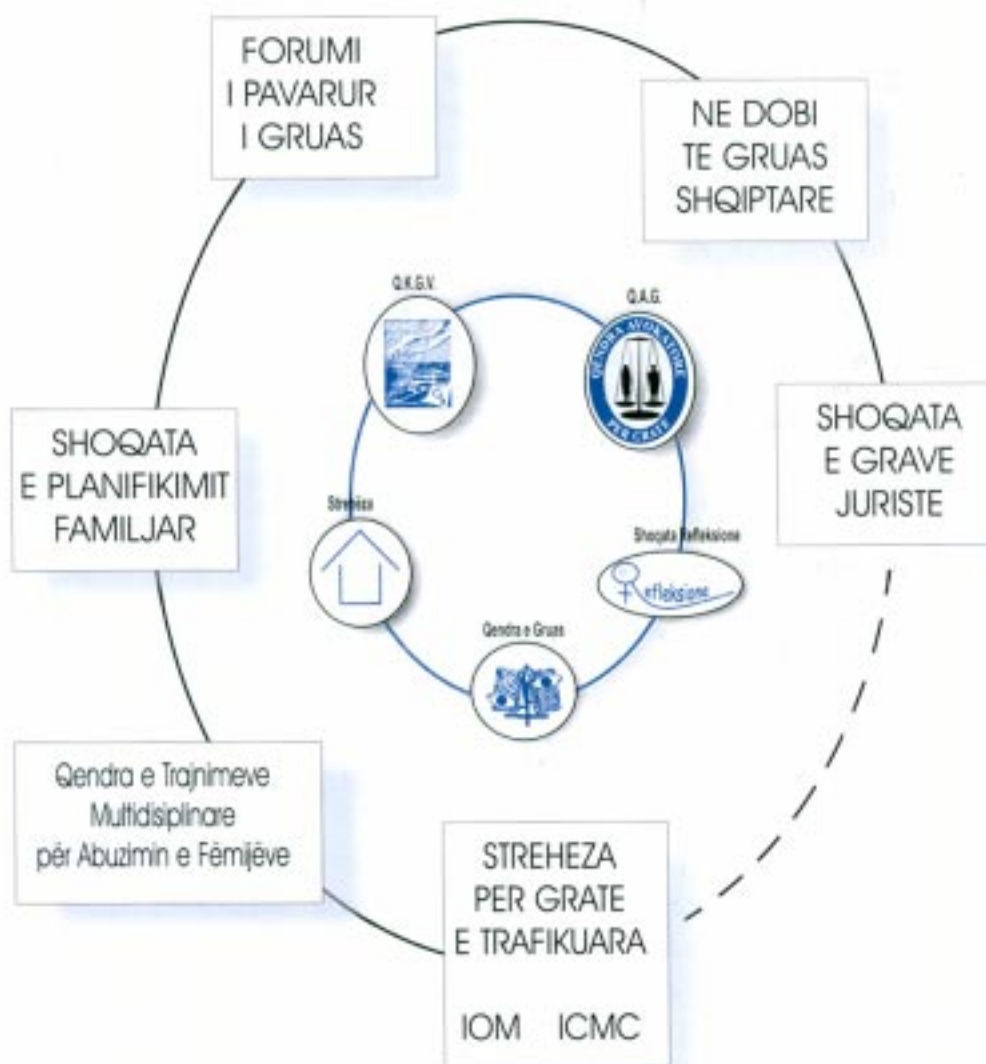


The second schema shows the Koalicioni Shqiptar Kunder Dhunes Gjinore dhe Trafikimit (Albanian Coalition Against Gender Violence and Trafficking). This coalition presents a wide level of co-operation among organisations that have expertise and have been successful in their activity against violence and trafficking. Their co-operation consists on several joint activities and important initiatives for Albanian women movement against violence along side different referrals to specialised services for common clients. This coalition is made up of the following organisations:

1. *Ne Dobi te Gruas Shqiptare- Useful to Albanian women*
2. *Forumi i Pavarur i Gruas- Women Independent Forum*
3. *Planifikimi Familjar- Family Planning*
4. *Qendra e trajnimit Multidisiplinar ne ndihme te Femijeve te Abuzuar- The Multidisciplinary Training Centre for Abused Children.*
5. *Streheza per Grate e Trafikuara (projects of IOM and ICMC)- Shelter for trafficked women.*
6. *Shoqata e Grave Juriste- Association of Women Lawyers.*
7. *Shoqata e Grave Refleksione- Refleksione Women Association.*

The circle representing this coalition is not closed. The interrupted line presumes the possibility for other partners to be involved and the expansion of it with other organisations, open to exchanges and collaborations that could have an impact on state policy.

Skema 2 – Koalicioni Shqiptar kundër Dhunës Gjinore dhe Trafikimit

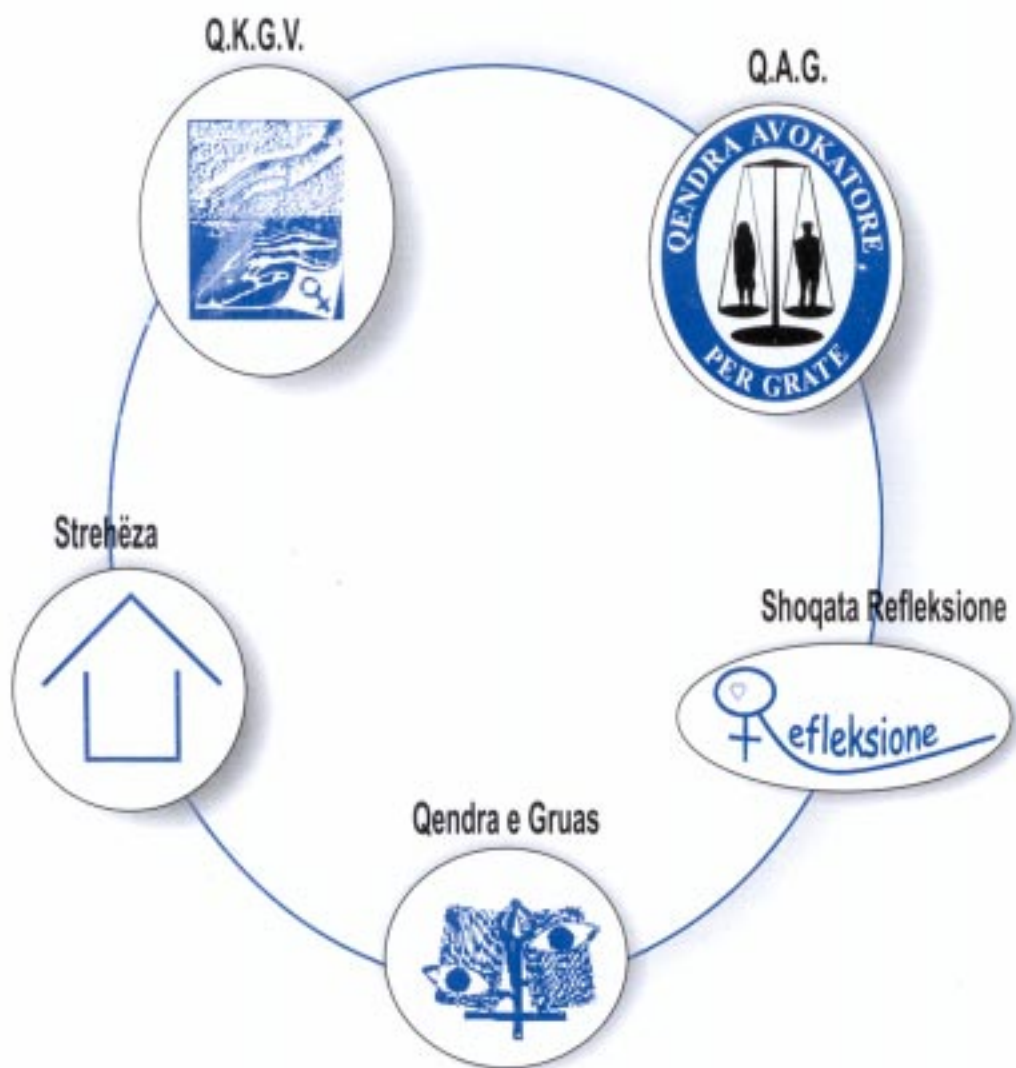


The third schema presents the Rrjeti Kunder Dhunes Gjinore dhe Trafikimit (Network Against Gender Violence and Trafficking), which offer services to abused women and girls:

- 1. Q.K.G.V.- Counselling Centre for Women and Girls based in Tirana and its branches in Shkodra and Pogradec. It offers emotional support for women and girls that have experienced domestic violence or are at risk. The service is offered through the telephone line or in face to face counselling sessions.*
- 2. Q.A.G. - Women Advocacy Centre, is a project of the Association of Women Lawyers. It offers legal advice for women that are facing legal problems, like divorce, the right on family property, the right of children etc.*
- 3. Streheza - Shelter for abused women and girls, a project of Refleksione, that offers shelter for women and girls who are in crisis situation. They can be victims of domestic violence, running the risk of being abused or in similar situations. Women receive emotional support, referrals to specialised services like medical treatment, legal advice, referral to vocational training for employment, housing, and connections to available resources in the community.*
- 4. Qendra e Gruas - Women Centre offers its expertise in the prevention of violence against women. It plays an important role in co-ordinating the activity of this network.*
- 5. Shoqata Refleksione- Refleksione Women Association that is connected with different enterprises and businesses to create employment possibilities for women, especially for abused women. This association is the pioneer of long term services for women and it has generated different programs from one year to the other. Counselling Centre, the Women Centre, Shelter, the project for abused children, have all been projects of this association. Currently, they are legally independent entities and co-operate together to offer specialised services to this category of women.*

This network represents the first level of services for the clients, otherwise considered as the level of direct services. This infrastructure of the network services against gender violence lays the foundations for the co-operation among organisations of a higher level presented in the second schema. The network against gender violence and the coalition of different NGOs that we presented above are supported by the following international organisations: SNV, ORT, USIS, World Bank, NPA, NOVIB, UNDP, Italian Government, etc. Their contribution has been significantly important to the activity of the national organisations and institutions.

Skema 3 – Rrjeti kundër Dhunës Gjinore dhe Trafikimit



Part IV

Recommendations

Training

Prepare, with the help of MAPE and womens NGOs who have experience in the field, training courses for future police staff in the Police Academy and refreshment courses for present police force;

Prepare future doctors to assist women who are victims of violence, including courses on techniques of interviewing. The health care system has an important role to play along with other sectors, such as the judicial, police and social services. Health care workers must be trained to recognise both the obvious and the more subtle signs of violence, and to meet women's health needs in this regard. From the public health perspective, it is important that both preventive and healing programs are in place.

Prepare pre and in-service training for the journalists on the issues of domestic violence in order to ensure reporting respect the victims.

Set up sensitivity training for health professionals and the police, and adapting new protocols for dealing with the victims of domestic violence.

Set up vocational training programs that will facilitate the employment of women.

To set up courses in non-violent parenting and conflict resolution.

To set up school curricula to enhance proper gender education that prevents gender violence.

Train community social workers to provide information to the victim on the law enforcement, available financial and other support offered by the State, the procedures for obtaining such assistance, etc. They must also be trained to identify violence and direct victims for treatment.

Government

Policies to facilitate co-operation of different actors in the field such as the Police force, health workers and social workers.

Policies to encourage social worker, doctor and police co-operation.

Policies designed at re-enforcing institutional capacities to efficiently respond to domestic violence.

Financial support to direct social services.

Strategies with other donors to set up and support services all over the country.

Co-ordination of activities, led by the NCWF, between the government and NGOs active in the field of domestic violence.

Harmonisation of economic, social and institutional policies.

Police force

Prepare, with the help of social workers, information materials to be distributed to police staff.

Encourage information exchange between police force and women NGOs.

Publish articles in the Albanian newspaper “Policia sot” (Police today).

Recruit women police officers and train them specifically to deal with victims of domestic violence.

Research

Conduct a nation-wide survey that respects a clear methodology (sample and interview techniques, question formulation). Encourage scientific research that look at the problem of domestic violence from sociological, psychological, and philosophical perspectives. Profile of violence perpetrator will also need to be identified.

Develop a research strategy in the Faculty of Social Sciences to encourage professors and students to conduct research on the problem of domestic violence.

Awareness Campaign

Prepare TV programmes on domestic violence.

Ensure that professors of the Faculty of Social Sciences (University of Tirana) play an important role in public awareness in the media.

Work with family doctors at the community level.

Develop elementary and high school activities for children and adolescents to sensitise them to the causes and consequences of violence.

Organise public discussions.

Organise public complaints about violent themes on television and radio.

Community-based projects

Set up a multi-disciplinary centre for abused women and children, where an integrated method could be used to understand the situation and on this basis to offer the support.

Set up other Linja and Shelter projects in other regions of the country.

Set up support groups for battered women where they can share their experiences.

Set up men's group to encourage them express their opinions and promote change of their mentality on this issue.

Set up co-ordinated/integrated community networks where the health system, the legal system, police, churches, social workers and community based groups meet regularly to design and carry out a co-ordinated response to domestic violence.

Conclusion

There is a great need to tackle domestic violence in Albania. A more co-operative relationship between government and civil society should be built to combat violence against women. To reduce the incidence of domestic violence in Albania, there is a need for a shared vision that translates into concerted actions. In order to both prevent and help the victims, lawyers, psychologists, doctors, police and social workers need to work together.

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