

# domestic violence women in albania

Qualitative Study

Report prepared by Adriana Baban

**unicef**   
United Nations Children's Fund



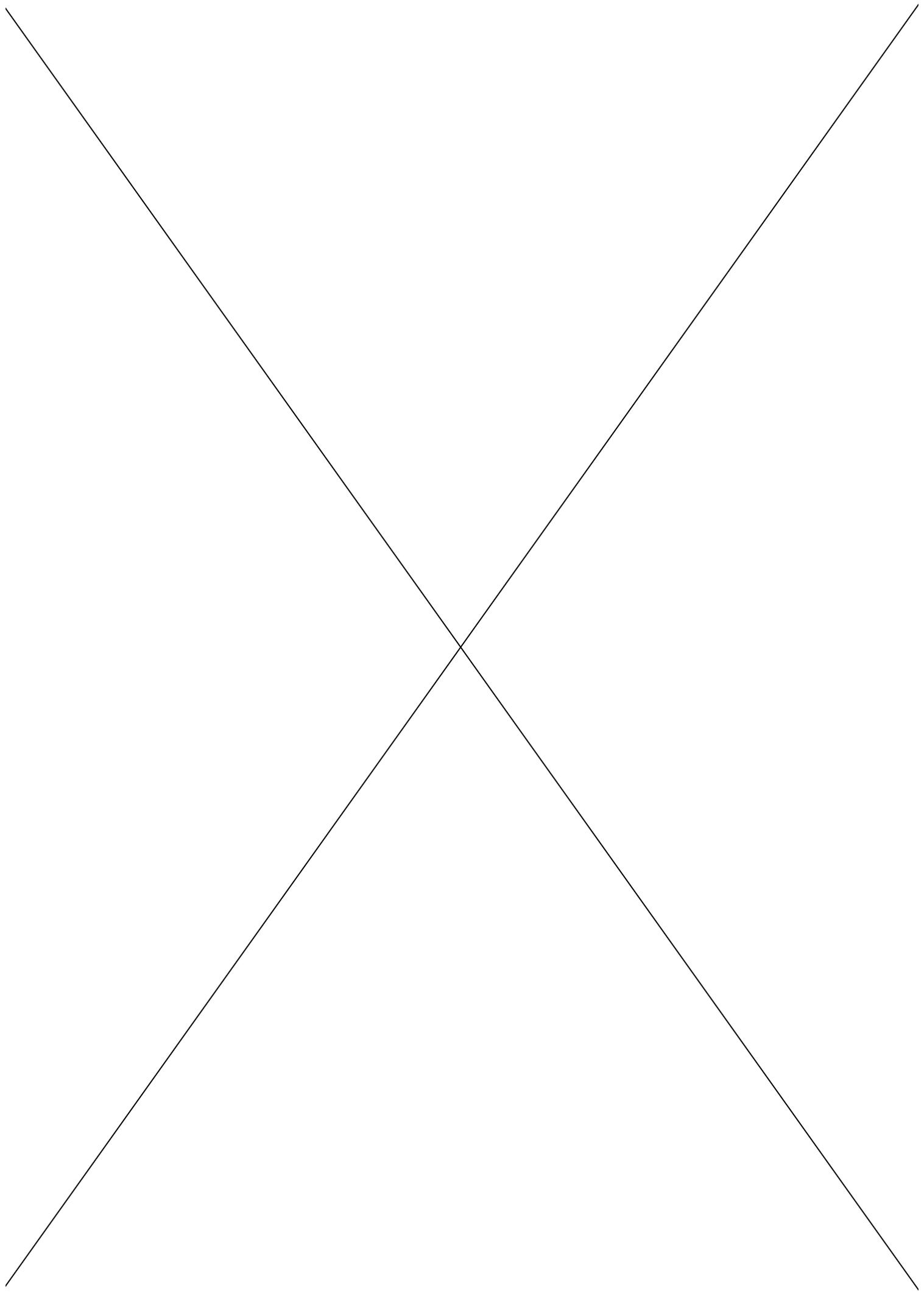
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**S**ilence is the enemy. Domestic violence thrives in the privacy of the home, damaging its victims and planting its seeds in the young witnesses of the next generation. Early data show that this violation – dismissed as bad behaviour but in reality a criminal act – is widespread and growing, part of the fallout of the societal vacuum left by the transition.

This study of women's experiences with domestic abuse is part of UNICEF's effort to put this issue at the top of society's agenda. Only there, where it cannot be ignored by the country's leaders, can it be addressed properly as a public health threat that saps Albania's future.

Roberto Laurenti  
UNICEF Representative in Albania

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**A.B.**

## Introduction

Violence against women is the most pervasive yet least recognized human rights abuse in the world. It is also a profound health problem, leading to death and injuries, compromising women's well being and eroding their dignity and self-esteem. It is well known that domestic violence transcends all boundaries and occurs in all cultures. Research on domestic violence demonstrates that the abuse of women is a complex and multidimensional problem. Explanations should include cultural, societal, family and individual factors that affect the probability that women will become victims of violence.

## Background

Albanian society has a history of male domination, a reflection of the strong patriarchal traditions of the Balkans. Women have long been taught to accept submissive roles. During the communist period, there was a great gap between women's theoretical emancipation and the circumstances of everyday life. With the fall of the communist regime in 1991, Albania is undergoing a period of deep and often dramatic social, political and economic change that is having a great impact on the life of Albanians. Gender equality is a principle that is new to Albanian society and has not yet been embraced by a significant percentage of the population.

## Study aims

For a long time research on domestic violence was totally missing in Albania. As a step toward increasing the knowledge in this area, this exploratory study of domestic violence in Albania attempts to: (i) identify the range of forms of violence commonly occurring within the family; (ii) gain insights into women's perceptions about what behaviours are abusive in what circumstances; (iii) explore what strategies women use to end violence or to reduce its

consequences; (iv) document the consequences of family violence on women, children, the family and society as a whole; (v) identify women's attitudes towards their abusers and abusive relationships; (vi) determine the social constraints that deprive many women of equality with men in the private sphere.

## Methodology

In-depth qualitative interviews were undertaken in person with 55 women victims of domestic violence living in Tirana, Shkodra and Berat. The sampling aim was to locate women from diverse social backgrounds and with different demographic characteristics. The interview guide included a series of broad, open-ended questions about women's experiences of abuse. All the interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed verbatim. The analysis of the interviews followed the technique of thematic decomposition, guided by phenomenological and discourse analysis. The Atlas.ti package computer software was used to manage, code and explore the data.

## Findings

Subsequent to analysing the interviews and looking for similarities across the interviews, seven major themes clusters emerged from the women's accounts. There is some overlap among the themes.

## Dreaming of marriage

The perception of marriage as a life goal is often the frame of reference, although some women mention the desire to escape the parental home, poverty or violence as a motivation for getting married. Marriage is constructed through women's discourse as a norm and a desirable condition for women's social status. The patriarchal traditions of marriages arranged by a male authority are still frequent. Through marriage, women expect to gain a successful

and worthy life. But all too frequently it becomes a scene of personal humiliation, tension, threat and conflict, rather than an opportunity to fulfill their dreams.

### Facing reality

For many women, the dream of the ideal marriage is contradicted by the reality. Findings indicate that abusive men favour traditional family roles and responsibilities. Abusive husbands appear to be dominant in family decision-making, while women are expected to tend the house, mind the children and obey their husbands. If a man perceives that his wife has somehow failed in her role, stepped beyond her boundaries or challenged his rights, then he may react violently. Women are supposed to find fulfillment in their roles as wives and mothers and be prepared to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their marriage.

### Experiencing violence

Women's accounts prove that abuse is a complex phenomenon because it includes various forms, ranging from humiliation, threats and social isolation to coercive sex and battering. Violence against women runs along a continuum, often escalating from milder forms to more serious acts. Physical violence ranges from a slap to an assault with a deadly weapon. Many women live in fear not only for their own lives but also for the lives of their children and family. Women's experiences with sexual violence vary along a continuum, from bullying, to threats, verbal humiliation and nonphysical forms of pressure to engage in sex against their will to battering and rape. Physical violence is very often accompanied by attempts to control the wife's social interactions, to monitor her movements. Some male partners prohibit women from going to work. Economic abuse is another form mentioned by participants. Women's economic contributions to the family do not reduce or influence the dominant position of their husbands within the family.

### Being an abused woman

Recurrent physical violence coupled with emotional, sexual and economic abuse has

multiple effects on women. For some women the burden of abuse is so great that they consider taking their own lives. Bruises, injuries and fractures are not the only physical outcomes of male violence. Abuse leads to a number of physical ailments, miscarriages and premature labour. Not surprisingly, women experiencing physical, psychological or sexual assault suffer from emotional distress. Most frequent symptoms mentioned by women include anxiety, depression, fatigue, irritability, headaches and problems concentrating and sleeping. Emotional numbness is also mentioned. The partner's abuse erodes the woman's self-esteem and sense of competence as a person, woman, wife, mother and worker. Many women consider the psychological consequences of abuse to be even more serious than its physical effects. Women also curtail social activities because of the partners' demands, out of embarrassment or in order to protect the family and friends.

### Worrying about the children

Children are profoundly affected by living in an environment of violence, fear or intimidation, whether or not they actually experience physical abuse. Children develop many cognitive, emotional and behavioural problems. Their mothers report poor school performance, shyness, avoidance of social contacts, feelings of guilt, irritability and aggressive behaviour. Some children develop psychosomatic complaints such as headaches and abdominal pains, or display regressive behaviors such as bedwetting and sleep disturbances. Mothers are most concerned about their sons repeating the violent behaviour of their fathers.

### Coping with violence

Findings indicate that women use several strategies for coping with the abusive situation based on social, cultural, familial and personal factors. An important step in coping with violence is the process of understanding its causes. Although informants identify multiple causes of domestic violence, women tend to explain it within a discourse that emphasizes the rapid social changes that have occurred in Albania since 1991. Men's violence towards women is represented as one of many social

diseases. In this respect, the gendered nature of violence is not consistently reflected. Other frequently cited causes are alcohol abuse of the perpetrator and his jealousy. Domestic violence is also constructed as the product of the man's dysfunctional emotions, such as depression or low self-esteem. Other women see men as naturally aggressive human beings.

As women are encouraged to maintain their family intact at all costs, it is not surprising that 30 women out of the 55 still believe that they should sacrifice their individual needs to keep the family together and restore the relationship while 19 of the women left their partners. Women's insufficient resources for independent living also prevent them from leaving the violent relationship. Women who choose to stay in abusive relationships develop diverse coping skills, such as hoping, avoiding, reframing (rationalizing the abuse by putting the situation into a different perspective) and compromising. Women who left their partners try hard to empower themselves in order to rethink their place in the world and to find new ways of life.

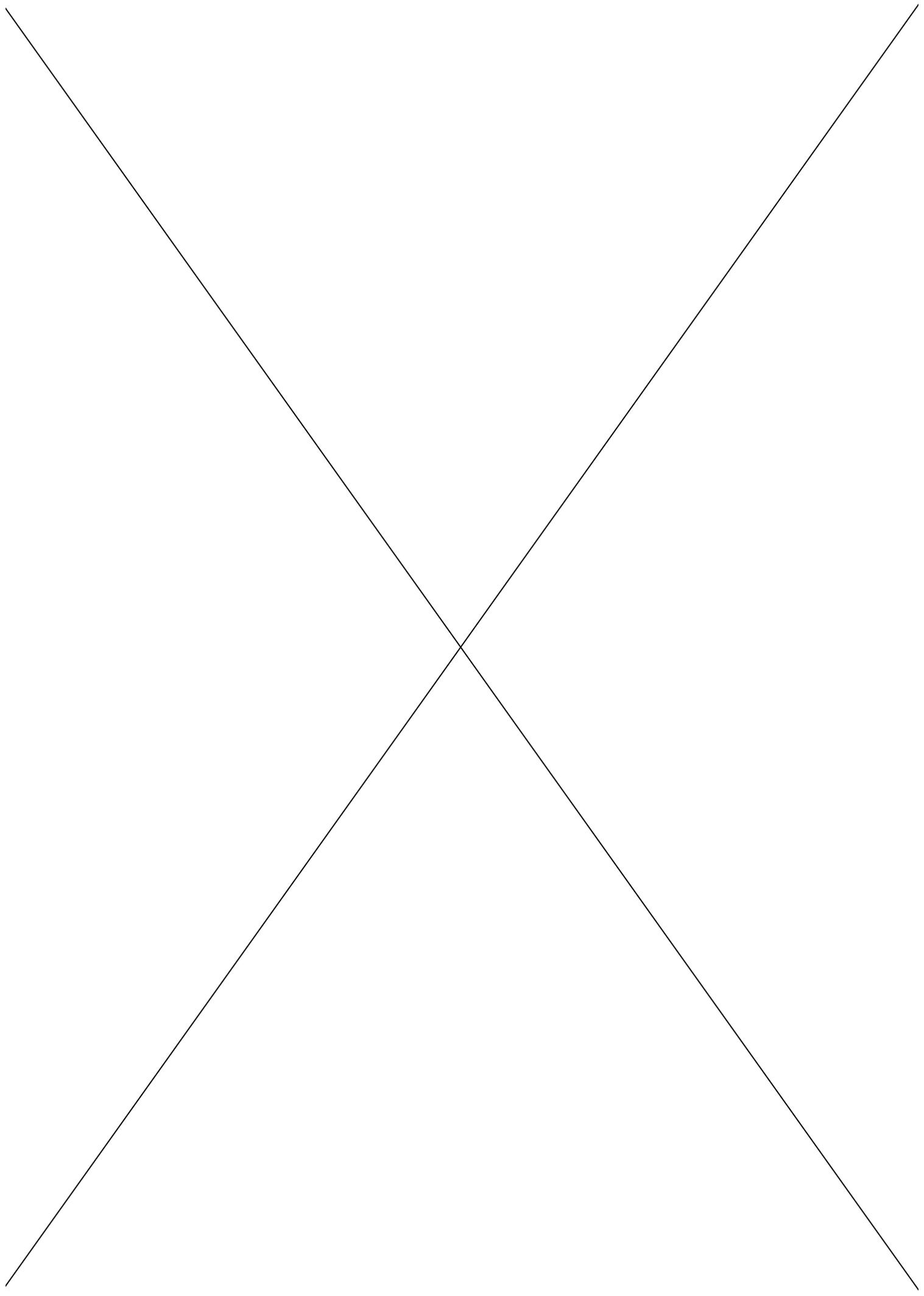
### Breaking the silence

By telling the story of their abuse, participants in this study break the silence around domestic violence in Albania. Women's personal dilemmas and concerns about disclosing violence are revealed in their accounts. Their

awareness that the situation is wrong, and above all, that they can take steps to change things for the better, are key strategies for eliminating violence. Women's narratives make visible the cultural tolerance for domestic violence, reflected in the ongoing belief that violence between intimates is a private affair.

### Conclusions

This exploratory research summarizes the complexities of family context in a patriarchal culture. The evidence of this report suggests that traditional gender relationships have imposed a heavy cost on women. The study provides insights into the ways that gender inequity in Albania puts women at risk of violence through a complex interweaving of cultural, social, economic and interpersonal factors. The findings dispel the myth that domestic violence is largely a problem among the poor and uneducated people. It shows that abuse cuts across socioeconomic boundaries. The evidence of this report suggests that traditional gender relationships have imposed a heavy cost on these women. Although in recent years important changes have taken place in Albania, women's subordinate status remains well entrenched. The interviews identified the long-term tragedy that has imbued women's lives, some of which are deeply scarred by hidden pain, but they also revealed the resistance of many interviewees.





A leading cause of death and injury to women worldwide is violence by intimate partners (Mills, 1996). A serious and extensive problem, it transcends all boundaries and occurs in all cultures. Still, there are societies, mainly in transition countries, where the issue has remained relatively invisible and is often unrecognized and underreported. Unlike street violence, which is generally considered a crime, family violence against women and children has been viewed as legitimate, acceptable and even desirable, or it has been ignored because it occurs in the private sphere of the home. The same acts that would be punished if directed at a stranger, employer or acquaintance often go unchallenged when directed at women within the family. However, in the last decade, a growing number of organizations, agencies and institutions have come to understand that they have a key role to play in addressing violence. As a step toward increasing knowledge in this area, the present study seeks to gather qualitative information about current attitudes, perceptions and practices of domestic violence against women in Albanian society.

There is no agreement on the definition of domestic violence. It varies considerably partly because acts of abuse take many forms and involve women and men as victims as well as perpetrators. However, official statistics reveal that women are more likely to be victims of spouse abuse and to sustain severe injuries than men (Population Report, 1999). The term "violence against women" refers to many types of harmful behaviour directed at women and girls because of their sex. In 1993 the United Nations offered the first official definition of such violence when the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. According to this definition, violence against women includes: *any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or*

*arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life* (UN Report, 1993). In this report 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 sex coerced 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. It 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 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. (UNICEF, Innocenti Digest, 2000).

There is increasing consensus that abuse of women is best understood within a "gender" framework because it evolves in part from women's subordinate status in society. Women's unequal status is pervasive in patriarchal societies. Domestic violence is considered to be supported by the traditional and patriarchal mentality. The conjugal relationship in any patriarchal society is unequal. Males are dominant and considered authority figures, whereas women, as the "weaker sex" are expected to sub-ordinate to and obey their husbands. The tendency to view women in

relationship to their husbands and as extensions of their husbands reconfirms the husband's right and obligation to control his wife.

Research on domestic violence demonstrates that it is a complex and multidimensional problem (Gelles, 1997). Explanations include cultural, societal, family and individual factors that decrease or increase the probability that

women will become victims of violence. Most research on family violence has occurred primarily in western countries. For a long time there was no research on domestic violence in Albania (Van Hook, Haxhiymeri and Gjermeni, 2000). During the communist regime, this issue was considered taboo. After that other priorities came first. Consequently, minimal research has been done in Albania.

Albania, a country of 3.2 million people located in the southwestern part of the Balkan Peninsula, was one of the least known countries in Europe. From 1944 until 1991, it was under the control of a totalitarian communist regime that isolated the country from the rest of the world. With the fall of the communist government, Albania has been undergoing a period of deep and often dramatic social, political and economic change. Despite the political and economic reforms undertaken by the post-communist governments to build a democratic system, social conditions, unemployment levels and average incomes are amongst the worst in Europe (World Bank Report, 2002a). As a result of a large variety of historical, political and economical factors, Albania faces both inherited and new problems.

Albanian society has a long history of male domination in which women are taught to obey their husbands and accept their submissive roles, a reflection of the strong patriarchal traditions of the Balkans (Gjipali & Ruci, 1994). Before World War II, Albania was a largely rural country with a strong peasant culture. This meant that traditional patriarchal values dominated much of society, defining gender roles and relations that persisted throughout the communist era and, to an extent, into the present. The patriarchal rural family fostered the ideal of a submissive and passive woman, obedient to father, and later to husband. The man's superiority was intrinsic to this tradition. The roots of maltreatment of Albanian women by men date back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century and are connected with the traditional code of customary laws known as the Kanun (UNICEF Report, 2000a). According to Kanun rules, a man has the right to beat and publicly humiliate his wife if she disobeys her husband. The man is allowed to cut his wife's hair, strip her nude, expel her from the house and drive her with a whip through the village. The Kanun specifies that a man may kill his wife for two reasons: infidelity and betrayal of hospitality. It forbids women from speaking with guests who visit the

house or entering the men's room without being asked by her husband.

Traditional relationships have persisted in Albanian communities probably to a greater degree than in any other ethnic group in the Balkans (Lawson and Saltmarsh, 2002). The Kanun remains important and contributes significantly to the social exclusion of women (De Soto, Gordon, Gedeshi and Sinoimeri, 2002). Many men, especially those from the northeastern part of the country, still adhere to this traditional code, in which women are considered chattel and may be treated as such. In some areas of the northeast, it is still acceptable to kidnap young women for marriage. Many women still view their social position under this framework of customary laws. Although their position in the family can shift according to class or age, most women are expected to serve their families, bear children and preserve Albanian cultural traditions. Cultural attitudes toward male honour also serve to justify violence against women and to exacerbate its consequences. A culture that teaches male mastery and domination over women encourages violence.

The Kanun is only one of the factors that enforced the inferior position of women in Albanian society. Other factors include the very low level of socio-economic development, high level of poverty, low level of education and lack of democratic culture. The fact that men continued to dominate women absolutely until the middle of the twentieth century places Albania in a special category among European countries (Gjipali and Ruci, 1994).

During the communist period, ideological doctrine formally promoted women's equality. Women had productive employment, but despite the egalitarian rhetoric, the paternalist nature of communist rule reinforced patriarchal attitudes and practices. The State reproduced and extended the more customary dependency relations of the patriarchal family. As elsewhere

in the Communist Bloc, the great gap between women's theoretical emancipation and the circumstances of everyday life undermined the slogan "women's equality to men" (Kligman, 1996).

The sharp economic decline accompanying the transition of Albanian society to free market policies has had a great impact on people's lives. The majority of Albanian families remain poor, with low incomes and inadequate living space. In absolute terms, 46.6% of Albanians live below the poverty line, while another 17.4% are extremely poor. By 2001, the level of unemployment was 14.6% (UNDP-HDPC Report, 2002). High male unemployment is eroding the traditional male breadwinner model. Men are confronted with a new trend - women as prime earners. They are reluctant to accept this phenomenon, unknown a decade ago, as it threatens their traditional identity (World Bank Report, 2002b).

Women are granted equal rights with men in all spheres of their lives by Albanian Constitution, but in reality, women do not benefit from many of the rights enshrined in law. The towns with the highest unemployment level of women are Tirana, Berat and Vlora (UNICEF Report, 2000b). Moreover, women tend to get the poorly paid jobs because of their domestic obligations. Migration and emigration have placed an increasing number of women in the role of single head of household.

Women are not excluded, by law or in practice, from any occupation; however, they are not well represented at the highest levels of their fields because they face discrimination in career advancement. For example, though women constitute 62% of teachers in basic education and 38.7% of high school teachers, only 5.8% of university professors are women (UNDP-HDPC Report, 2002). Women enjoy equal access to higher education, but they are not able to realize full and equal opportunity in their careers. It is common for well-educated women to be underemployed or to work outside the field of their training. Reductions in school enrolment and educational advancement have affected females more. The rise of prostitution and trafficking of girls and women has meant that in

some rural areas, as many as 90% of adolescent girls drop out of secondary schooling because of fears of being kidnapped. (Save the Children Report, 2001).

The average salaries of women in Albania are only about 70% of men's salaries. Men still predominate in leadership positions in government. Women represent 50.1% of Albanian population, but they hold just 10% of the jobs in government, and only 5.7% of seats of Parliament (2001). From 2001-2002 there were five women mayors, one woman prefect and two women ministers (UN-ACER Report, 2002). To build and strengthen the partnership between men and women in public and private life, it is necessary to have an equitable redistribution of the "decisional burden". This has not taken place. The triple burden on women as workers, mothers and wives is an old communist mentality that still lingers in Albania.

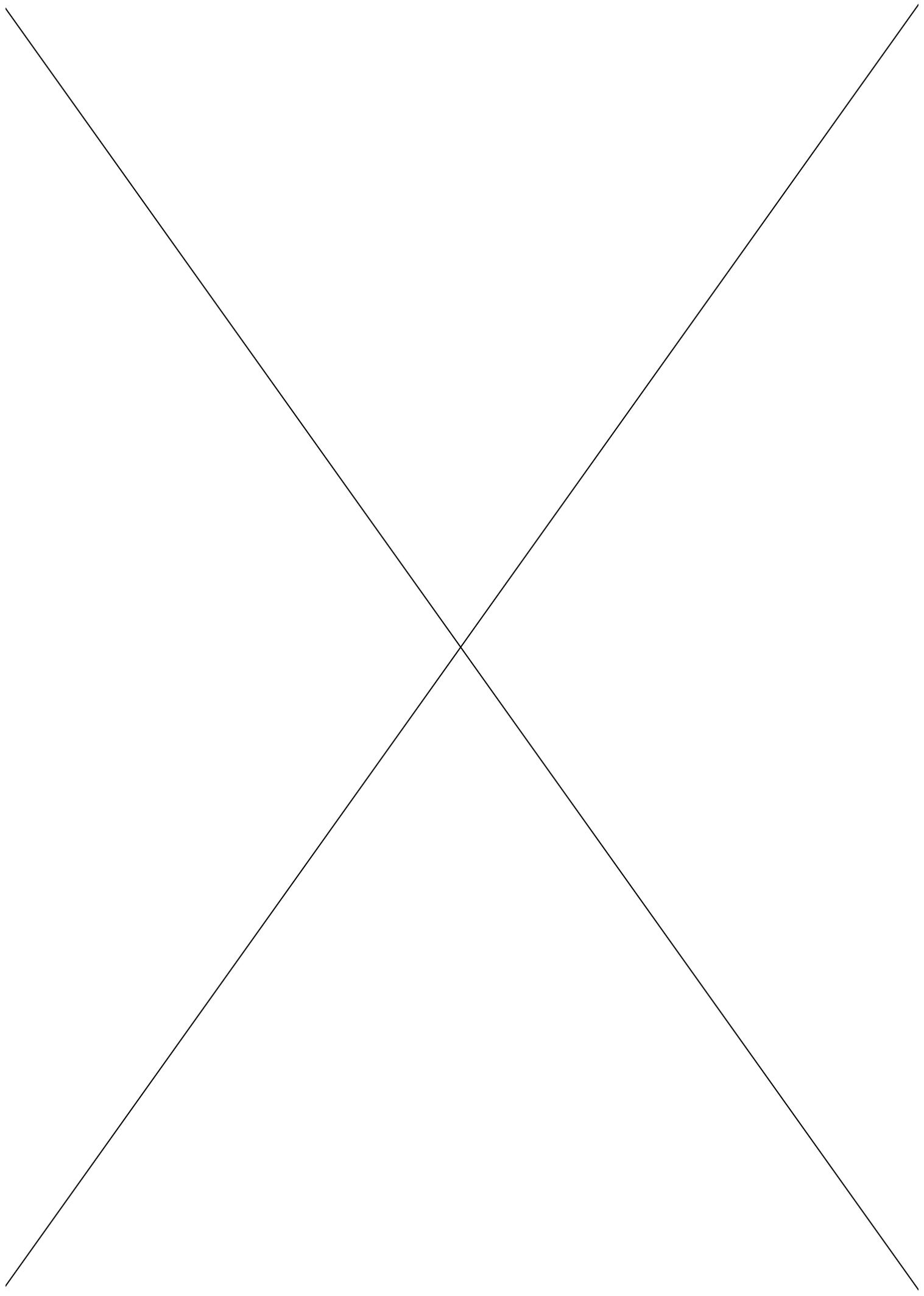
Migration from villages to cities has been one of the most dramatic features of the Albanian transition. The rural population that has arrived in the cities since 1991, brought along customs, traditions, mentalities and lifestyles from many different areas of Albania. Unemployment, poverty and anxiety about the future have resulted in a high level of stress and psychological problems, which can provoke aggression towards others. The incidence of death by unnatural causes has increased. In 1998, three times more people died of unnatural causes as in 1994, 95% of which are due to murder or car accidents (UNDP Report, 2000). According to police sources, murder was the most common crime in 1999. Although prostitution is relatively new to Albania, the country is among the main suppliers of sex workers to neighbouring countries. The trafficking of women and girls is a new tragic phenomenon in Albania (UNDP-HDPC Report, 2002).

At the moment there is no definition of domestic violence in Albanian law, nor is there any law specifically against domestic violence. There are, however, laws against violence and violent behaviour that can be used in the context of domestic violence. For example, article 89 of the Albanian Criminal code provides for fine up to 2 years of imprisonment for an intentional

injury causing temporary incapacity of no longer than 9 days.

The exact degree of violence against women in the family is difficult to establish for a variety of reasons. Underreporting by victims is common, and accurate statistics are not available from police, prosecutors, judges or other service providers (Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights Report, 1996). Gender equality is a new concept and has not yet been embraced by a significant percentage of the population. The concepts of marital rape and sexual harassment are not well established, and those acts would not be considered crimes. Social values and attitudes support the man in his position as the powerful head of the family whose absolute power cannot be questioned. Cultural acceptance and lax police response result in most abuse going unreported. In the

most scientific survey on the subject covering 11 districts, almost 40% of women surveyed claimed to experience physical violence regularly, and 64% percent experienced physical or psychological violence regularly (Albanian Women's Association, Refleksione, 1996). The extent of domestic violence can be understood by consideration of data from the Counseling Centre for Women and Girls. Since its founding in 1996, the Centre has received more than 5,000 calls and provided face-to-face counseling to more than 400 women. Albania's only shelter for family violence victims is in Tirana and it cannot meet the demand for shelter (UNICEF Report, 2000a). All these data prove that domestic violence is a serious problem in Albania. The number of women physically and emotionally injured or murdered as a result of partner abuse can no longer be ignored or tolerated by Albanian society.



## Objectives

The main goal of this exploratory study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of domestic violence in Albania. The study focuses on the psychological, physical, sexual and economic acts of abuse that are directed towards women by intimate male partners. As part of this objective, the qualitative assessment of domestic violence in Albania attempts to:

- Identify the range of forms of violence commonly occurring in the family.
- Gain insights into women's perceptions about what behaviours are abusive and in what circumstances;
- Explore what strategies women use to end violence or reduce its consequences;
- Document the consequences of family violence on women, the family, children and society as a whole;
- Identify women's attitude towards abusers and abusive relationships;
- Determine the social constraints that deprive many women of equality with men in the private sphere.

The study also aims to provide the background for a mass media campaign to raise public awareness of the occurrence, nature and consequences of spousal abuse, and consequently to reduce and prevent it. The study will also provide information and recommend actions for policy makers. Finally, it aims to empower victims of violence to break the vicious cycle of silence and isolation.

## Research participants

The group of participants consisted of 55 women currently involved in abusive relationships or with past experience of interpersonal violence (See Annex 1). The sampling aim was to locate women victims of domestic violence from diverse social backgrounds and with different demographic characteristics (See Table 1). Although these women represent different regions and socio-demographic characteristics, this does not translate into a representative sample of Albania. There is no assumption that the participants to this study are representative of the Albanian female population. However, it seems likely that the beliefs and experiences expressed in these interviews could be characteristic for many other Albanian women.

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Residence		Religion		Education Graduate of		Occupation	
Tirana	28	Muslim	35	Primary		Professional	10
Berat	13	Orthodox	11	Middle School		Technical	32
Shkodra	14	Catholic	9	High School		Unemployed	14
				University		Student	1
Age		Number of Children		Marital Status			
Under 20	2	None	2	Married		30	
21-30	9	1	14	Divorced		19	
31-40	31	2	20	Engaged		2	
41-50	8	3	14	Widowed		2	
51-60	4	4	1	Cohabiting		2	
61-70	1	5	3				
Average age	34	6	1				

## Method

We used qualitative research methods to explore how abused women describe their personal experiences. The data collection technique involved in-depth interviews with 55 women victims of domestic violence. Incorporating information from prior experiences, an interview guide was created using a semi-structured format designed to cover a wide range of topics in depth. In constructing the interview guide, we strove to develop questions that were as neutral as possible to explore the local construction of the topic. The interviews covered several themes, some of which were violence related, whereas others dealt with the everyday life of the couple. The violence-related themes covered questions ranging from the ways in which conflicts emerge and are negotiated to the specific arguments resulting from conflicts, to the development of the violent event, the event itself and the aftermath for both partners. In the everyday-life domain, issues addressed were role division in the family, decision-making processes, patterns of joint and separate activities in the family, intimate relationships and sex, relationships with the family of origin, contact with formal and informal supports, and the future perspective on the relationship.

The interview included a series of broad, open-ended questions about women's experiences of abuse. Questions designed to elicit concrete answers were combined with open-ended questions so that respondents could describe their experience in their own words. There was no specific sequence of questions, and interviewers were trained to follow and respect the participants' sequencing, while making sure that most themes of the interview guide were ultimately covered (Kvale, 1996).

## Procedure

Four pilot interviews were conducted using the preliminary guide, with women from Tirana, Berat and Shkodra. The guide was then finalized into a form that was used for the rest of the interviews. The sampling targeted women who defined themselves as victims, having been subjected to control or abuse of some kind, whether physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or economic. To contact potential

informants, the interviewers identified women who had gone to the Shelter or called the Counseling Centre. Women were informed about the aims of the research from the beginning. After a woman volunteered to participate, an appointment was made with her. The researchers provided each woman with all the details of the study. The interviewer read a paragraph to each informant that explained the purpose of the study and the kinds of questions to be asked, assuring the anonymity of responses and stating that her participation in the study was purely voluntary and could be terminated whenever she chose. Informed consent was obtained verbally. The interviewers made great efforts to assure privacy, allowing each informant to select the time and place most convenient for the interview, explaining the confidential nature of the interview and resulting data.

Research concerning women's experiences of domestic violence is considered "sensitive topic research" because it has the potential to bring up memories that are emotionally disturbing and painful. Some aspects of these experiences may never have been recounted before. Because women uncovering disturbing experiences are often vulnerable and exposed, all efforts were made to ensure a caring and empathetic relationship in order for each woman to feel safe and supported during the interview process. Tact, non-judgmental attitude and a sense of sharing experience were the keys to encourage women to speak about such sensitive issues.

Interviews lasted from 45 to 80 minutes, averaging 60 minutes. All the interviews were tape-recorded with each informant's consent. The interviews were transcribed verbatim into a computer with a word-processing program and produced more than 5,000 pages of transcribed text. Field notes were also taken during the interview.

The interviews were conducted over a period of four months (August to November 2002) by four researchers who had prior experience working in the region with victims of partner abuse. All interviewers were women. In preparation for conducting interviews, the researchers were

intensively trained for five days in the areas of qualitative methodology, in-depth interview techniques and ethical issues, as well as the attitudinal and emotional aspects of interviewing battered women. The UNICEF consultant monitored the interviewing process and provided overall supervision.

### Data analysis

Several strategies were used to analyse the data. The analysis was guided primarily by a version of what Smith (1999) has termed *interpretative phenomenological analysis*, but also by Parker's (1992) steps in an *analysis of discourse dynamics* and by the procedures of grounded theory (Charmaz, 1999). A computer software package (Atlas.ti, 1997) was used to manage code and explore the data.

The first approach aims to explore the participants' views of the phenomenon under investigation from their own perspectives. Phenomenology was chosen for this study based on the belief that it would result in a deeper understanding of the experiences of the women. Such knowledge would be based on the individual women's stories, and not on the researchers' presuppositions. The phenomenological method chosen for this study was the eidetic (descriptive) approach rather than the hermeneutic (interpretive) one. The goal of eidetic phenomenology is to achieve a description of the meaning of an experience from the participant's point of view. The researcher inspired by phenomenology does not offer her overt interpretation of the speakers' accounts; the goal is to present the accounts in such a way that the speakers' voices can be heard.

The analysis of the interviews followed the technique of thematic decomposition. The term "theme" is used here to refer to the researcher's identification of coherent patterns in the participants' accounts (Baban, 2002, 2002). A four-step procedure was followed: (a) first, all interviews were read by the author of this report several times, until a sense of intimate acquaintance and immersion in the material had been obtained; (b) second, the significant statements were identified in the

interviews, those which are richest in meanings related to the violent events; operational codes were developed and attached to the statements through a process of spelling out of the meaning; (c) third, passages that clearly expressed repeated ideas were excerpted and grouped together to represent salient themes; and (d) fourth, generalizations that unified several units of meaning into broader categories (clusters of themes) were developed. This was an iterative process. In some cases, some of the original themes appeared to cluster together to form a new theme. Any apparent clustering was then compared back with the transcript, to ensure that the new cluster description fit with what the participants had actually said. As this process was repeated, new understanding and themes emerged. It was noted that, although individual experiences were unique, there were many similarities among the women's stories. Due to sample size, which was quite large for a qualitative study, thematic saturation was noted in the final analysis of interviews.

The analysis of discourse dynamics involves treating the object of the study as a text (Parker, 1992). Thus, in this case, women's accounts were the text that put the object of the study (domestic violence and gender relationship) into words. A discourse analytic perspective assumes that lives, selves, experiences and their significance are constructed in and through language, through culturally available resources and practices and through shared patterns of meaning. Thus, not only is meaning achieved within the framework of discourses, but, given the multiplicity of discourses on any topic, the meanings too can be multiple. This approach does not attempt to reveal psychological universals but rather is concerned with the social context in which participants' responses are generated.

Several criteria specific to qualitative data were followed to ensure the validity of the results. Wolcott (1994) maintains that validity is the result of congruence between description and interpretation. In addition, we attempted to ground the interpretations in direct quotes from the descriptive data.

Subsequent to analysing the interviews and looking for similarities across them, seven major themes clusters emerged: (1) dreaming of marriage, (2) facing reality, (3) experiencing violence, (4) being an abused woman, (5) worrying about the children, (6) coping with violence and (7) breaking the silence. There is some overlap among the themes. Each major theme was further broken down into sub-themes that filled out the picture of domestic violence from women's perspective.

All the names used in the findings presentation are pseudonyms, and only some items of identifying demographic information is provided in the report, to avoid violating confidentiality.

# DREAMING OF MARRIAGE

"I have always wanted to be a good wife, have a good husband and a nice family. Well, it is understandable, like every other women, I dreamed of having a happy marriage with a partner who, besides being a partner, would also be a friend. At the beginning everything was beautiful, blissful. Then problems emerged which, as time went by, got worse. Conflicts and contradictions became frequent in our relationship." (Stella, 31 years old, schoolteacher, mother of two).

## Marriage as an ideal

Many of the participants talk about their dreams of getting married and for having a happy family. Marriage was of paramount importance to interviewed women, the most important goal in their lives. Through marriage, they were supposed to gain the respect and social approval that are the elements of a successful and worthy life. But for many women, marriage was anything but a fulfilled ideal. The dreams were soon contradicted by the reality. Denisa, who lives in Shkodra and works as a civil servant, says: "It is every girl's dream to get married and live a happy life. But marriage and dreams are two different things. For many girls dreams remain always dreams, as happened to me. What can I do? This was my fate, my destiny." Evelina, 44 years old, describes a similar experience: "I wished to have my family, to have a husband who would take care of me and my children, and I wanted to provide good educational opportunities to my children. None of my wishes has come true. I was a girl coming from the countryside but still, I had wishes and dreams for my life."

The family home is traditionally idealized as a place of stability, affection and peacefulness. Instead, all too often, marriage appears to be an arena for the emotional and physical abuse of women. As noted by Fatmira, an unemployed woman from Tirana: "I dreamed of a happy marriage. I didn't anticipate that I was going to experience a different life. From the first day of my marriage, life proved to be completely different from my dreams. It was always the same for me, only suffering and anguish." Erika, an economist from Tirana, asserts: "The difference between what I dreamed about

marriage and what I experienced is the same as the difference between day and night. I expected to have a home, live with my husband and raise kids. But in reality, I had to live with my mother-in-law, brothers-in-law and sister-in-law who were not married. My mother-in-law had the power in my family."

Many women reported that their relationships had started out well, but as time went by the men became more violent and controlling. Ariana, a resident of Shkodra, describes her experience: "At the beginning the relationship seemed very good. After a year we had a baby, a boy. As time went by, perhaps the transition or maybe the economical difficulties we were encountering caused a break in our relationship. My husband started drinking, behaved very badly with me stopped caring about our relationship, started being abusive towards me and beating me. I thought of getting a divorce, but I was expecting the second baby. I kept hoping that he was going to change. The second baby was born and the situation became even more difficult. He became more abusive towards me. He started gambling; he did not care about the marriage, about his family anymore. So our relationship reached a very critical point, getting worse and worse every day. He became increasingly abusive not only towards me, but even towards our children."

## Marriage as an escape

Marriage is perceived by eight women as the only way to get away from suffering caused by poverty or an abusing father. As they escaped the abusive home environment as children, several of these women were catapulted directly into violent adult relationships. As Dafina, a

young pregnant woman living in Tirana, notes: "The main reason for my marriage was family violence. My father has always terribly abused my mother and then the kids. When I got married I supposed it would be better than when I was a child. I didn't think he would also abuse me." Sonila is another young woman who feels that her dream of having a happy family was refuted: "I hoped to have a better life through marriage. Every night I used to dream of my future husband, my children, my house, having all these things of my own. I dreamed of having a household, of taking care of my family. I liked the mother's role, the wife's role. My dream did not come true." Bojana, a 40-year-old worker in Berat, feels that her hopes were betrayed: "I was praying to God to give me a good husband and a nice family; I was an orphan and I had suffered a lot. I was thinking that I would serve my husband as well as I could, I would love his family, I would take care of the house and fill it with children. I had bad luck and I do not know why this happened"

### Marriage as a norm

In a patriarchal society, to be a wife and a mother represent key aspects of a woman's identity. The status of being married is construed by women as normal and natural. For Aferdita, who lives in Tirana, getting married is a normative behaviour: "Well, the reason for my marriage was...simply something that has to be done, something that is mandatory ... well, maybe not mandatory, but every girl should think of getting married." As long as a young woman remains unmarried, whatever the reason, she automatically holds inferior status and is considered a burden to the family. Diana, a 50-year-old pharmacist, describes her reason for getting married: "I was first engaged to another man than my present husband. We separated because he was involved with another woman and she was pregnant with his child. After that, life in my family became more and more difficult for me. You know very well that back in those years, having separated once, even during engagement, was considered something very bad. Finally, I decided to get married, because my mother and I were afraid of never being asked again. I had to accept as my future husband a divorced man with one

child from his former marriage, and a lower educational background than mine whom I did not love. My dreams of having an ideal husband failed. Nevertheless, I decided to adapt to the circumstances." The same anxiety of remaining single was also expressed by Manjola, a technician in Tirana: "First, I would like to stress that it was not love, but public opinion; I had to marry. My parents were afraid I would never get married."

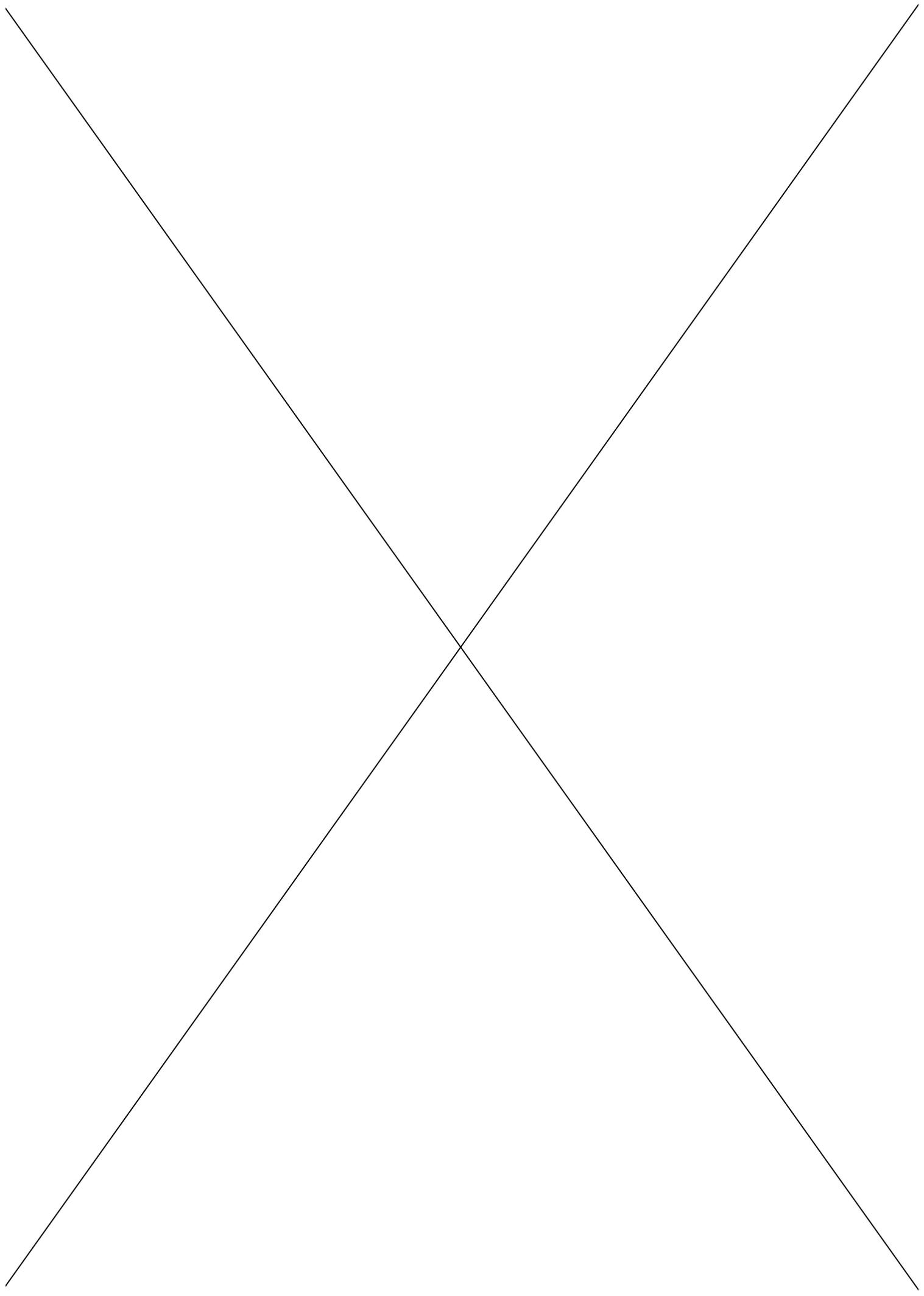
For some women, there was pressure to get married, pressure that began in young adulthood. Elona, a 43-years-old worker from Berat, says: "What did I know when I got married? I was just a kid. My mother and father took care of it. They told me to get married and that's all...I wish I were young one more time! I would not get married before the age of 20." Fatjona, a mother of five, had a similar experience: "We were 8 children in my family and we had a bad economic situation. My parents decided to marry me. My father engaged me and after two months, I got married. I considered my marriage as a way to help my family." Etleva, a young woman of 23, mother of two, notes: "Our marriage was arranged in a hurry by my parents. My father and mother told me that long-lasting engagements caused problems. They were afraid I might get pregnant before marriage and that would have been a shame for my family."

Among the participants, 19 reported entering into an arranged marriage, often orchestrated by the family's male authority (fathers or brothers). Aferdita confesses: "It was a mediated marriage. My father arranged my marriage. I didn't want to, but my father obliged me. So I did what my father wanted me to do. I got married because I had two parents asking me that." Arranged marriage practises against women's will and often has negative outcomes, as Vera from Shkodra states: "I was very young when I got married against my desire, because I was in love with a man of another religion and my family didn't accept him. So I was forced to marry a man I didn't love, but that man fulfilled all the conditions of my family regarding religion and economic status. Nothing went as my parents had planned." Rudina, a mother of three from Tirana, describes a very similar

experience: "My family, especially my brother, urged me to take a decision regarding marriage. I let him decide about this. Now, my family feels guilty for marrying me to him."

The perception of marriage as a life goal can be a frame of reference, although some women mention as a motivation the desire to escape

the parental home poverty or violence. Marriage is constructed through women's discourse as a norm and desirable condition for women's social status. The patriarchal traditions of arranged marriages by a male authority are still frequent. All too frequently the marriage becomes a scene of personal humiliation, tension, threat and conflicts.



# FACING REALITY

"Most Albanian men do not value women. They see them as slaves who have to take care of the children, of the house, do all the work and that's it." (Dorina, 22 years old, divorced, mother of one child).

## Gender relationship and domestic life

Many women talk bitterly about how their expectations and hopes regarding marriage were contradicted by the reality of everyday life. Oriola, a 40-year-old divorced lawyer, says: "I expected my marriage to be similar to my parents', but unfortunately, I found another model. He had his parents' model. He had grown up in a violent family. His father abused his mother and he wanted to do the same to me." Like women in other patriarchal cultures, Albanian women are taught to be submissive, passive, dependent and obedient to males. If they are disobedient, it is perfectly acceptable for the males to use violence to discipline them and maintain control. As Mimoza, a farm worker explains: "When I got married my mother advised me: *"Be careful, he is your husband and sometimes he might shout and sometimes he might even beat you."* My friends said the same to me. At the beginning, we had a good relationship. I was 20 when I got married and he always gave me compliments and made nice comments about my eyes. But after two years, when I had still not got pregnant, he began shouting: *"Will you have a baby or not? I did not marry you because of your eyes."* I felt sad and I cried." A divorced 31-year-old teacher in Tirana got the same advice from her mother: "I learned from my mother to be obedient to my husband. My father represented the male model of stubbornness and the quick-temper features ... My husband, in order to show his father that he was the one who led our relationship, began shouting at me, abusing me and making decisions on everything without asking me. Here in Albania, the tradition is to solve problems through arguments and terror."

Cultural beliefs regarding obedience as well as family and community traditions and norms

take precedence over individual rights, as Lira, an unemployed teacher, notes: "My husband has a university degree, but the problem is that he comes from a traditional family where the woman should be obedient and the man - powerful and arrogant." In this tradition, women have more duties than rights. Denada, a worker in Shkodra, observes: "This is the custom that the Kosovars have. The wife has to wash the feet of her husband as soon as he comes home, serve him food while he lies down and watches TV. He should not be disturbed by the children. The wife has no right to ask her husband where he was, what he did and if he brought home any money or not. In order to keep his customs I had to submit to all these rules. I had no right to go anywhere, to dress up or to use make-up. Even when I had a shower before going to work, he would ask me, *"Why did you have a shower?"*

## Gender gap in family roles

A variable that has been linked to spousal abuse is traditional attitudes towards family roles. Research indicates that abuse in partner-type relationships is more likely to occur and continue where the couple, particularly the man, holds traditional attitudes towards family roles (e.g., husband provides family incomes, wife takes care of home and children). Typically, men are given relatively free reign in a patriarchal society as long as they provide financially for the family. Such conclusions are consistent with our findings, which show that every husband or partner considers the housework to be the exclusive responsibility of his wife. Desantila, a civil servant in Shkodra and mother of two, describes how the household work is "shared" in her family: "I do everything in our house. My husband's duties are to go to work, to go out every evening, to lie

down and to find everything ready." Even if the woman is highly educated, she is not exempt from bearing the burden of all household activities, as Diana, a pharmacist and mother of one child, points out: "There is a long tradition in Albania according to which men do not hold any responsibilities in carrying out household activities. I do everything: cleaning, washing, ironing, cooking, etc."

Women are expected to tend the house and mind the children and to show their husbands obedience and respect. Silvana, a 31-year-old teacher in Tirana, says: "According to my husband's opinion, a woman has to be a housewife, know how to cook, do the housework, have good relations with her husband's family, accept others' viewpoints, be sweet, lovely, sexual, attractive and comply with her husband's desires every single moment." Merita, a tailor in Tirana and mother of two, accepts her traditional roles in the house, even if this means getting exhausted by the triple burden she has to face every day: "I do everything that a wife has to do. I clean, cook, take care of my kids. My husband did not have a job, and yet, he never did any kind of housework. He never thought of doing anything. I didn't expect him to do any housework either, but when he finished eating, he could have at least cleaned the table to help me because I was so tired from working every day and taking care of the kids."

If a man perceives that his wife has somehow failed in her role, stepped beyond her boundaries or challenged his rights, then he may react violently. This traditional view is reflected in the comment of a 40-year-old, mother of three living in Shkodra: "During my whole marriage I've worked hard for my family. My husband only works at his workplace; he comes home only to eat and sleep. I have to wake up at five o'clock in the morning and deal with all kinds of problems till midnight. My husband never tried to help me in solving family problems. Moreover, he sometimes brings the salary home, and sometimes he doesn't, but I never have the courage to ask him why he does that. If I would dare to ask him where the money is, my question could cost me a very unpleasant price." Other women in the study group share

the same experience: "Since the first day, I did all the work that should be done by a wife without receiving any help from my husband. He regards the house as a hotel; eats, sleeps, changes his clothes and goes out. When he comes home drunk I have to work twice as much because he throws up. What is even more terrible is that he sometimes hits not only me but also my son, something I cannot tolerate." Evelina, a mother of three, says: "I woke up early in the morning, I went to work on the farm and when I came back I took care of my children. I cooked, washed, ironed, served my husband and his relatives and friends who often came to have lunch or dinner with us. He did nothing. If he did not like what I had done he just shouted and yelled at me." Justifications for violence frequently evolve from gender norms about the proper roles and responsibilities of men and women, as Mimoza explains: "The man is a man, and the woman has to follow him, but at least, he should not abuse his wife and he should work for his family."

### Decision making process

Despite the fact that Albanian women increasingly entered the paid labour force during the last 50 years, traditional gender roles in the family are still preserved, as women state in their accounts. "The main obstacle for enjoying equal rights is the mentality of the Albanian man - even though he would say that he is an emancipated European man, etc, his Albanian male genes remind him that he is the one in control. Even if he saw that the woman earns more money, he would say: *I am here and I control you and your money*," says Erika, an economist in Tirana. Dafina, an unemployed woman in Tirana, comments: "It is considered a shame for our men to let the woman decide, or to admit that the woman has a better perspective, and take her perspective into consideration when deciding."

As recounted by the women, abusive husbands appeared to be dominant in family decision-making. Bojana, a worker in Berat, vividly describes her perception of Albanian men: "Men in Albania are all commanders. It has always been like this, but maybe things will change slowly. The Albanian man makes the decision

for everything. The woman works, and the man gives orders, the woman carries the load, but the man keeps the money."

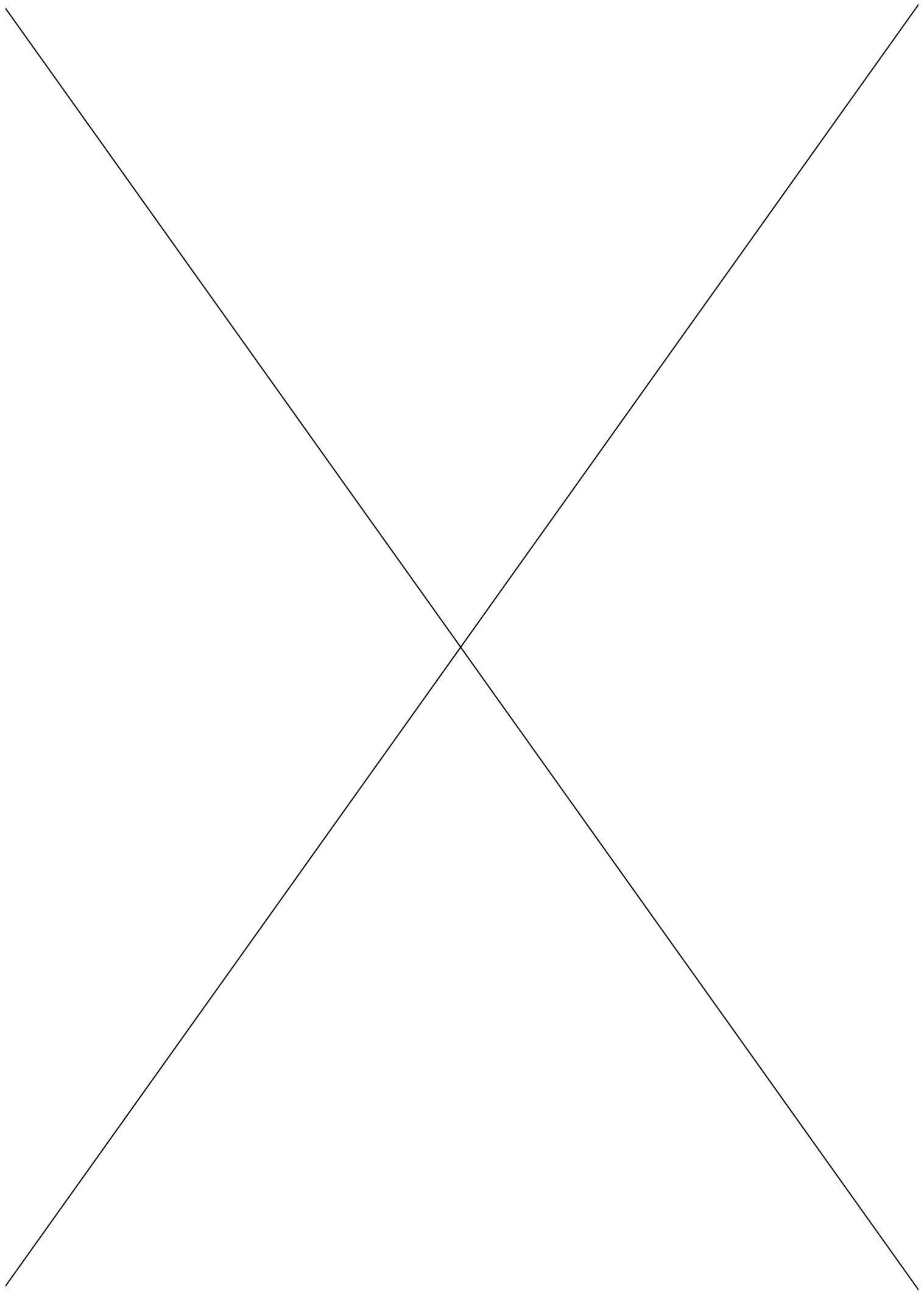
Women have to do their best to preserve their family. They are supposed to find fulfillment in their roles as wives and mothers and be prepared to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their marriage, as Jonida, a medical doctor, says: "My husband wanted to be responsible and take care over financial matters, whereas child care and household work were considered to be my responsibilities. It would be better if there were joint decisions on behalf of expenses and children's education. But he always wanted everybody to do exactly what he said, and he was the one to start arguments. I decided to tolerate his behaviour in order to avoid conflicts and to maintain the harmony in our family, even though this meant acceptance of being badly treated."

Fatmira, an unemployed woman in Tirana, mother of two, expresses her frustration: "He listens to me very rarely, hardly pays attention to my ideas. He usually decides on everything. He is in charge of the money. I never had money to administer on my own. I was only a wife who was supposed to stay at home and take care of children and do the housework."

The majority of women indicated that their husbands held a strong belief in the traditional culture that dictated women's submission to men. On the contrary, most of the women did not favour the traditional gender roles. Women expressed their desire to be equal to their

husbands. But traditional gender roles are difficult to break down, as shown in the women's statements. "Equal rights between men and women have never existed in Albania, nor do they exist nowadays. The main factor leading to this situation is the inherited mentality, which considers the woman a household property," says a 50-year-old woman from Berat. A 31-year-old teacher in Tirana explains: "Equal rights between a man and a woman mean that the man will no longer say: *I am the husband and you shall only listen to me, be obedient, subdued, bear children and keep the households*. Here in Albania, women's voices are not listened to, and the husband always behaves as a man, and the woman is forced to be obedient to him. The reason for this situation, I think, is the Albanian mentality."

Women's narratives show how traditional gender roles can break down the partner relationship. Patriarchal culture codes identify a woman as the property of her husband, holding a subordinate status in the marriage. The traditional role of Albanian women within the home is caring for the children and the house. Partnership between man and woman in confronting domestic problems is unfamiliar to Albanian men. The male pattern of domination restricts the woman's share in the decision-making process. For Albanian women, the fall of communism liberated them from the coercion of an autocratic and repressive state. Unfortunately, this did not translate into equal opportunities and responsibilities for men and women. They still have to act according to male-defined norms.



# EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE

"After the first month of our marriage he began abusing me. He used to slap, kick, beat me with his fists, hit my head against the wall. I don't even know how to describe those episodes. He used to kick me in the back. Once he hit me so hard that I couldn't breathe for a moment. For more than a week, I felt pain. I couldn't cough and breathe. He also tried to strangle me, hit me with a hard object until I started bleeding. I didn't even scream because I didn't want my children to hear. The children got very scared, so I took them with me and left the house. We spent the night out and we returned home after he had left for work. When he came back from work he kept cursing me, why I was still there. He wanted me to leave the house, but I had no place to go. I thought that things would go better, but he started getting angry each time he would see me. Even though I was trying to do my best, to be good to him, he didn't care about that." (Bardha, 42-year-old technician in Tirana, married mother of five).

Men's violence against women is generally characterized by privacy, which means that it tends to elude the gaze of an external observer. Women's accounts prove that abuse is a complex phenomenon because it includes various forms, ranging from humiliation to isolation, forced prostitution, coercive sex and battering. Intimate partner abuse is generally part of a pattern of abusive behaviour and control rather than an isolated act of physical aggression. Stella, a teacher in Tirana states: "He used to threaten me by saying he would take the children away from me. Once I told him I would divorce him. He came and took my daughter away for one week. Can you imagine what I felt during those days? I was very scared and could not sleep, as any other mother would do while her child was missing. I didn't know where my daughter was. I went out on the streets at 5 in the morning searching for her. My brother helped me. We called the police. Maybe he was afraid of the police and brought my daughter home."

Evelina, mother of three and unemployed, recalls: "Once, I was 8 months pregnant when he came home quite late. I felt very tired, because I was pregnant. We had a fight over a minor issue. I hadn't ironed his shirt or his pants, and he was mad at me. While we were shouting at each other, he slapped me. That was the first slap and since then, my life was changed. He did the same thing for another 15 years. He used to insult and offend me, and

then to take me to his room by force to beat me. Our children were often present. His mother sent them outside so that they would not see me screaming or crying." Another woman, technician and mother of two, describes her partner's violence as follows: "When I say that my husband is violent I mean he is like that in all possible ways. He refuses to talk with me, he tried to strangle me, he threatened me with a gun when he was a military officer. He has done everything to me."

The process of domestic violence is complex and fluid rather than static and simple. The fact that women are often emotionally involved with those who abuse them has profound implications for how they experience violence. Sonila, a 46-year-old unemployed woman in Tirana, express her puzzlement regarding her husband's behaviour, "After beating me, he used let me go, saying, *I love you; I want you; I did that because you made me angry; I will never do it again; if you don't believe me, you are free to do whatever you like.* I believed him and I stayed with him. But after a few days, he started hitting me again. I could not understand how he could do this to his wife, to the person that meant everything to him one day, and then start beating me again the day after! Anyway, I tried to find him excuses. I tried to justify him thinking that he became angry for a moment, but that he loved me anyway." Another woman, a 31-year-old university graduate, describes her

difficult relationship with her husband: "That day I went to work earlier than usual because a meeting of the pedagogic council was scheduled in the morning. He came to my work place and took me away from there. He was very, very angry. First I thought something wrong had happened and he needed to express himself. He began to yell at me without any reason: *Where have you been?* Then he dragged me to his car and turned to brutal physical

violence, he broke my arm, too. I could do nothing at that moment; I only prayed to survive, to remain alive, because he was so angry, resembling a beast. After this, I decided to leave him. He began to apologize and I thought of forgiving him because it was the first time he had hit me, and it would never happen again. I loved him and I thought he felt the same for me. But I was so wrong, the arguments occurred more and more often."

## Psychological abuse

"We had been married for two years, and one day I thought I was pregnant. One morning I found out that, in fact, I was not. He began to threaten me: *If you won't get pregnant I will send you back to your father.* I cried very hard... He did not come back home that day. I was very scared, waiting for him. When he came in the evening, I was afraid of him and I stayed in the corner of the bed. He came close to me and began caressing me. So, I was with him again. When I got pregnant he stopped beating me... Arthur was out every day. When I would ask him: *Where have you been all day long?*, he usually answered with an angry voice: *Don't interrogate me, I don't owe you any explanations*, and then he began offending me: *You're like a gypsy. Shut up! I will send you to your mother, etc.*" (Mimoza, 32-year-old worker from Berat).

Most physical abuse occurs in the context of other forms of abuse, such as verbal, emotional or economic abuse and social isolation. All the women in the study experience a high level of both physical and psychological abuse. This finding suggests that men who are physically abusive are also emotionally abusive. Women often say that the psychological abuse and degradation are even more difficult to bear than physical abuse. A 50-year-old pharmacist says: "I have lived in a nightmare for four years. I suffered a lot during this time. Those were dark years for me. I was afraid of him. I noticed his mother was afraid of him, too. We had only been married for six months, and he asked me: *Aren't you pregnant yet?* That was really shocking... I was very happy when I realized I was pregnant. He was happy, too. However, our arguments continued during my pregnancy. My pregnancy was not an easy one; I experienced continuous nausea and needed to stay in bed most of the time. He used to shout at me: *Stand up! Why do you have to be different from other women?*"

The acts of psychological and physical abuse are sometimes directed not only at the respondent but also at family and friends, as Stella describes: "The psychological violence was omnipresent until the day we separated, two weeks ago. He threatened me by saying that he would do this and that to me and to my family. He offended me all the time using bad words; he used to threaten me by saying he would send me back to my mother in pieces. One of the reasons I accepted to live with him was because he threatened me. I was afraid because he was a violent person not only with me, but also with others."

Verbal debasement, such as being called names, sworn at or put down, was frequently reported. "He always considered me a stupid person. If I asked him something, he answered: *You don't know anything. You're silly. You don't know what life is.* And all that was justifiable to him, because he had been to Italy many times, whereas I hadn't been anywhere," says a 20-

year-old divorced woman. Fatmira adds: "He humiliated me many times, making me feel stupid and crazy. When he came home drunk, he used to break things in the house, such as the radio or plates. He also used to kick us out of the house."

The women's accounts of emotional abuse also illustrate the processes through which women become demoralized and trapped in abusive relationships. Most women mention that psychological abuse severely affects their self-esteem, as a 40-year-old worker in Shkodra

notes: "He calls me idiot, stupid. I feel really offended, humiliated. I only feel like a real human being when I am with my mother and my sisters." Women are often told that they are not physically attractive, are inferior or incompetent, cannot cope or succeed on their own, and are not good mothers, wives, or housekeepers. Another married woman from Shkodra states: "He has tried all possible ways to humiliate me. *I am feeding you well, that's why you have become like a cow*, he told me. I have tried to defend myself, but with no results. He has become wilder and more violent."

## Verbal and physical threatening

"There was always violence. I thought of divorcing before, but when I told him that he was not the right man for me, he took out his gun and put it right to my head. He told me that if I divorced him, he would kill me. It was because of this pressure that I couldn't separate from him. I was also unprotected, because my parents were divorced." (Dafina, 22-year-old worker in Tirana, divorced and mother of one child)

Battered women commonly experience diverse forms of psychological abuse. Threats are common, aimed at terrorizing the woman to such a point that the male partner feels in total control. A schoolteacher states: "At the beginning, he threatened me by always mentioning divorce. He still continues threatening me by saying that he will take my son, or he will not pay any child alimony in case I would divorce him. Then, he began to threaten me with a gun." Another woman from Tirana adds: "One time, he abused me very hard, and I finally decided to divorce him. He put a lot of pressure on me, saying that if I would ask for divorce, he was going to blow my home into the air, to kill all of us, and that if I went abroad, he would find me and kill me. He tried to take away my son several times, in order to force me to

return to him." An unemployed 20-year-old woman expresses her feeling of helplessness generated by fear: "There were many cases when he threw stuff at me; he threw whatever he found on the table: ashtrays, phone etc. Then he would begin beating me. He threatened to kill me if I left him. He always used to say, *if you leave me, you are dead. I will kill you*. I was afraid of him and I did not know how to put an end to this dreadful situation."

Overtime, emotional abuse and threats lead, some women to an attitude of passivity, low self-esteem and "learned helplessness" in relation with their partners. This results from the experience of uncontrollability or the lack of a clear relationship between response and outcome.

## Physical violence

"He used to beat me very often. I had bruises on every part of my body because he used to hit me with anything he could find in those moments: shoes, sandals, ropes. I used to go to work with scars on my face and hands. I was ashamed in front of my friends, and I tried to find different explanations for those wounds. I ran away from home several times, and went back to my parents. After each episode of violence he calmed down, telling me that I was his wife and that he loved me very much. He always asked me to go back to him and I only returned because of my son." (Aurela, 42-years-old teacher in Tirana, divorced and mother of one child).

When describing physical violence, informants mention a series of incidents ranging from a slap to an assault with a deadly weapon. The findings show women had been shaken, slapped, punched, kicked, pushed against walls and furniture, lifted and thrown across the room or out of the house, pulled by the hair, strangled. They had their arms broken; they were burned by cigarettes. They had guns pointed at their heads, they were forced to have sex and they were threatened with knives and grenades. A 31-year-old married mother of three mentions the following situation: "He always used to beat me hard, but I remember one time when he abused me even harder. That day he came home very late at night and he was very drunk. He began hitting me very hard. I could not understand why. He took a bottle and broke it on my head. I was bleeding. My hands were cut. Then, he took me by my hair, dragged me out of the house and left me there. A neighbor helped me. She invited me to her home." Another woman, age 44, married with one child, reveals: "I have been abused from the very beginning of my marriage. I have been constantly abused for the last 25 years... He's always told me that he would kill me. He kicked me; he used scissors, forks, etc. The main reason causing this behavior was alcohol; my husband drank a lot. But even when he was not drunk he was still violent." A 46-year-old divorced mother of two offers another example of physical abuse: "Once he burned my skin with a cigarette. He also broke my bones. I didn't go to the hospital nor did I report him to the police because I was too scared while I was still living with him."

Acts of physical violence result in bruises, disfigurement and broken bones for many women, as an unemployed woman in Tirana reveals: "He came home and beat me up every time for no reason at all. His brothers took me to the hospital two or three times because of broken bones. After about an hour, he used to calm down and wanted me to forgive him. He treated me well for one month, and after that he did the same."

Physical violence frequently includes controlling behaviours such as monitoring the wife's movements. Transgressions of traditional gender roles and expectations, including suspected infidelity and disobedience on the part of the woman, also produce physical abuse. For example, a 31-year-old schoolteacher and mother of two explained: "My daughter was one month old when one night he started again with his suppositions: ... *you have been out, you have seen him*", whereas I had stayed at home all day. Then, he began kicking me. I had my daughter in my arms and tried so hard not to fall and hurt her. Then, these violent episodes started occurring more often. Furthermore, almost every night, he came home completely drunk. The last time he used violence against me was during my pregnancy with my son. That outbreak was extremely brutal; he hit me with all the force a man can hit. He was drunk again. The next morning, when I woke up and saw my face in the mirror I didn't recognize myself; my face was full of scars."

Two women mentioned intergenerational violence: "My father-in-law, my brother-in-law

and my husband beat me. What could you do? My husband would do everything his father told him to do. If his father told him that his wife was a bad wife, he would beat me up more. I could not say anything because I was scared and ashamed," says Amarda, 67-year-old widow.

Nine of the women were either abused as children or witnessed violence between their parents. Women's childhood experiences seemed more diverse: some felt that their childhood was fairly happy, with few conflicts; others felt that their families were very abusive. "As a child I was beaten by my father. I have seen my father abusing my mother many times. When my father was beating my mother, I was always trying to separate them, so he beat me too. Once he hit me with a bottle in my head; he used to hit with whatever he had at hand," recalls a young divorced woman of 22, mother of one. Another divorced woman, 20 years old, vividly notes: "My husband behaved nicely during the first months of our marriage. Then he started coming home late at night, or getting

drunk and becoming jealous (...) when I tried to say something, he became angry, he starting shouting or beating me... I remember what my grandmother used to say: *"If the mother suffers, the daughter will suffer, too."* I'm the only daughter in my family. My mother has suffered a lot. She has been extremely abused by my father. She accepted this reality. My mother always prayed to God for her daughter to have a better fate than she had. Unfortunately, the same happened to me. My father was violent with my mother, and so was my husband with me." Dafina, a young pregnant woman, bitterly recalls her childhood: "All my life I was submitted to violence; my dad has always been violent. He drinks and fights with mom. He beats her up and asks her to leave his home. He tells her very rude things. When he gets violent, he used to yell, insult, break objects and abuse my mom. He hits her, kicks her and threatens her with the knife. Sometimes I try to separate them, but he starts hitting me too. I hide the knives, if he comes home late, because I know the consequences."

## Intimate terrorism

"I have been abused in different ways, sexually and physically, among other forms of violence, for 16 years. I don't know where to start. The last time that I had problems with my husband was when he physically abused me in a terrible way. He never treated me well, he always used to kick me out of the house, along with my two children. He used to act like an animal, like I wasn't his wife. But the last time he threatened that he was going to kill me with his gun. I had to leave my house and ask for help and accommodation in a shelter. He is a very aggressive person, he doesn't care if he has to go to the police; I have tried to do everything, but he doesn't care. I am still so scared, even now that we are divorced. He is a very dangerous man. I don't know what he is going to do." (Fatmira, 46 years old, divorced mother of two, unemployed in Tirana).

The majority of women were physically abused by their partners many times. In fact, the informants often described an atmosphere of terror. One third of women say that they had feared for their life at some point in their relationship. Intimate terrorism is motivated by a strong wish to exert control over one's partner. The problem of domestic violence is complicated by the high rate of unemployment and the severe housing shortage in Albania. Often, divorced women are forced to stay in abusive relationships because they have no

other place to go. A 36-year-old woman, unemployed in Tirana, recalls how her former husband continued to terrorize her, even though they were separated: "One day my husband said to me, *I don't love you anymore. I'm going to ask for a divorce.* So we divorced and we lived separately, in the same apartment. But he still continued to threaten me. He came home with grenades yelling he was going to blow them up inside the apartment. He threatened me that he was going to take my children and sell them in Italy. Then, I reported him to the police."

Intimate terrorism is likely to involve serious injury and also a high risk of homicide. Nine women (16% of the respondents) reported they were threatened by a deadly weapon, such as a gun, grenade or knife. Dituri, a worker in Tirana and mother of six, was terrified by the last episode of violence, which finally convinced her to ask for a divorce: "I hoped he would change, but he never did. He was the same violent person every time. The last time, he brought a gun home, and he became very aggressive. He used knives to threaten me before, but after he bought a gun, he started threatening me with it. He even wounded me. Three of my children were present when he used the gun. It is unbelievable to think that he used his gun in front of the children. Fortunately, nothing happened to them. He was not shooting at me, but he was threatening me, shooting the floor and the walls. I found one appropriate moment, and I ran away. The children were running after me. When we left the house, he started shooting at us. The children were terrified. They were afraid he would kill

them. I told them to run away and I ran after them. He continued shooting at us. The third bullet wounded me. I kept running because I did not want to fall into his hands. The children were terrified because I was bleeding. They started to cry... A car stopped next to me, and took me directly to the hospital."

Many women live in fear not only for their own lives, but also for the lives of their children and family, as Edit, a married worker and mother of two in Tirana says: "Once he took the gun and wanted to kill me and the children. My parents were there. He was drunk and, as usual, he wanted to sell the house in order to pay his debts. I didn't accept because I had no place to go. He took the gun and threatened that he would kill me. Then, he left the house, locking the door from outside."

The domineering behaviour and physical abuse is not only a tool of control, but it puts women's lives at great risk.

## Sexual violence

"Every time he physically abused me, he also forced me to have sexual intercourse. After he kicked and hit me and my body was all covered by blood, he would become sexually violent. Being both physically abused and forced to have sexual intercourse was very humiliating for me! I felt very humiliated. I often looked at myself in the mirror and asked myself what was wrong about me. Now, two weeks after leaving him, I feel better, I feel like a woman. While being with him, offended, abused, accused for no reason, I forgot I was a woman." (Stella, 31 years old, school teacher, mother of two).

Physical violence was accompanied by sexual abuse for 19 of the 55 interviewed women (35% of the respondents). Women's experiences with sexual violence varied along a continuum, from battering rape and bullying to threats, verbal humiliation and nonphysical forms of pressure that compelled them to engage in sex against their will. In an abusive relationship, sex is just another form of male control, in an effort to gain the woman's complete acquiescence. These strategies of control often focused directly on his female victim's body and sexuality. The forced sexual act becomes one in which the

woman is silenced, controlled and subordinated.

As Stella's narrative reveals (see preceding vignette) women experienced rape or physically forced sex in the context of a battering relationship. Women are not willing to label their experiences as rape, which could be a sign that the concept of marital rape is rather absent in the Albanian culture. For these women, sex is the result of threatening behaviour on the part of the husband. In these cases, unwanted sex occurred due to fear of some negative reactions from the

husband. Sonila, 20 years old and unemployed in Tirana, recalls: "Once, he threatened me with a knife. He yelled: *I will kill you, I will kill you!* Then he wanted to make love to me. He started saying: *You are mine. I won't allow anyone to touch you.* He kept the knife with one hand, and tried to take my clothes off with the other. While doing so, he accidentally wounded me with the knife. He didn't want to do that, but I had to go to a doctor to take care of the wound."

Having sex is perceived by some women as the quickest way to counteract the husband's anger and to avoid further violence. From prior experiences women learned not to fight it and to do whatever their husband wanted, as suggested by Fatmira, a 37-year-old divorced woman and mother of two: "He would ask me to have sexual intercourse with him after he had beaten me in a terrible way. I was so scared that I allowed him to do everything he wanted. On other occasions, when he was drunk, he used to tell me that he had been with another woman."

Some women feel obliged to be dutiful and have sex with their husband. This type of acquiescence is based on the idea that a woman is obligated to serve her husband's needs, irrespective of her own wishes. Susana, 34 years old, worker in Tirana, states: "As his wife, I felt obliged to please his sexual desires. However, I never took the initiative to have sex with him. I never wished to have sex with him. I had to accept his demands, otherwise he would force me. There have been a few situations when I joked with him saying: *No, no! Go away. I don't want to,* and he began kicking me out of the bed and insulting me."

Sexual abuse also includes the process by which a husband humiliates his wife by flaunting that other women are sexually more desirable than her. A 27-year-old woman, mother of three notes: "When I refused to have sexual intercourse with him he used to say: *I don't need you, I have another woman. I am going over there,* and he left the house."

In other relationships, sexual abuse is accompanied by enough verbal threats to create an atmosphere defined by fear and filled with the anxiety of wondering what might happen if she

refuses to have sex with the alcoholic husband. This sexual manipulation is carried out by the perpetrator with the intention of emotionally degrading the intimate partner. Evelina, mother of three, and unemployed, describes: "Every time he came home drunk, late at nights, he started hitting me in order to wake me up, and forced me to have sex with him. Once he told me, *go away! You're not good at sex and you have never been.*" A divorced woman, mother of three, asserts: "He went out with another woman. I didn't care about that. The only thing I wanted from him was not to be beaten anymore. I left him once, and I went to my parents with the children. After a while I decided to come back to him. But the worst thing happened. He began to come home with his lover. We lived in the same apartment with him and his lover."

Based upon the women's narratives, it can be deduced that there is a double standard whereby a husband feels that he but not his wife is allowed and justified to have extramarital sex. Women who lack sexual autonomy most often do not have power of negotiating use of contraception, and thus are at risk of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. A schoolteacher, mother of one, says: "I had six abortions because he refused to use contraceptives. This has made me feel humiliated and ashamed, because I am considered to be an emancipated woman, who grew up in Tirana and graduated from the university in Tirana."

Respondents also mentioned being forced to engage in types of sexual activity that they found degrading and humiliating. In her interview, a worker in Tirana and mother of two mentions how her husband wanted her to watch pornography and perform different sexual acts. She says: "I feel so ashamed to tell you this, but he has a drawer full of porno movies at home. Often, before going to sleep, he would play one of those videos. I found them disgusting and I never wanted to watch them. He wanted me to do those things that he saw in the movie. They were very disgusting. I could not do them. I told him several times that I didn't want to do them, but he forced me to."

Denada, 28 years old and mother of two,

describes her experience: “He got really crazy. One evening he told me about Turkish drivers who were often coming to his work. He told me that they had a lot of money and paid 5,000 Lek (USD 35) to do it once with a woman. I didn’t understand what he was saying at first. When I realized what he was talking about, I was shocked. He said that since we did not have a lot of money I could gain more money this way. He said I could keep part of the money for myself and give him the other part. I could not believe my ears. I was really shocked. I never thought that a husband would dare say these things to his wife. I told myself he had gone crazy, pretending to be jealous one day, and then wanting me to do those things the next day. I told him that I was not that kind of person; I have a job and I have my salary, why would I need that money? It seemed that I had changed his mind, but one evening he asked me again what I thought about that business. I was really angry. I could not tolerate that any more. He understood that there was no way he could convince me to do what he wanted me to do, so he began to use physical violence. He began telling me that I had not done my chores well, that I had not cleaned

properly. He had no other excuses so he used the excuse of the house chores to fight with me. He was very cruel to me, he never missed a chance of hitting me and beating me up, even for the smallest things I had done and he did not like. He pulled my hair; he hit me and punched me. I was so desperate.”

In many of these relationships, the fact that sex is unwanted is most often not known to anyone, not even to the husband; “He never asks me if I would like to make love to him or not; he just does it. This is one of his traditions: never asks the woman. Also, he never accepts to use contraceptives... I am not sure if he has any relationship outside our marriage, maybe he does. This is also a normal thing, according to tradition,” says Lira, 28 years old and mother of two.

By forcing or threatening women to have sex, by insinuating or actually having a sexual relationship with another woman, husbands not only cause their wives to feel emotionally, physically and sexually inadequate, but also confusions about their identity as women.

## Social isolation

“He likes to have authority over his wife, because he believes this is how a man should be. I have been constantly abused, even for going to my parents’ house. I was isolated from my family. I didn’t talk to my sister for 15 years because he didn’t want me to. I could only go to my parents’ for short visits. I could only go to visit my cousins accompanied by my husband, never alone.” (Inis, 46 years old, married and mother of two, worker from Tirana).

Physical violence is very often accompanied by attempts to control the wife’s social interactions, to monitor her movements. Some male partners attempted to restrict the respondents’ activities in various ways, such as limiting contact with family and friends, accusing them of paying too much attention to other people or things, and prohibiting respondents from going to work. A 31-year-old woman says: “At the beginning, he allowed me to go and visit my parents, but after a while, he

prevented me from doing this. Imagine, both our families live in Tirana and yet, we are only able to see one another very rarely. There were many cases when I insisted that I wanted to go to see my mother, but he locked me inside the house. He used to do that almost everyday. There were cases when he was outside Tirana and I spent the whole week locked inside the house. My mother came to see me through the window. She wanted to call the police, but I did not agree. My mother and my neighbours provided

me with food through the window.... It was impossible to talk to friends. I had two friends at work, but after a while I lost contact with them. He never allowed me to have a friend or to invite a friend to my house. I was always isolated, alone at home, being only his. This was his goal."

Another woman, 50 years old, divorced, living in Berat, notes: "When I found a job in a pharmacy, I was very happy. However, my happiness did not last too long, because he started threatening me. *"I don't want to see you accompanied by her (a colleague from work) anymore," "She is chatty," "She is a bitch."* etc. Once, after I returned from my job, the very moment I entered the room, he began beating and kicking me. He shouted: *"Didn't I ask you not to be accompanied by the pharmacy's bitches any more? Why don't you follow my orders?"*

Social isolation as an aspect of domestic violence is complex. The abuser may impose isolation in an effort to control the woman. On the other hand, the abused woman might create the conditions for her own isolation because of her helplessness and hopelessness. Ariola, a cleaning lady in Tirana and mother of two, notes: "He always tried to isolate me from society. I could not visit friends. My work schedule was from 7:00 to 3:00, and he wanted me to be at home at 3 sharp. If I would be only one minute late, he would start beating, kicking,

and hitting me with his fists. He has humiliated me in front of my colleagues."

To avoid violence, many women censor their behaviour to suit what they think their partners will find acceptable. A young married woman of 28, unemployed, states: "He does not want me to use make up, nor to wear nice clothes. What upsets me the most is that he wants me to be an isolated person, a person that does all the domestic work and avoids all contacts with the outside world. I always have to ask his permission if I want to go out. He controls me and isolates me, but he's never had to lock me inside the house, because I've been obedient."

Social isolation of the woman can be a risk factor for domestic violence, preceding the onset of abuse. It is also a strategy of abusive partners to increase their control, and it reduces women's ability to leave abusive relationships. A 26-year-old woman residing in Tirana says, "Many times, he locked me inside the house, pretending that he was taking care of me, interested in not waking me up in case I was sleeping when he would return home. He ordered his nephews and nieces to watch all my movements throughout the day." Another young woman recounts: "I was hit by my husband because I left the house. I need to go out, I cannot live in a prison. He came home and started yelling at me, asking why I had gone out."

## Economic abuse

*"My husband did not work on a regular basis. Sometimes he worked, and sometimes he just used to hang out. He didn't care about earnings. I was responsible for making money and taking care of the financial problems of the family. Nevertheless, I was never allowed to keep and take care of the money. He kept it all, but if we needed to borrow some, I had to do that. If I couldn't get it, he would hit me. He took my salary or the loans, and he went and spent it on drinking or gambling. (Oriola, 40-year-old lawyer, divorced, mother of two).*

Economic abuse is another form of abuse in which women are the primary victims. Men have traditionally controlled and dominated the financial assets of the family, and have retained the power to make financial decisions within the

family. The abuser's tactics of financially dominating his wife are diverse. A 32-year-old woman, worker in Berat, recounts: "Whenever we run short of money, my husband forced me to ask for money from my father or my brothers.

I felt embarrassed for asking for loans so frequently. When I refused to do it, my husband would beat me. One day he wanted 2 million Lek from my father in order to do some work on the doors and the windows of the house. I did not want to ask for the money, but he convinced me. So, we both went to my parents' house. When we were getting ready to leave, he whispered into my ear: *God helps you if you haven't said anything about the money to your father.* I had gotten a million Lek (USD 7,500) from my father, but I did not tell that to my husband. On way back home he was breathing heavily like a horse. When we entered the house and he asked me if I had got the money, I had the courage of telling him: *Go to work as all others do.* At that moment he got very angry, and began to beat and kick me. In order to stop him I showed him money that I had got from my father. When he saw the money he was surprised and very pleased."

As women reported, economic or financial abuse involves the control of the use and availability of money, preventing her participation in money-spending decisions and refusing to give her money for basic household necessities. Even in the cases where the woman's financial status outside the home is better than that of the man, the husband continues to control financial resources. Women's economic contributions to the family did not reduce or influence the dominant position of their husbands within the family. A worker from Tirana, mother of three, says: "I was always sad because he argued with me, and got mad at me every time for the same reason: money. My eyes were bruised most of the time as a result of his violence towards me. My husband came home drunk, and he used to spend all the money I had earned on alcohol. When I had no money to give him, he used to yell at me in front of everybody, and to beat me." Another woman, 37 years old, mother of two, notes: "He had a job, but all the money he earned was spent on drinking. Furthermore, he used to spend the money with his friends buying knives, big knives, the illegal ones. As far I know, he used to buy guns too. Most of the time, he spent money only for himself, not for the family. He used to leave the house in the

middle of the night, taking all the money in the house and spending it all. It was quite common for him to come to my workplace and ask me for money, which he was going to spend on drinking. I used to give it to him, because I was ashamed to argue with him at work."

Women's narratives reveal that their husbands often beat them and take what they earn. Rudina, a 36-year-old divorced woman from Berat, recalls: "He wanted to take all my salary, but I didn't want to give all the earnings to him. I had to take care of my kids and myself, so I refused to give him the money. Then he hit me, took the money and did not come home for two weeks." Another woman, 62 years old, resident of Tirana, describes the last episode of violence: "He used to get angry and become violent because my salary was not enough to cover all the expenses. A few days ago, I had no money to give him, so he beat me, and hurt my eye so bad that I could have lost my eyesight. As you can see my eye is still black. I had to go to the hospital to have my eye taken care of, and there I was referred to the counseling centre."

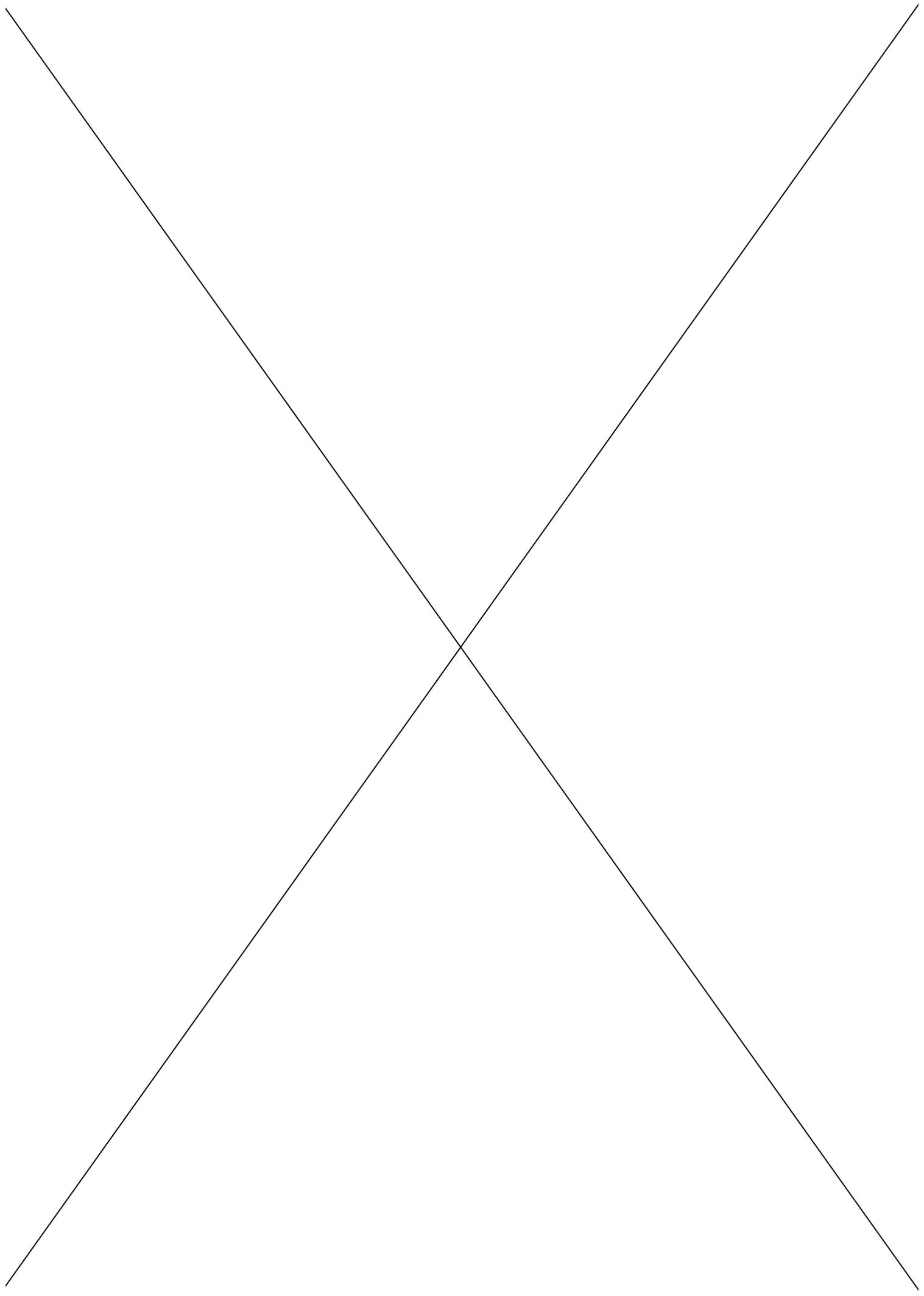
Nine women (16%) report that their partner did not let them to have money of their own. A 44-year-old worker says: "I had no money for my own personal needs when we lived together. I gave him my salary and he gave me money to buy bread and food." Another woman, 45 years old, mother of two, working as jeweler, shares the same experience: "I have a job, but I am not free, he keeps all the money. He doesn't think of us and of the things we need."

In two cases, economic abuse includes preventing the woman from working outside the home and earning an independent income. A 40-year-old woman, mother of three, resident of Shkodra, says: "He didn't let me work. He didn't allow me to leave the house." Physical violence can have adverse effects on the woman's economic status. "Sometimes I could not go to work because of the injuries caused by violence. I felt ashamed to go to work when my face was all bruised and scared" notes a 44-year-old woman, mother of two, working in Berat. Financial domination, like psychological, physical and sexual abuse, has important

negative effects on women's emotional, social and physical well-being.

The experience of violence itself is the salient aspect of women's accounts of partner's abuse. Victims of partner violence report a range of abusive acts. They primarily talk about physical abuse, but in almost all of the cases, husband violence also includes psychological, sexual, social and economic components. Abuse occurs in several ways, all interrelated. Violence against women runs along a continuum, often

escalating from milder forms to more serious acts. The majority of women are abused by their partners several times. This situation is due to their husbands' strong adherence to traditional attitudes favouring dominant and subordinate relations between husbands and wives. It appears that patriarchal mentality is a key factor supporting sustained violence in the home. The variation across individual cases and combinations of components of domestic violence is too large to allow establishment of a profile of either victim or perpetrator.





# BEING AN ABUSED WOMAN

"I cry for hours and hours and I have no support at all. I've always wondered how I could become stronger in order to endure all these things and not give up. I am always stressed and I can't sleep. I am afraid that my daughter might suffer as well. I feel like a slave. I feel an inferior human being, and I think that divorcing my husband would only make me feel worse. I've considered committing suicide. I don't see any solutions. These husbands should stop acting like monsters." (Inis, 46 years old, married and mother of two, worker in Tirana).

Recurrent physical violence coupled with emotional, sexual and economic abuse has multiple effects on women. Among all variations in forms of abuse and situational contexts in which women are victimized, partners seem to use violence to deprive women of their physical, psychological and social integrity and well-being. Many informants mention multiple consequences of violence, both physical and psychological. For six women the burden of abuse is so great that they consider taking their own lives. Phrases such as: "I feel so tired. Sometimes I think that it would be better for me to die than live in such conditions." (Eli, married and mother of three). "Sometimes I think of killing myself but I feel sorry for my kids. They are innocent." (Etleva, married and mother of two). A similar experience is recounted by another woman, schoolteacher in Tirana and mother of one: "When night came I was beginning to feel anxious. I had breathing difficulties and my heart was beating really hard. I thought of committing suicide, by taking some poison. The doctor recommended me to take medication. I needed it."

## Body and violence

Seven participants report that their partner's physical violence caused them injuries and fractures that needed medical intervention and long-term treatment. A few point out that the violent event could have resulted in their death. More commonly, informants mention bruises and lesions as physical consequences of violence. For example, a 33-year-old mother of

two, worker in Berat, notes: "I had bruises on my face, my head was swollen, my eyebrow was bleeding. I had to ask the nurse to come home and take care of my wounds." Another woman from Shkodra, mother of two and unemployed, says: "I am so tired. My body is always bruised. My husband comes home and it is his hobby to hit me, kick me and call me names."

But injuries are not the only physical outcomes of male violence. Abuse leads to a number of physical ailments, including irritable bowel syndrome, gastrointestinal disorders, hypertension and various pain syndromes. Violence during pregnancy ended in miscarriage in the case of two of the women whose partners had punched them. One respondent mentioned premature labour. In addition, a few informants note that sexual abuse caused unwanted pregnancies. One woman mentions being infected with sexually transmitted infections.

Some women feel emotionally exhausted and became detached from their bodies. This type of mental detachment is common among survivors of abuse. Susana, 34 years old, married, worker in Tirana and mother of one: "My body is numb. I do not feel anything, as if my body were not mine". Another married woman, 33 years old, says: "I don't feel anything about myself any more. My heart has changed into a stone."

## Dealing with trauma

The quotation in the vignette exemplifies the range of severe consequences of domestic

violence on women's health. It is understandable that a woman who has developed a sense of helplessness and hopelessness as a result of being abused has a difficult time mobilizing herself to leave the relationship. Inis' account (see the vignette) illustrates the processes through which an abused woman becomes demoralized, de-energized and trapped in the abusive relationship. Suzana lives a similar experience: "I am scared and I feel lonely. I cry a lot because I am alone and I am not strong enough to do anything."

Not surprisingly, women experiencing physical, psychological or sexual assault, suffer from emotional distress. Edit, married and mother of one, worker in Tirana states: "I have headaches, I cannot sleep at all. I am always scared when he comes home. I am afraid of him; I am afraid to spend a whole afternoon with him." Denada, worker in Shkodra and mother of one, notes: "I can not sleep because I am scared. I watch TV all the time and I get very anxious as the time for my husband to come home gets close. He doesn't have a set time of getting home, he can return at any hour of the night. So, I am always under pressure and scared about what will happen when he comes home."

The partners' degrading verbal remarks often erode the woman's self-esteem and sense of competence as a person, woman, worker, wife and mother. Many women consider the psychological consequences of abuse to be even more serious than its physical effects. A divorced woman, 37 years old says: "I felt like his slave, like I was an abnormal person. I felt oppressed and I am always scared. Even now I suffer from headaches and I am depressed." A 54-year-old widow, medical doctor and mother of two, comments: "There were days when I felt useless; I had no self-respect; I was depressed, but since I was a doctor I could take medication without having to talk about my problems to anybody. I tried not to show my sufferings. I stopped visiting my colleagues in order to avoid any discussion about my depression." The process of abuse gradually alters women's views of themselves, their relationships and their place in the world. "I feel scared, and I

consider my existence in this world as futile. Above all, I am afraid of my husband, and I also feel embarrassed in front of others," says a 28-year-old married woman, mother of two.

The informants, discussing the psychological consequences of physical, emotional and sexual conjugal violence, most frequently mention that they feel anxious and depressed. Other health problems incurred by abused women include fatigue, backaches, headaches, restlessness and the inability to sleep. A divorced woman, 36-year-old resident in Berat, says: "I had serious sleeping problems. I couldn't sleep all night long. I had to take pills in order to manage to get some sleep. I used to stay up thinking about what I was going to do with my life." Depression, an important risk factor for suicidal thoughts and acts, is often mentioned by women. Another divorced woman, 28 years old, recounts: "I felt very sad, I was really depressed. I think back and I cannot understand how I managed to walk, to work, to live."

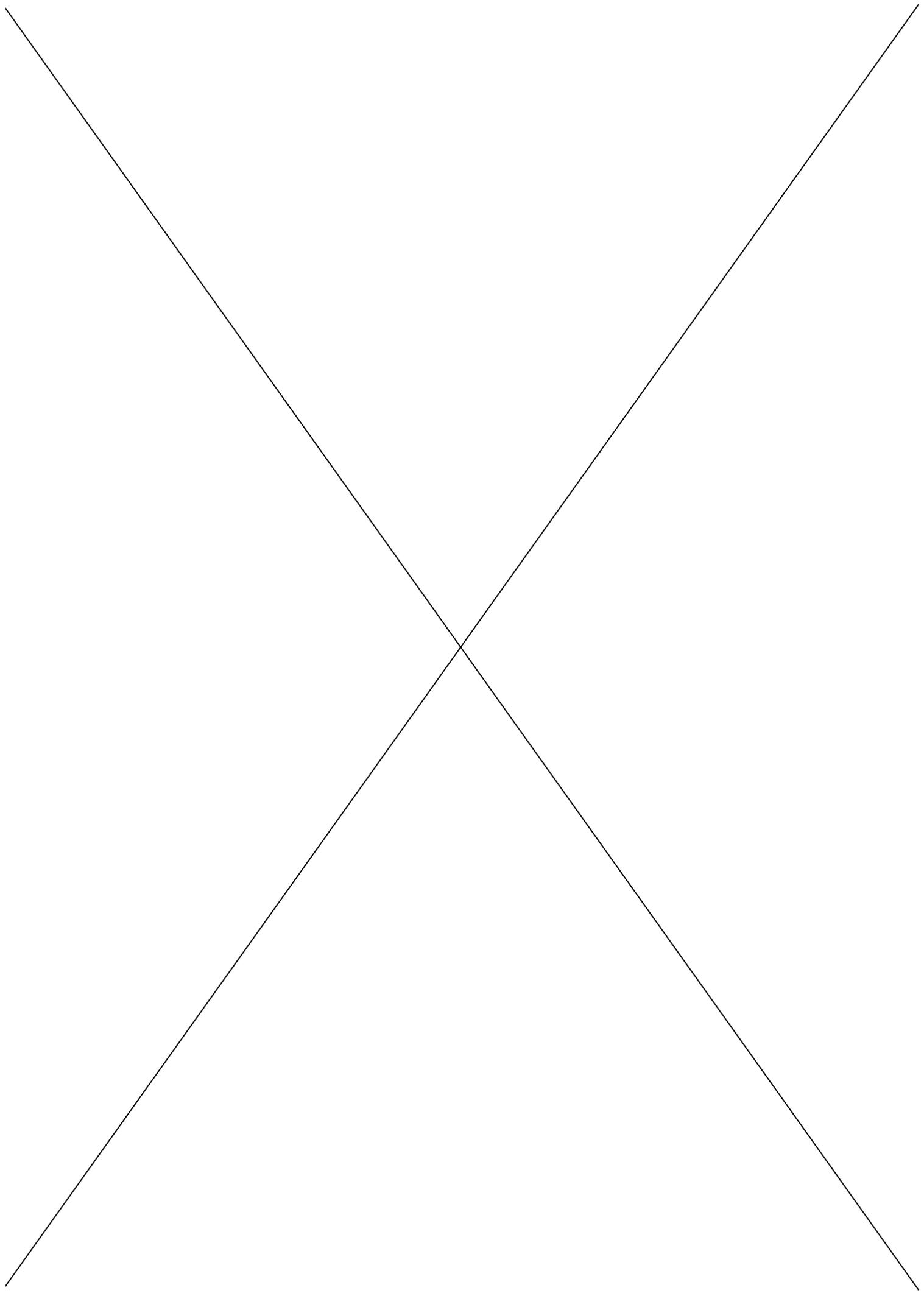
Many abused women experience post-traumatic stress disorder, an acute anxiety disorder that can occur when people go through or witness a traumatic event in which they feel overwhelming helplessness or threat of death. Symptoms include mentally reliving the traumatic event through flashbacks, or "flooding"; trying to avoid anything that would remind one of the trauma; becoming emotionally numb; experiencing sleeping and concentration difficulties; and being easily alarmed or startled. Diana, a divorced woman of 50, comments: "It is many years since I've divorced and yet, I have vivid memories of those years. He destroyed my youth; he ruined my body and wanted to destroy my personality as well. I am sorry for having tears in my eyes every now and then, but I am sure you understand; my youth is gone and will never come back again." A schoolteacher in Tirana, 44 years old, says: "I am taking sedatives because I can't sleep very well. Even when he behaves normally, I am still in a state of alert and anxiety because he might go out and drink with friends and then come back home and start the same thing over again."

### Living with the consequences

Domestic violence directly or indirectly isolated some women from their support network. They gradually curtailed social activities, either on the partners' demands, out of embarrassment or in order not to make family and friends worry. A woman, resident in Shkodra, mother of one, notes: "I have become an unfriendly person, introverted and passive. I cannot follow my friends' discussions; I can't take part in their joy. I am always anxious about what I will find at home." The consequences of experiencing violence also include an inability to undertake work or daily activities, as a divorced woman says: "I was constantly irritated, I couldn't work. I was rejecting my friends. I was constantly trying to hide the truth from my family." Denisa, 37 years old, married and mother of one, elaborates: "Violence influences me in different ways. I try to be a good mother, but violence does not allow you to pay great attention to your children, because you feel psychologically exhausted after having been beaten by your husband or having a fight with him. Of course violence also influences your work, since you

cannot work the way you want to; your hands do one thing, but your mind is absent. Violence influences your social relations too, because you are sad, introverted. When everybody is laughing you cannot do the same, as you think of what is happening to you and your husband. You don't have the energy to enjoy any activities or your free time, because you don't get the permission from the person who beat you up the night before."

Domestic violence has profound consequences on women's overall well-being. The experience of domestic abuse puts women at greater risk of physical and mental health problems including injuries, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, sleep disorders, low self-esteem, loss of confidence in life and suicidal tendencies. The influence of domestic violence can persist long after the abuse has stopped. The more severe the abuse, the more severe its impact on women's physical and mental health. The impact of different types of abuse and multiple episodes over time appears to be cumulative. In its most extreme form, domestic violence kills women.



# WORRYING ABOUT THE CHILDREN

"He abused the kids as well. I didn't care if he loved me or not. The only thing I wanted from him was at least to love his kids. He did not like our first son at all, because people used to say that he looked like me. Children should feel happy, not scared when their father comes home. My kids were afraid of their father. When he came home they were silent. One day, when my husband was beating me, my older son took the knife and wanted to kill his father, but I managed to stop him in time. Quite often, my son used to tell me "I'd rather die." (Rudina, 36-year-old, divorced and mother of three, unemployed, resident in Berat).

Children are profoundly affected by living in an environment of violence, fear or intimidation, whether or not they actually experience physical abuse. Nineteen women (34%) report that their husbands repeatedly physically abused their children. The women express their concern about the effects violence has on their children's lives. A divorced woman says: "He used to beat my daughter and son and yell at them for no reason. Most of the time, when he fought with me, he used to hit the children as well. He never talked nicely to them. My kids don't know what having a loving, caring father means." Another mother comments: "When children see their father come home drunk, scream, beat their mother, even if they are not directly harmed, they are still abused, because they see, feel and remember more things than adults do, and they can become introverted suffering inside. My children are traumatized."

## Children as victims

The abusive husband and father victimizes children in different ways. Children become alternative targets of male control and dominance. A young woman, mother of two recounts: "He also abuses our daughter; it is not physical violence, but psychological. He puts pressure on her by asking her: *Tell your dad where your mom has been*, and so on. She is afraid. If I ask him to leave her alone, he begins hitting me.... My daughter has witnessed many violent scenes as he abused me in front of our children. This is the form of violence practised on the children."

Mothers appear concerned to protect their children against the fathers' anger and violence, as one divorced lawyer, mother of two, says: "I couldn't afford thinking about ways to protect myself against my husband's violence. I had to think about my children a thousand times more. When he came home and he was very loud, my children often pretended they were sleeping. They first assessed the situation. If he was quiet they slowly came, one by one, into the kitchen. If he was angry, they continued to pretend they were sleeping. It was a terrible situation." Another mother of five notes: "I never cry in front of my children when I am abused by my husband. I do not want to stress them. When he was beating me I used to send the children away so they would not see the scene, but they were staying behind the window and listening to everything."

In other situations children are those who defend their mother. A 43-year-old mother of three says: "My children have often fought with their father. To tell the truth, they try to stop him most of the time, they try to defend me." There is a risk that children who witnesses violence as a means of resolving conflicts might turn out to use violence themselves, as in the following example: "It is very difficult for children to see their parents having problems. It was difficult for my children to see me in that condition because of their father. They hated him when they saw my face bleeding. My son wanted to hit his father in order to defend me. I got between them. I felt bad about my child wanting to hurt his father, even though I was being terribly abused by him."

## Difficulties in parenting

Abused women reflect on how the partner's violence affects their parenting abilities. They are aware that domestic violence has negative outcomes on their mother role. Women express their wish to exert more self-control in their relationship with the children, and not to transfer their stress to them. They also express the desire to compensate the negative effects of family violence. A mother of two, unemployed, living in Shkodra, says: "My children are witnessing terrible scenes, and I am afraid that when they grow up they will imitate their father. We live in a small house, with one room and a kitchen. So, the children see and hear everything that's going on in the house. Quite often, after I am hit, they are beaten as well. I have done that sometimes myself, because I was so angry and didn't know what to do. Now I am more careful with them. I cry, I get sad, but I do not beat my children anymore. They are innocent." Another mother of three, 44 years old, recalls: "I was very stressed all the time, and because of that, I used to shout at my children. I was angry with him, but I couldn't yell at him, because I was afraid he would beat me. So I took the stress out on my children. Sometimes I used to smack them, but now that they have grown up, they have forgiven me for that, especially my daughter who is also a mother."

## Losing the innocence of childhood

Children who are abused themselves or who witness violence between their parents develop many cognitive, emotional and behavioural problems. Women worry about how family violence psychologically affects their children. A young mother of two states: "My children are always afraid that something very bad might happen. The oldest son is often anxious and very tense. He is not very outgoing and often disturbs the other children, breaks their toys."

Abused children are less likely to have many friends or participate in outdoor activities, and they have difficulties in their relationships with others. Children also experience guilt and shame about the abuse. The following phrases illustrate these effects: "My children feel really bad and they cry when their father is violent.

They isolate themselves in their world, because there is nothing else they can do." (Vera, mother of three, resident in Berat), "My daughter is not like other children of her age. She does not like to speak too much. She never goes out to play with her friends. I've noticed she is distant with other children. She prefers to stay indoors, she likes to draw, but when her father comes home she is very scared of him" (Ariana, mother of one, resident in Tirana). "Children see their father coming home completely drunk, with no money left, and that makes them lose their respect for him. Our son cannot endure seeing his father like that. The girls have become more introverted, they do not speak with others, do not go out, they are sad most of the time." (Jonida, mother of three, resident in Shkodra).

Some children witnessing intimate violence develop psychosomatic complaints such as headaches and abdominal pains. They also display regressive behaviours such as bedwetting and sleep disturbances. A divorced mother of two says: "My son was only 4 years old when my husband started beating him with his belt before sending him to kindergarten. He was so scared that he used to shake while sleeping and wet the sheets."

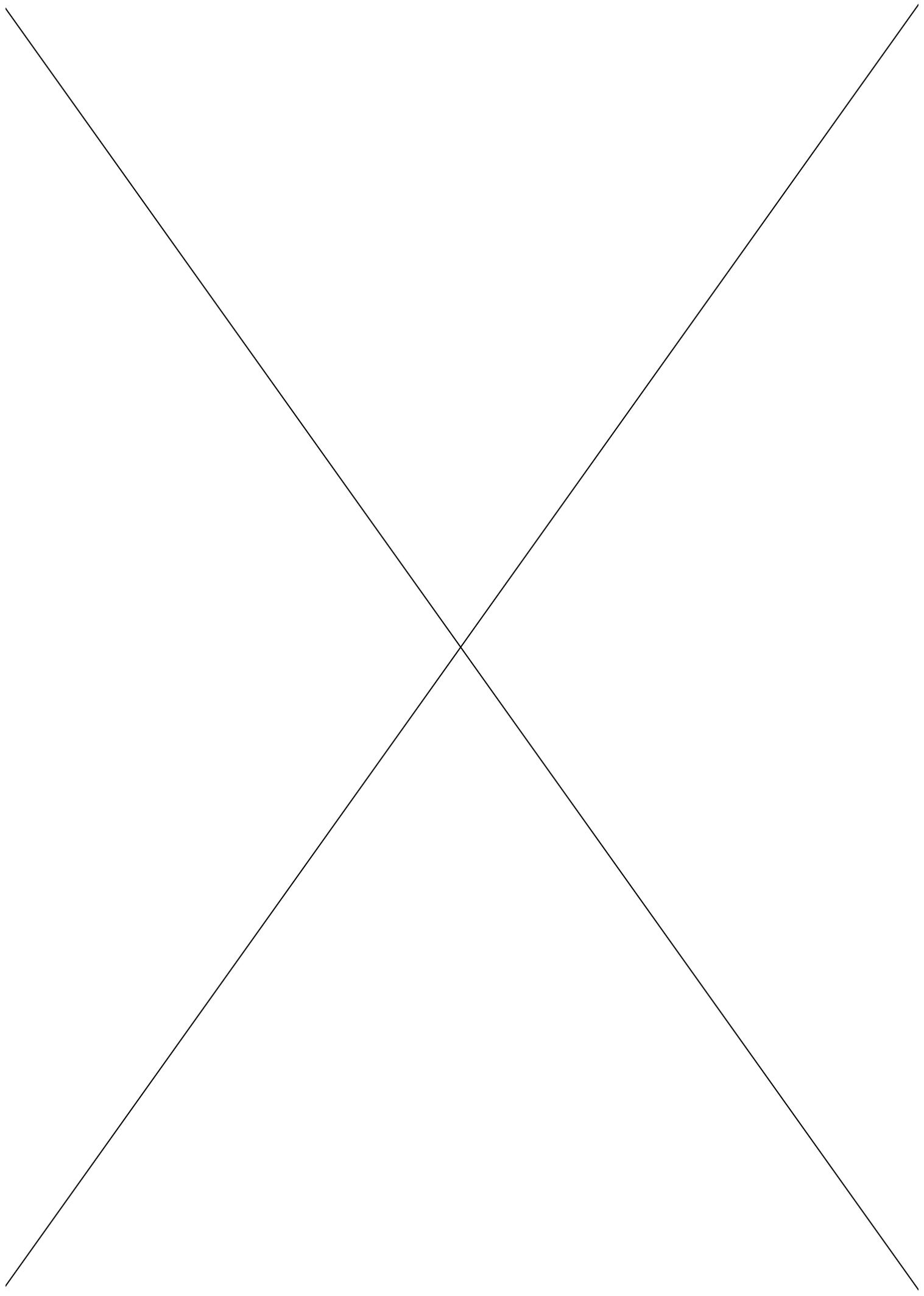
Informants comment on how their children externalize behaviours such as fighting, bullying or lying. The tendency to yell, irritability, hiding, is reported by their mothers. Children are also more disobedient at home and at school, and have poor school performance. A mother of one says: "My son is aggressive with other children. If things do not happen the way he wants them to, he becomes angry and beats other children. At home, he throws things on the floor... He models his father's behaviour." Another mother of five notes: "My children became aggressive with other children. One of my sons gets angry even for small things... My younger son has the same habits as his father. When he is angry, he breaks things, such as glasses. It is very difficult to calm him down in those moments."

Mothers are most concerned that their sons will repeat the violent behaviour of their fathers, as a mother of three recounts: "The child behaves the same way as his father. I realized this when my son would ask me for money. If I didn't give

him any, he began shouting, insisting he wanted the money he was asking for." Another mother complains about her young son's problems with alcohol abuse.

Domestic violence has profound effects upon children. Behavioural effects include aggression and social withdrawal, among others. Psychological effects include anxiety,

depression, low self-esteem and lower level of school and social competence. There is also evidence of long-term effects, such as substance abuse. Few women state that violence has no effect on their children. The majority are aware, and they attempt to address the negative effects of violence on their parenting abilities, as well as the direct effects on the children.



# COPING WITH VIOLENCE

"I have been maltreated during all 20 years of my marriage. During the last two or three years I have been a regular client of the women's counseling centre. Now the violence is worse than it was before, and the scars on my face are a real evidence of that. So, I decided to divorce, even though he keeps pleading, asking me not to do that. I need to think about the future of my child and about my future too. (Silvana, 40 years old, teacher in Tirana, divorced and mother of one.)

The findings indicate that women use several strategies for coping with the abusive situation: understanding, enduring, avoiding, hoping, reframing, compromising and leaving. Social, cultural, familial and personal factors interact to constitute the specific coping process of each abused woman. Possible determinants of the selection of a strategy include: the woman's beliefs about marriage and family, the frequency of violence and her idea of what causes it, the presence of children, her economic security and her support network. Some factors contribute to maintaining women in abusive relationships as victims, while another set of factors propels women to challenge the violence.

## Making sense of violence

"There are many reasons explaining violence: first, the lack of living space. We had two rooms and a kitchen and were in the same household with two brothers-in-law, my father-in-law and three kids. Second, the economical situation, the transition and the job shortage on the labour market. When I lost my job, my husband started drinking and gambling. Then, he started using violence on our children and me. I think the crucial cause generating violence is poverty, when there is no money, the husband starts using violence on his wife. Then there is jealousy and unemployment too." (Jonida, 40-year-old married mother of three, worker in Shkodra)

Usually, an important step in taking the decision to leave a violent partner is the process of understanding the causes of abuse. Domestic violence is attributed by women to a wide range of factors: individual (psychological problems, frequent use of alcohol, or jealousy); family context (male control of financial resources,

lack of economic means, intergenerational conflicts); community (women's isolation and lack of social support); cultural norms (male model linked to toughness, male honour or dominance that legitimizes men's violence, traditional gender role rigidly defined and enforced, acceptance of violence as a means of settling interpersonal disputes and the perception that men have the "ownership" of women); and societal factors (social stress, poverty, unemployment).

Although informants identify multiple causes of domestic violence, and many of these causes are mentioned as interrelating, they tend to explain the abuse within a discourse that emphasizes the rapid social changes that have occurred in Albania since 1991. Forty six women (83%) see violence as a social problem that springs from a society out of balance, caught between tradition and modernity. Some men cannot cope with these social changes and new pressures. This means that the responsibility for violence is externalized by many informants. Susana, 34-year-old married mother of one and worker in Tirana, explains: "It's unemployment that causes these problems. Even if you are employed, the salaries are very low, whereas the prices are very high, and it is normal that all this creates problems between spouses. There has been too much stress during this last decade. Half of the couples of Tirana have divorced."

Living in poverty generates stress and frustrations, and a sense of inadequacy in men for having failed to live up to their culturally defined role of "bread winner". Albanian men, caught between two worlds and marked by stress, have lost their sense of identity and self-worth. They may view their home as the last

bastion of male authority. Frustrations are released in the home, with women and children being the most common victims. Evis, 40-year-old mother of three and worker in Shkodra, says: "I think that economical factors cause domestic violence. A good financial situation prevents violence. Violence is completely avoidable in cases where financial security is present." As many women mention, men are just acting out the anger and pain accumulated through confrontation with social stress. A married mother of five, resident in Tirana, adds: "The precarious economic situation causes a lot of problems and a lot of stress. Men start drinking and making big scandals at home."

Another frequently cited cause of domestic violence, mentioned by 21 women, is the alcohol abuse of perpetrators. As one 37-year-old mother of two states: "After he would drink lot of alcohol, he used to hit me with anything he could find." Denada, worker in Shkodra, married mother of two, explains: "Drinking is one of the main reasons [for violence] because men no longer know what they are doing. I really think that the first thing Albanian men think of when they wake up in the morning is drinking liquor. I think that they should pass a rule for bars not to serve liquor in the morning. It would be better to prohibit the selling of alcohol because it is destroying people's lives. I have lived with an alcoholic for 12 years, and I can tell you they really don't know what they do."

According to 16 informants, jealousy on the part of the aggressor can provoke violent behaviour too. "He was very jealous. He was ready to start a conflict any moment. He got to the point of threatening that he would cut parts of my body with scissors," reveals a young woman of 28, mother of two. Another married mother of three says: "He used to become violent when he was jealous, if I were to dress up or use a little make up when we went for a walk together. I never try to change my look now, as this might cause problems. There have been cases when he used physical violence with me just because of a small misunderstanding." Another woman, resident in Tirana recounts a similar experience: "At the very beginning we had a good relationship, as any normal couple, but soon

after, arguments, fights and violence began. The main reason was jealousy. As a result of his jealousy, I was forced to leave my job. He also used to lock me in the house. Then he started drinking, and would not renounce this habit, which led to alcohol addiction. From my perspective, alcohol and jealousy were the main reasons for our fights."

Three women attribute their partners' violence to psychological factors. In this sense domestic violence is constructed as the product of dysfunctional emotions, such as depression or low self-esteem. This focus on the causes of violence at the individual level involves a justification for violent acts, acts that are beyond the perpetrator's control. Perpetrators are thus believed to be in despair, to act because of emotional problems and mental instability. Acts of violence are perceived as the result of bottled-up feelings of anxiety, frustration or anger. Elona, 40-year-old mother of three, says: "My poor husband doesn't do all this because he wants to, but because he is desperate. Most men hit their wives because of their state of depression, like my husband does."

Another cause of violent behaviour was ascribed by our informants to "machismo", which implies that in these women's opinion, men are violent simply because they are men, as a 42-year-old woman explains: "Men are violent by nature, so there is nothing you can do to change them. For seven years I tried to do something to help my husband, but he got worse." A divorced young woman of 22 states: "Violence is in his blood." Another woman, a pharmacist, comments: "I think that the main reason of violence is male ego and lack of tolerance." This understanding of male violence is based on psychobiological explanations, in which men are constructed as naturally aggressive. One 20-year-old woman, unemployed in Tirana, says: "Men like to fight for nothing. They want to do everything according to their wishes and likes, and they like to be superior to their wives." Another woman, unemployed in Berat, explains: "I think some men are born to be violent. Violence cannot be explained through economic situation or financial factors, because when he had money, he behaved even worse."

Some informants also mentioned that pressure from other people, such as the mother-in-law, could lead to a violent situation. After being repeatedly denigrated, three women began blaming themselves for the abuse and failure of their relationship. They expressed the belief that they had probably not been good enough wives; Silvana, a school teacher, felt she was to blame for the abuse: "I often considered myself guilty. I never said anything and I always apologized to him. I used to cry all night. Then, I realized that it was not my fault."

Other women could not reach an understanding of domestic violence, as Milva, a married mother of two says: "I worry, because I don't know the reasons causing violence; I am only aware that it happens, without being able to understand why." Manjola, 46-year-old technician in Tirana, states: "I often ask myself what the reasons for the violence in our family, because anything is a reason for him. He is the only one who knows why he behaves this way." Etleva, 23 years old and unemployed in Shkodra, expresses a similar confusion: "I have often asked myself this question, but never found an answer. I think it has more to do with his nature. He is a violent person, there is no other reason. We live with our two kids and nobody interferes with our life. We have a normal financial situation, he has a job...but he is still violent."

When women try to reflect upon violence and explain it within the Albanian context, the majority turn to social factors as a main explanatory framework. Women articulate a systemic understanding of violence as a product of dysfunctional social relations rather than dysfunctional individuals. They invoke poverty, high rate of social stress, unbalanced society, polarity between poor and rich people, between tradition and modernity. Men's violence towards women is represented as one of many social diseases. The assumption that men act violently out of transitional stress depicts them as true victims of social changes. In this respect, the gendered nature of violence is not consistently reflected. The fact that domestic violence is not really perceived as a gendered phenomenon has serious implications for violence prevention programme. To combat the problem of violence

against women, it is imperative to change the socialization of men and women in order to become more aware of the gender discrimination existing in Albania.

### Feeling trapped

"I am one of those women who are being abused and cannot do anything against it. The main reason is not having a house. Where can I go with three children? I cannot go to my parents; I don't have a job, and I don't have money so it is still better to stay where I am abused." (Aferdita, 27-year-old married mother of three, unemployed in Tirana)

It is well known that in a patriarchal society, women are socialized to accept responsibility to ensure a successful marriage. This way, women are entrapped in the patriarchal structures of family and go to great lengths to save their home and marriage. As women are encouraged to maintain their family intact at all costs, it is not surprising that 30 out of the 55 women are still living with their abusive husbands. Nineteen informants explicitly mention "enduring" as a strategy to violence. For example, a 52-year-old married economist in Tirana states: "I think that the woman should sacrifice herself, because even if she marries another man, it would be the same story, were she not tolerant. The woman must maintain the balance in the family."

Many women in violent relationships suffer years of oppression because they are taught to live their lives according to traditional values. These women believe that they should try, as prescribed by their roles of wives and mothers, to keep the family together and restore the relationship by any means. A 46-year-old married mother of one, and worker in Tirana, explains: "The reason I have endured all the suffering for 27 years is that I do not want to destroy my family. I need to educate my daughter. I do not want my daughter's future husband to say that she is from a broken home. She will always know that her mother suffered and sacrificed herself in order to provide her with a proper education. I endured all the suffering out of love for my daughter." Juliana, unemployed, living in Tirana explains: "My

marriage was arranged, and I have three children as a result of this 22 years of marriage. My husband has been violent ever since the beginning of our marriage. According to his mentality, I am his property and he can do whatever with me. I endure so much only because of my children. Also, I have always hoped that his behaviour towards me would change."

Women feel committed to their role as mothers beyond any other consideration. These women link leaving the relationship or making drastic changes to a lack of commitment to their families. A worker in Tirana, mother of two, says: "I don't think divorcing and starting a new family is a good choice. The second family will not be better than the first one. I could not enjoy a new life if I would divorce and marry another one. I think I would suffer again in the new marriage."

Women perceive themselves as the main person responsible for the children's care and well being. They believe in sacrificing their individual interests for the sake of the family, as a 40-year-old woman explains: "I have three children with him, so I have to tolerate violence because of them. I hope he will change one day before the kids grow up. I believe in God, and I believe that one day God will change him for the sake of the children. It is not easy to divorce at this age, and with three children. Things are very hard for me, indeed, but it is better for the children to have their father than to grow up without him. One day they might ask me where their father is. It is impossible to divorce a husband after having three children with him. It is really very shameful."

Children are the main factor that makes women endure violence for a long time and not seek help. The fact that many of them believe that children need both parents, despite one being violent, keep them trapped in violent relationships. Women think that whatever the problems are, they have to be patient and obedient for the children's sake. They do not consider divorce to be a solution to their abusive situations. A 46-year-old woman, mother of two, says: "The advice I would like to give to other women who are in the same situation is to be patient until their children

grow up. We should protect our children, be patient and protect ourselves from the abuser. After the children are older we can deal with this problem." Another woman, age 36, mother of two, reveals: "If I thought divorce were the solution, I would have divorced him a long time ago, but I think that I would have destroyed my family if I divorced. My children would grow up without a father."

Women who choose to stay in abusive relationships develop diverse coping skills such as hoping and avoiding. As a result, they usually justify staying in a violent relationship thinking that men will change. Pranvera, a married mother of two, says: "I have been married for 20 years now, and I have been suffering since the day I got married. I live with hope, only because of my children." An abiding hope that "he will change" is also expressed by Denisa, 37-year-old civil servant in Shkodra and mother of two: "There is a proverb which states: 'Hope is the last thing to die'. I hope that one day he is going to change. I hope he is going to become the same man he used to be, and that he will quit drinking and gambling. I always hope he will change. I still hope for a better life."

Another coping strategy that women use is reframing and compromise. These strategies include keeping out of the husband's sight, refusing to engage in an argument initiated by the husband or simply leaving the home to avoid a probable violent incident. One woman, mother of three, says: "I have to go away when he comes home drunk. However, I am afraid that if I let him alone at home he will break everything in the house. What can I do? He is still my husband and the father of my children. A wife should tolerate this kind of behaviour because of the children and the family." Gentiana, 21-year-old mother of one, unemployed in Tirana, comments: "The woman has to be very tolerant with a violent husband. She has to be quiet when her husband is angry or drunk. She can talk to him about the problem afterwards, using a lot of tact. She has to try to explain to him what he has done. Women have no place to live in case of a divorce, they cannot go back to their parents...they have no support. That's why women have to bear a violent relationship."

As a way of coping, some women learn to avoid topics and behaviours that might provoke their husbands. Women begin to make concessions by thinking over their husbands' habits and behaviour patterns and by carefully controlling their own tempers. For example, one participant says: "I am an obedient person and I endure everything. I try to keep myself busy in order to avoid arguments." Another 50-year-old woman states: "Every time I hoped he would never do it again. Thus, we had quiet periods, with no conflicts, because I always tried avoiding them. After a while, though, he started doing the same all over again. It was a real torment." Some women attempt to keep peace by capitulating to their husbands' demands, as a 52-year-old married economist in Tirana, comments: "He behaved very badly, he was violent and hit me. I felt offended, humiliated. This wasn't a problem for him. I was the one to put everything behind, and act like I forgot, because my husband didn't even apologize. I waited two weeks for him to apologize but he didn't; I decided to tolerate everything because of the child. And it was the good thing to do."

A woman's response to abuse is often limited by the options available to her. Women consistently cite similar reasons for remaining in abusive relationships. Besides the concern for their children, they mention the lack of a house and other means of economic support, and lack of support from family and friends. **Very seldom, women seek legal intervention.** A married woman, mother of one, elaborates: "The main reason why a woman has to stay in a violent relationship is the economic factor. If she had another place to go, the problem would be easily solved, without being forced to let herself be violated. The second reason in most of the cases, is the children. Women would do everything for their children and they accept being beaten, because it is very difficult for a child to grow up without a father. The third reason for staying in a violent relationship is related to the public opinion."

Some women are aware of becoming trapped in their own feelings of powerlessness, helplessness and hopelessness, as a 31-year-old woman reveals: "It was terrible. I did nothing, I couldn't; I was powerless. I didn't say

anything. Being a fragile person, as any other woman in my condition I forgave him. What else could I do? I was pregnant and I didn't have any place to go with two children. I did not believe the police could resolve the situation. And even if they would, this would only be temporary. He would threaten me again. I couldn't go to my mother because of my stepfather." An unemployed mother of three, 44 years old, says: "There was nothing I could do. I knew from the first day we were married that I would stay with him no matter what price I had to pay." A worker in Berat, mother of three, adds: "I used to get very upset, but I kept it all inside. What could I do? This was my fate. You can't do anything against fate."

Women's lack of resources or insufficient resources for independent living and their concern about the welfare of their children prevent them from leaving the violent relationship. "I had to take him for a while, but at least I raised my children at home, not on the streets," says Fatjona, 38 years old mother of five. At the same time, shame and fear of social stigma often prevent women from reaching out for help. Some women say that they have never told anyone about their abuse, as the following example shows: "When he got angry he behaved like a beast. The day after he physically abused me first, he behaved as if nothing had happened. I decided to remain silent and not to say anything to anyone. I thought he would never do it again." Most respondents mention never having contacted the police. Drita, a married mother of two, states: "No, I never thought of denouncing him to the police. I was so tolerant ... He was my second husband, and I didn't know where to go if I divorced him. I could not go to my family."

There are women who suggest that family and friends do not understand their situation, so there is no use in asking them for help. The lack of understanding, shame, a history of abuse within the family of origin, and not wanting to disillusion their own family are among the factors that constrain women from disclosing their feelings. Lira, 28 years old, unemployed in Shkodra and mother of two, says: "I have told my parents about my husband's violence. They didn't see this as an unusual thing as it is

common in many families from Shkodra.” Another one recounts: “I have suffered a lot during my second marriage too. I have been physically abused, humiliated, but I haven’t had the courage to tell my parents anything. I know their answer. They would say: *“Go back to your husband. You divorced once, and a second*

*divorce would be a shame for our family.”*

Several women reported that their partners’ violence had intensified as a result of them trying to leave the relationship. Fear of an escalation of violence has further trapped many of the women in the abusive relationship.

## Negotiating a new identity

*“I’m a new person now; I’m a mother who enjoys living with her two children. I’m a mother of two children who are no longer scared. This is as a new start for me. Ever since I escaped his violence, I’m totally prepared to face all the challenges of life.” (Oriola, 40-year-old, lawyer, divorced, mother of two).*

Despite many obstacles, 19 out of the 55 (35%) women interviewed left their violent partners. The decision to leave was not easy for many women and was often accompanied by financial problems or confusion and worries over the effect of parental separation on children. A 23-year-old woman says: “During those moments of violence I instinctively thought just of defending myself. Later, I started thinking about potential ways to escape the situation, because I could not face it any more.” Another 20-year-old woman states: “I was not happy. I was facing a big problem, but I didn’t know what to do. I couldn’t stay with my husband anymore, but I couldn’t go back to my family either. My dad had made it clear to me: *If you marry him you have nothing to do with us anymore.* Life was unbearable for me. I suffered a lot and I decided to end that situation.”

The decision to leave the partner is usually not a sudden one. Leaving an abusive relationship is rather a process triggered by some specific situations: the violence becoming increasingly severe, more frequent, and more constant in the relationship; violence beginning to take a toll on children; coming to the conclusion that “he” is not going to change. For most women

the perception that their lives or their children’s lives were threatened was the main trigger to break the “helpless-hopeless” attitude and leave the relationship. Some interviewed women had left and returned several times before they finally decided to leave once and for all.

Women who decide to leave the abusive partner may also have to deal with some troubling behaviour on his part. He may become very apologetic and beg her to reconcile with him, he may promise to change or he may threaten to hurt or kill her, to gain custody of the children, to kidnap them or to harm them. Juliana, a mother of three, says: “Now I am under pressure, because his family is asking me to go back. I think that my children are big enough now to face life by themselves. I cannot endure violence anymore. Going back might cost me my life, because he cannot control himself.”

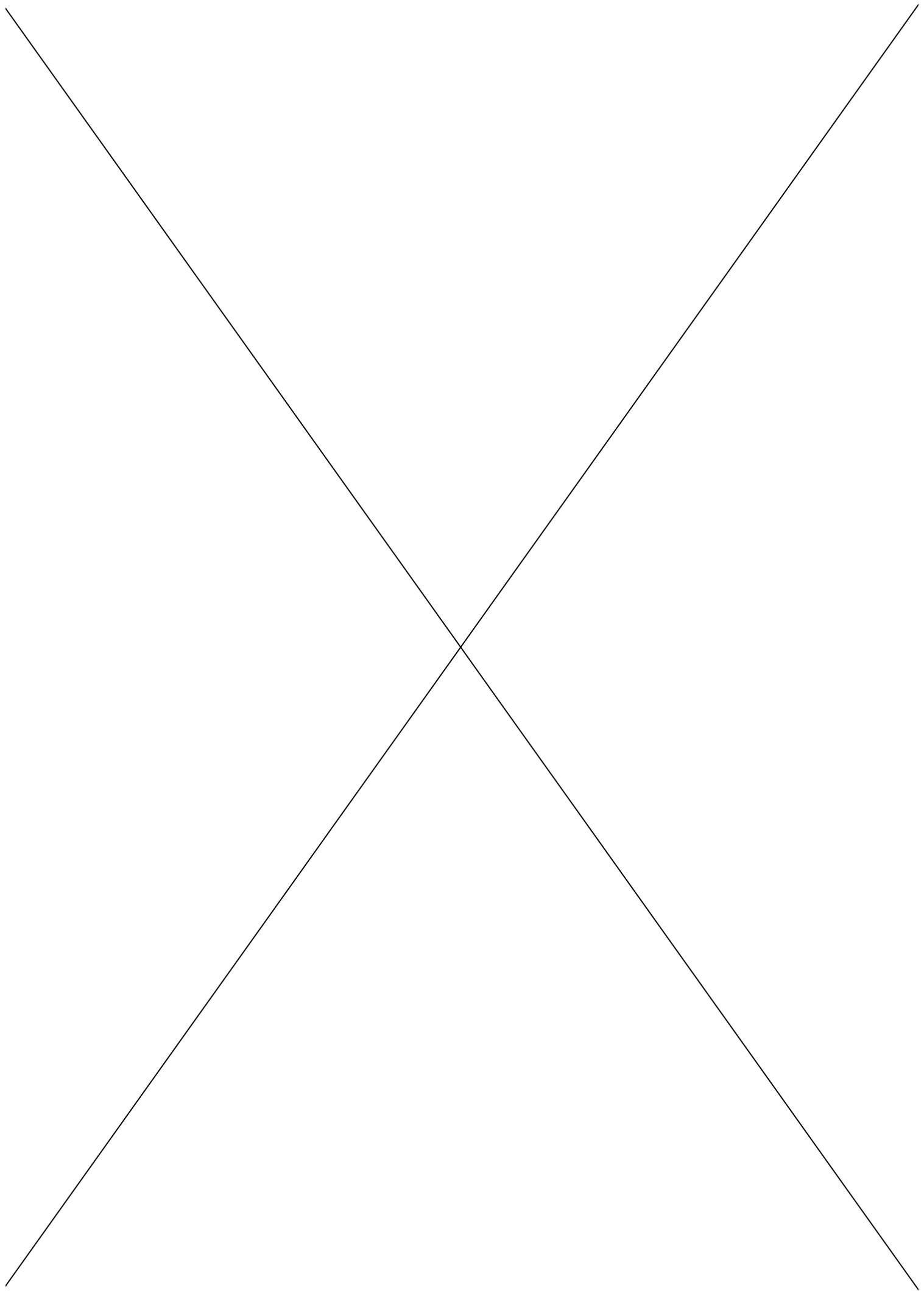
Divorce is one of the active coping strategies for women in abusive relationships. Dituri, a mother of six, states: “Finally I decided to divorce him. Now, I live only with my children. We don’t have very good living and economic conditions, but when I have the children close to

me, I feel I have everything." Many women who divorced were supported by their family members and friends, as in the following example: "It is horrible when a husband abuses his wife. I used to cry every night. It was unbearable to listen to him threatening me every day. I was also afraid of what would happen to me if I divorced him. I was afraid of others' opinion. I decided to find the force to fight against the violence and the public opinion. My parents supported my decision. I filed for divorce. He did not believe it; he thought I would always take his behaviour. I am finally living as a human being. I feel sorry for my son who has grown up without his father, but a violent father would have had a negative influence on him."

Many women mentioned the beneficial influence of divorcing a violent partner. They attempted to make sense of what had happened to them, and to better understand their inner worlds and how they could ultimately end their victimization. Rudina, unemployed in Tirana, reveals: "There have been situations when I wanted to kill him, especially when he brought his lovers into the same room where I lived. If I killed him I would be in prison now, for homicide. This is my advice to other abused women: if you suffer violence in your family, it is better to divorce than to kill your husband. I divorced him after 13 years of marriage and after having three kids with him. It would have been better to divorce him earlier. But anyway, I feel better now. I receive social help and assistance from my family, my neighbours. I can say that it is better to have financial problems than to suffer domestic violence."

Participants feel that they regain their dignity and sense of self-worth and personal power. Women try hard to empower themselves in order to rethink their place in the world and to find new ways of life. The way out of victimization is facilitated if they can generate their own income. Dorina, 22 years old, says: "I don't expect anything from him. I know that I have to face everything by myself. I am working and I solve my problems alone." Another woman, age 31, states: "I feel better now. I feel sorry for myself when I think of all those situations. I'm sorry about the lost years, but I feel better. I feel calm. At least, I no longer feel that fear when night is falling; fear that he will come home drunk and kick me. I'm not in a good situation now. I have no place to live, neither a job. But I feel free from the terror in which I used to live."

It is important for women to establish a new understanding of themselves, to reanalyse, reinterpret and reassess themselves and their married lives in order to take control and find strength to take up new challenges. This helps them to handle the situation and deal with their new lives. Entering this stage, women also feel capable of sharing their experience with other abused women. This provides divorced women with psychological support that helps them to revalidate their new identity. As Sonila explains: "I would advise other women not to remain in a violent relationship. They should not say: *My life is finished, I have to accept him*. No, they should never think like this. Why do we have to accept them? Find a solution! Find it, as I did! I found a way to free myself from all that violence, and now I'm free, I am a different woman!"



# BREAKING THE SILENCE

"I would like to never hear that other women have to face the same experiences as I did. They ought to raise their voices, and they should not accept to be obedient as I used to be. Bearing violence is agonising both for them and their children." (Diana, 50 years old, divorced, mother of one, pharmacist from Berat).

Silence around domestic violence is certainly an efficient way of reinforcing power relationships between man and woman. Silence is not only a sign of victimization, but a mark of oppression as well. Violence, oppression and silence are all linked in an attempt to maintain domination and control. During the communist regime, domestic violence in Albania was almost invisible. Abused women were not allowed to become visible.

There were no shelters, no counseling centres, no media coverage no help from the police or other state institutions. Coming out of the dark on matters of domestic violence is still a difficult process and tainted by a considerable stigma. Many victims of domestic violence still keep the abuse secret. But telling another human being about what's happening to you and your body is a powerful means of dispersing the veil around domestic violence. Uncovering the hidden events of domestic violence is an important catalyst for change.

By telling the story of their abuse, participants in this study break the silence. Making intimate violence visible is an important step in challenging the abuser's hegemony. Although in recent years important changes have taken place in Albania, the country has not yet managed to uproot the well-entrenched attitudes regarding women's subordinate status. As a 34-year-old woman, married and mother of three, says: "People in the world talk about human rights. So why are women in Albania treated as male property? They should talk about this, as well." Stela, a schoolteacher of 31, adds: "Women have to raise their voices from the very first episode of violence. No

woman should accept violence, because if she forgives once, it will continue forever. Women should affirm their own personalities because they are not slaves, only good for being housewives, doing housework and giving birth to children."

## Empowering women

Through their narratives, women create a tool to free themselves from their partners' abuse. In this context, breaking the silence could be a dangerous act, and it is not surprising that it is fraught with anxiety and fear of stigmatization. Women fear that the family will not be supportive of them if they go public, that they will feel ashamed and guilty because they brought this into the open, that their husbands will retaliate, and that their children will be taken away. A 40-year-old woman, worker in Shkodra, comments: "I could not talk to my parents because I was the one who wanted to get married to him. They had no idea about the terrible things I was going through. One day my parents got to know the truth, but they did not support me. They told me to accept the situation because I had three children and our living conditions did not allow any other viable solutions or choices. Fortunately for me and my children, I did not follow their advice."

These women decided to speak up after waiting for so long because they know they do not deserve the abusive treatment they have received for years. Only after this new self-assessment are they able to stand up for themselves and take action. Statements such

as the following illustrate this attitude: "There are many women going through the same thing as I did. They suffer a lot, and sometimes they don't tell anything to anyone, because they feel ashamed. They do not receive support from their families. I would advise them not to act like me. They should not allow their husbands to abuse them. They should not tolerate violence, insults and humiliation. It's terrible and no woman deserves this treatment," notes a 44-year-old woman, unemployed and mother of three. Battered women who decide to leave their husbands often risk not only economic hardships but also the social stigma of having failed as a wife and mother. Given the prevailing attitudes towards violence, it is not surprising that battered women are reluctant to disclose their situation to anyone. However, silence, while protecting the woman from social stigmatization, usually reinforces her sense of isolation and shame. Although participants' stories document the extreme difficulties faced by abused women, their willingness to talk about them represents an important vehicle for empowering women. A 40-year-old worker in Shkodra states: "I would like to tell other women that they shouldn't tolerate even a bad word, an insult from their husbands, because if you tolerate one, you tolerate the second, the third, and then it becomes a habit in your life." By giving voice to these issues, they inform other women of their struggles, illustrate the centrality of these issues in their lives and demonstrate courage in speaking out about them, as Dafina, a young pregnant woman, says: "I would advise women not to tolerate violence. They have the possibility of finding a solution to their problem. I know it's difficult because of the children, but I think that it's best to leave a violent husband. Who knows what other consequences violence might have? I think that in such situations, divorce is the only solution. Yes, I know that it is difficult because of the children and the public opinion, but she has to think of herself first and foremost."

Women's awareness that the situation they are experiencing is wrong, and above all that there are steps they can take to change things for the better, is illustrated by the words of Shpresa, economist in Shkodra and mother of one: "Many times I did not react to my husband's insults. I

tolerated him, maybe because of my son and because I wanted to protect my family from trouble. I cared too much about the impression that my family was making. I'm not saying that women are one hundred percent able to fight against violence, this would be an ideal situation, but most of them are capable of taking a stand against it. I make by myself a very good income for my family; nevertheless I accept the patriarchal mentality of my husband, which makes our relationship impossible. For women of my age, protecting the family from rumors is extremely important. So, I have tolerated my husband, I have been silent, and I have accepted violence. I'm conscious and convinced that if I reacted against it from the beginning, things would be better now."

Women will never escape violence as long as they derive their social value exclusively from their role as wife and mother. A woman, worker in Berat, describes her family situation: "My husband accused me of several things: that I was not a good housewife, that I didn't care for my son and my family. So, he started to beat me and treat me very bad, until one day I decided to leave him." Empowering women is not only a worthy goal in its own right, but also a key strategy for eliminating violence.

### Social space for domestic violence

Women's narratives make visible the cultural tolerance for violence against women. Violence in the home has generally received high levels of acceptance from both family members and non-family members. It is generally regarded as less serious than other forms of violence. Oriola, a lawyer, divorced and mother of two, says: "A legal framework is quite necessary in the cases of violence against women. If there were a law against it, nobody would abuse his wife. Women are the most unprotected human beings in Albania. That's why others abuse them." Women have to overcome many personal, family and institutional barriers to get the help they need. A mother of two, worker in Tirana, comments: "Many times, I thought of leaving my husband, but the mentality prevented me from doing this. My parents, my brothers, my sisters, all my relatives said: *You would publicly dishonor us. You would humiliate your family. You have to*

*stay with him. He is your destiny.* Only after a long struggle with myself I understood that I have to take my life into my own hands.”

There are various reasons for tolerating violence. Violence is generally accepted and tolerated because of the lack of empathy for victims, the belief that victims can prevent their victimization by not placing themselves in dangerous situations, the belief that women deserve to be victimized because of their attitude, the concern for one’s own safety if intervention occurs. A divorced woman of 36, resident in Berat, recounts: “There were cases when people saw my husband abusing me and they did not react. They could have at least called the police.” Such tolerance for violence may cause the abuse to escalate to more severe acts, if proper measures are not taken to disseminate the message that even minor acts of abuse should not be accepted or excused. According to Juliana, unemployed in Tirana: “The state should interfere in families where the wife and children are abused. No one did anything in my case. People who knew our family also knew how my husband behaved. But they never interfered because of the mentality that a woman must endure.”

Domestic violence should be treated just as cases of assault perpetrated by a stranger. In practice, however, this has hardly been the case. All too often, the police take no action and fail to take the situation seriously on the grounds that violence in the home is a private matter in which they should play no part. Ariola, a divorced woman and mother of one, confesses: “To tell the truth, the police have not assisted and supported me at all. Once I went to the police station with my son after having escaped from the house. I left home because my husband wanted to kill both my son and me. I went to the police station to report the situation, but they did not show up. They wrote down the name and address, but never came. It was a terrible situation. The police should have come that night and arrested him, but they did not. Women in similar situations have no place to go, they have no shelter, no financial support, no job.” Another woman, schoolteacher and mother of one, asserts: “There should be more laws to protect women. I think the police ought

to be more proactive, they should arrest a violent husband and detain him at least for a few days.”

Not only do police officers fail to recognize domestic violence as a crime, but women also mention procedural barriers, as 36-year old woman, mother of three, says: “Law does not exist in Albania. I have denounced him more than 10 times, and yet they cannot try him because there are no witnesses. I have witnesses, but they are too afraid of him to testify. Why does the law not listen to my children’s voice and my voice? Why aren’t we considered witnesses?”

It is not surprising, therefore, that a number of women in our study suffered in silence, seeing few viable options to break the silence. According to a 46-year old woman, worker in Tirana: “There are no laws to protect women here. Money makes the laws in Albania. The one who has the money has the power, and can throw you out of the house. Therefore, Albanian woman should obey.” Many respondents feel ignored and abandoned by society, as an unemployed woman from Shkodra, mother of three, points out: “The society could do much more for solving the problem of domestic violence. There should be more laws designed to protect women. Society doesn’t offer me any support, and neither does my family. Where is an abused woman supposed to go? I don’t have a place to go, I am stuck at home, having to endure violence. There is no possibility of finding a job for a woman with three kids like me, so I have no courage to divorce because I have no economic independence to feed my children. Employment opportunities for divorced women could help a lot.”

Additional barriers to safety include inadequate responses by health care providers. Many battered women could find themselves at some point in a physician’s office or the emergency room of a hospital. While physicians are effective at treating women’s physical injuries, the intervention often stops here. Only two women mention that they were referred by the doctor to a counseling centre. Health care providers have a responsibility to victims of domestic violence. As practitioners, they should

be cognizant of the role that abuse may play in the etiology of certain emotional health complaints, as a 37-year-old worker from Berat points out: "I went through emotional turmoil every day. Even now that I no longer live with him, I still suffer the consequences of those days. I have terrible headaches, I have trouble falling asleep, I have nightmares. The doctor prescribed me valium, librium and atenanol." I

In most cases, the prescription of psychotropic drugs is not appropriate. The health care providers should be aware that battered women are usually not mentally ill and should not be treated as if they were. Women's emotional symptoms are often signs of a sane reaction to the insane circumstances of their lives. The short- and long-term side effects of sedatives should not be neglected. Besides the risk of dependence, tranquilizers induce passivity and limit women's capacity to act with clarity. Health care providers should provide women with information about community resources (counseling centres, shelters) and put women in contact with individuals and groups better prepared to deal with violence-related problems. It appears that training programmes to sensitize health care providers to domestic violence are urgently needed.

The social tolerance for domestic violence is reflected in the ongoing belief that violence between intimates is a private affair. While a large number of our interviewees recognized domestic violence as a public issue, six out of the 55 women stated that it was a private

matter. A worker from Berat states: "Violence is none of the world's business, it is the business of the family and relatives. Couples should be responsible for resolving the problem of violence. The police have no right to interfere. My husband really beat me up several times, but my children interfered and he changed. The world has nothing to do with our family problems."

In an effort to help in breaking the silence around domestic violence, women come out with suggestions to raise awareness in society. A 38-year-old woman, economist and mother of one, states: "State institutions along with NGOs should be much more engaged in working against domestic violence. It is so important to make women fully aware that they must fight against violence. Women should be empowered to feel that they could contribute to the solution. Second, I think that it is highly necessary to also have programmes for men regarding these issues. Discussions and debates between men and women should be organized. There are many ways that can help resolve this problem."

It is very important for every society to break the deep silence that surrounds the issue of domestic violence and to acknowledge the wide extent of the problem and the depth of the hidden pain of the victims. Hopefully, over time, women speaking in a collective voice about domestic violence and patriarchy will lead to further social action that will ultimately result in changes in cultural norms, laws and social policy to meet the needs of oppressed women.

# CONCLUSIONS

This is a qualitative study designed to explore the perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of Albanian battered women, the consequences and the ways of coping with domestic violence. "Giving voice" to abused women to express their problems in their own words was a major focus of this work. Because this qualitative assessment is not statistically representative for the whole of Albania, the conclusions are limited to the group on inquiry. The qualitative data provide insight into the meaning of violence from the perspective of interviewed abused women. In-depth interviews were conducted in three different Albanian sites with 55 abused women of diverse age, socioeconomic circumstances, and cultural background. One of the strengths of this narrative analysis is the access it provides to the cultural context in which the abuse takes place.

The research suggests that there is a complex interweaving of cultural, social, economic and interpersonal factors that may place Albanian women at increased risk for violence. The findings dispel the myth that domestic violence is largely a problem the poor and uneducated people, and indicate that abuse cuts across socioeconomic boundaries. The evidence in this report suggests that traditional gender relationships have imposed a heavy cost on women. Although important changes have taken place in Albania in recent years, the country has not yet managed to uproot the well-entrenched attitudes regarding women's subordinate status. The interviews identified the long-term tragedy that has imbued women lives, some of which are deeply scarred by hidden pain, but also revealed the resistance of many women.

Traditional values induced in many women the perception of marriage as the most important goal in their lives. Through marriage, women expect to reach a desirable social condition and a worthy life. Women see being married as a key element of a woman's identity. The patriarchal

traditions of arranged marriages by a male authority are still mentioned by women. Marriage is also perceived as a means to escape a poor and/or abusive home environment.

Women's dreams regarding marriage are frequently contradicted by the reality of everyday life and by their subordinate status in the marriage. Research indicates that abuse in partner-type relationships is more likely to occur and continue where the couple, particularly the man, holds traditional attitudes toward family roles. Findings have proved that abusive husbands appear to dominate in the family decision-making process, while women are expected to assume responsibility for the housework and child care. Even if the woman is at a high social and professional level, she is not exempt from bearing the burden of all the housekeeping activities. Women are supposed to find fulfillment in their roles as wives and mothers and be prepared to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their marriage. Partnership between men and women in confronting the problems of domestic life appears to be unfamiliar to many Albanian couples. Women still have to act according to male-defined norms.

Transgression of traditional gender roles and expectations leads to physical and psychological abuse. Intimate partner abuse has generally appeared to be part of a pattern of abusive behaviour and control, rather than an isolated act of physical aggression. Women's accounts have proved that family abuse is a complex phenomenon because it includes various forms, such as verbal, emotional, physical, sexual or economic. Physical violence experienced by women ranges from a slap to an assault with a deadly weapon. This research has shown that the potential for lethal violence against Albanian women occurs throughout their lives. Women mentioned having their arms broken, their bodies burned with cigarettes, guns pointed at

their heads, and having been threatened with knives and grenades. Many women live in fear not only for their own lives but also for the lives of their children, family and friends.

Women's experiences with sexual violence vary along a continuum, from battering rape and bullying, to threats, verbal humiliation and non-physical forms of pressure to engage in sex against their will. Accepting unwanted sex is perceived by some women as a way to counteract the husband's anger and to avoid further violence. Other women feel obliged to be dutiful and to serve her husband's needs, irrespective of their own wishes. The forced sexual act proved to be one way in which the woman is silenced, controlled and subordinated.

Women frequently report humiliation and emotional manipulation. Social isolation has also been mentioned as a strategy used by abusive partners to increase their control and reduce women's ability to leave abusive relationships. Some of the abusive men prevented women from participating in money-spending decisions or refused to give women money for basic household necessities. Women's economic contributions to the family do not reduce or influence the dominant position of their husbands within the family.

The experience of domestic abuse puts women at greater risk of a variety of physical and mental health problems including injuries, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, sleep disorders, low self-esteem and suicidal thoughts. Injuries are not the only physical outcomes: physical ailments, miscarriages, premature labour and unwanted pregnancies are among other severe physical consequences the women had to face. The effects of experiencing violence also include the inability to undertake daily work or social activities.

Women perceive the psychological consequences of abuse to be even more serious than physical effects. When personal coping resources are exhausted, many women turn to medication, often perceived as a protective screen against traumatic events. The findings

illustrate the processes through which women become demoralized and trapped in abusive relationships. The process of abuse alters women's views of themselves, their relationships and their place in the world.

Domestic violence has profound effects upon children, whether or not they actually experience physical abuse. The children of the women in this study developed many cognitive, emotional, somatic and behavioural problems. Among these, women mentioned lower levels of school and social competence, anxiety, irritability and aggressive behaviour, headaches, bedwetting and sleep disturbances. Women also expressed concerns about the effects of the father model on the development of their children.

An important step in coping with violence is understanding the causes of abuse. Although informants identify multiple causes of domestic violence, the dominant one describes it as a social problem that springs from a society out of balance, caught between tradition and modernity. The main cause of family abuse is perceived to be poverty, which generates stress and a sense of inadequacy in men for having failed in their traditional role of breadwinner. Other frequently cited causes of domestic violence are the alcohol abuse of the perpetrator and his jealousy. Domestic violence is also constructed as the product of men's dysfunctional emotions, such as depression or low self-esteem. This focus on the emotional causes of violence at the individual level creates a justification for violent acts that are perceived to be beyond the perpetrator's control. Other women perceive men as naturally aggressive human beings. Some women blamed themselves for the abuse, as they believed they had failed in their roles of wives and mothers.

Participants' narratives reflect that women are socialized to accept the main responsibility for the success of their marriage and for the children's care and well-being. They believe in sacrificing their individual rights for the sake of the children. This attitude has entrapped many women in the abusive relationship because of their goal of maintaining the family intact at all costs. Women mentioned hoping, avoiding,

reframing and compromising as strategies that helped them endure violence.

A key strategy for eliminating violence is women's awareness that the situation they are experiencing is wrong and that there are steps they can take to improve their lives. Divorce is one of the active coping strategies mentioned by women. Despite many obstacles, women who divorce have rejected being passive victims of family violence. The beneficial influence of divorcing a violent partner has been mentioned by women. Participants feel that they regain their dignity, sense of self-worth and personal control over their lives. Women struggle hard to empower themselves in order to find new ways to live and to rethink their place in the world.

Women's narratives have made visible the cultural and social tolerance for domestic violence. Breaking the silence that surrounds this sensitive issue acknowledges the wide extent of domestic violence and the depth of the consequences. The desire to empower other victims of violence through their confession was also indicated by the research findings. Women expressed the hope that their speaking out against domestic violence would lead to

changes in cultural norms, laws and social policy to protect women's rights. However, women in Albania should not wait for the state to take the lead in addressing these critical issues—it is women themselves, at the level of civil society, who must take up the struggle themselves.

The responses of the women in this study clarify how violence drained them of emotional and physical capacity as they constantly attempted to defend their core identities as women. Abused women need professional counseling to overcome these negative feelings and rethink their way of life. The findings of the study also call for changes in social policies that maintain unequal gender power in both public and private spheres of life.

With respect to giving voice to Albanian women and encouraging their empowerment, this report represents a step forward. We anticipate that this process of understanding local cultural meanings of domestic violence and individual perceptions, attitudes and responses to it can be used as a scientific basis for developing appropriate interventions for violence reduction and prevention in Albania.



## ANNEX 1

### Profiles of Respondents

N	age	city	marital	education	occupation	children	religion
1	31	Tirana	Cohabit.	University	Teacher	1	Orthodox
2	50	Berat	Divorced	University	Pharmacist	1	Muslim
3	37	Tirana	Divorced	Secondary	Unemployed	2	Muslim
4	32	Berat	Married	Secondary	Self-employed	1	Muslim
5	27	Tirana	Divorced	Secondary	Worker	3	Muslim
6	28	Tirana	Married	Secondary	Self-employed	2	Muslim
7	21	Tirana	Engaged	Secondary	Unemployed	1	Muslim
8	31	Tirana	Divorced	University	Teacher	1	Catholic
9	36	Tirana	Divorced	Secondary	Unemployed	3	Orthodox
10	44	Berat	Married	Secondary	Unemployed	3	Muslim
11	20	Tirana	Divorced	Secondary	Unemployed	0	Muslim
12	52	Tirana	Married	University	Economist	1	Muslim
13	46	Tirana	Married	Secondary	Employed	2	Muslim
14	23	Shkodra	Married	Secondary	Unemployed	2	Muslim
15	37	Shkodra	Married	High sch.	Civil Servant	2	Orthodox
16	35	Shkodra	Divorced	Secondary	Worker	1	Catholic
17	37	Shkodra	Divorced	Secondary	Self-employed	3	Muslim
18	34	Tirana	Divorced	Secondary	Cleaner	2	Muslim
19	33	Shkodra	Divorced	University	Lawyer	2	Muslim
20	55	Tirana	Divorced	Secondary	Unemployed	3	Catholic
21	35	Tirana	Divorced	University	Teacher	1	Muslim
22	39	Shkodra	Married	Secondary	Worker	3	Orthodox
23	43	Berat	Married	Secondary	Worker	3	Muslim
24	35	Shkodra	Married	Secondary	Worker	3	Catholic
25	54	Berat	Widow	University	GP/medical doctor	2	Orthodox
26	40	Berat	Married	High sch.	Electrician	3	Orthodox
27	33	Berat	Married	High sch.	Worker	2	Muslim
28	34	Tirana	Married	Secondary	Worker	1	Muslim
29	32	Berat	Divorced	University	Teacher	2	Orthodox
30	27	Tirana	Married	Secondary	Unemployed	3	Muslim
31	39	Tirana	Divorced	University	Unemployed	2	Orthodox
32	30	Berat	Married	University	Teacher	2	Catholic
33	38	Berat	Divorced	High sch.	Worker	1	Muslim
34	42	Tirana	Married	High sch.	Cleaner	5	Muslim
35	46	Tirana	Married	High sch.	Worker	2	Catholic
36	37	Shkodra	Married	University	Economist	1	Muslim
37	28	Tirana	Divorced	Secondary	Unemployed	1	Orthodox
38	31	Tirana	Married	Secondary	Worker	3	Catholic
39	37	Berat	Married	Primary	Worker	5	Muslim
40	22	Tirana	Divorced	High sch.	Restaurant Chief	1	Muslim
41	18	Tirana	Cohabit.	Secondary	Unemployed	1	Catholic
42	44	Tirana	Divorced	Primary	Worker	5	Orthodox
43	30	Tirana	Divorced	Secondary	Worker	4	Muslim
44	41	Tirana	Married	High sch.	Unemployed	2	Catholic
45	30	Tirana	Married	High sch.	Worker	2	Muslim
46	30	Tirana	Married	High sch.	Worker	2	Orthodox
47	28	Shkodra	Married	High sch.	Unemployed	2	Muslim
48	35	Shkodra	Married	High sch.	Jeweler	2	Muslim
49	34	Shkodra	Married	Secondary	Unemployed	3	Muslim
50	19	Shkodra	Engaged	University	Student	0	Muslim
51	34	Shkodra	Married	High sch.	Civil Servant	2	Muslim
52	35	Berat	Married	High sch.	Worker	2	Muslim
53	31	Berat	Married	High sch.	Lab specialist	3	Muslim
54	32	Berat	Married	High Sch.	Worker	3	Muslim
55	67	Tirana	Widow	Primary	Self-employed	6	Muslim

\*\*\*In Albania: Secondary School is from the 5th to the 8th grade while High School is from the 9th to the 12th grade.



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