

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND FEMALE SURVIVAL: SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS ON WOMEN VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (CASE STUDY IN THE CITY OF DIBRA)

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Abstract

Domestic violence continues to be a serious problem as a global phenomenon that affects all family members, especially women. Based on the frequency, types and level of abuse, this phenomenon essentially violates human rights and affects women in all social, educational and economic level.

The main factors that precede this phenomenon are rooted in the patriarchal system of Albanian society and are based on customary and religious norms who in many regions women are extremely denigrated and abused, such that the absolute power of men justifies violence and even normalizes it. According to research findings based on women's reports, men remain the main source of violence and this is confirmed by over 70,0 % of the female respondents.

This study aims to analyse the experiences of women victims of domestic violence by demonstrating the presence of this phenomenon in a small town in the Republic of North Macedonia - Dibra. The study will be preceded by an examination of the forms of violence, information on laws and human rights, as well as the role of state institutions in the treatment of victims. The methodology of the work will focus on the use of research methods and techniques that will facilitate the course of the study and will reveal clear results on the verification of the hypotheses and objectives set. Specifically, the survey will include a sample of 100 women in the city of Dibra from different rural and urban environments and with different educational status.

Keywords: family, women, violence, legal protection, social services

Introduction

Domestic violence is a complex phenomenon that affects and damages the health of all members living in a common home. However, women are the most affected category, who in over 90 percent of cases are victims of physical, psychological, sexual and financial violence. Also known as 'gender-based violence', (Russo, N. F; Pirlot A., 2006) it is now a global problem where it is said that one in three women worldwide has been beaten, forced into sexual or otherwise abused during her lifetime (Mordan, 2015). Contemporary studies show that experiencing domestic violence produces complex long-term trauma, which affects the personal identity, social relationships and mental well-being of victims (Herman, 2022).

In the Balkan countries, patriarchal ideology is found to be a key factor influencing domestic violence, as it legitimizes the dominance and control of men over female family members. In this case, studies show that patriarchal values are closely related to the incidence and tolerance of intimate partner violence (UN Women, 2019).

In Albanian society, including Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia, domestic violence is a problem that negatively affects women and children, as well as families and communities. Albanians tend to consider domestic violence as a private, family matter, and as a normal part of marital and family life. Since domestic violence often occurs behind closed doors and is not openly discussed, accepted or dealt with in Albanian society, victims generally suffer in silence (UNICEF, 2000). Similarly, these factors on violence are also reflected in the city of Dibra (Republic of North Macedonia) where power structures and gender relations have historically

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been built on patriarchal models. Violence against women continues to function as a means of control and discipline against those who deviate from socially accepted roles. Despite the fact that the legal context treats domestic violence as a criminal offense and is regulated through the provisions of the Criminal Code, Article 122, point 21 and special laws for protection from violence in accordance with international standards for the protection of human rights, adopted in 2004 (Ministry of Justice, 2021) the effectiveness of the fight against domestic violence depends on coordinated inter-institutional intervention and the professionalization of social, policy and judicial services (Davies, P ; Barlow, Ch., 2024). Therefore, this study is designed to reveal the feeling and perception of violence by women as inferior beings in addition to gender roles in society.

Methodology of the research

The purpose of this study is to identify the presence of domestic violence, mainly against women in the city of Dibra. The methodology of the work will be based on the use of key methods and techniques, according to the results obtained, the forms of violence, the perpetrator of violence, as well as the ways of survival or coping strategies of the victims will be examined. The methods that will precede this study are: content analysis, comparison and statistical methods, while the techniques used will be a survey developed according to the Likert scale, then the results will be processed with descriptive analysis.

The sample of the research will be girls and women from rural areas and the city of Dibra itself. About 100 women will participate in the study, whose answers will confirm or deny the presence of domestic violence.

The scientific results of this study are expected to provide a clear and well-argued overview of the prevalence and forms of domestic violence. The results are also expected to contribute to the expansion of scientific knowledge in this field, serving as a basis for the design of preventive policies and concrete interventions at the local level and beyond.

Research results

In the Dibra mentality and the surrounding area, the phenomenon of domestic violence includes a special dimension due to the cultural and social structure of the area, and many women who experience violence remain silent due to fear, shame, lack of institutional support and community pressure to “preserve the honor of the family”. Furthermore, economic dependence and the lack of alternatives for independence make it difficult to leave an abusive relationship. Thus, patriarchy does not only manifest itself in the form of direct violence, but also in symbolic and structural form through exclusion from decision-making, control over financial resources and the limitation of women’s personal autonomy.

Below, let us follow the empirical and descriptive report from the research conducted, expressed statistically through tables.

To the question **"Have you ever experienced domestic violence in your life?"** Table 1 shows the responses of the surveyed women, whose statements clearly demonstrate the presence of this phenomenon in the city of Diba:

Table No. 1: Experience of domestic violence (N=100):

Have you ever experienced domestic violence in your life?	F	P
I have often experienced violence.	22	22.0%
I have rarely experienced violence.	52	52.0%
I have never experienced violence.	26	26.0%
Total:	100	100

*N- Total number of participants in the research.

*F - Frequency of responses.

*P – Percentage

As can be seen from the results of the research sample, about 22% of the respondents report that they are often exposed to domestic violence, which indicates that these women are at serious risk for long-term consequences that may result in the phenomenon of femicide. 52% of the women surveyed stated that they have rarely experienced violence, although this result is also an indicator of the presence of this phenomenon. Only 26% of the participants report that they have never experienced domestic violence.

Looking in detail at the research analysis, the results show that about 74% of the women surveyed in this study have experienced domestic violence at least once in their lives, so that from the total number of women surveyed, it appears that the vast majority of them vary as real or potential victims of violence. For a small settlement like Dibra, this result reveals a worrying prevalence of domestic violence, reflecting a serious social problem and which is also in line with global findings according to the research literature, according to which about 27–30 % of married or romantically involved women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from their partners at some point in their lives. These figures have been confirmed by large epidemiological analyses and global statistical models (Kathryn M. ; Yuk F. Cheong, 2022). Therefore, we can conclude that the phenomenon of violence is a global problem and not a local issue.

Forms of violence expressed according to research results:

In the above-mentioned reviews, we emphasized that the most pronounced forms of violence are physical violence, psychological violence, sexual violence and economic violence. All forms of violence overlap when a person tries to control and exercise power over his partner in an intimate relationship (Anon., 2013). However, prior to patriarchy in Albanian society, violence against women was also exercised by fathers or brothers in specific cases when women were denied decision-making. When asked what forms of violence you have experienced, the results in table no.2

Table no.2 Forms of experiencing violence by frequency (N=100)

No.	What forms of violence have you experienced?	FREQUENTLY (F) (P)	Rarely (F) (P)	ever (F) (P)	Never (F) (P)	in total (F) (P)
1	Physical violence	6 (6.0)	5 (5.0)	5 (5.0)	2 (2.0)	18 (18.0)
2	Psychological/emotional violence	13 (13.0)	11(11,0)	10 (10.0)	7 (7.0)	41 (41.0)
3	Sexual violence	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)

4	Economic violence	5 (5.0)	4 (5.0)	6 (6.0)	0 (0.0)	15 (15.0)
5	Other	4 (4.0)	7 (7.0)	15 (15.0)	0 (0.0)	26 (26.0)
6	in total	28 (28.0)	27 (27.0)	36 (36.0)	9 (9.0)	100

The data presented in Table No. 2 provide a detailed overview of the forms of violence against women experienced by women, as well as on their frequency, reflecting the complex and multidimensional nature of domestic violence. According to the figures, the most widespread form of violence is psychological/emotional violence, reported by 41% of respondents. A significant portion of this violence is experienced frequently (13%) and rarely (11%), confirming that emotional violence is the most normalized and least reported form institutionally, but with serious long-term consequences on mental health.

Physical violence has been experienced by 18% of women, with repeated (frequent) experience accounting for 6%, which indicates a direct risk to the physical safety and life of the victims. Economic violence reported by 15% reflecting financial control and structural dependence, a key factor in the inability to leave the abusive relationship.

category (26%) suggests the presence of combined or clearly unarticulated forms of violence, highlighting the difficulties of victims to identify and name their abusive experiences, especially in cultural contexts where violence is minimized or justified.

It is worth noting that sexual violence was not reported at all (0%) perhaps because this phenomenon, exclusively in the Dibra area, is considered an indicator of social taboo, fear and stigmatization, which hinder the reporting of this form of violence.

Violence and male strength

Often accused of using violence in the family are considered men, regardless of gender roles and positions. Since in Albanian society and more broadly, patriarchy leads to domination in gender relations. It has been examined biologically, but also in social theories there is much evidence that men are more violent than women due to gender imbalances where violence is implanted in policies and practices, creating the militarization of men throughout the world (Smith, 2024). It is characteristic that in this structure the presence of violence by parents against daughters is also considered, as a phenomenon where discipline, punishment and listening should precede the father's decision and not personal determination. Let's analyze the data in table 3:

Table 3: Family member who committed violence by frequency (N=100):

No.	Which family member have you experienced violence from?	FREQUENTLY F (P)	Rarely F (P)	ever F (P)	Never F (P)	Everything F (P)
1	HUSBAND	9 (9.0)	7 (7.0)	11 (11.0)	16 (16.0)	43 (43.0)
2	Father	3 (3.0)	4 (4.0)	3 (3.0)	12 (12.0)	21 (21.0)
3	Brother	2 (2.0)	2 (2.0)	3 (3.0)	13 (13.0)	7 (7.0)
4	Other	0 (0.0)	2 (2.0)	3 (3.0)	10 (10.0)	14 (14.0)

5	Total	14 (14.0)	15 (15.0)	20 (20x,0)	51 (51.0)	100
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The results in Table No. 3 show that the husband represents the main source of domestic violence, with 43% of women reporting experiencing violence from an intimate partner at various levels of frequency. Particularly significant is that 27% of women have experienced violence from their spouse (often, rarely or sometimes) .

Violence by the father reported by 21% of female respondents. These cases are particularly present in Albanian society, namely in rural areas, among women when they want to make decisions regarding the selection of a partner or the continuation of education, so that the ban has been categorical and has been accompanied by the exercise of violence by the father.

Meanwhile, 20% of respondents report violence from their brother , while 15% by other family members , proving that domestic violence is not a phenomenon limited only to the marital relationship, but appears in multiple forms within the family structure.

In terms of frequency, 49% of women have experienced violence at least once (often, rarely or sometimes) from a family member, while 51% report that they have not experienced violence from any of the listed categories.

Legal context and institutional protection of victims from the domestic violence

The protection of victims and the sanctioning of domestic violence in the legal system of the Republic of North Macedonia is carried out both within the criminal-legal system and within the civil-legal system (Metaj, A. ; Ibish, E., 2022). Since Debar is a small town, institutional protection is not so pronounced, since the majority of women prefer to keep violence quiet out of fear, shame and lack of support from the wider family. Regarding information on legal protection, let's look at the results in table no. 4:

Table 4: Level of information of women regarding protective laws against domestic violence (N=100)

No.	How informed are you about laws protecting against domestic violence?	F	P
1	Fully informed	23	23.0%
2	Partially informed	19	19.0%
3	Little informed	20	20.0%
4	Not informed at all	38	38.0%
5	in total	100	100%

Regarding women's legal knowledge of their rights, as can be seen from table no. 4, the results are quite worrying. Referring to empirical figures, it is seen that over 58% of respondents are not informed about legal procedures and institutional protection from violence. Only 23% of survey participants report that they are fully informed and another 19% declare that they are partially informed. This result shows a very small proportion of women who are properly aware of the legal basis and the institutions where they can seek help in case of domestic violence, while 38% stated that they are not at all informed about legal conventions for protection and 20% declared that they are little informed. According to these attitudes, it is seen that the majority has superficial knowledge and lack of information on legal acts and personal rights for protection, especially for women who are affected by violence.

Social-institutional services provided to victims of violence

When women report violence to the Social Services Center of the respective city, they are directed to specialized services that are available to cases 24/7, while counseling centers operate by appointment (Anon., 2024). To examine the assistance provided, the quality and social support from these centers, let us analyze the results obtained from the survey of women who have reported violence and sought support. Table no. 5 examines the results numerically:

Table 5: Assessment of social services in case of reporting violence (N=100)

No.	Are social services sufficient when reporting violence?	F	P
1	Yes, very much.	21	21.0%
2	Partially	18	18.0%
3	Nothing	14	14.0%
4	I did not request services.	47	47.0%
5	in total	100	100

Regarding the support of social centers and the efficiency of services, the attitudes of the surveyed women result in the highest level of responses that have not sought help and services with about 47% of the responses given. In most cases, non-reporting of violence occurs due to fear, stigmatization, lack of information on the laws and a number of other factors. From other data it is seen that only 21% of the respondents stated that the social services they received were sufficient and effective, which indicates a very small percentage of women who feel really helped by the system. 18% of the respondents stated that the services are not sufficient and not fully effective, while complete dissatisfaction with the efficiency of the work of support institutions is preceded by 14% of women from the total research sample. This dissatisfaction often occurs as a result of the lack of conditions and long-term centers for the care of victims, the exploitation of legal procedures, and the failure to apply sanctioning measures against perpetrators.

In this case, the overview of this study reveals on the one hand the fear of reporting violence and on the other hand the poor institutional quality to support victims, so that radical reforms in institutions are needed, special funds for the creation of specialized conditions and the application of grants and international projects to increase the quality of work and the efficiency of services.

Should I continue living together or end the abusive relationship?

Although in the Dibra culture, as in all Albanian regions, giving up on the family due to the presence of violence is a very difficult moment that happens almost rarely or never. The influence of tradition, patriarchal cultural norms, shame and judgment from the circle and above all the love and sacrifice of the woman for her family are the essential factors that prevent the termination of abusive relationships, on the contrary, they are forced, even after the short-term support of social centers, to continue living in environments of violence just to preserve honor and stand by the family. For this situation, our research expresses the results encoded in table no. 6:

Table 6: Level of women's determination to end or continue living in abusive relationships (N = 100)

No.	How determined are you to stop or continue? life in an abusive relationship?	F	P
1	I am very determined.	18	18.0%
2	I am partially determined.	30	30.0%
3	I am very little determined.	11	11.0%
4	I am not at all determined.	41	41.0%
5	Total	100	100

Continuing to live with a partner who continuously uses various forms of violence or making the decision to end it and get a divorce is a very difficult decision, so in relation to this attitude to the answer, I am not at all determined which direction to choose, declare over 50% of the women surveyed. 'A small mistake can last a lifetime' precedes the doubt to make the decision to end the abusive relationship, so many women, appreciating the value of marriage and the role of social norms, choose to continue living with their partners while enduring the violence. 30% have stated that they are partially determined, which makes it clear that although some women are aware of their rights, there are secret factors that make them make personal decisions. 18% of respondents declare that they are categorically determined in decision-making, which indicates a category of women who are more emancipated, economically independent, or more informed about their legal and human rights.

Conclusion

This research summarizes a case study on domestic violence where the focus group is on women victims of violence in a suburban town of North Macedonia, Dibra, which is located in the western part of the country. The quantitative data expressed in figures were generated from a routine survey where the female respondents expressed their attitudes regarding the experience of domestic violence as a form of oppression and constant belittling by their partner.

Some of the conclusions that precede the hypothetical stance of this study verify that men remain the main source of violence against women, accounting for over half of the reported cases. Thus, patriarchal structures, traditions, and customary norms continue to rule the Dibra mentality even in contemporary times.

Although laws have been drafted to protect victims, the vast majority of women are little or not informed about the institutional approach, and even social services are in most cases ineffective and insufficient due to the lack of full capacity to provide assistance to victims. This means that many women continue to be under the pressure of violence, proving that sacrifices to family, honor and lack of economic autonomy are seen as serious obstacles to women's decision-making.

In the end, it can be said that Dibra society, like many other communities, is faced with the urgent need to change attitudes and perceptions about the role of women, to build a culture of respect, equality and zero tolerance for violence. Only through such a transformation can a reality be achieved where women do not just survive, but live with dignity and security.

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