

Domestic violence: A paralyzing phenomenon for the family and society

Nuredin Chechi*

Abstract

Domestic violence in Albanian society is one of the most widespread phenomena and one of the most unreported crimes. This makes it impossible to accurately measure the extent of such a phenomenon. Domestic violence is treated more as an individual problem, which belongs only to family members and not to the society. It is the responsibility of the state and individuals to take effective steps to protect women and children and stop the violence. Statistics show that only 5 percent of battered women report violence. According to studies conducted, it results that domestic violence, particularly the one against women and girls, has increased during the transition period. This problem is complicated because of its roots in the marital relationships, therefore it has a negative impact on parenting. Women who are victims of domestic violence usually find it hard to concentrate and work effectively with their children, are more prone to avoidance or denial of the situation and neglect the impact of violence on themselves and their children. In such a context it is necessary to design a national strategy to identify all forms of domestic violence, to determine the causes of violence and its effects. Also it should be drafted a social policy and various intervention programs, necessary to prevent any kind of consequence that could damage the family and the whole society.

Key words: Violence, family, women, parenting, children, law, society

1. Introduction

Albania has undergone and is still going through a difficult period of transition, and therefore it ranks among the countries that have suffered more the political, social and economic changes which have affected the lives of many individuals and Albanian families. Today, Albania is facing many challenges related to domestic violence. It is one of the most widespread

phenomena and one of the most unreported crimes in Albanian society and this makes it impossible to accurately measure the extent of such a phenomenon. Domestic violence is a widespread and serious threat to the lives and welfare of women. Only 5 percent of battered women report violence. Any form of “smacking” perpetrated on a woman is a violation of her rights. In most cases it leaves the woman with severe psychological and physical consequences. Therefore her ability to live a full life becomes limited.

Life experience to date has proven that children learn what they see in their family. Thus, for example, children who witness or experience violence at home, often grow up to exercise it to their partners and children. In this way they become the cause of a repeated cycle of violence that continues over generations (UNICEF, 2003). According to a nationwide survey conducted in 2003 by UNICEF, at least 8 percent of Albanian women have experienced physical violence from an intimate partner and 25 percent have experienced psychological violence. According to the survey conducted by the Office of Publications of the EU (2014), Albania was ranked the eighth among EU countries for the use of violence against women. In 2013 it resulted that 59.4 percent of women aged 18 to 55 years had experienced domestic violence. "Newspapers and the media in general report almost daily about this phenomenon which is difficult to treat and harder to be reported, as to understand that the dynamics of domestic violence is often not easy" (GADC, 2008). It is treated more as an individual problem, which belongs only to family members and not to the society. In transition societies, where we have had many significant political, social and economic transformations, human rights are violated more often.

Studies show that domestic violence, particularly the one against women and girls, has increased a lot especially during the last decade. "In the first years of the democratic system, the problem did not exist in the rate that it does today, but it has grown over the past five or six years, becoming a real concern" (Loya & Jamal, 2005). The main objective of local reformers and the international community must be improving the practice of human rights (Horowitz & Schnabel, 2004). This paper will provide a description of the current situation regarding domestic violence in Albania and its negative effects on children, parenting, the establishment of relations between family members and the development of society.

2. A short overview of domestic violence in Albania

In recent decades our country has been included in a powerful wave of violence within the family. Therefore domestic violence and its consequences have become a serious problem in Albania. According to the Progress Report of Albania (2008), prepared by the Commission of the European Communities, it was concluded that domestic violence is a "key phenomenon, which has been increasing" due to the fact of not taking proper measures in time and to the non-enforcement of laws. They also say that a very small number of domestic violence cases are reported, investigated and prosecuted. The Criminal Code on domestic violence is treated as an attack leading to a general crime. Although there are some rules about this problem, the issue is that the victims still do not consider domestic violence as a crime or they are afraid of reporting incidents as they can cause shame on their families.

Women accept the conviction that men are stronger and more capable than women, they understand that the state favors men, government positions are occupied by men, and this is reflected everywhere: in employment, socialization, etc. Although the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, which came into force on August 1, 2014 requires stringent measures against various forms of gender-based violence, domestic violence statistics in our country show higher levels. Thus during 2013 it results that 59.4 percent of women aged 18 to 55 years have experienced domestic violence. This figure that has been increasing since 2007, which at that time showed that 56 percent of women aged 15 to 49 years had experienced domestic violence.

But by focusing on forms of violence in the family, including violence against women, it shows that one in two women in Albania have suffered psychological violence, a high ratio compared to the figures in the European countries where the ratio is two in five women who suffer this kind of violence. But in addition to psychological violence used against women, our country has also a high number of cases where are used physical and sexual violence. The victims' ratio of this kind of violence in our country is one in four women, while in EU countries the ratio is one in five women. Neither pregnant women have escaped from violence in our country. According to a research conducted in 2013, it results that 13 percent of Albanian women, currently in a relationship with a violent man, claim to have been hit, slapped, kicked or physically hurt during pregnancy. Not all categories of women experience violence against them either in a relationship or even in a family. The unequal position of women in society is what

affects mostly in their victimization. Education is the key element that determines the position that women have in society, which affects the use of violence against them. Women with secondary education or less are more likely to experience domestic violence than those with higher education. Moreover, women who do not work outside the home are more likely to suffer violence than those who work outside the home.

Referring to the figures of battered women, it shows that 19 percent of abused women in Bangladesh suffer domestic violence injuries, such as: cracks / bruises, deep wounds, bone / broken foot, unconsciousness, head injuries and injuries in the abdominal area. 14 percent of abused women in Bangladesh were unable to do housework or take care for children, because of injuries from domestic violence, and 44 percent of abused women had a sexually transmitted disease. But what varies in the use of violence, is the period when women in our country begin to experience it. One in four women begins to experience violence in the first year of marriage, while one in two women, according to a research done in our country, asserts that violence against them started in the second or third year of marriage. Unlike EU countries, where women do not fear to denounce the fact that violence was used against them, in Albania, apparently there is the fear, as well as the mentality and the shame to denounce any form of violence used on them or in their family. It's a very small number of abused women, who manage to denounce any form of violence exerted on them. So, it turns out that only 8 percent of abused women in Albania ask for help to end violence in their lives, compared with 33 percent of battered women in EU countries, who require help from social services and organizations.

Violence against women has been often tolerated and never considered or treated as an abuse of human rights, including women`s and girls`, safety, freedom of speech ,physical and mental integrity. Such violence has always been justified because of the Albanian government and judiciary tradition or “mentality”. “Recognizing that women and girls do not report violence against them as they often do not realize that they are victims of it, but instead consider themselves as participants in it, states must inform women about their legal rights and educate them specifically about domestic violence. In traditional families women have to follow some rules, they have to be "good girls" and violence is part of this tradition. They do not consider domestic violence as violence; they see it as normal” (SRVAW, Report of the Commission on Human Rights, 1996).

The role of the government and national authorities has been limited or non-existent in supporting and providing assistance to the victims of the domestic violence in Albania. Active roles in the treatment of this phenomenon have played non-governmental organizations (NGOs) of women, by offering numerous services including hotlines and shelters to support and protect these women from the abusers. Distrusting the role of the police because of the state non-recognition of the domestic violence as a criminal offense and being ashamed sense of women are not encouraged, to complain about the violence, but instead accepting it as their misfortune. Another reason of being shouted is their inability to financially support themselves and their children when they leave or divorce from their partners. But who are considered the common abusers inside a family? Based on this study, men with secondary education or a lower one are likely to be more violent rather than those with a university education. Another category includes those who are part of the low classes of the society, and consumers of alcohol. Albanian women, whose husbands consume alcohol, are 6 times more likely to experience physical violence and 1.5 times more likely to experience psychological violence.

Reasons why this happens vary. In various reports made by organizations that protect the rights of these women and that of the family members, show that men want to establish a sense of power and control, or keep women dependent on them, not to consider any attempt to be independent. Some other researches show that some men use violence, seeing it as the only way to be linked with his partner. Meanwhile, a lot of men are grown up in this way, being raped by their stepfathers experiencing everything themselves. Comparative Sociological studies at micro level have proven empirically that, due to the lack of economic opportunities and ways to cope with economic difficulties, men show a tendency to be violent against women and their children, especially to girls, not as a way to cope with such problems, but as a result of the lack of social solutions to such economic difficulties. The paternalistic and patriarchal figure, which dominates a large part of the Albanian society, not only in villages and remote areas, but also in cities, is an important factor.

Despite the progress made, in many cases women are considered to be “owned” by their husbands. In many cases, a woman has little or no authority in the family, even to her children. Their role, by the men, and unfortunately, even by a part of women, continues to be understood as in the past: take care of home and family, to satisfy the sexual needs of the husband, bear a

baby, and raise him. In many cases, violent behaviors against women are caused by the jealousy. Jealousy cannot be excluded from the list of reasons that causes violent behaviors, but is just a cause, not the main one. As an emotional response to a threat or to the real danger for an intimate relationship, jealousy may eventually be associated with abusive behaviors, physical violence, emotional or verbal one. However, as a sociologist, I think we should look beyond the narrow framework that sees violence against women as a cause jealousy by men. I want to lay the emphasis on the rapid changes that are continuing to occur in the Albanian society in terms of ethics and sexual behavior, not only to the younger generation, but also at a good part of the population, especially in the cities and among educated people.

3. The effects of violence on children

Domestic violence affect not only one of the partners, but in most cases are also children who become victims to its exercise. During the recent years, violent behaviors have escalated, especially in urban areas, and therefore children have been exposed to violence at home, school and community. Domestic violence is considered a form of child abuse, where children inevitably are affected by this phenomenon (Lapierre, 2008). In the study conducted in our country in 2013, it shows that 58 % of the children are beaten by a family member, as well as a high number of 86 % of the children become witnesses of domestic violence. This “double violence” to children certainly brings negative consequences in their social life or in their integration into the society. Besides the psychological trauma ,that remain in their minds, this violence reflects negatively on their education, making 43% of the children have difficulties at school, 31 % of the children live with fear, because of domestic violence, and 6 % of the children leave home to live with their relatives. The study showed that one in two children in 86 % of cases requires more assistance to the violence against him to one of the parents, and a single case is not required by children abused by doctors or police assistance.

Domestic violence can take the form of one or more traumatic incidents, which may cause a sudden change. Such changes are often observed in the child's behavior, such as aggression, or lack of respect for women. Domestic violence also changes the way how children think and feel about themselves, their families and life in general (Cunningham & Baker, 2007). They say that children are good observers and poor performers, so they are able to hear and see what happens, but they fail to understand the situation as adults do. Children may be angry

because their mother is such a person, they are afraid that it will go back to it, or worry that it may be accompanied with another abusive partner. So children can not believe their mother can keep them in a safe environment, or they may even wonder whether she loves them or not. The quality of the relationships that parents and especially mothers, create with their children in childhood, is a significant indicator of the child development and all the relationships that the child creates during his lifetime (Bornstein 2002; McCain & Mustard 1999).

Sometimes children can develop some negative beliefs that are essential for themselves, such as asking: “Am I someone who deserves to be happy?” Such beliefs are formed in childhood and parents play an important role during this process (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002). Research also shows that children who have been victims of violence within their families were 24% more likely to report violent behavior as adolescents than those who had not been abused. Teenagers who were victims within families where there was a violent partner were 21 % more likely to report violent acts than those who have not been exposed to it (Baker & Jaffe, 2003). Efforts to assess and treat mental health for young people who have witnessed violence were more limited. Limited research also shows that, as a result of exposure to violence, children may be threatened by mental disorders, symptoms of post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety, anger and aggression, impaired interpersonal relationships with colleagues and relationships with friends and poor academic achievement. This is based on some findings made by Levendosky and his co-author (2006), where children with a history of domestic violence are more likely to display behavioral problems in the external environment.

In another study of 103 pre-school children, who were at risk of exposure to domestic violence against their mothers, it was found that domestic violence negatively affects the behavior of children while interacting with their mothers, but that does not affect the relations of mother -child's problematic behavior. These findings suggest that the impact of domestic violence starts very early, reflecting more the relationship built with the mother and other individuals, rather than the child's mental health (Levendosky et al., 2003). In a study of Holden (1998), was reported that marital violence is associated with a wide range of behavioral and adaption problems, such as emotional and behavioral problems of children. The effects of domestic violence are set by Rossman (2001), as being considered as long-term effects where exposure at any age can create disruptions and disorders in all aspects of child development. To

witness a mother's abuse by her partner for a long time, affects the child or adolescent's perception of the mother as a vulnerable victim of emotionally, or as someone who can not defend it. Often in these cases there is a change of roles, where the child goes to the mother's caretaker role, by leaving behind all his childish dreams and desires.

4. Domestic violence and parenting issues

Violence against women is a serious threat to women's health throughout the world. Such violence may interfere with their motherly behavior. This complicated problem with its roots in marital relationships has a negative impact on parenting. Women, who are victims of domestic violence, have usually difficulties in concentrating and working effectively with their children; they are more inclined to withdrawal and avoidance and ignore the impact of violence on themselves and their children. These mothers risk being killed or seriously injured and most of the time they suffer from chronic pain, depression, psychosomatic disorders, unwanted pregnancies, miscarriages, and so on. The roles played by all members of an abusive family reflect how each person adapts and gets used to the confidentiality, intrigues, and dangerous situation in which they live. An abusive man undermines the efforts of a mother in parenting, whether, in rejecting it, weakening its confidence as a parent, or by changing the views of her children towards their mother in order not to be considered as a person worthy of respect. She can change her style of parenting (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002).

Most women do not usually report violence to the police, they do not understand that it is a criminal offense, because many of them are violent towards their children and at the same time see it as a tool for education. The effects of violence can continue even after the abuse has stopped because such effects can be significantly undeclared. The results of a study (Albania Reproductive Health Survey) conducted by the Ministry of Health in 2002, show that 11.5 percent of Albanian women between age groups 15-44 had children who have witnessed parental abuse. Also male individuals with the same social profile reported having observed (47.4 percent) and have experienced, (66.8 percent), high levels of violence as children. A survey conducted by professionals in the health sector shows another profile of such abuse. They found that 37 percent of women living in Tirana have experienced physical violence, where women aged 25-34 were at higher risk. According to their findings, the increase in the educational level of women has increased the risk of being abused. Also, in families where only women were

employed, the risk of being abused was higher. Such findings are consistent with theories which argue that violence is used to enforce gender hierarchies (Burazeri et al., 2005).

Nowadays, there is a great concern about the effects of violence on children and a limited attention exercised on the effects of violence against their mothers and parenting. Such concerns have always been focused more on children than among women who play a key role in their children's welfare. Although some studies show that domestic violence does not have a big impact on parental attitudes towards raising children, this does not mean that the quality of a parent remains the same, as in a violent environment, as well as in non-violent households (Holden, 1998). For example, mothers of children exposed to domestic violence in fact show a huge increase in the use of positive discipline and a slight decrease in bringing the softness and warmth compared to mothers of children not exposed to violence (Levendosky et al., 2003 and Letourneau et al., 2007). Also, find out how reasonable is mediating the connection between domestic violence and parental behavior through internal mental representations of the mother, to herself, her child and care (Stephens, 1999). Sometimes, women feel as trapped and fight to protect their children from abusers. In this context, the mother plays an important role in how children are affected by violence. Many studies have focused more on abused women where regarding parenting; they are considered a failed mother. A few studies have been made about the effect of domestic violence on parenting experiences under such circumstances, regardless of the position of the mother.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Through this work we found some of the difficulties that women face in relation to parenting in the context of domestic violence. In addition to the evidences and the negative impact of violence on women and children, being familiar with the domestic violence indicators show that the judiciary and other government institutions lack the will to focus their powers to child welfare, women and their issues related to parenting. Having considered and treated as a crime of violence within the family, the state and the judicial authorities think that such a problem will be resolved once the perpetrator is punished. But such a conclusion is not correct, because the punishment of domestic violence should be accompanied by the provision of intervention or rehabilitation programs in the service of mothers and children to recover from trauma these victims, by the state structures. In fact, safety and rights of victims of domestic

violence should be a top priority in all aspects of the services provided by the judicial institutions.

Cultural changes take time so that new cultural values and social concerns about the life of the society of the country, primarily in its core cell is the family. Making changes in marital relationships between parents and children requires the creation of a new culture, seeking an active role in society (civil) and also require decisive implementation of state laws that protect the rights and freedoms of every citizen and condemning any kind of violence in society and in the family.

Also, child welfare professionals and family must be aware of and assess the risk for children and establish relationships with their mothers and intervene appropriately and in a timely manner to prevent this phenomenon. When in most cases the abusers are male partners in the family, it is important that they become part of the problem and be involved in the intervention programs. In this way, their commitment as fathers towards their children can open up opportunities for change. Therefore, domestic violence strategies and intervention programs should support their view that domestic violence is a criminal activity, it is a learned behavior, and is therefore variable. The focus of social policies and practices related to domestic violence should be to improve the safety of women and children and the prevention of abusive behavior, intimidation and violent offenders to this category of population.

Bibliography

1. Baker, L. L. & Jaffe, P. G. (2003). Youth Exposed to Domestic Violence: A handbook for the Juvenile Justice System to Enhance Assessment and Intervention Strategies for Youth from violent homes. Center for children and the family in the Justice System, p. 7.

2. Bancroft, L. & Silverman, J. (2002). The batterer neither parent: Addressing the impact of Domestic Violence on Family Dynamics .: Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

3. Bornstein, M. (Ed.). (2002). Handbook of Parenting: Vol. 1: Children and Parenting (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

4. Burazeri G., E. Roshi, Jewkes R, Jordan S., Bjegovi V., & Laaser U. (2005). "Factors Associated with spousal Physical Violence in Albania: Cross sectional study", *British Medical Journal* 331, 197-201.

5. Cunningham, A. & Baker, L. (2007). *Little Eyes, Little Ears: How Violence Against Children a mother nor broke the world Grow shapes. The center for children and the family in the justice system* (book).

6. Domestic violence in the focus of media - Guidelines. (2008). Gender Alliance for Development (GADC). Taken from: www.gadc.org.al

7. Holden, G.W. (1998). Introduction: the Development of Research Into Another consequence of Family Violence. In: *Children Exposed to Marital Violence: Theory, Research, and Applied Issues* (eds GW Holden, RA Jouriles Geffner & EN), p. 1-20. American Psychological Association, Washington.

8. Horowitz, however. & Schnabel, A. (April, 2004). *Human rights and Societies in transition: Causes, consequences, Responses*. United Nations University Press, Tokyo, New York, Paris.

9. Lapierre, S. (2008). Mothering in the context of Domestic Violence: the pervasiveness of a deficit model of mothering. *Child and Family Social Work* 13, 454-463.

10. Letourneau, NL, Fedick, CB & Willms JD (2007). Mothering and Domestic Violence: A longitudinal Analysis. *Journal of Family Violence*.

11. Levendosky, AA, HUTH-Bocks, AC, Shapiro, DL & Semel, MA (2003). The impact of Domestic Violence on the maternal-child relationship and PRESCHOOL-age Children's functioning. *Journal of Family Psychology* 17 (3), 275-287.

12. Levendosky, AA, Leahy, KL, Bogan, GA, Davidson WS & von Eye, A. (2006). Domestic Violence, maternal Parenting, Maternal Mental Health, and infant externalizing behavior. *Journal of Family Psychology* 20 (4), 544-552.

13. Loya, A. & Jamal, B. (2005). Crime Within the family. *The Review of English Legal Medicine* 2, 9-16.

14. McCain, M., & Mustard, F. (1999). Early years study: reversing the real brain drain. Ottawa: Canadian Institute of Advanced Research.
15. Rossman, B. B. R. (2001). Longer term Effects of Children's Exposure to Domestic Violence. Domestic Violence in the Lives of Children: The Future of Research, Intervention, and Social Policy (eds SA Graham-Bermann & JL Edleson), p. 35-65. American Psychology Association, Washington.
16. SRVAW, report to the Commission on Human Rights, (1996). AI Interview with NGOs. Useful to Albanian Women.
17. Stephens, DL (1999), Battered Women's views of their Children. Journal of Interpersonal Violence 14, 731-746.
18. How prevalent is Domestic Violence in Albania. Retrieved from: www.unicef.org