

Domestic Violence in Azerbaijan Matlab Asgar

Domestic violence against women is a taboo subject in Azerbaijan's patriarchal society. It is one of the main obstacles to achieving gender equality in all spheres of life. Realising this, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women noted in January 1998, that it was

seriously concerned that insufficient efforts have been introduced to assess and combat violence against women, particularly in the light of the fact that socio-economic and physical hardships usually increase the incidence of violence, especially in the domestic sphere.

The Human Rights Committee also noted with concern in November 2001,

that domestic violence is apparently not acknowledged to be a problem and that information on these matters is not systematically maintained, that women have a low level of awareness of their rights and the remedies available to them, and that complaints are not being adequately dealt with.

The Women's Rights Monitoring Group of the Human Rights Centre of Azerbaijan carried out research on domestic violence in six Azerbaijani regions. The results showed that 35.3% of women had been subjected to violence by their male relatives; 21.3% believed that men did not respect women's opinions; 20.2% of women complained of moral humiliation; and 19.8% of women were under the physical influence of men. However, there are no reliable state statistics about the violence against women in general and about domestic violence in particular. In Azerbaijan, it is not acceptable 'to seek solutions for family problems outside of the family or household'. Moreover, women/girls are not accepted or encouraged to go to the police in the cases of abuse by husbands, brothers, or fathers. A complaint to the police would be badly perceived not only by the victim's family, relatives, and public opinion, but also by the representatives of authority and the policemen to whom the woman would go to.

It is reported that women are often deprived of their rights to self-determination (independent decision-making), equal participation within the family, and to proper education and employment opportunities as compared to male counterparts. It is also worth noting that the majority of abused women do not consider the abuse, which they suffer within the home, as morally humiliating. Society largely considers the phenomenon to be a part of social life. The problem of domestic violence is one of the most common and difficult problems in the Republic. Despite its prevalence within society, the problem is silenced. Wives, who suffer violence from their husbands, may refer to the authorities, but young girls, who suffer systematic violence from their fathers and brothers, almost never turn to the authorities.

The Women's Crisis Centre was established in 2001 with the Institute of Peace and Democracy and represented the first and, thus, the only women's organisation in Azerbaijan. By 2003, the Women's Crisis Centre had helped 1,884 women and girls with problems of domestic violence. In the first nine months of 2004, the Women's Crisis Centre received 1,507 cases. Created in January 2004, the Family Crisis Centre, accepted 42 victims of domestic violence within the first nine months of its conception.

Women's human rights activists have also been subjected to harassment in Azerbaijan. Pressure on the activists and human rights NGOs have been imposed in several ways:

- Despite the current legislation, the Ministry of Justice rejects the majority of human rights NGOs from official registration or fails to issue licenses to these NGOs for official operation.
- The media, both electronic and printed, is controlled by the authorities and constantly discredits the activities of women's rights defenders. The media depicts them as the enemies of society, whose activities are directed against the interests of the nation. It is necessary to consider that in Azerbaijan independent television is generally absent. All electronic media is under the control of the authorities and consequently forms public opinion.
- Though authorities rarely follow through with their threats to use violence, they often use law enforcement agencies against female human rights activists.

Domestic violence is not private problem; it is national problem. Let's protect each other!

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