

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN UKRAINE**

In recent years, gender-based violence against women has become a topic of much discussion in Ukraine. Grassroots movements are calling out sexual and domestic violence, sexism in media and politics, and discriminatory attitudes in Ukrainian society.

National and international organizations are campaigning for stronger implementation of Ukraine's obligations to combat domestic violence. However, despite new laws and measures to address gender-based violence, and the current media attention and debates on social media, violence against women remains a widespread yet deeply hidden phenomenon in Ukraine. While some extreme cases have made headlines, the everyday experience of many women of sexual, physical, economic and psychological violence remains largely unacknowledged and invisible. All too often, such women are simply failed by the institutions tasked with protecting them, and prosecuting their abusers. [ 1, c.10]

According to latest UN Report around 45 percent of Ukraine's population (45 million) suffers violence – physical, sexual or mental – and most of them are women.[4]

From the historical point of view the problem of violence against women in Ukraine was always surrounded by silence. There are not too many sources of official statistics to estimate how deep the problem is. This fact also brings understanding that the mass media is unsure how to approach the issue, the authorities do not know how to deal with the manifestations of the violence and the nation doesn't know how to mobilize the public to end the violence. [5, c.76]

In Ukraine domestic violence towards women has a long history. There are evidences that the model of male aggressiveness directed towards women is transferred from generation to generation. Recent studies reveal that violence against women is not limited to any particular segment of the Ukrainian population and occurs across all social layers. There are not many Ukrainian women who have achieved economic independence and own their own home. [5, c.77]

According to recent research violence against women remains a hidden problem, but it is clear that the ongoing War in Donbass in Ukraine leads to an increase in its prevalence. [ 6, c.6]

A survey of young Ukrainian girls performed by All-Ukrainian Committee for the Protection of Children reveals that a sexual abuse of them accounts for high proportion of the abuse victims. For example, it was reported that one Ukrainian girl out of three had experienced sexual harassment, one out of five had suffered physical sexual abuse, one out of ten had been raped. Criminal statistics reports that 55% of registered sexual assaults in Ukraine are directed towards youth under 18, and 40% of them or 22% in total - towards children under 14. [5, c. 78-79]

In 2017, Ukraine initiated a reform of legislation on domestic and sexual violence. The now former president Petro Poroshenko signed a law (“On Preventing and Counteracting Domestic Violence”) which launched this reform process. [ 2,c.14]

How does Ukraine's new domestic violence law work in practice? According to Ukraine's Unified Register of Court Judgments, 2,288 administrative and 42 criminal

cases on domestic violence were opened in 2019. So far, most domestic violence penalties have led to fines of 170 hryvnias (around £5) or they are closed because a plaintiff fails to appear or withdraws their statement.

The reason why so few criminal cases are open is both because Ukraine's judicial system is slow to change - and because proving the systematic nature of domestic abuse is a long process.[ 2,c.15]

While you may or may not be ready to leave an abusive relationship, it's important to take precautions to keep yourself safe. To ensure your welfare, you should be alert, prepared, and educated. Your safety plan should include the following:

- Know the signs that your abuser is getting upset.
- Identify safe areas of your home—avoiding small spaces, rooms with weapons, and rooms without exits.
- Create several believable reasons to leave your home to avoid abuse.
- Create a code word to let loved ones know you're in danger.
- Make and memorize a list of emergency contacts.[3. c.12]

Ukraine has taken its first step in combating domestic violence. Now the question is how many more years will it take to make the country's law on domestic violence more efficient. In the meantime, there is a strong need for more shelters, more resources and more encouragement to call the police when witnessing or experiencing domestic violence.

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