

The Social Policy of Combating Domestic Violence in Georgia and Lithuania

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Summary. *Domestic violence is perceived as one of the most severe violations of human rights and gender inequality. It has negative psychological, social and economic impact on the victim. In seeking to combat violence of an intimate partner, laws against domestic violence were implemented in many European countries. Two countries, Lithuania and Georgia, are compared in the article. Even if they have different locations and patriarchal traditions, the common past of belonging to Soviet Union unites them.*

The article compares the political measures and their impact on the solution of the domestic violence problem. Even the laws criminalizing domestic violence were implemented in 2006 in Georgia and in 2011 in Lithuania. The problem of domestic violence remains a top issue in both countries. The amount of reported domestic violence events maintains a high level; however, the investigated cases level remains low. Still, a high level of unreported domestic violence cases remain in both countries. Insufficient shelters for women victims of violence remain a problem in both countries.

Keywords: *domestic violence, social work, social policy.*

Introduction

Domestic violence is one of the type of gender based violence. EU Member States use legal definitions of different types of gender-based violence in their national legislation. The main definitions are: intimate partner violence, rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment and stalking. *Violence* means “an intentional physical, mental, sexual, economic or other influence exerted on a person by an act or omission as a result whereof the person suffers physical, property or

non-pecuniary damage.”¹ For intimate partner violence, in Lithuania the term *domestic violence* is used. The term was implemented in Law on Protection Against Domestic Violence in 2011. Another term – *domestic environment* – means “the environment comprising the persons currently or previously linked by marriage, partnership, affinity or other close relations, also the persons having a common domicile and a common household.”²

During the first author’s secondment at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University in 2016³, it was chosen to compare the domestic violence situation in Lithuania and Georgia. Both countries have experienced a Soviet Regime and after gained independence in the 1990s and 1991s experienced encouragements of Western countries to solve domestic violence problem. During the period of the 1980s and 1990s, the United Nation placed the issue of violence against women on the UN agenda. The *Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW 1979) was supplemented in 1992 by *General Recommendation* number 19, as violence against women was not mentioned in the Convention before. According to the supplementation, violence against women was included to the understanding of discrimination (Hester, 2005). *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) was ratified by Lithuania in and Georgia in 1994. Optional Protocol to *the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* was accepted in Lithuania in 2004.

The article analysis statistical data on domestic violence, legislation against domestic violence in Georgia and Lithuania and measures to combat domestic violence issued by police, nongovernmental sector and special focus giving on the role of social worker in the field.

The Spread of Domestic Violence in Georgia and Lithuania

Domestic violence is an acute problem in Georgia and Lithuania. Even though official crime statistics in Georgia have not increased over the last few years, crimes committed within the family are on the rise⁴. Both the government and the civil sector admit that the rapid rise in cases of domestic violence is related to law enforcement’s improved response to these crimes.

Statistical data regarding domestic violence has significantly changed during the last few years. The table below provides information regarding the numbers of notices received on the police hotline and commenced investigations on domestic violence (Table 1).

¹ See id.

² Republic of Lithuania Law on Protection against Domestic Violence. 26 May 2011 No XI-1425, Vilnius, http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_e?p_id=410975&p_query=&p_tr2=2

³ The article was prepared on the material gathered during the secondment at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University (April-June 2016) in the frame of the FP7 Project *EU-PREACC-Possibilities and Limits, Challenges and Obstacles of Transferring CCE EU Pre-Accession Best Practice and Experiences to Modlova’s and Georgia’s Pre- Accession Process (2013–2017)*.

⁴ Criminal Justice Statistics, available at: http://geostat.ge/?action=page&p_id=601&lang=geo; Statistics on crimes related to domestic violence committed during 2007- 2014, available at: <http://police.ge/files/pdf/9%20ოჯახური%20ძალადობა%202007-2014--6%20თვე.pdf>
Statistics on crimes related to domestic violence committed in 2015 – http://police.ge/files/pdf/statistika%20da%20kvlevebi_new/geo/sxvadasxva%20statistika/2015/ოჯახში%20ძალადობა%202015წ.pdf

Table No. 1. *Reporting Domestic Violence in Georgia and Lithuania⁵ (%)*

	2013		2014		2015	
	LT	GE	LT	GE	LT	GE
Registered calls to police (112) regarding domestic violence	21 615	5 447	29 339	9 290	38 510	15 910
Initiated investigation regarding domestic violence (LT, BK article 140, 145, 138) %	10 015 (46.3)	–	10 374 (35.4)	–	10 703 (27.8)	–
Refuses to investigate the case (LT) %	7 285 (33.7)	–	10 176 (34.7)	–	–*	
No procedural decisions were implemented because of administrative violations or false calls (the information was not confirmed) %	4 315 (20)	–	8 789 (29.9)	–	–*	
Investigated cases on domestic violence (Articles 11 ¹ and 126 ¹ of Criminal Code of Georgia) %		185 (3.3)		350 (3.8)		949 (5.9)

* Not published yet.

Resource: Statistics from the Department of the Lithuanian Police, National Statistics Office of Georgia, Special reports prepared by the Public Defender of Georgia (2013–2015).

The abovementioned data shows reporting of domestic violence has increased and that more people report domestic conflicts to the police using the hotline. Since the Law on Protection Against Domestic Violence in Lithuania (2011) was implemented, the reported acts of violence to police is increasing every year. The percentage of investigated cases in Lithuania, however decreases, as the numbers of those refusing to launch the investigation has also increased. In Georgia, domestic violence grew rapidly through 2013–2015 period, largely due to increase in women victims, as 2014 saw an unprecedented increase in the number of femicides (Table No. 2). These dynamics are explained by better reporting and registration of the cases, due to increased awareness through the governmental and civic efforts. However, there might also be other influencing factors⁶, which deserve further study. As Table No. 2 shows Lithuania has also high rates of homicides and femicides.

⁵ Statistics on reports received by 112 are taken from the special reports prepared by the Public Defender of Georgia: Women’s Rights and Gender Equality 2013, p. 13, available at: <http://ombudsman.ge/uploads/other/3/3280.pdf>; Women’s Rights and Gender Equality 2014, p. 24, available at: <http://ombudsman.ge/uploads/other/3/3288.pdf>; Women’s Rights and Gender Equality 2015, p. 33, available at: <http://ombudsman.ge/uploads/other/3/3722.pdf>

⁶ A twofold increase in criminal investigation on domestic violence in the period 2013–2014 is hardly explainable only by raised awareness, especially if we take into consideration the hike in femicides, which predated the beginning of government campaign for awareness rising.

Table No. 2. Homicides and femicides in Georgia and Lithuania

	2013		2014		2015	
	GE	LT	GE	LT	GE	LT
Murders committed in the family	9	21	17	16	–	18
Women killed by husband, ex-husband or partner	8	19	14	15	–	14

Resource: Statistics from the Department of the Lithuanian Police, Violence against Women in Georgia, 2015 Report.

As mentioned before in international legislation victims of domestic violence are mainly women. About 90% of domestic violence cases in most countries victims are women. The victim breakdown by gender in Georgia and Lithuania are not exceptional (Table No. 3). It can be noticed only that the number of domestic violence cases rapidly increased in Georgia in 2015, however the proportion of female and male victims remained similar.

Table No. 3. Victims of domestic violence by gender in Georgia and Lithuania (%)

	2013		2014		2015	
	GE	LT	GE	LT	GE	LT
Female victims	112 (88.2)	5 652 (95.1)	125 (89.3)	5 331 (94.6)	2 301 (87.2)	5 248 (94.3)
Male victims	15 (11.8)	293 (4.9)	15 (10.7)	303 (5.4)	337 (12.8)	319 (5.7)

Resource: Women and Men in Lithuania 2013, 2014, 2015, Statistics Lithuania.

According to the type of domestic violence the physical violence is reported most. On the second place is psychological violence. Both countries report very low rates of sexual violence. European surveys report that usually women are reluctant to answer questions about sexual violence, especially when it occurs in current partnership (WAVE 2013).

Comparing statistical data of domestic violence in Georgia and Lithuania one difference is noticeable – in Georgia domestic violence grew rapidly through 2013–2015 period, largely due to increase in women victims, as 2014 saw an unprecedented increase in the number of femicides. These dynamics are explained by better reporting and registration of the cases, due to increased awareness through the governmental and civic efforts. However, there might also be other influencing factors,⁷ which deserve further study. Even the number of reported domestic cases in Lithuania also was on the rise in the period of 2013–2015, the percentage of investigated cases in Lithuania, however decreases, as the numbers of those refusing to launch the investigation has also increased. Another reason of lower percentage of investigated cases were false calls.

⁷ A twofold increase in criminal investigation on domestic violence in the period 2013–2014 is hardly explainable only by raised awareness, especially if we take into consideration the hike in femicides, which predated the beginning of government campaign for awareness rising.

The Perception of Domestic Violence

Eurobarometer survey (2016) showed that awareness of domestic violence is increasing in Lithuania. In comparison with the Eurobarometer survey in 2010, 31% of population (3% more) told that domestic violence against women is very common. In total 83% of Lithuanian inhabitants had an opinion that domestic violence against women is very common or fairly common (Eurobarometer, 2016). 24% of population had an opinion that domestic violence against men is common as well. In Georgia, a national public opinion survey on domestic violence conducted in 2013 showed that 77.8% of inhabitants have an opinion that domestic violence occurs very often or quite often (Sumbadze 2014).⁸

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) conducted an EU wide survey on violence against women (FRA 2014). The interviews with 42 000 women across EU countries were conducted. Women were asked about their experiences of physical, sexual and psychological violence, including domestic violence (incidents of intimate partner violence). During the survey, women were also asked, how common is violence against women by partners, acquaintances or strangers in their country of residence. The data of EU countries showed that on average, 78% of women consider violence against women very common or as common. In the countries where media gave more attention to the problem of violence against women, the rates were higher.

A public opinion survey *Domestic Violence* conducted in 2014 in Lithuania showed that 18.4% of respondents have suffered from domestic violence, women have experienced violence more often than men: 26.4% of women and 9.3% of men reported having experienced domestic violence (more often physical and psychological violence). Still, 70% of victims haven't sought help (Social Report 2014–2015, 2015).

A survey in Georgia showed that 66.8% of respondents know victims/survivors of domestic violence and 56.3% admitted that they know perpetrators personally (Sumbadze 2014) According to Eurobarometer survey (2016) 74% of respondents in Lithuania knew a female or male victim of domestic violence. 33% knew the victim in their circle of friends or family, 30% – in their neighborhood and 11% – in their studies or work (Eurobarometer 2016) In the FRA study (2014), it was also noticed that there is a positive correlation between the experience of physical and/or sexual violence and knowing other female victims of violence.

79% of respondents of survey in Georgia think that women, experiencing domestic violence, should divorce. Still, 17% of interviewees said that women should tolerate violence in order to maintain marriage. 57% of interviewees considered all instances of domestic violence as a criminal offence. 68.9% of respondents admitted that a wife battery should be punished. According to analysts, the public opinion of the country shows an increasing intolerance to domestic violence (Sumbadze 2014)

The Eurobarometer survey of 2016 showed that 78% of Lithuanian inhabitants think that domestic violence against women is unacceptable and should be punished by law. 72% of

⁸ 1500 persons (women – 65.1% and men – 34.9%) were surveyed in the age groups of 18 to 80. Eight focus group discussions were held with women and men, as well as youth. The survey was conducted in Tbilisi, Kakheti and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti regions of Georgia.

Lithuanian inhabitants expressed the opinion that domestic violence against men is also unacceptable and should be punished by law as well. Female respondents showed less tolerance to domestic violence (81% of women and 73% of men). The most tolerance to domestic violence in Lithuania showed a middle-aged generation (45–54 years old). The younger and the older generation were less tolerable to domestic violence.

An older generation of respondents in Georgia (over 60 years old more often considered domestic violence as a family matter than a criminal offence (Sumbadze, 2014). Patriarchal norms are seen as the root of the problem of domestic violence in the country (Research Directorate 2015). The younger generation in the age group 18-30 was less tolerant to violence. The attitudes also correlated with the level of education. Persons with higher education showed less tolerance to domestic violence. Women were also more informed than men where to get help in case of experience of domestic violence. The survey also showed that access to new technologies correlate with less tolerance to violence. It might be that global ideas do greater influence than local policy measures (Sumbadze 2014).

In the definition of domestic violence, physical violence is usually emphasized and the terms perpetrator, victim and/or survivor are used. The focus groups discussions in the survey in Georgia in 2013 showed that participants also named psychological, economic violence, restriction of freedom and control. There was mentioned not only husbands/partners violence against women, but also parents' violence against children, grandparents' violence and brothers violence against sisters. Young men justified brothers' violence against their sisters in order to change their behavior and protect them from "disgrace". Focus groups participants talking about reasons of domestic violence named gender inequality, men superiority over women. Many participants said that society tolerance to swearing is widespread and this is also one of the main reasons of domestic violence. Excessive demands towards boys also encourage the accumulation of aggression. The widespread unemployment of men was also mentioned as a reason of violence. (Sumbadze 2014).

According to Eurobarometer (2016) survey 45% of Lithuanian respondents agreed or tend to agree that violence against women is often provoked by a victim. Lithuanian scientific scholars agree that patriarchal family model, inherited from Baltic culture and reinforced by Catholic Church, lack of positive capacities to solve conflicts in the family are the main reasons of domestic violence (Gustainienė 2005; Maslauskaitė 2005). Alcohol abuse is also one of the main factors influencing conflicts in families (Gudžinskienė, Gedminienė 2011). Lithuania, according to Statistics, is one of the most consuming alcohol countries in Europe. In 2015, one Lithuanian inhabitant over 15 years old consumed 14 liters of pure alcohol (source: The Drug, Tobacco and Alcohol Control Department).

In summary, in both countries the majority of inhabitants think that domestic violence happens often in their country. However, in analyzing the inhabitants' opinion by age group, the slight difference is noticeable between countries: in Georgia, the oldest group of inhabitants found domestic violence as family matter more often, and in Lithuania most tolerant to domestic violence was a middle aged generation. Further surveys are needed to explain these differences. Both countries inherited patriarchal norms and gender inequality is one of the main reasons of domestic violence.

Legislation for Combating Domestic Violence in Georgia and Lithuania

Combating domestic violence has been a priority for Georgia for a decade. The Law on Domestic Violence was adopted in 2006, which was followed by state action plans and changes to criminal and administrative legislation. In May 2012, amendments were made to the criminal code of Georgia, which criminalized Domestic Violence. The Article 11 defines a circle of family members and refers to the list of crimes throughout the code. Article 126 determines the criminal nature of domestic violence and establishes responsibility for committed acts.

Nevertheless, domestic violence remained one of the most underreported and neglected crimes. After a dramatic rise in femicide in Georgia in 2014, law enforcement agencies became more effective in investigating domestic violence cases. The crime of domestic violence is now more visible and public awareness is growing steadily, but the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs (MoLHSA) is minimally engaged in combating domestic violence, undermining progress on this issue.

Some of the more visible changes took place within the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia. The Ministry launched a public awareness campaign on violence against women. While the campaign was criticized for multiple reasons,⁹ it ultimately succeeded in increasing the knowledge and sensitivity of police officers who were involved in the campaign. More victims of domestic violence are now told by the police, that combating domestic violence is a priority. Consequently, cases of domestic violence are treated more seriously and effectively. Since 2014, the crime of domestic violence has been on the rise. The police also show readiness to intervene in cases of administrative and criminal violations, which results in issuing restraining orders and the commencement of investigations (Table No. 4). If people continue to trust the police and the effective response from law enforcement continues, the statistics will continue to rise as well.

Table No. 4. Restraining orders issued by Georgian police (%)

	2013	2014	2015
Restraining orders issued by the police	212 (3.9)	902 (9.7)	2,726 (17.1)

Resource: Special reports prepared by the Public Defender of Georgia (2013–2015).

Lithuanian police officers have two kinds of problems while intervening in domestic violence cases – insufficiently mediating where it is needed and mislabeling domestic violence as a conflict (between to equal parts) allowing a perpetrator to avoid responsibility. The repeated violence cases show that even restraining orders are issued by police, often the victims doesn't get help on time, when the perpetrator violates the order. 90% of the domestic violence cases the perpetrator has to obliged not to leave the country, however, often he can stay at home and the victim is not protected from the recurrence of violence (Vaigė 2015).

Georgia implemented a National Action Plan 2016–2017 on the Measures for combating domestic violence. For strengthening the prevention of domestic violence a large scale of training

⁹ The campaign “No to violence” was initiated by the Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia – <http://police.ge/ge/shs-ministris-initsiativit-datskebuli-kampania-/7435>. The Emergency and Operative Response Center – 112 joined the campaign “No to violence” - http://112.gov.ge/?m=8&news_id=94;

is planned for staff of different institutions participating in the field of domestic violence: the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Chief Prosecutor's Office, staff of Primary Healthcare System judges/judicial assistants, teachers/principals of secondary schools and vocational educational institutions, social workers of the Social Service Agency, social workers and psychologists of penitential institutions, lawyers, staff of preschool educational institutions and staff of local self-government bodies.

In 2011, the Government of the Republic of Lithuania submitted the Fifth Report on the Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Lithuania. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women collected information from Civil Society organizations and made concluding observations in the year of 2014.¹⁰ The positive progress since 2008 were noticed, still the Committee expressed concerns about inadequate assistance and number of shelters in Lithuania available to women who are victims of violence and insufficient information on the evaluation of the implementation of the National Strategy for Combating Violence against Women 2010–2012. The Committee also noted that non-governmental organizations of women's rights get inadequate funding and their involvement in the implementation of the National Program is limited. According to Committee the marital rape has not been explicitly criminalized (CEDAW Committee 2014).

According to recommendations Lithuania adopted a national program for 2014–2020. The purpose is to strengthen the prevention and intervention measures for combating domestic violence. The strategy language, however, is to neutral and lacks connection with international legislation and focus on eliminating all forms of violence against women (Vaigė 2015). The CEDAW Committee also recommended to Lithuania to involve the secondary schools and primary health sector to prevention and interventions programs against domestic violence.

NGO Work in the Field of Domestic Violence

The Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE) Network includes NGO's combating violence against women and children from 46 European countries. The European network was established in 1994 and since 2014 it got status of formal network. The WAVE collects data in field of violence against women and children from European countries. Lithuanian and Georgian NGO's working in the violence against women and children field are also in this network. The WAVE Network publishes data from member countries and let to compare different practices of countries in combating violence against women and children.

In 2014, the Network published, what kind of help victims of violence can get in the European countries. According to it in Lithuania there is one women helpline called Women's Line, which started its work in 2004, but 24/7 operation started only in 2016. Another helpline – the "Line of Hope" – is also available 24 hours. Both helplines provide help for free. There are two national women's helplines in Georgia, established in 2010, both offer free of charge 24/7 support to female survivors of violence. There are, however, no specialized shelters for survivors of sexual violence neither in Georgia nor in Lithuania. Municipal Social Care Centers in Lithuania

¹⁰ Adopted by the Committee at its 58th session (30 June–18 July 2014).

offer accommodation for all persons being in a crisis situation, including women and men and vulnerable groups such as the homeless, ex-convicts, drug users, children and young people without appropriate family support (WAVE, 2014).

A network of 17 NGO – Specialized Help Centers for victims of violence was formed and it works on a 12-month program basis in comparison to previous temporary funding. These Centers were modeled according to Austrian intervention center approach. The centers assist not only the victims, who are actively looking for support, but also contact the violence survivors, who reported violence to police and offer them support. The centers, however report that funding is not sufficient, as it allows providing only two to four staff at each center (WAVE 2014). Since 2016, Specialized Help Centers began working 24 hours. In 2014, 93% of victims of domestic violence got support and assistance from the Specialized Help Centers. They mainly received consultation and information (7 811 individuals). Psychological assistance was provided to 48% of victims (4 043 individuals) and 31% of victims received legal assistance (individuals 2 624). 5% of violence survivors (432 individuals) refused offered assistance. In comparison with 2012, when the network of specialized assistance centers (SAC) started to operate, the number of victims of domestic violence who were provided assistance has more than doubled (Social Report 2014-2015, Social Report 2012–2016).

There are four state funded shelters for victims of domestic violence in Georgia, which operate in the following cities: Gori, Kutaisi, Tbilisi and Signagi. Most of which can accommodate 20 victims. These shelters are managed by the State Fund for Protection and Assistance of Victims of Human Trafficking. In order to get into these shelters, a person must have an official status as a victim of domestic violence. In Georgia, there is a special procedure regulated by law as to how one can get this official status, which entitles a victim to receive services from the state.

In addition to this, recently, the government has opened a Crisis Center for prospective victims in Tbilisi, which can accept 15 victims. A person can get to the crisis center without the official status as a victim of domestic violence and receive immediate help. Three shelters for victims of domestic violence run by NGOs also operate in Georgia (Anti Violence Network of Georgia) which are in Tbilisi (10 places), Akhaltsikhe (8 places) and Gurjaani (2 places). In order to get into these shelters a person does not need to have the official status of a victim by the state. These shelters offer the following support: psychosocial, medical, legal and consultations as well as housing.

Domestic violence against LGBTI individuals in Georgia and Lithuania is mostly unreported. The FRA survey on domestic violence in 2014 reported that 7% of respondents indicated that they had experienced serious incidents of violence by their family members. Female respondents indicated more cases of domestic violence than their male counterparts. Only 5% of respondents were gay or bisexual men (FRA 2014). No such studies on domestic abuse cases towards LGBTI people have been carried out in Georgia (EMC 2016). Despite that, some NGO's working for LGBTI rights, such as Identoba, run internationally funded projects offering temporary shelter for LGBTI people leaving home because of experienced psychological and/or physical violence.

In 2015, Lithuanian Gay League carried out an international project called *Bleeding Love* about violence in intimate relationships among LBT women. The project sought to raise public awareness about domestic violence issues in a LGBT community. The Law on Protection against Domestic Violence is not completely applicable to same-sex couples, as they cannot legally

register their relationships in Lithuania, and usually hide their residing together from the public. The gender-neutral provision of the law is too vague to take into account the specific needs of the members of the local LGBT community. Therefore, none of the 17 victim support facilities in the country openly declare themselves as being equipped to address the specific needs of the members of the local LGBT community.

In summary, despite some progress in women rights protection observed since 2008, inadequate assistance and insufficient shelters for women victims of violence remain a problem in Lithuania. Specialized shelters for survivors of sexual violence exist neither in Georgia nor in Lithuania. Nevertheless, in Lithuania, like in Georgia, adoption of legislation against domestic violence and rising public awareness increased number of acts of violence reported to police. On the other hand, increase in the reported cases (during 2012-2015) was not so drastic in Lithuania as in Georgia that is another indication of need for additional study of factors influencing domestic violence statistics dynamics in case of Georgia.

Work with Perpetrators

Men Crises Centers, established in the biggest cities of Lithuania works also with men suffering violence and have behavior change programs for perpetrators. Unfortunately, there is not one men crises center in Georgia. The services for perpetrators is next to zero. Only if a probationer is perpetrator then probation agency is working with him. By the moment there is established a special program for work with probationer. In one of Lithuanian prisons there was implemented one program for sexual offenders (SeNAT), but no special programs for perpetrators (Prison Department, 2015).

The perpetrators programs in Lithuania are adapted from work practice with perpetrators in Denmark. According to it there is offered a behavior change program of 28 group meetings. Some centers also offer parental skills development programs for violent men. According to Men Crises Centers employees, men usually suffer from psychological problems after divorce, as they stay alone and not always can stay in touch with children, because according to court practice children stay with mother. Men also experience psychological violence from partners, but don't seek for help. Still support for men is not as well established, as support for women.

According to Alan Clarke and Sarah Wydall (2013), who analyzed domestic violence programs in England and Wales, domestic violence perpetrator programs do not always respond to individual men's needs, especially for those perpetrators, who recognize their problem and want to change their behavior. The programs are usually orientated to a *quick fix*, there are set of a fixed number of sessions by psychologist, but their needs of practical support, such as housing, employment, treatment of alcohol or drug abuse, parental skills development usually are not fulfilled. However, as authors notice there is a dilemma, which programs to prioritize, when services for victims are under-resourced (Clarke, Wydall 2013).

In summary, in Lithuania, unlike in Georgia, there are crises centers working with men, including perpetrators, suffering from violence and having violent behavior. While men also experience psychological violence from partners, in both countries support for men is not as well established, as support for women. On the other hand, beyond information, consultancy and skills development services they need also support in terms of housing, employment, treatment of drug abuse etc.

The Role of a Social Worker in Combating Domestic Violence against Women

International best practice as well as the 2006 Law of Georgia on the Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Domestic Violence (hereinafter the law on domestic violence) both highlight the important role of social work in combating and preventing crimes related to domestic violence. To achieve tangible results in fighting domestic violence, social workers have to intervene in every reported case. They should protect the interests of children, inform victims of domestic violence of available remedies and services and work with abusive spouses. Undeveloped legislation and the lack of financial and human resources are obstacles to the development of social work as a key to successfully fighting domestic violence.

As the police become more active, social workers remain practically uninvolved in the fight against domestic violence in Georgia. Currently, social workers intervene only in cases of domestic violence where children are involved, namely in cases where victims of domestic violence are children.¹¹ In other cases, for instance where victims of domestic violence are women, social workers play no role. This takes place because of the law on domestic violence Article 8 on social work is suspended by Article 22(3) of the same law.¹² So, one of the barriers for engagement of social work in fighting domestic violence lies within legal regulations. However, currently the government is working on developing national referral mechanism to provide coordinated response to domestic violence cases. The document will elaborate the role and functions of the fundamental services to protect victims of DV, such as social services, law enforcement services and health services.

According to the employees' qualification requirements for work at the Specialized Help Centers in Lithuania, which entered into force since 1 January of 2016 (Decree No. A1-227, 2015), a degree of social work studies is not required. A social consultant has to have a bachelor or college degree of social sciences or the experience of 3 years in the area of domestic violence. The priority is given for employees, who have finished a special program of 40 academic hours for volunteers on domestic violence and human rights. A social consultant has to finish special training of 16 hours before starting to work at Specialized Help Centers. The training consists information on psychological support, human rights, legislation of domestic violence and work of institutions of justice. Volunteers can be also involved in the work with victims of domestic violence (Decree No. A1-227, 2015), however combating domestic violence shouldn't be based on volunteer work.

Police officers were also involved in trainings in Lithuania as in Georgia. In 2014, training for police officers was organized covering the topics of the protection against domestic violence and the prevention of domestic violence and protection of victims. 161 officers were trained and methodical recommendations on domestic violence have been published (Social Report 2014-2015). 6 organizations with partners (17 Specialized Assistance Centers) were financed through the funds the Ministry of Social Security and Labor and they will provide specialized integrated

¹¹ The official website of the Social Service Agency states that social workers engage in domestic violence cases only when a child is involved: http://ssa.gov.ge/index.php?sec_id=801&lang_id=GEO

¹² Law of Georgia on Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Domestic Violence, available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/26422?impose=original>

assistance all over Lithuania in 2016–2018 (Social Report 2012–2016, 2015). However, most of the Specialized Assistance Centers has only 4-6 insured employees each and the need of support is high (Table No. 3, 38510 calls to the police in 2015, Lithuania). As mentioned before the combating domestic violence should be more professionalized and the requirement of social work bachelor or college degree should be included in the employees' qualification requirements.

The total number of social workers in Georgia is extremely low. There are 600 employed in both the governmental and non-governmental sector, out of which only 240 are employed by the Social Service Agency of the MoHLSA.¹³ The population of Georgia is 3.7 million according to last official state census of Georgia.¹⁴ That makes one state social worker for 15 416 persons. These 240 social workers are in charge of performing all the social work related to children, the elderly, probation, prisons, psychiatry, social insolvency, etc. Even before adding the activities associated with preventing and reacting to domestic violence, they are overburdened.

There is no statistic, how many social workers work in the field of domestic violence in Lithuania. The Minister of Social Security and Labor reacted to the homicide of social work assistant during the working time in 2016 and increased the number of social workers in the field of assistance for social risk families by 391. In 2016, 766 social workers were employed in the field of support of social risk families. Since 2017, it should be 1157 social workers in this field. As, domestic violence happens not only in the families of social risk, the separate attention should be given to this field as well.

Therefore, in order to effectively implement domestic violence legislation and policy in Georgia, establishing of a mechanism of social work and engagement of specialized social workers is of vital importance. Domestic violence cannot be effectively addressed without the preventive function of social work. The 240 overloaded social workers are not in a position to take over new tasks related to domestic violence. Therefore, the Georgian Government should consider hiring a number of new, specialized social workers. For the engagement of social work in combating domestic violence both legislative and budgetary changes are necessary.

In summary, preventive function of social work is needed to address domestic violence. Georgia, unlike Lithuania, has very few social workers overburdened with multiple roles and too many cases. On the other hand, domestic violence cases need coordinated response combining social services, law enforcement services and health services. Combating domestic violence should be more professionalized in Lithuania and the requirement of social work bachelor or college degree should be included in qualification requirements for the service providing practitioners involved in the field.

Conclusions

Gender-based violence is perceived as one of the most severe violations of human rights and gender inequality. During the period of the 1980s and 1990s, the United Nation placed the

¹³ Information on social Workers (duties, tasks and obligations, their spheres of competences) is available on the official website of the Social Service Agency (only in Georgian): http://ssa.gov.ge/index.php?sec_id=801&lang_id=GEO

¹⁴ Statistics on population of Georgia by National Statistics Office of Georgia, available at: http://www.geostat.ge/?action=page&p_id=472&lang=geo

issue of violence against women on the UN agenda. The Law on Protection Against Domestic Violence were implemented in Georgia in 2006 and in Lithuania in 2011. Since then, the statistic of reported domestic violence cases is rising in Lithuania as well as in Georgia. Nevertheless, in Lithuania, like in Georgia, the adoption of legislation against domestic violence and rising public awareness increased number of acts of violence reported to police. On the other hand, an increase in the reported cases (during 2012–2015) was not so drastic in Lithuania as in Georgia. In Georgia, domestic violence grew rapidly largely due to increase in the number of femicides in 2014. These dynamics are explained by better reporting and registration of the cases due to an increased awareness through governmental and civic efforts. However, there might also be other influencing factors that deserve further study. In Lithuania, unlike in Georgia, the percentage of investigated cases of domestic violence decreased during the same 2012–15 period due to increasing numbers of victims refusing to trigger a criminal case. Reasons for this different behavior in the two countries need to be studied separately.

Despite some progress in women rights protection observed since 2008, inadequate assistance and insufficient shelters for women victims of violence remains a problem in Lithuania. Specialized shelters for survivors of sexual violence exist neither in Georgia nor in Lithuania. Domestic violence against LGBTI individuals, in Georgia as well as in Lithuania, is mostly unreported. However, from the Lithuanian case, it is clear that the existing laws on domestic violence, designed on assumption of heterosexual relationships, are ineffective in the LGBT community case due to widespread homo-, bi- and transphobic attitudes. On the other hand, relevant agencies need to coordinate responses to domestic violence in same sex relationships and engage more experienced and educated staff in these cases.

In Lithuania, unlike in Georgia, there are crises centers working with men, including perpetrators, suffering from violence and having violent behavior. While men also experience psychological violence from partners, in both countries support for men is not as well established as support for women. On the other hand, beyond information, consultancy and skills development services, they need also support in terms of housing, employment, treatment of drug abuse etc.

The support for victims is not professionalized enough. The Lithuanian case also showed that police officers have two kinds of problems while intervening in domestic violence cases – insufficiently mediating where it is needed and mislabeling domestic violence as a conflict (between to equal parts) and allowing a perpetrator to avoid responsibility. The role of a social worker is very important in this field. Georgia, unlike Lithuania, has very few social workers, who are overburdened with multiple roles and too many cases. On the other hand, domestic violence cases need a coordinated response combining social services, law enforcement services and health services. Combating domestic violence should be more professionalized in Lithuania and the requirement of social work bachelor or college degree should be included in qualification requirements for the service providing practitioners involved in the field.

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