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## **How Much We Know Reality: Small Statistics on Gender-Based Violence**

Domestic or family violence/discrimination is a relatively new realm of study and research in Social Sciences. Zinn, Eitzen and Wells (2008) have indicated that it started since 1975 by sociologists Gelles, R. and Straus, M. in the United States (p.356), whereas in some countries it has been spoken publicly merely couple of years ago.

Families are historically shaped by the culture, traditions and values of certain ethnic and race groups; in addition, different geographic locations affect the distribution of gender roles and hence power in the family.

In spite of that a family is based on mutual love and affection; it is like all other social institutions a power system (Zinn et al., 2008); that means there is a unequal distribution of power among family members. This uneven role/position and responsibility leads to conflict. Thus, neither love and security nor violence or abuse are strange for a family.

However, the notion of family conflict and domestic violence differs among various societies that prompt different attitudes and ways to display, discuss, solve or even make taboo the problem.

After defining domestic violence, explaining the methodology of the survey and some data, research will expand (I'm not clear on the meaning you're trying to convey) on peculiarities of this phenomenon in two countries ---- the United States and Georgia, distinguished in many cases from each other; the article will focus on reasons that shape different concerns about family conflict in these countries; the macro context that influences the micro level will be revealed, as well as ways of solving the problem.

According to the National Violence Against Women Survey (Tjaden and Thoennes, 2005, p.5) violence is defined as “intimate partner violence to include rape, physical assault and stalking perpetrated by current and former spouses, cohabiting partners, and dating partners” (as cited in Zinn et al., 2008, p.361). In a Georgian source the definition is almost the same: “Domestic violence is permanent abuse and prohibition that one or several members spread over other member/members of the family for control and power.” (American Bar Association, 2002, p.1). Say in general verbal, sexual or physical abuse, limitation of financial, educational or professional freedom as well as emotional threats (blackmail, development of inferiority complex) by one family member to other can be identified as a domestic/family violence or discrimination. In the process of research of this social phenomenon both the qualitative and quantitative methods are used, but the subject remains difficult to examine. There are several obstacles for it that are different according to countries, culture, traditions, ethnicity, class, race and gender.

In 1974 Stainmetz and Starus (p.3) have indicated that it is a problem “because we prefer to picture the family as an arena for love and gentleness rather than a place for violence” (as cited in Zinn et al., 2008, p.356). But since the 1970s many things have changed and the facts of family violence in American society cannot be ignored. One of the reasons that makes it difficult to get entire data about family violence is that police and courts often choose nonintervention, as they consider that the privacy of marriage should be endorsed (Zinn et al., 2008).

The knowledge and experience of American society in certain (I'm unsure what you mean here) field both from scientific and legislative point of view have increased dramatically since the 1970s; However, Georgia has just started to speak about domestic violence openly. The main reason that issue was taboo can be found in the culture, traditions and notion of a family as a social institution in the consciousness of the Georgian people, and also in the Criminal Code of Georgia. It is worth mentioning the Georgian Constitution as well, where there is no definition of “female discrimination.” As it is indicated in the Periodic Report by Non Governmental Organizations Under The Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in Georgia “The level of understanding discrimination in the Georgian public is

very low. The reasons for this are strong traditional, patriarchal beliefs. The strict illegal traditions toward women are not considered to be discriminative” (Meskhi et al., 2006, p.2). Up to June 2006 there were not any articles in the Criminal Code of the country that provided a penalty for domestic violence due to absence of this word in the legislative document. The abovementioned reasons have resulted in the concluding comments of CEDAW report in Georgia: “Committee is concerned about the lack of information and statistics on domestic violence, and that such violence may still be considered a private matter”(Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, 2006, p.4).

As NGO Anti Violence Network of Georgia(AVNG) argues according police statistics “every third emergency call in Tbilisi is for domestic violence. The information gathered by the patrol police overestimated all our expectations” (AVNG, 2006). Here are other statistics: in the USA “Every year, around 1,3 million women and more than 800,000 men are physically assaulted by an intimate partner” (Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000 as cited in Zinn et al., 2008, p.362). Macionis (2007) points out that nevertheless in some cases family brutality stays unreported to police, according the US Bureau of Justice Statistics (2005) about 700,000 people are victims of family violence in each year in the US and 73% constitutes of violence against women (p.487).

The focal research question is: what factors contribute to the hiding or enduring of domestic violence rather than which factors cause it. In this regard the issue on micro- and macro levels should be discussed.

In large scale, the micro level reasons that prompt hiding of some cases of domestic violence are similar in the USA and Georgia.

Among one of the first factors for American society Zinn (2008) indicates is *privacy*, that means no witnesses except family members at the moment of physical assault (p.362). In Georgian society, where patriarchal traditions continue to rule on the level of family relationships, this factor is much more strict. This problem is still taboo. Talking about the problem of domestic violence openly is unacceptable. Many claiming that it is interference in the private life of person (AVNG, 2006).

Among the second and third factors are reluctant but almost necessary relationships with *medical professionals and public agencies/police* (Zinn, 2008). While treating a victim of domestic violence physicians' obligations are limited in some instances --- they can't inquire deeply into the case; also victims evade speaking about details (again due to privacy). As for police and court, many battered women argue that they don't trust them (Zinn, 2008). Tjaden and Thoennes (2000) have indicated that only 27% of women applied to the police with claims about physical assaults (as cited in Zinn et al., 2008, p.362). And at last, victims often lie out of *shame, fear or to protect the partner*(Zinn, 2008).

In Georgia all abovementioned factors emerge with some peculiarities.

*Shame* is among the main reasons why domestic violence is hidden. Georgians are still greatly dependent on public opinion, as in what other people say and that results in *lying*. Although, in almost all cases the symptoms of body injury and the victim's emotional behavior or offensive confession (that the victim often denies later) the evidence of domestic violence is clear. Battered women appeal to medical professionals only in the case of emergency (grievous bodily harm, attempted murder, etc.). Here are some estimates of the extent of the abuse of women by their family members. We could obtain it with certain difficulties in all the hospitals of Kutaisi-city (Georgia) with a population up to 185,000.

Women's Trauma due to domestic violence in 1991-2002 years.  
(According to official data from all hospitals in Kutaisi-city; absolute numbers)

Years	Trauma		Suicide and Attempted suicide
	Premeditated murder and attempted murder by use of a fair gun or a sharp weapon	Battering; Trauma cause by use of a tough weapon	
1991-1992	34	87	59
1993-1996	47	107	118
1997-2000	3	91	70
2001-2002	22	56	29

Physicians usually inform police about the case, but the process doesn't go far enough. Offended people often consider this institution unresponsive, unreliable and corrupted. Up to June 2006 criminal law in Georgia did not consider domestic violence as a criminal offense; accordingly such cases were registered as a common crime or even were not registered at all.

As a quantitative methods underrepresent the incidences of abuse, it is often necessary to use qualitative methods of research simultaneously. It becomes especially helpful to study the nature of further relationships between an aggressor and a victim. As Zinn (2008) argues: "once violence begins, it becomes a pattern that is repeated and may escalate"(p.354). The question is: "Why abused partner keep relationships and endure the violence?"

For abused Americans the most obvious deterrent is related on the one hand to *hope and love* and on the second to *fear* (Anderson, et al., 2003, p.154). 70.5% of women preferred to stay due to mate's promise for change, and 53.8% for love. Fear of not being able to survive without a mate, were indicated by 32.4%, and fear of losing children indicated by 24.4% of women; 36.7% were afraid of their mates (fear of persecution, terrorizing and killing) (as cited in Zinn, et al.,2008, p.372).

Investigation of domestic violence phenomenon within Georgian society have been supported by the American Bar Association (ABA) and the author was one of the participants in the project. The results have been slightly different from the American reality.

Offended women's dependence on public opinion (16.2%) while keeping violent family relationships were expected, because that is typical among traditional societies. Fear of not being able to survive without mate were indicated by 20.7% of respondents. Concern about children (kids would suffer without mate) and losing the family, deterred 58.8% of abuse victims from leaving (ABA., 2002).

Among the very significant reasons resulting in staying and in taboo against discussing the issue is the *self-blame* of the battered person. Anderson and his colleagues (2003, p.155) indicated that “in a patriarchal society, women are socialized into the role of being the primary caretaker of relationships. This role squarely puts the blame on her for the failing relationship. Internalizing this blame makes it difficult to escape, as she is expected to repair the damage” (as it is quoted in Zinn, et al.,2008, p.373).

In other cases in Georgia if woman can escape an aggressor, mostly she returns to her parents (if she is still young and even one parent is alive), and they usually take care of their daughter and grandchildren. Remarriage has always been less welcomed in Georgian society that is also one of the peculiarities of this culture. The situation has changed in the last decade, but public opinion still favors one marriage.

All factors that are displayed explain domestic violence on the micro level, but the macro processes -- political or socio-economical that shape this social phenomenon are very significant as well.

Gender relationships in Georgia were developed under the influence of Soviet dominant ideology that propagated the equality of men and women and was common for all soviet republics, however, everything remained on the theoretical level. Traditionally, Georgian society has assumed that discrimination based on sex did not exist in the country (Meskhi et al., 2006). In many cases discussions about domestic violence still causes aggression, irony and quite often ignorance of the problem. The majority of the society members say that such cases do not happen around them. With such reaction a person tries to underline that he/she personally does not have such problem (AVNG, 2006).

We consider contemporary Georgian society to be post communist, thus a post totalitarian society. This country has just begun to sharing in democratic values that have been gained as a result of a long struggle by Western societies. Living under pressure (national, social, political) results in dominance of *a power* in general and using a power *as an argument* in common, everyday relationships (gender, class, ethnic). As AVNGs chairperson points out “about 30 % of the abusers cannot acknowledge that they are

aggressors because he/she also was brought up in the family where the violence happened quite often and thus he/she thinks that it is normal action” (2006) . There was not domestic violence legislation in Georgia. That’s why discussion of the draft-law of Domestic violence in the Georgian Parliament in 2005 became the subject of aggression and irony. The members of supreme legislative structure asserted in a persistent way that there was no domestic violence in the country!

Another macro factor that influences how people experience abuse at the micro level is large-scale political and socio-economic crisis --- civil war, hard criminal situation, inflation, unemployment, poverty. Revaz Gachechiladze (1995) points out that between 1988 to 1992 ( in 1991 Soviet Union broke up, 1991-1992is the period of the Civil War in Georgia *I.I.*) violence against the person especially premeditated murder and attempted murder causing serious bodily injury, rape, robbery, burglary, malicious hooliganism, increased dramatically. Recorded crime totals rose by 46% (p.p. 138,140). The level of latent crimes would have been even higher.

Some parameters of economic crisis such as men’s unemployment, poverty, etc. Zinn (2008) can be attributed to the criterion of a social class. When the abused women were asked about their most stressful situation, half of them mentioned financial or health problems, or children and didn’t connect their stress to their abuse (p.364). As a rule, unemployment increases economic strain that can be devastating for men who are the breadwinner in the family (Gelles and Cornell, 1990, p. 75 as cited in Zinn, et al.,2008). However, it should be noted that during conflicts caused by economic hardship grown-up male members of Georgian families were the prime targets of aggression , which should be explained by the fact that men are held responsible for the economic situation of the family (Durglishvili, 1997, p. 18).

How to solve the problem in these countries?

In the US all states have established marital rape laws that no longer attribute domestic violence to a private family conflict. Now even without formal divorce, every woman can obtain court protection from an

abuser. Following or threatening of the other partner is forbidden for a former spouse. Established community shelters across the country provide temporary housing and assistance for the victims of domestic violence (Macionice, 2007, p. 488).

In Georgia only Women's NGOs carry out public awareness campaigns on domestic violence and women's rights. Their work in this direction is more effective than the work of the government. Such activities cover educational, research and legislative reform work, as well as creation of shelters and crisis-centers network (Meskhi et al., 2006). They held workshops with target groups -- government officials, patrolling police, physicians, jurists, journalists in order to raise the awareness of the society toward family abuse, to train the police officers and to teach them how to act in case of domestic violence and how treat the victims after the conflict (AVNG. 2006).

After high resistance from some parliamentary officials but big endeavors of Women's NGOs, human rights analysts, and jurists the goal was reached: the Georgian parliament adopted the Law Protection and Aid for the Victims of Domestic Violence with the third hearing on May 15, 2006 and it was taken into force since June 9 (year?). Since the new law was adopted the patrol police are obliged to take all the measures and react on domestic violence cases according to the law.

Violence is still among one of the urgent social problems of mankind. But the endeavor of certain societies to choose the way of civil development provides hope and should be welcomed.

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