

United Interagency Efforts to Combat Domestic Violence in Georgia: A Local or International Agenda?

The present study was conducted with the support of the Academic Swiss Caucasus Net (ASCN). ASCN is a program aimed at promoting the social sciences and humanities in the South Caucasus (primarily Georgia and Armenia). Its different activities foster the emergence of a new generation of talented scholars. Promising junior researchers receive support through research projects, capacity- building trainings and scholarships. The program emphasizes the advancement of individuals who, thanks to their ASCN experience, become better integrated in international academic networks. The ASCN program is coordinated and operated by the Interfaculty Institute for Central and Eastern Europe (IICEE) at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland). It was initiated and is supported by Gebert Rüt Stiftung.

Project Team:

Nino Javakhishvili, Research Leader; Full Professor of Psychology (Tbilisi State University, TSU)

Lia Tsuladze, Senior Researcher; Associate Professor of Sociology (Tbilisi State University, TSU)

Nino Lagidze, Project Manager (TSU)

Tamar Sabedashvili, PhD student (Gender Studies, Central European University, CEU)

Daria Bakhturidze, MA student (Gender Studies, Center for Social Sciences, TSU)

Ida Bakhturidze, MA student (Gender Studies, Center for Social Sciences, TSU)

Nana Chabukiani, MSc student (Social Science Research Methods, TSU)

Magda Javakhishvili, MSc student (Social Science Research Methods, TSU)

Gvantsa Jibladze, MSc student (Social Science Research Methods, TSU)

Lia Zagania, MSc student (Social Science Research Methods, TSU)

Summary

Domestic violence (DV) is a serious problem in Georgia, as it is also recognized universally in many other nations. Numerous studies dedicated to the topic of domestic violence in Georgia have attempted to determine its scope, attitudes and knowledge regarding this problem. To date, there remains a lack of research that has examined both non-governmental and governmental organizations combating domestic violence while serving as agents of social change in Georgian society.

The international experience of combating domestic violence demonstrates that united efforts among different organizations and community members are needed to ensure effective results (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Johnson, 2009; Weldon, 2004). Thus, united interagency efforts to combat domestic violence are critical in every country, including Georgia. It is also important to

examine whether real collaboration occurs between NGOs and the Georgian government in combating DV. This report is the first attempt to investigate the role of social capital - in our case, this is the networking between governmental and non-governmental organizations - in combating gender-based violence in Georgia in addition to discovering and handling the potential impediments or challenges to this process.

Our goal is to examine the following topics: 1) The extent to which the agendas of non-governmental and governmental organizations in Georgia are shaped by Western donors; 2) the effectiveness of networking between Georgian governmental and non-governmental organizations in combating gender-based violence in Georgia; and 3) the factors that contribute to the success, or lack thereof, of Georgian governmental and non-governmental in combating DV.

To answer these questions, 46 semi-structured interviews were conducted with the representatives of 33 organizations (29 non-governmental and 4 governmental agencies). Moreover, a comprehensive list was assembled containing all of the organizations working on the issue of domestic violence. The main findings of the study are as follows.

With few exceptions, the organizations combating domestic violence in Georgia are not well-developed. The state, international donors, local communities, media and religious institutions attribute to their weakness through a lack of support via funding and expertise.

Members of the organizations in this study rely on the traditional understandings of domestic violence causes and solutions. Organization publications reflect an understanding of domestic violence within the “de-gendered domestic violence frame”. That is, women are not specifically mentioned as victims of DV, rather, anyone, especially children, may be considered victims. In the best-case scenario, organizations operate within a “women-centered frame” that acknowledges women as the primary victims of domestic violence; however, they make no attempt to search for DV’s roots within the structural gender inequality that exists at the societal level (Krizsan & Popa, 2010). Such approaches to domestic violence contribute to the lack of success in its solution. Although our respondents positively assess their efforts to combat domestic violence, they do not consider the outcome of their attempts to be sufficient. Some representatives of these organizations even criticize past efforts and believe that a systematic, focused, approach is still lacking.

Western donors have played a crucial role in establishing and funding both non-governmental and governmental organizations in Georgia. Both types of organizations acknowledge that donor influence is significant, although their opinion regarding the degree and type of influence differ. While state organizations are content with donor support, NGOs are more critical and believe that donors often have their own agenda that does not necessarily coincide with local needs. NGOs also complain about the lack of donors’ financial support.

The extent of networking between Georgian governmental and non-governmental organizations is currently insufficient. The two sectors have different understandings of their respective roles in the process of combating DV: Each regards itself as playing the most important role in the process while perceiving the other to play a supporting role. There is more cooperation within the sectors than between the sectors, although NGO representatives consider even this cooperation to be negligible. In addition, there is competition among the NGOs due to the scarcity of resources. As a result, the united efforts of Georgian governmental and non-governmental organizations in combating gender-based violence cannot yet be considered effective.