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Social and Economic Factors of Violence Against Women in the South of Moldova: Identification, Estimation, and Mechanisms of Elimination

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ABSTRACT

A surge in violence against women requires a better understanding of its causes and factors, which is the problem that this study seeks to address. This study aims to identify mechanisms through which these factors are reproduced on all levels of the gender system (individual, family, social milieu, professional milieu, state institutions). The focus is made on the case of the Autonomous Territorial Unit Gagauzia in Moldova. The study relies on systems analysis methods and approaches based on the institutional economic theory, systems theory, and gender economics to assess the impact of socio-economic factors on the likelihood of intimate partner violence (IPV) in this region. In Gagauzia, there is a decline in women's opportunities to realize their economic rights and ensure their financial independence. While the incomes of households are falling, gender discrimination, including physical violence, is perceived as justified by more and more people. Another contributing factor is the lack of effective mechanisms for IPV prevention. The factors contributing to IPV are related to the system of specialized institutions, which impose sanctions for violating the rules of gender stereotypical behavior. The study proposes a set of projects to promote more egalitarian norms on all levels of the gender system.

KEYWORDS

women's human capital, gender system, gender stereotypes, factors, violence against women, systematic approach, institutions, sanctions, codes of behavior, gender education

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Introduction

International organizations, researchers and representatives of public communities are increasingly drawing attention to violence against women as an obstacle to sustainable development due to its high economic, social, and political costs (Duvvury et al., 2013). The growing rates of violence are another cause for concern: according to the survey conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO), as of 2018, approximately every third woman in the world had experienced some form of intimate partner violence (IPV) in their life (Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2021). The prevalence of violence against women in the EU countries is slightly lower. According to the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), in 2014, 22% of women reported that they had been subjected to violence or abuse by an intimate partner (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2015).

As far as Moldova is concerned, the rate of violence against women increased almost by 13% in 2010–2018, reaching 73% in 2019 (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2019; Statistica Moldovei & UNPD, 2011). Importantly, in that period, the country extensively implemented a set of laws and national strategies, including those aimed at preventing domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual and physical violence, and ensuring marital gender equality in general. In this regard, it is important to identify a system of factors that influence the level of violence against women in the country.

Currently, the research literature identifies a wide range of factors that influence the level of violence against women. There is still, however, much uncertainty surrounding the relationships between these factor variables. There is evidence of the importance of women's economic independence (Sanders, 2015) and employment status on the labor market, the level and the form of wages (Chin, 2016), the stability of employment (Adams et al., 2012), the availability of housing (Johnson, 1992), and the level of education of women (Sanders, 2015; Scaricabarozzi, 2017; Shiraz, 2016). All these factors are considered to reduce the likelihood of violence and its severity.

The significance of the above-mentioned social and economic factors that reduce the likelihood of IPV has also been confirmed by the surveys on violence against women in one of the settlements of Autonomous Territorial Unit Gagauzia (ATU Gagauzia)—Chirsova village—and in Moldova¹ in general. These factors should

¹ For more information on the methodology of these qualitative studies, see Description of data for the study.

be taken into account when developing tools to reduce violence against women in a particular region.

Interestingly, there is also evidence of the increased possibility of IPV in the case of women's employment (Terrazas-Carrillo & McWhirter, 2015), their increased income, higher professional status or level of education in comparison to their partners (Bott et al., 2005; Koenig et al., 2003). E.C. Terrazas-Carrillo and P.T. McWhirter explain the connection between violence and female employment by the fact that a woman's employment status is "embedded within the multiple contexts of her life, including individual factors, the influence of family, peer groups, culture, and local and global economic conditions" (Terrazas-Carrillo & McWhirter, 2015, p. 1144). M.L. Connerley and J. Wu, when systematizing the results of various studies on the relationship between various characteristics of women's employment and the level of violence, point out the need to take into account the entire range of data of unobservable variables in order to enhance the reliability of the results and the possibility of interpreting cause-and-effect relationships (Connerley & Wu, 2016).

A number of studies have shown that women who receive microfinance assistance experience spousal violence much more often than those who do not participate in such programs (Dalal et al., 2013; Hughes et al., 2015; Sinha & Kumar, 2020). Focusing on the case of Bangladesh, P.K. De and A. Christian have demonstrated that the dependence is influenced by the types of microfinance programs, the ability to control the use of the received financial resources, women's status and level of education, and the level of prevalence of traditional gender norms that justify the possibility of violence against women (De & Christian, 2020). Thus, violence is more likely to occur in families with strictly defined gender roles and less likely in relationships based on the principles of gender equality (for more detail, see Hughes et al., 2015). The impact of social acceptance of violence against women on its level and degree was also confirmed in the case study of some Indian regions (Sabarwal et al., 2014) and some regions in sub-Saharan Africa (Cools & Kotsadam, 2017). In this regard, researchers are increasingly emphasizing the importance of considering social environment as a factor that influences the level of violence against women.

In addition, the role of the macro-environment that determines the likelihood of violence against women is emphasized. For example, L.L. Heise and A. Kotsadam (2015) used linear and quantile regression methods to identify the direction and strength of the impact of the country's socio-economic development indicators on the prevalence of violence against women. For example, partner violence is less common in countries with a high proportion of women in the labor force, and, in contrast, the risk of violence against women increases in countries with low rates of women's employment. For our investigation it is significant that L.L. Heise and A. Kotsadam (2015) point out women's ability to implement *de jure* or *de facto* economic rights as factor variables. These rights include women's access to land, property and other productive resources. The ability to access these resources reduces the level of violence against women. The researchers, however, also

highlight the importance of social environment—this factor is prevalent over macro-level factors, for example, the female employment rate in the country (Heise & Kotsadam, 2015). It should be noted that, in the countries with a high rate of gender equality, the possibility of discrimination cases is limited including those sanctioned by the state. These conclusions were also confirmed by S. Nevala (2017), who used the data of the Agency for Fundamental Rights (2012) to show that the level of gender equality in a country is one of the factors that determines the possibility of forced control over women (various forms of violence against women). S. Nevala stresses that gender equality helps to increase the level of disclosure of information about violence through the ability to practice frank conversation with other people (Nevala, 2017).

It appears that each of the above-described socio-economic factors is important because in one way or another they contribute to the increased IPV levels in society and, therefore, must be targeted in order to change the situation. In this study, these factors are systematized and analyzed from the perspective of institutional economic theory, systems theory, and gender economics. In our opinion, this, on the one hand, may bring more clarity into our understanding of how these factors influence IPV levels and how these factors interact with each other. On the other, this may give us a larger picture of the mechanisms of IPV risk reproduction at all levels of the gender system: the individual, family, social and professional milieu, state institutions (for more on the gender system levels see Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

The following sections outlines the proposed methodological framework.

Methodological Framework

According to institutional economic theory, the establishment of power relations between economic agents, when, in the language of gender economics, one (man) discriminates against another (woman), is possible only when certain codes of behavior for each of these sides are established through a system of institutions. These codes are realized in the process of interaction at different levels of the gender system (for more on this see Bazueva, 2015). The institutional system comprises the following elements: informal institutions that determine the codes of behavior in society through a system of “social control”; formal institutions in the form of a system of laws and economic contracts, officially enshrined in the rules of law and binding on all citizens and organizations (North, 1990). As shown in Bazueva (2015), in social development, this system of institutions supports the permanent reproduction of gender stereotypes and the system of gender inequality in general, which are the basis for the permanent reproduction of discrimination against women, including such extreme forms as violence. Table 1 generalizes the socio-economic factors that influence the likelihood of violence against women, depending on the type of institution and the nature of the sanctions applied in the case of violations of the codes of behavior established by each institution.

Table 1
Institutions That Support the Reproduction of IPV Risks

Subjects of gender system	Institutions	Functions of institutions	Socio-economic factors of gender inequality	Mechanism of enforcement (types of sanctions)
State	Laws and regulations	Establishing fundamental rules of socio-economic behavior Enforcement of socio-economic and civil rights	Enshrining of formal gender equality in law Regulation of domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual and physical abuse, and marital rape Priority state funding for “male” sectors of economy Women’s status of primary beneficiary of social services and workers ‘with caregiving responsibilities’ makes employers resistant to hiring or promoting them	State system of coercion (imprisonment, fines, community service, etc.)
Organisations	Contracts Ethics code	Defining the forms of organization of business activities Influencing directly the behavior of employees and candidates	Restrictions on women’s ability to exercise their social and economic rights (gender pay gaps, limited access to advanced training, career progression, etc.) Employers’ reluctance to hire women due to gender stereotypes The possibility of sexual harassment against women as a condition for their career promotion.	The system of coercion adopted in the organization (prejudice against women, cancellation of bonus, coercion, targeted commands, etc.)
Social environment	Code of conduct in society	Control over the behavior of group members	Reproduction of gender stereotypes that regulate standards of behavior for men and women	Public stigmatization
Family (represented by the head)	Code of conduct in the family	Men’s use of women’s resources to maximize their own benefit	Reproduction of gender stereotypes Gender-based division of household responsibilities Alienation of resources (goods) Restriction of access to goods Control over behavior (decision-making), interests and motivation	Sanctions in the form of physical violence, psychological coercion, targeted commands, etc.
Women	Code of personal conduct	Internal control of one’s own behavior	Compliance of one’s own behavior with gender stereotypes Gender gap in housework, childcare and family care, which affects women’s career opportunities in the public sector Women’s underestimation of their business qualities	Internal sanctions that depend on moral norms (remorse, guilt)

The current situation of gender-based violence and the contributing institutional factors (for more on this see North, 1990) can be summarized as follows: while the current legislation formally guarantees women their economic and social rights and punishes the perpetrators of such violence, the current system of informal rules determines the conditions and opportunities for women to exercise their rights in the real world, establishes the permissibility and justification of violence against women at the level of their social environment, employers, and family. In addition, it is important to take into account women's acceptance of such violence and their acceptance of various forms of gender discrimination in general, because the degree of such acceptance determines women's internal control over their own behavior, modifying the structure of their goals and motivations (for more on this, see Bazueva, 2015). The above-mentioned methodological principles will be applied further to assess the risk of socio-economic factors and to propose a set of measures to reduce the likelihood of violence against women in one of the southern regions of Moldova—the ATU Gagauzia.

Description of Research Data

The assessment of women's ability to exercise their economic rights and its influence on the level of IPV in Gagauzia includes the following:

- (a) analysis of the legislative documents of the Republic of Moldova regulating the issues of sustainable development, achievement of gender equality and manifestation of various forms of violence;
- (b) analysis of the results of the World Bank's *Women, Business and the Law 2020* study, which covers the laws and regulations that affect women's ability to get jobs, earn income, set up and run businesses in 190 countries around the world;
- (c) analysis of the structure and values of the Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI), which reflects the level of gender stereotypes in the country, calculated by the UN on the basis of questions from the World Values Survey;
- (d) analysis of the data of the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, characterizing the dynamics of the main indicators of the regional labor market and income;
- (e) analysis of the results of qualitative research on the prevalence of violence against women *Well-Being and Safety of Women: OSCE-Led Survey on Violence against Women (Moldova)* and *Addressing Violence against Women in the Republic of Moldova: Exploring and Learning from Local Solutions* in Chirsova village.

Let us consider in more detail the methodology applied by these qualitative studies.

The OSCE-led survey was implemented in Spring/Summer 2018 and involved 15 expert interviews, providing an overview of the issues related to violence against women and conflict-related acts of violence. It also included a survey of

a representative sample of 1,802 women aged 18–74 living in Moldova to establish the prevalence and consequences of violence through the multistage, stratified, random probability sample design. Eight focus groups with women from various backgrounds on their attitudes towards violence against women were conducted. These were followed by four in-depth interviews with women to review the impact of the violence they have experienced in more detail (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2015). To meet the basic requirements for collecting qualitative, reliable, and comparable data, the survey used probability sampling techniques, which are based on the methodology used by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) for its 2012 survey on violence against women in 28 European Union member states (for more on this, see European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2013).

The second study was conducted from August 15th to September 13th, 2018 by the UNDP team as part of the project *Addressing Violence against Women in the Republic of Moldova: Exploring and Learning from Local Solutions* (Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Chirsova Village, 2018).

To ensure the representativeness of the sample, we selected respondents according to the following criteria: gender and education; occupational status; and family status. The categories of interviewed persons were established in cooperation with the UNDP team, local and international experts. The snowball method was used for respondent selection. Local authorities of Chirsova village assisted with respondent recruiting. Focus groups and individual interviews with IPV victims were organized by the CBS-AXA sociological agency from Moldova. Semi-structured individual interviews with 23 local government stakeholders and NPO leaders were conducted by using a thematic questionnaire (see Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Chirsova Village, 2018; Appendix 1).

The guide for conducting focus groups was based on the social vignette approach. The topics for discussion included gender norms and roles, attitudes toward victims of violence, socially acceptable/desirable behavior in situations of domestic violence, examination of victims' needs and reactions to domestic violence, awareness of legislation regulating violence, services available for victims, and possible recommendations for improving the response to violence against women in the region. In total, 59 people representing different categories of the population participated in the focus groups. Focus groups with men were moderated by a male researcher, with women—by a female researcher. The duration of each focus group averaged two hours (see Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Chirsova Village, 2018; Appendix 2).

Individual interviews were conducted with eight female survivors of intimate partner violence using a semi-structured questionnaire to learn about their opinions and perceptions of gender-specific behaviors, to assess the quality of available services and forms of support, factors that prevent and facilitate referral to services that support victims of intimate partner violence (see Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Chirsova Village, 2018; Appendix 3).

Respondents participated in the qualitative research on a voluntary basis and gave their informed consent. Discussions took place in a comfortable and

confidential environment. All FGDs and individual interviews with the victims were audio-recorded, conducted and transcribed in Russian. The transcripts of the FGDs in English are available upon request (Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Chirsova Village, 2018).

Risk Assessment of the Social and Economic Factors Contributing to the Increase in Violence Against Women in the ATU Gagauzia

According to the logic of the study presented in the methodological section of the article, the task of prime importance is to determine women's ability to exercise their economic and social rights and to identify the regulated types of punishment for violence against women enshrined in the system of national legislation.

Analysis of the Legislation of the Republic of Moldova Regulating Gender Discrimination

As far as the legislative framework is concerned, the Republic of Moldova has ratified the main international documents aimed at achieving gender equality in the main spheres of life. In 2015, the country adopted the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, a set of national strategies and laws were adopted, including those aimed at the prevention of domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual and physical violence. The legislation also guarantees equal opportunities for women and men in the realization of their human capital on the national labor market, which refers both to the ability to engage in entrepreneurship and to the entitlement to equal pay for equal work (Women, Business and the Law, 2020). As part of the General Recommendations of the UN Committee on the elimination of discrimination against women and the Beijing Platform for Action, Law No. 5-XVI of February 9th, 2006 "Cu privire la asigurarea egalității de șanse între femei și bărbați" [On ensuring equal opportunities for women and men] and the national strategy for ensuring equality between women and men (2017–2021) were developed and approved. As part of the Soros Foundation project *Development of Civil Society in the ATU Gagauzia*, a working group was created to develop a Gender Equality Strategy in this region (Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Chirsova Village, 2018, p. 18).

In general, according to the World Bank's study *Women, Business and the Law 2020*, formally the country's legislation provides gender equality in the main spheres of human activity with the exception of the retirement legislation due to the differences in the retirement age of men and women. There is also a perceived gap in the labor legislation, which does not require employers to pay men and women equally for doing the same work and does not explicitly prohibit sexual harassment at work or specify any penalties for such acts.

However, in real life, women are facing a much wider range of problems when realizing their economic rights. These problems are reflected in the negative dynamics in the main indicators of the national and regional labor market as well as in the level and structure of household income. We will focus further on these factors since they, as was noted above, may contribute to violence against women.

Analysis of the Efficiency of the Current Legislation from the Perspective of Women’s Economic Rights and Opportunities in the Regional Labor Market²

One of the main indicators that reflect the degree of participation in labor activity and employment opportunities enjoyed by women and men is the level of their economic activity (Table 2).

Table 2
Changes in the Level of Economic Activity of Men and Women

Activity rate	2007		2013		2019		2021	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Age groups—total	41,6	37,1	34,6	32,9	36,5	30,3	34,8	28,6
15–24	18,1	13,8	17,5	14,1	15,5	9,1	13,0	9,4
25–34	43,5	42,7	33,8	33,9	45,2	36,5	41,8	37,8
35–44	53,8	60,5	44,6	57,6	45,2	56,4	53,6	48,5
45–54	62,9	63,3	50,6	56,7	54,4	58,6	49,5	55,1
55–64	61,6	34,0	47,5	26,5	42,5	26,8	44,3	28,4
65+	12,4	5,1	6,0	4,5	5,9	2,1	2,0	2,1

Note. The data describing labor market and population income dynamics are monitored by the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova for enlarged statistical groups. Due to the lack of data on the ATU Gagauzia, we use the data provided for the statistical region of the South, which Gagauzia is part of (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

If we evaluate the general level of economic activity for all age groups, it should be noted that it is significantly lower than in the EU countries. For example, in the EU countries the level of economic activity of women increased by 14.8% and was 78.5% from 2010 to 2021. Iceland (86.3%), Sweden (87.5%) and Switzerland (76.8%) had the highest values in this indicator (Eurostat, 2022). These countries are the leaders in terms of gender equality achievement (United Nations Development Programme, 2020).

The level of economic activity of women and men during the period under investigation is decreasing and corresponds to the fluctuations in the economic environment. The greatest negative changes are typical of the age groups that provide the maximum return on the implementation of human capital. This fact indicates the imperfection of regional labor market.

Overall, men’s level of economic activity is higher than that of women. Similar trends are also typical of the dynamics of employment of men and women (Table 3).

Table 3 shows that the employment rate of women is lower than that of men. This is a consequence of the reduction in the number of working women, primarily in traditional sectors of female employment: wholesale and retail trade, hotels and restaurants; public administration, education, health care and social work. In the period from 2011 to 2020, the number of employed women in the region decreased by 192 people, while the number of employed men increased by 2,853 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022), which might be a consequence of discrimination against women in the labor market.

² There is a lack of detailed information about female victims of violence, which is why these trends are described for women in general.

Table 3
Structure of Employment of Men and Women by the Level of Education

	2007		2013		2019		2021	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Level of education—total	39.5	36.3	32.3	31.3	33.7	29.1	33.5	28.0
Higher	66.4	67.7	48.5	54.2	45.2	55.8	56.2	61.9
Secondary specialized	50.1	57.4	43.4	46.9	38.4	39.8	33.5	31.6
Secondary professional	52.3	52.0	38.5	34.1	43.7	38.8	40.3	31.7
Secondary school	33.1	32.9	24.1	26.7	28.5	25.5	27.8	25.1
Gymnasium	31.3	27.3	26.0	21.7	26.1	17.1	27.3	17.9
Primary or no education	11.3	5.6	10.6	3.8	9.1	0.8	4.0	0.4

Moreover, Gagauzia is primarily an agricultural region, which means that the possibility to realize high quality human capital here is limited. The share of R&D enterprises in the region is lower than the national average (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The industrial park in Comrat is seen as one of the opportunities for economic development of the region. The park currently comprises companies specializing in growing and processing fruit products, a photovoltaic park for the production of solar energy, companies producing meat products and paper disposable cups. It is estimated that the park is capable of creating more than 2.5 thousand jobs. Unfortunately, there are reasons to believe that most of these workplaces will be occupied by men.

The higher levels of education among women (Table 3) may be explained by the differences in the educational paths chosen by men and women under the influence of gender stereotypes. Men’s professional choices are largely guided by their salary expectations, the prestige of the profession in society, and the payback period of investments in education. Women are guided primarily by their own preferences and the need to balance work with family interests (for more on this, see Bazueva, 2015; Rapoport & Thibout, 2018). In addition, the so-called socially useful career breaks connected to the birth of children and family care as well as limited opportunities for continuing education resulting from gender discrimination in the labor market lead women to invest more effort than men into obtaining higher education before starting a family. Men, on the other hand, are initially more interested in obtaining a primary or secondary vocational education in order to enter the labor market more quickly. Moreover, if necessary, employers are more willing to give men an opportunity to improve their professional skills regardless of their marital status and the number of children (Bazueva, 2015)³.

These negative trends and gender segregation in the regional labor market determine the need for projects such as the one provided by NGO “Association of

³ These gender strategies of human capital formation in men are gradually beginning to transform under the influence of the modern economic conditions. However, as a result of the time lag between education and labour market entry as well as the agro-industrial specialization of the region, these changes have not yet had an impact on the structure of employment by education level.

Women of Gagauzia”, which offers career counselling as well as individual support for employment. In the period under investigation, this organization paid almost 400 beneficiaries for training in the following professional spheres: driver, computer user, accountant, hairdresser, masseur, manicurist. As a result, 217 people managed to find employment. This NGO mainly offered training in the so-called traditional female professions (Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Chirsova Village, 2018, p. 52).

Meanwhile, special attention is paid to women from socially vulnerable groups, including the victims of violence. For example, as part of the project *Ending Gender-Based Violence and Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals*, grants were provided to create or expand the activities of the existing organizations to enhance social and economic reintegration of women affected by violence, increase their economic freedom and financial independence from their partners. The projects are mainly aimed at providing various services in Chirsova village in Gagauzia. The services include computer maintenance, photo and video studio shooting, beauty services, and motorcycle repair. None of the projects is science-intensive and or involves high-quality human capital, i.e., they are focused on meeting the current, rather than strategic needs of the region’s economy. We found that it is typical of many projects aimed at helping IPV victims open their start-ups. Such projects are mainly implemented in the B2C (business-to-consumer) sector, since they are focused on the existing professional skills of women. In future, it may become an additional restriction for the economy focused on the high quality of human capital. It also increases women’s risk of becoming victims of domestic violence. Thus, according to the results of the OSCE-led survey on violence against women in Moldova conducted in 2018, university-educated women are less likely to be physically or sexually abused by a partner (22%) than those who have not completed higher education (36%) (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2019).

Third, the above-mentioned negative processes that reduce women’s opportunities to realize their human capital on regional labor markets are accompanied by an increase in the gender pay gap (Table 4).

Table 4
Dynamics of the Average Salary in 2011–2020

Regions	2011			2020		
	gross average salary, lei		gender pay gap ⁴ , %	gross average salary, lei		gender pay gap, %
	Women	Men		Women	Men	
Whole country	2,856.6	3,252.9	87.8	7,387.2	8,558.5	86.3
TAU Gagauzia	2,313.6	2,303.4	100.4	6,180.9	6,118.5	101.0

Note. Compiled by the author by using the data from the National Statistical Office of the Republic of Moldova.

⁴ Gender pay gap is the ratio of women's salary to men's salary (Calculated by the author by using the data from: National Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Larger gender equality in men's and women's wages in Gagauzia can be described as "equality in poverty", since the average salary in the region is significantly lower than in the country as a whole. Besides, the average salary does not provide any positive dynamics in the structure of consumer spending. In 2021, food and basic necessities accounted for 80% of consumer spending (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Thus, it can be concluded that there is a variety of factors that contribute to the increasing violence against women in Gagauzia. Therefore, further in this article, the extent and level of prevalence of the certain types of gender stereotypes in relation to women in Moldova will be considered. As was mentioned above, these stereotypes influence women's ability to realize their rights in real life and reinforce the acceptance and justification of violence against women.

Gender Stereotypes as a Factor of Violence against Women

According to the 2020 UN report (United Nations Development Program, 2020), in the Republic of Moldova, 90.6% of respondents indicated the presence of at least one prejudice against women, and 67.21% of responders indicated at least two prejudices. Only less than 10% of the country's population support gender equality, which is almost 2% below the global average. It is a matter of concern that 65.2% of respondents believe that physical violence against women is justified. The negative attitudes towards women's economic and political empowerment are a significant factor since men enjoy the privileges if the number of vacancies is limited: 58.33% of respondents think that preference should be given to men and 60.33% believe that women are less capable than men in doing business. It should be noted that the percentage of men who support gender-based discrimination is higher than that of women in Moldova. The majority of men and women believe that physical domestic violence against women can be justified (61.16% of women and 69.70% of men). In addition, every sixth respondent thinks that higher education is more important for boys than for girls (United Nations Development Program, 2020).

The survey findings may be explained by the high level of patriarchalization in Moldovan society. According to the OSCE-led survey on violence against women in Moldova conducted in 2018, almost half of women (45%) believe that their friends would agree that "violence against women is often provoked by the victim" whereas only 15% of women in the EU share this opinion. Similarly, two out of the five (40%) women believe their friends would agree that "women who say they have been abused often make up or exaggerate claims of violence or rape" compared to 20% in the EU. Half of women believe that their friends would agree that "a good wife should listen to her husband, even if she doesn't agree with him" (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2019).

Under these circumstances, people who constitute the social environment of the family often prefer not to interfere in the situations of violence, considering it a private matter. Thus, women are left to deal with these issues on their own. The prevalence of this attitude among women in Moldova is almost four times higher (55%) than in the EU countries (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2019).

It should be noted that these patriarchal attitudes are less common among young women. This fact brings us to the conclusion that there are some positive shifts towards the egalitarianization of the gender behavior norms in the family. This agrees with the findings of the study conducted in Chirsova village in Gagauzia in 2018 (Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Chirsova Village, 2018).

A number of projects have been implemented in Moldova to reduce the level of patriarchalization. For example, the NGO "La Strada" organizes the annual campaign "16 Days of Active Struggle against Gender-Based Violence" to raise awareness of violence against women and change the perception of gender roles (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2019). Interestingly, according to the results of the above-mentioned survey of employers in Chirsova village, they are ready to provide jobs to victims of domestic violence (Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Chirsova Village, 2018, p. 21). However, the analysis demonstrates that despite the specialized projects aimed at changing traditional gender norms, the justification of discriminatory practices against women, including the extreme forms of physical violence, is still widely spread in Moldova. It stems from the high level of persistent gender inequality, which, among other things, is caused by the lack of effective legal sanctions for gender-based discrimination.

Based on the above-discussed findings, the following preliminary conclusions can be drawn.

In general, it should be noted that the current national legislation in Moldova is not conducive to the creation of an effective mechanism for promoting gender equality, including gender equality in the labour market⁵. There is evidence that many women in Moldova remain largely unaware of their rights, of men's responsibility for their actions, and of the available assistance in the cases of gender-based violence. Only "around four in ten women feel very well or well informed about what to do if they experience domestic violence themselves (39%), and a further 28% feel somewhat informed, while 26% do not feel well informed or do not know what to do at all" (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2019). In our opinion, this is due to the lack of consistency and low coverage of public awareness-raising activities.

There is a lack of coordination between different ministries and governmental agencies in implementing gender equality policies. The persons authorized by the national legislation to provide support to victims of violence are subject to different levels of government. For example, most of the specialists working in Gagauzia are subordinate to local authorities, while the social assistants and police officers are subordinate to the region's Department of Social Assistance and the police inspectorate located in the city of Comrat, the region's administrative centre (Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Chirsova Village, 2018, p. 8).

Moreover, the gender approach has not been integrated into the activities of all governmental agencies. Local authorities, including the administration of Chirsova

⁵ For more information on the principles of effective national legislation to prevent discrimination and violence against women, see: Beijing declaration and platform for action: Beijing+5 political declaration and outcome, 2015 (strategic aim D.1; iss. 19; iss. 201); UN CEDAW, 1988; Committee of Ministers, 2002.

village, have not been informed about the policy in the field of gender equality and countering gender-based violence. Thus, according to the study *Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Chirsova Village*, none of the 23 respondents from the local public administration and NGOs, except for one police officer, took part in any specialized trainings dealing with the domestic violence legislation, gender equality legislation, or regulations to prevent human trafficking (*Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Chirsova Village*, 2018, p. 17).

The government of the Republic of Moldova does not have a ministry or special experts responsible for ensuring gender equality in the country. Gagauzia, however, has a specialized commission to combat violence against women established in 2018 (*Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Chirsova Village*, 2018, p. 8). However, so far, the Commission has failed to deliver any real action.

The national legislation specifies only the penalties for physical violence while other discriminatory practices, including psychological abuse and sexual harassment, are not covered by any legal norms. Furthermore, the labour inspectorate has not been legally assigned the function of monitoring the employer's compliance with the principle of gender equality. Moreover, the level of development of forensic medicine in Gagauzia and in Moldova in general is insufficient and makes it difficult to prove the fact of psychological violence in court (*Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Chirsova Village*, 2018, p. 21). Under these circumstances it is difficult for victims to prove gender-based violence and/or discrimination. To address this problem, in many countries, the burden of proving gender discrimination is shifted from the victim to the perpetrator.

According to the OSCE-led survey on violence against women in Moldova, IPV victims reported the low level of effectiveness of perpetrator punishment. The key points made by the victims include the following considerations: (a) when fines are issued, they are paid from the family budget; (b) community service sentences for a minimum number of days does not protect the victim from the abuser; and (c) the attendance rates of the mandatory rehabilitation course are low (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2019).

In view of the above, for more effective enforcement of legislation on violence against women, it is necessary to create conditions for women's socio-economic empowerment and for IPV risk minimization.

Measures to Reduce Violence Against Women in the ATU Gagauzia

The experience of developed countries demonstrates that the efficiency of the existing national legislation that ensures gender equality in all spheres of life depends on the strength of traditional gender-inequitable attitudes and beliefs that justify the use of discriminatory practices against women, including their most extreme forms. To this end, it is necessary to create a system of "gender equality education" on different levels, encompassing government employees, businesses and entrepreneurs, families and their social environment. From the perspective of the institutional economic theory, only in this case it is possible to establish and

promote new norms of behavior. Moreover, if interactions on the basis of egalitarian norms of gender behavior are practiced by a large number of people, then, according to the coordination effect⁶, the number of those willing to interact on the basis of patriarchal norms of behavior will be minimal. In this case, adherence to alternative norms of behavior that support gender discrimination would be made too costly by the sanctions system and, therefore, not advisable. However, our analysis shows that the range of proposed measures does not involve all economic actors in the system of "gender education". The focus is made primarily on IPV victims (Ahmed, 2005; McWhirter, 2006); small population groups (Buller et al., 2018), or women's partners (Hughes et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2007). Consequently, at least two actors in the institutions that support the reproduction of IPV risks (see Table 1) are completely excluded from the process of building new norms of behavior. Others are involved only fragmentarily. The excluded categories usually comprise people who are the most capable of adopting egalitarian norms of behaviour. This, in turn, impedes the diffusion of the new norms in society and thus prevents the transformation of the existing system of sanctions maintaining the patriarchal norms (Table 1).

The following sections will describe the design of the system of gender equality education for all economic actors (representatives of state and local government, business, friends and acquaintances, family members). This system is based on the integration of effective legal mechanisms for achieving gender equality and the use of individual practices to strengthen the effectiveness of these mechanisms by eliminating the identified gaps in the compliance with the determinants of the institutional system's quality (Bazueva, 2015). The success of the proposed measures depends on the level of the country's socio-economic development and the possibility of their incorporation into the existing system of institutions in the region.

Development of the Gender Equality Education System

According to the recommendations for gender mainstreaming developed by the Committee on Gender Equality in Sweden⁷, it is necessary to provide gender equality training for regional and local government employees. Such training programs, among other things, should focus on the correspondence of gender equality education to the state development goals – the regulatory framework of the state, the ineffectiveness of the current dichotomy, possible results of work and the basics of gender analysis (Swedish Gender Mainstreaming Support Committee, 2007a, 2007b). It is possible to organize specialized training to enable government officials to work more effectively with IPV victims as part of programs for violence detection, rehabilitation, social assistance and support. In Gagauzia, specialized courses dealing with men's violence

⁶ The effect of coordination means that the more consistently the norm is enforced in society, the more damage each particular individual suffers when he or she deviates from it. The design of the negative feedback mechanism in this case contains positive feedback: the more people follow the norm, the less expedient it is to deviate from it, the more people follow the norm (Polterovich, 1999, p.9).

⁷ It should be noted that according to the comparative studies in the EU, the system of institutions for ensuring gender equality established in Sweden is one of the most effective. See, for example, European Institute for Gender Equality, 2013; Rubery, 2002.

against women and domestic violence could be included in higher education programs at the Comrat State University (Comrat).

A productive approach could be to involve business into combating discrimination against women. This makes particular sense, since in the economic sphere, it is business that discriminates against women by underestimating the return on their human capital through the gender wage gap. In this case, interactive trainings for employers and employees could be organized to show how to apply the integrated gender approach more effectively. The International Labor Organization (ILO) has devised a gender audit methodology, which has proven to be efficient in tackling the problem of gender inequality at work (for more on this, see International Labour Organization, 2012). Following the example described in (Adams et al., 2012), it would be useful to develop a separate project aimed at creating and implementing specialized training courses for employers to encourage them to create a more sensitive workplace policy for IPV victims, to eliminate stereotyping and misguided preconceptions about women's lower productivity, and to prevent the dismissal of women during the rehabilitation period.

Less men and women would follow the patriarchal norms of behavior if an efficient system of institutions for gender equality education was developed. Awareness raising programs promote a more critical attitude to the existing patriarchal norms and values. The most successful forms of gender equality education include the following: (a) introduction of gender equality courses throughout the system of education from pre-school to university; (b) social advertising aimed at eliminating gender illiteracy; (c) development of special manuals explaining the main forms of gender discrimination and the mechanism for filing complaints; (d) production of demonstration films teaching the basics of gender equality in accessible and exciting forms; (e) introduction of sex education courses for schools.

Promotion of more egalitarian gender norms is impossible without gender education of media professionals since media influence social norms⁸. At present, in Moldova, gender-biased representations are common in the mass media. It would, therefore, make sense to launch a specialized project, which would include gender equity certification programs for journalists. This measure, however, is likely to have a short-term effect. To ensure a more long-term effect, media outreach activities must be systematic. To this end, the frequency of these activities should be specified in the corresponding regulatory documents, e.g., the Gender Equality Strategy.

The system of gender equality education in the region should be supported by specialized programs aimed at encouraging women from socially vulnerable groups to maintain and develop their human capital, to enhance their business skills and competencies, to challenge their self-limiting beliefs and boost their self-esteem. Only in this case it will be possible to eliminate the internal control orientation, which is one of the factors contributing to the persistence of the patriarchal system of values (Table 1).

⁸ This aspect was also discussed in Hidrobo et al., 2016. However, the authors only declared the need to encourage negative attitudes toward violence and to raise awareness of the unacceptability of discriminatory life-behavior practices in the media.

Development of IPV Victims' Personal Potential and Business Skills

The analysis has revealed that women from socially vulnerable categories, especially IPV victims, often do not get the chance to develop their own competitive human capital as they have limited access to educational services. On the other hand, they tend to underestimate their personal potential and business qualities (e.g., behaviour stereotypes). This problem could be tackled through a system of specialized training for IPV victims. The trainings will contribute to the identification and promotion of their personal and economic interests, strengthening of their capacity and realization of their human capital to achieve financial stability and independence.

In this case the education technology "I—Corporation" implemented by business managers can also be used (Bazueva, 2015). It involves the situations when a person describes him/herself as a corporation assessing their strengths and weaknesses, including their external environment. On the one hand, it would reduce the influence of gender stereotypes on women's choice of areas for the application of their human capital. On the other hand, it would help determine the trajectory of their training. To this end, it would be productive to use the innovative tools of the *WE GO (Women Economic Independence and Growth Opportunity)* project financed by the EU (WE GO 2 Against Violence, 2018). These tools include the elaboration of individual plans for the development of IPV victims' social ties, regular monitoring of their needs and employment opportunities, development of individual career programs, job placement assistance, and trainings for potential employers (WE GO 2 Against Violence, 2018).

It would also make sense to launch a financial literacy project for those women who would like to open a startup. The aim of the project is to enhance IPV victims' financial security, to train them in implementing effective technologies of managing their personal finances, help them obtain the skills of economic and financial planning to achieve their goals.

The project can be also expanded to include low-income women who have a permanent source of income. This could be a separate project aimed at helping women develop individual savings programs similar to the MAP program. Unlike the project for stimulating startups, such project could accomplish the following: (a) help women achieve a wider range of financial goals; (b) encourage them to build their skills for wiser management of their family budgets, choosing a savings strategy to reach financial goals; and (c) help women accumulate personal savings. Participants of the IDA (Individual Development Accounts) or matched savings program open accounts in a certain financial institution and make regular contributions for a specified period of time. A certain proportion (depending on the state and program) of the resulting sum can be spent to achieve a financial goal, e.g., to buy a house, to start a business, etc. In this case, it is important to help low-income women discover their personal potential and become independent by providing them financial assistance in the form of a grant or social benefit (Sanders et al., 2007).

The impact of such microfinance projects on the prevention of violence against women in the region should be monitored (for more on this, see Hughes et al., 2015). Unfortunately, the project *Ending Gender-Based Violence and Achieving the*

Sustainable Development Goals, which is currently being implemented in Gagauzia, does not involve such monitoring and assessment.

In Gagauzia, as our analysis has shown, the share of employed women with higher education is decreasing. The region's labor market is gender segregated. In the long term such situation may exacerbate women's discrimination in the labour market because the quality of their human capital in the emerging knowledge economy will be uncompetitive. In this regard, one of the projects aimed at helping women enhance their human capital is to offer them career guidance and encourage them to obtain higher education. The project can be implemented in schools among the students of grades 8 and 9. In addition, the project can also solve the problem of reducing the influence of gender stereotypes on women's choices of profession and career, encouraging their interest in STEM. Thus, this project can contribute to reducing gender segregation in education and, subsequently, in the labor market of the region.

The project can be supplemented with a program for the creation of innovative enterprises by a team of educated women from socially vulnerable groups. Such enterprises can become part of the industrial park in Comrat and offer competitive salaries to highly qualified specialists, thus preventing the latter's labour migration to other countries or regions. Graduates of the industrial college, which is being opened in the ATU Gagauzia with the support of the Turkish Government, and graduates of the Comrat State University can be involved in training personnel for this enterprise. Girls participating in a career guidance project can get practical training or internships at this enterprise with the opportunity to be employed there after completing their higher education. The operation of the enterprise should result in the production of high-tech products with high added value.

There is a need for a project to develop an effective mechanism for coordinating the efforts of various departments, institutions, agencies, employers, and the public to provide various forms of assistance and services to IPV victims. It should be based on the 'single window' principle, which increases the effectiveness of rehabilitation measures by minimizing transaction costs. Furthermore, this principle can be used to create methodological tools for more effective prevention of violence against women. The synergistic effects of the project can also result in promoting the gender-equality approach in public administration and in the creation of an institutional environment in the region that promotes egalitarian gender norms in the family and society as a whole.

The potential projects outlined above aimed at women's economic empowerment may be integrated into a single comprehensive project to prevent violence against women in Gagauzia.

Conclusion

This study outlined and classified the social and economic factors that influence violence against women. Statistical analysis of the data from UNDP Moldova results and qualitative studies was used to estimate the likelihood of violence against women in one of the southern regions of Moldova—the ATU Gagauzia. It was found that violence against women stems from a wide range of factors, including the following.

First, on the regional labour market there are limited opportunities for women to realize their economic rights. In general, women in Gagauzia are less economically active than men. Women's employment rate is also lower, including the traditionally female sectors of economy. There is also a decrease in the employment rate of women with higher education and a growing gender pay gap. This picture fits well into the overall socio-economic situation in the region where the income levels of households are falling and the problem of poverty is exacerbated.

Secondly, there is a high level of patriarchalization of the population's consciousness as people tend to justify discriminatory practices against women, including extreme forms of violence.

Thirdly, there is no effective mechanism for ensuring gender equality in the region. As a result, women are not informed about gender equality policies and responses to gender-based violence, about their rights and opportunities to receive assistance in cases of violence, as well as about men's responsibility for these actions. There is a lack of coordination between the ministries and state departments responsible for the implementation of the gender equality policy. Similarly, local authorities have not been informed about the policy in the field of gender equality and measures to counter gender-based violence, no experts or officials have been appointed on the national or regional level to oversee the realization of the gender equality policy. While there are relevant legal provisions and legislation on physical violence, other forms of discriminatory practices, including psychological violence, are not regulated by law, and there are no penalties for sexual harassment at work.

We have shown that these factors, which increase the risks of IPV, is supported by the system of specialized institutions, each of which applies its own system of sanctions for the violation of its rules of gender stereotypical behavior. Promotion of egalitarian norms of interaction and adaptation of economic agents to them is possible only if the existing mechanisms of enforcement are eliminated.

For this purpose, in the light of the recommendations given by the UN and the EU as well as the successful experience of developed countries, the following set of projects is proposed:

- development of the system of gender equality education of economic entities on different levels of the gender system (state and local authorities, business, social milieu, family and individuals), development of an institutional environment in the region that will be conducive to the establishment of egalitarian gender norms in the family and society as a whole and to the elimination of discrimination practices against women, including physical violence;
- implementation of a system of specialized programs to stimulate women to enhance their human capital and realize their personal and professional potential;
- development of an effective mechanism for coordinating the efforts of various departments, institutions, business, and the public to ensure the provision of various forms of assistance and services to IPV victims. The project should rely on the single window implementation principle of a "single window" for enhanced cooperation of all the authorities involved in the process.

In the future, the proposed set of projects will create conditions for promoting the norms of egalitarian interactions between economic agents at different levels of the gender system. This will help prevent gender-based discriminatory practices, including the extreme forms of violence against women, through the formation of a self-sustaining system of gender equality institutions.

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