

Women in Georgia Living in Accordance with an Honor Code

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Women continuously experience injustices solely because of their gender in Georgia. Gender stereotypes are still deeply rooted. Across Georgia, honor-based violence remains an acute problem and the work to prevent and combat it is the responsibility of many actors in Georgian society.

Gender discrimination, starting in childhood, disproportionately affects girls in Georgia. In Georgian culture, men are seen as superiors and are placed in a dominant position in all areas of economic, social and political life. A girl is more likely to experience unequal treatment in her rights, in personal autonomy, in sexual rights and in education. In Georgia, women's roles are tightly intertwined with expectations around motherhood and domestic responsibilities. Women are largely expected to obey their husbands. The research conducted by UNFPA in 2009 found that 78.3 percent of women believe that domestic violence is a family issue and no one should intervene from the outside. Sadly, women and men in Georgia show a high degree of tolerance towards the use of violence against women in relationships, including sexual violence. The justifiable attitude towards the violence emphasizes the broader, severely rooted sociocultural impact of gender inequality. Another restriction that usually applies to only girls and women, is the restriction of their leisure time and meeting friends, especially boys. Typically, such parental authority is

an established way of life for females, regardless of their age, as long as they live at home with their parents. Notably, none of the aforementioned restrictions apply to boys and men. Such strong demands for obedience make it hard for Georgian women to choose a life of their own.

As stated by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Georgia faces alarming statistics of gender-based violence. One of the most prevalent forms of violence experienced by women is Intimate partner violence (IPV), as well as, early and forced marriage. Numerous gender-based violence cases remain largely underreported or under-investigated. One of the recent examples of the under-investigated case was the case of Khanum Jeiranova who was found dead in September 2014 in Georgia's Sagarejo municipality due to severe violence from her family members. Ms. Jeiranova was accused of having an extramarital affair by her husband's relatives. In September 2014, three of her husband's relatives beat her so hard that she lost consciousness several times. As found by the UN Women's rights committee, "That night, the village governor and police officers were called to the victim's father's house where they saw her crying and begging for help as her family members wanted her to take a jar of rat poison. They didn't make any arrest and didn't send her to the hospital. The village governor took her away for the night but returned her to her mother the next morning. One day later, Jeiranova's mother found her dead, her body hanging by a rope in the garden shed." The police did not conduct a forensic examination and an investigation was quickly closed. It was concluded that the victim had committed suicide as a result of her "dishonorable" and "shameful" behavior. On 11 November 2021, the UN women's committee concluded that Georgia failed to investigate and prosecute gender and honor-based violence against Khanum Jeiranova and failed to provide effective protection to her. Furthermore, the country has failed to fulfill its obligations to investigate and punish those responsible.

Women and girls who belong to patriarchal families are living under various types of coercive control. This control can be physically nonviolent as well as physically violent. The concept and understanding of honor and its norms change over time and can have different meanings in different societies. In societies with an honor-based value system, honor refers to "the regulation of women's sexuality and their conformity with social norms and traditions". In Georgia, honor plays a key role in families' lives and includes not only the women's own worth but also the worth of the whole family. Moreover, women are being seen as "the guardians of the family's honor" and punished and shamed if they do not comply with the title and do not act in accordance with socially constructed norms. Notably, dominant religious views emphasize gender norms, social expectations for girls and boys, family values and sexuality. And in case of the domestic violence, a strong discourse on male authority and the sacred nature of marriage can prevent female victims from leaving an abusive relationship.

Women who are brave enough to express and explore their sexuality and not comply with the forcefully imposed restrictions, are seen as "immoral" and "disgraceful". Unfortunately, this may have a severe consequence for them: physical and/or emotional abuse. In Georgia, where virginity is still regarded as the main measurement of worth, the demand for premarital chastity is one of the most important of all the family norms. This norm is often expressed through the metaphor of the daughter being an innocent holy spirit, symbolizing the family's honor and pride, that cannot be touched by anyone apart from the future husband. Disobeying this norm often leads to various forms of psychological but mainly, physical violence from the family members, including femicide. Strangely, the chastity culture does not apply to boys and men, on the contrary, they are being encouraged and often praised for being sexually active.

Another, recent disturbing honor-based violence in Georgia took place in early 2021 when a 14-year-old girl in Kobuleti municipality committed suicide after systematic physical and psychological abuse from her grandfather and relatives. The teenager has previously been a victim of sexual abuse. Unfortunately, despite being informed, the authorities, as well as social workers, failed to provide effective protection to the child and punish those responsibly. The appropriate investigation only started after the suicide. After being sexually abused, the 14-year-old girl told everything to her family, the family members severely beat the girl for “disgracing” the family’s honor. This case further highlights the situation of girls and women living with violence from their families and emphasizes the gloomy reality of how widespread and rooted the honor-based norms and the honor-based violence are in Georgia. The country urgently needs to strengthen measures to ensure the right to life of girls and women and their freedom from torture, with special attention to communities that are isolated, closed and where honor-based norms apply.

UN Women Georgia, throughout the years, has been supporting national partners in Georgia to end violence against women and girls. They have supported the establishment of specialized services for survivors of domestic violence, such as crisis centers, first state-run shelters and hotlines. In 2017, UN Women published National Study on Violence Against Women in Georgia. The study was carried out in partnership with the National Statistics Office of Georgia (GEOSTAT) within the framework of the “Unite to Fight Violence against Women” project was funded by the European Union. According to the study, in Georgia, research points to widespread experiences of violence against women across the country. According to the 2009 UNFPA-supported National Research on Domestic Violence against Women in Georgia: “6.9 percent of women reported having experienced physical violence from their husband or a partner, and 3.9 percent experienced sexual violence during their lifetime. The 2014 UN Women study on perceptions and attitudes towards domestic violence concluded that 77.8 percent of the respondents believe that domestic violence occurs very often or quite often; 66.8 percent admitted that they know victims/ survivors of domestic violence, and 56.3 percent admitted that they know perpetrators personally.”

Without a doubt, ending violence against women in Georgia demands a shift in attitudes, beliefs, and systems that perpetuate gender inequality and normalize violence. This underlines the importance of working with men and boys to promote gender equality. The normalizing of violence against women, particularly in the home area, is based on gender norms that perpetuate women's inferior status within the household, as violence is used as a tool to retain men's dominance over the family unit. Implementation of innovative policies and plans related to gender equality, as well as actively promoting gender equality across the country is crucial. After all, equal rights and opportunities of any gender are essential to a prosperous and stable society.