



International Rescue Committee
Azerbaijan Program

Assessment on Violence and Women in Azerbaijan

*An overview of violence in the lives
of women in IRC's beneficiary population.*

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International Rescue Committee Assessment on Violence and Women in Azerbaijan Conducted March – May 2004

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Catherine Galenkamp - Consultant

Acronyms Used

CDC:	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
FGW:	Focus Group Women
FSP:	Female Survey Participant
GBV:	Gender-Based Violence
GoA:	Government of Azerbaijan
IDP:	Internally Displaced Person
IOM:	International Organization for Migration
IPV:	Intimate Partner Violence
IRC:	International Rescue Committee
MSP:	Male Survey Participant
OSCE:	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SPPRED:	State Programme on Poverty Reduction and Development
UMCOR:	United Methodist Committee on Relief
UNDP:	United Nations Development Program
UNFPA:	United Nations Population Fund
USAID:	United States Agency for International Development
VAW:	Violence Against Women

Executive Summary

Violence against women is a global problem that violates fundamental human rights and restricts the equal and full right of women to participate in society. It is an obstacle to the development and maintenance of a stable and equitable nation. As Azerbaijan continues to strive for stability and progress, it has become clear that the issue of violence against women has yet to be fully acknowledged and addressed by both the Government of Azerbaijan and those who provide influence through funding and program development.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC), concerned that the impact of violence against women is hindering long-term community and national development, has undertaken this assessment to determine both the level and effect of violence against women in its implementing areas. In addition, IRC conducted a review of the prevention activities and response service provision existing in Azerbaijan, highlighting deficiencies that remain.

The results indicate a surprising lack of program attention and service availability to women in crisis. There is currently little widespread holistic programming in the prevention of and response to violence against women in Azerbaijan. Several international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have implemented awareness raising programs or research, but few have engaged in any direct service provision for survivors of violence. The regions are virtually absent of any direct violence against women prevention and response activities. Although the Government of Azerbaijan has made some positive steps in creating action plans and documents that promote equality of women and address violence perpetrated against women, these policies have yet to be realized in the daily lives of Azerbaijani women. There are no security or safety measures established for women who need to be removed from high risk relationships and the poor track record of the current legal system does not encourage women to come forward to seek justice. At present, donor interest and activity to address these gaps is limited.

Focus group discussions and survey results indicate that violence against women is both perpetrated and tolerated in Azerbaijan. Thirty seven percent (37%) of women surveyed reported some type of violence perpetrated against them in their lifetime; violence perpetrated primarily by intimate partners, but also by fathers, brothers, and father- and mother-in-laws. Forty-three percent (43%) of married women surveyed reported violence in their current relationship. The majority of men and women surveyed indicate that certain occasions warrant physical abuse to be perpetrated against women. Women are subjected to violence in their families of origin prior to marriage either through witnessing violence perpetrated between their parents, or perpetrated against themselves by members of their immediate family. Women do not know of any viable solutions to the violence in their lives and are uncertain of where to go for assistance. Lack of financial opportunities, community ostracization and blame, fear of losing children, and lack of available support systems deter a woman from leaving a violent relationship. A culture of silence surrounds this issue, keeping it outside the public forum and maintaining women's subordinate position in family and society. Women indicate they need services, they desire support, they request solutions, and they want the violence to stop, but they currently have limited options.

Enormous gaps remain in the prevention of and response to violence against women in Azerbaijan. Government bodies need to be supported to adequately commit and respond to this issue and donor agencies need to be influenced to see this as a concern to the long-term stability and development of Azerbaijan. Until this glaring need is addressed, women and men in Azerbaijan will continue to tolerate violence against women and women will continue to lack the power to fully participate in and enjoy the rewards of a developing society.

Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. And it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture, or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development, and peace. —Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General

Background

In May 1994, Azerbaijan and Armenia signed a ceasefire agreement ending a 6 year war over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. This conflict left 20% of Azerbaijan's territory occupied by Armenian forces and over 800,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. Coupled with the challenges faced after the breakup of the Soviet Union, recovery has been slow. Economic and social conditions have considerably worsened, resulting in a collapse of social health and welfare services, decreased educational standards, underdeveloped government regulations and systems, and a wide-spread black market economy.

In this context of social and economic uncertainty the status of women remains precarious. With the fall of the Soviet Union, state programs specifically focusing on the special needs of women were eliminated. Women in employment statistics have steadily dropped since 1991 and wage disparity between men and women is common. Although the Government of Azerbaijan (GoA) has more recently attempted to include the concerns of women in their recovery strategies¹, little has been felt in the day-to-day lives of Azerbaijani women.

In a recent USAID Gender Assessment for Azerbaijan², it was found that the concept of domestic violence was not well understood or widely discussed, but commonly accepted as a traditional norm within the general population. The same assessment also found that restrictions on movement and employment, early marriage, forced sexual intercourse, and an overall lack of basic understanding of human rights, as they pertain to women, were prevalent. There is a fear that re-emerging patriarchal traditions may increase the risk to the status of women in Azerbaijan, including risk from Gender-Based Violence (GBV)³. Current GBV programming was not seen as extensive, programmed primarily through national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that competed for funding, and was perceived as lacking coordination.

The USAID assessment mirrors findings from an earlier Reproductive Health Consortium study indicating that as of 2001 in Azerbaijan "domestic violence, sexual violence, prostitution and trafficking exist...yet among refugee and IDP communities...there is no programming to address GBV"⁴.

As Azerbaijan recovers from the effects of the conflict and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it is clear that certain social gaps must be met for the benefits of recovery to be felt by the whole population. As indicated, an area which has not had significant programming focus is the aspect of violence perpetrated against women. Approximately one in three women in the world will have been beaten, sexually assaulted or similarly abused in their lifetime⁵, and not surprisingly, Azerbaijan is not immune to this statistic. In a recent reproductive health survey involving 7,668 women in Azerbaijan, 30% of currently/previously married women reported verbal abuse, 20% reported physical violence

¹ Republic of Azerbaijan, *State Programme on Poverty Reduction and Economic Development*, Baku, 2003.

² USAID Azerbaijan, *Gender Assessment for USAID/Caucasus/Azerbaijan*, Baku, 2004.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Ward, J, *If Not Now, When: Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Refugee, Internally Displaced and Post-Conflict Settings*. Reproductive Health Consortium, 2001.

⁵ Amnesty International, *Making Violence against Women Count: Facts and Figures – a Summary*, 2004.

and 10% reported sexual violence perpetrated by their partner or ex-partner at some point during their life.⁶ Other studies show similar results⁷ and at least one survey of Azerbaijani IDP women indicated that 30% were forced to have sexual intercourse at least once in their lives⁸.

Violence against women has been called the "greatest human rights scandal of our times"⁹. Apart from the immediate short term consequences of violence which are primarily physical injury, long-term consequences to women include chronic physical disability, reproductive health problems, sexually transmitted infections, mental health disorders, and self-harming ideation and activity. Children exposed to violence in the family are at a higher risk of becoming victims or perpetrators in their own intimate relationships. As women are forbidden to participate equally in community and national decisions, developing societies miss the invaluable cultural, social, political and economical contributions women make. Developing societies that reject the input of women become male-based civilizations, further minimizing the inclusion of women and hindering any possibility of full and equal participation of all members of society. It is a tragic, repetitive cycle.

As a first step to breaking this cycle, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) commenced an overview of violence against women (VAW) in Azerbaijan. Whilst a portion of the assessment focused on determining current prevention activities undertaken and response services available to women in Azerbaijan, the primary function of the assessment was to gather first hand information from the affected beneficiary population in IRC's current programming regions to establish the level and impact of violence in lives of female beneficiaries and their families. This document highlights these findings.

⁶ USAID Azerbaijan/CDC, *Reproductive Health Survey Azerbaijan, Final Report*, March 2001.

⁷ Pathfinder International, *Knowledge, Attitude and Practice of Refugees and IDPs towards Reproductive Health and Family Planning Issues*, Baku, 2001.

⁸ Kerimova J, Posner SF, Brown YT, Hillis S, et al. *High prevalence of self-reported forced sexual intercourse among internally displaced women in Azerbaijan*. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2003; 93: 1067 – 1070.

⁹ Amnesty International, *Stop Violence against Women Campaign*, 2004.

Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed for data collection. A literature review of written research and documentation on gender and violence against women in Azerbaijan was conducted. Interviews were held with employees from international and national organizations significant to the assessment topic. Women's focus group sessions were conducted with women using scenarios for topic presentation followed by a semi-formal question and answer period for each scenario. Structured surveys were administered to both men and women.

It should be understood that this assessment is not a scientific study on the epidemiology of violence against women in Azerbaijan, nor will scientific statistical analysis be undertaken on the results. The results of the focus group discussions and survey are to provide IRC with basic qualitative and quantitative information regarding current violence against women incidences and beliefs of randomly selected Azerbaijan women and men, primarily from IRC's area of operation, to assess future programming possibilities. However, regardless of scientific intention, this study does not minimize the importance of *any* reporting of violence in the beneficiary population. All self-disclosures of VAW in IRC's beneficiary population through the focus group or survey process are viewed as credible and present a need that must be addressed programmatically.

Available research and documentation on gender and VAW in Azerbaijan was collected and reviewed to determine nature and scope of assessments and activities undertaken to date. Additionally, statistical information was gathered to provide context for the current assessment and against which to compare information gathered during focus group and survey activities.

Interviews were held with representatives of NGOs, UN Agencies and the GoA to gather qualitative information on the variety and scope of current GoA and NGO programming relating to the wider topic of 'gender' and then narrowing to focus specifically on programs relating to VAW. Interviewees were asked to give their impression on the scope of and need for further areas of programming, challenges and opportunities, as well as their own programming experiences. Interviews varied between individuals depending on the type of organization they represented and the level of their involvement in direct service provision.

Focus group locations were chosen based on IRC's experience working in the chosen communities and the ability to establish forums for the meetings. Women from the selected communities were invited to attend discussions regarding women's programs. The community and participant selection process was not intended to create external validity (generalization to the wider Azerbaijani population), but to provide a sampling of responses in IRC's current area of implementation. Focus groups were originally envisioned as age segregated (18 – 34 and 35+) to ensure that younger participants felt free to voice opinions. However, this was challenging to realize, which resulted in most groups being mixed. Two focus groups were held with non-IRC urban beneficiaries from one location. These two focus groups were facilitated to determine if there was an obvious discrepancy between urban and rural focus groups. The groups were chosen based on availability and cooperation with UMCOR.

Women's focus groups were co-facilitated by one English-speaking female and one English and Azeri-speaking female. Groups were provided with definitions of the terminology used to ensure increased understanding of the focus topics. Focus group discussions were based on presented scenarios followed by question and answer periods. The question and answers were semi-structured with flexibility given if a particular subject provided additional information that was not part of the required question list.

Following the focus group discussions, women were invited to participate in a structured survey, administered in Azeri by an Azeri facilitator. Surveys were intended to gather information from self-reports on gender beliefs and current/historical violence in the lives of

the participants. As the women completing the surveys had been involved in the focus groups, definitions of violence were not given again.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of trained male facilitators, focus groups for men were not feasible. To collect information regarding men's beliefs regarding gender and violence male surveys were completed in the eleven regions in which IRC is currently operating, administered in Azeri by a male facilitator. Survey participants were randomly selected from the IRC beneficiary population. As male survey participants were not privy to a pre-survey focus group, survey questions were not related to participant personal behavior and were general in nature.

Terminology

For the purpose of this report, **violence against women (VAW)** is defined as¹⁰:

Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. Accordingly, violence against women encompasses but is not limited to the following:

- a. Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;
- b. Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;
- c. Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is defined as actual or threatened physical or sexual violence or psychological and emotional abuse directed toward a spouse, ex-spouse, current or former boyfriend or girlfriend, or current or former dating partner¹¹.

¹⁰ United Nations. *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women: Program for Action*, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995.

¹¹ Saltzman LE, Fanslow JL, McMahon PM, Shelley GA. *Intimate Partner Violence Surveillance: Uniform definitions and recommended data elements*. Atlanta: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; 1999.

Women in Azerbaijan: An Overview

Azerbaijan has a total population of 8,016,200¹² people. Women make up 51.1% of the population in total¹³, yet statistics on this demographic group are not readily available. Much of the data collected by the government is not sex disaggregated and data sets specifically pertaining to women and women's issues are difficult to locate. However, the following highlights basic information available regarding women in Azerbaijan.

In general, women and men have equal access to education and have similar literacy levels, although women are more inclined to the 'softer' technical school and university programs and are less likely than their male counterparts to attend post-graduate education¹⁴.

Women make up 45% of the non-agricultural labor force¹⁵. However, employed women tend to gravitate towards the more acceptable health and education sector which remunerate historically below the national average. In addition, women often earn up to 45% less than men in the same jobs¹⁶. Anecdotal evidence also indicates that once a woman is married she will face increasing pressure from her husband and husband's family to stay at home regardless of education level or earning potential¹⁷. At this point she will often withdraw from the work force. Women have low employment rates in the political sphere, with only 2% of government ministries headed by women and women holding only 11% of the seats in parliament¹⁸.

Women have an average lifespan of 75.2 years with a lifetime fertility rate of approximately 2.1 children per woman¹⁹. Whilst the average fertility rates are dropping in all age groups, the fertility rate of women aged 15 – 19 has increased twofold. The most widely used form of birth control is induced abortion. Government statistics put the abortion rates at 7 per 1000 women, but a recent study found the rate to be much higher at 116 per 1000 women with approximately three abortions to each live birth nationally²⁰. In 2003, there were 100,245 births registered with the government, of these 9275 were born to single women or women with no marriage registration²¹.

¹² Republic of Azerbaijan, *State Programme on Poverty Reduction and Economic Development*, Baku, 2003.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Focus group discussions 15 March and 12 – 15 April 2004

¹⁸ UNDP, *Human Development Report*, 2003.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ USAID Azerbaijan/CDC, *Reproductive Health Survey Azerbaijan*, Baku, 2001.

²¹ Ministry of Justice, Government of Azerbaijan

Violence Against Women in Azerbaijan: The Statistics

Due to the lack of the systematic data collection regarding women in Azerbaijan by the GoA, obtaining information regarding specific women's issues and concerns, particularly violence against women, is challenging. The difficulty in obtaining concrete information regarding women and women's issues and concerns is further compounded by the perceived shame involved with public discussion of these topics. Sexual and reproductive health and violence against women (whether physical, sexual or psychological) are not well understood, rarely spoken about openly and never spoken about in mixed-sex groups. The more common approach to these issues is to feign ignorance about women's sexual health and to profess that violence towards women does not occur in Azerbaijan. In fact, many Azerbaijani women, having never been exposed to or educated on violence against women, are convinced that it cannot occur in Azerbaijan. All of this further hinders incident reporting and accurate statistical gathering.

However, to date, several studies of various magnitudes have been undertaken outside of the government sphere that provide fairly substantial data comparable to global statistics regarding violence against women. A USAID/CDC study in 2001 indicated that in regards to intimate partner violence, of 7,668 women respondents, 30% reported verbal abuse, 20% reported physical abuse and 10% reported sexual abuse. In a Pathfinder International study, of 178 women respondents, 28% reported being the victim of physical violence from their husband or partner in the month prior to undertaking the survey, with over 5% reporting violent incidences occurring more than 5 times that month.

Two surveys conducted by Symmetry, an international NGO, found that approximately 45% of female respondents were victims of violence with 59% of the violence occurring in the home, 36% perpetrated by the husband²². Other perpetrators indicated in the Symmetry study include brothers, parents, and relatives of the husband.

Regardless of statistics indicating that psychological, physical and sexual violence is occurring in Azerbaijan, women are unlikely to report it. Most women in violent situations consider domestic violence 'normal' and do not perceive a need to seek assistance. Social stigma, shame, fear of ostracization, and dependence on the husband and his family for economic support also severely restrict a woman's perceived ability to report. One study found that only 1% of women abused by their intimate partners reported the case to the police or talked to a health provider and less than 1% sought legal assistance²³.

This is supported by the minimal number of cases being reported through the Ministry of Justice. In 2002, 317 cases were registered regarding crimes of violence against women and in 2003, there were 289²⁴. In 2000, only 39 rape cases were registered in Azerbaijan and only 46 in 2003²⁵. The lack of protection and support provided by the police, medical profession and judicial process further hinders a woman's ability to report. This, combined with the belief that violence is normal and the fear of shame and ostracization, make reporting almost non-existent.

The issue of trafficking in persons has had increased attention in Azerbaijan due to recent U.S. Government funding support and political pressure and international organization focus (IOM and OSCE are working together with the GoA on a National Action Plan on counter-trafficking). This has heightened the focus on women's rights in general in Azerbaijan. However, the attention has been primarily on the new 'hot topic' of trafficking with the less fashionable topic of 'plain old domestic violence' remaining the background. Additionally, it has been mentioned (unconfirmed) that national NGOs who have focused historically on women's programming are getting swept up in the trafficking prevention furor in order to be party to some of the funding that is expected to accompany the implementation of the counter-trafficking National Action Plan.

²² Symmetry, *Violence by views of women, men and children: Results of special Survey*, Baku, 2000.

²³ USAID Azerbaijan/CDC, *Reproductive Health Survey Azerbaijan*, Baku, 2001.

²⁴ Ministry of Justice, Republic of Azerbaijan

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Current Response and Service Provision

Government Response to Violence Against Women

The GoA has taken tentative steps towards addressing VAW in Azerbaijan. However, the full effect of these actions has yet to be felt by the majority of women. With the fall of the Soviet Union came the suspension of social protection programs for women. To fill the resulting gap in services and protection, women-focused NGOs began to emerge. Lack of governmental support resulted in relatively small and localized programming for most of these organizations.

However, the GoA has slowly been turning its focus toward women. In the last few years, several steps have been taken on this path. In 1995, the *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women* was ratified. In 1998, the State Committee for Women's Affairs was created and, in 2000, the President issued a Decree *On the Implementation of State Policy on Women's Issues in Azerbaijan*. More recently, the *State Programme on Poverty Reduction and Economic Development* (SPPRED) has included a small section on actions to be taken and indicators for the protection of women²⁶.

These documents indicate that, amongst other activities, the GoA will ensure that information is disseminated on women's issues; women subjected to domestic violence are provided medical, legal and psychological consultation and support; and programs for the protection of girls and young women are initiated. It is noted in these documents that the implementation of GoA activities will likely be heavily supported through the activities of United Nations agencies and NGOs.

Regardless of the good intention, there is a fear that the majority of government activities regarding women's issues have so far been mere rhetoric. In response to the initial report of States Parties submitted by Azerbaijan to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee expressed a concern regarding the "discrepancies between *de jure* and *de facto* equality for women" and "insufficient effort to assess and combat violence against women" on the part of the GoA²⁷. The Committee recommended close collaboration with NGOs to forward gender awareness activities and initialize violence prevention and response programs.

The following highlights specific sectors of possible prevention and response and the GoA's involvement in each. It should be recognized that there may be GoA initiatives that are occurring but have not been identified at this time.

Awareness Campaigns

It does not appear that the GoA is currently active in promoting VAW prevention public service awareness campaigns. Although there are GoA documents and decrees specific to this issue, they have not been well disseminated to the general population.

Research

Government research specific to VAW is either not available or has not been conducted. Additionally, statistics regarding the status of women in Azerbaijan are primarily demographic and lack substance. The GoA has endorsed the USAID Azerbaijan/CDC *Reproductive Health Survey Azerbaijan*, which contains a section on VAW, but does not seem to be conducting research of its own.

²⁶ It is disappointing to note that in the recently released SPPRED annual report, violence against women is not mentioned and gender issues are not really represented beyond women's access to education and political employment. Republic of Azerbaijan, *State Programme on Poverty Reduction and Economic Development Annual Report – 2003: Azerbaijan Progresses toward the achievement of the MDGs*, Baku, 2004.

²⁷ United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, *Consideration of Reports of States Parties: Azerbaijan Initial Report (1 September 1996)*, 1998.

Security, Legal Assistance and Justice

GoA related services are poorly equipped to provide security and justice for survivors of violence. The police force has undergone minimal training on violence against women, with no inclusion of the topic in the national curriculum. The only training received has been through NGOs and UN Agencies and, at most, has reached a few hundred of the tens of thousands of police officers. Police are largely unable to provide support and security to survivors who come forward. Additionally, there remain gaps between the legal codes for the protection of women and the prosecution of crimes of violence against women, particularly with respect to domestic violence. Many of the laws for women are specifically in regards to pregnant women as a special demographic, as opposed to women in general. Unfortunately, statistics regarding cases reported to the police regarding VAW as compared to cases successfully prosecuted are not readily available. But it is generally believed that women do not perceive the government as able to provide the security or judicial retribution needed through the police or legal system.

A formidable hindrance to seeking justice is that domestic violence crimes not resulting in major physical injury are prosecuted at the local government level. There is no guarantee of the confidentiality that may exist in a court located in a regional center, and the only punishment is the levy of a small fine to the perpetrator. Non-payment of the fine results in jail time, but there is no evidence that this process is sought after by women for perceived minor abuses.

Medical Assistance

GoA health care is fairly available through any of the state-run clinics in the larger cities and towns. However, most medical employees are not trained on how to handle cases of violence against women, are not prepared to initiate conversations with women who present with signs of domestic violence, and are not able to diagnose early signs of violence and assist families in the initial stages of violence prevention. Additionally, government doctors are required by law (through an agreement between the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Health) to report to the police any suspicious injuries that present at the clinic, thereby making anonymous applications to government health services virtually impossible. It is not clear whether or not doctors follow this Soviet-era law, but not following it can result in the doctor's job loss. This requirement severely impacts on whether or not a woman will honestly report incidences of abuse to her doctor. Additionally, women in smaller villages may not even have adequate access to health services even if they wanted to seek services for injuries from violence.

With funding and assistance through UNFPA, the Ministry of Health has opened a National Office for Reproductive Health and Family Planning, but it is unclear if this office addresses the various forms of violence against women. Additionally, it is feared that without continued pressure and monetary assistance from UNFPA, this office will eventually close. No other office within the GoA specifically addresses the health needs of women.

Psychological Assistance

There are currently no GoA-initiated psycho-social services in response to VAW.

Government Response – Conclusion

Even though the GoA has specific action plans to combat violence against women, as this 'problem' is seen as alternately nonexistent or dishonorable, there is some concern that programs directly addressing VAW, particularly in the regions, would be met with resistance from local government officials themselves. Problems faced when trying to implement programs that are not fully backed by the government can result in an inability to implement, lack of community support, and intimidation.

There are many gaps within the GoA response. However, by holding the GoA accountable to its declared commitment on this issue, and using the GoA's own documents as incentive, many opportunities are available for organizations to collaborate with the GoA on all sectors of VAW prevention and response, including: state health provision for survivors, ensuring safety and security for women reporting abuse to the state authorities, psycho-social assistance, and legal reform. Additionally, organizations can work with the GoA to inform the population on both the issue of VAW and the pledge the GoA has made to address it.

Non-Governmental Organization Response to Violence Against Women

Due to the perceived gap of attention that women's issues were receiving from GoA bodies, many women-focused NGOs (primarily national) began to emerge in the 1990s. As of 2000, 44 national women's NGOs were formally registered with the GoA²⁸. Most of the organizations working in VAW prevention have been involved in research or awareness raising campaigns with few providing direct tangible services to survivors. Initiatives have primarily been limited to Baku, with no concrete prevention and response activities established in the regions. One women's organization, Azad Qadin, has done some work in Imishli region, but with no definitive focus on VAW.

Unfortunately, yet of importance, the motivation behind some of the national NGOs is not always clear. It has been acknowledged that many "women's NGOs" are used as conduits to take either a pro- or anti-government political stance. It has also been suggested that many women find that the only way they can enter politics is through the NGO forum, and several NGOs are criticized for being nothing more than political soap boxes. This creates a challenge for international NGOs in selecting non-partisan national partners and also hinders collaboration between the NGOs who may have different political views. Regardless of political motivation, there are several national NGOs whose work to address VAW has been notable.

Although many national and international organizations have done work to promote a variety of women's causes in general, the following highlights the more recent and major undertakings specific to combating VAW.

Research

High quality qualitative and quantitative research regarding VAW has been undertaken by several organizations including Symmetry, the Center of Legal Assistance to Migrants, Pathfinder International, and the Azerbaijan Sociological Association. Other organizations that have gathered information regarding women's concerns intended for broader dissemination to the public include Clean World and the D. Aliyeva Association for Women's Rights Protection. Clean World's newsletter that compiles articles about violence against women in the media seems to have a large distribution list. It is not clear, however, how wide this research and information has been disseminated or shared through the larger community, or if it is being used to influence donor funding or government policy on state run women's programs or services.

The USAID Azerbaijan/CDC *Reproductive Health Survey* is the most comprehensive research to date. It had the highest survey participant number and is considered to have results reflective of the entire population. Of importance, this survey and its results were accepted and endorsed by the GoA.

Awareness Campaigns

Mass media initiatives have been undertaken at different times by various NGOs. The Azerbaijan Young Lawyers Association had a supplement in one Russian language newspaper called "Femina" that provided information for women including women's legal

²⁸ United Nations Development Program, *The Report on the Status of Women of Azerbaijan Republic*, Baku, 2000.

rights. This was suspended due to funding. Recently new funding has been found and this initiative will be restarting soon. One television program, "Families and Faith", has been regularly broadcast in Azerbaijan, and was noted by a few beneficiaries as one they had seen. Symmetry has made a film entitled "I wish you seven sons and only one daughter" in a campaign against selective induced abortions. More recently, the Center for Psychological Counseling has created a television campaign to be aired in the next few months regarding spousal abuse. World Learning, Catholic Relief Services and Internews, through USAID funds, are implementing a public service announcement campaign that includes messages on domestic violence and early marriage, amongst other women-focused issues.

In general, more focus has been on awareness raising campaigns than on other initiatives, but it is not clear what their overall reach or scope has been or how effectively they have been accepted and assimilated by the target population. What is clear is that women in the regions have rarely been privy to these information campaigns and do not cite them when asked about what they have seen or heard in regards to violence against women²⁹.

The Open Society Institute – Soros Foundation has been a primary donor of national NGOs undertaking media and awareness campaigns. It is envisioned that they will continue to fund such activities in the future.

Legal Assistance and Justice

The two most accessible services for confidential legal assistance besides directly applying to a lawyer are through the Azerbaijan Young Lawyers Association and the Women Crisis Center. Both have telephone hotlines and legal consultants on staff to offer advice to women. Although there is some concern that women don't actually access these services, in two and a half years, 973 individuals have consulted the lawyer at the Women Crisis Center for advice. Unfortunately, the Women Crisis Center lawyer cannot apply to court for their clients. Alternatively, the Center of Legal Assistance to Migrants has provided court assistance to women who have been subjected to violence though it is not specifically established to do so.

To date there is a lack of legal service provision *specifically* for women survivors of violence that is easily accessible, tangible and affordable, and that allows for advice, consultation, and subsequent legal support through the court process.

Safety and Security

Inconsistent training for the police has occurred over the last few years, primarily provided by Symmetry and UNFPA. However, relatively few police officers have been trained and there is little indication that there has been a change in attitudes and practices towards VAW. More training initiatives are planned for the near future, but this is more in regards to trafficking of persons than VAW in general.

There is no secure housing anywhere in Azerbaijan for women who need to escape from a violent situation.

Medical Assistance

The Women Crisis Center is attempting to offer women specialized gynecological services with a Gynecologist on staff that is available to see women who present at the center. Unfortunately, the doctor is not licensed to see women at the Women Crisis Center, so she refers clients to herself at the hospital where she practices. She has seen 1006 women in two and half years and of these, 48 were victims of rape. Other than the Women Crisis Center there is no NGO that has been established or specifically trained its medical staff to provide direct health services for survivors of VAW.

²⁹ Focus group discussions 15 March and 12 – 15 April 2004

There is some concern that women applying to state health clinics are not assured anonymous consultation due to the legal requirement of police reporting. However, it has been suggested that should an NGO hire a medical practitioner to consult with survivors of violence and remunerate them through the organization and not the state, there is no requirement for them to report to the police. The survivors' anonymity would be protected through the parameters of the program³⁰. This possibility, while appealing, raises concerns of GoA legislation circumvention and would need more consideration before using as an alternative. To date, this alternative does not seem to have been utilized by NGOs.

Psychological Assistance

Only a few service providers exist that offer direct psychological assistance to survivors of violence against women, and it is not clear on the qualifications, experience or expertise of many of those providing these services. However, it is evidenced that if services are available, women will utilize them. The Women Crisis Center has a psychologist on staff that has seen 1154 women in two and a half years. The majority of the complaints (albeit vague) were in regards to "problems with husband" (583), "result of rape" (53), and "intimate problems" (179). The newly reopened³¹ Center for Psychological Counseling will offer direct client services to men, women, and children, as well as offer referrals for women to medical and legal services.

There is a lack of available qualified and trained psychological service providers in Azerbaijan in general and virtually none in the regions. Although there are psychologists and social workers in the country, most received their training many years ago and are not up-to-date on current social work practice, particularly on the special needs of women survivors of violence. However, even if services are available, like the two listed above, most women are not aware of them and do not know how to access them.

Of note, Baku State University will be starting a Social Work program in the fall of 2004 which will hopefully fill the gap that is currently so evident.

NGO Response – Conclusion

Besides awareness raising activities, little programming has been done to directly prevent or respond to VAW in Azerbaijan. Service availability is minimal for survivors and non-existent for perpetrators. With the exception of the Center for Psychological Counseling in Baku, there are no programs for families or couples in crisis. Funding for programs has been inconsistent, with several programs starting and stopping dependent on continuing donor involvement. Large scale programs that address the survivor's holistic needs are costly and challenging and have never been implemented. Major initiatives to support the government in establishing programs that "assess and combat the problem" have never been realized.

To date, no substantial donor activity in regards to VAW has materialized in Azerbaijan. The Open Society Institute – Soros Foundation has funded several national NGOs, including some of the initiatives listed above (Center for Psychological Counseling and Azerbaijan Young Lawyers Union). While there has been major funding for reproductive health programs through the USAID funded Mercy Corps Azerbaijan Humanitarian Assistance Program umbrella grant, program objectives focus primarily on family planning. Continued minimal donor initiative will further limit comprehensive NGO VAW prevention and response programming.

³⁰ Meeting with Alovzat Aliyev, Director Center of Legal Assistance to Migrants, 26 April 2004

³¹ Closed due to funding constraints

Focus Groups and Individual Surveys

Corresponding with a mandate to provide holistic services to people in need and recognizing the gaps outlined above, the International Rescue Committee in Azerbaijan went directly to beneficiary groups and individuals in their target areas to determine the level and effect of VAW, including the harmful beliefs that support it. This included focus groups for women and individual surveys for both men and women. A total of 275 individuals were involved in this process.

It should be noted that two focus groups were conducted from UMCOR's caseload of IDP women *not* in IRC's operational area (Baku) to determine if there was a major difference in response between the rural and urban beneficiary population. There did not appear to be so.

Women's Focus Groups

Over the course of six days, twelve focus groups were conducted that included a total of one hundred and seventy five (175) women, aged 15 – 69, from six regions in Azerbaijan. The focus group women (FGW) were asked to participate in discussions concerning women's issues. The average group size was approximately 14 women with some being as small as 9 and at least one being as large as 27 women. The focus groups were facilitated in both Azeri and English, translated through a co-facilitator.

Largely, the focus groups resulted in an animated exchange of ideas and viewpoints regarding VAW. Some of the FGW indicated that had the men in the community known the topic to be presented they would not have allowed their wives/daughters-in-law/daughters to attend. In one session a man came to retrieve his wife, threatening to throw her tea cup at her for wasting time socializing instead of being at home. In that same session a mother-in-law came to get her daughter-in-law. In several sessions FGW would leave mid-way through the session, indicating that they had to be home at a certain time otherwise they would be "like the women in the scenarios". It was understood that for many of the women safety was a real and present issue and if women requested to leave they were allowed, no questions asked.

To ensure all of the FGW understood the context of the meeting a short introduction including terminology to be used in the sessions, global statistics regarding crimes against women, and a brief breakdown of the consequences that result from violence against women were presented. The facilitators then read a series of four scenarios to the participants, followed by a question and answer period based on the stories. The scenarios primarily examined intimate partner violence with the exception of scenario four, which focused on child sexual abuse

The scenarios were used to gauge the beliefs and experiences of the participants through the safer medium of an external situation. However, most women personalized the scenarios and acknowledged that the stories expressed similarities to their own lives or the lives of women they knew. The following highlights the main themes from the discussions with the participants. Most of the themes presented below are regarding Scenarios 1 -3 which portray intimate partner violence, unless otherwise indicated in the text. The theme regarding child sexual abuse will be presented separately.

Denial and Acknowledgement

At the outset most of the FGW were quick to assure the facilitators that VAW did not occur in their communities, with some denying its existence in all of Azerbaijan. However, shortly after hearing the first scenario every group acknowledged that it represented issues common to their own communities, with a small number of women acknowledging that the stories (primarily the first two that portrayed psychological and physical violence) mirrored their own lives personally. In some focus groups when asked if they knew anyone who was

in a similar position to the women in the scenarios, the women often would respond "all of us here".

There are several possible explanations as to why denial occurs as the first response to questions about violence in the lives of women in Azerbaijan. The two most prominent that emerged in the focus groups were the concept of 'shame' and the perception of what constitutes violence.

For many women, merely talking about violence in families and between intimate partners is shameful even when referring to the hypothetical. It was indicated in all focus groups that a woman in a violent relationship would rather publicly deny the violence than to bring shame to her family by telling someone what is happening, particularly a stranger. Even within their own communities the women said, "We see and hear these things happening, but we don't discuss them". This was evidenced in the focus group discussions as women were more likely to talk about violence in the lives of other women they knew, historical violence in their lives, or violence that affected them all collectively. They were much less likely to admit and discuss current personal violence. It was acknowledged that these focus groups were the first opportunity the women had ever been given to publicly discuss violence against women.

In addition to shame, although a woman may be 'unhappy' regarding a situation in her life, she most likely would not define it as violence³². Many FGW asked "Is this really so bad?" in regards to the presented scenarios, downplaying the actions of the husband, and encouraging behavioral change in the woman to defer to the husband's wishes. The phrase "This is normal" was repeated in many of the focus groups. As such, admitting that violence occurs when it is not always seen as out of the ordinary, or even as wrong, can be difficult. The one exception was if violence was perpetrated by a stranger. This was seen as a great tragedy. However, if a husband committed the same act (marital rape) it was to a certain extent seen as his right, and not really seen as something as strong as abuse, and definitely not seen as rape.

As such, shame and lack of understanding of what constitutes violence may inhibit women from acknowledging its existence. On the other hand, when provided an appropriate forum, women can, and do, express that it is occurring. They express it *eagerly* when given the opportunity. This dichotomy clearly indicates the struggle within the women regarding their own beliefs around VAW.

The Big Choice: Tolerance, Divorce, and the Lack of Options

When asked the question "What can the woman in the scenario(s) do to make her life better?" the major theme that emerged was that of "Tolerate or Divorce". FGW were not aware of any median between those two options. The belief that the husband is the leader of the family, holds all the power, and must be obeyed was strongly elucidated, particularly if the husband was bringing money into the family.

- "If he's meeting all of her financial needs, then she needs to obey him in return".
- "Let her husband go out and earn money and let her stay home and eat".
- "If the man provides everything she doesn't need to seek anything – if she is looking after the children and her husband takes care of her that is the biggest treat she gets".

The wife's only duties are to "stay and obey" and comply with her husband's desires. Lack of power translates into lack of options and tolerance is the only choice. As one woman said "if my husband says yogurt is black, yogurt is black".

³² The term most used by the focus groups to describe a woman in an unhappy relationship was nothing worse than the word 'bored'. It can be assumed that this word encompasses unhappiness and depression in intimate partner relationships.

However, there was a notion that women had to have an alternative to tolerance and that "a woman could not be expected to be beaten forever". The only alternative, and presented as the worst case scenario, was divorce. Although there were a handful of divorced women in the focus groups, they were by far the minority. Women fear to lose everything in a divorce situation. They are often dependent on their husband for finances and accommodation.

Financial ties to the husband were echoed when one woman stated that "A woman needs to have a job in order to be independent; if she had one she would be at liberty to divorce." Women fear losing their children and being rejected by their communities and indeed by Azeri society as a whole. A divorced woman has a very slim chance of remarrying, regardless of the reason she divorced. "You can't convince people why you got divorced, people would still blame you that it is your fault and you didn't try enough". Therefore, even though this is one of the two options, it is not the preferred.

These two extremes represent the lack of options a woman has when faced with violence in her relationship. As services are not available or are unknown, women do not envisage alternatives to the two option menu. One International Agency employee summarized this quandary as follows:

If a woman has never seen or heard of a banana before she is not going to go to the store to buy bananas. She is not going to know what they are or even that they exist. It is the same with services for women in violent relationships. If she has never seen or heard of services for women in her situation, she isn't going to know to ask for it and isn't going to consider it as an option.

To sum up the two options for women in violent relationships and the weighted choice, as one woman said "Women can stay to protect the family or they can divorce, but they would rather stay and tolerate, even to the end of their lives". Tolerance was described by FGW with a sense of pride. Azerbaijani women 'tolerate well'.

Seeking Help: The Family Circle versus The Outsider

When pressed to look past the tolerate/divorce options and discuss who women in a violent relationship could approach for assistance, the most likely response was that she could seek support from someone close to her, preferably family members and maybe close friends. For women in violent relationships in Azerbaijan, families *are* the service providers. They provide advice on relationships; emergency shelter should a woman need to leave a physically violent situation; and mediation and reconciliation services for couples. They are the first people that will be approached by a woman and their advice is weighted the heaviest. While a blessing in providing a strong family support network, this system is also a curse: the assistance is not always helpful and it is inhibitive to approaching external support services.

It was indicated that family members would most likely give 'assistance' detailing methods of tolerance or suggesting 'faulty' behavior change for the woman. Additionally, the family members a woman might approach have different levels of influence with which to assist. A power hierarchy exists within the family circle granting the husband's parents primary influence, followed by the husband himself, then the wife's parents, followed by the wife. Unfortunately, the husband's parents often agree with the husband's behavior, and the wife's parents, not wanting to cause a problem that could result in the divorce of their daughter, often prefer to do nothing. It should be highlighted, however, that some of the FGW indicated that consultation with their husband's parents or their own, had resulted in a positive outcome.

Talking to someone outside of the close family inner circle was seen as very inappropriate. It brings shame onto the family and breaks the tradition of solving problems internally. However, it was acknowledged that sometimes the family circle was not always helpful. Given this, focus groups were given a menu of alternative external options to determine

their possible usefulness. Most focus groups thought an anonymous telephone hotline that provided information and assistance was a good possibility – as long as anonymity was assured and the person on the phone was an expert in relational matters. Another possible service was a professional located where a woman could easily access without her husband's awareness – as in a clinic, school or hospital.

The status of the lawyer in Azerbaijan seems to hold a similar value as a family therapist might in other countries. It was noted that some women or couples applied to a lawyer when they were having difficulty and the lawyer helped them stay together. It is not clear what advice the lawyer gave or how he assisted, but several of the focus groups indicated that visiting a lawyer could be helpful to the couple if they went together.

Most women were uncomfortable with seeking assistance from a doctor, due to the possibility that the police would be informed and the husband imprisoned. The two exceptions were in the case of marital rape, but only if there had been some gynecological or reproductive damage, or if it was stranger-rape. But even in these situations it was not preferred.

None of the women recommended seeking assistance from the police unless a woman had been raped by a stranger. And even in this situation it wasn't highly recommended. There was a fear that any police involvement would result in the arrest of the husband and the complete breakdown of the family. Additionally, it was implied that the police would not be able to assist anyway and would only raise community awareness that something bad had happened to the woman, thus increasing her risk of shame and ostracization.

Regardless of the opportunity or diversity of options for external assistance, there was concern expressed that any external body would not be able to provide concrete help and the woman would be at more risk from her husband for going outside the family. There would be no advantage to the woman approaching anyone externally because talk alone could not positively influence the husband's behavior, while the husband parents, for example, may be able to influence their son. Additionally, it is unlikely that the husband would follow the instruction of an external service provider. Given this, the women perceive the cons weighing heavily on proceeding with external assistance.

The FGW indicated that a perpetrator *might* approach friends or family for advice, but this was also seen as improbable for several reasons: 1) Why would he want to tell anyone what he was doing?, and 2) if he is perpetrating it is unlikely he would see it as something that needs to change. Additionally, if he spoke to his friends and family, the women suspected they would most often support his behavior.

It should be highlighted that no one group unilaterally agreed on any of the assistance options presented. It was clear that while some women thought seeking external assistance was acceptable, others in the group maintained that it was inappropriate to talk to anyone outside of the family circle. Additionally, individual women themselves varied in their responses. It was not uncommon to have one woman say that it was permissible for a woman to go to a doctor for assistance regarding violence and then a few minutes later say that a woman should never tell anyone about her problems and that tolerance was the best measure. Most of the groups concurred that if there was an agency that existed to provide assistance to women in these situations, women might seek those services, but generally only after she tried obeying her husband first or dealing with it through family members. Old traditions and values were at odds with unknown and unproven methods of problem solving. As one woman concluded: "Our first duty is to protect our society and its values", and society's value means keeping it in the family.

Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women: "We're in this together" versus "It's her fault"

In general, the women agreed that the men's behavior in the scenarios was bad. It was wrong for the women to be treated in the manner presented and she should be regarded

with more respect. When reflecting on the scenarios, the FGW indicated they understood what the scenario women were experiencing. Many related that she or someone she knew had experienced similar things. They all were aware and empathized with the suffering of the women in the scenarios. The FGW frequently indicated that the scenarios "happen to all of us".

However, *acknowledging* suffering from violence and *assigning fault* for it was divergent. Most of the focus groups were universal in their responses that even if the husband's behavior was not good, it was the wife that needed to change her behavior to amend the situation (for example, "if she would please her husband, he would not rape her"). According to one woman "90% of beatings are a wife's fault".

It was stated in various ways that good wives know how to change their husbands, thereby indicating that a woman who couldn't stop the abuse didn't use good wife techniques, thereby further blaming her for the violence. It was suggested that a woman could try to modify her behavior so that her husband would cease the violence. These ranged from dressing nicely, learning to cook, changing her hair, being more attentive to his needs, and above all else obeying his wishes. Some suggested that the woman should apologize to her husband because she had obviously done something to offend him and deserved his behavior. Even when the women acceded that the abuse could be the husband's fault, it was often put to an external situation that was causing him some stress such as finances, work problems, or even a girlfriend, and therefore should be excused or forgiven. Not forgiving or excusing was the sign of a bad wife.

Even though women presented a "we're all in this together" attitude, when faced with actual cases, women could show a frightening lack of empathy. One example was the lack of emotion shown when a focus group described an honor killing victim from a village up the river.

A woman was raped in the village up the river from us. No one knew who the rapist was. Her brother tied iron around her and threw her into the river to drown. She floated down the river to our village and lay on the bank for days. No one took her out and the dogs ate her legs. Eventually someone pushed her back into the river and she went away. No one knows where she ended up.

The group indicated that the brother had killed her because of the shame her rape brought to the family. The girl was apparently pregnant at the time of her death. The brother has not been prosecuted for the crime. This same group at a later point in the session suggested (perhaps in jest) that to keep these things from happening you need to kill a woman in the village and then all the women would know that they need to keep themselves from getting raped.

The focus group women, through incongruent and inconsistent responses, represent the challenges facing programming in this area. While on one hand learned buzz words like "human rights" and "psychological violence" were used flippantly to describe the scenarios presented, there was not much substance behind the terms as far as understanding and assimilation into knowledge and attitudes. The blame for the violence and the responsibility for managing the husband's behavior were primarily responsibilities of the wife. It remained difficult for the focus group women to link violent spousal behavior to the wife's inherent lack of power and seeing her as the victim instead of a failure as a wife and a deserver of the violence.

Child Sexual Abuse and Early Marriage

One scenario presented sexual abuse of a 14-year old girl by a neighbor, supported by the child's mother for financial gain. This scenario was met with revulsion and shock. The blame fell alternately between the absent husband and the mother for not protecting the child. At no time was the man who had sex with the child blamed for the action. Forcing

the child to marry the man was not necessarily seen as 'child abuse' but the groups were mixed as to whether or not it was a good or bad option. However, when discussing how to rectify a situation in which the girl had already had sex with the man, it was preferred that she marry him even if she didn't want to. Her options would be limited if she didn't and it was feared that she would merely become a commercial sex worker due to her lost virginity. One woman suggested that it would even be better to kill the daughter than to live with the shame of the daughter having sex before marriage. In at least two focus groups, women revealed they knew someone who was prostituting children, and in one case the children's mother was implicated.

Forcing a child to marry her rapist is considered an alternative to bringing shame on the family and provides the child with a future that she might not otherwise be able to get. Cultural norms dictate that a woman should be a virgin at marriage and she is punished through lack of marriage options regardless of how her virginity was removed. This scenario allowed for the concept of 'early marriage' to be discussed. While contrary to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, early marriage is occurring in the villages. Even though the legal age of marriage for girls in Azerbaijan is 17, the focus groups did not seem to consider the marriage of a 15 year old girl as abuse, and it was in fact becoming more common. The did concede, however that it was better if a woman were 18 – 25 years old before she got married.

In one focus group several 15 year old girls were present. The facilitators excused the 15 year old girls due to the sexual nature of the scenarios and the fear of offending the participants with their inclusion. However, it was later found that two of the 15-year olds were to be married in two months time. This raised the question of sexual education for children and their understanding of sexual relations prior to marriage. It was found that for the most part this is not occurring (neither at home, nor in the schools).

Women indicated that while they thought it was a good idea that girls were aware of sex and relationships prior to marriage, they were uncomfortable with the idea of their own daughters getting this information outside of the home. However, they were uncertain how they themselves could tell their daughters about it. The discord between 'protecting' the girls from talking about this shameful topic, and giving them the information they need to understand what happens in a sexual relationship was strong.

Sexual violence against children and all that it incorporates (early marriage, forced marriage, and incest, for example) is a topic which need much more focus and study in Azerbaijan and did not receive much attention in this assessment outside of this scenario.

Moving Forward: What needs to happen to address violence against women?

The FGW had difficulty elaborating what steps needed to be taken to start tackling the problem of violence against women in their community. Although women, as noted above, were quick to blame each other/themselves for faced violence, it is ironic, but not surprising, that they did not see themselves as part of the healthy problem solving equation³³. Given the relative lack of power they currently hold in the major family and community decisions they readily give deference to the traditional power holders in the community. The list of those responsible for promoting change included:

- ◆ Community Elders
- ◆ Executive Committees
- ◆ Men
- ◆ Programs provided by NGOs

All focus groups indicated that programs should be established to help abate VAW in their communities including:

³³ As opposed to accepting responsibility for the abuse resulting in unhealthy behavior modification.

- Education and awareness raising for families (women, men, *and* children) regarding violence and human rights
- Programs assisting mothers in teaching their girl children about sex and women's human rights
- The creation of women's clubs and women's centers
- Programs for self-reliance activities/jobs so women wouldn't be dependent on their husbands for financial security
- Confidential service provision for women in violent relationships
- Programs where couples in crisis could talk to couples who had successfully overcome their problems to find out how they did it

One woman commented that "In Azerbaijan, there are not that many activities for women outside of the home, so men are not used to it." It would be seen as foreign and thus untrustworthy. Another woman worried about the sustainability of programs, particularly if men did not allow women to attend. It was indicated that it would be better for women to obey the husband and not attend because "maybe the group will be destroyed tomorrow and she will lose both the group and the family".

It is particularly important to remember that women indicated fear of loss (of family, children, accommodation, finances) as a repercussion from participating in a women's program. It was suggested that any program created should involve both women and men to minimize the jealousy or suspicion that would materialize if women were invited to attend a program to which men were not invited. Another woman suggested that to be successful, programs need to address the needs of both men and women.

It is clear from focus group discussions that some type of prevention or response programming would be appropriate and supported by the women in the community if established in a suitable and sensitive manner. Most focus groups indicated that they were interested in having someone come back to their village to talk to them about violence against women again.

Women's Individual Survey Results

Following the focus group discussions, women were invited to participate in a voluntary and anonymous survey regarding the focus group topics. The surveys were created to ascertain individual beliefs regarding women in Azerbaijan as well as get clearer indications of VAW incidents in the communities through self reporting. The women were given the option to decline any question with which they were uncomfortable. The surveys were completed in Azeri with a female Azeri facilitator. Of the 175 women's focus group participants, 134 women completed the survey, which took about 10 minutes per participant.

Basic Demographics

One hundred and thirty-four (134) women completed the survey, aged 15 to 69. The median age of the female survey participant (FSP) was 35. Over 50% of the FSPs were married and 62% of the married/previously married women had at least one child (with the average being three children per married/previously married woman).

What is your current marital status?		
	Frequency	Percent
Married	73	54.5
Engaged	1	.7
Separated due to marriage breakdown	1	.7
Divorced	3	2.2
Widowed	8	6.0
Never married	48	35.8
Total	134	100.0

All of the women had completed at least primary school, with over 50% completing technical/vocational school, or university.

What is the highest level of education that you completed?		
	Frequency	Percent
Primary School	2	1.5
Secondary School	61	45.5
Vocational School	10	7.5
Technical School	39	29.1
University	22	16.4
Total	134	100.0

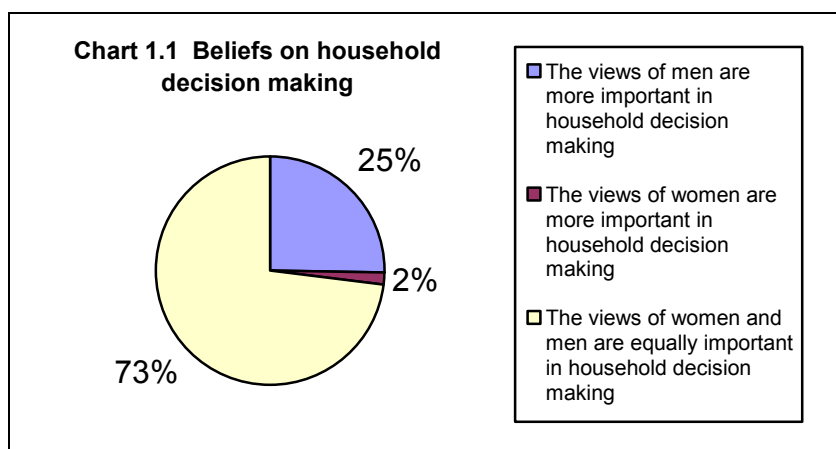
Eighty-seven percent (87%) of the women were employed outside of the home at least 20 hours per week. Most of the jobs reported can be classified as "female appropriate" occupations like teachers (20% of those employed), nurses (6%), and servants (7%). Amongst the employed women there was one chemist, one doctor, and two women who were employed in business. It was more likely for a woman who pursued education past secondary school to be employed (75%) versus one who had not (54%).

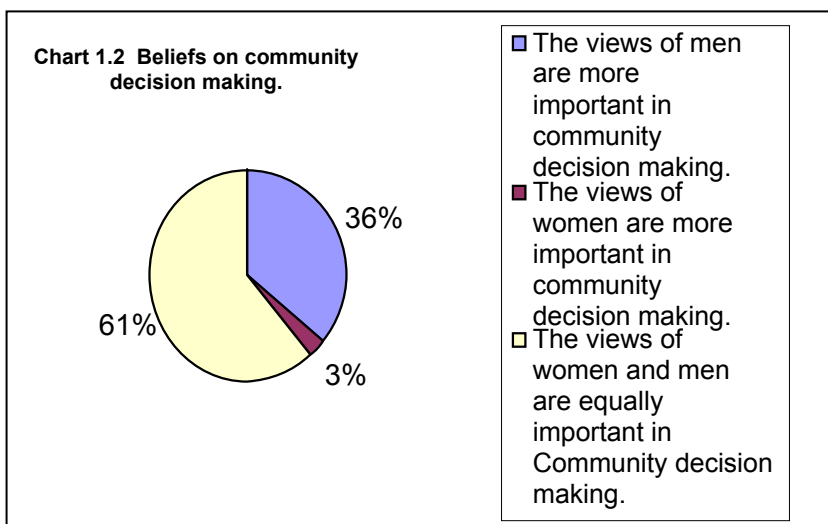
Marital status did not seem to affect the percentage of women working outside of the home. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the married women reported working outside of the home versus 64% of the non-married (divorced, widowed, never been married) women. Of interest, only 47% of married women reported that their husbands were gainfully employed outside of the home.

Gender Beliefs

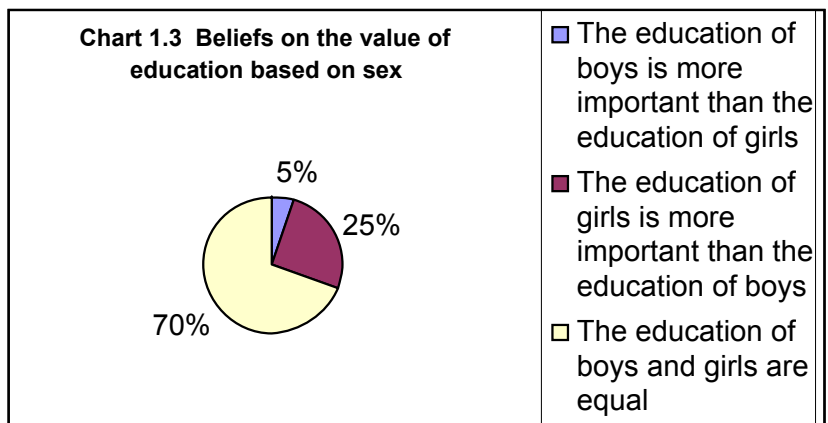
In community and household affairs, the majority of FSPs saw the views of men and women as equal (61 – 73%). Not surprisingly, at least 25% of the women thought that men's views were more important in these two spheres.

Married/previously married women were more likely (40%) to think that men's views were more important in community decision making than never married (27%), whilst marital status did not play a significant role on beliefs in household decision making (23% and 27% respectively). Eighty percent (80%) of all women interviewed thought women were good at managing finances. Married women, however, were more likely (23%) to think that women were not good at managing finances than previously married (9%) or never married women (14%).





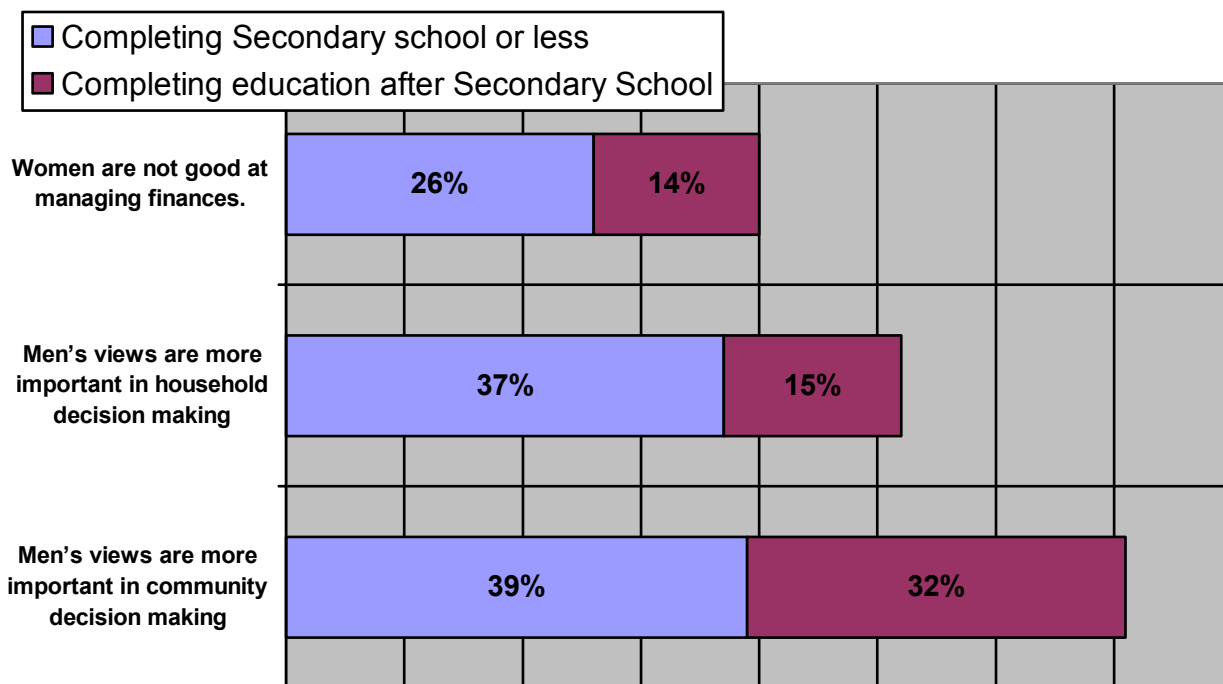
Of interest, although the majority of women thought that the education of boys and girls were equal in importance (69%), twenty-five percent (25%) thought that the education of girls was more important than the education of boys, with 33% of never married girls choosing this option.



Regarding rights under the law, 63% of the women thought that men and women had equal status. Married/Previously married women were more likely (67%) than never married women (52%) to think this.

Unsurprisingly, education level affected the women’s gender beliefs. Women completing secondary school or less were more likely to think that men’s views were more important in household decision making (37%) and were more likely to think that women were not good at managing finances (26%). It is interesting to note that higher education levels did not greatly determine a woman’s belief that men’s views were more important in community decision making.

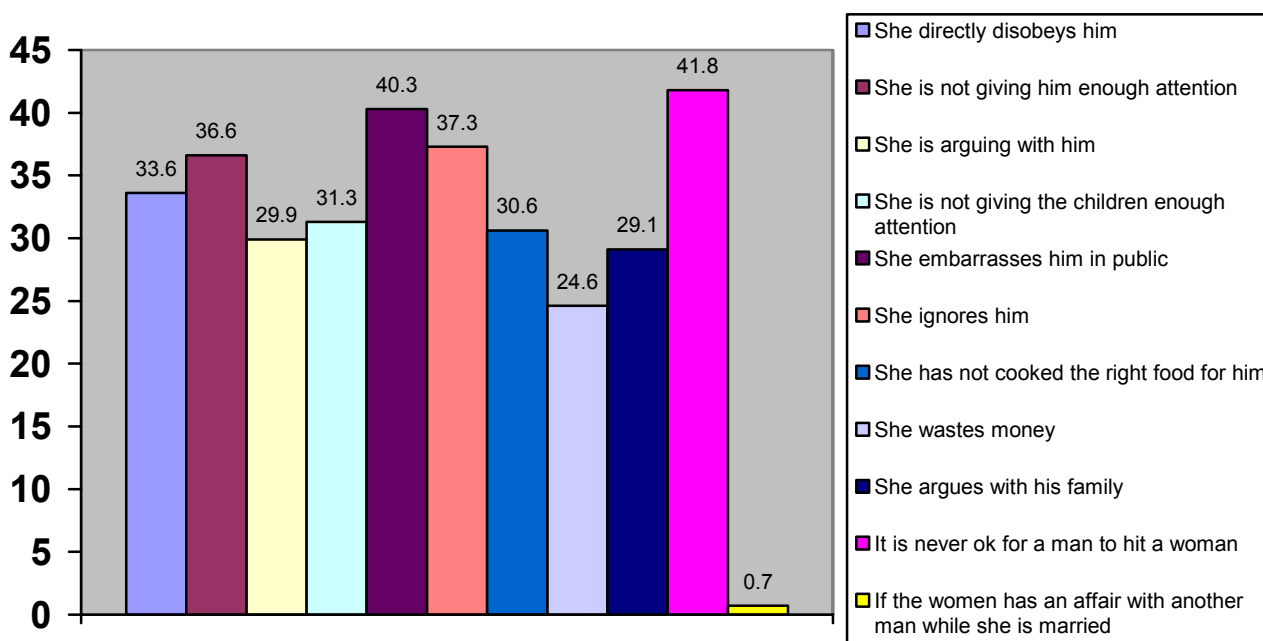
Chart 1.3 Comparison of education levels with gender beliefs



Beliefs on Physical Violence

Unsurprisingly, and fitting with the belief that women are responsible for their abuse that emerged during focus group discussions, the majority of women believed that some occasions warranted physical abuse from a husband to his wife. The least selected choice of when it is correct for a man to hit a woman was when 'she wastes money (33%), whilst the most selected was if she embarrasses him in public (40%). One individual offered the occasion of "when a wife has an affair" which was not on the original list. While 42% of the FSPs indicated that it is "never correct" for a man to hit a woman, this statistic is deceiving in that some women selected this response while also indicating certain occasions when physical abuse would be deserved.

Chart 1.4 When it is correct for a man to hit a woman

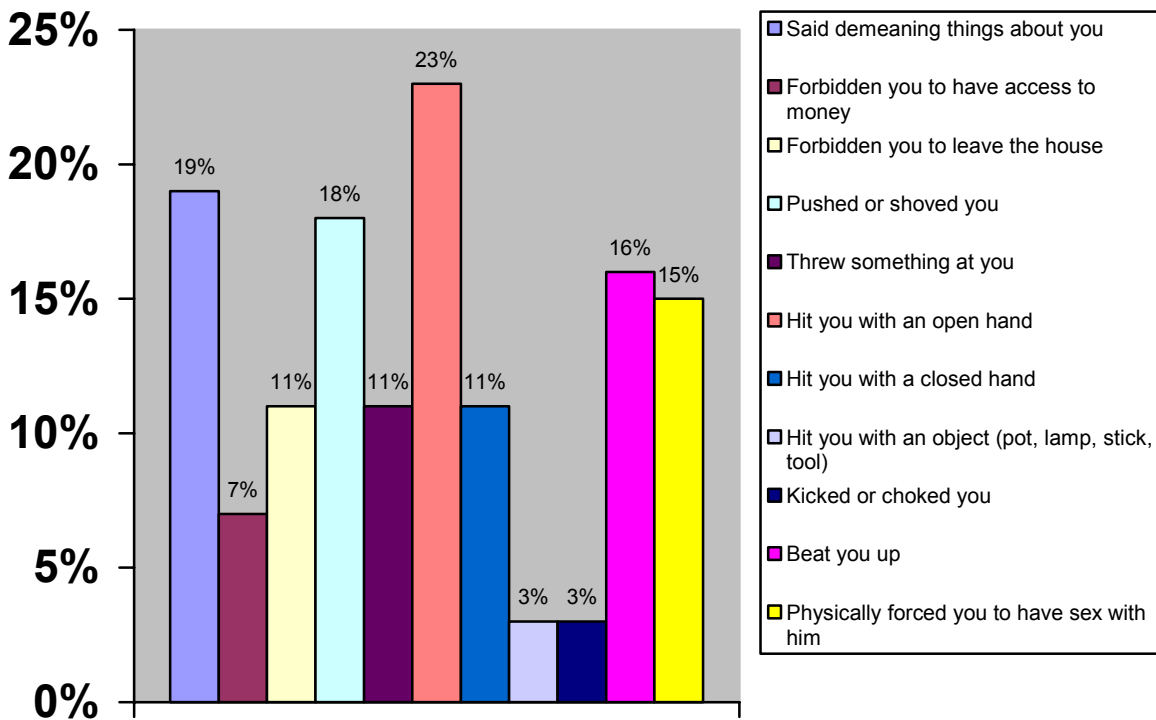


Regarding reporting abuse, 66% of the FSPs thought women should tell someone if she has been abused in order to get assistance. However, only 57% of the married/previously married women chose this response versus 82% of the never married women. Fifty-three percent (53%) of the FSPs would intervene to help a neighbor if she knew the husband was abusing his wife. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of the married women would intervene, whilst only 43% of never-married women indicated that they would do so. It can be inferred that although married/previously married women may be less likely to believe women should report abuses, they would be more likely to assist their neighbor if she were in need.

Intimate Partner Violence

Of the 73 married women, 43% reported intimate partner violence (IPV) in their current relationship, with 26% reporting psychological violence, 33% reporting physical violence, and 15% reporting the occurrence of marital rape³⁴. Not surprisingly there were reporting overlaps between the three types of violence. Of interest, 74% of women reporting violence in their current relationships report witnessing abuse as children between their parents. Sadly, 32% of married women reporting IPV also reported violence perpetrated against them from other blood or in-law family members. Chart 1.5 highlights the various types of IPV that was reported. Percentages are based on the total married woman population of survey respondents.

Chart 1.5 Reported types of intimate partner violence per total married women



Personal History of Abuse Snapshot

Of the total 134 FSPs, 37% indicated some type of violence perpetrated against them in their lifetime. Twenty-nine percent (29%) reported some form of psychological violence, 27% reported physical violence, and 8% reported sexual violence.

³⁴ Compared to USAID Azerbaijan /CDC *Reproductive Health Survey*, women in this assessment reported higher incidences of physical and sexual violence.

The following highlights when most incidences of abuse were likely to occur³⁵:

When he was drinking or using drugs	31%
Because there was not enough money	24%
Because of my relationship with his mother	21%
Because my intimate partner was unemployed	17%
Because of jealousy	10%
Because there was not enough food in the house	10%
When I was pregnant	7 %
It is normal	7 %
When I was drinking or using drugs	3%
Just after I had given birth	3%
Because I was unemployed	3%
I beat our child	3%
Because of something I did (It was my fault)	3%
When he was tired	3%
When he was young	3%

These results are not surprising. Unemployment of the perpetrator and lack of financial security increase family stress and further increase unhealthy coping mechanisms, including drug and alcohol abuse. These factors combined increase the risk for violence in intimate partner relationships.

Nine individuals indicated that the IPV resulted in bruising, cutting, or other physical injury. However, only one woman sought medical care. Nineteen of the married women in abusive relationships (61%) told another person about the abuse. The primary person reported to was another family member. For those who didn't talk to anyone, the main reason was that they didn't want any one to talk about the family.

Non Intimate Partner Violence

Although 58% of married women reported no violence in their current *intimate relationship*, 14% of these women reported being the victim of violence from other blood or in-law family member. Interestingly, no woman ever reported being the victim of any type of violence outside of the immediate family of origin or in-law circle.

Of the total FSPs, 23% reported violence from other blood or in-law relationships. The primary perpetrators reported were fathers, brothers, father-in-laws and mother-in-laws. Of the never-married women, 29% report having been the victim of violence from family of origin relatives, primarily fathers and brothers. Sixteen women reporting non-intimate partner violence (52%) talked to someone, primarily to immediate family members or girlfriends. The main reason for not wanting to talk to anybody was again the fear that the family would be talked about.

Family of Origin Violence

Only 24% of women who reported no violence in their current intimate relationship reported witnessing abuse as children between their parents (compared to the 74% witnessed by women reporting violence in their current relationships). Fifty seven respondents in total (43%) indicated that as children they had witnessed some form of domestic violence between their parents. The primary perpetrator was their father although mothers were also implicated.

³⁵ The percentages are based on the 29 FSPs answering the question. The remainder of the women either did not answer or it did not apply to them.

When you were growing up, did you ever witness the following between your mother and father?					
		Mother	Father	Both	No answer
Saying demeaning things	Count	3	24	3	1
	%	2.2	17.9	2.2	.7
Forbidding the other person to have access to money	Count	1	5	2	
	%	.7	3.7	1.5	
Forbidding the other person to leave the house	Count	2	11	3	
	%	1.5	8.2	2.2	
Pushing or shoving the other person	Count		1	5	
	%		.7	3.7	
Throwing something at the other person	Count	1	9	3	
	%	.7	6.7	2.2	
Hitting the other person with an open hand (slapping)	Count	3	15	3	
	%	2.2	11.2	2.2	
Hitting the other person with a closed hand (punching)	Count	1	9	3	
	%	.7	6.7	2.2	
Hitting the other person with an object (pot, lamp, piece of wood, tool)	Count		8	2	
	%		6	1.5	
Threatening the other person with a knife or weapon	Count	1			
	%	.7			
Beating up the other person	Count	1	9	1	
	%	.7	6.7	.7	
Physically forcing the other person to have sex with them	Count		1		
	%		.7		
None of this ever occurred in my family when I was growing up	Count	64			
	%	47.8			
Did not wish to answer question	Count	12			
	%	9			

Service Provision

Only 22 women (16 percent) indicated that they knew of services for women who have been physically or sexually abused. However, when asked what kind of services they knew about, the answers, for the most part, did not include anything concrete but more indicated what they might do including "solve women's problems", provide "financial aid" and "solve unemployment problems". Six women indicated television programs that they had seen on this issue, and four mentioned women's crisis centers. One woman each mentioned "doctor", "hospital", "lawyer" and "psychologist". It is clear from the responses that very few women know of actual current services for women in this situation.

Additional Comments

All FSPs were given opportunity to comment further on any of the questions in the surveys. The majority of the women gave affirmative responses including positive reaction to being involved in the focus groups and the discussions. Many also expressed the desire to have these types of programs available to women.

Men's Individual Survey Results

Surveys with men were carried out from the 4th April to the 9th April 2004. One hundred (100) randomly selected men from 11 regions in Azerbaijan were surveyed. The surveys were created to ascertain men's views on gender and violence against women, without going into specifics of potential perpetrations by the respondents. The surveys were completed in Azeri with a male Azeri facilitator. Unfortunately, due to lack of available trained male facilitators, it was decided to forgo men's focus groups.

Basic Demographics

One hundred men from 11 regions in Azerbaijan were surveyed, aged 19 – 68. The median age of the male survey participant (MSP) was 42. Ninety-three percent of the MSPs were married and 95% had at least one child (with the average being 3 children per married respondent).

What is your current marital status?		
	Frequency	Percent
Married	93	93.0
Married but wife lives elsewhere for financial reasons (financial)	1	1.0
Living with an intimate partner but not married	2	2.0
Widowed	1	1.0
Never married	3	3.0
Total	100	100.0

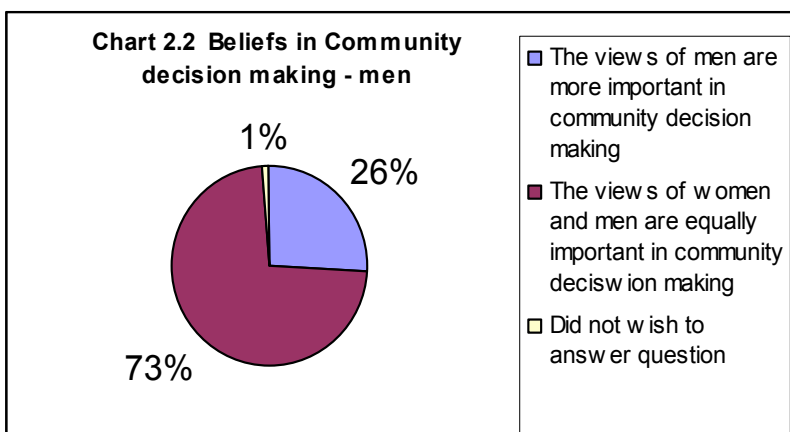
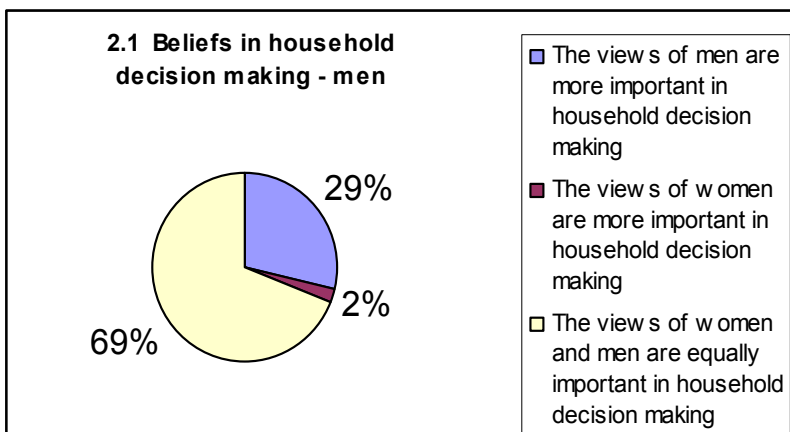
All of the MSPs had completed at least primary school with 67% completing vocational/technical school or university.

What is the highest level of education that you completed?		
	Frequency	Percent
Primary School	2	2.0
Secondary School	31	31.0
Vocational School	15	15.0
Technical School	23	23.0
University	29	29.0
Total	100	100.0

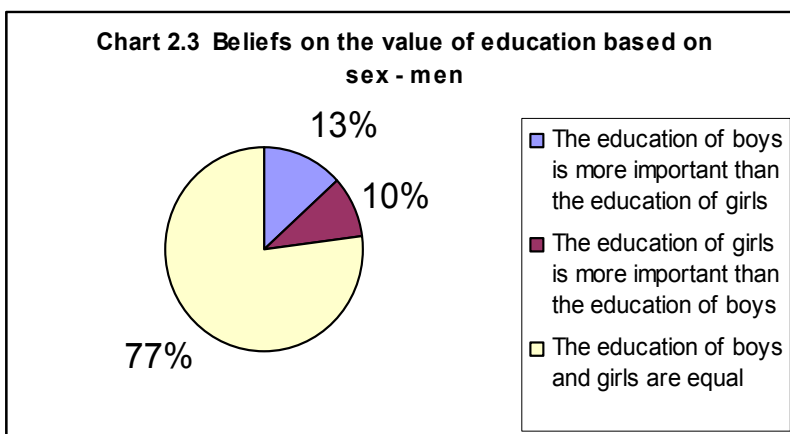
Only 49% of the MSPs were employed outside of the home more than 20 hours a week, with the highest reported types of employment being some type of agriculture (43%), business (12%), or education (10%). Education level did not seem to have an impact on whether or not a man was employed outside of the home. Twenty-one percent of MSPs currently living with a wife or intimate partner indicated that partners were currently employed outside of the home. Of the employed female partners, 62% work 20 hours per week or more, with 62% being teachers.

Gender Beliefs

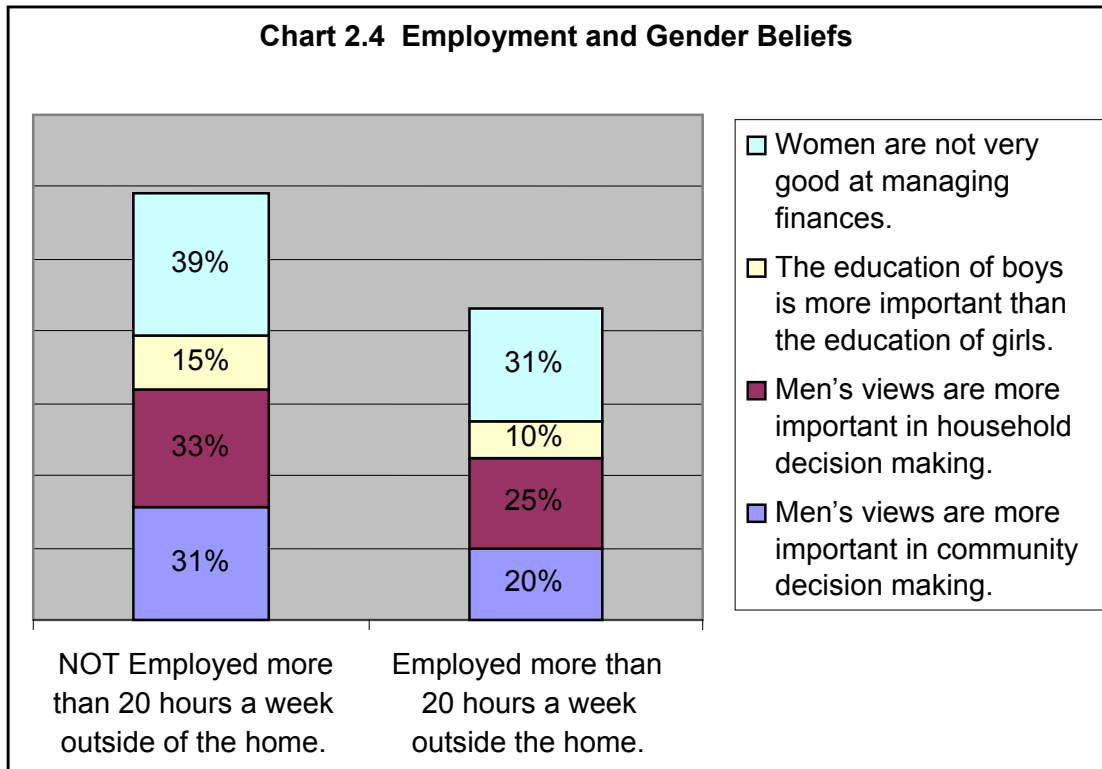
In household and community affairs, the majority of MSPs believed the views of men and women were equally important (69% and 73% respectively). Men not employed outside of the home more than 20 hours a week were more likely to believe that men's views were more important in household decisions (33%) and community decisions (31%) while men employed outside of the home more than 20 hours a week were less likely to think so (25% and 20% respectively). Additionally, men employed outside of the home were more likely to think that women were good at managing finances (69%) than men not employed outside of the home (61%). Education level did not greatly affect men's gender beliefs with the exception of household decision making in which 36% of men with secondary education or less believed men's views were more important than women's versus 25% of men completing technical/vocation school or higher.



Seventy-seven percent (77%) of the MSPs believed that the education of boys and girls are equal. Again, employment level was a factor in that men not working outside of the home more than 20 hours a week were more likely (15%) to see the education of boys preferred to that of girls versus men employed outside of the home (10%).

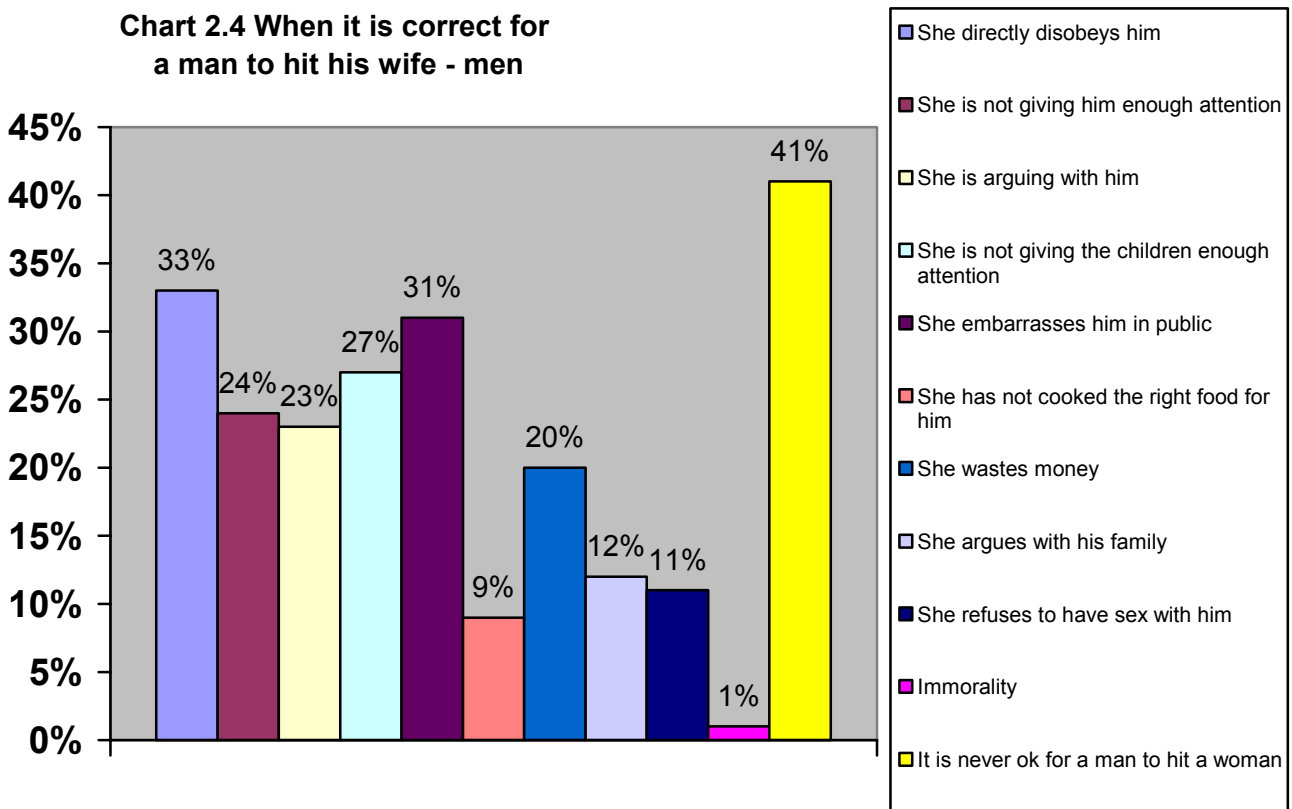


Although 90% of MSPs thought men and women had equal rights under the law, men employed outside the home were more likely to believe this (98%) than men not employed outside the home (82%). Clearly, employment status correlates with gender beliefs, highlighted below.



Beliefs about Physical Violence

The majority of MSPs believed there were occasions when physical abuse towards a wife was warranted, highlighted in Chart 2.4.



The most selected occasion was if she directly disobeys him (33%) followed by her embarrassing him in public (31%). The least selected was if she did not cook the right food for him (9%). Forty-one percent indicated that it is never acceptable for a man to hit a woman. However, as in the case with the FSPs, some men selected this choice as well as indicating occasions when it would be permissible, thus making that statistic unreliable. It is interesting to note that while both 41% of MSPs and FSPs indicated that it is never okay for a man to hit his wife, the men, on average, had lower percentages for each chosen occasion than the women.

Of interest, but not surprising, men who had completed an education higher than secondary school and who were not employed outside of the home for more than 20 hours a week were more likely to indicate that at some occasion it was acceptable for men to hit their wives.

Fitting with the accepted tradition of blaming the woman for her own abuse, should a woman be physically abused by her partner, the majority of MSPs (65%) thought the woman should try to behave better, 45 % thought she should apologize for upsetting her partner and 16% thought she should do nothing. Twenty-eight percent thought that she should talk to a family member while only 8% thought she should talk to a doctor and 4% to the police. One person believed that the wife should hit her husband back. Thirty six percent (36%) believed that physical abuse in families is normal and nothing should be done, while 49% believe that the husband needs help to stop abusing his wife and should talk to someone. Twelve percent (12%) thought the wife should divorce the husband. None of these results are particularly surprising and reflect the accepted traditions and norms that were expressed by the women in the focus groups. While almost half of the MSPs indicated that the husband should try to seek help for his behavior, the abuse was believed to be the woman's responsibility, and only a tiny minority thought the wife should go outside of the family system to seek assistance from anyone.

It is interesting to note that 51% of the MSPs would intervene if his neighbor was hitting his (the neighbor's) wife. However, 78% would intervene if their daughter was being hit by her husband. Men who were not employed outside of the home were more likely to intervene with the neighbor's (61%) or daughter's (84%) relationship than those who worked more than 20 hours outside of the home (41% and 71% respectively).

Seventy-three percent believed that it is not possible for husbands to be hit by their wives.

Only 11% believed that problems between husband and wives are a social matter and the community needs to come together to help prevent it and support the victim. The rest believed that this is a private problem between husbands and wives and should be kept in the home.

Sexual Violence

Fifteen percent (15%) of the MSPs believed that sex was a wife's duty to her husband that men should be able to have sex with their wives whenever they want, even if she is feeling too tired. This correlates exactly with the percentage of married FSPs indicating marital rape (15%). Seventy six percent (76%) of the MSPs thought men and women have an equal right to decide, while 9% did not want to answer that question.

Programming

Seventy nine percent (79%) of those surveyed indicated that they would like to be involved in programs that try to prevent violence in the family, 16% would not want to be involved and 5% did not wish to answer the question. This reflects the dichotomous thoughts and beliefs that the population has on this topic. Similar to the women, men both feel that this issue should stay within the family sphere (89%), but also show interest in being involved in prevention programming.

Additional Comments

When asked if they had any other comments regarding the questionnaire, as opposed to the women only 7 individuals had comments, with 2 individuals indicating that they would like to participate in further discussions on this topic. One individual's poignant remark on the depth of this problem in the community was "It is too late for us".

Confounding Factors to Survey Results

It is recognized that there are inherent difficulties to the reliability of survey results, therefore the following need to be considered when evaluating the survey responses:

- ◆ Opportunity for further discussion and clarification of questions and answers is often not possible. It is not guaranteed that the survey participant fully understands the question or the survey facilitator understands the response.
- ◆ The lack of confidentiality and perceived safety in many cases of survey participants is not always guaranteed. Particularly for the women participants, anonymity was not guaranteed. Each woman knew the others in the group and knew who completed a survey. Although the surveys were completed with as much confidentiality and security as was possible given the survey completion loci, men were in the vicinity and, in some cases, walked into the room during the focus group session. This possibly decreased the perception of safety and increased the possibility of false negatives.
- ◆ Proactive community women may have chosen to participate, while less keen women may not have, giving results that may not be fully representative of the communities from which the women came.
- ◆ It is possible that completing the women's surveys following the women's focus groups influenced the surveys. However, it is not clear if:
 - a) It gave more or less freedom to self-report incidences of abuse; or
 - b) It encouraged women to provide answers they thought the facilitators would like to hear versus what they actually believed; or
 - c) Women were more likely to report hoping that increased reports would increase the likelihood of programming in their community.
- ◆ The questions used regarding gender beliefs do not allow for reflection of the real. While the survey participants may indicate that they *believe* the views of women and men are equal in community decision making, it has been indicated that women are not involved in the community decision making process. A more suitable question for the woman may have been "I participate in making community decisions" or something similar. Beliefs and practices are often quite different.
- ◆ There is no information on refusal rate (i.e. how many refused or for what reason) for the male surveys. Forty-one (23%) of the focus group women did not complete the post-focus group surveys. The surveys were completely optional and no woman was queried as to why she did not wish to complete the survey. Refusal rates can skew results, as the 'refusal population' may have been a significant data set. It would be inappropriate to formally surmise why women refused the surveys. However, it was known that some women who were identified (either through self-report or by reference from other participants) as survivors of violence opted not to participate in the survey exercise.

Conclusions

All evidence indicates that violence against women in Azerbaijan is a real and present concern. Although both the government and the population promote the belief in equality of men and women, power differentials, acceptance of psychological, physical and, to some degree, sexual violence are the norm, with programming availability for women in violent relationships minimal.

Both the GoA and NGO sector response remain uneven and uncoordinated. Recent additions to service provision and awareness raising are encouraging, but they are limited to Baku and do not offer easily accessible and holistic services. Donor activity in this area remains minimal. Lack of options for women in need relegate women to the tolerate/divorce options and lack of community mobilization encourages the continuance of victim blaming and harmful family coping mechanisms.

Self-reports in focus groups and women's surveys correspond with previously undertaken research indicating regular occurrences of violence against women. Psychological, physical, and sexual abuse is occurring in the assessment areas, perpetrated by intimate partners, and both blood and non-blood relatives. Dichotomous attitudes and beliefs regarding the acceptability of violence towards women create a confusing arena in which to promote non-violent relationships and healthy families and communities. Although there are many opportunities to help communities create change, the veil of secrecy challenges any foray into this issue.

In the regions, there remains an enormous gap prevention and response activities in all sectors: community mobilization, medical response, legal response, psychosocial response, and self-reliance (financial empowerment) activities for women. Due to minimal problem recognition and acknowledgement, women in Azerbaijan continue to be abused with limited availability of relevant and timely services or opportunities for recourse. Without a concerted effort by all actors to address this problem, it is unlikely to change and every single day in Azerbaijan, women will continue to be psychologically, physically, and sexually abused.

Prevention and Response: Recommended Guidelines for Programming

Based on the findings of the assessment, the following is recommended for prevention and response programming for violence against women in Azerbaijan:

- ◆ All efforts should be made to lobby both traditional and non-traditional donors to recognize violence against women as a hindrance to the long-term development and sustainability of Azerbaijan in order to secure funding directly targeted at and exclusively reserved for this issue.
- ◆ Collaboration between the NGOs targeting women should be assisted to ensure that efforts are coordinated and overlap minimized. Increased coordination can provide a more dynamic government and donor advocacy vehicle.
- ◆ Executive Committees, Municipalities and Central government bodies should be encouraged, using pre-existing GoA or government-backed documents (Presidential Decrees, SPPRED, State Policy on Women's Issues, USAID/CDC Reproductive Health Survey) to be involved in prevention and response initiatives.
- ◆ Holistic programs, in collaboration with Government offices, should be implemented to ensure women across all regions of Azerbaijan have the necessary response services, including adequate and appropriate post-violence health care, emergency and secure shelter provision, emergency hotlines, community psychosocial programs, as well as community education campaigns.
- ◆ Relevant Government offices should be supported to collect sex-disaggregated data and data particularly reflective of crimes against women and any pursuant judicial actions to allow multi-year tracking of case response, and the change of the status of women in Azerbaijan in general.
- ◆ Relevant Government offices, members of the police force and judiciary should be educated on violence against women and the relevance of the justice system in eradicating violence.
- ◆ All research should be widely disseminated to assist humanitarian organizations, government and other major players in Azerbaijan to conceptualize the scope of the problem of violence against women in Azerbaijan and the effect it has on long-term stability and development.
- ◆ Programs that intend to provide direct support services to women in crisis that cannot be sustained after NGO withdrawal should be avoided. This would leave women unsupported and vulnerable due to lack of other available service providers.
- ◆ Any program should be seen as community value-added and not "women" value added to minimize suspicion and prevent compounding any intimate partner conflict. This can occur through clear program introduction, or involving both men and women in the program implementation.
- ◆ Any program that directly addresses violence against women should have programs for perpetrators/potential perpetrators. However, perpetrator focus should never undermine the survivor-focused nature of programming by giving men the impression that they have the final say in programming decisions.
- ◆ Programs in the regions that focus on awareness raising alone due to funding or timing constraints should be done with caution. Although a necessary function of prevention programming, it provides no concrete options for women in violent relationships and could endorse the tolerate/divorce/lack of options dilemma.

Women may come forward for assistance and find that no service provision is available.

- ◆ Safety of employees and beneficiaries should be considered when deciding on programming area. Isolated implementation areas can increase risk to both employees and women through lack of accessible emergency help. If working in isolated areas is required, safety plans for emergency evacuation of both employees and beneficiaries must be established at the initial stages.
- ◆ National partners should be incorporated into all programs to develop regional national NGO capacity and increase sustainability.
- ◆ Given that violence against women is not an accepted topic for the public domain, to ensure sustainability, a slower implementation process for any program should be expected.

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