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THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA AND AZERBAIJAN

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Pregledni članak

Abstract: In recent times, we often encounter domestic violence that hinders the conscious development of society. Violence against women is a global problem. Domestic violence is especially noticeable in regions where former patriarchal traditions remain and prevail. In independent Azerbaijan, national legislation serves to prevent all forms of discrimination by ensuring women's equality, while state policy on gender issues is aimed at realizing equal opportunities for women. Gender equality is one of the main priorities for the development of a democratic society and the protection of human rights in modern times. In Republic of North Macedonia, it is important to emphasize that there is a special law covering domestic violence known as Law on Prevention, Combating and Protection from Domestic Violence. The purpose of the law is aimed to prevention and protection of victims of domestic violence, respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms, life, personal integrity, non-discrimination and gender equality, with regard to the interests and the needs of the victim. The purpose of this paper is to present a comparative study of domestic violence in Azerbaijan and North Macedonia during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key words: Domestic violence, COVID-19, victims of violence, women, pandemic

Introduction

Domestic violence is a global problem of whole world. It recognizes no geographical boundaries or age limits, and no ethnic or religious group is insured against this problem. With the outbreak of the COVID-19, most countries in the world have declared a state of emergency. States have had various forms of emergency, such as curfews, self-isolation measures, quarantine measures, as well as various sanctions. Corona virus has created a new challenge facing the whole world. Certainly the pandemic has negatively affected most fields in the states such as: economic crisis, rising poverty rate, education, culture, law, unemployment of citizens and domestic violence or known as a domestic abuse or intimate partner violence that we cover in this paper. When it comes to domestic violence, the same topic is associated with violence mostly against women. This is a completely justified reason, because in most cases we find women as victims of domestic violence. Unfortunately, historically, the social role of women in society has been reduced for one reason or another, their rights have not been recognized, and women have been subjected to various forms of harassment, pressure and persecution. This, in turn, has forced women to fight for their rights, and has led to the formation of doctrines and currents such as feminism, and gender policy. When we talk about the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on domestic violence one of the most important characteristics related to this topic was the statistical numbers of victims of domestic violence in Republic of North Macedonia and Republic of Azerbaijan which is an indicator of the rate of domestic violence in both countries.

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1. The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Domestic Violence in Republic of North Macedonia

In the last decade, we have often encountered victims of domestic violence, mostly women and children. This situation indicates the fact that the rate of domestic violence is on the rise. States have introduced laws and signed international conventions to prevent domestic violence at the national and international level. Domestic violence, can be defined as a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone. Domestic abuse can happen to anyone of any race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender.⁹⁷

In the Republic of North Macedonia, the Government declared a state of emergency on March 18, 2020 for the entire country in order to prevent the spread of corona virus. During the state of emergency, new measures were adopted in Republic of North Macedonia to deal with the pandemic. The adopted measures are aimed at alleviating the health, social and economic crisis. In the initial phase of the pandemic, many families were unable to meet their subsistence needs due to lack of material resources.

Due to the rapid and constant increase in the number of infected persons from COVID-19, there was a need to introduce a curfew in order to prevent the spread of the virus. Although this was one of the most widely used measures in the world, it proved to be risky due to the increase in the rate of domestic violence where unfortunately in this case the home becomes the most unsafe place for victims of domestic violence.

In domestic violence the most common crimes are in filed of life and body (article 130: body injuries) and crimes against freedoms and rights (article 140: threatening security). The restrictive measures that were applied in order to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, and in particular the introduction of curfew, created a situation of difficulties for victims in reporting domestic violence, and hence the increased number of violence against women and children.

In Republic of North Macedonia, in the first month of the state of emergency (March 2020), there was no increase in the reporting of incidents of domestic violence. Due to the physical presence of the perpetrators, women were unable to call help and support lines or report violence. The most curfews in Republic of North Macedonia were from April to June. During this period, the police registered a large number of complaints by victims of domestic violence. According to statistical data from the Ministry of Interior, the rate of complaints in 2020 related to domestic violence a growing trend.

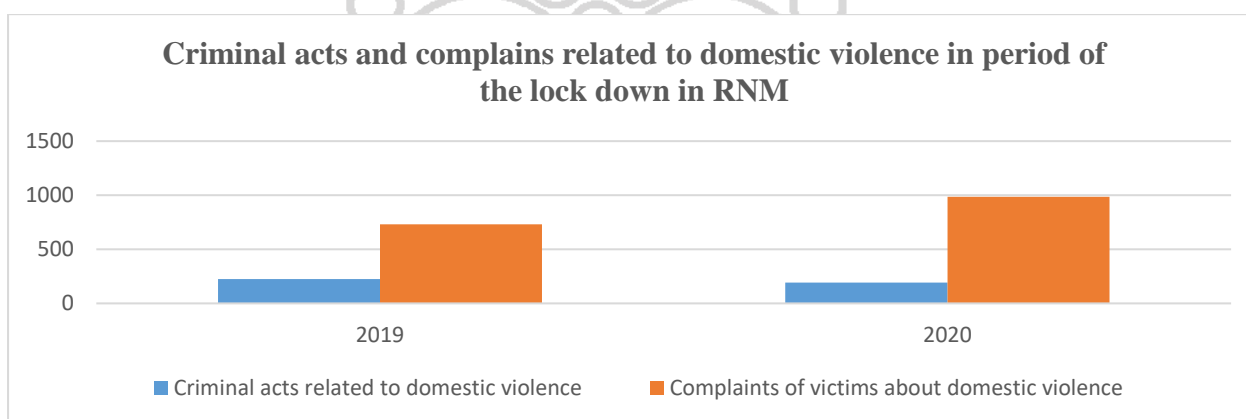
⁹⁷ <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/what-is-domestic-abuse> , last access: 12.03.2021, 10:30

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Table number 1: Criminal acts and complaints related to domestic violence in the period of the lock down (from April to June) in RNM⁹⁸

April - June	Criminal acts related to domestic violence	Complaints of victims about domestic violence
2019	226	732
2020	193	985

Chart number 1: Criminal acts and complaints related to domestic violence in the period of the lock down (from April to June) in RNM



In table and graph number 1, it can be clearly seen that a comparison has been made about crimes and complaints related to domestic violence in 2019 and 2020 in order to determine the rate of domestic violence during a pandemic shows an increase. The rate of complaints compared to 2019 was increased by 34%. It is absurd that the number of crimes related to domestic violence has decreased compared to the previous 2019.

The difference between “criminal acts” and “complaints” shown in the table number 1 is following: when there are visible bodily injuries to the victim due to domestic violence, then *criminal charges* are filed. If it is a matter of verbal violence, then a *complaint* is filed

2. The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Domestic Violence in Republic of Azerbaijan

The women's rights in Azerbaijan is protected by a number of local and international laws. In 1995, Azerbaijan acceded to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). On October 10 2006, the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On Guarantees of Gender Equality” was adopted. An important aspect of the law is the manifestation of deep-rooted discrimination against women both in the past and now, which prevents them from exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

⁹⁸ <https://mhc.org.mk/media/potresni-svedoshtva-za-seme%d1%98no-nasilstvo-i-inertni-instituczii-za-vreme-na-kovid-krizata/> , last access: 13.03.2021, 18:50

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According to this law, through legal, organizational and other mechanisms, the state guarantees equal representation of men and women in governance and decision-making, equal opportunities, gender equality and the elimination of all forms of discrimination. It also seeks to ensure gender equality by eliminating all forms of gender discrimination and creating equal opportunities for men and women in the political, economic, social, cultural and other spheres of public life. The main reason for this violence is the lack of knowledge and indifference to human rights in society. There are many laws against violence and against the violation of women's rights. In 1979, the UN adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women and on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination. In 1981, 21 countries joined the Convention. In 1995, Azerbaijan ratified the convention. This Convention consists of 30 articles, 10 of which relate to women's rights. Violence is rampant in almost every country in the world. Numerous studies have shown that one in three women has ever been abused, and at least one woman is killed every three minutes. One in five women in the world is a victim of sexual violence and attempted sex.

According to the data of violence related crimes of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan the total number of violence-related crimes was 3017 that is 125 facts less (-4%) than in the previous year. Among them there were 1116 (-123; -9.9%) crimes against women. In the period of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), positive results are achieved owing to the timely and effective response to domestic assaults as well as purposeful preventive measures against such negative phenomena that disturb society, and the measures are continuing in this regard.⁹⁹ More precisely in table and chart number 2 there is a data of total number of victims of domestic violence in 2020 compared to 2019.

Table number 2: Criminal acts related to domestic violence in 2019 and 2020 in Republic of Azerbaijan¹⁰⁰

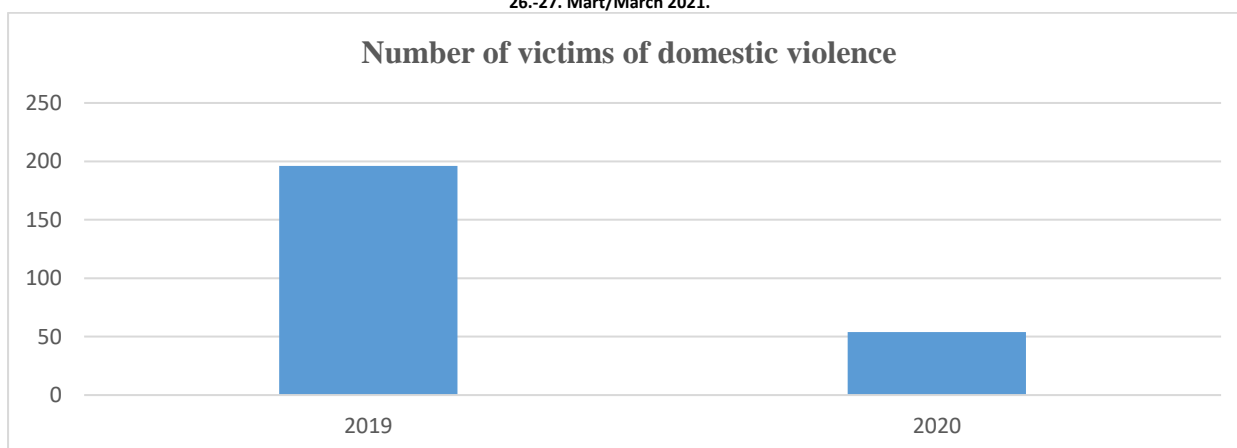
Years	Number of victims of domestic violence
2019	196 victims of domestic violence
First quarter of 2020	54 victims of domestic violence

Chart number 2: Criminal acts related to domestic violence in 2019 and 2020 in Republic of Azerbaijan

⁹⁹ <https://www.mia.gov.az/?/en/content/30007/> , last access: 13.03.2021, 23:40

¹⁰⁰ <https://oc-media.org/features/domestic-violence-and-violence-against-women-have-increased-in-azerbaijan/> , last access: 14.03.2021, 19:41

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Every year, 3-4 million women around the world are beaten by their husbands. 95% of victims of domestic violence are women and 80% of cases are committed by men.

2497 in 10 countries by the World Health Organization in a study conducted in consultation with a woman; physically the prevalence of sexual violence is also between 15-71% reported. Violence against women in Azerbaijan and the first encapsulation in a national publication investigating its prevalence According to the results of the study, the female-oriented family the prevalence of violence is 35% . Status of a woman the Director General's "Women in Azerbaijan Intra-Family Violence Research in the Family physical or sexual violence prevalence in 2019, 65% were reported as 78% in 2020. Physical or sexual violence in general in Azerbaijan level and product in 2019 and 2020 it is seen to be similar in large proportions. Women are exposed to social gender inequality this is why they are at the forefront of violence, and right away is effective in all types of violence. In male-dominated systems, women's lives and bodies depend on men's and is controlled and regulated by the rules set by men. Men's sovereignty is evident, women avoid violence and the social and legal needs they need to be protected support systems are inadequate prevalence of violence against women in developed countries is high. Domestic violence against women is common to be seen in all kinds of communities and statuses however, the socioeconomic and educational level is low who, experiencing marital problems, divorced or who is on the verge of divorce, previously exposed to violence left, himself to his children or other people violence against women who have lost seven the risk of exposure is higher.

Emergenced in China in January 2020 and then the epidemic caused by COVID-19 turning into a pandemic the disease still continues its effects all over the world. The rapid spread of the virus and its still activity lack of proven medication or vaccine in return, many countries can control the epidemic for; social distancing and isolation and some in various situations such as quarantine application has implemented the measures. Similarly Council of Europe during the COVID-19 outbreak domestic violence in many council countries their cases are on an alarming increase reported, that the Istanbul Convention (for Women) Prevention of Violence and Domestic Violence and Council of Europe Convention on Struggle suggested its implementation. United Nations; Germany, United Kingdom, Indoor in France, Cyprus, USA,

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Canada, Singapore reported increased reporting of violence Wuhan, China, where the epidemic first appeared of domestic violence in February 2020 tripled compared to the previous year, these cases 90% is associated with the COVID-19 epidemic. This increase is 30-36% in France, 40-50% in Brazil, 25% in Argentina, Singapore 33%, 10-35% in different states of the USA rates. In the historical process, all kinds of crisis risks, especially the epidemic, and the environment and thus, it shows that it affects the family structure in different dimensions. In the process, family communication and relationships were also affected due to the new type of coronavirus pandemic. This situation has also affected the structure of the family institution. This is public health it brought some psychosocial discussions with it. Basically, like disasters, epidemics social initiatives aimed at preventing the damages of these events, trying to ensure their complete well-being. Following events such as disasters and epidemics, this one of the initiatives is psychosocial aid work. As a biological disaster coronavirus, such as other disasters or vulnerable groups are more therefore, in the studies carried out in this process,

The importance of the social work profession, which is one of their professions, cannot be denied. Because in crisis situations psychosocial support constitutes the rationale for social work intervention. In the relevant literature, epidemic it is seen that such crisis situations like these are handled within the framework of crisis intervention approach. However, studies mostly show family crises. He points out that the intervention is caused by family problems and some other social problems. According to another source, in the quarantine process with the new type of coronavirus pandemic with the possibility of improving relationships in the family, as well as increased tolerance and communication problems, there may also be an increase in the problems within. A new type of coronavirus that coincides with the present day and has a global effect by spreading rapidly. The epidemic caused people to spend more time in their homes as part of quarantine. Family and family members who spend most of their time at home sometimes cause family problems and thus crisis has led to their situation. As a biological disaster, this crisis situation caused by coronavirus and we can say that the results affect the families who are in disadvantaged situation more. At this point, the crisis the social work profession has a critical place in dealing with its situation. Because social work; fragile, vulnerable with the individual, family, group, community and society, especially those in a disadvantaged situation. Effective crisis intervention to protect the family and social aspect during the epidemic period methods are important to do. Social work profession and discipline, with its protective and preventive roles is an essential part of the crisis intervention process.

Conclusion

From the analysis of the total rate of victims of domestic violence during the coronavirus, compared to the previous year, it can be seen that there is no huge increase. Of course, this does not mean that there were no cases of domestic violence during the corona virus in the Republic of North Macedonia.

In most cases, because the victims were in the same place with the perpetrator, they were not able to report domestic violence. In the Republic of North Macedonia, the system of protection from domestic violence consists of two components: civil and criminal component. In Republic of North Macedonia there are several measures for protection from domestic violence: accommodation in a center for persons - victims of domestic violence; adequate health care appropriate psycho-social intervention and treatment; psycho-social treatment in a counseling center; assistance to the family for regular education of a child; legal aid and representation, and economic empowerment of the victim through her active involvement in the market of labor. It is so important to emphasize the competent institutions relevant for the prevention and control of domestic violence especially: Ministry of Labor and Social Policy; Ministry of Interior; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Education and Science; and CSOs. In addition to international treaties, the protection of women's rights in the Republic of Azerbaijan is regulated by the Constitution, the Family Code, the Civil Code, the Law on Ensuring Gender Equality (Men and Women) and the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, and other legislation. A central executive body dealing with women's rights has been established in the country since 1998 (the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan). The activities of non-governmental organizations working to ensure gender equality have intensified over the past 10 years. One of the indicators of this is that there are more than 200 NGOs operating in this field.

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