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GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN FAMILIES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES



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GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN FAMILIES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Summary

Introduction

Domestic violence, gender-based violence and abuse of older persons are universal phenomena, which permeates all societies, all cultures and all regions of the world. It is based on the imbalance of power and gravitates towards family members who do not have the power to resist it, so the most common victims are women, children and the elderly and infirm persons. Although efforts in the fight against gender-based domestic violence have intensified in Serbia in recent years, this phenomenon is still widespread.

The occurrence of gender-based domestic violence in rural areas is still an under-researched phenomenon. There is only partial knowledge of the phenomenological and etiological specifics that characterize domestic violence in rural areas.

The legal framework for protection against domestic violence is largely completed and in line with international standards, but the institutional response to this type of violence is still not at a satisfactory level.

The aim of this research was to collect data that provide answers to several key questions about gender-based domestic violence in rural areas: 1) What is the total and current actual prevalence of gender-based domestic violence? 2) In what forms does this violence manifest itself and what do the prevalences of different forms of violence look like? 3) Who are the victims and who are the perpetrators of violence, according to the type of family relationship (current or former marital / extramarital partners, parental relationship, other type of kinship relationship)? 4) What are the significant determinants of violence, i.e. which individual and family factors increase and which decrease the probability of the manifestation of gender- and age-based violence? 5) How well are the respondents informed about the institutions and their competencies, in case they use the services of the institutions or have experience? 6) How often and with what expectation does addressing institutions and services provide protection, assistance and support? 7) How is the work of institutions and services evaluated? 8) What are the specific characteristics of domestic violence against the elderly in terms of frequency, forms of manifestation, the relationship between victims and perpetrators and addressing institutions? and 9) Did the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic affect the occurrence of domestic violence, the ability of victims to report violence, as well as the way in which the institutions responsible for providing protection, assistance and support operate?



The research included respondents from rural settlements in the area of the cities of Kraljevo and Kragujevac and the municipality of Ruma.

The research consists of two segments: 1) Desk research, which includes a review of legal and strategic documents, relevant research and academic literature, as well as analysis of socio-demographic data on the population of rural settlements in the area covered by the research; 2) Empirical research, which consists of four segments: a) surveying 110 people; b) in-depth interviews conducted with 2 women and 1 man, residents from the study area; c) in-depth interviews with 6 employees in social services, as well as with 2 priests; d) 4 focus group discussions, in which 25 persons participated.

A special questionnaire (tool) was prepared for the survey, consisting of six parts: (1) general data on the respondents; (2) living conditions and family relationships (3) data on exposure to violence and forms of violence; (4) data on the last violent incident, (5) information of the respondents on the rights and available protection mechanisms and experiences in accessing social services to support victims of violence; (6) attitudes towards gender roles and gender equality. Special protocols have been prepared for in-depth interviews, and a discussion guide has been developed for focus groups. The consent of all persons involved in the research was obtained, and special training for field work was organized for all researchers.

Data on respondents

The survey included 43 men and 67 women, among whom the most persons from the age cohort were 66-75 years (34.5%), and the least persons were 18-35 years old. The largest number of respondents was born in the countryside (65.5%), while almost twice as many were born in the city and live in the countryside. Most respondents live in a household with their spouse (44.5%), but a relatively large number of those live alone (20.9%). 15.5% of respondents live with the family of their descendants, which testifies to the relatively high frequency of the traditional type of extended family household. More than half of the respondents are married (53.6%), which confirms that the traditional family structure prevails in rural areas. 31.8% are widows, 8.2% are unmarried and only 5.5% are divorced.

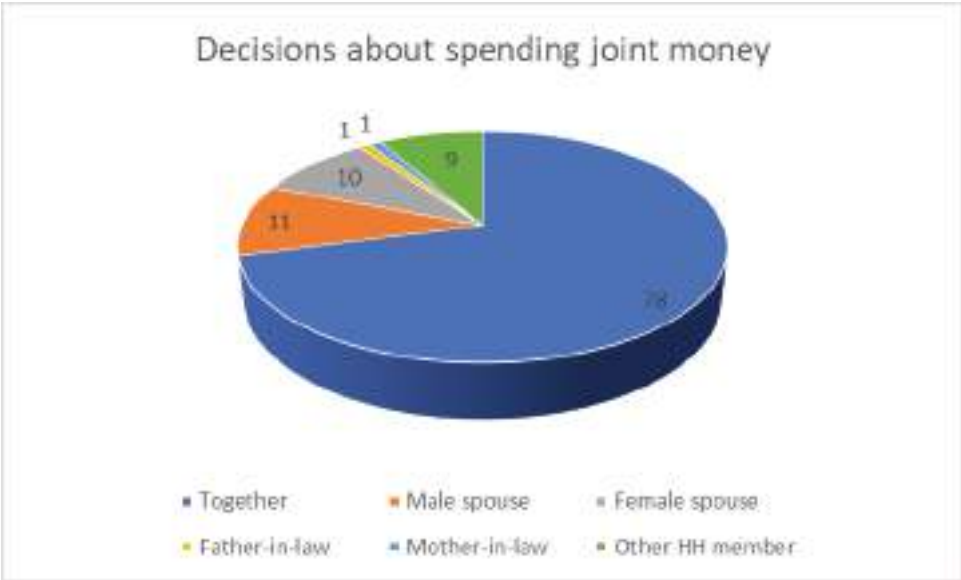
The majority of the sample are members of the Serbian nationality (96.4%), while the share of respondents from minority ethnic communities is very small - only 3.6%. People with secondary education dominate (43.6%), but the share of those with primary education is also high (38.2%). 10.9% of respondents have a diploma of higher and university education, while the least are those without formal education (7.3%). Among the respondents, 9.1% are persons with disabilities, which is 1.7% more than the representation of persons with disabilities in the general population, which is about 8%.

Living conditions and family relations

Almost half of the respondents are in the status of pensioners (49.1%), 19.4% are engaged in work in agriculture and animal husbandry, and 7.9% of the respondents perform these jobs as assistants, 2.6% of them are still being in education, and two respondents are business owners, two female respondents are engaged in childcare, and two help in family businesses. The wives of the respondents have a similar status.

Respondents are generally dissatisfied with current living conditions. The most numerous are those whose main source of income is old-age, disability or family pension (58.1%). Almost 10% have no personal income, and 2.7% of respondents receive financial social assistance.

According to the respondents, the relations in their families are good (59.1%) or mostly good (24.5%). With regard to property ownership, traditional gender norms and patterns apply in the families of the respondents: properties and cars are mostly registered in the name of the male spouses. Decisions about spending joint money, however, are made by the both spouses together.



Prevalence, incidence and causes of domestic violence in rural areas

The largest number of respondents believe that domestic violence occurs often in Serbia (40.9%) or very often (20.9%). Most of them think that violence against the elderly occurs often (34.5%) or very often (14.5%). The vast majority of respondents (69.1%) believe that the dominant victims of domestic violence are women, that they suffer more violence, especially physical violence, which is most often committed by middle-aged men. Such is the assessment of the employees in the institutions as well, who believe that domestic violence also occurs in rural areas, but that victims suffer more and report less often.

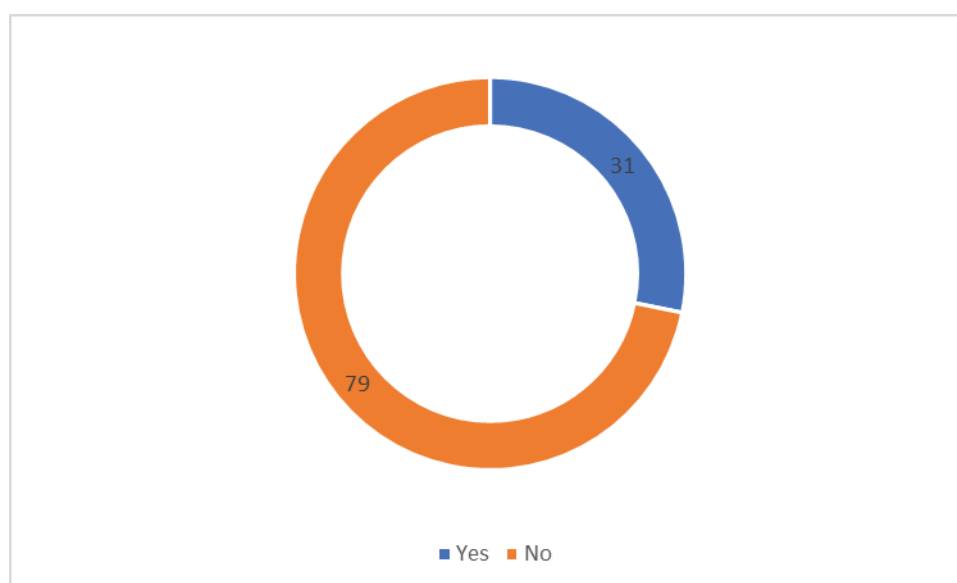
When it comes to forms of domestic violence, the most widespread is economic, followed by psychological and physical violence. The view was also expressed that older people are more exposed to domestic violence than younger ones, especially when it comes to economic violence. The most common victims of violence are women, and the most common perpetrators are their spouses. The gender basis of domestic violence is generally not recognized, and the key causes are the poor socio-economic situation, jealousy and adultery, possession of weapons, etc.

The dominant opinion of the respondents is that victims of domestic violence should to some extent tolerate violence, that the problem of violence should be solved within the family, and that addressing institutions should be the last option.

Personal experience of domestic violence – during lifespan

According to the respondents, a third of them experienced violence – Graph 1. This finding does not testify to the true extent of domestic violence, because research shows that "subtle" forms of violence are often not recognized, that they are "normalized" and accepted as an integral part of living.

Graph 1: Have you ever experienced violence from a family member after the age of 15?

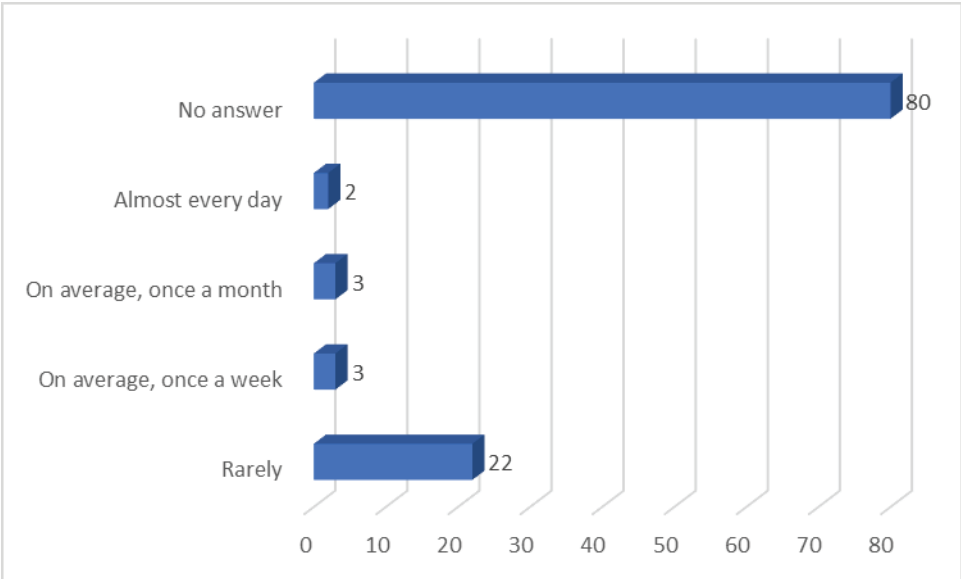


Partner violence is the most widespread, but the perpetrators are often father, son and other male relatives, which confirms the gender-based nature of domestic violence.

There are few respondents who answered the question of what type of violence they were exposed to, and those who answered most often stated that they were victims of psychological and physical violence. Respondents in the 35-50 age category were the most exposed to physical violence.

Most respondents were not ready to answer the question about the frequency of violence. Among those who answered, the majority are respondents who claim that they were rarely exposed to violence (20%) - Graph 2.

Graph 2: How often have you been exposed to violence?



According to the small number of answers given by the respondents to the question whether the other household members knew about the violence, there is almost an equal number of those whose household members knew and those whose household members did not know about the violence. Although few respondents were willing to describe violent incidents in detail, the statements of those who did testify to the different, often brutal methods of violence, as well as its frequency.

Personal experience with domestic violence – within last year

The prevalence of current domestic violence in the rural areas included in the research on violence is not high - Table 1.

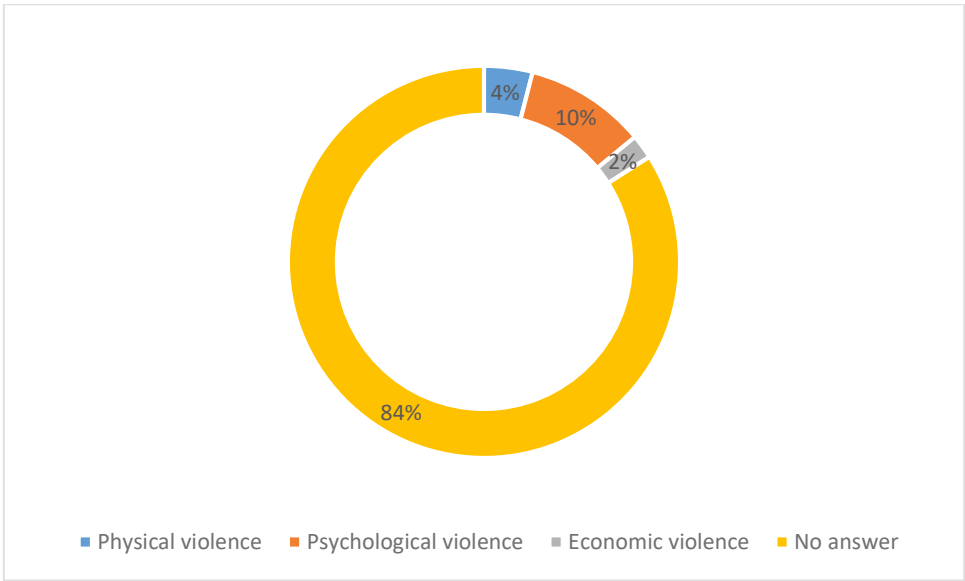
Table 1: Have you experienced violence from a family member in the last year?

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	16	14,5
No	94	85,5
Total	110	100,0

Those who have experienced domestic violence in the last year most often state that the perpetrator is their current (6.6%) or ex-spouse (1.7%) - a total of 8.3%. Numerically, in the last year, only women experienced intimate partner violence. Among those who have experienced violence in the last year, the majority are married, living with their spouses. Adult children's violence against their parents, but also between brothers and sisters, is also widespread.

The most common form of violence experienced in the last year is psychological violence (9.8%), followed by physical violence (4.5%), while economic violence is the rarest (Graph 3). Women were exposed to both physical and psychological violence more than men, and with regard to marital status, among those who experienced intimate partner violence in the last year, the majority were married, which shows that intimate partner violence is the dominant type of current domestic violence, such as is also the case with the violence that the respondents experienced during their lives.

Graph 3: If so, what kind of violence was in place?



The largest number of respondents did not want to answer whether their family members knew about the violence that was happening, and among those who answered, there were more who said that their family members knew about the violence (8.2%) compared to those who said they did not know (5.5%). According to the type of household they live in, among the respondents whose household members knew about violence, there are more married people.

Reporting domestic violence

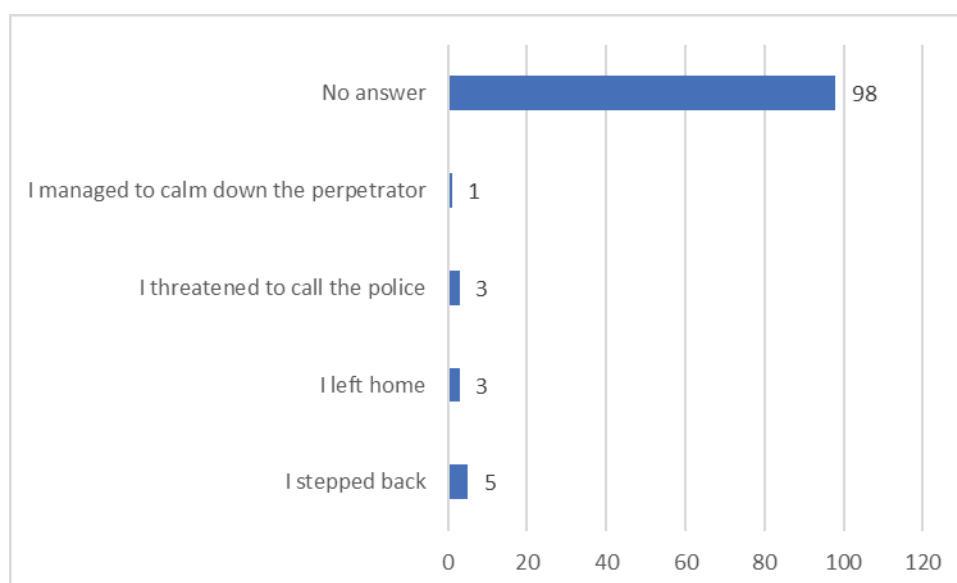
Victims of domestic violence rarely report the violence to the competent authorities and rather count on the help of family members and friends, than relying on institutions. This finding leads to the conclusion that domestic violence is still considered as a private problem, which should be solved within the family and immediate environment. On the other hand, the level of trust in the work of institutions and their ability to prevent further violence is also low. Compared to men, women are more numerous among those who seek help from parents and relatives. Observed according to marital status, married people seek help from parents, relatives and friends more. People with disabilities exposed to violence are more numerous among those who did not seek help from anyone.

The reasons for not reporting violence are different: fear of the perpetrator, shame, the desire to protect the perpetrator, etc. Family members, neighbors and friends of victims of violence also rarely report violence, most often because they "don't want to interfere", but also because of fear of the perpetrator.

Reporting violence generally does not lead to the cessation of violence, and reporting itself sometimes increases the risk of violence.

In situations of violence, respondents apply different strategies: they hide, leave the house, threaten the police, try to calm the perpetrator, etc. (Graph 4).

Graph 4: If you didn't turn to anyone for help, how did you resolve the situation yourself?



Women are slightly more numerous among those who resolve the situation of violence by threatening the police. Moving away from the violent environment as a way to solve a situation of violence is more often used by people with disabilities than by people without disabilities, which is an expression of feelings of powerlessness, fear that they will not be trusted, but also greater distrust in the work of the institutions of the system. According to the interviewees, gaining economic independence is the most important factor for getting out of a situation of violence.

In practice, reporting violence is often used by women as a mechanism to warn and intimidate the perpetrator of violence, where they do not want any services or protective measures, and often withdraw reports and give up further proceedings, continuing to live with the perpetrator of violence.

The respondent's awareness of rights and available protection mechanisms

The respondent's level of information about the obligations of state authorities in the domain of protection against domestic violence is not at a satisfactory level. Although most of the respondents know that domestic violence is a criminal offense, the level of information among the respondents about the criminal proceedings against the perpetrator is very low. A large number of respondents do not know that the criminal proceedings are conducted ex officio and that the withdrawal of the report of violence by the victim does not lead to the suspension of the proceedings – Table 2. This finding is worrying. Ignorance on the legal effect of granting a report can be a reason for victims of violence to be exposed to pressure, blackmail and intimidation in order to withdraw the report in the belief that this will lead to the suspension of the procedure.

Table 2: The criminal proceedings against the perpetrator of domestic violence are automatically suspended if the victim withdraws the report

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	37	33,6
No	15	13,6
I don't know	58	52,7
Total	110	100,0

Respondents recognize three institutions as competent for reporting violence: the police (43%), the center for social work (19.9%) and the public prosecutor's office (12.2%). There is a relatively large number of those who do not know who to report violence to – Table 3.

Table 3: To whom a victim of violence can report the violence to which he/she is exposed

	Frequency	Percentage
Police	95	43,0
Center for social work	44	19,9
Doctor	31	14,0
Public Prosecutor's Office	27	12,2
Employee in the local community	13	5,9
I don't know	11	5,0
Total	221	100,0

Respondents generally know that a victim of domestic violence has the right to support for recovery, empowerment and independence (74.5%), however, more than a quarter do not know this (25.5%) – Table 4.

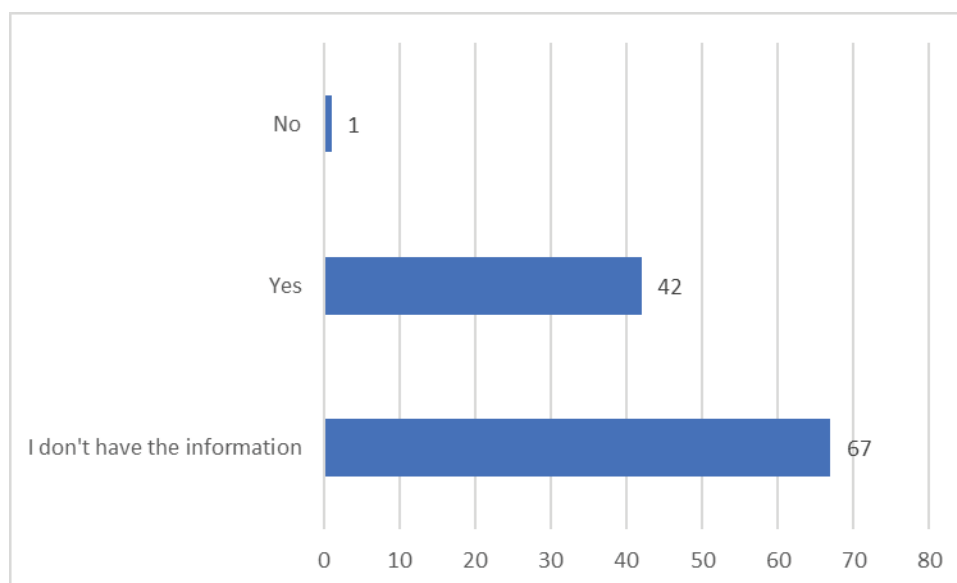
Table 4: Every victim of domestic violence has the right to support for recovery, empowerment and independence

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	82	74,5
I don't know	28	25,5
Total	110	100,0

The majority of respondents (68.1%) are familiar with the protection measures, but there is a relatively large number of those who are not familiar with it. There is insufficient information about the right to free-of-charge legal assistance for victims of violence, which is an additional reason why victims of domestic violence often give up seeking legal protection.

There is a very low level of information about the work of coordination and cooperation groups at the public prosecutor's offices and their duty to prepare an individual protection and support plan for each victim of domestic violence: 38.2% know that such groups exist and what their mandates are, while even 60.9% have no information – Graph 5.

Graph 5: There is a group for coordination and cooperation in the public prosecutor's office, which is responsible for preparing an individual protection and support plan for each victim of domestic violence.



Men are more informed than women about the existence and functioning of groups for coordination and cooperation. Better information is also noted among persons with disabilities compared to persons without disabilities.

The reasons why respondents do not turn to institutions and seek protection from violence are shame, the attitude that violence is a private problem, but also fear of condemnation from other family members – Table 5.

Table 5: If you did not contact the institutions, for what reasons did you not do so?

		Percentage
I don't think the institutions can protect me	1	0,9
Domestic violence is a private matter and should be dealt with within the family	6	5,5
I was ashamed	7	6,4
I was afraid of the revenge of the perpetrator of violence	2	1,8
I was afraid of the judgment of other family members	3	2,7
I was afraid of the condemnation of the wider community	2	1,8
No answer	89	80,9
Total	110	100,0

Availability of services and work of institutions: beneficiaries' evaluation

The majority of respondents did not have contact with the institutions, and those who did, were not entirely satisfied with the efficiency of the institutions' work. They indicated the long duration of court proceedings, the inadequate and unfriendly attitude of employees in contact with victims of violence.

Capacities, cooperation and challenges in the work of institutions: assessment of institutions civil servants

Employees of the institutions believe that centers for social work have the most capacity to work on cases of domestic violence. One of the key challenges faced by centers for social work is the insufficient number of employed professional workers, due to which the employees are overburdened, so that they are no longer able to engage in preventive work. When it comes to the organization of work on cases of domestic violence, the interviewees indicate that there is no special internal team to work on cases of domestic violence, which makes the work difficult.

Priests indicate that, thanks to the education of young priests, the Church is able to influence the reduction of domestic violence and provide support to victims and perpetrators.

Quality and application of legal regulations: assessment of employees in institutions

In the assessment of the quality of legal regulations and protocols on the actions of institutions in cases of domestic violence, the employees of the institutions generally express their positive attitude. When it comes to the application of legal regulations and protocols, they point to a number of challenges, primarily those concerning the inefficiency of court proceedings and the uneven burden on the institutions involved in the adoption and implementation of protection measures. In particular, the bad practice of the public prosecution's waiver of criminal prosecution in situations in which the victim of violence does not join the criminal prosecution, as well as the failure to initiate lawsuits for the determination of family legal protection measures, is apostrophized.

In practice, reporting violence is often used by women as a mechanism to warn and intimidate the perpetrator of violence, where they do not want any services or protective measures, and often withdraw reports and give up further proceedings, continuing to live with the perpetrator of violence.

Support for victims of violence: assessment of institutions' service providers

Victims of domestic violence are provided with information, counseling services and psychological and emotional support. Victims of domestic violence have a particularly great need for psychological support because there are numerous psychological consequences that this violence causes, such as fear, sadness, loss of self-confidence, self-esteem, feelings of inferiority and helplessness, and in rare cases, depression.

The key techniques used to empower victims of violence in families are information provision, a conversation that helps the victim gain confidence, reduce fear and feel safe, accepted and protected.

Priests state that victims turn to them when they see that the situation is hopeless, and they are often disappointed in the system, in society, so they come to the Church to seek help from God, advice and spiritual support from priests.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on domestic violence and the functioning of institutions

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the lives of women and men all over the world. Elderly people who live alone, especially those who need someone else's care and help, most of whom are women, were in a particularly difficult situation. Among other things, the risk of domestic violence increased due to staying in the house with an abuser and the difficult possibilities of reporting violence. The work of institutions during the state of emergency was adapted to epidemiological measures, but no special work rules were introduced. According to the employees of the institutions, the services they provide were available, and the crisis did not have a negative impact on their work.

Working with perpetrators of violence

Programs for work with perpetrators of violence, which in the earlier period were implemented within the project-based framework, are generally evaluated as useful. There is a need to include more perpetrators of domestic violence in these programs. Their implementation should be entrusted to social workers, psychologists, and religious leaders. According to the priests, it is necessary to intensify work on the resocialization of perpetrators of domestic violence, which is not given enough attention to.

Prevention of domestic violence

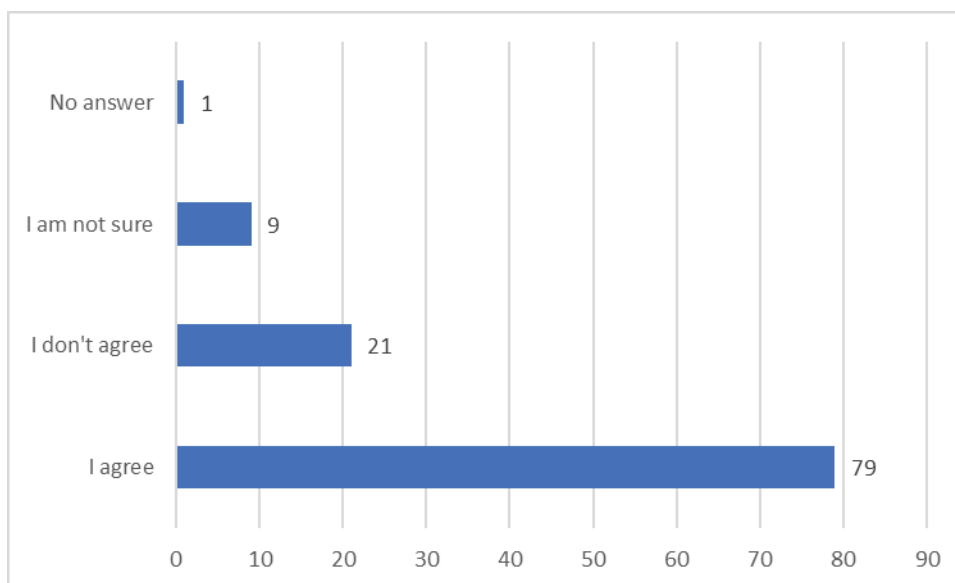
The collected data point to the conclusion that the prevention of domestic violence is recognized by all participants in the research as an important topic. Numerous suggestions were made on ways of prevention, and the key role should be played by schools, media and the Church. For the most part, it is assessed that punishment, from the aspect of general prevention, has limited scope.

The need to organize lectures on the topic of domestic violence more often was pointed out, including lectures in the Church. According to the priests, the entire society should be involved in preventive work, and the priests' task is to permanently show that violence is unacceptable and contrary to religious teachings.

Attitudes towards gender roles and gender-based violence

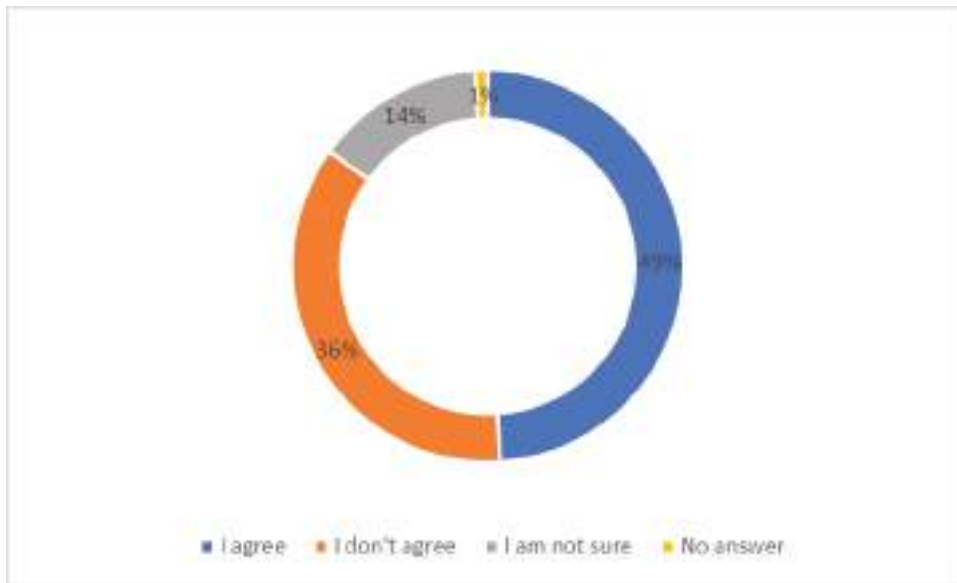
In the rural areas covered by the research, the patriarchal value orientation is still dominant. There is still a strong patriarchal matrix regarding the distribution of work in the household and around children, which most consider "women's work" - Graph 6.

Graph 6: Households and children should be taken care of by wives and husbands should help them in that



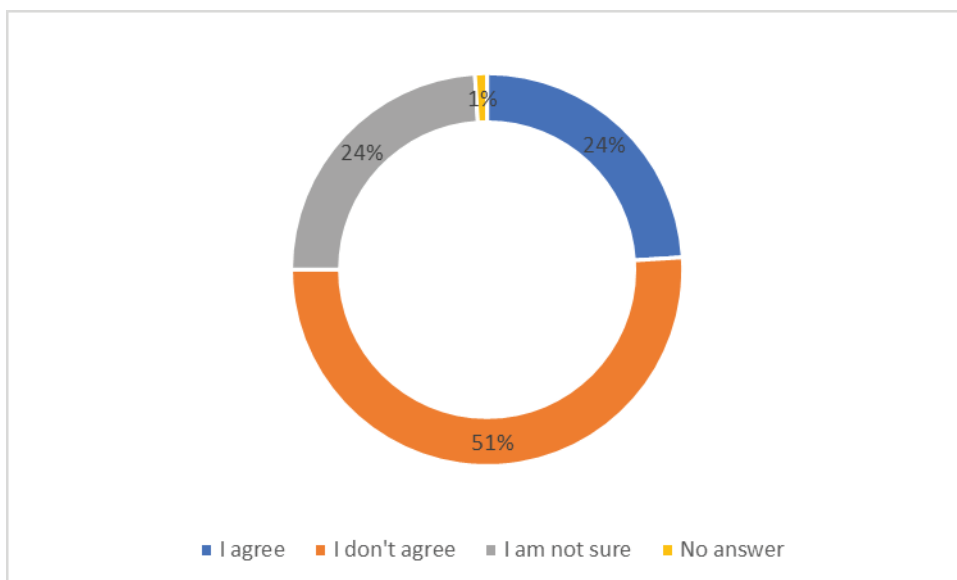
Almost half of the respondents (49.1%) agree with the statement that it is important to know that a man is the "head of the family", while a slightly smaller number of those who disagree (36.4%) and are undecided 13.6% – Graph 7.

Graph 7: It's fine for women to be equal, but it's still important to know that the man is the "head of the family"



The gender-based nature of domestic violence is generally not understood. Almost a third of respondents support the view that a woman is to blame for the violence she suffers because she provokes the perpetrator – Graph 8. This view is more prevalent among men than among women.

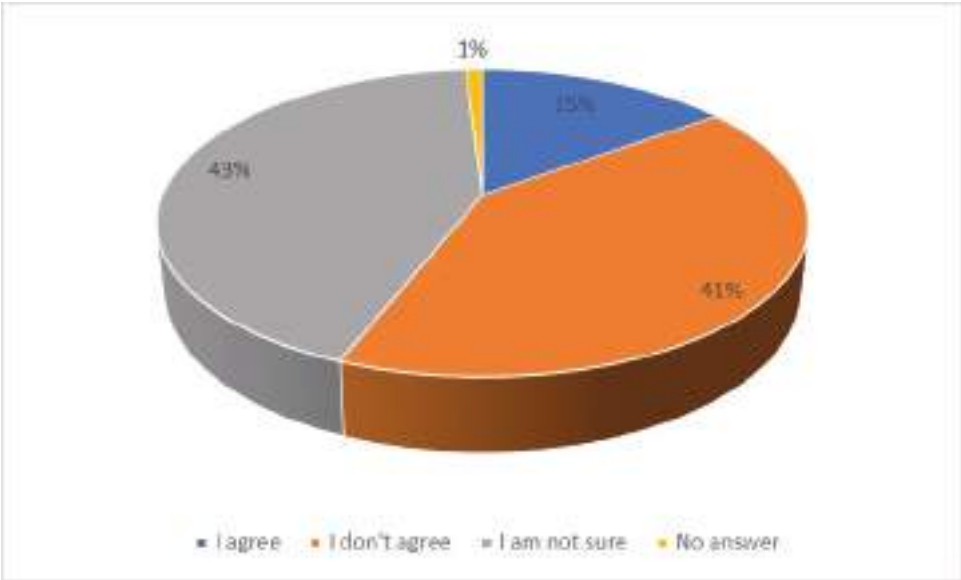
Graph 8: Violence against women is often provoked by the victims themselves



There is also a widespread view that alcohol consumption is the main cause of domestic violence, which is an expression of misunderstanding of violence's essential causes, but also a willingness to rationalize it and give the perpetrators amnesty in this way.

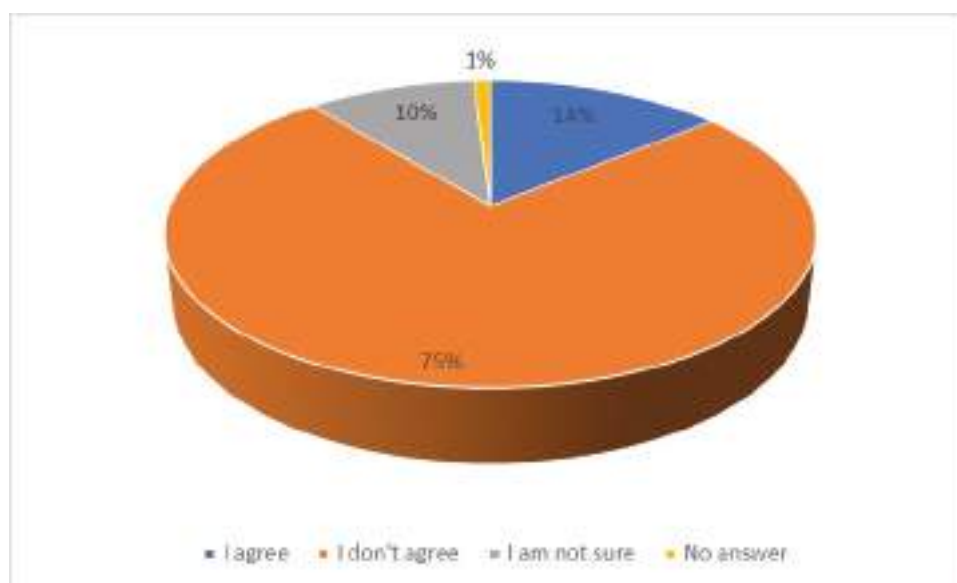
One of the key arguments used by opponents of the criminalization of domestic violence is that it opens up a wide range of abuses for women. In our sample, the largest number of respondents (42.7%) had an ambivalent attitude towards the statement "*Current legal regulations on domestic violence provide women with a lot of room for abuse*". However, 40.9% of them do not agree, while 15.5% of those who agree – Graph 9. The gender of the respondent has a statistically significant influence on the answers. A significantly larger number of men (27.9%) than women (7.6%) agree with this statement.

Graph 9: Current domestic violence laws provide women with a lot of room for abuse



There is a great willingness of the respondents to normalize domestic violence and accept it as a "natural" way of exercising power and control over the partner's behavior, actions and emotions - Graph 10.

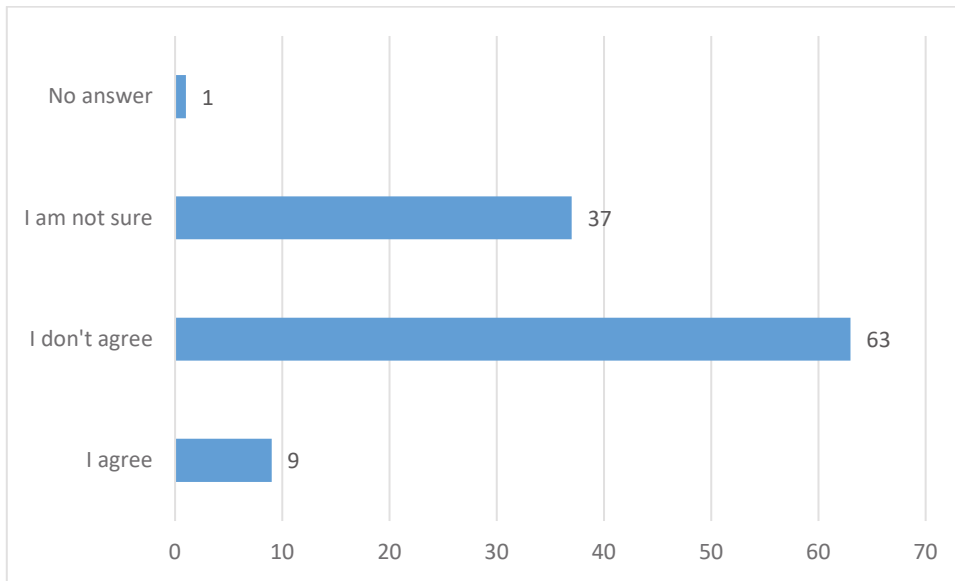
Graph 10: It is understandable for a husband/partner to hit a wife if she does something wrong or doesn't listen to him



Women in rural areas are not in an equal position compared to men, they are overburdened with housework, they are economically dependent and they face difficulties regarding the division of property in case of divorce.

There is a relatively large number of respondents who express skepticism regarding the possibility of achieving gender equality – Graph 11. Among them, there are significantly fewer respondents from younger generations, which is an indicator of changes and greater acceptance of the idea of gender equality by younger generations of women and men.

Graph 11: Gender equality is fictional and impossible in practice



Conclusions

1. In recent years, domestic violence and gender-based violence has been the subject of comprehensive research, both in Serbia and globally but still insufficient attention has been paid to looking at the phenomenological and etiological specificities of violence in rural areas.
2. The legal framework for protection against domestic violence and partner relationships, which is mostly in line with international standards, consists of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, ratified international treaties that are directly applicable, and a number of laws regulating the prevention and processing of domestic violence. Although the legal and strategic framework is relatively satisfactory, the institutional response to violence against women and domestic violence, including gender-based domestic violence in rural areas, is still not at a satisfactory level.
3. In the area covered by the research, local legal and strategic documents relevant to the promotion of gender equality and prevention and protection from gender-based violence in the family have either not been adopted or are not sufficiently gender-sensitive. There is a lack of gender-sensitive publicly available data on the prevalence of gender-based violence in the family, its characteristics, as well as on the services provided to victims of this violence.
4. Among respondents in rural areas, the most numerous are people aged 66-75, who were born and live in the countryside. Respondents most often live married or alone, and there is a relatively large number of those who live in an extended family household. Almost one third of women in this age group are widows. The share of respondents from minority ethnic communities is smaller compared to their share in the general population. Among the respondents, 9.1% are persons with disabilities, which is a slightly higher percentage than in the general population.
5. The majority of respondents have a secondary education, but there is a high proportion of those with primary education, while the fewest respondents have a university degree and no formal education.
6. Almost half of the respondents are retired, with old-age, disability or family pension as their main source of income. There is a relatively small number of those who are in paid work or engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry. Almost 10% of respondents have no personal income, and their spouses are in a similar situation. The majority of respondents rate the standard of their household as mediocre and are generally not satisfied with the current living conditions.
7. According to the respondents, relations between family members are good or mostly good. Decisions about spending money in the household are made jointly by the household members. In

terms of property relations, traditional gender norms and patterns apply: the property is registered in the wife's name only in 8.2% of cases, and the car in only 3.6% of cases.

8. The vast majority of respondents assess that domestic violence occurs often or very often in Serbia, and slightly less than half assess that this violence is often or very often perpetrated against elderly people. According to the majority, women are the dominant victims of domestic violence, especially physical violence, with the fact that there are significantly more women than men who have such an attitude. This is also the assessment of employees in public institutions, who state that violence also occurs in rural areas, but that it is suffered more and reported less often. Regarding the most widespread form of violence, the respondents' opinions are divided. Respondents recognize various causes of violence, such as poor socio-economic situation, alcoholism, jealousy, adultery, etc., but mostly do not recognize a gender-based nature, nor do they understand the very concept of gender-based violence.

9. The dominant opinion of the respondents is that victims of domestic violence should tolerate violence to a certain extent, that the problem of violence should be solved within the family, and that addressing the institutions should be the last option.

10. Only about a third of respondents stated that they experienced domestic violence after the age of 15, which is a confirmation that domestic violence is still a well-kept family secret in rural areas. There are slightly more women than men among them. However, the majority did not state who the perpetrator of the violence was, and those who did, stated that the perpetrators were husbands, fathers, sons and other male relatives, which confirms the gender-based nature of domestic violence. Women were slightly more victims of partner violence than men, while men suffered violence from their fathers more than women. Respondents who live in a community with their spouse's parents are somewhat more exposed to partner violence.

11. The majority of respondents did not state the form of violence they were exposed to, and those who did, stated that they were victims of psychological and physical violence. Judging by the respondents' answers, economic violence is not widely represented. Respondents in the 35-50 age category were slightly more exposed to physical violence. There are few responses from the respondents regarding the frequency of violence, and those who answered generally stated that they were rarely exposed to violence. The few who were willing to describe the violence testified to various, often brutal, methods of violence. Among them there are also those who suffered violence from early youth, in their primary family, as well as in adulthood, in the family they founded later.

12. There is a relatively small number of respondents who have experienced violence from a family member in the last year, with more women than men among them. Most often, it is partner violence, to which only women were exposed. Violence between children and parents, but also between brothers and sisters, is widespread. The most common form of violence experienced in the last year is psychological violence, followed by physical violence, while economic violence, judging by the respondents' answers, is the rarest. Few respondents gave an answer to the question of whether

the other members of the household knew about the current violence they were exposed to, and among those who answered, there were more who said that their members of the household knew about the violence, and such an answer was given by more women than men.

13. Victims of domestic violence rarely report the violence to the competent authorities and they rather count on the help of family members and friends than rely on institutions. Compared to men, women are more numerous among those who seek help from parents and relatives. These findings point to the conclusion that domestic violence is still considered a private problem, which should be solved within the family and close persons, but also to a low level of trust in the work of public institutions and their ability to prevent further violence.

14. Victims of domestic violence generally do not report violence due to fear, shame, but also the desire to protect the perpetrator. Family members do not report domestic violence even when they are aware that it is happening, and neither do neighbors because they do not want to interfere and are afraid of the perpetrator's reaction.

15. Respondents apply different strategies in situations of violence: they hide, leave the house, threaten to call the police, try to calm the perpetrator, etc. Sheltering as a way to solve a situation of violence is more often used by people with disabilities than by people without disabilities, which may be an expression of powerlessness, fear that they will not be trusted, but also greater distrust in the work of the institutions of the system. According to the respondents, gaining economic independence is the most important factor for getting out of a situation of violence.

16. In practice, reporting violence is often used by women as a mechanism to warn and intimidate the perpetrator of violence, when they in fact do not want any services or protection measures, and often withdraw reports and give up further proceedings, continuing to live with the perpetrator of violence.

17. The respondents' level of being informed on the obligations that public authorities have in the domain of protection against violence is not at a satisfactory level. Although most of the respondents know that domestic violence is a criminal offense, the level of information among the respondents about the criminal proceedings against the perpetrator is very low. Most of the respondents are familiar with the protection measures, but there is still a relatively large number of those who are not familiar with it.

18. Respondents generally know that a victim of domestic violence has the right to be supported for recovery, empowerment and independence, but more than a quarter of those do not know this.

Respondents estimate that victims of domestic violence are insufficiently informed about their rights. More than a third of respondents are not familiar with the right to free legal assistance for victims of

domestic violence, as well as the conditions under which it is granted. There is a very low level of information about the work of groups in charge for coordination and cooperation at the public prosecutor's offices and their duty to prepare individual protection and support plans for each victim of domestic violence. That is why it is necessary for coordination and cooperation groups to make information about their work more accessible in the entire territory over which they exercise jurisdiction, including rural areas.

19. Most of the respondents did not have personal contacts with public institutions, and those who did, were not entirely satisfied with their work. They particularly point to the long duration of court proceedings, the inadequate and unfriendly attitude of employees in contact with victims of violence.

20. Employees in the institutions estimate that centers for social work have the most capacity to work on cases of domestic violence. The priests point out that, thanks to the education of young priests, the Church is able to influence the reduction of domestic violence and provide support to victims and perpetrators. From the perspective of employees in public institutions, cooperation with women's organizations is at a satisfactory level.

21. In the opinion of the employees in the centers for social work, the key challenge in their work is the insufficient number of employed professional workers and their overload. Work on cases of domestic violence is also hampered by the lack of specialized internal teams.

22. Employees in public institutions generally positively evaluate the quality of legislation and protocols on the actions of institutions in cases of domestic violence and indicate that they give a good framework for the provision of victims with adequate protection and support to get out of a situation of violence.

23. In the opinion of the employees in the public institutions, the effectiveness of the protection system against domestic violence is hindered by the inefficiency of court proceedings, the uneven burden of the institutions involved in the adoption and implementation of protection measures, the abandonment of prosecuting the perpetrators of domestic violence when the victim does not join the criminal prosecution, as well as the failure to initiate litigation for the determination of family law protection measures.

24. Victims of domestic violence are provided with information, counselling services and psychological and emotional support. Victims of domestic violence have a particularly great need for psychological support because there are numerous psychological consequences that this violence causes, such as fear, sadness, loss of self-confidence, self-esteem, feelings of inferiority and helplessness, and in rare cases, depression.

25. Priests believe that victims of violence usually seek spiritual support from priests clergy when they find themselves in a hopeless situation. This support is adapted to the circumstances of the specific case.
26. The COVID-19 pandemic has influenced the increase in domestic violence. According to the public institutions' employees, although no special work protocols were introduced, the services they provide were available, and the crisis did not have a negative impact on their work.
27. Programs for perpetrators of violence, which were implemented in the earlier period as part of individual projects, are useful and there is a need to increase involvement of domestic violence perpetrators in such initiatives. The implementation of such programs should be entrusted to social workers, psychologists, and clergy. According to the priest, it is necessary to intensify work on the resocialization of perpetrators of domestic violence and provide support to both victims and perpetrators.
28. Prevention of domestic violence is very important, and a key role should be played by the educational system, media and church and religious communities. For the most part, it is assessed that punishment, from the aspect of general prevention, has limited impact. According to the priest, the entire society should be involved in preventive work, and the task of the priest is to permanently demonstrate that violence is unacceptable and contrary to religious teachings.
29. Gender-based domestic violence is generally not understood. Almost a third of respondents support the position that a woman is to blame for the violence she suffers because she provokes the perpetrator. There are significantly more men than women who made this statement. There is also a widespread view that alcohol consumption is the main cause of domestic violence, which may be an expression of misunderstanding of the essential causes of domestic violence, but also a willingness to rationalize it and give the perpetrators amnesty in this way.
30. The attitude that women are responsible for being sexually harassed and victims of other forms of sexual violence finds great support among respondents, with this attitude being more widespread among men than among women.
31. Women in rural areas are not in an equal position compared to men, they are overburdened with household chores, they are economically dependent and they face difficulties regarding the division of property in case of divorce.
32. There are widespread stereotypical attitudes about the gender roles of women and men, which reflect the still strong patriarchal matrix and the acceptance of hegemonic masculinity in the family context, but there is a relatively high number of those who lean towards an egalitarian model

of family relations. Among the younger generations, positive changes in the gender roles of women and men are observed.

33. There is a relatively large number of respondents who express scepticism regarding the possibility of achieving gender equality, but among them there are significantly fewer respondents from younger generations, which may be an indicator of change and greater acceptance of the idea of gender equality by younger generations of women and men.

Recommendations

1. Provide greater support for conducting periodic research that provides insight into the phenomenological and etiological specificities of gender-based domestic violence in rural areas and the prevalence and incidence of this violence.
2. Systematically collect and make publicly available data on the prevalence of gender-based domestic violence in rural areas, its characteristics, as well as data on reported and processed cases of violence and services provided to victims of this violence.
3. Work on improving the institutional response to gender-based domestic violence in rural areas and strengthen proactive action in terms of its detection and processing; encourage the proactive action of local services of free legal aid in terms of informing the public, including the public in rural settlements, about the right to free legal aid and the way to access it.
4. Improve the capacities of employees in social welfare institutions, police and prosecutor's office to recognize and assess specific risks of gender-based domestic violence in rural areas.
5. Initiate and/or proceed with the development of local action plans for gender equality in a transparent and inclusive process in the local government units LGUs covered by the research, which will define measures and activities to eliminate gender inequalities and transform patriarchal gender relations among the rural population; integrate gender-sensitive measures for the prevention and protection of gender-based domestic violence into action plans and provide full, individualised psycho-social support to victims.
6. Create and implement public awareness campaigns in rural areas on gender-based domestic violence, improve the level of information about the system of protection against domestic violence, the methods of its reporting and processing, the rights that belong to victims of violence, including the right to free legal aid, as well as inform rural communities on available health and social welfare general and specialized services.

7. Improve the capacities of respective authorities and other actors involved in gender-responsive determination of needs and priorities, with full cooperation with women's CSOs, local institutional mechanisms for gender equality, local social protection actors and other stakeholders.

8. Include a regular periodic review of the results of the work and cooperation of authorities and other actors on the prevention and protection of gender-based domestic violence in rural areas in the work plans of local institutional mechanisms for gender equality and local security councils, and make the findings available to general public.

9. Encourage clergy for greater proactive action in the promotion of gender equality, promotion of non-violent conflict resolution in partner and family relationships and intensify their work with perpetrators of gender-based violence in the partner/family context, including work with convicted perpetrators, in order to change violent patterns of behaviour and reintegration into the community.

10. Establish self-support groups for women in rural areas with experience of domestic violence and encourage their activities and cooperation with women's CSOs from urban centers that provide support to women victims of violence.

