

WEB TEXT

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Unequal partners

Not all women in Albania have the same rights as men.

At least a third of all women in Albania are estimated to have experienced physical and psychological violence at the hands of their husbands or partners. In some parts of the country, the figure is much higher.

“They say in Albania, one in three women are beaten by their husbands, in Shkroda we say it’s two and a half out of three.”

- A doctor in the town of Shkodra

Women in some areas of Albania are brought up to believe that domestic violence is a normal part of marriage. Discriminatory customary law, known as *Kanun*, is used to justify the control of women’s behaviour. In a few extreme cases, women and girls believed to have transgressed notions of family honour have been murdered. Even at the highest levels of the government, police and judiciary, violence against women is widely tolerated on grounds of tradition.

“Every day...if I had bruises around one eye, he hit the other one, every day for three years so that you would not be able to recognize me, my face wasn’t a human face.”

- “D.K.”

Many women are threatened, injured or killed with guns, including pistols or automatic rifles. An estimated 200,000 small arms and light weapons are in circulation and easily available following the breakdown of law and order in 1997, which included the widespread looting of government arms depots.

“He came home and threatened to kill me with a pistol in front of the children, and the children protected me and came and stood in front of me and they said, ‘You have to kill us first’.”

- “F.”

Despite Albania’s obligations under international human rights standards, the government has failed to protect women from violence by their husbands or partners. But there is a movement for change in Albanian society. In January 2006, a coalition of Albanian NGOs presented a petition to parliament signed by 20,000 citizens calling for a new law.

Women’s organizations have worked since 1996 to challenge violence against women. They have run awareness-raising programmes, trained state officials and documented domestic violence. They have also established telephone help-lines, counselling centres, shelters and given free legal assistance and employment advice.

“There are no structures, no institutions; you have to do it on your own, there’s no protection. I could not have done it without the shelter and the telephone line. Thank god for the shelter that gave me help, and the hope to start my life again.”

- “P.”

Although the work of NGOs is a positive development, the Albanian government must pass a law criminalizing domestic violence, helping the police and judiciary to prevent and protect women.

Domestic violence is a human rights abuse and must be prosecuted and punished, and survivors compensated and supported. The Albanian state must act with seriousness and speed.

- Albanian police official admits 'women do not get access to justice'
<http://web.amnesty.org/wire/April2006/Albania>
- "It's not her shame"
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engneur110022006>
- Protecting women from violence is an obligation, not a choice
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engneur110032006>
- Control Arms
<http://www.controlarms.org/>

TAKE A LOOK.

At least one in three women and girls has been beaten or sexually abused in her lifetime.

TAKE A MINUTE...

Domestic violence often does not consist of a single incident; it is instead a continual state of victimization.

TAKE SOME ACTION!

Domestic violence exposed: the third in the series of monthly features focuses on Albania