

AI Index: PRE 01/284/2008  
13 November 2008

## **Armenia: Women suffer in silence**

*The government says domestic violence is not an issue for this country. I want both state and society to just acknowledge that this problem exists in Armenia.*

*Survivor of domestic violence*

Over a quarter of women in Armenia have been hit or beaten by a family member and about two thirds have experienced psychological abuse, yet the state fails to prevent, investigate and punish violence against women, Amnesty International said in a report published today.

“Women in Armenia suffer disproportionately violence or psychological and sexual abuse in the family and at work. This makes them victims of discrimination and therefore victims of a human rights violation. Unfortunately, this aspect is not widely understood in Armenia. On the contrary, declared support for the family perpetuates hidden abuse,” said Laurence Broers, Amnesty International’s expert on Armenia.

“The protection of the family cannot be prioritized at the cost of the right of women and girls to live with dignity.”

Amnesty International’s report [\*No pride in silence: Countering violence in the family in Armenia\*](#), addresses different forms of violence against women, including domestic and sexual violence and sexual harassment in the workplace. It exposes the causes because of which such crimes go significantly under-reported and the perpetrators unpunished.

The Armenian saying "A woman is like wool; the more you beat her, the softer she'll be", reflects the deeply rooted culture of acceptance of domestic violence which is one of the major hurdles that women face. Other hurdles include the stigmatization of rape victims, reluctance by police to investigate domestic violence cases thus perpetuating it; lack of shelters and support for abused women.

Women told Amnesty International delegates how they were beaten by their husbands or other family members; how they were controlled to the extent of being prevented from meeting their parents and friends; how they were raped and verbally abused; how powerless they were made to feel.

Forty-five-year old G.M. lost her sight after years of violence: “Anyone who felt like it could beat me. If something was wrong in the house, I was the one who got the blame. They pounced on me and beat me - all together.” Another woman, G.L. tried in vain to escape a violent relationship: “Several times I wanted to walk out, but I have got nowhere to go. I have two young children, and if I leave he will not let me back. I want a divorce, but he does not.”

The Armenian authorities are failing to provide women with options to leave violent relationships by not putting into place a functional system of either initial protection against violence in the family or longer term support through employment and housing.

“A sea change in attitudes at all levels of the criminal justice system and across society is needed to counter pressures on the victims of domestic or sexual violence not to seek justice,” Laurence Broers said.

Amnesty International is urging the Armenian authorities to fight violence against women in all its forms through the implementation of legislative, institutional and public educational strategies and more specifically to:

Criminalize domestic violence through the adoption of a specific law;

Implement a cross-agency approach including police, health workers, the judiciary, shelters and crisis centres and non-governmental organizations;

Increase the public awareness of violence against women as a widespread criminal offence and human rights violation.

### **Background**

Violence against women is a global phenomenon affecting in one form or another nearly one in three women.

The report, No pride in silence: Countering violence in the family in Armenia, is part of Amnesty International’s series of publications issued within the organization’s global ‘Stop Violence against Women’ campaign, which was launched in March 2004. The campaign is urging state governments to comply with their obligation under international human rights law to counter discrimination against women and girls.

Amnesty International has exposed violence against women in countries from the USA, France and Spain to Russia, Georgia, Belarus, Ukraine and Turkey.