

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN KOSOVO

NARRATOR: Violence against women is a serious problem that exists throughout the world. And Kosovo is no exception. In a 2008 UN survey, forty-eight per cent of women in Kosovo said it was okay for their husbands to hit them. Some attitudes may have shifted since then. But the situation today is far from perfect.

The Liria women's shelter, in the town of Gjilan/Gnjilane, was founded in 1999. It looks after women who have suffered from domestic violence. The women come from ten different municipalities. And they are cared for by psychologists and social workers. The Liria shelter gets support from five UN agencies.

Nazife Jonuzi, the founder and head of Liria, feels that Kosovo's society has come a long way.

NAZIFE JONUZI: We have taken many steps since 1999. This topic is not taboo anymore because women today report violence. We have held workshops in villages to inform women about our work. They used to say that immoral women stay here. But after many years, they have a completely different opinion because there are so many changes in families and society.

NARRATOR: Many of the women at Liria end up there because they have nowhere else to go. According to one survivor, her husband beat her to the point where she knew she had to leave.

SURVIVOR: He beat me. Sometimes he would pull me out of bed, just because he felt like it, and kicked me in my stomach with his shoes on. The children were there when he beat me.

He threw me into a bathtub filled with cold water. He tried to rip my eyes out. I opened the window and screamed, because I was bleeding. I sought help from the neighbors. I said, Help me because I am going to die.

NARRATOR: The survivor found her way to the shelter. But since she was unemployed, a court gave custody of her children to her husband.

SURVIVOR: I have been apart from them for two years, I don't get to put them to bed or wake up with them. When I see them, they're always hungry. They say, Mom, we miss your cooking. I do not know what to do.

NARRATOR: According to the Liria shelter, survivors need economic independence.

NAZIFE JONUZI: All institutions have worked a bit on prevention and protection. But nothing has been done to reintegrate the survivors back into society. Ninety percent of the women at the shelters return to violent environments. Why? Because there is no sustainable employment.

NARRATOR: Local and international actors are working to address that problem. Igballe Hajdari is a clothing designer in Gjilan/Gnjilane. She trains and employs survivors.

IGBALLE HAJDARI: I saw that they were here because of the violence they had experienced. I trained them to work with handicrafts. They worked with my fabrics. And I am training them on tailoring. I can see that they now have the will to work.

NARRATOR: The UN Kosovo Team is also trying to help. With UN support, Kosovo has become one of the few places in the region that has a law against domestic violence. Andrew Russell is the UN Development Coordinator in Kosovo.

ANDREW RUSSELL: Laws are important. But we also need to see real changes on the ground. This is why the UN Kosovo Team is partnering with local institutions to create long-term systems and capacities to deal with all the different aspects of gender-based violence and particularly domestic violence, so that we not only have good laws on the books, but we can actually implement these laws. We've helped to not only establish shelters for survivors of violence, but we've also advocated for the long-term financial sustainability of these shelters. We've also helped to strengthen investigative capacities to deal with individual cases. For example, we've helped to create safe interview spaces where women and children can feel comfortable reporting abuse. And perhaps most importantly, working, again always with our local partners, the UN has drawn upon its capacities to see how we can connect the survivors of domestic violence with long term employment. So, ultimately, they can move out of the shelters and become economically independent.

NARRATOR: Violence against women is still one of the world's most widespread human rights violations. It affects women of all ages, ethnic groups, and social backgrounds. It happens in times of peace, as well as during conflict. And only by uniting together can we hope to eliminate this global pandemic.