



MARITAL VIOLENCE AMONG ALBANIAN  
WOMEN IN BERAT: THEIR VOICES, PAIN AND  
EXPERIENCE

BY

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## **ABSTRACT**

Violence against women in Albania is a serious human rights issue, and yet it is not a topic discussed openly in society. This study aims to investigate the seriousness of the problem within Albanian society with the purpose of providing valuable data on grounds which could likely be used by social workers in the area. This thesis is based on case studies of women's experiences in violent relationships in Berat, Albania. Participants include fifteen married Albanian women who were once or currently being abused in their homes during the time of their interviews. A qualitative methodology is utilized for analysis while data collection is undertaken from the case study approach. Specifically, the research focuses on the forms and factors that cause marital violence, as well as coping strategies employed by the victims. Interviews with the participants indicate that most of the typical forms of abuse are prevalent in their abusive relationships. While the factors that trigger marital violence in Albania vary from cultural, social, and economical to interpersonal, findings dismiss the myth that marital violence is a problem limited to the poor or the uneducated. Probing inquiries reveal that Muslim culture per se has no direct connection to the growing problem of marital violence in Albania. In fact, the cultural factor contributing to the less-than-ideal treatment of women comes from the traditional patriarchal Albania norms that existed prior to even the advent of Islam. Against this backdrop, research suggests that what pushes traditionally inclined men is not so much the patriarchal tendencies alone but, much like other social ills found in Albania today, the economic and social changes that are gripping the country.

## خلاصة البحث

يعد العنف ضد المرأة في ألبانيا قضية مهمة فيما يتعلق بحقوق الإنسان، إلا أنه لم تتم مناقشة هذه القضية بشكل مفتوح بين المجتمع. لذا تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن خطورة هذه القضية داخل المجتمع الألباني، للوصول إلى تقديم بيانات مفيدة من أرض الواقع، ولكي يتم الاستفادة منها من قبل العاملين في المجال الاجتماعي بالمنطقة. وتستند هذه الأطروحة على دراسة حالات من تجارب النساء الألبانيات ضحايا العنف الواقعة بمنطقة بيرات. وتشمل هذه الدراسة خمس عشر امرأة ألبانية متزوجة من اللاتي واجهن إساءة واحدة أو بعض الإساءات في منازلهن خلال فترة إجراء المقابلات معهن. وتنتهج الدراسة منهجية التحليل النوعي للبيانات التي جمعت من دراسة الحالات. ويركز البحث على الطرق والعوامل التي سببت في حدوث عنف الأزواج، فضلاً عن التعرف على استراتيجيات المواجهة التي تستخدمها الزوجات الضحايا. وتشير المقابلات مع عينة البحث إلى أن معظم أنواع الإساءات إليهن تعود إلى العلاقات السيئة بين الزوجين. بينما العوامل التي تثير عنف الأزواج في ألبانيا تتراوح ما بين العوامل الثقافية والاجتماعية والاقتصادية والشخصية. كما أوضحت نتائج البحث الشائعات القائلة بأن مشكلة عنف الأزواج تقتصر على طبقة الفقراء وغير المثقفين. وكشفت التحقيقات بأن الثقافة الإسلامية في حد ذاتها لا تمت بصلة مباشرة إلى مشاكل تزايد عنف الأزواج في ألبانيا. إلا أن الواقع يشير إلى أن الثقافة الأبوية الموروثة تسهم بشكل مثالي نسبياً في طريقة التعامل مع المرأة وهي نابعة من أنماط الحياة الأسرية والتقليدية في ألبانيا الموجودة منذ ما قبل ظهور الإسلام. وفي ظلّ هذه المعلومة فقد توصل البحث إلى أن ما يدفع الرجال تقليدياً لهذا التصرف لا يقتصر على الثقافة الأبوية الموروثة فحسب، بل هناك العديد من المشاكل الاجتماعية المنتشرة في ألبانيا، مثل التغيرات الاقتصادية والاجتماعية التي اجتاحت البلاد في العصر الحالي.

## **APPROVAL PAGE**

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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Signature.....

Date .....

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Affirmed by Brikena Qafa Osmani

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Signature

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Date

*This dissertation is dedicated to my wonderful son Haris, my husband Orhan,  
and my parents.*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Amnesty International
CCWG	Counselling Centre for Women and Girls
CE	Council of Europe
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
IPH	Institute of Public Health
ISTAT	National Institute of Statistics
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPO	Non Profit Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PHARE	Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring Economies
RWA	Refleksione Women's Association
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
WHO	World Health Organization

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

The family is a central feature of every society. It is an enduring institution that nurtures and protects its individual members and provides them with a sense of belonging and security. In general, family members do care for each other, provide for each other, and help each other to survive in a world that often seems hostile and uncaring (Coltrane & Collins, 2001). However, the family also has its dark side. In some societies, this institution is ridden with conflict and violence – problems that pose both a threat and a challenge to national and global society (Coltrane & Collins, 2001: 41).

One of the most widespread forms of family violence is marital violence against wives. In 2000, the United Nations Development Programme reported that one woman in every three was subjected to violence in an intimate relationship (Mooney, 2000). Similarly, the World Health Organisation reported that up to 70% of female murder victims were killed by their male partners (Amnesty International, 2004). Meanwhile, the Council of Europe identified domestic violence as the major cause of death and disability for women aged 16 to 44 (Amnesty International, 2004; Mooney, 1994a).

The prevalence of violence against wives was further documented by Levinson (1989 cited in Randal, 2003) in his study of thirty-nine cultures around the world. A study by Gelles (1997) has also confirmed the occurrence of physical abuse of wives in other countries such as Chile, Ecuador, Japan, Korea, Canada, India, New Zealand

and the United States, among others. Straus and Gelles (1990) estimated that 16% of the 8,145 American couples they studied experienced an incident of physical assault in 1985. In 2001, the Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that approximately 85% (588,490 out of 619,710) of victimisation cases by intimate partners were against women (Wallace, 2008).

The alarming incidence of violence against women has prompted both non-governmental organizations and international governmental bodies to call for the passing of laws to curb this problem. In 1993, the United Nations issued the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. The Assembly, for the first time, defined violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993: 2). The Assembly also called on states to “condemn the violence against women and pursue...by all appropriate means ...a policy of eliminating violence against women,” (Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993: 3). Similarly, the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 have all addressed violence against women and identified it as an issue of global importance.

In Albania, violence against women is a serious human rights problem, yet it is one of the topics that is not discussed openly in society. This phenomenon must be analysed in the context of Albanian culture and traditions. Historically, Albanian society has regarded domestic violence as a personal problem, but also a phenomenon

that belongs “behind closed doors” (Gjermeni & Bregu, 2003). In 1995, Shoqata Refleksione (Refleksione Women’s Association), in a survey distributed to men and women across Albania, found that 46.3% of rural women and 36.3% of urban women reported intimate partner violence, and 28% and 16.4%, respectively reported sexual violence. In the analysis of surveys done by the Albanian Reproductive Health Survey in 2002, it was found that of those who reported intimate partner violence, 30.4% of women aged 15-44 reported verbal abuse, 8.2% reported lifetime physical violence, and 2.9% reported being forced to engage in unwanted sex. Researchers found little difference according to residence or age although younger women were more ready to report physical violence (10.6%). Significantly, 31.2% of previously married women reported that they had been subjected to violence, as opposed to 7.5% of women who were still married or in a relationship, suggesting that the latter were likely to under-report.

The statistics stated above on the number of cases of marital violence against women in Albania, show that social problems relating to the family and marriage are increasing in the country and, therefore, such a problem requires more attention. More sociological studies are needed to examine the factors that cause marital violence in the country, and the coping strategies used by victims.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

- Studies on domestic violence in general and in particular marital violence are relatively few in Albania. Despite an increasing awareness on this phenomenon, very limited research is available on the topic of marital violence in the country. Therefore, there is a need to further conduct investigation on this issue in order to fill the gap in knowledge.

- Although there is a considerable amount of literature on the subject based on studies done in other societies, a study conducted in the Albanian context will be a unique case. Unlike other societies, Albania was under Communist rule for 50 years, and during the communist period, there was a great gap between women's theoretical emancipation and the circumstances of everyday life. With the fall of the Communist regime in 1991, this country is experiencing a period of deep and often dramatic changes with serious consequences on the society. A study of violence against women in this unique socio-cultural setting may generate rich and unique information, which is important in solving spousal violence.
- According to Abraham (2000), "addressing marital violence without examining the experiences of different categories of women leads to false assumptions that there is homogeneity in women's experiences of violence (xi)". Although marital violence cuts across race, ethnicity, and class with devastating effect, the complex ways in which ethnicity, citizenship, and class intersect with gender must be examined if we are to make progress in addressing this problem. Therefore, an understanding of violence would be incomplete without an account of the experiences of those who are often deemed "invisible others" because of their ethnicity, race, class and legal status (Abraham, 2000: xi).
- Furthermore, the present study will give the researcher "an opportunity to observe and analyze a phenomenon previously inaccessible to scientific investigation" (Yin, 2003:45 as cited in Bryman, 2008:57). In Albania, violence against wives is treated as a private matter, not discussed openly by society. Yet, violence in the marital relationship is a serious problem that

deserves public attention (Nikolic-Ristanovic, 2006). The present study is designed to examine the circumstances and conditions surrounding violence against married women in Berat City, Albania using a qualitative methodology.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study hopes to find answers to the following questions:

1. What are the forms of violence that married Albanian women experience at the hands of their spouses and how do they experience it?
2. What are the cultural, social, and economic causes of their violent marital relationship?
3. What are their ways of coping as victims of such an abusive relationship?

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study is designed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To investigate the forms of violence that married Albanian women experience at the hands of their spouses.
2. To examine the cultural, social, and economic causes for women's violent marital relationships.
3. To find out the coping strategies used by women in such an abusive relationship.

## **JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY**

Violence between spouses has long been considered a serious social problem across societies. Preventing this type of problem may require broad, sweeping social changes such as eliminating societal norms that legitimize the culture of violence against women. Furthermore, this will also require the preparation of sound social policies and intervention strategies that are tailored to the realities of women's experiences and are designed to address the root causes of violence. In doing this, social policy makers and interventionists need to have access to reliable information generated from victims' perspectives. The best sources of data are the findings of studies such as the present, which examines the forms, causes and consequences of marital violence as well as the victims' responses to this problem.

Indeed, the present study will shed light on the realities and complexity of violence against women which is widely regarded as a "private matter" from an Albanian socio-cultural setting. Nevertheless, there is a need to transform this problem as a private matter into the sphere of public concern and to translate that public concern into a widespread social consensus for action. However, this can only be done effectively if data are available on this phenomenon from victims with different backgrounds.

Besides, the present study which uses a qualitative methodology will provide a deeper understanding of the victims' perspectives of marital violence, which is overlooked in macro studies of the problem.

## **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

In a study on family violence, it is important to have a clear understanding of the definitions of the terms involved. Various researchers have agreed that one of the most

challenging issues that the researcher on spousal abuse faces is the lack of consistency in the definition of relevant terms (Gelles, 1990). There is a variety of definitions and terms used throughout this study but the most commonly used ones that need to be defined are *family violence*, *marital conflict*, *marital violence*, and *abuse*.

*Family Violence*: Violence may be defined as an act carried out with the intention or perceived intention of causing physical pain or injury to another person (Straus & Gelles, 1980; Steinmetz, 1980). It can occur mutually among members of a family, but is more likely to entail the physically stronger using force against the physically weaker. This study borrows heavily from Star (1980) who defines family violence as a type of physical violence and threat, which is limited specifically between members of a nuclear or extended family. Family violence is any act of commission or omission by family members, and any conditions resulting from such acts as inaction, which deprive other family members of equal rights and liberties.

*Violence against women*: For the purpose of this study, the term ‘violence against women’ means “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or ability, deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life” (United Nations, 1993: 2).

*Marital Conflict*: Marital conflict is defined as a mutually antagonised discrepancy between idealised expectations and the reality of insufficient resources, different personal goals and values, and impulses between the couples (Giles-Sims, 1983; Reber, 1985). It is important to note that not all conflicts or disagreements lead to violence in a relationship; however, some do lead to physical violence, and some marital conflicts end in death (Millar & Vander, 2000).

Marital violence: This study borrows heavily from Campbell's definition of marital violence (Campbell, 2003). Therefore, marital violence is defined as any act of control that comprises the use of physical force including acts of forced sex, verbal abuse, threats, and economic abuse. It is mostly directed by the husband against the wife, and because it was traditionally hidden in the home, there has been, until quite recently, a general lack of awareness of the seriousness and extent of the problem (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Walker, 1980; Borkowski, Murch & Walker, 1983). In this study, the term marital violence is used synonymously as violence against women, spousal abuse, intimate partner violence, and abuse against wives.

Abuse: Regarding the definition of abuse, this study adopts the definition given by Wallace (2008). According to him, abuse is defined as any intentional act or series of acts that cause injury or intend to control one's partner. These acts include physical, emotional or sexual abuse. Finkelhor (1984) defines abusiveness as any situation in which a more powerful individual takes advantage of a less powerful individual, and, therefore, the abusive act includes not only physical but also sexual, emotional, and material or financial forms of abuse.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This section attempts to highlight the relevant literature on marital violence. This is an important step to narrow down the problem, identifying scopes that have already been covered and looking at what needs to be investigated. It would allow refining the initial questions and preventing repetition of the same research. It involves a range of resources such as books, journals, the Internet, electronic journals, and abstracts (Barron, 2006).

The literature review in this research is divided into four components, which are forms of marital violence and abuse against women, theoretical framework, empirical explanations for this phenomenon, and conceptual framework.

#### **FORMS OF MARITAL VIOLENCE AND ABUSE AGAINST WOMEN**

Violence and abuse against women, including marital violence, may take different forms. The following section will discuss these forms:

##### **Physical violence**

This type of violence against women is the most evident and difficult to hide, as it affects their physical appearance. Physical abuse, also called physical aggression, in the context of intimate relationships has been defined as an act carried out with the intention, or perceived intention, of causing physical pain or injury to another person (Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980). This is a behaviour that is intended,