

# A STUDY ON WOMEN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED GBV IN GEORGIA AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

**“WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
GBV AND ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE  
FOR WOMEN IN GEORGIA?”**

**AUTHOR: LELA JAVAKHISHVILI**

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**KVINFO**





**KVINFO**  
**CHRISTIANS BRYGGE 3**  
**1219 KØBENHAVN K**  
**TEL +45 33 13 50 88**  
**[kvinfo@kvinfo.dk](mailto:kvinfo@kvinfo.dk)**  
**[www.kvinfo.dk](http://www.kvinfo.dk)**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research explores the relationship between gender-based violence (GBV) and women's economic independence in Georgia. The study aims to examine the relationship between GBV and economic independence for women in Georgia. A mix of qualitative methods was used, including secondary analysis, document analysis, in-depth interviews with women, expert interviews, and focus groups with youth. The research exposes the deeply ingrained gender inequality and normalised violence against women in Georgia. For instance, during the stages of document and secondary analysis, it became evident that more than 30% of ever-partnered women aged 15-64 in Georgia report encountering intimate partner violence. Unfortunately, there are limited protections and support services available. Concurrently, deeply ingrained norms that portray women as caregivers restrict their involvement in paid work and economic participation (UN Women 2023). Studies show that, despite legal reforms, over 27% of women have disclosed encountering emotional abuse, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, or physical abuse. Within the surveyed group, 16.3% of women identified as survivors of sexual abuse (in the forms of sexual harassment, sexual violence, or both), while 8% reported instances of physical violence. Importantly, these figures do not represent incidence rates, as women's actual experiences of violence may differ from their reporting. Also, about 5% of women say they were forced by their partners to give up some or all of their money or quit their jobs because of what their partners wanted. However, these figures likely underestimate the true prevalence due to underreporting driven by victim-blaming attitudes and societal acceptance of violence (World Bank Group 2017).

A crucial discovery in this research is the presence of major economic obstacles that greatly impede women's independence. Particularly, women in rural areas and from ethnic minorities highlight the challenges of finding employment for women. Even if they manage to secure employment, it becomes challenging for them to have control over their earnings. They acknowledge their underrepresentation in the job market compared to men, and when they do find work, they often face discrimination and harassment while also shouldering household responsibilities. Additionally, the lack of personal property or the loss of control over property adds to these challenges.

Women from the LBT community, ethnic minority representatives, those who have faced violence, and Ukrainian women in Georgia encounter unique challenges. This suggests that an additional social layer introduces distinct issues for women, despite facing similar overall challenges. When comparing their stories, it becomes clear that employment, discrimination, and violence in the family or from partners are major issues for each group. However, they view these problems from different perspectives and experience them with varying intensity. Participants in the research believe that these challenges are rooted in the overall atmosphere against women in the country. While there is some progress over time, the participants note that due to deeply ingrained norms, it will take years to see significant change. Regressive attitudes persist, especially

in rural areas and among minorities, further cementing the perception of women as caregivers rather than professionals.

Some of the study participants were women who sought refuge in shelters to escape violence. They appreciate the support provided by the state as a helpful resource for women trying to break free from abusive families. However, they emphasise that it's still insufficient, as their lives remain in constant danger. The interviews highlight how gender-based violence significantly hinders Georgian women's access to education and job opportunities, trapping them in cycles of economic dependence and abuse. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and coordinated response, ranging from bolstering legal protections and support services to implementing programs that actively empower women with skills and resources for independence.

Interviews with LBT women in Georgia highlight significant discrimination and challenges they confront in society and their personal lives because of their sexual orientation. Despite some positive developments, LBT women still grapple with substantial economic instability, a lack of legal protections, familial rejection, and daily psychological stress. There is an urgent need for increased support and acceptance to address these multidimensional hardships. Targeted empowerment initiatives from both the government and civil society are essential to alleviate the challenges faced by LBT women in the country.

The research uncovers the various layers of marginalisation that ethnic minority women in Georgia experience. They encounter similar challenges to the broader female population but also face additional cultural and linguistic barriers that heighten their vulnerability. Although there has been recent progress in improving educational access, bringing about meaningful change in their economic empowerment and security demands coordinated efforts at all levels of society. This includes breaking down restrictive norms and enhancing access to crucial resources.

The stories shared by Ukrainian women refugees in Georgia depict a challenging situation marked by significant economic and social uncertainty. These difficulties arise from a combination of factors, including the loss of previous stability, discrimination, and reliance on short-term aid. Empowering and fostering self-sufficiency for these women requires comprehensive support from various levels of Georgian society. It is crucial to address structural gaps that hinder their integration and resilience to bring about positive change.

Insights from expert interviews bring attention to the deeply rooted societal norms and attitudes that contribute to psychological abuse, economic marginalisation, and the overall disempowerment of women in Georgian society. This emphasises the necessity for a comprehensive, multi-faceted strategy that involves policymakers, community leaders, academics, and advocates. Such an approach is crucial to breaking down enduring gender barriers and initiating transformative cultural change.

Despite certain legal progress and changing attitudes among Georgian youth, traditional norms about gender roles and women's societal roles persist. This



fosters inequality and makes many women susceptible to violence throughout the country. It highlights the urgent requirement for additional economic, legal, and socio-cultural reforms to empower women and safeguard their rights.

Overall, the study relies on a Gender-responsive approach (GRA), through which it emphasizes the fundamental need to address the root causes of gender inequality in Georgian society. It also applies an intersectional approach to all the populations involved in the study, which means that the study examines women from different socio-economic backgrounds, types of settlement (urban/rural), ethnic origin, and sexual orientation. This approach considers how the listed factors interact with the research focus.

In conclusion, there are significant gaps in social, economic, and legislative aspects that contribute to inequality, restrict women's agency, and normalise violence against them. The data obtained within the framework of the research confirm that there is a close relationship between violence against women and women's economic independence. In particular, from the perspective of the results of this research, violence against women hurts women's economic independence. And, women's economic independence significantly reduces the risk of violence against them. Immediate and thorough efforts are necessary to change attitudes, enhance protections for survivors, tackle women's disempowerment, and enforce unbiased policies. Solutions should actively challenge the deeply ingrained norms that sustain gender-based violence and inequality in Georgia.

Key recommendations include:



- Implement economic empowerment initiatives for women led by civil society.
- Launch awareness campaigns targeting men to promote gender-equitable norms.
- Government investments in essential areas such as childcare, healthcare, and financial inclusion.
- Encourage the private sector to adopt pay equity and flexible work policies.
- Engage the media in leading awareness campaigns on gender roles and relationships.

Achieving change necessitates coordinated action across all sectors to address systemic marginalisation and ensure women's safety, autonomy, and economic freedom. The time to act is now.

In conclusion, the outlined recommendations serve as a roadmap toward a more equitable and inclusive society in Georgia. By actively promoting economic empowerment, fostering awareness, and securing necessary investments, we pave the way for transformative change. Collaboration across civil society, government, private sectors, and media is paramount to dismantling deeply ingrained norms and systemic barriers, ensuring women's safety, autonomy, and economic freedom.

# INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a widespread global challenge that disproportionately impacts women from various backgrounds. In Georgia, deeply established patriarchal gender norms contribute to normalising attitudes that subordinate women and enable gender-based discrimination and violence. In Georgia, dealing with a mix of social and cultural factors is making it hard to address common problems like domestic abuse and women feeling economically powerless.

This research explores the details of the relationship between GBV and women's economic independence within Georgia's specific context. Over 30% of ever-partnered women aged 15-64 in Georgia report experiencing emotional, physical, or sexual violence by a husband or partner (UN Women 2023). However, few robust protections and services exist for survivors.

Simultaneously, women face barriers to economic participation through formal employment and asset ownership. The female labour force participation rate stands at just over 50%, almost 20% lower than the rate for men (World Bank Group 2017). Deeply entrenched norms that position women as caregivers limit their engagement with paid work (Chitashvili et al. 2010). According to a National Study on Violence Against Women in Georgia, some partners controlled the money that women earned, and a few even took legal control of property or family businesses (UN Women 2023). Recognising this cyclical relationship, this study investigates connections between GBV prevalence and women's financial autonomy.

The research methodology includes interviews with women, focus group discussions with youth, expert interviews, desk research, and secondary analysis. This thorough approach helps understand the research topic from different perspectives. First, directly from women, then from the new generation (young men and women), from experts who have a strong understanding of this theme, and then from documents and research reports that consolidate the knowledge collected until this research.

## **RELEVANCE OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

GBV is a widespread challenge that goes beyond borders, impacting women around the world (UNICEF, n.d.). The lasting existence of GBV shows why it is important to study its different aspects and reasons. This chapter explains why the research problem in this study matters, focusing on how economic independence for women in Georgia may be connected to GBV. By looking into this problem, the research aims to show why this topic is vital in promoting gender equality, empowering women, and developing effective policies and actions.

GBV is a global phenomenon that knows no boundaries, affecting women of all ages, backgrounds, and socio-economic statuses. It encompasses various forms, including physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence (European Commission, n.d.). Based on the reason that GBV continues

globally, it's important to do thorough research to address this widespread problem.

Even though GBV is a problem worldwide, its effects are directly felt in local communities. In Georgia, like in many other places, GBV is a challenge. So, the study concentrates on Georgia to recognise the special social, economic, and legal factors that play a role in GBV there. Getting a good grasp of GBV locally is crucial for creating interventions that truly understand the situations faced by women living in Georgia.

Economic independence is a fundamental aspect of women's empowerment (UN Women, n.d.). It not only provides women with financial autonomy but also enhances their decision-making power and self-determination. Studying how GBV and economic independence are connected is crucial because it helps to understand if having economic power protects against GBV or could make it worse. These findings can guide specific plans to support women economically and tackle GBV. Such a need arises from the fact that Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Georgia have noted that the stresses placed on households due to the aftermath of the pandemic have led to an increase in instances of violence at home. This is a factor exacerbated by the challenges women face to gain regular employment and earn a regular income. CSOs in Georgia working on gender-based violence have noted a lack of information regarding the relationship between women who experience violence and their economic situation. These same CSOs have identified a need to understand the complex gender relations present for women's economic empowerment in Georgia and how economic empowerment is related to gender-based violence (GBV).

This research adopts a holistic approach, examining various facets of GBV, including domestic violence, inheritance withholding, psychological violence, and barriers to economic participation. Additionally, it analyses legislative frameworks and social barriers. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of GBV, facilitating the identification of root causes and effective intervention points.

The findings of this research serve as a foundation for formulating effective policies and interventions. With an understanding of the dynamics of GBV and its connection to economic independence, policymakers, organisations, and stakeholders are equipped with valuable insights. These insights guide the design of evidence-based interventions aimed at combating GBV and advancing economic independence for women in Georgia. In conclusion, the relevance of the research problem addressed in this study cannot be overstated. GBV's global prevalence, the specific context of Georgia, and the critical link between economic independence and women's empowerment all underscore the significance of this research. This study seeks to contribute not only to academic knowledge but, more importantly, to the well-being of women in Georgia and beyond, by offering practical insights that can lead to meaningful change. The relevance of the research problem addressed in this study cannot be overstated for several critical reasons. Firstly, gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive and deeply entrenched issue with far-reaching consequences for women's health, safety, and overall well-being. Its prevalence not only in

Georgia but globally underscores the urgent need for comprehensive solutions. Secondly, the aftermath of the pandemic and the economic challenges faced by women in Georgia have exacerbated the risk of GBV, creating a pressing need to understand and address the complex interplay between economic independence and vulnerability to violence.

Furthermore, the lack of information and data regarding the relationship between women's economic situation and their experiences of violence hinders the development of effective interventions. By addressing this knowledge gap, this research provides invaluable insights that can inform evidence-based policies and programs tailored to the unique context of Georgia. Additionally, the holistic approach adopted in this study, encompassing various facets of GBV, legislative frameworks, and social barriers, ensures a comprehensive understanding of the issue, facilitating the identification of root causes and entry points for targeted interventions.

Moreover, the critical link between economic empowerment and the broader goal of women's empowerment underscores the profound implications of this research. By shedding light on the complex gender relations and barriers to economic participation, this study has the potential to catalyse meaningful change and foster an environment that supports women's autonomy and agency. Ultimately, this research not only contributes to academic discourse but also has the potential to positively impact the lives of women in Georgia and beyond, making it a significant and impactful endeavor.


# METHODOLOGY

## THE AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

GBV remains a persistent issue globally, affecting the lives of countless women, including those living in Georgia. **The study aims to examine the relationship between GBV and economic independence for women in Georgia.**

This study, through its examination of various forms of GBV, analysis of legislative frameworks, and exploration of social barriers, will contribute to advancing self-determination in the pursuit of gender equality and women's empowerment within the region. By understanding the dynamics of GBV and its correlation with economic independence, this study seeks to provide valuable insights for policymakers, organisations, and stakeholders to design effective interventions and policies.

The primary objectives of this research are:

-  • To explore the various manifestations of GBV experienced by women in Georgia, including domestic violence, inheritance withholding, psychological violence, and intentional hindrance to access the labour market and financial resources;
- To investigate whether economic independence acts as a contributing factor to GBV, or serves as a means for women to escape from it (or both);
- To assess the existing legislative frameworks concerning economic independence, particularly legislation concerning women's inheritance rights, access to credit, and loans, while examining the presence of gender discrimination within these laws;
- To analyse whether current economic policies in Georgia exacerbate existing inequalities and contribute to the feminisation of poverty;
- To identify and understand the social barriers hindering women's economic independence in Georgia;
- To compare and contrast the experiences of Georgian women, other women living in Georgia, and Ukrainian refugees about GBV and economic independence;
- To study the attitudes of a specific group (young people) regarding the possible connection between GBV and economic independence for women in Georgia.

## CONCEPTUALISATION AND OPERATIONALISATION

In this research, it was necessary to define and operationalise key concepts to ensure clarity and consistency in the study. The primary concepts to be conceptualised and operationalised are "Gender-Based Violence", "Economic Independence", and the concept of "Legislative Frameworks".

### ► Gender-Based Violence

*Conceptualisation:* GBV refers to any harmful act perpetrated against an individual based on their gender, which results in physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm or suffering. GBV encompasses various forms, including

domestic violence, inheritance withholding, psychological violence, and intentional hindrance to access to labour market opportunities, education, and financial resources (UN Women, n.d.). It reflects power imbalances rooted in societal norms, discrimination, and gender inequality (World Bank Group 2016).

*Operationalisation:* In this study, GBV was studied through a combination of self-reported experiences of women in Georgia and documented cases. Various manifestations of GBV, including physical abuse, psychological harm, economic deprivation, and social exclusion, were measured through structured interviews, expert interviews, and focus groups. Additionally, specific instances of GBV, such as inheritance withholding, were identified and categorised based on participants' official records.

### ► **Economic Independence**

*Conceptualisation:* Economic Independence signifies a state in which an individual, particularly women in this context, possesses the financial resources, skills, and opportunities necessary to make autonomous economic decisions, support themselves and their families, and participate actively in the labour market. Economic independence enhances an individual's control over their economic circumstances and reduces dependency on others (Government of Canada 2021).

*Operationalisation:* Economic Independence was studied using a multidimensional approach. It involved assessing factors such as income level, employment status, access to credit and loans, financial literacy, and decision-making power regarding economic matters. These factors were measured through questions that explored participants' economic choices and decision-making abilities.

### ► **Legislative Frameworks**

*Conceptualisation:* Legislative Frameworks refer to the collection of laws, regulations, and policies established by the government or relevant authorities that shape and govern economic rights, gender equality, and women's empowerment. This study was particularly interested in legislative frameworks related to economic independence, including laws concerning women's inheritance rights, and access to credit, and loans.

*Operationalisation:* Legislative Frameworks were studied through a review of existing laws, policies, and analytical reports related to economic rights and gender equality in Georgia. This involved an analysis of legal texts, government documents, and reports to identify specific provisions and regulations that impact women's economic independence.

## **DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS METHODS**

For the research to give complete information, a triangulation approach was used. The study included different methods at different stages of the research. The research was conducted using qualitative methods.

In the research, the following approaches were used:



- Secondary analysis to study the present studies;
- Document analysis to study the legislative framework;
- In-depth interviews to analyse women's perspectives;
- Expert interviews for formulating recommendations;
- Focus groups with young people from different regions of Georgia to study the attitudes of the new generation towards the research topic.

Data obtained at all stages of the study were analysed in MAXQDA.<sup>1</sup> In the case of documents, thematic analyses were carried out.

### **I. The first phase of the study**

In the beginning, the research used secondary analysis to examine existing studies and document analysis to give an overview of the legislative framework.

1.1 Secondary analysis is crucial for building a comprehensive understanding of the existing body of knowledge on the topic. By reviewing and analysing prior research studies and literature, one can identify key trends, gaps, and areas of consensus or contention. This helps in establishing a solid foundation for the research, ensuring that the study is informed by the latest developments and insights in the field. Secondary analysis also enables benchmarking of the findings, providing valuable context for interpreting results (Ruggiano & Perry, 2017). In this case, a secondary analysis helped to understand how previous studies have perceived the relationship between GBV and economic independence for women in Georgia.

1.2 Document analysis provides an overview of the legislative framework, essential for understanding the legal and policy context surrounding the research topic. It helps to review relevant laws, regulations, policies, reports, and official documents related to gender-based violence and economic independence in Georgia (Tsuladze, 2020).

In summary, the selection of these methods in the first phase of the research was driven by the necessity to build a strong foundation of knowledge, incorporating both existing research and the legal landscape.

### **II. The second phase of the study**

After the secondary analysis and document analysis, the research continued with 15 interviews with women and 5 interviews with experts. These methods were selected for their specific merits in this initial phase.

<sup>1</sup> MAXQDA is a software program designed for computer-assisted qualitative and mixed methods data, text, and multimedia analysis in academic, scientific, and business institutions. <https://www.maxqda.com/>

2.1 These interviews were essential for gaining a nuanced understanding of women's perspectives and experiences related to gender-based violence and economic independence. It effectively conveys the purpose of the study, which is to engage in one-on-one conversations with women from diverse backgrounds and contexts in Georgia in order to explore their personal narratives, challenges, and aspirations. These interviews captured the lived experiences of women, shedding light on the dynamics between GBV and economic independence (see the criteria for selecting respondents in the next subsection).

2.2 Expert interviews are a valuable component of this phase as they provide a broader context and insights beyond individual experiences. Engaging with experts, including (1) a legal professional, (2) an economist, (3) gender specialists, (4) an academic representative (university representative), (5) a policymaker, allowed the study to tap into their specialised knowledge. These interviews served the purpose of formulating informed recommendations and solutions based on a deep understanding of the legal, policy, and advocacy landscape about GBV and economic independence. Experts also offered critical perspectives on potential interventions and policy changes.

The choice of in-depth interviews with women and expert interviews in the second phase of the research was deliberate and strategic. These methods facilitated the gathering of valuable qualitative data from both the grassroots level and the realm of expertise, ensuring a well-informed exploration. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted approximately one hour.

### **III. The third phase of the study**

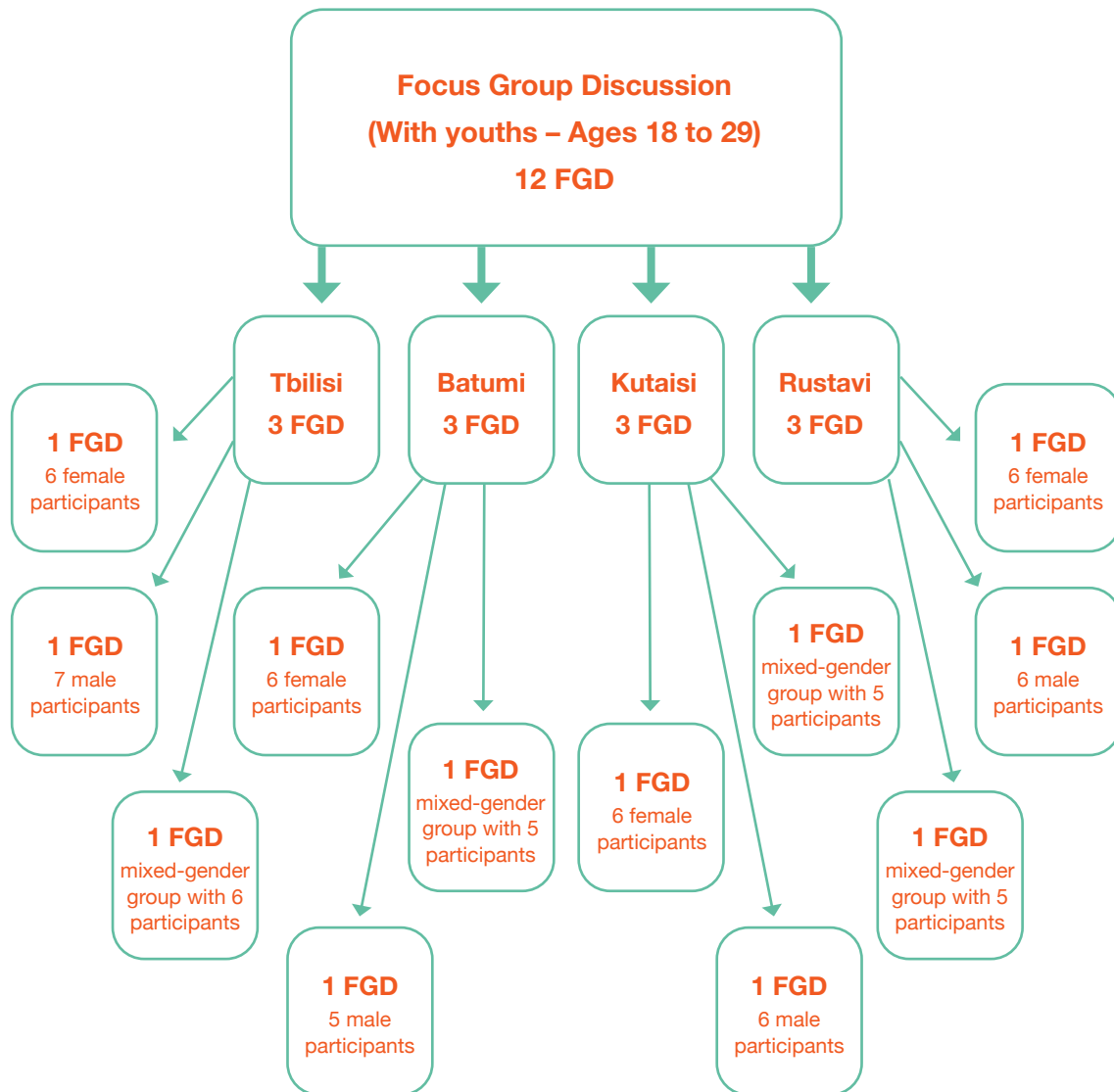
In the third phase of this study, the research continued with 12 focus group discussions. Focus group discussions allowed for a more comprehensive exploration of the research question. At this stage of the research, young people not only have to answer questions but also comment on specific statements that are formulated based on the findings of the second phase.

The selection of cities, namely Tbilisi, Batumi, Kutaisi, and Rustavi, was based on their demographic significance and geographic spread across Georgia. This ensured that the research captured a diverse range of regional perspectives and experiences. Including young individuals from rural backgrounds who have migrated to urban areas for education, including some in university cities, added depth to the understanding of how geographic mobility intersects with the research topic. This demographic diversity allowed the study to explore the unique challenges and opportunities faced by young people in different contexts.

By dedicating separate focus groups to individuals aged 18 to 29, the study aimed to provide a platform in this research for the younger generation to



express their views. This age group often plays a crucial role in shaping societal attitudes and behaviours, making their perspectives particularly relevant to the research.



The division of focus groups into exclusively female, exclusively male, and mixed-gender groups ensured that the study considered gender dynamics in the analysis.


This methodological choice aligned with the research objectives and allowed the research to delve deeply into the attitudes and perspectives of young people regarding the research question.

#### **CRITERIA FOR SELECTING**

Throughout the research, targeted groups were employed to intentionally select participants who possess expertise in the field or have direct experience with the research problem. This approach extended to the analysis of documentary

evidence, where relevant studies addressing the research topic and documents presenting existing laws related to the issue were selected.

Given that this study focused on women who have experienced GBV in Georgia, the second phase of the research specifically included 15 women who meet the following criteria:

-  • Participants were chosen to represent various levels of GBV, encompassing physical, psychological, or economic abuse. This diversity allowed for an in-depth analysis of the distinct impacts on economic independence.
- Women from both rural and urban areas account for the diverse experiences and access to resources in different geographic contexts.
- The selection encompassed women who have sought assistance from GBV-related organisations or services and those who have not sought such help, facilitating an examination of differences in economic independence outcomes.
- The research ensured representation from various ethnic backgrounds and cultures within Georgia, recognising that experiences varied based on cultural factors.
- Special consideration was given to including women from marginalised groups, such as lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals who face unique challenges related to GBV and economic autonomy (United Nations 2023).
- Given the potential specific challenges they encounter, refugees from Ukraine were included, including those who face language barriers and legal status issues.

These selection criteria were consistently applied in the subsequent part of the second phase, involving 5 expert interviews. These experts represented various fields, including economics, law, gender studies, academia, and policymaking. Regarding the selection of young people for the focus groups, individuals aged 18-29 were included based on the principle of targeted selection. This geographical selection ensured that the focus groups represent diverse urban contexts within Georgia.

### **RESEARCH LIMITATIONS**

Every research project faces constraints and potential biases that have to be acknowledged for a comprehensive interpretation of findings. For this research targeted sampling was used to ensure diversity among participants, covering women from various backgrounds and experiences. However, there was a possibility that certain groups remained underrepresented, which may have affected the generalisability of findings.

Given the sensitive nature of this research topic, GBV, and social desirability bias may have influenced responses. Participants might have wanted to provide socially acceptable responses, which could result in not sharing everything or changing how things happened. Also, the study followed a cross sectional design, enabling the identification of associations but not establishing causality between GBV and economic independence.

A notable limitation of the study was the absence of quantitative research methods. While qualitative research provided rich insights into the experiences and perceptions of participants, it did not allow for statistical generalisability to a larger population. Participants may remember their experiences with GBV differently, including when they happened and how they affected their finances. This variation could affect how accurate findings are and how well we understand the long-term effects.

One primary limitation of the study was the restricted number of interviews, possibly not fully capturing the diversity of experiences and perspectives within the population of interest. This limitation could have impacted the comprehensiveness and generalisability of the findings. Understanding and acknowledging these limitations was crucial for maintaining research integrity. While this study contributed significantly to the field, it was important to interpret the findings within the context of these constraints.

### **ETHICAL STANDARDS**

In the research, it was crucial to prioritise ethical standards and discuss these issues to maintain the study's integrity and credibility. A fundamental ethical principle guiding the research was the "No Harm" principle, emphasising a commitment to protecting the well-being and rights of participants.

In the research process, steps were taken to reduce any possible harm or distress for participants. One important ethical consideration was getting informed consent from everyone involved. Before taking part, participants received detailed information about the study's goals, procedures, and potential risks and benefits. They could ask questions and freely choose whether to participate, making sure they agreed willingly and understood their role in the study.

To keep participants' information private, all collected data, including interview transcripts, were securely stored, and any identifying details were removed. Since this research focused on the sensitive topic of GBV, there was a possibility of participants feeling emotionally distressed when sharing their experiences. To address this, interviews were conducted in a supportive and non-judgmental way. Participants were also given information about support services in case they needed assistance.

### **EXPECTED IMPACT AND SIGNIFICANCE**



- **Policy-makers:** The findings will inform evidence-based policies addressing GBV and women's economic empowerment in Georgia;
- **Civil Society and NGOs:** The study will offer insights to develop targeted interventions and support programs for GBV survivors, emphasising economic autonomy;
- **Academic Community:** The research will contribute to the existing literature on GBV and its relationship with economic independence, especially in the context of Georgia;
- **Women in Georgia:** The study will shed light on the challenges faced by women concerning GBV and economic autonomy, ultimately aiming to improve their quality of life.

# DESK REVIEW

## COUNTRY OVERVIEW: INSIGHTS FROM RECENT RESEARCH

Georgia has a long history of GBV against women, though it has often been a taboo topic avoided in public discourse. As Georgia has transitioned to a democracy, it has faced challenges regarding gender equality. Traditional family values run deep in Georgian society, where women are still largely seen as subordinate to men. Despite some changes in women's roles since the Soviet era, conservative gender norms persist. Studies show many Georgians hold traditional attitudes about women being caregivers and obeying their husbands. Care plays a pivotal role in significantly influencing women's engagement in both formal and informal employment within the sector. Additionally, women engage in such activities three times more frequently than men (UN Women Georgia 2018).

This section will examine studies directly researching violence against women in Georgia, providing empirical evidence to inform policy discussions on this critical issue. The information emphasises that GBV is still a persistent human rights problem that requires attention in the country. Research indicates that violence against women is widespread in Georgia. A World Bank survey conducted five years ago revealed that over 25% of Georgian women have experienced **some form of violence**. The actual rate is probably even higher because many incidents go unreported due to cultural taboos surrounding GBV (World Bank Group 2017). GBV, especially domestic violence, remains a silenced issue in Georgia, in part due to Soviet attitudes dismissing such inequality. Over time, the family has become an untouchable space for the state (Asian Development Bank 2018). However, patriarchal norms, taboos, distrust in law enforcement, and financial barriers stop many women from seeking help to escape violence. Official statistics show 13.6% of Georgian women have experienced some form of **domestic violence** (European Union 2021).

Current beliefs that treat such violence as a private affair worsen the problem. Even though more women are speaking out, challenges persist due to societal beliefs and insufficient support systems. The increasing use of restraining orders suggests a rising awareness and improved responses from law enforcement (European Union Delegation to Georgia 2021). However, many Georgians still justify violence against women under certain conditions (Asian Development Bank 2018). It's noteworthy that employed women are less inclined (compared to unemployed women) to endorse the idea that "women should tolerate violence to preserve the family" (with corresponding figures standing at 6% and 10%). This observation indicates a lower impact of societal views on economically independent women (UN Women Georgia 2018). Studies reveal concerns about the acceptance of violence against women, reflecting a broader reinforcement of gender inequality. While official rates are below the European average, conservative attitudes in Georgia suggest underreporting due to barriers like shame and fear (UN Women Georgia 2018). Studies in Georgia reveal violence against women is sometimes normalised and often seen as an acceptable discipline. Socio-cultural factors, including ingrained gender roles

positioning women as subordinate, contribute to this domestic acceptance. A substantial portion of men hold unequal attitudes, necessitating engagement to promote gender equality. Pervasive patriarchal stereotypes and expectations for men to control wives are common in Georgia and the region, enabling societal acceptance of violence against women (UN Women 2020). The concept of “Patroni” (protector, defender) further reinforces unequal norms by linking a woman’s respectability to her male partner’s status.

In discussions about young people, it’s clear that Georgia’s leadership and public life still have ongoing imbalances. Lasting beliefs continue to suggest that men are considered better political leaders. Discomfort reporting to female managers underscores women’s professional challenges (UNFPA 2020).

A noticeable generational shift in norms offers potential transformative change. While older rural men adhere to ingrained expectations, younger groups, especially women, hold more egalitarian views. There are big differences between what people expect domestically and broader beliefs about the capabilities of women leaders, which could be a catalyst for societal change (World Bank Group 2017).

Ultimately, various data shows that Georgian women suffer high levels of gender-based and domestic violence, with underreporting due to norms and attitudes. Victims also face high femicide risks (European Union Delegation to Georgia 2021).

Data from 2009-2014 showed high rates of physical and sexual violence against women in Georgia, prompting governmental and non-governmental groups to take action. While the problem has continued, progress has occurred (European Union Delegation to Georgia 2021). For example, in 2023, Georgia ranks 76th out of 146 countries globally in the Global Gender Gap Index, behind Armenia but ahead of Azerbaijan, signaling room for improvement (World Economic Forum 2023). 10 years before, in 2013, the country occupied the 86th place out of 153 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum 2013).

Some positive changes are visible, but experts emphasise that continuous efforts and resources are necessary to attain gender equality. At the same time, women handling domestic duties encounter delays in entering politics, and their workforce participation is disrupted. Despite gradually sharing more housework, women carry a disproportionately heavy unpaid workload, highlighting the need for a more equitable division of responsibilities. Additionally, childcare, mainly considered a woman’s job in Georgia, further complicates things. Dividing duties is seen as crucial for ensuring equal opportunities (UNFPA 2020).

Based on studies, those most vulnerable to violence in Georgia include urban women, those with unstable housing, early marriage, partners under stress, and former combatants with military service. This highlights the link between personal experiences and societal structures (World Bank Group 2017).

Studies show gender imbalance persists in Georgian leadership and public life, with many still believing men are better political leaders (UNFPA 2020). The

broader region of Eurasia, which Georgia is part of, shows an ongoing struggle to attain gender parity. Of particular concern is the region's low score of 10.9% for gender parity in political empowerment, just half the global rate. While Georgia and some neighboring countries have made strides in improving women's political representation, even having a female president, gaps remain, especially in political empowerment. Despite female presidents in Georgia and Moldova, prevailing regional challenges emphasise the need for sustained efforts to tackle gender inequality, particularly in political roles (World Economic Forum 2023).

Under EU integration, Georgia has pledged to address gender gaps, with 85% of programs significantly targeting gender equality. The EU stresses gender equality and women's empowerment in cooperation, including sex-disaggregated data and specific gender equality actions (European Union Delegation to Georgia 2021). Georgia is also implementing international commitments like CEDAW, the Istanbul Convention on violence against women, SDGs, and the Beijing Declaration to eliminate gender discrepancies across life domains.

#### **WOMEN'S ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE**

Studies show well-established gender stereotypes and barriers hinder equal economic participation for Georgian women and men. Challenges include regulations not supporting the reconciliation of paid labour with domestic care and maternity, and a lack of gender-responsive budgeting (European Union Delegation to Georgia 2021). Research highlights a major gender disparity in economic involvement in Georgia, with women facing various obstacles. Working women in Georgia face an extra challenge due to the gender pay gap, where women consistently earn less than men on average (International Labour Organization 2022). Over the past decade, workforce participation has averaged 64.23% for men versus just 43.86% for women, indicating significant gaps (UNDP Georgia 2018). Critical factors influencing Georgian women's economic activity and workforce engagement include unpaid care work, disproportionately done by women, greatly affecting their participation, with family duties cited as a major reason for not working among those aged 18-64. The pay difference between men and women, known as the gender pay gap, makes it harder for women to pursue jobs because they end up earning less than men (UN Women Georgia 2018). Looking at the latest data, as mentioned, **Georgia ranks 76th of 146 countries in the 2023 Global Gender Gap Index**, presenting a mixed equality picture across indices. In educational attainment, it performs relatively well at 28th globally. However, economic participation and opportunity challenges emerge, ranked 68th. Health and survival are more favorable at 56th of 146. Political empowerment is particularly concerning at 91st (World Economic Forum 2023).

Despite education playing a key role, tertiary-educated women still have lower participation, emphasising persistent societal gender norms and unpaid work impacts on women's economic activity. In Georgia, households with unemployed women tend to have worse economic well-being, with a 26% higher poverty rate, affecting overall women's and family quality of life (UN Women Georgia 2018). Marital status also affects engagement, with single mothers having the lowest participation rates, increasing poverty risks. Despite facing challenges, Georgia has undertaken positive measures and international

commitments to boost women's economic participation. Research emphasises the enduringly low participation of women in the labor market because of factors like household duties and limited job opportunities. In 2020, Georgia enacted major Labour Code changes to align with EU directives, especially on maternity leave. Nevertheless, challenges remain, notably around the gender pay gap (European Union 2021).

Researchers state about half of Georgia's working population is informally employed, equally affecting women and men. Informal work typically means lower income, confidence, and happiness. Informally employed women earn far less than those with formal jobs. While acknowledging potential medium-term implications, the focus remains on encouraging formalisation (UN Women Georgia 2018). In Georgia, the adjusted gender pay gap shows differences in wages because of unfair attitudes, variations in work hours, and family duties like childcare and inflexible schedules (European Union 2021). UN Women data shows that in 2018, Georgia had a relatively low population share below the international poverty line (\$1.90/day) at 4.5% – slightly higher for women than men (UN Women 2022). Non-economic quality of life indicators shows working women report slightly higher happiness, highlighting employment's positive well-being impact. Key drivers of women's economic inactivity are the gendered division of unpaid care work and family reasons heavily influencing women's decisions not to work (UN Women Georgia 2018). The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated gender gaps. Reports indicate increased domestic violence during lockdowns while economic hardships disproportionately affect women (UNDP Georgia 2018).

While declining since 2013, poverty in Georgia remains relatively high rurally, with ethnic minorities facing greater challenges in Georgia, half of the female-headed households lack a labour income earner, a situation observed in only one-third of male-headed households. The absolute poverty rate is highest (32 percent) among households without any labour income earners. Due to this and other factors, social exclusion in Georgia manifests itself in socioeconomic, cultural, and political dimensions. Disadvantaged groups experience elevated risks of poverty (UN Women 2020). Considering this, it is unsurprising that for pursuing gender equality, women's economic empowerment is seen as crucial for overall development. Research shows educational gender segregation persists in Georgia – fewer women in agricultural studies and fewer men in education. Traditional norms of men as household heads remain deeply embedded rurally and urbanly. Recognising women's economic empowerment as vital for national economic growth, and transforming inactive populations into active contributors enhances well-being and fosters greater prosperity. Key aspects include financing and resource access, robust institutional protections, and fundamentally, the right to choose and control one's life.

Past studies conclude that over the past decade, specific programs directly addressing women's economic empowerment have been lacking, and the state's strategic economic documents lack comprehensive coverage of this critical issue. This absence of a consolidated state vision contributes to ongoing challenges in advancing women's economic empowerment (Margvelashvili 2017). Limited economic resources constrain women's choices in GBV cases,

with over 50% lacking personal income, and household assets mostly controlled by men. Even assets legally owned by women are often controlled by men. Despite equal capability, women frequently lack job skills and networks for independence, heavily relying on partners or family (World Bank Group 2017). This economic dependence limits women's freedom and choices, making them more vulnerable to domestic abuse. Furthermore, a 2017 World Bank study revealed that 36% of domestic violence victims returned to abusive partners because of limited financial resources and a perceived inability to survive independently. As a result, the economic disempowerment of women and Georgia's high tolerance for domestic abuse create a harmful cycle (World Bank Group 2017). Many women face both economic and emotional abuse. The widespread secrecy about this type of violence makes reporting difficult, highlighting the importance of changing cultural attitudes (UNFPA 2020).

Despite reforms in areas like maternity leave and anti-discrimination statutes aligned with EU directives, Georgia still needs substantial policy changes and cultural shifts to break down barriers to women's economic equality. Recognising the importance of improving women's participation in the workforce and their earning potential, leading organisations stress that these efforts are crucial for the nation's development and for reducing gender inequality.

Importantly, the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened domestic violence risks, with reports of surging incidents during this period. Yet despite increased dangers, insufficient reporting to police has occurred amidst the risks (European Union Delegation to Georgia 2021). Tackling this requires sustained efforts to transform attitudes, enhance social support systems, and strengthen legal protections for women. Additionally, the pandemic has worsened economic challenges for women, especially single mothers, large families, and vulnerable households. It has also prompted a major increase in domestic duties for women, with 42% reporting more household chores than pre-pandemic. Closing schools and kindergartens further strained families, particularly those with children (UNDP Georgia 2018).

### **CONFLICTS AND GBV**

Studies show that entrenched stereotypes against refugees in Georgian communities result in discrimination and xenophobic attitudes. These views disrupt social unity and isolate refugees. Despite desiring understanding and coexistence, refugees encounter stigmatisation in public facilities and by authorities, negatively affecting interactions. Refugees often have restricted social networks mainly comprising homeland individuals, making building relationships and embracing local values like equality, autonomy, and independence difficult (UNHCR 2023). However, specific conflict-affected subgroups like internally displaced women and men with direct war exposure report higher sexual harassment and violence. Conflicts tend to create economic stress, which in turn is observed to heighten the risk of gender-based violence (GBV). This underscores the nuanced and far-reaching impacts that conflicts can have on the overall well-being of a society. Findings show potential links between conflict, economic adversity, and GBV, emphasising that women's economic security is vital to access support and GBV services. While Georgian law enforcement and social services traditionally lead GBV prevention and response, a more comprehensive



approach including employment opportunities and women's economic independence could enhance addressing this challenge (World Bank Group 2017).

Despite being economically better off than rural groups, internally displaced persons (IDPs) face unique challenges. Research shows the transition from traditional livelihoods to urban settings has not translated into stability, with IDPs often grappling with unemployment and insecure work. Economic disparities become a key factor in making women more vulnerable. Limited resources make it difficult to escape abuse, leading to underreporting. Over half of women lack personal income and household asset control remains predominantly with men, entrenching dependence cycles (World Bank Group 2017).

Assessments of Georgia's law enforcement and judiciary reveal policing practices frequently re-traumatise abused women. A 2020 UN study found frequent interrogation over support in investigations. Attitudes often justify domestic and sexual violence while prosecutions are rare (UN Women 2020). Hence, women impacted by conflict face compounded protection barriers.

The situation of Ukrainian refugees arriving in Georgia after Russia's 2022 invasion is not yet well documented. However, recent studies suggest the most vulnerable refugees, including women, children, and the elderly, tend to stay in Georgia. So, twice as many adult females are staying in the country compared to adult males. More Ukrainian children and elderly also remain. Among surveyed refugees, 55% expressed willingness to start full-time work in Georgia. Notably, 51% of women preferred part-time roles, versus 77% of men seeking full-time jobs. Observed gender differences include women having higher qualifications – 90% of female versus 81% of male Ukrainian refugees have tertiary or vocational education (PMC Research Center 2023).

Emerging early data on Ukrainian women refugees in Georgia indicates over 60% of adults remaining rather than transiting are female (PMC Research Center 2023). This prolonged displacement, largely of women with children, signals a growing need for targeted GBV prevention and response.

Given the heightened risks for displaced and marginalised women due to conflicts, there's a need for coordinated efforts in Georgia across human rights, social services, and transitional justice. It's especially crucial to prioritise women's economic rights, security, and involvement in decision-making for effective reconstruction and reconciliation.

# LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

Over the past twenty years, Georgia has made notable progress in enacting laws to tackle longstanding issues surrounding GBV and expand economic rights and opportunities for women. Key legislative accomplishments include passing domestic violence prevention laws in 2006, prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in 2014, and ratifying the Istanbul Convention in 2017 requiring alignment of Georgian laws (Government of Georgia 2020).

However, major gaps remain both in terms of the legislative framework and practical enforcement of existing laws. Challenges persist regarding transforming cultural attitudes that normalise violence, bolstering institutional capacities to enforce laws, and converting written policies into genuine culture change. This text closely examines Georgia's legal landscape related to protections against GBV and advancing women's economic empowerment.

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LEGISLATION**

In 2006, Georgia passed landmark legislation specifically criminalising domestic violence for the first time (Amnesty International 2006). The Law on Violence Against Women and/or Domestic Violence defines domestic violence as “Domestic violence is the violation of constitutional rights and freedoms of one family member by another family member through neglect and/or physical, psychological, economic, sexual violence or coercion”. It introduced key protection measures for survivors such as restraining orders, and access to shelters and crisis centers. The 2006 law was introduced and backed by two-year National Gender Action Plans focused on eliminating violence, protecting victims, and providing support (Parliament of Georgia 2006). It also expanded the mandate of the State Fund for Protection to include domestic violence. Before this law, Georgia did not have specific legislation addressing domestic violence. Local NGOs, international donors, and parliamentary advocates strongly championed the law's introduction and passage, which was catalysed by surging public awareness and demands following a high-profile case (in 2005) where a woman killed her repeatedly abusive politician husband in self-defense. The law officially recognised domestic violence as a crime in Georgia for the first time. It includes measures to protect and help victims, work with offenders to prevent repeat offenses, and allow criminal prosecution when necessary (Asian Development Bank 2018). In 2012, Georgia's Criminal Code added a hate motive as a reason to impose stronger penalties for crimes, including those driven by hatred toward sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Council of Europe 2017).

Several legislative initiatives in Georgia have focused on improving women's financial independence and economic participation. Following international standards, Georgia has created comprehensive legislation on gender equality and non-discrimination, including relevant definitions. In 2010, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the Law on Gender Equality, which defined gender as “a social aspect of the relation between sexes which is expressed in all spheres of public

life and implies opinions formed about different sexes through socialisation” and gender equality as “a part of human rights which implies equal rights and duties, responsibilities and equal participation of men and women in all spheres of personal and public lives” (Parliament of Georgia 2010). That same year, Georgia passed the Gender Equality Law, defining gender equality as an integral human right with equal rights, duties, and participation for both genders across personal and public realms. This spurred corresponding National Action Plans in 2011, 2014, and 2016. Underscoring its commitment to safeguarding women from violence, Georgia has signed major international conventions, especially those concerning women in conflict. Most notably, in 1994, Georgia’s Parliament ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (European Union 2021).

2014 marked another turning point when Georgia signed the Istanbul Convention, requiring the alignment of domestic laws. This catalysed 24 legal amendments, widening protections for female victims of abuse and state obligations to furnish key services. That same year, a non-discrimination law explicitly banned discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity for the first time (Asian Development Bank 2018).

Most abused women refrained from reporting violence due to cultural stigma (United Nations 2017). A culture of victim-blaming persisted when incidents were reported. Additionally, inconsistent enforcement allowed most violations of protection orders without repercussions (Amnesty International 2006). Gaps also existed in violence response services and multi-agency coordination.

In 2017, Georgia took a significant step towards strengthening its legal framework on gender-based violence by ratifying the Istanbul Convention. Following this ratification, the country enacted a series of legislative reforms to align its laws with the international standards outlined in the Istanbul Convention. These changes demonstrate Georgia’s commitment to addressing gender-based violence and bringing its legal provisions in line with globally recognised norms and best practices (European Union 2021). This expanded the definition of domestic violence to expressly prohibit assault, stalking, and psychological abuse (Parliament of Georgia 2017).

Additionally, in 2013 and 2014, amendments extended maternity leave protections (United Nations 2023). After this change, all employees were guaranteed full wages for 126 days of maternity leave with optional unpaid extended leave (Open Society Georgia Foundation 2016). However, broader gender inequality persists in the labour force due to ingrained social norms (Chitashvili et al. 2010). Discrimination in hiring and promotions inhibits career advancement and wages for women. In the economic realm, Georgian laws guarantee gender equality but lack implementation requirements (Gender Equality Council, n.d.). The Labour Code prohibits workplace discrimination (Parliament of Georgia 2010), but sexual harassment policies are still absent from many workplaces. Laws fail to address professional development for post-maternity leave returnees.

Georgia has a “Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and/or Domestic Violence” that defines key domestic violence terms and outlines

mechanisms for responding to and preventing such violence. The law aims to create legislative guarantees for protecting the rights and freedoms of family members, ensuring equal rights, and establishing efficient mechanisms for detecting, eliminating, and preventing domestic violence. It defines terms like “victim,” “abuser,” “protective order,” and “restraining order” and focuses largely on outlining police duties, protective orders, rights of victims, services like shelters, and transitional provisions for implementation (Parliament of Georgia 2006). While an important step, this law lacks specificity on protecting women from gender-based violence or promoting their economic rights. It does not outline rights, empowerment policies, or inequality facing women. The protections appear gender-neutral. No data on violence against women is included. In summary, the law establishes key mechanisms addressing domestic violence generally but does not substantively target legislative guarantees for women’s security, empowerment, or advancement.

Explicit considerations around women’s economic security and independence are limited in Georgia’s legislative framework surrounding GBV. However, study findings highlight the potential for economic interventions like employment and livelihoods programming targeting women to contribute to GBV prevention and response by increasing women’s agency and support options (World Bank Group 2017).

The above study revealed that while the majority of people (67 percent of women and 74 percent of men) are aware of the existence of laws in Georgia addressing violence against women, there is a significant lack of understanding regarding the specific forms of violence covered by these laws. Notably, less than half of the respondents, comprising 38 percent of men and 44 percent of women, recognised marital rape as a criminal offense. This finding highlights the need for increased awareness and education about the comprehensive nature of gender-based violence laws and the various types of acts they encompass, including marital rape (UN Women Georgia 2018).

#### ● **Sexual Violence and Harassment Legislation**

Substantial gaps limit practical progress. The 2017 National Survey revealed around 14% of women aged 15–64 who have ever had a partner reported experiencing physical, sexual, and/or emotional violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime. Specifically, 6% reported physical abuse, 2% reported sexual partner abuse, and almost 10% experienced some form of economic violence in their lifetime (UN Women Georgia 2017).

A 2019 law defines and prohibits sexual harassment including unwanted sexual behavior/exposure, and verbal/non-verbal actions (European Union 2021).

Workplace violence, especially harassment, disrupts the trust/cooperation atmosphere necessary for productivity. Domestic violence ripple effects also strongly impact employees experiencing such violence (Council of Europe 2016). Yet despite legislative progress, Georgia still struggles with enforcement and implementation issues. Workplace harassment/discrimination persists, with private sector employers often flaunting rules (Asian Development Bank 2018).

### • **Anti-Discrimination Legislation**

The 2014 Law on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination bans gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation discrimination across employment, education, healthcare, etc. (Parliament of Georgia 2014). The 2010 Gender Equality Law established gender equality as an integral human rights principle (Parliament of Georgia 2010).

In Georgia's civil code, property acquired during marriage is considered jointly owned (Parliament of Georgia 1996). While Georgian laws technically guarantee equal property/land rights, social/cultural barriers block these rights in practice. According to patriarchal norms, the inheritance from parents often only goes to the sons. Women, after marriage, are expected to manage their husband's property without any financial gain. However, as mentioned earlier, this expectation is not always met, and women also face economic violence within their husbands' families (Chitaia 2021).

Rural women lack opportunities/independence (United Nations Georgia 2017). Since 2015, the Agency for the Development of Cooperatives has actively launched State programs in various areas. For example, one of the initial cooperatives funded was a nut factory with 500 shareholders in Samegrelo, village of Darcheli. About 34% of cooperative shareholders were women. Another significant area is beekeeping, a popular field for women. The program offers a reduced co-payment (20% instead of 30%) for beehives if all members of the agricultural cooperative are women (Margvelashvili 2017).

Addressing these complex barriers requires moving beyond paper laws to changing mindsets and strengthening institutional capacity. Recommendations include standardising parental leave, expanding compliance mechanisms, and enforcing hiring regulations. But realising gender equality laws remain Georgia's next frontier (Asian Development Bank 2018).

A 2019 amendment prohibits labour/pre-contract discrimination including in job ads/interviews. Labour Code discrimination definition was added in 2020 (European Union 2021).

### • **Land Rights and Entrepreneurship Legislation**

Land and property laws technically guarantee spousal equality (Parliament of Georgia 1996). The 2020 SME Development Strategy prioritises women's entrepreneurship (Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development (Georgia) 2015).

It is crucial to develop a legislative agenda to empower women comprehensively. Comprehensive prevention-to-response strategies must confront normalised GBV while expanding social, health, and economic services for survivors (UN Women 2020).

In recent decades, Georgia expanded its legislative scope substantially to promote gender equality and empowerment (UN Women 2020).

However, major gaps persist regarding comprehensive GBV protections, economic rights, and addressing discriminatory barriers (UN Women 2017). Effective implementation poses additional challenges (UN Women 2020).

A pivotal 2017 institutional development was the Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence Against Women, and Domestic Violence under the Prime Minister's office, bringing key ministries together to coordinate implementation. However, the Commission's effectiveness has been critiqued (for example, due to weak or absent coordination between the central and local self-government, as well as among various agencies) (UN Women 2020).

In 2019, it was found that there is a gender pay gap in Georgia, where women's average monthly earnings were 869 GEL compared to 1362 GEL for men. After an increase in the average male salary in 2019, the average female salary in agriculture and various service sectors dropped significantly (the reasons are unknown). However, the salary reduction slowed down in specific sectors, such as public administration, social security, art, entertainment, and recreation (International Labour Organization 2022).

As part of the government's SME Development Strategy 2021-2025, a special emphasis has been placed on promoting women's entrepreneurship in Georgia. Women's entrepreneurial activity faces obstacles from cultural stereotypes and practical challenges. Notably, women own less real estate, including land, compared to men, with only 16% documented as owners of agricultural land. This impacts access to finance, where commercial banks often require collateral for loans, limiting women's financial resources. As a result, female entrepreneurs heavily rely on personal finances, a challenge that is particularly acute in the regions (Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia 2021).

The "State Concept on Women's Economic Empowerment," endorsed by Georgia's Parliament, serves as a comprehensive roadmap outlining the nation's vision, policy priorities, and measures to foster economic empowerment. This strategic document incorporates a dedicated section addressing violence against women and domestic violence, recognising the pivotal economic empowerment role of state support for women victims of such violence (Parliament of Georgia 2023). The concept emphasises tangible compensation and incentives to actively involve women victims of violence in the labour market (Parliament of Georgia 2023). Proposed measures encompass a robust commitment to combating economic violence against women, establishing long-term support structures, and implementing tailored economic empowerment programs for affected women. Public awareness campaigns also aim to educate about countering violence against women. Beyond addressing violence, the concept delves into crucial economic independence aspects including enhancing women's property and finance access. Furthermore, the document advocates employment practices and pay equality, recognising these as pivotal for fostering women's economic autonomy (Parliament of Georgia 2023). A specific gap in the law creates a problem in the informal sector, where many women work. This leaves them at risk of insufficiently protected rights (UN Women 2020).

While making admirable legislative strides, Georgia stands at a crossroads, needing renewed commitment and action to address the persisting economic and social challenges plaguing women (European Union 2021).

To summarise in a few words:

- A National Action Plan (2018-2020) prescribes GBV prevention activities, and establishes referral mechanisms and data collection systems (UN Women 2018).
- The Legal Aid Service provides free legal assistance to GBV survivors including consultations and court representation, with over 38 counseling Centers (Legal Aid Service (LAS) 2022).
- Abortion is permitted on medical/social grounds (Parliament of Georgia 1997). The COVID-19 pandemic limited access to safe abortion services as the government advised the temporary halt of non-urgent health appointments. This led to health clinics categorising non-emergency abortions as “elective” or “non-essential,” hindering access during the emergency state and lockdown (Gotsadze 2020).
- Lack of government service (for example, psycho-social services) access in these areas is a major challenge (Public Defender of Georgia 2020).

Legislative Framework on Women’s Economic Independence:

- The Public Service Law grants fully paid maternity leave (Parliament of Georgia 2015). Parental leave can be taken by the parent who is taking care of the child. The father can take advantage of this, only if the mother of the newborn has not taken advantage of the leave provided for in this article (Parliament of Georgia 2015).
- A 2020 Labour Code amendment mandates equal pay for equal work (Parliament of Georgia 2010). The SME Development Strategy recognises gender inequality in SME access/financing, prioritising women’s entrepreneurship promotion (Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia 2021).
- The government established an Employment Support Agency (2019) and adopted a Labour Assistance Law (2020) to facilitate employment opportunities (Parliament of Georgia 2019).

# WOMEN'S OPINIONS – RESULTS OF IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

## WOMEN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED GBV

Even though the women in the study come from various backgrounds, their daily routines mostly overlap, mainly focusing on childcare. It is crucial to highlight that all participants are mothers, consistently underscoring that their primary focus is on their relationships with their children. Even though some of these women achieved higher education, the violence they went through in the past stopped them from pursuing careers in their chosen fields. Many mentioned that their priorities changed, and career goals were put on hold after marriage. After removing the abuser from their lives, some tried to get back into their previous activities and resume career development, while others chose to explore different vocations.

*“I have a higher education, I graduated from the university with a legal education. Besides that, I have many hobbies, embroidery, sewing, knitting, skiing, exercise, swimming, and so many other things.”*

*A woman from an urban area*

*“I’m employed, but I’m not busy with official work. I am a manicure specialist, and I have mastered this profession I’m currently working at a beauty salon that isn’t very high-end. My income fluctuates between 600 and 700 GEL per month. Since I’ve recently started, I don’t have many clients yet, but I’m slowly building up my customer base and growing in my profession.”*

*A woman from an urban area*

In the shelter, some women take on different roles, like catering for meetings. When talking about their daily routines, it’s clear that abused women, also dealing with the challenges of single motherhood, have to handle both earning income and raising their children. This double duty is a tough task in all cases, made harder by the lack of a co-parent and the additional burden of both domestic and foreign labour.

In the course of our discussions, the participants highlighted that at the initial stages of their relationships, everything appeared to be positive. They attribute this positive perception largely to their inexperience, which hindered them from paying sufficient attention to potential negative aspects. Consequently, they did not recognise certain qualities that could later contribute to challenges in their relationships.

*“My ex is about nine years older than me, there is quite a big age difference, but we got to know each other through mutual friends, in*



*such a friendly circle. At that time I was in my first year at university. Now, probably from this point of view a person with a little more information, education, and experience, I would have known from the beginning that he was a toxic person. But at that age, with that experience, you couldn't physically understand it like that. There wasn't that much information then, and we [women] were in an informational vacuum."*

*A woman from a rural area*

Some women decided to leave their husbands as soon as they recognised psychological violence, ending the relationship quickly. Others only considered leaving the family when the violence became more complex, involving both economic and physical harassment. Those who separated during the psychological violence stage mention that the mistreatment continued after the divorce. This included manipulative actions, like phone messages and calls where the ex-husband reminded the woman of her maternal duties or used emotional blackmail.

Respondents say that violence has its stages of development. According to their subjective perceptions, it starts with psychological pressure, grows into economic violence, and sexual harassment constantly followed, and finally ends with physical violence. According to them, conflicts in some cases stem from economic difficulties, however, this is not the main cause of tension.

From the stories, it becomes clear that cases of domestic violence are not limited to violence against women only but also extend to other members of the family. During the conversation, the women recalled that their children were often present in the conflict, and this left a heavy psychological mark on them in the future. Also, there were cases when the abusive husband had a conflict with the woman's parents.

*"After six months, he unexpectedly came to my home in Kutaisi to my parents and physically assaulted both me and my father, leading me to call the police. Subsequently, legal proceedings began. My ex-father-in-law and my ex-husband's family held considerable influence, attempting to use threats, blackmail, and manipulation to dissuade me. Despite these challenges, I somehow found the strength to persist, never giving in. Eventually, after nine months, my husband was arrested, and the prosecutor acknowledged all the concerns I had raised. While in prison, my ex-husband participated in sessions with a psychologist. Since his release, he has been afraid to complain again."*

*A woman from an urban area*

Regarding parents, it should be noted that in some cases they are not part of the support system for women who have experienced violence. According to the respondents, there were instances when parents encouraged the women to remain with their abusive partner, citing concerns about public perception. In certain cases, domestic violence is viewed in terms of one parent perpetrating violence against the other parent. The respondents believe that when children call for their parents to separate due to domestic violence, it can have an immediate impact. However, due to the mindset of the grandparents' generation, the children are still blamed as the instigators for initiating the separation.

According to the research participants, the cycle of violence is a kind of vicious cycle from which it is very difficult for a woman to escape. According to their explanation, the situation sometimes stabilises at certain moments, but this does not mean that something positive has changed in the relationship. On the contrary, it is a sort of introduction to new violence.

*“There is a recurring pattern in our relationship – a tense phase, followed by a critical period, and then a relatively “calm” interval. This cycle repeats, and over time, the duration of the “calm” period shortens. We experienced a period of luxury with gifts, invitations, concert tickets, and opera attendance. However, this was later followed by tense and critical phases, creating a repetitive cycle in our relationship.”*

*A woman from an urban area*

Ultimately, this whole process affects both the mental and physical health of the woman. Women who have supporters outside the family cope with the situation relatively effectively, because according to them it means a lot that there is a house where their supporters (for example, parents will accept them), while those who do not have such an opportunity emphasise the multifaceted development of the problem. Women have a hard time remembering the changes taking place in their bodies, which they could not find names for, but after distancing themselves from the events, they realised that these were the consequences of the violence that happened to them. Some of them blame the deteriorating health on domestic violence, threats, and stress experienced after separation.

*“It had a profound impact on both my mental and physical well-being. I became extremely thin, losing ten kilograms during my marriage. Looking back at our photo videos from that time is disheartening – drooping eyes, a lack of color, and visible weakness. The impact extended to nightmares, waking up in the middle of the night, hallucinations, and persistent physical fatigue. The lack of energy was not just physical; it had a psychological toll. Even after the breakup, the physical injuries healed relatively quickly, but the psychological trauma lingered. It took many years of seeking help from a psychologist at the Ministry of Health to regain my psychological strength.”*

*A woman from a rural area*

*“The psychological abuse was that if I insisted it was so if I showed the truth, he would say no and make excuses, and this was bad for me. I developed a terrible neurosis. I can’t blame only that though – my mother passed away and I developed gout due to nervousness. I had some neurotic problems and a lot of stress, but now I’m fine.”*

*A woman from a rural area*

As a result of the research, it was revealed that similar mental and physical changes affect women’s ability to work. In particular, according to the experience of the respondents, it is impossible to think about work and focus on development at such a moment. Although you are aware of economic needs and know that this may be the only way to save yourself, the general tension

still affects your work. The problem becomes even more acute when we consider it about learning. Respondents shared that in moments of violence, their ability to concentrate decreased and it became almost impossible to receive new information and learn. It should be said here that in the case of some of them, such activities became unavailable immediately after marriage. And those who tried to maintain their status in educational institutions had to overcome many additional barriers. In the study, women mentioned that abusers made them economically dependent by suppressing their desire to study and pursue a career. The opposite trend is observed in the case of partners, who mostly prefer women to work and, in the case of having a common child, transfer all economic responsibilities to them.

*“It was such a moment that when you are physically and psychologically abused, you feel like you don’t want anything anymore. You don’t want to look for a job anymore. You don’t have a head to think anymore. You end up in such an awful situation, and there are fights and tension every day. I had many difficult moments. Because I was still studying at the university during this time, I did not even go to some exams. I remember once when I went to an exam and looked at the test – I couldn’t understand what was written. I put my pen down and left. I failed that subject and had to retake the course,”*

*A woman from an urban area*

The stories from research reveal that violence against women greatly blocks their access to education, which, in turn, hampers career growth and economic independence. When women separate from the abuser, it often results in an economic setback. Some lose their homes, and others are left without any income. In such situations, moving to a shelter becomes one of the solutions.

*“It was difficult for me financially without him. I had no income and no savings. I had no one to help me. My mother had passed away and my father had his own family. I had no one I could turn to for financial help or support – not even hope. My husband was my only means of assistance before – whether it was for medicine, transportation, or anything else, I was relying completely on him. Now I am living in a shelter and I have nothing.”*

*A woman from a rural area*

The issue of economic well-being is tied to their ability to provide for their children. That is why some respondents also say that they had to leave their children with their father due to lack of money. It should be emphasised that this decision does not depend on the women’s wishes and on the contrary, the respondents emphasise that their main goal is to live with their children. They aim to resort to legal means to secure custody but their lack of financial means forces them to make painful compromises.

*“At this moment, the children are with him because the children are used to a good, comfortable life. We had bought a house together via the bank and lived as what seemed like a perfect family. When we separated because of his jealousy issues, I fought to get custody of my children – I*

*didn't abandon them. Instead, I called the police to assist me in picking up my children."*

*A woman from a rural area*

Some of the women respondents believe that the incidents of violence did not affect their children in the process, because at that time the children were small and did not understand exactly what was happening. According to some, all this left a great mark on their children. Women who were able to bring their children with them after the separation say that they took almost full responsibility for their child's care and did not receive support from their ex-husbands in this regard.

Women mention the involvement of the police as one of the support mechanisms for getting their children away from their abusive husbands. The research revealed that in cases of violence, the first supporter of women, in addition to other family members, is police employees. They evaluate their work effectively and show quite positive attitudes. The police turned out to be a link to the shelter for women who needed housing to escape from their abusers. Women believe that taking this step (calling the police) was due to the social campaigns that have become stronger recently.

*"It took me a long time to first realise that I was a victim of domestic violence. At that time, there was some sort of social awareness campaign, and the buses were displaying a phone number and address for the Ministry of Health. There were advertisements like this in the campaign, and every time one of those buses would come and go, it felt like something was clicking in my mind."*

*A woman from an urban area*

Considering the above, women perceive information campaigns as an important mechanism, and raising awareness in this regard is an urgent necessity. As a result of the research, it is clear that they do not have information about specific laws protecting them from violence, so it is difficult for them to establish exactly what kind of rights they have. That is why, for example, the issue of property division after marriage remains problematic. Some of the respondents either returned to their parents after the divorce or went to the shelter, which was because the ex-spouse avoided dividing the common private property, or it was not necessary to do so. In individual cases, the women participating in the study say that they did not even think about dividing the property, or if they decided to do it, their ex-husbands got rid of it in different ways (for example, by transferring the property to a third person). Therefore, it is not surprising that women were left without capital, even more so in the conditions that in most cases they did not inherit from the family (some of their families did not have private property at all, or if they did, the male son was given priority of inheritance). Since the women faced material problems after leaving the violent environment, and some of them still did not have a stable income, they did not contact the bank for loans, installments, or other services.

*"During the divorce, I did not receive a single coin of financial settlement. Because at that time I didn't think about it at all and I couldn't think clearly*

*due to the many parallel problems occurring. He was manipulating me by saying that he wanted my share of the marital property, essentially black-mailing me. I said that if I die hungry, I don't want anything from you."*

*A woman from an urban area*

In terms of economic empowerment, women participating in the study are less likely to recall such programs that would help them who have experienced violence. However, they have only superficially heard about organisations that carry out information campaigns and provide specific services.

*"In terms of organisations I have come in contact with – there is "SAPARI." In this case, they were not my protector, but I have many friends there, and there was moral support and communication between us. There is also "GYLA"...as well as the crisis center of the Ministry of Health."*

*A woman from an urban area*

The women participating in the research, who have been subjected to cases of violence, believe that the aggression, pressure, and manipulations towards them were because they are women. The same reason is mentioned when analysing the issues of economic independence. Women say that their gender largely determines their economic independence, and unfortunately, it only does so in a negative way. The list of barriers to economic independence is endless. Women name the problem of time as the most important obstacle, according to them, it is sometimes impossible to do something at the same time as having a child and taking care of the income. For such people, it is almost impossible to work with a standard schedule, and even if they can, they face various forms of harassment at their workplaces. Women believe that the entrenched stereotypes regarding women's employment are still relevant.

*"Some people have small children and may not be able to work typical business hours that span from nine in the morning to six in the evening. There is also a well-known hierarchy issue prevalent in many workplaces: there are mostly men in managerial positions, and this reflects a kind of sexism that remains widespread in Georgia. Many people also make comments like "You are a woman, why should I ask you for advice..." While I did not face this directly at work, at my old office they once told me "You are a woman, why should I talk to you about this?" These sorts of pejorative attitudes towards women are still commonplace in employment contexts. Of course, women have to overcome substantially more barriers – both at work and in their personal lives – to achieve goals that men can reach very easily by comparison"*

*A woman from an urban area*

In conclusion, this chapter illuminates the complex interplay between the personal and professional lives of women who have experienced domestic violence. It underscores the challenges they face in pursuing education, career development, and economic independence amid the pervasive effects of abuse. The narratives emphasise the urgent need for comprehensive support mechanisms, including awareness campaigns, legal safeguards, and economic

empowerment programs, to break the cycle of violence and empower these women to rebuild their lives.

### **LBT WOMEN IN GEORGIA**

To present the positions of LBT women as fully as possible in this chapter, the research included the experiences of lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women. The in-depth interviews in this segment revealed that sometimes LBT women living in Georgia are victims of additional oppression because of their sexual orientation/gender identity. Also, as a result of the research, it is clear that despite being united in one community, each of these groups (lesbian, bisexual, transgender) may have different challenges from each other. For example, when we asked the respondents to describe their typical day, their routines were structurally different from each other, and in some cases, it was due to their economic situation. Relatively higher access to educational services was evident for both lesbian and bisexual women than was found for transgender women.

*“Within the workplace itself, there is an unequal distribution of opportunities that amounts to preferential privilege. Employers may tell you that you lack the proper education or experience to deserve or demand a salary of one thousand or two thousand GEL”*

*A woman from a rural area*

The transgender woman interviewed mentioned that for other transgender women in her circle, who are primarily engaged in sex work, their day typically begins in the middle of the day rather than the morning. This is because many of them, including the interviewee herself and others involved in sex work, stay awake through the night to earn income, as sex work constitutes their primary source of financial support. Consequently, due to their nighttime involvement in sex work, they don't wake up and begin their day until the afternoon or evening.

*“At this stage, I am not at all emotionally or physically fit to engage in sex work. And I feel that for me right now, being forced into that would constitute violence because it would destroy me. This pressure does not necessarily come from any one person but from my circumstances and environment in general. Although donors (international and local foundations/organisations) likely understand the situation here, and my employer [at another job – in the NGO sector] has treated me well – if it wasn't for this job, I would probably have left the country long ago. But even though the state increased salaries by ten percent initially, nothing truly changed...This financial hardship compounds the violence because, whether I want to or not, I have to keep working this job against my will and endure the mistreatment.”*

*A woman from an urban area*

In addition, the transportation routes of transgender women during the day are mostly completed on foot, as the use of different types of transport creates some discomfort for them. Lesbian and bisexual women in Georgia are less concerned about the same problems, because, as they explain, the main thing here is that their appearance and clothing are less affected by their sexual orientation than transgender women.

The main challenges faced by LBT women stem from the moment their sexual orientation or gender identity becomes known to their families, society, and their broader environment. The mixed reactions they receive from others, including from other women, is the first source of stress, which they describe as a form of psychological violence. Following this, they face various manifestations of homophobia and discrimination from society. The respondents mentioned specific incidents where they were harassed or attacked, such as having stones thrown at them in public, being verbally insulted, and attempting physical abuse against them. The one positive note is that according to the respondents, the overall situation and the level of acceptance have improved gradually over the years, although this positive change is occurring at a very slow pace. Considering the negative feedback and discrimination they face from their surrounding environment and society, the LBT women believe their rights are not adequately protected by laws and institutions in Georgia. This lack of legal protections also negatively impacts their economic situation and opportunities.

Unlike heterosexual women, when discussing abuse and the challenges they face, LBT women tend to place more emphasis on the psychological and emotional abuse they experience. In this regard, they feel an acute sense of vulnerability first and foremost from their family members and parents. According to the respondents, in a socially conservative country like Georgia, where the older generation of parents tends to hold fairly traditional attitudes, simply revealing one's non-heterosexual orientation alone can lead to immense pressure and rejection from the family itself. In addition to this psychological strain from their families, the respondents also reported incidents of sexual harassment, which they experienced not only from society at large but also from their relatives. Due to the risk of such mistreatment, including from their own families, LGBTQ youth will often try to conceal their identity and only share information about their sexual orientation in extremely trusted and safe spaces.

The respondents consider that the situation for LBT women is relatively better in urban areas compared to rural areas. There are more job opportunities in cities, and acceptance from family members may be more likely than in smaller peripheral towns and villages. However, even living in an urban settlement, LBT women may still face several obstacles. For example, lesbian and bisexual women mentioned hiding their orientation at some jobs because they fear discrimination. For transgender women, there is a risk of not being accepted for employment due to their appearance and gender identity. The circle of friends with whom LBT women can share information about their sexual orientation is also very selective and limited. It becomes a matter of evaluating whether family and friends will sufficiently accept this aspect of their identity or not. Ultimately, this can lead to great economic hardship, as women often end up homeless and estranged from their families after declaring their orientation. One respondent stated that because she could not receive an inheritance from her family due to her sexual orientation, she has been renting housing for about 15 years. They have to work extremely hard to support themselves financially when cut off from familial resources and acceptance.

LBT women believe that the state doesn't want to support them. This perception arises from the conservative views prevailing in society, where they are

sometimes seen as a tool for the State to negotiate necessary compromises among diverse groups of people.

*“The State is failing to protect our vulnerable group. Over half of the women engaged in sex work, whether voluntarily or through threats and blackmail, are acting as informants for the Ministry of Internal Affairs. I was fortunate to avoid that fate. I worked hard to maintain my autonomy and avoid becoming an agent. Yet the State continues to sanction abuse from above. It has no interest in empowering us to become less vulnerable and dependent – even though our predicaments often stem from exploitative individuals manipulating desperation over sums as small as fifty GEL in exchange for sex acts, which they then use for their benefit. The women themselves are deprived of skills and resources that could offer alternatives.”*

*A woman from an urban area*

As for the non-governmental sector, the respondents name “Equality Movement”, “Women’s Initiatives Supporting Group” (WISG), and “Tbilisi Pride” as the main service providers. It is through these organisations that they get information about various protective laws, and despite the shortcomings, they still look for many positive sides.

According to the research, the current situation with LBT women in terms of access to banking services, and information about women’s economic empowerment programs is similar to the situation discussed in the previous chapter.

### **REPRESENTATIVES OF ETHNIC MINORITIES (AZERBAIJANI AND ARMENIAN WOMEN) IN GEORGIA**

Women from ethnic minorities, while sharing their unique experiences, have consistently emphasised that they face the same problems as other women living in Georgia, but on top of that, some barriers make their lives more difficult. In terms of access to education, they say, a lot has changed in recent years, and now more and more girls from the Azerbaijani and Armenian ethnic groups are attending university. In addition, they are involved in various projects and receive informal education. According to them, it is relatively easy for women to live in villages where the population is of their ethnic origin. In such a society, there are still widespread opinions that a woman should stay at home, or if she wants to work, she should choose something suitable for her, for example, teaching. This indicates that society should still actively influence women’s decisions.

*“There are those societal barriers, ingrained public opinions, which even my mother has internalised. I tell her that I don’t like it when she echoes those attitudes. She should not think that way – but she worries “What will others think?” My response is – why should I care what others think?!”*

*A woman from a rural area*

However, psychological violence is not the only form of violence among ethnic minority women, as in other groups. When talking, they point to economic vio-



lence and say that a large number of women in their community are completely financially dependent on their husbands, which then results in additional psychological pressure. To cope with this, women go to work on the land in the summer, when men are more likely to go abroad to emigrate. Later, this may lead to jealousy on the part of the man and result in violence. Respondents recall cases when men physically assaulted their fellow villagers due to unfounded jealousy. In such cases, the chances of contacting the police are low, because according to the women, their relatives work in this job as well, and often women do not want to solve the problem in this way. In addition, women who do not know the Georgian language cannot be physically informed about the laws protecting them.

In the case of ethnic minorities, it is also problematic that sometimes women have nowhere to go after violence, because there are families that give priority to boys when distributing inheritance, and women are less likely to find homes in such cases. Nevertheless, there is a positive trend that fewer and fewer people think this way. Representatives of ethnic minorities rarely, but in private and important cases, started legal disputes over property disputes. The fact that they do not have initial capital often becomes a barrier for women to get a loan from the bank for the development of their farm or any venture.

*“It is a very big problem traditionally, it comes from centuries that what is the property of the parents, will remain with the boys and that is very bad, I am very much against it. It’s a gender thing...”*

*A woman from a rural area*

Regarding women’s economic empowerment programs, it can be said that such programs are also available for representatives of ethnic minorities, although respondents say that often only those who have already embraced and adapted to the system benefit from it.

*“There are several active women who are involved in the projects. A maximum of ten women and the rest don’t even know what organisations are. When I am involved, they only know that these are training, that I go to training, and so on. Besides, if a woman works, then she goes home, there are household chores, and there is no time for her to do anything”*

*A woman from a rural area*

According to the respondents, women’s opinions are neglected in the community inhabited by ethnic minorities. When there is a change to be made, women’s opinions are less important and women’s voices are less heard.

Underpinning these issues are traditional gender norms dictating a woman’s place in the home. Respondent notes *“There are families with us who say that a woman’s place is in the kitchen”*, and shares stories of being discouraged from pursuing higher education by relatives commenting *“It’s time for the wedding”*. Such attitudes curb women’s ambitions and limit their economic agency.

In conclusion, research participants identified several priority areas – expanded access to information on legal rights, increased funding for skills training and

business opportunities for women, more domestic violence support, and initiatives to promote gender-equitable cultural change. Progress on these fronts can start to shift the gender dynamics contributing to minority women's marginalisation. But transforming the status quo will require a concerted effort across all levels of society.

All this is added to the issue of early marriage, which has recently become particularly acute in the Azerbaijani community. Regarding this, the respondents say that this has nothing to do with their traditions and the problem lies in the enforcement of the law.

### **UKRAINIAN WOMEN REFUGEES NAVIGATING LIFE IN GEORGIA**

The interviews with Ukrainian women displaced in Georgia provide insight into the challenges refugee women face while rebuilding their lives in exile. Escaping conflict with limited resources, many endure economic hardship and dependence on aid organisations. Several women reported facing GBV with little recourse for protection. As one respondent explained, the police are unable to help, and shelters cannot often assist. Cultural stigma and a lack of interpretation services create additional barriers.

*“The police cannot help, and the woman in this situation is trying to escape as soon as possible...Women are sometimes dependent; they cannot work and have to endure it [GBV].”*

*A woman from a rural area*

Meanwhile, the loss of livelihoods in Ukraine has forced women into improvised work. Respondents mentioned, *“They lost their jobs, learned how to do manicures and hair, just to make some money”*. However, precarity persists, with aid only temporarily preventing destitution.

Looking ahead, decent work opportunities appear scarce, especially considering language barriers. The respondent argues that economic security lies in remote work or acquiring specialised skills, but recognises that many lack the resources needed. Frustrations abound over unmet needs and the gap between policy aims and reality. As the war continues to devastate Ukraine, tangible support and long-term solutions remain crucial for displaced women to build stability in Georgia. However, the state and the humanitarian system appear overwhelmed by mounting demands and gaps in care.

The interview with one of the Ukrainian women, a displaced Ukrainian woman caring for two children, reveals the layered challenges refugee mothers face while rebuilding their lives in exile. Many grapple with economic precarity, discrimination based on gender and nationality, and a lack of childcare support.

The respondent describes the desperation of women fleeing war zones without livelihoods or assets. As she says, *“Some people have nothing left – all their lands are occupied. Others may have some property, but they are afraid it will also be taken – so they flee”*. While some access humanitarian assistance, it is time-bound, forcing difficult decisions about work and family care.

Seeking employment also brings barriers, from language gaps to prejudice. They argue that local mindsets undermine Ukrainian women's economic confidence and autonomy.

Many women in Ukraine had stable jobs, businesses, homes, and savings, which they suddenly lost access to when the war erupted, forcing them to escape the violence. One woman interviewed shared that non-governmental organisations helped them by providing information about job vacancies and how to access them.

Arriving in Georgia, most found themselves having to start over financially, searching for any work just to scrape by without networks, professional contacts, or sufficient language skills. Some noted the uncertainty of investing in a business or future in Georgia out of fear that they could be displaced again if the situation in Ukraine worsened.

To cope with such economic hurdles, many Ukrainian women refugees have turned to organisations in Georgia for assistance. One woman said, *"Yes, I think the Georgian state/government offers assistance, or there are lots of Ukrainian organisations that help Ukrainians, and they guide us or tell us where to go and ask for help"*. Some have gained crucial monetary aid, job contacts and placements, and general help navigating bureaucracy and life in Georgia thanks to Ukrainian diaspora groups and local NGOs.

On top of financial uncertainty, some women also face ongoing instability regarding housing if their homes are in occupied territories. As one interviewee lamented, it remains unclear when, if ever, they can reclaim their property.

However, Ukrainian women refugees reported few issues accessing essential services like banking and loans in Georgia, especially for those with Georgian citizenship. As one woman stated, access and language barriers dealing with banks have not been difficult. Thus, while economic and housing stability remains fraught, Ukrainian women refugees can at least establish critical financial services in Georgia as they work to rebuild their lives.

In conclusion, the narratives of Ukrainian displaced women in Georgia highlight the intricate challenges they face in rebuilding their lives, encompassing economic precarity, gender-based discrimination, and a persistent struggle for stability. As these women navigate the complexities of exile, tangible support, and long-term solutions are essential to empower them in their journey towards resilience and economic independence.

# EXPERT OPINIONS

As mentioned at the beginning, the respondents participating in the phase of expert interviews have different professional experiences. The similarity between them is that each of them has worked in the direction of the intersection of their activities with the theme of women's rights.

For example, according to an **economic** expert participating in the study, psychological violence is the most common form of violence in Georgian society. Only after that comes economic and other types of violence. However, physical violence seems to be the most easily identifiable among them. From a professional point of view, the expert sees the manifestation of economic violence in different ways. According to him, to see this, it is enough to look at the indicators of economic participation and see that in terms of economic activity, women's data is significantly lower than men's.

*“Initially, it may seem like a woman's personal choice, a decision she made on her own. But what is behind this choice? Here, I think, is the basis of economic violence. Often, it involves a dynamic where a partner suggests that the woman doesn't need to work, emphasising their higher salary and proposing that she focuses on taking care of the children and managing family responsibilities.”*

*Expert in Economics*

Also, the expert considers the behaviour of a man in the family as a form of economic violence, for example, he abuses his immigrant wife to force her to give him her money. Or, let's say they have a family farm, the man brings the product to the market and then the man receives the money. Ultimately, the woman is deprived of any share and does not have access to money. This problem is more visible among ethnic minorities, which is not linked to their tradition at all. Often, men representing ethnic minorities explain their control over financial resources by traditional roles, however, women interviewed within the framework of the study believe that this argument has no connection with reality.

Considering the expert's background in assessing economic empowerment programs, his insights were intriguing. The evaluation of economic empowerment programs for internally displaced persons (IDPs) revealed that when a man, typically perceived as the family breadwinner or a skilled artisan, experienced increased income within the program, it did not alter societal perceptions of him. However, when a woman earned more money through the program, women noted a positive change in their status among neighbors and family.

*“They say my husband now helps me with things at home. In our family, I'm the main earner, and my husband shares childcare, housework, and our business responsibilities. This change happened through a program I was part of. I called those people in the program and found they improved financially and socially. The program helps people in need, like a tailor needing a sewing machine or refugees wanting to go to college,*

*without needing startup money. Despite these positive changes, there are still challenges to address“*

*Expert in Economics*

Regarding assets, according to the expert’s analysis, when a couple owns common property, the husband is still more likely to be the sole decision-maker in disposing of those assets, even if the asset is registered in the woman’s name. This can sometimes hinder women’s participation in economic empowerment programs. According to the expert, there is an indirect link between the rate of violence against women and participation in such programs. In particular, he said that women who participate in economic empowerment programs may be less vulnerable to violence later on. This suggests a connection between women’s economic empowerment/autonomy and their reduced vulnerability to violence. In other words, the economic empowerment of women means they are less likely to experience violence.

The respondent says that the issue of economic independence for women is complex in Georgia, with cultural norms and traditions often limiting women’s financial autonomy. As the economic expert explained:

*“It is common that when a husband and wife separate, the wife does not ask for or has difficulty obtaining property rights – even when the property was purchased by her during the marriage.”*

*Expert in Economics*

A major barrier to women attaining economic independence is a lack of control over and access to assets like property. As the expert highlighted, *“The fact that she does not ask is because she knows she cannot ask...it has been transferred under her mother, father, etc.”* Cultural traditions around inheritance also disadvantage women:

*“When we discussed inheritance in focus groups, they mainly said if I had two houses, I would happily distribute them to my children. But that one house I have, how to divide it”*

*Expert in Economics*

While laws exist in theory to protect against economic abuse, there are issues enforcing them in practice. The expert noted that *“We have the concept of economic violence in the law but very few cases of economic violence are recorded...Usually, it is categorised as physical violence”*. Reasons cited include victims not recognising economic abuse, lengthy court processes, and institutions lacking sensitivity and capability to identify and address this specific issue.

The expert believed capability was improving in addressing physical violence against women after years of training and legal reforms. However, society may now be ready to tackle economic abuse: *“I think the time has also come for us to work in this direction”*.

When discussing hiring discrimination and the gender wage gap, the expert shared how a prior study tried getting company pay data but faced resistance:

*“Companies didn’t want to report it...We created a non-disclosure agreement but in reality that violates the purpose of the study”*. With limited transparency and disclosure around salaries, discrimination is difficult to conclusively prove.

However, experts in economics believe discrimination likely exists, especially when considering pay gaps for similar roles and qualifications. Reasons were thought to include women taking on more domestic responsibilities, husbands restricting work travel, and women being less likely to negotiate pay raises compared to men. Tackling these specific issues around work-life balance, expectations of women, and confidence was seen as important.

The expert highlighted regulations in Switzerland, France, and elsewhere requiring pay gap reporting for large companies to encourage addressing imbalances – *“Just publicity leads companies to think about why there are such differences”*.

When examining potential clashes between women’s economic independence and traditional gender expectations, religion’s role also arose: *“In principle, religion does not positively view those women who have a passion for career advancement here”*.

Overall, while progress has been made on legislation and violence against women, addressing economic barriers and providing equal access and opportunities around assets, jobs, and salaries was emphasised as an ongoing need by the expert. Specific recommendations centered on enforcement and reporting mechanisms for economic abuse, along with transparency and mandatory company pay gap disclosures.

An expert working in **academia** shared insightful perspectives on women’s issues and gender violence based on her work empowering female students and her personal experiences.

On women’s economic independence, the expert emphasised its importance in preventing abuse: *“I think that a woman needs her own business, from which she will receive income. That is, she should not depend on anyone”*. She shared an example from her own family, where her mother gained employment and income significantly increased her confidence and independence.

On the most common form of gender violence, the expert sees psychological abuse as widespread: *“Psychological violence is the most difficult and widespread form of violence”*. She traces its roots to childhood experiences and upbringing.

Within academia itself, the expert has observed problematic attitudes among staff: *“The head of the faculty said that the primary duty of a woman is to create a family”*. She suggests training is needed on these issues.

Overall, the expert believes academia can play a pivotal role through public advocacy and leading by example in gender equality: *“They are opinion leaders in a way... [they] can contribute to the removal of this violence and gender inequality through different campaigns...”*.

The **law** expert delves into the intricate web of violence and suppression faced by women, emphasising the insidious nature of psychological abuse, which often goes unrecognised by the victims themselves. This form of violence, she argues, stems from deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and traditions that perpetuate the unequal treatment of women, considering them as less than equal. The societal perception of women as submissive and modest further reinforces this power imbalance.

While acknowledging that all women face risks of gender-based violence, the expert sheds light on the compounding factors that exacerbate these risks. Vulnerabilities such as poverty, rural residence, ethnic minority status, and lack of education amplify the challenges faced by women. The stark contrast in access to resources and freedom between men and women becomes more pronounced, creating a lopsided power dynamic.

In terms of seeking help, the expert points to available services like legal aid, state protection agencies, and non-governmental organisations that aim to assist victims of violence. However, she highlights the persistent challenges in the regional availability of lawyers, the time-consuming and traumatic nature of legal processes, and the lack of sensitivity among law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges in handling cases of violence.

The law expert identifies legislative gaps, particularly around the definition of rape, as a major obstacle to effective legal recourse. Resistance from various quarters, including the government and religious groups, is attributed to Georgia's deeply rooted patriarchal culture. Discriminatory inheritance practices further contribute to the denial of women's rightful share.

In light of these challenges, the law expert advocates for systemic changes that extend beyond legal reforms to address the pervasive tolerance of gender inequality and violence against women. She underscores the importance of transforming social norms to create a more equitable and safe environment for women. Additionally, the expert emphasises the need for greater access to economic resources and independent housing, recognising these as crucial elements empowering women to escape abusive situations.

The expert from **academia** has been active in addressing educational and career development needs, aiming to *“understand the needs of individuals and create a supportive environment”*. Noting a strong emphasis on encouraging boys, the expert aspires to create *“a similar initiative specifically for girls, aiming to boost their confidence and motivation”*.

On economic independence, the expert states: *“I strongly believe in empowering women economically, as financial independence not only boosts self-confidence but also acts as a deterrent against controlling behaviors”*. Further, *“Economic strength allows women to set examples and support others”*.

Sharing a personal story, the expert encouraged her mother to work, emphasising *“the importance of personal fulfillment”*. Despite resistance, her mother has been working for years now. As the expert observes: *“Today, when she has her*

*income and thinks that if necessary she can live independently...she defends her positions much more”.*

The expert links economic strength to independence in abusive relationships:

*“Empowered women act as guiding lights, inspiring others and breaking the cycle of dependency. Women must have their sources of income, not only for personal fulfillment but also to challenge and reshape societal norms.”*

*Expert in Academics*

On common forms of gender violence, the expert states: *“Psychological abuse is pervasive and challenging to overcome. Abusers often resort to psychological tactics, damaging self-esteem and causing long-term harm. This form of violence is difficult to detect and combat”.*

Tracing the roots of such violence, the expert notes: *“The roots of psychological violence often lie in early experiences within families and societal influences. The environment in which individuals grow up significantly shapes their perceptions and behaviors”.*

The expert also noted instances of commentary on women’s appearance over intelligence, seeing this as *“psychological violence, where women are perceived primarily for their beauty rather than their intelligence or skills”.*

Overall, the expert calls for systemic change, stating that *“it’s evident”* academia needs *“rejuvenation and new perspectives”* to address urgent gender issues. The emphasis is on enforcing statutes, raising awareness of violence, and fostering an environment where speaking up is not difficult.

Finally, a **local government representative and expert in policy planning**, who is acutely aware of the crucial role that addressing women’s issues plays in the development and implementation of effective policies. Their responsibility extends beyond mere acknowledgment; it encompasses a commitment to creating policies that genuinely empower and protect women in their community.

The diversity of the local community demands an inclusive approach. By actively considering and integrating women’s perspectives into the policies, they encourage an environment that is not only equitable but also reflects the true needs and aspirations of all citizens. Gender-sensitive policy planning is not an option but a necessity, ensuring that the diverse needs of the population are met.

The local municipality representative believes that the local government has a pivotal role in setting an example for the broader society. They need to support programs that help women gain equal rights and be included in society. Whether it is in employment, education, healthcare, or safety, they need policies that break down barriers and create opportunities for every woman to thrive.

Moreover, the local government representative is committed to fostering an



environment where women feel heard and represented. Beyond mere lip service, she actively advocates for mechanisms that involve women in decision-making processes. This includes creating platforms for open dialogue, consultations, and feedback loops that empower women to shape the policies that directly impact their lives.

In essence, their approach to political planning revolves around ensuring that women's issues are not an afterthought but a core consideration. By prioritising gender sensitivity in their policies, the local government contributes to building a more just, inclusive, and progressive society for everyone.

# OPINIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

## TBILISI FGD

**The girls from Tbilisi FGD** (girl participant's group) provided a mixed assessment. Some initially believed in a youth *"bubble"* of equality but had views changed by workplace experiences, stating *"This man was a pig, he treated women like that"*. Another prevailing bias is that *"It is perceived that women are the weaker sex"*. However, others say *"I have not felt anything of this kind around me"*.

All agree financial ability enables women to leave abusive relationships, with one arguing: *"If a woman is economically strong, she can divorce the abuser"*. However, some point out psychological abuse may still occur, due to *"emotional weakness"*.

Ethnic minority women face compounded barriers, with one giving the example that *"gender violence affects ethnic Azerbaijani girls very much, they even limit their education"*. Another argues any woman can be victimised but economic issues make injury/frequency worse for some. After the war, Ukrainian refugees are also seen as vulnerable to harassment.

In conclusion, while girls acknowledge progress among Georgian youth in some ways, gender biases persist in society and economic barriers combined with stereotypes significantly obstruct the full empowerment of women. More change is still needed for true gender equality.

**The young men** (from the young men participant's FGD) provide a nuanced perspective on Georgia's state of gender equality. However, cultural biases produce lagging real-world implementation, with one pointing out: *"It seems that we face a challenge where the legislation is well-defined on paper, but its effective implementation falls short of expectations. The gap between what is outlined in the laws and the actual execution needs to be addressed for the intended impact to be realised"*. Ethnic minority groups appear especially prone to gender inequality, with one singling out that: *"In most ethnic minorities and especially in the Azerbaijani community, the role of women is less"*.

On connections between economic independence and domestic violence, the boys largely endorse financial ability providing more freedom, though not fully preventing psychological abuse. As one argues, *"The more financially independent you are...the more opportunities you have, but this does not necessarily mean that there will be no domestic violence"*. Another adds that greater courage to leave overtly *"radical"* cases of violence is afforded by financial independence.

When presented with the idea that women's economic rise threatens traditional families, the boys push back on this concept. One states bluntly *"It is not in*

*any way, it does not create a problem*". However, they observe prevailing social attitudes that see decision-making as a "man's privilege" within familial power dynamics.

In discussing obstacles to economic empowerment for Georgian women, employers' biases are raised as an issue. As one boy puts it, *"It's concerning that some employers may avoid hiring pregnant women due to concerns about maternity leave"*. More broadly, the country's economic struggles impact opportunities regardless of gender.

On especially vulnerable groups, the boys quickly point to ethnic minority women facing cultural restrictions on rights. Additionally, they note how Ukrainian refugees in Georgia encounter uncertainties around employment and risks of harassment.

**In mixed-gender groups**, views are somewhat mixed on Georgia's gender equality progress. One girl sees advancement but problems persisting, while a boy argues that *"It cannot be said that it has increased or decreased"* and misuse of quotas risks deepening divides. Another boy observes residual bias that *"a woman cannot work in the same position as a man"*.

On financial independence and GBV, participants largely agree economic empowerment reduces vulnerability, with a boy pointing out *"The provision has a very correct wording"* that it decreases but does not fully prevent abuse risks. However, one boy counters that total insulation is impossible, and *"If a woman is financially independent, she feels less pressure"*.

The group resoundingly disagrees that women's economic rise threatens traditional families, with a boy arguing *"I really cannot agree with this statement"* and another asking *"What is a traditional family structure?"* However, one participant notes that if such a structure is defined as a breadwinner man, *"There is a danger at some level"*.

When discussing why women do not report violence, a boy relays knowing victims who refrained for the sake of their children's reputations. Another observes *"It is stressful not only from the experience that some pressure has been put on a woman, but she also has to deal with society"*.

On whether violence is a private or social issue, one girl argues *"Both are private and social. Therefore, I cannot agree...and say that this issue exists both from a private and social point of view"*. A boy adds *"If it is seen by a second or third party who may be passively involved, it gives them the responsibility to respond"*.

Regarding divorce and property rights, a girl notes that by law distribution should be equal in registered marriages, but publicity deters some women. A boy observes that without enforcement, *"These women can often become victims of violence and leave them as that"*.

So in summary, the mixed Tbilisi group sees progress but persisting gaps in gender equality, with economic biases and social perceptions slowing

empowerment. While the risk of violence may be reduced by financial independence, social pressures and stigma disempower victims. Enforcement and attitude change are needed.

#### **RUSTAVI FGD**

On financial independence and GBV, the members from the **female participant's group** strongly agree economic ability enables leaving abusive situations, with one noting *"I heard very often from my parents or older women that they generally cannot come from their families in case of violence if they are not financially independent"*. Another adds that an income means women can meet basic needs and reduce vulnerability.

When asked if women's empowerment threatens traditional families, views are mixed. One argues *"This is not a Georgian tradition at all"* while another observes *"In a traditional family, is it still meant to be a man's work?"* However, the role of grandparents influencing dependence on men is raised.

On barriers to financial independence, the loss of careers during long, unpaid maternity leaves is cited, with one girl pointing out *"If maternity leave was well paid and financially stable, there would not be huge setbacks for a woman after each child is born"*. Another notes older women leaving jobs to raise grandchildren due to a lack of paternal leave support.

More broadly, traditional norms are seen as obstacles, with one girl stating: *"Many times, based on what I observe in both family members and clients, women aren't usually asked about their aspirations. I've seen friends who had to quit their jobs simply because they chose to start a family"*.

In summary, girls from Rustavi cite persistent biases in some views of traditional roles but mainly focus on systematic policy and economic barriers like inadequate maternity leave that hinder Georgian women from fully participating in the workforce after having children. Legal progress is noted but stigmas and poverty impose difficulties leaving abusive situations.

On financial independence and GBV, the **young men from the male participant's group** largely agree it reduces but does not fully prevent abuse risks, with one stating *"The majority is like that, if a woman is financially independent, the risk of violence is less"*.

When asked if women's economic empowerment threatens traditional families, views are again mixed. One argues *"If both are independent, on the contrary, it will strengthen the family"* while another observes both men and women delaying families now to establish themselves, though 70% of female classmates already have children.

On stigma and reporting violence, one boy notes *"Women often try not to document the violence against them, so that others do not think that they are violating established norms"*. However, stigma impacts both genders. Another discusses tolerance for some forms of violence, stating *"There are higher authorities to whom both women and men can approach"*.

Regarding divorce and property division, the boys note that informal marriages and lack of legal knowledge are obstacles, with one stating *“They have neither the ambition nor the head to start a dispute”* over assets. However, some observe women occasionally exploiting divisions unfairly.

In summary, the young men from Rustavi discuss, that while agreement exists around financial independence empowering women, traditional outlooks persist that wives should handle domestic duties. Both legal and cultural progress is needed to enable leaving abusive situations.

**The mixed-gender focus group** consisted of both women and men, mostly young adults, including students and working professionals. When discussing gender equality in Georgia, participants agreed progress has been made, especially among the younger generation, though inequality persists, particularly in rural areas. As one woman said, *“In our generation, gender equality is more or less protected, both at work and in the family”*. A man echoed that *“People of my generation are less likely to be against gender equality”*.

On whether economic independence reduces GBV, a woman noted *“It is often difficult for women victims of violence to take a step, leave the family”* when financially dependent. A man agreed *“It is true, but in some ways, I think it’s individual”*. There was also disagreement that economic empowerment threatens family structures, with a woman arguing *“I don’t think that [working] will prevent [managing families]”*.

Participants affirmed that stigma around reporting GBV remains an issue. According to one woman, *“Many girls have probably had a case of stalking, harassment...but it is often difficult...to tell my friends”*. A man acknowledged though *“The shyness and fear of women to voice similar problems has lost its massive character”*.

Regarding the role of government, one woman critiqued that *“I don’t see a step forward from them. If I hear anything about violence, I hear it from NGOs, they speak up”*. However, a man noted the government’s public information campaign about resources for violence victims. Overall, participants agreed progress has been achieved, but gaps persist in gender equality, especially outside urban centers. Quotas and legal protections haven’t fully addressed deeply ingrained societal attitudes.

#### **BATUMI FGD**

**The female participant’s focus group** consisted of students and young professionals from Batumi. Regarding the current state of gender equality in Georgia and specifically Adjara, the participants noted that while improvements have been made over the years, inequality persists. As one woman said, *“If I compare Batumi with Tbilisi, there is a difference, traditions have a bigger role here”*. Several participants pointed to deeply ingrained societal norms that favour men as family heads and primary breadwinners. One participant summed it up by stating, *“Unfortunately, anything still tips the scales in favour of men”*.

When presented with the statement that women with financial independence

experience less domestic violence, the participants unanimously agreed. As one woman recounted, *“I have often heard that women cannot leave their families because they have nowhere to go, because of this they have to endure domestic violence”*. They disagreed, however, with the notion that women’s economic empowerment threatens traditional family structures.

The participants spoke positively of microfinance programs aimed at economically empowering women, providing several examples of women in mountain villages successfully starting small businesses through such initiatives. However, one participant noted that sometimes the same women receive multiple loans, making it harder for new women to access funds.

Regarding domestic violence laws, the participants acknowledged they exist to provide equal inheritance rights and protect women in divorce. However, social norms often prevent their application, as women refrain from pursuing their legal rights to avoid family conflicts. As one woman explained, *“People often believe that when a woman gets married, she will leave, while the man, staying with his parents, will take care of them, and the property will remain in his possession”*. Another noted that even when the property is legally divided equally, *“The men always sell property, women are careful”*.

When asked which groups of women are most vulnerable to GBV, the participants cited minority ethnic and religious communities in which traditional patriarchal attitudes prevail. However, one disagreed that violence manifests differently across communities – *“If you are a woman, the same forms of oppression and discrimination apply”*.

As for Ukrainian women refugees in Georgia, participants speculated they likely face economic instability and integration difficulties. However, their experiences may differ from Georgian women regarding social support networks and societal attitudes towards refugees. In the conversation of the focus group participants, the pity they have for Ukrainian refugees is obvious, although information about public attitudes towards them is unknown – *“I can personally say that I feel sorry for these people, because there is a war in their country, and I don’t know the public’s attitude, there was no strong opinion, neither social spread on the network, and I haven’t heard that there was anything about Ukrainian women”*. For some, their situation is relatively clearer. Such people believe that women who moved from Ukraine to Georgia because of the war work online abroad, and the attitudes of society towards them are non-violent and, on the contrary, supportive – *“I know a few individuals who came after the war, and as far as I know, they do not face any problems. Some of them work online from abroad and don’t need local employment. They don’t experience violence on the streets, and they feel support from the country and its people. I haven’t heard anything negative from them”*. The focus group participants believe that the main obstacle these women have is the language barrier – *“The only thing I saw was the language barrier. Young people who aspire to pursue higher education face challenges due to the absence of Russian language colleges or universities. Even English-language colleges cannot physically commence classes. As time is running out for them, they are contemplating changing their place of residence, perhaps to Canada or Germany. Learning Georgian and mastering a profession*

*no longer seems viable for them*". Based on this reasoning, it can be said that the views regarding the situation of Ukrainian refugee women are mixed.

**The young men participant's group** consisted of young men working in fields like youth programs, business, and civil society. Regarding gender equality in Georgia, the participants acknowledged progress but agreed more substantial changes are still needed, especially in women's political participation and tackling ingrained societal attitudes. As one man stated, *"Big steps are being taken in this regard, it is not resolved by meetings alone"*.

When presented with the statistic that financially independent women experience less domestic violence, the men unanimously agreed. They cited factors like increased options to leave an abuser and not rely on unsupportive families. One participant added that financial independence also protects from other forms of abuse, not only physical violence.

On the topic of women's empowerment threatening traditional family roles, the participants rejected this notion. One stated empowerment would strengthen families, while another said it challenges outdated assumptions about household responsibilities. A third advocated for *"Both of them to take responsibility"* in modern couples.

Regarding vulnerable groups, the participants named disabled women, sex workers, women journalists, and politicians who face amplified discrimination and violence due to their circumstances and work. One man recounted the frequent public harassment of female reporters and politicians. However, some men noted financial instability and emotional dependence as factors that can lead to abuse of women across communities.

On support programs for Ukrainian women refugees, the participants focused on differences in social attitudes rather than women's individual experiences. As one explained, *"Speaking of education, some girls get married early and because they don't have a higher education, they work in the service sector, it's hard to break these ties"*.

**The mixed-gender focus group** consisted of university students and young professionals of both genders. On the topic of gender equality, the participants acknowledged progress but agreed inequality persists in salaries, career opportunities, societal attitudes, and violence against women. As one woman recounted, *"I grew up with the idea that everyone is equal, and then I faced a lot of problems in everyday life"*.

The participants unanimously agreed that financial independence empowers women to leave abusive situations. However, they rejected the notion that women's empowerment threatens families. As one man stated, *"Even if it does, it is not a problem"*.

Several women highlighted the role of societal norms and lack of awareness in perpetuating inequality. One explained, *"They don't know what they belong to. That's why I think that the problem is still there and women should learn, they*

*don't know what they can afford [As they do not know their rights]*". Participants cited early marriage, restricted access to education, and property rights as barriers preventing women's economic independence.

On reasons women refrain from reporting violence, participants focused heavily on victim-blaming attitudes and lack of legal and social support. One woman noted, *"If they say that the information will reach the relatives, they will spread such information that they do not want"*. A man added, *"The environment is arranged in such a way that it is against this woman"*.

Regarding vulnerable groups, participants named ethnic and religious minorities, LGBTQ individuals, and women in rural areas as the most marginalised and targeted with violence.

On government efforts to promote equality, opinions diverged. Some were unaware of major policies, while others cited progressive measures by local municipalities. As one woman said, *"The opinion of women was taken into account in budgeting, and real benefits came to the village"*.

From discussions with girls, boys, and mixed-gender groups, it's clear that significant gender inequality and discriminatory societal attitudes are still deeply rooted in Georgia, despite some progress. There is a consensus across groups that financial independence empowers women to escape abusive situations. Yet, strict norms about gender roles, insufficient legal protections and support services, and a tendency to blame victims persist, placing women, particularly those in marginalised groups like ethnic/religious minorities, LGBTQ individuals, disabled women, and those in rural areas, in subordinate positions and exposing them to violence. While awareness of women's rights has grown through progressive government and local initiatives, substantial additional social, legal, and economic reforms are still required to transform harmful gender dynamics, ensure equal opportunities for women to participate in society, and eliminate tolerance for GBV in Georgia.

#### **KUTAISI FGD**

The **all-female focus group** consisted of university students and professionals in their 20s. On the topic of gender equality, the participants stated that while more women work in Georgia today, inequality persists in salaries, leadership roles, and societal attitudes that pressure women to be successful both at work and in family life. As one woman explained, *"Men are preferred in leading positions and therefore they are paid more than women"*. The women noted higher rates of GBV in Kutaisi compared to other cities.

The participants unanimously agreed that financial independence empowers women to leave abusive relationships. As one said, *"Many women, then and now, are so sorry that they have a husband as a breadwinner"*. Another added, *"The abuser commits violence when he thinks that the woman is weaker"*. However, some women recounted personal experiences of not recognising psychological abuse despite being financially stable.

On reasons for not reporting violence, the participants focused heavily on



victim-blaming attitudes and fear of condemnation. One woman stated, *“Even on the relatives, it turns out that the woman is guilty”*. Another explained, *“In Kutaisi, the influence of what someone says prevails more than in Tbilisi”*.

Barriers that hinder women’s economic independence range from childcare duties, short maternity leaves, and sexual harassment in the workplace to societal stigma against working women. One woman shared, *“Some people tell you why you can’t propose. After working so hard, you also want a partner who is mentally and financially strong”*.

The discussion did not address the experiences of Ukrainian women refugees or vulnerable groups prone to violence. It centered on personal anecdotes and broader trends in Kutaisi specifically relating to inequality in the workplace and relationships.

The **all-male focus group** consisted of university students in their early 20s. Regarding the state of gender equality in Georgia, the participants acknowledged some recent improvements in legislation and women’s participation. However, they agreed inequality and discriminatory attitudes persist, especially outside major cities. As one man stated, *“Overall, the gender balance is not particularly positive, we have a problem in the private and public sector as well”*.

The men unanimously concurred that financial independence empowers women to leave abusive relationships. However, they noted it does not fully protect against violence and highlighted the role of unsupportive families as an additional barrier. As one explained, *“If you are financially independent, you will go. And if not, you have to stay, unfortunately”*.

On reasons for not reporting violence, the participants focused on victim-blaming attitudes in society. One man said, *“The society’s approach is that the man did not rape for nothing, and there are always question marks about the woman”*. Another gave the example of a woman being returned by her parents after divorce due to neighbours’ disapproval.

The discussion touched on failures in law enforcement, citing the Basilashvili case (Court acquits tennis player Nikoloz Basilashvili – The famous athlete’s ex-wife accused him of various forms of abuse (JAMnews 2022)). One man critiqued, *“The state should prioritise this topic”*. The participants agreed on the need for more stringent policies and enforcement around GBV.

Regarding inheritance rights, the men stated that while laws formally provide equal rights, violations still occur in practice. One explained that families sometimes deliberately conceal property from daughters.

The **mixed-gender focus group**, which consisted of both girls and boys and included a civil society activist and a university student, were all in their early 20s. Regarding gender equality, the participants agreed discriminatory attitudes persist in Georgia, though changes are happening slowly. As one woman explained, *“It is normalised that men are superior and we are taught that it should be so”*.

The participants concurred financial independence empowers women to leave abusive relationships. However, one woman recounted still facing psychological abuse despite being financially stable, noting, *“I was a victim of psychological abuse and I grew up from it”*. Another man argued that immigrant women remain vulnerable to abuse because of economic dependence on partners.

On women’s empowerment threatening families, a woman critiqued the notion as stemming from the belief that *“If women become economically empowered... they will no longer believe in the minimum based on which families were formed”*. Participants also unanimously agreed financial autonomy is important for women to gain awareness, options, and confidence.

While acknowledging equal inheritance rights for women in law, a participant argued, *“The mentality is that they never demand it, but if they demand it, they are crazy”*. The group cited cases of police refusing to intervene in domestic violence due to privacy norms. Regarding the state’s role, a woman critiqued the government’s inaction, especially around child marriage in ethnic minority villages.

The discussion did not address the experiences of Ukrainian women refugees. It focused largely on societal attitudes, legal policies, and personal anecdotes around financial independence, violence reporting, and gender roles.

### **CONCLUSION OF FGDs**

On the current state of gender equality in Georgia, views diverge both within and across cities. Some girls from Tbilisi initially believed in equality but had that challenged by workplace biases against women. However, another states *“I have not felt anything of this kind around me”*. The male group from Tbilisi observes progress legally but lags in cultural change, especially in ethnic minority communities. In Kutaisi, girls note increasing numbers of female employees but enduring pay and leadership gaps favouring men. The girls from Batumi highlight persistent societal attitudes that *“Anything still tips the scales in favour of men”*.

There is a consensus across cities that financial independence empowers women to leave abusive relationships. A girl from Tbilisi argues *“If a woman is economically strong, she can divorce the abuser”*. A female participant from Kutaisi also states that dependence leaves wives *“Sorry that they have a husband as a breadwinner”*. However, some note psychological abuse may still occur regardless of income.

Most groups across the cities reject the notion that women’s economic rise threatens traditional families. A young man from Tbilisi counters *“It does not create a problem”*. Some girls from Batumi observe that notions of “tradition” often wrongly restrict women’s rights.

Regarding barriers to financial independence, girls from Tbilisi cite hiring biases and expectations to juggle careers with domestic duties. The girls from Rustavi highlight inadequate maternity leave policies resulting in women leaving careers after having kids. Girls from Kutaisi also note sexual harassment and stigma against ambitious women.

On violence reporting, young men from Rustavi discuss the stigma of violating gender norms. The participants from Batumi observed a lack of social support and legal accountability.

In general, Tbilisi mixed groups hold nuanced perspectives on progress made versus persistent biases. Rustavi and Batumi participants also have diverging views on modern versus traditional outlooks. Across cities, the complete empowerment of Georgian women is limited by economic barriers and societal perceptions.

The views of Georgian youth on gender equality and women's empowerment paint a picture of a society in transition. While legislative reforms and expanding opportunities have brought progress, deeply ingrained attitudes continue to reinforce traditional gender hierarchies and norms.

The discussions reveal a generation straddling modernity and tradition, pragmatism and prejudice. On the one hand, many young Georgians endorse the idea that financial independence empowers women to escape abusive situations. They recognise how economic barriers often trap women in cycles of violence when family support structures fail. There is also a strong rejection of notions that women pursuing professional careers somehow threatens family cohesion. An embrace of modern coupledoms where both partners pursue interests beyond the home comes through.

Yet regressive mentalities dictating "a woman's place" also emerge. Participants highlight numerous systemic obstacles, from pay discrimination to sexual harassment to unfair childcare burdens that continue hindering Georgian women's workforce participation and advancement compared to men. Entrenched social stigmas blaming and silencing victims of domestic violence similarly disempower abused women from seeking help. The discussions reveal how GBV remains an extensive but under-reported issue.

Attitudes towards marginalised groups come across as a mix of tolerance and paternalism. Minorities like ethnic Azerbaijanis and religious communities are consistently named as facing amplified discrimination and vulnerability to violence. There is strong sympathy expressed for Ukrainian women refugees displaced by conflict, seen as needing care and charity. But also uncertainty around the societal reception of foreigners.

Faith in the government's commitment to gender equality is polarised. Some laud local initiatives to integrate women's input into policies. Others see major gaps in the implementation and enforcement of protections around violence response, property rights, and more. Yet cutting across the debates is a sense that progress, while real, remains fragile and incomplete in Georgian society. Traditional outlooks have far from disappeared, especially outside urban spaces. Women continue carrying dual expectations to fulfill professional aspirations and family duties seen as their destiny.

The discussions ultimately reinforce that the full promise of empowerment and security from harm remains unrealised for many Georgian women. How

gender dynamics evolve in the country will depend significantly on the pace of changing mentalities. While eliminating discrimination and violence requires top-down legal efforts, transformations in social perceptions and narrow understandings of womanhood must also happen. The views of today's youth provide hope, yet serve notice that generational change alone does not guarantee more equal treatment tomorrow. Sustained political commitment and cultural shifts are crucial to dismantling lingering biases and barriers undermining women's rights.

# KEY FINDINGS

The analysis and interviews conducted in this study show the deeply ingrained gender inequality and normalised violence against women in Georgia. Studies conducted in different years reveal disturbing indicators of violence against women. However, these figures likely underestimate the true prevalence due to underreporting driven by cultural taboos, victim-blaming attitudes, and societal acceptance of violence as a form of “discipline”. This problem is particularly acute among rural women, minorities, and refugees, who face additional risks and barriers to seeking help.

A crucial finding of this research is the identification of significant economic barriers severely hindering women’s independence. Desk research showed that less than half of women participate in the workforce compared to over 60% of men, with unpaid domestic duties, short maternity leaves, hiring discrimination, workplace harassment, and substantial gender pay gaps acting as major deterrents for women.

Financial reliance emerges as a key factor enabling abusive situations, as over a third of victims return to partners out of necessity. Most lack personal income or control over household assets, which are predominantly controlled by men despite technically equal property laws.

Regressive attitudes persist, especially in rural areas and among ethnic minorities, reinforcing the perception of women as family caregivers and hindering professional advancement. Surveys reveal victim-blaming rationalisations further perpetuate a culture of impunity, treating harassment and assault as provoked or avoidable. While there is a gradual shift towards more progressive views among younger groups, the pace of change remains slow.

In summary, this study exposes glaring gaps in social, economic, and legislative realms that contribute to the perpetuation of inequality, limit agency over life choices, and normalise violence against Georgian women. Despite recent reforms, urgent and comprehensive efforts are needed to transform cultural attitudes, expand protections and services for survivors, address women’s economic disempowerment, and enforce policies without discrimination. The road to substantive change requires a holistic approach that goes beyond legal amendments, challenging and reshaping the deep-rooted societal norms that sustain GBV and inequality.

# CONCLUSION

This comprehensive research illuminates the persistent inequality and distressingly common violence experienced by women across Georgia, despite recent legal reforms. A pivotal revelation from this investigation is the identification of significant economic constraints that severely limit women's financial autonomy and self-determination. The results indicate that the connection between violence against women and women's economic independence is direct and quite clear to the respondents. In particular, the data obtained within the framework of the research confirm that there is a close relationship between violence against women and women's economic independence, with violence against women hurting women's economic independence, while women's economic independence significantly reduces the risk of violence against them.

The data underscores formidable (social and other kinds of) barriers impeding women's economic participation at levels comparable to men's. Discriminatory hiring practices, prevalent sexual harassment, penalties associated with motherhood, pay disparities, and the unequal burden of unpaid domestic duties converge to severely curtail professional opportunities and earning potential. The concentration of decision-making authority and household resources in men's hands leaves many women vulnerable to coercion, reduced negotiating leverage, and diminished ability to escape toxic situations.

For those women who do secure employment, financial gains are often relinquished to husbands who wield control over household finances and assets. Limited financial literacy and pathways to establish independent incomes, credit, or savings further hinder progress. Opportunities for career advancement are stifled by societal attitudes that prioritise women's caregiving roles over their professional identities.

In essence, discriminatory social norms, inequitable access to high-quality jobs and earnings, disproportionate domestic obligations, and negligible control over finances or assets collectively obstruct women's economic participation and autonomy. This, in turn, fosters environments where GBV can persist relatively unchecked.

Addressing these systemic challenges requires comprehensive solutions that target root socio-cultural and economic forces. These forces perpetuate systemic marginalisation. Initiatives such as expanding professional skills training, providing affordable childcare access, enhancing financial literacy, enforcing labour laws, and implementing income generation programmes can fortify women's economic security – a crucial factor in escaping abuse. Simultaneously, public awareness and education initiatives focusing on healthy relationships, equal status, and female empowerment should complement economic interventions.

Georgia is presented with an urgent cross-sector opportunity to disrupt cycles of violence against women by implementing holistic empowerment strategies

that secure financial self-sufficiency and transform regressive gender perspectives. Recognising the intrinsic link between women's safety, autonomy, and economic freedom, solutions must be interconnected, fostering profound shifts that rewrite the rules that allow systematic violations to persist. The time for action is now, as we endeavor to create lasting change.

While the research presented here has effectively revealed insights based on the opinions of the respondents, there are still aspects that could not be thoroughly evaluated in alignment with the research objectives, necessitating further study. For instance, there is a need to analyse whether current economic policies in Georgia exacerbate existing inequalities and contribute to the feminisation of poverty. Based on the information in this report, there are several areas for new research to further study the topic:

1. A quantitative study on the relationship between economic independence and experiences of gender-based violence among women in Georgia. This would utilise representative survey methods to investigate the various forms of GBV faced by Georgian women as well as women refugees/migrants, and assess whether greater economic resources serve as a protective or risk factor.
2. A comparative analysis of inheritance rights and discrimination in access to loans/credit between Georgian women and ethnic minority/migrant women in Georgia. This quantitative study can identify gaps in financial inclusion policies and determine if discriminatory practices exist.

All of this will significantly contribute to the production of knowledge around the issue and will increase the visibility of issues related to violence against women in Georgia.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The research demonstrates the dire need for multi-dimensional efforts to address the deeply ingrained gender inequality and normalised violence against women in Georgia. While legislative reforms indicate progress, substantial systemic barriers endure economically, socially, and culturally that perpetuate abuse, limit women's agency and autonomy, and deny fundamental rights. Comprehensive solutions encompassing economic empowerment, attitudinal change, expanded services, and policy transformations are imperative.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

- ☀ Promote Women's Economic Empowerment
  - Offer skills training, career guidance, business incubators, and networking for women to improve employability, earning potential, and workforce participation.
  - Advocate for state-subsidised childcare and flexible work arrangements to support working mothers.
  - Start resilience funds providing small grants or loans to help women launch home-based enterprises. Develop savings groups and financial literacy programs.
  - Lobby for gender-sensitive budgeting, pay transparency, equal wages, extended parental leave, and implementing labour protections.
  
- ☀ Prevent and respond to GBV
  - Run awareness campaigns targeting men and cultural gatekeepers to promote positive masculinities, healthy relationships, and gender-equitable norms.
  - Expand crisis hotlines and support groups. Provide emergency legal assistance. Offer vocational rehabilitation for survivors.
  - Train informal community watch groups on GBV response. Engage religious and civil leaders on prevention.
  - Advocate strengthening GBV legislation, police training, judicial capacities, municipal coordination, and budget allocations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT, DONORS, PRIVATE SECTOR, MEDIA

- ☀ Government, Municipalities
  - Increase investments in childcare infrastructure, women's health-care, financial inclusion programs, and SMEs supporting women entrepreneurs.
  - Implement gender-responsive budgeting. Enforce pay gap transparency and hiring regulations. Expand paid parental leave.
  - Bolster GBV response capacities across health, justice, and social welfare systems through resourcing emergency shelters/services and building practitioner skills.



- Incorporate community organisations into municipal GBV prevention and response coordination networks.

#### ☀ International Donors, UN Agencies

- Prioritise funding women-focused programs on economic participation, skill-building, rights awareness, protection services, and cultural change.
- Support campaigns engaging men and community influencers promoting gender-equitable social norms and healthier masculinities.
- Invest in large-scale youth programs encouraging equal relationships and respect. Incorporate messaging into education curricula.

#### ☀ Private Sector

- Voluntarily adopt pay equity and gender-sensitive employment policies like on-site childcare, flexible arrangements, and domestic violence leave.
- Contribute to women entrepreneur networks and funds. Implement gender-aware value chains empowering female producers and workers.

#### ☀ Media

- Expand nuanced coverage of women's rights issues through in-depth, solutions-oriented reporting and community dialogues.
- Lead awareness campaigns on gender roles, healthy relationships, and constructive masculinities. Foster national debates on tackling barriers facing women.

The interventions proposed focus on mutually reinforcing women's economic empowerment and protection from violence through coordinated prevention and response efforts. Achieving gender equality demands urgent, dedicated actions across all sectors to address root systemic drivers of marginalisation. Georgia faces a pivotal opportunity to safeguard fundamental human rights and freedoms for its women.

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