



SUPPORT SERVICES FOR WOMEN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS: ACCESSIBILITY AND BARRIERS

Brot
für die Welt

Introduction

Domestic violence against women affects the well-being and safety of not only the survivors and their family members but also the broader community. The availability of effective support services is crucial for empowering survivors and promoting their stability and well-being.

This document assesses the accessibility of support services for survivors of domestic violence and explores public attitudes toward their effectiveness. It analyzes whom women affected by violence turn to for support, which services are prioritized when choices are available, and what factors hinder access to assistance and adequate support. Additionally, it reflects women’s perspectives on whether Georgia’s current social and political climate may pose challenges to non-governmental organizations in delivering comprehensive support services to the community.

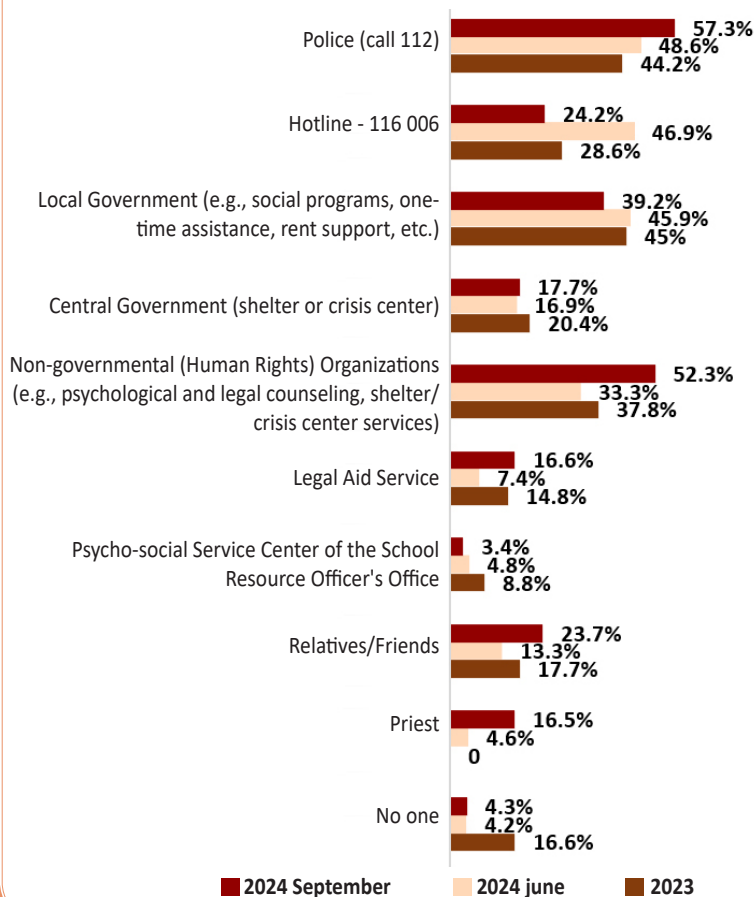
The analysis is based on data from qualitative research conducted by the Women’s Fund “Sukhumi” between May and September 2024 and quantitative research from September to October 2024. This research assessed the views of both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries on existing support services for survivors of domestic violence and examined the effectiveness of these services. The study encompassed 11 target municipalities: Chokhatauri, Kobuleti, Tskaltubo, Kutaisi, Khoni, Terjola, Samtredia, Senaki, Zugdidi, Tsalenjikha, and Khobi. Using qualitative methods (interviews and focus groups), 52 respondents were engaged, including both service providers and recipients. Additionally, the quantitative research surveyed 553 women from a broad cross-section of the community.

Findings

- **Quantitative Data** – Quantitative research data indicates that women affected by violence most frequently seek support from the police (57.3%), non-governmental organizations (52.3%), and local authorities (39.2%). This highlights the trust in, awareness of, and accessibility of these services among affected women;
- **Qualitative Insights** – Qualitative research reveals that women affected by violence view various entities—including the police, city halls, social services, and non-governmental organizations—as crucial resources for support. Feedback from interviewed women underscores that these services often play a decisive role in their survival and improvement in life quality. Women note that police intervention was critical for their safety, while services provided by city halls and non-governmental organizations offered them essential psychological and social support.

Diagram №1

In cases of domestic violence, whom or which support service would you refer to or seek help from for protection?

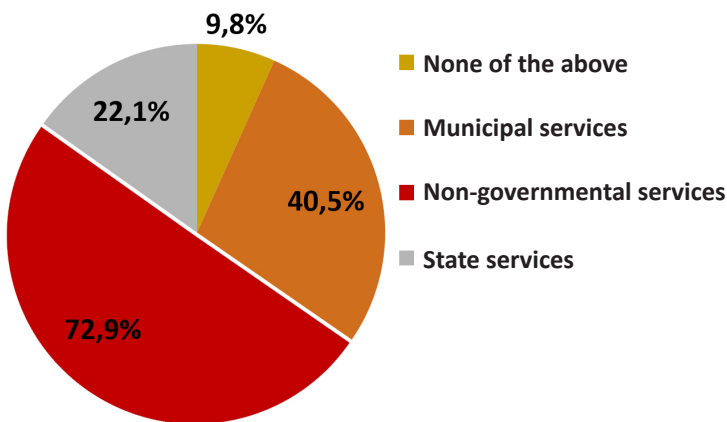


I had interactions with multiple agencies, such as the police, the Mayor's Office, the Women's Fund 'Sukhumi,' and the Social Services Agency. Each provided me with highly professional services. The police saved me multiple times; without them, I wouldn't be alive today. The Mayor's Office in Senaki was also my lifeline—their support was vital and essential for improving the lives of my children and me. The Women's Fund 'Sukhumi' has been my true savior—the psychological counseling, the smartphone I was granted, the sewing courses I attended, and the time I spent in the rehabilitation center have all been crucial to me.” - Kh.K., beneficiary of the Women's Fund 'Sukhumi' rehabilitation center, Senaki

I didn't reach out to anyone; I thought family conflicts weren't anyone else's business, and I didn't even know who could help me. I only sought help because I was strongly advised to contact the Women's Fund "Sukhumi," and I am grateful for that- it was a good decision.” - N.T., beneficiary of the Women's Fund 'Sukhumi' rehabilitation center.

Diagram №2

In general, if given a choice, which support service for survivors of violence would you choose or refer to?



Note: Multiple responses were allowed for the question. Therefore, the provided data reflects the number of cases rather than the number of respondents.

“They don't even hide the fact that these funds remain unspent... they themselves create barriers. I suggested, for example, that they support beneficiaries of the crisis center, but the response I received was that, in that case, anyone could request assistance, and they wouldn't be able to manage. Then I proposed limiting assistance to those who come with a restraining order, but they replied that if a large number of beneficiaries reached out, they wouldn't be able to handle it. It was strange – on one hand, they sought advice from me, yet, on the other, they blocked every suggestion.” - Respondent from Kutaisi Municipality

▪ **Comparison with Previous Studies** – A comparison of 2023 and 2024 (June) data indicates an increase in referrals to police and non-governmental organizations, likely due to greater trust and increased awareness of their services. Conversely, a decrease has been observed in the use of local government services and hotlines, which may reflect a preference for faster, more reliable, and timely responses offered by other services;

▪ **High Trust in Non-Governmental Organizations** – Quantitative data shows that 72.9% of respondents prefer the services of non-governmental organizations (see diagram #2), primarily due to the speed and simplicity of service delivery, as well as the ability to respond quickly to the specific needs of women affected by violence.

Findings - Barriers

The results of the research highlight the structural barriers that hinder access to services, including:

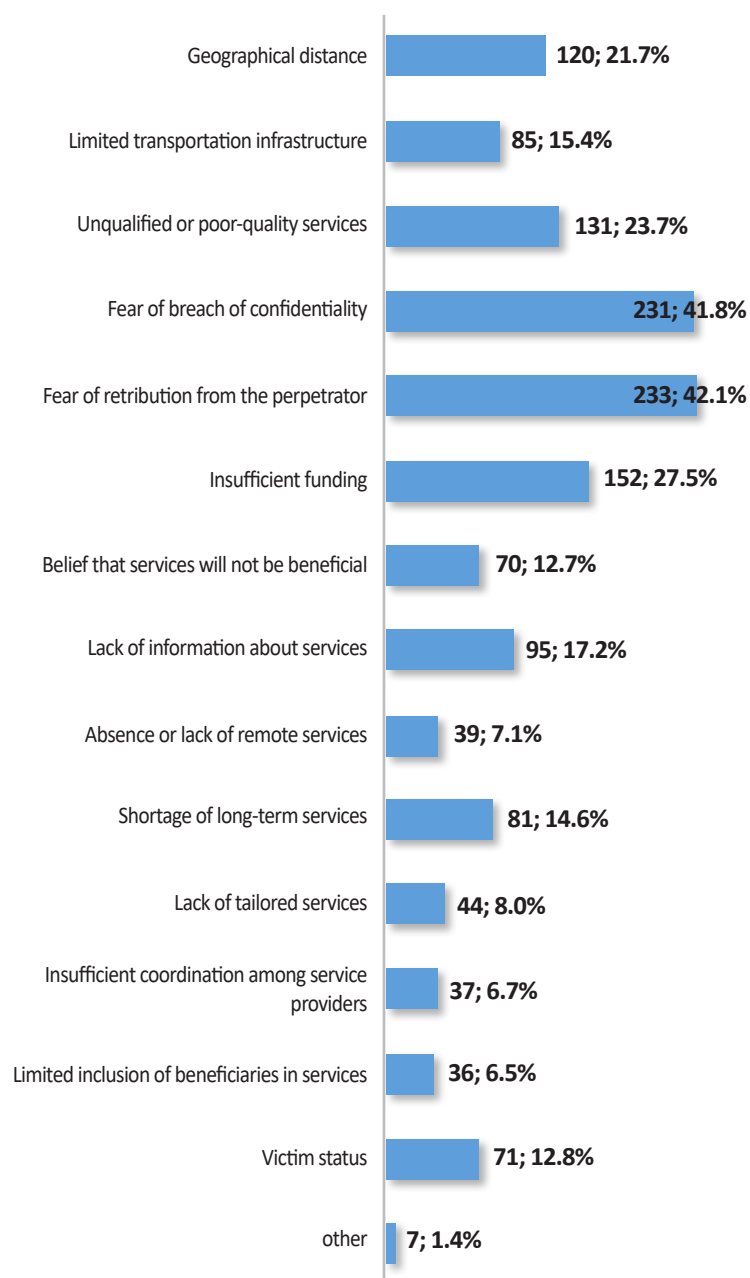
- **Demand for services exceeds supply:** This occurs due to the increase in the number of beneficiaries and the scarcity of resources. As a result, some individuals are left without services or offered low-quality assistance (e.g., two families living in one room in a shelter). It is paradoxical that, despite increased awareness among women and active efforts to boost service utilization, demand remains unmet;
- **Restrictive prerequisites for access to services:** Women domestic violence survivors face barriers to accessing services if they have not used shelter services (as observed in the practice of Kutaisi Municipality) or have not reported to the police;
- **Registration issue:** Beneficiaries are unable to access services in the municipality where they temporarily reside after escaping a violent environment because they lack registration in that location.

Findings - Barriers

- Participants in the quantitative study who responded "none" to the question, "If given a choice, which service would you select or refer to?" (see diagram #2), cited two main reasons: **stigma and fear of societal judgment** (25%), and the **fear of public disclosure regarding their "problem"** (16.5%). This indicates that women are avoid negative reactions and judgment from society;
- Additionally, women highlight key factors that they believe generally impede access to services. These include **the fear of retaliation from the abuser** (42.1% of cases) and **concerns over breaches of confidentiality** (41.8% of cases) - see diagram #3, which are also supported by findings from the qualitative research;
- Geographical distance to services** poses a significant obstacle in 21.7% of cases, while **transportation** availability is cited in 15.4% of cases, and associated costs are mentioned as substantial barriers in 27.5% of cases (see diagram #3);
- The concept of "victim status"** as a misperceived prerequisite for accessing services is noteworthy. Despite the legislative changes effective July 1, 2023, which state that "victim status" is no longer a requirement for service access, a lack of information and the absence of clear criteria still restricts access for women in certain municipalities. According to quantitative data, **in nearly 13% of cases, respondents identified "victim status" as a barrier to receiving services;**
- Problems related to the protection** of confidentiality and insensitivity in state services significantly diminish the willingness of beneficiaries to utilize these services, as highlighted by qualitative research. It becomes evident that women often decline services due to unpleasant questioning and breaches of confidentiality.

Diagram №3

Barriers to Accessing Support Services for Victims of Violence Against Women / Domestic Violence



"Confidentiality still cannot be effectively controlled – a letter passes through five different agencies before it reaches the intended recipient. I've had several cases where a beneficiary sought support from the Mayor's Office for a mental health program, but they were asked such intrusive questions that they lost all desire to participate. I send them to a state agency that is supposed to uphold the law, only for the beneficiary to return to me feeling humiliated... this is an issue of incompetence. They should know that beneficiaries like these may not feel comfortable disclosing their situation publicly. A significant barrier is created between the beneficiary, the law, and the service provider." (GCRT)

Findings - Barriers

- **Lack of Readiness Among Women:** Many women affected by violence are not prepared to embark on a new life, such as attending training courses, pursuing a new profession, or seeking psychological or legal consultations. This finding underscores the need for more engagement with psychologists and other relevant specialists to enable these women to utilize services and receive support despite their challenges;
- **Discontinuation of Legal Proceedings Due to Procedural Difficulties:** Women involved in legal processes often abandon their cases due to the complexities and procedural hurdles at each stage, which serve as additional barriers to their progress;
- **Lack of Multi-sectoral and Coordinated Approaches:** The qualitative study indicates that weaknesses in multi-sectoral cooperation and coordination among agencies significantly reduce the timely and effective delivery of services, hindering the integrated and comprehensive support that women domestic violence survivors require;
- **Stereotypes and Traditional Approaches:** The traditional perception of domestic violence as a private and familial issue remains deeply rooted, obstructing appropriate responses. For instance, mayor's representatives in villages or local social services, often fail to respond adequately, despite being informed about instances of violence. Women, fearing stigma and societal condemnation, refrain from seeking help, which further exacerbates their situation and complicates the support process.

According to quantitative research results, **65% of respondents believe that the functioning of non-governmental organizations is at risk**, which is alarming given that 79.2% of women respondents prefer and place greater trust in civil society organizations.



The "Foreign Influence Transparency" law and the ongoing negative campaign against non-governmental organizations, which attempts to label them as "agents," create a hostile environment that may pose a barrier to both public cooperation with the civil sector and the operations of these organizations.

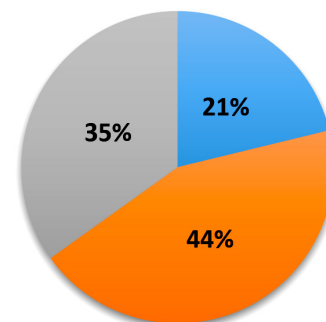
It is essential for NGOs to have the freedom and safety to function independently so that they can continue to fill gaps left by the state, particularly by providing services to women domestic violence survivors and other vulnerable groups that the state is unable to support adequately.

Recommendations

- **Implementation of Simplified Access Criteria for Services** – Remove bureaucratic and artificial barriers, including the requirement to use shelter services, to have local registration, and "victim status" as prerequisites for service provision, to ensure that service delivery aligns with Georgian legislation and the Istanbul Convention;
- **Strengthening Coordination Among Referral Mechanism Actors** – Ensure continuous and timely cooperation between agencies for effective support of women affected by violence;
- **Increasing Geographical Accessibility and Reducing Transportation Barriers** – Expand the availability of services in regions and improve transportation infrastructure, particularly in rural areas; subsidizing public transport costs is also recommended;
- **Challenging Stereotypes and Stigma** – Implement campaigns to increase support for women affected by violence and to challenge existing stereotypes and stigmatization.

Diagram №4

Does the current situation in Georgia hinder the future functioning of non-governmental organizations and their ability to provide support and assistance to the population?



- The current situation is a hindrance for all non-governmental organizations.
- The current situation is a hindrance for some non-governmental organizations.
- The current situation is not a hindrance to the functioning of non-governmental organizations and their ability to provide support and assistance to the population.