



EXTENT OF WOMEN'S AWARENESS OF SUPPORT SERVICES FOR SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Introduction

This brief report represents a segment of the monitoring conducted by the Women's Fund "Sukhumi," which is focused on assessing the level of women's awareness regarding support services for women survivors of violence. The report highlights the changes observed over time in women's awareness, which directly impacts the accessibility and quality of support services available to women survivors.

The findings indicate a slight improvement in women's awareness levels compared to 2023. While 12% of women in 2023 had never heard of support services, this figure decreased to 5% by September 2024. Despite this progress, significant challenges remain, necessitating systematic efforts to raise awareness. Particularly critical is the implementation of a long-term strategic approach aimed at enhancing knowledge about support services and overcoming gender stereotypes.

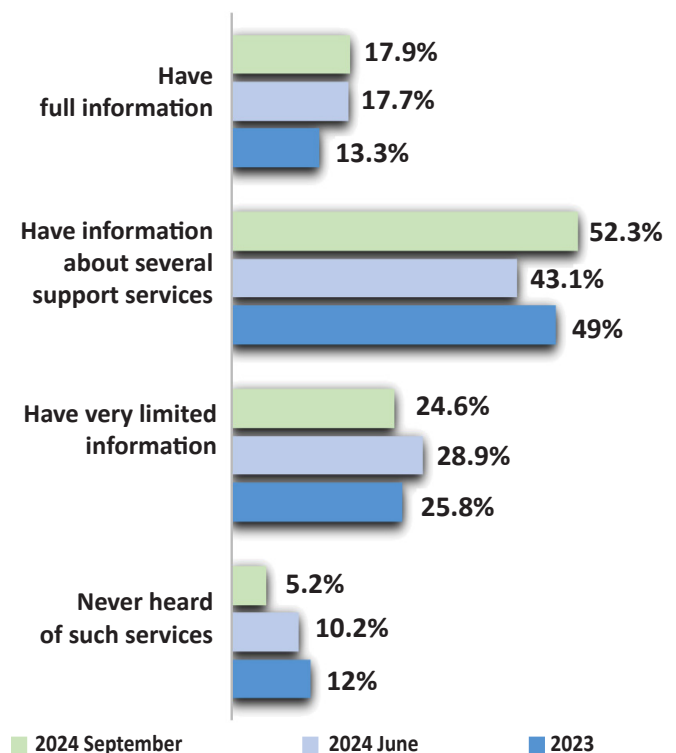
This brief is based on qualitative and quantitative research conducted by the Women's Fund "Sukhumi" between May and October 2024. The study covered 11 target municipalities: Chokhatauri, Kobuleti, Tskaltubo, Kutaisi, Khoni, Terjola, Samtredia, Senaki, Zugdidi, Tsalenjikha, and Khobi. Using qualitative methods (interviews and focus groups), 52 respondents were surveyed, including both service providers and beneficiaries. Additionally, the quantitative research surveyed 553 women.

Findings

- Quantitative research data indicates that, similar to the trends observed in 2023-2024, 52.3% of women survivors of violence have information about only a few available support services. While awareness levels have shown a slight but steady increase, the proportion of women with detailed knowledge about support services rose from 13% in 2023 to 18% in 2024 (see Diagram #1);
- Compared to previous studies, the share of women who are entirely unaware of support services for survivors of violence has decreased significantly. As of September 2024, this figure stands at 5.2%, a notable decline from 10-12% recorded in surveys conducted in 2023 and the summer of 2024.

Diagram #1

Do You Have Information About Support Services for Survivors of Violence?



Findings

- Quantitative research data (Table #1) indicate that women's awareness is highest regarding four key services: **non-governmental organizations, municipal services, shelters/crisis centers, and police/112**. The **high recognition of NGOs** is attributed to their active information campaigns and direct communication with women survivors of violence, a finding supported by qualitative research;
- Awareness about municipal services** highlights their efforts to enhance information dissemination through community meetings and other channels. **NGOs play a significant role in facilitating communication between municipalities and local communities**, contributing to broader dissemination of information about available local services;
- The data reveal (see Diagram #2) that **NGOs (59.9%)** are the primary source of information about support services, reflecting their reliability and active engagement with the community. **Social networks (36.5%)** and **friends/acquaintances (26%)** demonstrate the increasing importance and impact of informal and digital communication, particularly where formal mechanisms are limited. **Information dissemination by local authorities through community meetings (31.8%)** reflects a positive trend and an expanding role, as confirmed by other research findings. However, this channel still requires strengthening to ensure local authorities can fully meet the information needs and expectations of the population.

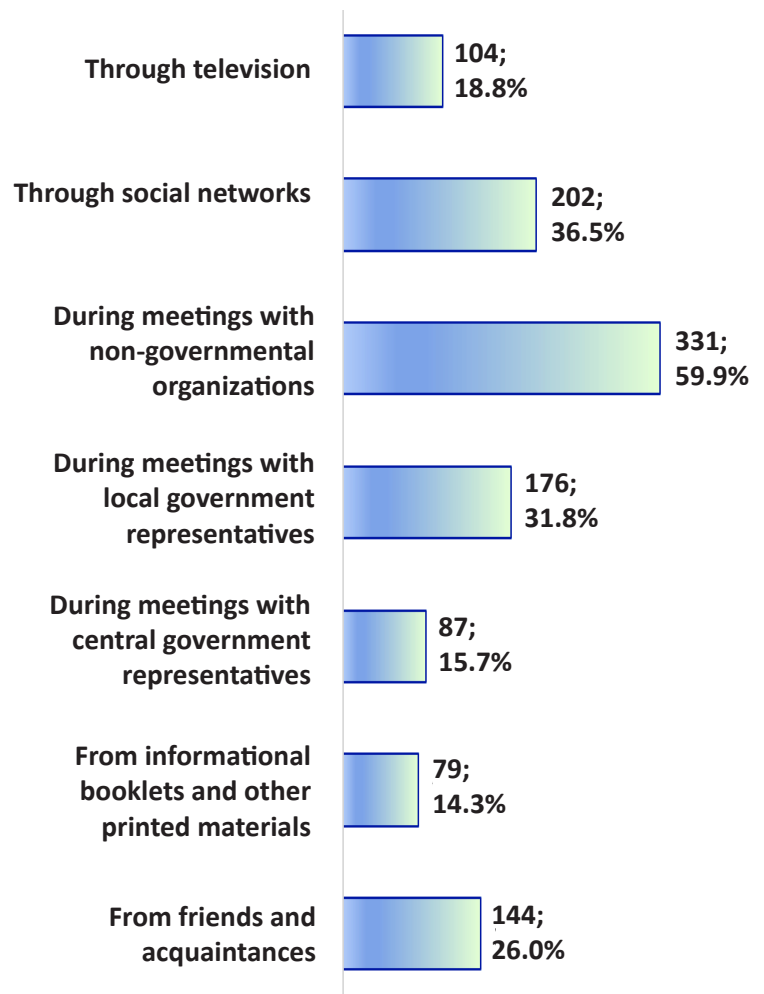
Which Support Service for Survivors of Violence Are You Most Familiar With? (Table #1)

1	Non-Governmental Organizations (including legal and psychological counseling)	125 cases
2	Municipal Services (including one-time assistance, social programs, mayor's office support, and housing rent subsidies)	101 cases
3	Shelters/Crisis Centers	86 cases
4	Police / 112	68 cases
5	Legal Services	41 cases
6	Hot line 116 006	11 cases

Note: These data were obtained from an open-ended question where respondents identified the support services they were familiar with.

Diagram #2

Where Do You Obtain Information About Support Services for Survivors of Violence?



▪ **The qualitative data** reveal that women survivors of violence have **insufficient knowledge about legally defined forms of violence, with particularly limited awareness of psychological and economic violence.** Some respondents admitted that **they had not recognized psychological violence as a legally acknowledged form of violence subject to legal protection.** One respondent recalled that 2–3 years ago, she believed that support services were available only to survivors of physical violence. Additionally, respondents highlighted a **lack of awareness regarding property rights, particularly in cases of divorce;**

▪ During interviews, **most women noted they were unaware that, as of July 1, 2023, the “victim status” was no longer a prerequisite for accessing support services.** This information was known only to a small portion of respondents, primarily through non-governmental organizations. The lack of information, combined with societal stigma, often discourages women from seeking support services, as they mistakenly believe that access is impossible without “victim status” or a “restraining order.” This finding underscores the significant impact of informational gaps on the accessibility and effectiveness of services. Women frequently avoid contacting the police due to fear of public stigma and the misconception that services cannot be accessed without official documentation. These findings highlight the urgent need to strengthen awareness-raising initiatives and improve information dissemination to enable women to fully exercise their rights and access the support they need.

“For me, violence was only physical contact. It was only after years of enduring psychological terror that I realized otherwise. Initially, I thought it was normal to obey the head of the household. I didn’t associate violence with being unable to make decisions on my own or spend the money I earned. Today, I understand that psychological violence can be just as damaging as physical violence.”
– A woman survivor of violence, Khobi municipality.

“Until a year ago, I knew nothing about my rights or the available programs. A few months ago, I attended a meeting organized by the Women’s Fund ‘Sukhumi,’ where I found the courage to share my story. They offered to take me to a rehabilitation center with my child, and I agreed because I was in a very difficult psychological state. There, I learned about my rights and the various assistance programs I could use. However, I didn’t have any documentation as a victim, no official status or restraining order, which is required to access support. Because of this, I didn’t pursue it further... I didn’t want my family’s issues to become public. It’s a small municipality where everyone knows each other, and I don’t want my son to grow up ashamed of his father or me to be seen as a mother running to the police.”
– D.M., 40 years old, Tsalenjikha municipality.

Recommendations

- **Systematic Improvement of Women’s Awareness Processes:** The systematic enhancement of women’s awareness should become a priority for central and local authorities, as well as all relevant stakeholders. Broad-based informational campaigns are essential to raise public awareness about the forms of violence, legal protection mechanisms (including recent legislative updates), and available support services. These campaigns must be coordinated, targeted, and tailored to meet the diverse needs of various population groups, ensuring accessibility and awareness nationwide;
- **Reduction of Gender Stereotypes and Stigma:** To combat social stigma and gender stereotypes, it is essential to implement educational programs and information campaigns that promote a culture of open discussions and dialogue on domestic violence against women within various communities (particularly in small towns and rural areas) and advance the integration of gender equality principles into everyday life.