

**WOMEN FROM RURAL AREAS ARE VULNERABLE TO  
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

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**Abstract.** *The article deals with the issues of social work with women living in rural areas who have experienced violence. It also highlights approaches to training of specialists who provide social services to this category of population.*

*It is established that the gender policy is based not only on international legal acts ratified by Ukraine, but also on national legislative acts regulating equality between men and women. One of the key areas of this policy is to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women from rural areas, including the realisation of their human rights.*

*At the same time, women living in rural areas are more vulnerable to gender-based violence than women living in cities. This necessitates the development of special social and psychological rehabilitation programmes for such women.*

*A social work specialist with the appropriate education and qualifications is involved in assessing needs, preparing contracts and individual plans for the provision of social services, organising their provision, and supporting vulnerable groups by providing them with the necessary support.*

*Based on the analysis of the content and focus of social work with women, the study of regional experience of social services and the disclosure of the peculiarities of training future social workers, recommendations were developed to improve the quality of social services for women who are victims of domestic violence: timely detection of the problem of domestic violence against women; intervene as needed through a multidisciplinary approach; correction and change of the situation; correction of negative conditions in women victims of violence: To correct the negative effects of violence, it is necessary to implement: Social work focused on establishing connections and supporting women; educational work aimed at teaching positive communication skills (conflict resolution, adequate expression of opinions), development of adequate thinking and attitude, decision-making, psychological protection, as well as raising the level of self-esteem of women; psychological support for guilt relief, emotional and physical relaxation.*

**Keywords:** *social work, women, gender, rural areas, training of social workers.*

**ЖІНКИ ІЗ СІЛЬСЬКОЇ МІСЦЕВОСТІ – УРАЗЛИВІ ДО ГЕНДЕРНОГО  
НАСИЛЬСТВА ГРУП**



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**Анотація.** Стаття присвячена аналізу соціальної роботи з жінками із сільської місцевості, які постраждали від насильства, а також розгляду підходів до підготовки фахівців соціальної сфери, що працюють із цією вразливою категорією населення. Визначено, що гендерна політика в Україні ґрунтується як на міжнародних правових актах, ратифікованих державою, так і на національному законодавстві, що забезпечує рівність прав і можливостей жінок і чоловіків. Особлива увага приділяється необхідності реалізації прав жінок із сільської місцевості, які є більш вразливими до гендерно зумовленого насильства порівняно з жінками, що мешкають у міських умовах.

На основі аналізу напрямів соціальної роботи, вивчення регіонального досвіду діяльності соціальних служб і розкриття особливостей підготовки майбутніх соціальних працівників до роботи з жінками, які постраждали від насильства, запропоновано практичні рекомендації щодо підвищення якості соціальних послуг для цієї категорії осіб.

**Ключові слова:** соціальна робота, жінки, гендер, сільська місцевість, підготовка соціальних працівників.

**Problem statement in a general form and its connection with important scientific and practical tasks.** The 62nd session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62), which is the leading global intergovernmental body dealing with gender equality and the empowerment of women, was held at the UN Headquarters in New York from 12 to 23 March. The main topic of the meeting was the challenges and prospects for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in rural areas [10].

The Commission was established by ECOSOC in 1946 to develop recommendations for the protection of women's rights in the political, economic, social and educational spheres. In addition, it monitors progress in the implementation of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the 23rd Special Session of the UN General Assembly in 2000. The Commission also promotes the implementation of gender policies within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which aims to accelerate the achievement of equality for women and girls.

The 62nd session, which took place on International Women's Day, was an important event for drawing attention to the rights of women in rural areas. It also provided a platform for

joint discussion of this issue by representatives of the UN, government, parliament, civil society and international organisations, which allowed the development of new measures to improve women's lives [10].

The current state policy is aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for women and men, and it takes into account international instruments ratified by Ukraine. These include such important acts as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966, the Charter of the United Nations of 1945, the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women of 1967, the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others of 1949, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 1979, the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 1950, the Beijing Declaration of 1995 and other international agreements.

**Analysis of recent research papers and publications.** Gender policy in Ukraine is not only based on these international norms, but is also regulated by national legislation that guarantees equality between women and men.

An analysis of research and strategic documents shows significant progress in the implementation of gender equality. Since independence, a number of important government decisions have been made that take this aspect into account. In particular, an action plan for the implementation of the National Human Rights Strategy until 2020 was approved, as well as a national action plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. The National Human Rights Strategy and its implementation plan have also been developed, the Poverty Reduction Strategy and its action plan have been approved, as well as the Concept of Public Administration Reform. The Ministry of Education and Science prepared a draft Strategy «Education: Gender Dimension 2020». In 2016, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved the National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which aims to increase women's participation in peacekeeping processes, provide assistance to victims of violence and rehabilitate them. In April 2017, the Government approved the Concept of the State Social Programme for Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men until 2021, developed by the Ministry of Social Policy.

These measures contribute to the consolidation of gender equality principles and the expansion of women's rights in various spheres of public life, increasing their social security and opportunities for self-realisation.

**Purpose.** The article focuses on the importance of ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women from rural areas, which is a key area of gender policy. Recognition and realisation of their human rights contributes to the achievement of gender equality and the Sustainable Development Goals.

**Presentation of the key points of the study with a full justification of the obtained scientific results.** Gender equality is an indispensable condition for sustainable development, as without the empowerment of women and girls, it is impossible to achieve fair and balanced social progress. One of the goals of the Sustainable Development Agenda is to ensure that women and girls in rural areas enjoy basic rights such as access to land and security of tenure, quality and adequate food, and the right to live free from violence, discrimination and harmful practices. It also recognises the need to ensure the highest possible standard of health, including reproductive rights, and to guarantee accessible and quality education throughout life [4].

Ukraine's ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has imposed an obligation on the state to take into account the specific difficulties faced by women in rural areas. Their role in ensuring the economic well-being of families and conducting economic activities, in particular in non-tradable sectors of the economy, requires appropriate support. Ukraine has assumed responsibility for implementing

measures aimed at ensuring the rights of women in rural areas in accordance with international standards [8].

In addition, the ratification of the 1996 Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements obliged Ukraine to focus on the integrated development of not only cities but also rural areas. The document emphasises that sustainable development must take into account the special needs of women, children and youth in safe and livable environments. The Declaration notes that urban and rural development are interconnected, and therefore it is necessary to create infrastructure, provide public services and expand employment opportunities in rural areas. This will help reduce urban migration and improve the quality of life in rural areas. The participation of all women and men, regardless of their place of residence, in the political and economic life of the country is also important [8].

Equal rights are also guaranteed by the Constitution of Ukraine, which in Article 24 of Section II, «Rights, Freedoms and Duties of Man and Citizen», proclaims the equality of all citizens before the law, excluding any privileges or restrictions based on gender, ethnic origin, place of residence or other factors. This establishes the legal basis for further implementation of effective gender policies and protection of women's rights in rural areas.

The Government of Ukraine-United Nations Partnership Framework 2018–2022 recognises that women in rural areas are often overlooked and excluded from development, recovery and humanitarian action. In this regard, the UN system has identified them as one of the key target groups for its initiatives. Using the complementarity of the mandates of different entities, the organisation is working to address the challenges faced by women in rural Ukraine.

The relevance of ensuring equal opportunities for rural women is explained by the fact that one third of Ukrainian women live in villages. Statistical studies indicate the significant difficulties they face: almost half do not have access to healthcare services, more than a third do not participate in decision-making in their communities, and two-thirds do not have access to the Internet. Women's wages in agriculture, fishing and forestry are 85,5 % of men's wages. A large proportion of women do not have access to drinking water at home, and only one fifth have a bank account. Internally displaced women living in rural areas face additional challenges: their employment rate is 17 per cent lower than that of women in large cities, and most of them are dependent on social assistance or pensions [10].

This data confirms that women and girls in rural areas are discriminated against in terms of access to healthcare, education, employment, social services and opportunities to influence decision-making processes. This is also confirmed by the results of the Comprehensive Study on the Situation of Women Living in Rural Areas (2015), conducted by UNDP in Ukraine in cooperation with the Secretariat of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights [8].

The study covers a wide range of issues, including women's contribution to rural development and the challenges they face. It analyses their participation in community development plans, access to healthcare and social security, formal and non-formal education, use of public services and advisory support, formation of cooperatives, engagement in collective activities, access to agricultural credit and marketing systems, and provision of adequate living conditions, including housing, sanitation, electricity and water.

The results of the study show that the situation of rural women is much worse than that of men in rural areas and urban residents in most of the areas considered. They are more likely to face poverty and social exclusion, which requires comprehensive approaches to supporting them and empowering them in society.

This issue requires special attention from social sector professionals, especially in the context of decentralisation. It is important to ensure that women from rural communities have access to social services, including identifying people in difficult life circumstances,

assessing the need for social assistance, organising the provision of necessary services, consulting and informing citizens about all types of social support, and accepting applications and documents for it.

International research confirms that respect for women's rights in rural areas and gender equality have a positive impact not only on the well-being of individual families and communities, but also on overall economic efficiency, given the significant share of women in Ukraine's agricultural sector.

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has recommended that Ukraine improve rural infrastructure and introduce measures to overcome poverty among women in rural areas. Particular emphasis is placed on access to justice, education, housing, formal employment, training and skills development opportunities, financial instruments, including microcredit, and the right to own and use land. Special attention should be paid to women affected by armed conflict [10].

In addition, the Committee recommended that women should not only be considered as recipients of assistance, but also as active participants in the formulation and implementation of relevant policies. In general, women in rural areas play a key role in improving community living conditions and strengthening the rural social environment.

However, it is in rural areas that women are more likely to experience gender-based violence. According to statistics, 17 % of married rural women have experienced physical or sexual violence by their partner, while among urban women this figure is 14 %. At the same time, 5 per cent of victims in rural areas do not report cases of domestic violence [10].

Ukraine has already started implementing various approaches to preventing domestic violence. These include preventive measures, training programmes, cooperation with law enforcement agencies, shelters for women victims, crisis centres, reintegration centres, mutual support groups and psychotherapy programmes.

The problem of violence against women is one of the key factors in such social phenomena as child homelessness, rising divorce rates, the formation of a culture of violence, begging, a decline in moral values, and an increase in crime.

To overcome the negative consequences of violence, it is necessary to include comprehensive social, educational and psychological work. Social support involves establishing sustainable relationships, while educational support involves developing effective communication skills, conflict resolution, self-esteem and psychological protection. Psychological assistance is aimed at relieving feelings of guilt, overcoming emotional stress and physical tension.

Let's take a closer look at the first area – social work, which is one of the key tools in addressing the current problems of Ukrainian women. Social work is carried out by regional social services, including services for children, families and youth. These institutions implement systematic and diverse measures aimed at facilitating the adaptation of women in need of assistance, promoting their socialisation, restoring their vital resources and ensuring a decent standard of living.

The main causes of family disadvantage are financial difficulties, alcohol abuse, unemployment, difficulties in raising children, health problems, intra-family conflicts and various forms of violence. In such families, the level of provision and upbringing of children often does not meet minimum social standards, which negatively affects their development.

In order to provide timely assistance to families in difficult life circumstances, social service workers should regularly visit such families, assess their needs and provide appropriate social services.

Parents, especially mothers, should be provided with ongoing information and awareness-raising activities on alcohol prevention, healthy lifestyles, domestic violence

prevention, responsible parenthood, compliance with sanitary and hygienic standards and effective use of state social assistance.

An important aspect is the training of future social workers, who must have a thorough knowledge of gender issues, women's social problems and ways to solve them. In order to assess the level of students' awareness in this area, a study was conducted at Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University among students majoring in social work.

The survey was conducted in the form of a questionnaire on the topic «What do I know about women's issues?» without any preliminary explanations. Thirty-five students took part in the study: 18 fourth-year students and 17 first-year students. Women predominated among the respondents, accounting for almost two-thirds of the respondents, which indicates their greater interest in this topic.

One of the proposed questionnaires – «Who is a woman for you?» – demonstrated differences in perception between boys and girls.

First-year male students described women through the prism of everyday roles they observe in real life (Bohdan K.: «Woman is a mother, a worker»). On the other hand, older male students more often used traditional gender stereotypes (Rustam D.: «Woman is the weaker sex», Mykola Zh.: «Woman is a fragile person of the female gender, gentle», Dmytro R.: «Woman is a family keeper, an important component of society»).

The girls, regardless of the course, described a woman through her life and social roles (Vladyslava E.: «A woman is the beginning of a new life», Victoria K.: «A woman is a lover, mother, daughter, sister, grandmother»). Fourth-year students approached the definition more philosophically (Valeriia V.: «A woman is an invitation to happiness!», Nataliia P.: «A woman is a source of love, care and beauty»).

The students expressed a variety of opinions on the problems faced by women. The first-year students focused on aspects such as unemployment, health, marriage, infertility, alcoholism and mental disorders. Fourth-year students demonstrated a broader view, noting issues of gender inequality, domestic violence, humiliation, underestimation of women's capabilities, stress, age-related changes, domestic difficulties, and even personal aspects such as PMS and weight (these topics were mentioned more often by boys).

The first-year students answered the question «Who helps to solve women's problems?» in a more general way: «husbands», «friends», «relatives», «close people», and occasionally mentioned psychologists. Fourth-year students demonstrated greater awareness of social support structures, mentioning centres for women in difficult situations, doctors, psychologists and local healthcare authorities. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the educational process in shaping professional knowledge.

The answers to the question about gender equality in Ukraine were interesting. About 80 % of students answered neutrally or indifferently («50 / 50», «it doesn't matter»), and 10 % were negative. This demonstrates the ambiguity of young people's perception of this issue.

The answers to the question «How would you personally implement gender equality?» were even more revealing. About 90 % of respondents admitted that they did not know how to implement it. Only a few fourth-year students gave conscious answers, such as Rostyslav: «I would start with myself. I would treat everyone equally and raise my children!», Artem: «I would give equal rights to both men and women».

Another important aspect of the study was the attitude of students towards convicted women, as social services are involved in their rehabilitation and prevention of repeat offences. Students' answers were distributed as follows: 7 people said they were indifferent or «don't care», 6 expressed a «normal» attitude, 5 – «negative», the rest answered conditionally, for example: «Depends on the crime» or «Depends on the situation».

When analysing the answers to the question «Should women serve their sentences in the

same way as men?», significant gender differences were found. Young men expressed a categorical position – 95 % answered «yes», while only 5 % answered «no». Girls were more sympathetic – 40 % said yes, while 60 % believed that women should be treated differently. First-year students were more lenient towards female prisoners, for example, Victoria said: «There should be an exception for women for health reasons», while Vladyslava said: «It depends on the crime».

Considering the problem of violence, which is becoming more widespread in society every year, students expressed their views on the concept of «domestic violence against women». It turned out that in the first year of studying social work there is no study of this problem. Accordingly, students of this speciality, in response to the question «What do you understand by the concept of domestic violence against women?», mostly answered that it is «when a man beats a woman» and suggested that they should seek help from friends or the police. In turn, senior students majoring in Social Pedagogy, thanks to courses that include Pedagogy and Psychology of the Family and Methods of Social and Pedagogical Work, demonstrated greater awareness. Their responses were marked by a deeper understanding of the problem, and the following can be distinguished among them:

- «Violence occurs when a woman allows it» (Daria);
- «This is abuse by a man who takes advantage of a woman's weakness» (Oksana);
- «It is moral oppression and harm to a woman's physical health» (Inna);
- «A man, not respecting either himself or a woman, commits violence against her» (Artem);
- «Violence is unequal rights, psychological and physical violence» (Ilya).

All of these answers emphasise that students are not indifferent to the problem of domestic violence against women.

At Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University, the Faculty of Social and Psychological Education has a Student Social and Psychological Service that organises information campaigns every year by 25 November, including posters about violence against women and white ribbons to protest against all forms of violence. Volunteers of this service inform students and the public that violence against women is one of the most widespread human rights violations in the world. They emphasise that violence claims more lives and causes disabilities among women than cancer, malaria, road accidents and military conflicts combined.

In addition, the university established the Gender Centre, which is a platform for practical training of social work students. The purpose of the Centre is to promote gender education and support gender approaches in the educational process. As part of its activities, various events are held, including: a brainstorming session on gender stereotypes, a survey on attitudes towards the LGBT community, scientific flash mobs, exhibitions and trainings. These initiatives contribute to the formation of a healthy and tolerant society.

The fourth-year students who actively participated in these events are well aware of the problem of violence against women, so the question «Where can a woman suffering from domestic violence go?» did not cause them any difficulties. They mentioned the following options for assistance: «psychological hotlines, police», «rehabilitation centres», «social service», «secondary care centre», «family and youth service» and others.

The main task of a social worker is to be a support for families facing various difficulties. This includes helping families who find themselves in difficult life circumstances due to job loss, disability, serious illness, child abuse, divorce, the return of a parent after serving a sentence, alcohol or drug abuse, etc. It was interesting to find out how many women with these problems do students meet in their environment?

It turned out that the answers of students of different courses to the question «How many women do you know who are addicted to alcohol? How many drug addicts?» were quite different. Among fourth-year students, only three indicated that they knew women who were addicted to alcohol or drugs, with alcoholism being more common. While first-year students in most cases mentioned women with such problems. «There are 20 alcohol addicts and 3 drug addicts,» writes Vladislava E., «A lot!» notes Ruslana B., «Many» emphasises Victoria K.

This shows that for first-year students, such problems are more visible and cause more concern, especially when it comes to families with children. Older students seem to be more «adapted» to this phenomenon, which has become commonplace for them and is not so shocking. They meet such women but try to ignore them.

In the work of a social worker, one of the most important aspects is the early identification of families where the mother is abusing alcohol or drugs and needs help. The goal of social workers is to identify the problem in a timely manner and provide the necessary support. Therefore, «adaptability» to such women among young people is a problem, especially for future professionals in the field of social work and social pedagogy.

It is interesting that fourth-year students majoring in Social Pedagogy have a greater awareness of women's social problems, in particular through participation in social pedagogical practices in social services and through knowledge of theoretical disciplines that are part of their professional training.

Additionally, during the educational hours, students receive information about current social issues such as AIDS, HIV among women, drug addiction, alcoholism, inclusion, domestic violence, and other issues related to contemporary social problems. This confirms that social services need to continuously conduct diagnostic and preventive work among the population, in particular among young people, to teach them how to solve these problems and reduce the need for further assistance.

A social work specialist with the appropriate education and qualifications is involved in assessing needs, preparing contracts and individual plans for the provision of social services, organising their provision, and supporting vulnerable groups by providing them with the necessary support.

**Conclusions of the study. and prospects for further research in this direction.** Based on the results of the analysis of international and national gender legislation, the study of the content and focus of social work with women, as well as the study of the regional experience of social services in working with this category of population, a number of recommendations have been developed to improve the quality of social services for women who are victims of domestic violence:

- Timely detection of the problem of domestic violence against women: The primary task is to collect initial information, conduct an investigation and make a report. It is important to identify signs of violence by external symptoms (e.g., signs of beatings, poor hygiene, sleep disturbances, sudden weight changes, fear, confusion, passivity, sadness, unwillingness to undergo medical examination, lack of money, and living conditions that do not match real opportunities). Methods of data collection include observation, interviews and discussions.

- Intervene as needed through a multidisciplinary approach: In situations requiring intervention, it is important to involve a team of professionals to discuss the details of the situation, assess resources, define strategies and responsibilities of each team member. In this case, the social worker works with a specific case, choosing techniques aimed at developing the skills of proper interaction, providing support and advice. In addition, a social worker coordinates the activities of other services and, if necessary, acts as a coordinator of a multidisciplinary team.



- Correction and change of the situation: Supporting and activating family members, changing interpersonal relationships, and developing skills for proper family interaction are based on the therapeutic square, which includes four key groups of factors necessary for proper understanding and assessment of the situation:

- the role and feelings of the carer in this situation;
- the nature of the relationship between a caregiver and a cared-for person;
- the support of other family members for the caregiver;
- financial status of the trustee.

- Correction of negative conditions in women victims of violence: To correct the negative effects of violence, it is necessary to implement: Social work focused on establishing connections and supporting women;

- Educational work aimed at teaching positive communication skills (conflict resolution, adequate expression of opinions), development of adequate thinking and attitude, decision-making, psychological protection, as well as raising the level of self-esteem of women;

- Psychological support for guilt relief, emotional and physical relaxation.

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