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## **HOMICIDES WITHIN FAMILY, AS A SERIOUS CRIME THREATENING OUR FAMILIES, IN THE EYES OF YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY**

### **Abstract**

The long lasting transition period of the albanian society has affected all social institutions, facing them with a wide range of new-old social phenomena. Family, as one of the most important social institutions, nowadays, is being faced with a wide range of social issues, domestic violence as one of the most concerning between them. Figures show that there is a daunting rise in domestic violence cases from year to year. In this paper, our main focus relies on homicide crimes within family, as the most frightening end of domestic violence. The purpose of this paper is to explore young people's thoughts on this concerning issue that is happening within our families. How do young people see this phenomenon? What could be, according to them, the causes that lead someone to the point of taking away a family member's life? Why are women the main victims of such horrible crimes?

To explore young people thoughts on this matter, 30 semi-structured interviews with students of the Faculty of Education, Aleksander Moisiu University, Durrës and Social Sciences Faculty, Tirana University, were conducted. From the interviews, it results that the main factors that contribute to the increase of homicide crimes within families are considered: Increased difficulties and uncertainties in coping with everydaylife; Lack of protective and punitive force of the law; Families no longer have the sanctity and the role it has had in the past; It seems that all family members are endangered by this crime, although figures indicate that women (in particular) are more at risk. Patriarchal mentality is thought to be one of the major factors contributing to this fact. From the interview results it turns out that: jealousy is the main cause that can spur a man to kill his wife, in the other hand, violence against her or her children can

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spur a wife to kill her husband. On the other hand, if a parent kills his child, he should be suffering from a mental problem.

**Key Words:** Homicide, Family, Youth, Perceptions, Gender Issues, Albanian Society;

## 1. Introduction

When we think about our family and what it means to us, warmth, support and love, seem to be the first things to come to our mind. Family is one of the most important social institutions from which the continuity of society is ensured. Inside families children come to life, they get raised and educated, they become adults, create their own families, and so on. Family is the place where each of us seeks to find security, support and protection, comfort and love. Despite the fact that a number of social and economical issues have accompanied the albanian families nowadays, it seems that bigger concerning phenomena are occurring within them. Life is being taken off with violence in the place where life is born.

The long transition period of the albanian society has affected all social institutions, facing them with a number of new and difficult phenomena. Thus, in the whirl of these challenges, family seems to have lost “tranquility” and is threatened not only by traditional factors such as death, illness, disaster, poverty, etc., but also by “non-traditional” deviant behaviors, all-round conflicts, violence, alcoholism, abusive use of drugs, etc., (Avokati i Popullit, 2012: 6).

Among these issues, domestic violence is among the worst concerns for the albanian families. Figures show that there is a daunting rise in domestic violence cases from year to year. Data show that the number of domestic violence victims has reached 4121 people in 2014 (out of which 3090 are women) (INSTAT, 2015: 47, INSTAT, 2014: 9-10, Data Centrum, 2012: 14). Also according to the Annual statistics by INSTAT, the number of domestic violence victims is raising up each year. In 2012 there are 2526 reported victims of domestic violence, and in 2016 are reported to be 3700 victims of domestic violence (INSTAT, 2017: 21).

Domestic violence against women is not a new phenomenon in Albania. This social phenomenon has deep roots into the patriarchal traditions and customs, that have long shaped the albanian society (INSTAT and UNDP, 2013: 9).

However, studies show that its important to be noted that domestic violence often occurs behind closed doors and is not widely discussed, accepted or dealt within the albanian society. Victims generally suffer in silence. Albanians tend to consider domestic violence as a private, family affair, and as a normal part of marital and family life. Consequently, various studies estimate that there are several factors that may influence low reporting of domestic violence, such as

shame, fear of punishment, cultural norms, stereotypes that exist for domestic violence, etc., ( Data Centrum, 2012: 14-15).

In this paper, our main focus relies on homicide crimes within family, as the most frightening end of domestic violence. The evidence show that homicide cases within family have increased in recent years. According to the General Prosecution's report, during 2013 there were 47 homicide cases within family that account for 10% of the total of crimes investigated this year<sup>2</sup>. A non-negligible percentage! Written and visual media fills pages of newspapers and TV shows with bombastic news like, parents violate children, child violates parent, mother kills children, spouse kills wife, and other frightening events like these. You can easily find in TV-news, newspapers and other media channels terrifying homicidal cases.

Only with a random search we found frightening homicide cases as:

- August 24, 2017 - In Pogradec, the 49 year old man kills his wife<sup>3</sup>.
- October 23, 2017 – In Kavaja, husband kills his wife<sup>4</sup>.
- February 22, 2015 - In Gjirokastra, the wife (62 years old) kills her husband (66 years old) with a knife after a conflict;
- March 10, 2015 - In Tirana, husband (32 years old) kills his wife (28 years old) mother-in-law (65 years old);
- March 16, 2015 - In Lushnje, the mother (71 years old) slayed the boy (40 years old);
- April 1, 2015 - In Gramsh, husband suffocates his wife (35 years old);
- April 3, 2015 - In Tirana, uncle (62 years old) kills his grandson (36 years old), and then himself, allegedly being drunk when he committed the crime;<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to explore young people's thoughts on this worrying issue that is happening within our families. How do they see this phenomenon? What could be, according to them, the causes that lead someone to the point of taking away a family member's life? Why are women the main victims of such horrible crimes?

For the purposes of this study firstly we need to specify who we gonna consider as youth.

From reviewing the literature it turns out that the definitions on young

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.pp.gov.al/web/raporti\\_2013\\_855.pdf](http://www.pp.gov.al/web/raporti_2013_855.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.standard.al/2017/09/24/detajet-krimi-brenda-familjes-ne-pogradec-banoret-tregojne-si-ndodhi-vrasja/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.kohajone.com/2017/11/23/vrasja-ne-kavaje-policia-jep-detaje-te-reja-per-krimin-ne-familje/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://koha.net/?id=27&l=5177>

people are many, depending on the criterion taken into consideration by the researchers. Thus, in some cases, ``youth `` is treated as a mental state, at other times as a legal definition, somewhere treated as a stage of age development, and somewhere as a cultural phenomenon of a particular society (Delgado, M., and Staples, L., 2008: 16; Mortimer, JT, and Shanahan, M., 2003: 215).

Given that the social, economic, and cultural conditions in which young people are formed are specific to any society, it seems that the age criterion is considered as a criterion that connects all societies. However, it must be kept in mind that age as a criterion differs from one society to another depending on the above factors. Although this criterion has changed at various stages of the development of society, in many countries, age 18 is defined as the age at which the youth begins as a life cycle (Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, 2009: 7) and this phase is prolonged up to 30 years old today (Wyn, J., and White, R., 1997: 1).

In this article, young people are considered all those aged between 18 and 30 (Wyn, J., and White, R., 1997: 1; Council of Europe, 2010).

## 2. Methodology

To explore the opinions of young people on homicides within families, 30 semi-structured interviews with young people are conducted. The interviewees are conducted with students from the Faculty of Education (master and bachelor level), Aleksander Moisiu University, Durrës and Social Sciences Faculty, University of Tirana. The data for respondents are summarized in the table below:

<i>Data for the interviewees</i>		Nr.
Age	18-20 years	10
	21-23 years	10
	24-26 years	10
Gender	Female	Male
No.	15	15

The interview contained ten semi structured questions, the completion of which required about 20 minutes for each interviewee.

## 3. Results from the conducted interviews

Young people interviewed said they were very worried by this phenomenon and the scary news they are listening every day. It's like they cannot escape to

hear about violence and murder that seems to be happening everywhere and every day.

*“It’s frightening to hear that a mother has killed a baby or a husband his wife”* says a student during the interview. *It feels like the earth moves beneath our feet. We all need a safe place to feel protected, family is the nest we encircle. When we hear the macabre cases of feverishness, it seems as if the end of the world is coming”.*

Data shows that from year to year, figures on domestic violence have increased significantly, particularly homicide cases within family. Why this growth?

From the interviews results that respondents think that three are the main factors that have contributed:

- Increased difficulties and uncertainties in coping with life issues;

According to the respondents, each of us faces daily with a very difficult and insecure living. A transitional society, coupled with many issues that hinder people’s efforts to secure their livelihoods, has added much pressure and stress to people. The growing difficulty and insecurity is bringing the birth and multiplication of many harmful phenomena to society.

*Many people give up “ the pressure of life ” - as a student says - and fall prey to drugs, alcohol, gambling. Life is so insecure and so many people are getting out of the rails - another student says.*

- Lack of protective and punitive force of the law;

According to the respondents, the lack protective and punitive force of the law is an important factor. It seems like people are not afraid from the punitive force law nor do they believe they are protected by it. According to the respondents, the number of crimes and breaches of the law has increased, including homicide within family.

As a student says: *“It seems like the state has turned a blind eye and deaf ear to homicides. All those women who are raped and killed and the law does not offer you any opportunity to escape, but to shut your mouth and endure violence”*; *“It is normal that it is the fault of non-implementation of the law,”* says another interviewee - *all the unpunished violence that is going on in the albanian families, sooner or later, will end with the killing of any of the members”.*

- Families no longer have the sanctity and the role they had in the past;

According to the interviewees, the family is losing its holiness and the role it has had in the past. According to them, more and more generations are not respecting one another:

- children do not obey you as parents once;
- parents are not properly caring for children;
- divorces are increasing;
- domestic violence is growing;
- and many other problems.

Many negative phenomena are occurring within the family, waning its image as a “safe nest”. People are not feeling safe inside the family as they felt before, they are feeling threatened.

*“Once, hearing that a son beat his parents looked incredible, and surely the child must have had mental problems.....today nothing arouses any wonder. It seems as if people are used to these kinds of events where everything can happen inside families” - says a student.*

### **3.1. Women are victims of violence and murder mainly due to patriarchal society**

Studies and statistics show that women are mostly the victims to domestic violence and homicide compared to men. Respondents think that in a patriarchal society like ours, men are more violent than women. Men are taught that, in order to command, you must punish all those who do not obey you. While women are taught to obey and not discuss the decisions of family leaders, who are males.

*Albanian males use violence to “restore the rule,” - says a student. “Our society is so masculine - says another student - it seems to me that men think that women are their property and can do whatever they want with them, even kill them if they do not obey or raise them.”*

The evidence shows that men are mostly the biggest bullies within the family, especially to their spouses but also to children. Victimization of women by their husbands is reinforced by the economic situation, mentality and tradition, as well as by the inadequate awareness of the people on domestic violence (Ombudsman, 2012: 1).

### **3.2. A parent with mental problems can kill his/her child**

What can push a parent to take his child’s life? When interviewed students were asked this question, there was some kind of confusion or inflammation in their face.

As one of the students says - *“It is difficult to think of such a thing, but such cases have taken place. When you hear that a mother or father has killed a child directly you think about mental problems, it seems as if only a mentally ill parent can kill his or her child. No other cause seems to make you overcome such a bitter fact.”*

Data show that mental illnesses are mentioned as one of the reasons that may be the main cause of these events. Another reason for the interviewed students is alcohol and economic problems.

One of the students says - *“From the poverty that has gripped the albanian families, one loses logic and goes to the killing. Moreover, due to economic problems, many fathers have been given to alcohol, adding cases of domestic violence from them.”*

During the interviews an interesting fact emerged. The interviewed students mentioned the old mentality as one of the main causes that could lead a parent to take away his child’s life.

As one of the students says - *“...this can happen in families where the old mentality prevails, when the child goes out of the norms and habits of the family, then it pushes the parent to kill the child. In families that have old habits, when the family honor is touched, the killing of the child may occur.”*

*“For this reason, many more victims are women,”* - says another student - *“They can lose life from such an outdated mentality simply because they seek something different, attend school or love a boy.”*

### **3. 3. From abused to perpetrator.**

What is the reason that can push children to violate and kill their parents? Interestingly, most of the respondents, about 95% of them, mentioned violence, maltreatment or abuse exercised by parents as one of the main reasons that could lead the children to make such an act. According to them, if the child has been subjected to constant abuse, they may also cause them to become self-inflicted. An adult child with violent and alcoholic parents is likely to grow back to parents with the same coin. Another mentioned cause is the limitation of the freedom or the excessive intervention of the parents in the lives of their children.

*“Some parents may become too sanguine with the control they make to their children frustrating their children to the point that they lose their torah.”* - a student says.

Dependence on alcohol, drugs, mental problems and stress are seen as other causes that may affect.

*“Today, the number of young people who use alcohol and drugs is too high - says a student - even underage children are using them. What can you expect from such children except the trouble, why not even violate their family members.”*

*“I had a neighbor who used drugs, - said a student - he beats his mother and father often, stealing and selling home appliances, breaking and crushing things”* - he continues.



### **3. 4. A jealous man kills his wife, a woman who betrays is killed.**

It appears that respondents think that the wife's betrayal is the main cause that may cause a man to kill his wife.

As one of the students says - *"... an albanian man loses the reason when it comes to betrayal. The situation can be so severe that it can go as far as killing children even if they suspect they are not theirs"*.

As it was mentioned before, mental problems are often considered as a main cause for someone to take someone else's life, especially when this someone is family. It seems that respondents think that someone who kills is likely to have a mental problem. It seems like the interviewees think that murder is such a macabre crime that just someone who is not "okay", can do something as macabre like that. Another cause mentioned is the use of alcohol, gambling and drugs.

*"The bars and cafes are full of men who sit all day there, drinking and betting. Then they return back home drunk and in deep debts. Such a man can do everything"* - says a student.

On the other hand, the spouse may go as far as killing her husband if she or her children are abused by him. A woman generally kills to defend herself or her children according to the respondents.

*"When you hear that a man has killed or has attempted to kill his wife, people are wondering: do she betray him? If you hear that a woman has killed or has attempted to kill her husband, they wonder: did he abuse her or the children..."* - said a student.

## **4. Conclusions:**

Homicide within family is a concerning phenomenon with which albanian families are being faced. Figures show that there is a daunting rise in domestic violence cases from year to year. In this paper, our main focus relied on homicide crimes within family, as the most frightening end of domestic violence. The purpose of this paper was to explore young people's thoughts on this concerning issue that is happening within our families. How do young people see this phenomenon? What could be, according to them, the causes that lead someone to the point of taking away a family member's life? Why are women the main victims of such horrible crimes?

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