

Social work with domestic violence against women in rural areas

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Abstract. The relevance of this study is to analyse of domestic violence against women in rural regions, which can enhance the creation of improved support and protection systems for victims. This study aimed to examine social work and the obstacles encountered by social workers in supporting women from rural regions of the Republic of Kazakhstan who have suffered domestic violence. The study employed comparative and analytical methods to examine quantitative indicators and trends of domestic violence against women in rural areas. Primary data was obtained via a survey. As a result, domestic violence against women in rural areas of Kazakhstan was found to be a widespread problem. Official statistics show that approximately one in 165 women experience domestic violence, but this data does not account for unreported cases due to cultural and moral barriers. The study confirmed the increased vulnerability of rural women and highlighted additional challenges such as cultural aspects, geographical remoteness, lack of crisis centres, and inadequate funding for social services. Important barriers include limited awareness of resources, fear of stigmatization, and distrust of services. Traditions and religion in Kazakh society can perpetuate violence and limit access to assistance. The analysis of the legislative framework, in particular the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Prevention of Domestic Violence”, showed that despite the existence of comprehensive measures, their implementation is hampered by various factors. The study concludes with recommendations for improving social services in rural areas and emphasises the practical significance of this research

Keywords: abuse; victim protection; support measures; non-urban areas; crisis centres

Introduction

Modern society is developing in accordance with the sustainable development goals set by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly back in 2015. One such goal, Goal 5, is “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” (United Nations, 2015). As part of this global development goal for the world by 2030, paragraph 5.2 reads as follows: “Eradicate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including human trafficking, sexual and other forms of exploitation” (United Nations, 2015). Despite such goals, violence still takes place in society in its various manifestations against women, having a negative impact not only on the victims, but on society as a whole. Also, domestic violence against women is a public health and human rights violation that is widespread throughout the world (World Health

Organization, 2021). This topic remains relevant because domestic violence against women has negative physical, emotional, psychological consequences (Youngson *et al.*, 2021). As the World Health Organization (WHO) points out, domestic violence occurs in all countries and in all sectors of society (World Health Organization, 2021).

According to statistics in Kazakhstan, 0.6% of all women in Kazakhstan experienced domestic violence in 2021 (Agency for Strategic planning..., 2022a). It should be noted that over the period 2007-2022, the growth rate of domestic violence against women in Kazakhstan increased by 75.44%. That is, this trend is not decreasing and is probably higher, since not all cases are recorded by statistics. Analysing the problems of domestic violence, researchers G.M. Kassa and A.A. Abajobir (2020) found a fairly common latency in

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relation to these situations. According to C.M. Homan *et al.* (2020) only 18% of women who experienced domestic violence reported to the police and only 3% to a medical or social worker. The reason for this is gender inequality in Kazakh society. As of 2021, the Gender Inequality Index is the highest (0.442) compared to 2010-2023, hindering women's political, economic participation, and access to finance and health care (Agency for Strategic planning..., 2023). Sh. Aytanova *et al.* (2022), assessing the cost of the state to combatting domestic violence in Kazakhstan, stated that the availability of crisis centres is only 15%, which is why victims from rural areas have no access to them. S.A. Musabekova and K.E. Mkhitaryan (2022), while examining forensic statistics in Central Kazakhstan, found that one third of domestic violence against women occurred in rural areas.

R. Chandra *et al.* (2023) emphasize that Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a significant public health concern globally, with about 35% of women in South Asia experiencing physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner. In India specifically, 32% of ever-married women reported experiencing physical, sexual, or emotional violence by their husbands in their lifetime. The researchers highlight the importance of understanding the characteristics of perpetrators to address IPV effectively. They note that IPV in India is deeply rooted in patriarchal cultural norms and a conservative social structure, reflecting unequal power dynamics between men and women in marital relationships.

Y. Tian (2023) emphasizes that despite legal progress, such as China's 2015 Anti-Domestic Violence Law, deeply ingrained gender-related cultural norms and values continue to shape attitudes and behaviours, particularly in rural areas. It highlights the importance of considering cultural factors, particularly those related to patriarchal structures and traditional gender roles, when studying domestic violence in rural areas. The findings suggest that addressing domestic violence requires not only legal measures but also efforts to change deeply rooted cultural norms and improve women's economic independence.

The study of this issue in rural areas of Kazakhstan is of particular interest, since rural areas may have their own specific characteristics and challenges. There is a limited amount of research on social work with domestic violence in rural areas of Kazakhstan. The development of a study on this topic will fill the gaps in scientific knowledge and offer new practical recommendations for social workers. That is the relevance of this study. The purpose of this article was to study social work with domestic violence against women in rural areas of Kazakhstan. To achieve the goal, it is necessary to complete the following tasks: conducting a literature review on social work and domestic violence, with a focus on research conducted in the context of rural Kazakhstan; analysis of statistical data in order to identify the main characteristics and consequences of violence; conducting a survey among social workers to obtain data on the problem of domestic violence in rural areas and evaluate the effectiveness of existing social work approaches.

Materials and methods

The first phase of the study consisted of a questionnaire survey. This method was chosen due to its ability to process a significant amount of information, as well as its relatively low cost and time required for implementation. The survey was conducted among social workers of the Republic of

Kazakhstan in an offline format. When conducting the survey, the main principles – reliability and confidentiality of information – were observed, which were ensured by the formulation of questions in the questionnaire and the organization of the survey itself.

The survey was conducted based on a self-developed questionnaire in two stages: in November-December 2023 in crisis centres of Akmola, Aktobe, and Karaganda regions, and in January-March 2024 in the following regions: Almaty, Atyrau, West Kazakhstan, Zhambyl, Kostanay, Kyzylorda, Mangystau, South Kazakhstan, Pavlodar, North Kazakhstan, Turkestan, and East Kazakhstan. The survey involved 212 social workers from each crisis centre. The authors informed the participants about the anonymous and voluntary participation, and the participants provided their consent. The study followed the recommendations set out in ICC/ESO-MAR International Code on Market, Opinion and Social Research and Data Analytics (2016).

Through analysis, a systematic sample of respondents was created with its subsequent study. According to the sample, the age of the respondents was 18-55 years. The study was also monitored, during which the fact of the interview, the completeness, and reliability of the information received by the interviewer from the respondents were checked. The following research tools were used: an interview form (questionnaire), a route sheet, and a site map for each respondent. The questionnaire used closed, semi-closed, and open types of questions to identify aspects of interest within the framework of the topic under study, namely:

1. "Are women in rural areas more likely to seek help for violence than women in urban areas?"
2. "What challenges and barriers do women from rural areas most often face when seeking help in cases of domestic violence?"
3. "What types of support and assistance are most appropriate from social workers for women suffering from domestic violence in rural areas?"
4. "What are the specific challenges and barriers social workers face in helping women in remote rural areas?"
5. "What innovative approaches or models of work exist to improve social care for women suffering from domestic violence in rural areas?"

Initially, studies already conducted by Kazakh and foreign scientists were studied to identify gaps and further find answers to questions of interest. This applies to both theoretical foundations and empirical studies, as well as their results, including WHO and UN reports. An important stage of the research was the analysis of the legislative framework regarding the implementation and organization of social work, as well as court cases related to domestic violence. The method of legal analysis was used for a detailed study and interpretation of legislative acts, court decisions, and other legal documents related to domestic violence and the protection of women's rights. In particular, this method was applied for a deeper analysis of the new Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 72-VIII (2024), as well as other relevant legislative acts. The method of comparative legal analysis was applied to compare the legal norms and practices of Kazakhstan regarding domestic violence with international standards and legislation of other countries. This allowed for the identification of potential gaps in Kazakhstani legislation and the proposal of possible ways for its improvement.

For a general analysis and understanding of the global nature of the problem under consideration, official statistical data were analysed, namely indicators of the number of violence against women in urban and rural areas of Kazakhstan (Agency for Strategic planning..., 2022b). Also, indicators of the Agency for Strategic planning and reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan Bureau of National statistics (2022a; 2023) were analysed, namely the dynamics of the number of domestic violence against women in Kazakhstan for the period 2000-2022 and the number of crisis centres and shelters for the period 2002-2022. At the final stage of the study, materials representing the results of the survey were analysed, including anonymised answers to the questions of the questionnaire received from the participants in the study.

Results

Definition of the categorical concept of “violence”, its types and features. Violence against women is a violation of several basic human rights, including the right to health and physical integrity (Strand *et al.*, 2021). It also constitutes a form of gender discrimination, as recognised in the Convention’s General Recommendation on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Kazakhstan is a signatory to CEDAW, among other international human rights treaties. International human rights law requires states to be diligent in preventing, protecting and prosecuting violations of human rights. Failure to do so constitutes further violations of human rights, including the right to access to justice and the right to an effective remedy, and is also a violation of the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sex. The Republic of Kazakhstan has undertaken to combat violence against women by introducing a number of legislative and policy documents. The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “Concerning Prevention of Domestic Violence” (2009) provides comprehensive measures to prevent physical, psychological, sexual or economic violence against women and guarantees special social services for victims of violence. This law established a framework for addressing domestic violence, including measures for prevention, protection of victims, and accountability for perpetrators. However, despite these efforts and the existence of crisis centres and shelters in Kazakhstan for victims of violence, statistical data indicates that cruel treatment of women persists in Kazakhstani society (Agency for Strategic Planning..., 2022b).

Examples of violence include various forms: domestic abuse and neglect, incest, sexual abuse, bullying and other forms of violence, corporal punishment, psychological aggression, and many others. This list is not exhaustive. In Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “Concerning Prevention of Domestic Violence” (2009) states that domestic violence is a deliberate unlawful act (action or inaction) of one person in the sphere of family and domestic relations in relation to another (others), causing or containing a threat of causing physical and (or) mental suffering. Firstly, it should be pointed out that there is no clear definition in law which of the forms of danger to women or abuse has the greatest impact on their lives. But it can be determined that all of the above forms of violence can be attributed to one of its types: sexual, physical, psychological and economic violence, which, taken together in the form of attacks and coercion in a family environment directed at a partner, constitutes domestic violence (Spytska, 2023). Recognizing the need for further

action, the government has introduced new legislation to strengthen protections for women and children.

The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated April 15, 2024, No. 72-VIII “On Amendments and Supplements to Certain Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Issues of Ensuring Women’s Rights and Children’s Safety” (2024) represents a significant step forward in combating domestic violence. This new law expands the definition of domestic violence to include economic violence, strengthens penalties for perpetrators, introduces new protective measures such as restraining orders, and improves the system of support for victims. It also emphasizes the importance of early intervention and prevention strategies. The implementation of this new law is expected to enhance the legal framework for protecting women from domestic violence and provide more comprehensive support to victims, particularly in rural areas where access to services has been historically limited. This law introduces significant changes in the legal regulation of domestic violence issues and protection of women’s rights, in particular:

- 1) expands the definition of domestic violence, including economic violence;
- 2) strengthens responsibility for domestic violence;
- 3) introduces new mechanisms for protecting victims of domestic violence, including restraining orders;
- 4) improves the system of assistance to victims of violence.

Although any of the forms occurs separately, variants of combined cases of violence are possible. In this study, due to the availability of complete statistical information on physical violence, only this type of domestic violence is considered. Hereinafter, physical violence against a woman in this study refers to physical violence committed by a partner in the family, suggesting its various manifestations: from light spanking to such a form of physical violence as a result of which a woman can be injured or death occurs. Also, the following manifestations can be attributed to the obvious consequences of physical violence: bruises, bruises, injuries, fractures, sprains, dislocations, cuts, punctures, scars, black eyes (World Health Organization, 2022). That is, the intentional infliction of harm to health by the use of physical force and the infliction of physical pain (Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 214-IV, 2009). Depending on the object, there are independent, interpersonal and collective violence (Fig. 1).

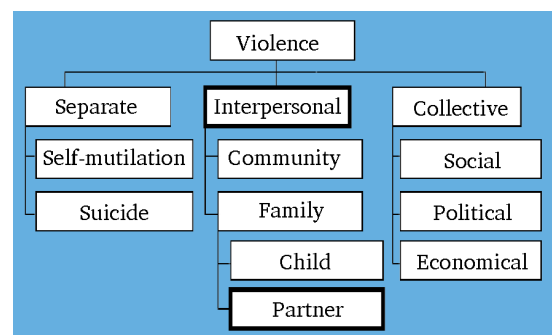


Figure 1. Typology of violence

Source: World Health Organization (2022)

The studied type of violence is a subspecies of interpersonal violence in the family between two partners. Kazakhstan’s legal framework has evolved to acknowledge the seriousness

and intricacy of domestic violence. Despite substantial advancements via legislative actions, the ongoing prevalence of domestic violence highlights the necessity for sustained efforts in execution, education, and societal transformation. The enactment of the new law signifies a hopeful advancement in the prevention and response to domestic violence; however, its efficacy will hinge on rigorous implementation and a comprehensive strategy that tackles the underlying causes of violence against women in Kazakhstani society.

Analysis of statistical data related to the problem of violence against women in Kazakhstan. The main source of official data on violence against women in Kazakhstan is administrative data. According to the Agency for Strategic planning and reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan Bureau of National statistics (2022a), in 2021, 16% of women aged 18-49 (18-75) have been subjected to lifetime physical

violence and 3.9% to sexual violence by a partner. At the same time, in 2022, 5.3% of women experienced domestic violence and 1.2% sexual violence (Agency for Strategic planning..., 2022b). The dynamics of the number of registered cases of domestic violence against women for 2000-2022 is ambiguous: the figures are significantly lower for the period 2000-2010 compared to the period 2011-2022. Thus, for the period 2000-2010, the number of victims of domestic violence did not exceed 40 thousand people. For the period 2016-2022, this indicator tended to decrease, but was still critical. The growth rate decreased by 50.58% (from 124 thousand victims in 2016 to 61 thousand victims in 2022). Despite the fact that in 2020-2022 the number of victims of domestic violence has significantly decreased compared to the period of 2016-2019 (decreased by 50.58%), it still exceeded the figure for 2010 by 1.5 times (Fig. 2).

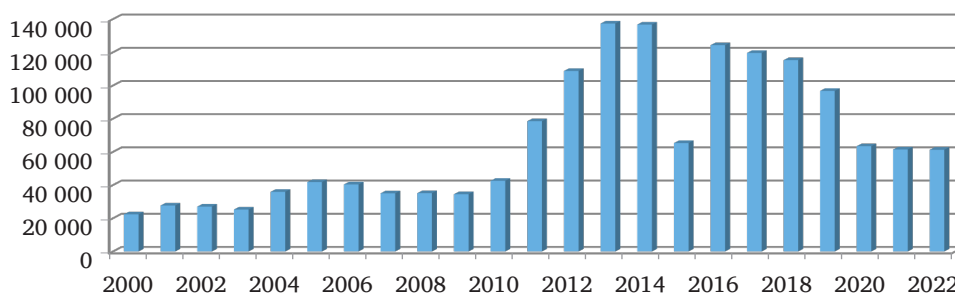


Figure 2. Number of registered cases of domestic violence against women for the period 2000-2022 in the Republic of Kazakhstan

Source: Agency for Strategic planning and reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan Bureau of National statistics (2022a)

Compared to available data for the 2022 year, the number of women (10.1 million women) (Demographics of Kazakhstan, 2022) in Kazakhstan with the number of cases of domestic violence against them (61.2 thousand women), it can be concluded that every 165 woman was subjected to domestic violence in accordance with official statistics, not taking into account cases when women do not apply for assistance and, accordingly, their cases are not included in the official statistics. According to official statistics Agency for Strategic planning and reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan Bureau of National statistics (2022a), the number of women who experienced any form of partner violence during their lifetime in urban areas was 56% of cases, and in rural areas – 44%.

During the years of independence, a number of strategic documents have been adopted, where an important area of gender policy is to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women from rural areas, including the implementation of their human rights expedient and relevant in modern conditions, this is social work with women subjected to domestic violence in Kazakhstan (Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 214-IV, 2009). The country has crisis centres and shelters designed to help victims of domestic violence. These institutions provide temporary shelter, counselling, and support for women suffering from domestic violence. The number of crisis centres, including those with shelters, increased by 69.23% over the period 2002-2022 (from 26 units in 2002 to 42 units in 2022). At the same time, 12 out of 42 crisis centres are located in the Karaganda region and there are no centres in the South Kazakhstan region (Agency for Strategic planning..., 2022a). Given the number of victims, it can be

assumed that there are not enough crisis centres in all regions, or their effectiveness is low. Governments are failing to meet the SDG targets of ending violence against women, despite strong evidence that intimate partner violence is preventable (Sardinha *et al.*, 2022). The presence of permanent crisis centres is a necessity and a guarantee of access for victims of RLS to emergency social assistance (Aytanova *et al.*, 2022). There is an urgent need to invest in effective multisectoral interventions, especially from social services.

In conclusion, although official statistics reveal that one in every 165 women in Kazakhstan encountered domestic violence in 2022, the true figures may be elevated due to underreporting. Although there was a 50.58% reduction in registered cases from 2016 to 2022, the victim count remains alarmingly elevated, especially in rural regions where access to support services may be constrained. The 69.23% increase in crisis centres over two decades is commendable; however, the absence of centres in specific regions and the ongoing elevated rates of violence highlights the critical necessity for additional investment in comprehensive, multi-sectoral strategies to effectively tackle and prevent domestic violence against women.

Results of a survey of social workers in Kazakhstan on violence against women in rural areas. In order to identify directions for improving social work with domestic violence against women in rural areas, it is necessary to identify the main problems that were extracted from the conducted empirical study – a survey of social workers in Kazakhstani crisis centres. The first question was: “Are women in rural areas more likely to seek help in the case of violence than women in urban areas?”. Respondents responded

that women in rural areas often seek help for violence to a lesser extent than women in urban areas. 89% of respondents answered in the affirmative.

As a result, the above answers were justified by the following question: “What problems and barriers do women from rural areas most often face when seeking help in the case of domestic violence?”. The low proportion of rural women seeking help from social workers is due to lack of access to crisis centres and limited resources. Women face challenges and barriers such as lack of information about available resources and services – 76 (36%) of respondents, fear of judgment – 68 (32%), distrust of law enforcement – 38 (18%), and lack of economic independence and housing solutions – 30 (14%). According to the results of the analysis of the survey of social workers, all barriers can be grouped into three main groups. First, shame in recognizing what

happened. Social workers noted such a word, which is dictated by the Kazakh society, as “uyat” (shame and disgrace) (Nukezhanova *et al.*, 2024). At the same time, women do not ask for help from relatives, law enforcement agencies, or social workers. That is, a barrier to the provision of social assistance to women from rural areas who have experienced domestic violence is latency. Secondly, the reason for this is the patriarchal attitudes and accepted morality, ethics, and rules of conduct that are rooted in Kazakh society: a man controls family life, exposing his woman to gender discrimination (Ricoy-Cano *et al.*, 2024).

The third question was: “What kind of support and assistance is provided by social workers for women suffering from domestic violence in rural areas?”. As a result of the analysis, the responses are grouped into subcategories (Table 1).

Table 1. Types of support and assistance from social workers for women suffering from domestic violence in rural areas of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Types of support and assistance	Share of respondents, n (%)
Counselling and emotional support	68 (32)
Security and shelter	45 (21)
Legal support	42 (20)
Financial aid	34 (16)
Psychological help	15 (7)
Educational programs and trainings	6 (3)
Referral support	2 (1)

Source: developed by the author

According to the interviewed experts, the most common responses are measures for counselling and emotional support for women (68 responses), providing advice on problem-solving. Also, a significant number of responses related to the provision of security and shelter (45 responses). The least common responses were about educational programs and trainings (6 responses) that are aimed at raising awareness about domestic violence, strengthening self-protection skills and preventing domestic violence. The minimum number of responses in the form of referral assistance (2 responses), which involves referring a woman to specialized organizations and services where they can receive further help and support.

In order to identify contemporary issues that become barriers for women who are victims of domestic physical violence, the survey asked the following question: “What are the specific challenges and barriers that social workers face in helping women in remote rural areas?”. Among the existing problems, the main one is limited access to resources 102 (48%) of respondents (Fig. 3). This concerns the lack of adequate institutions, especially in rural areas, as well as the lack of specialists. Together, these two aspects can make it difficult to provide effective assistance to women. Problems with transport – 51 (24%) – are observed in rural areas remote from central cities or other settlements where crisis centres are located. These problems manifest themselves from two sides. On the one hand, this creates difficulties in organizing the mobility of social workers, and, on the other hand, makes it difficult for women themselves to access. There are significant communication problems – 23 (11%) – to provide coordination of activities with other services and organizations. In remote areas, there may be differences in culture and language, which requires social workers to adapt

and take into account local characteristics, which was found in 19 (9%) of the respondents’ answers. It should also be noted the social exclusion of women, which drew the attention of 17 (8%) of respondents. Women living in remote areas or with low socioeconomic support may suffer from social exclusion and limited access to assistance. Lack of information about available resources and services, fear of stigmatization and distrust of services can become barriers to seeking help.

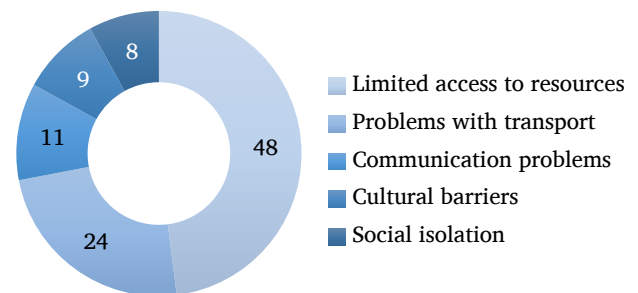


Figure 3. Special challenges and barriers for social workers in assisting women in remote rural areas, %

In order to consider new opportunities to improve the provision of assistance to women victims of domestic violence, the question was asked: “What innovative approaches or models of work exist to improve social assistance to women suffering from domestic violence in rural areas?”. For 89 (42%) of respondents, the focus was on mobile assistance services, which is appropriate given the problem with transport to the nearest crisis centres. For 40 (19%) – the development of online resources in the form of platforms or chats in support and the provision of counselling and psychological

assistance. 64 (30%) of respondents noted networking, that is, the establishment of networks and partnerships between various organizations and institutions, including governmental, non-governmental and international organizations, allows pooling resources and experience to help women more effectively. This may include knowledge sharing, training, joint programs and coordination of activities. 15 (7%) of respondents paid attention to the development of local initiatives, which involves the creation of local resource centres. The remaining 4 (2%) of respondents noted the active introduction of social innovations and technologies, as well as the use of telemedicine and video communication in a ratio of 1:1. The introduction of modern technologies, such as alert and alarm systems, mobile device applications and online reporting systems, can increase the availability of care and ensure a rapid response to situations of violence in remote areas.

Based on the analysis of innovative approaches and current aspects of addressing domestic violence in rural areas, it is clear that a multifaceted approach is necessary to improve the provision of assistance to women victims of domestic violence. The survey results highlight several promising strategies, with mobile assistance services, networking, and online resources emerging as key areas for development. These findings, combined with the four main aspects of social services identified, provide a foundation for developing comprehensive recommendations to enhance support for women in rural areas. To build upon these insights and create a more robust system of support, the authors propose the following expanded recommendations:

Given the strong support for mobile assistance services, implementing fully equipped mobile units staffed with social workers, psychologists, and legal advisors is crucial. These units can provide on-site support, counselling, and emergency assistance in remote rural areas. They should also be equipped with technology for immediate connection to crisis centres and law enforcement if needed. Expanding on the support for online resources, it is important to create a user-friendly, secure online platform that offers 24/7 chat support and counselling services, educational resources on domestic violence and women's rights, a directory of local and national support services, safety planning tools, and anonymous reporting mechanisms (Lokot *et al.*, 2024).

Building on the support for networking, and establishing formal partnerships between governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, healthcare providers, law enforcement, and educational institutions is essential. This network should facilitate regular knowledge sharing and training sessions, develop standardised protocols for identifying and responding to domestic violence cases, create a centralised database for case management and resource allocation, and implement a coordinated community response model. Empowering local communities by expanding on the idea of local initiatives is crucial. This can be achieved by establishing community-based resource centres that provide information, support, and referrals, training local volunteers as first responders and peer support providers, and engaging community leaders and influencers in awareness campaigns and prevention efforts (Tian, 2023).

Leveraging technology for safety and support is another important aspect. This includes developing and distributing personal safety apps with discreet alert systems, implementing telemedicine services for remote psychological counselling and medical assessments, and utilizing AI-powered

chatbots for initial screening and information provision. Enhancing early identification and intervention is critical. This involves training healthcare providers, educators, and community workers in recognizing signs of domestic violence, implementing routine screening protocols in healthcare and social service settings, and developing confidential reporting mechanisms accessible to rural communities (DeKeseredy & Rennison, 2020).

Providing comprehensive support services is essential. This includes offering holistic support such as legal aid, psychological counselling, financial assistance, and job training, developing family-centred interventions that address the needs of both victims and perpetrators and implementing long-term follow-up and support programs to prevent the recurrence of violence. Focusing on prevention and education is paramount. This can be achieved by integrating domestic violence awareness and gender equality education into school curricula, conducting regular community workshops on healthy relationships and conflict resolution, and engaging men and boys in prevention efforts through targeted programs and mentorship initiatives (Aytenova *et al.*, 2022).

By implementing these expanded recommendations, we can create a more comprehensive and effective system of support for women experiencing domestic violence in rural areas of Kazakhstan. These strategies address the unique challenges of rural settings while leveraging innovative approaches and technologies to improve access to services and support. Continuous evaluation and adaptation of these initiatives will be crucial to ensure their effectiveness and responsiveness to the evolving needs of rural communities.

Discussion

The analysed literature and the results of the empirical research indicate that rural societies differ significantly in social dynamics compared to urban societies, which leads to a difference in society's response to domestic violence. The results of this study are in line with other studies that address the additional complexities and risks for victims of domestic violence in rural communities. Researcher P. Moffitt *et al.* (2022), studying intimate partner violence and COVID-19 in rural Canada, determined that the impact of COVID-19 has made social work even more important to rural communities and required continuous improvement to reach the most vulnerable victims of domestic violence. Analysing domestic violence against women in the world before and after the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic, L. Sardinha *et al.* (2022) concluded that this problem was likely exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused an unprecedented downturn in efforts to reduce violence against women, as well as due to the long stay at home during the period of quarantine restrictions (Usher *et al.*, 2020). Exploring the relationship between the pandemic and rural violence, A. Peterman *et al.* (2020) also focused on the worldwide increase in the incidence of domestic violence against women in the wake of COVID-19. Since the effects of the pandemic are international, it can be assumed that this argument also applies to the situation in Kazakhstan, which is supported by statistics on domestic violence against women. Resources are not always readily available to victims living in rural areas due to the many factors that create barriers for women to get help with domestic violence (Spytska, 2024). It is difficult to quantify the amount of abuse of women in Kazakhstan in rural areas based on official data, as not all cases are recorded.

Analysing urban and rural violence, W.S. DeKeseredy and C.M. Rennison (2020) find that higher levels of acceptance and tolerance for domestic violence among rural residents contribute to higher levels of violence internationally. The Republic of Kazakhstan is no exception. The reasons may be different, aspects of which were studied by N. Youngson *et al.* (2021). When comparing the distance between houses in urban and rural areas, the greater distance in rural areas makes it difficult for neighbours to detect domestic violence. Understated information about violence can be caused by the silence of both the victim and the society that surrounds her for cultural reasons, the refusal of other fellow villagers to help the woman due to a similar situation. Also, it should be taken into account that even if a woman is ready to report violence, the problem is the distance to the nearest help centre and the difficulty of getting there by public transport. Gender inequality can also be considered as the cause of women's violence (Aliyeva & Adli, 2024). Coercive, controlling behaviour that isolates women from their support networks. Taco conclusion made by D.C. Slakoff *et al.* (2020) examining intimate partner violence against women.

Trying to analyse the difference between the problems of violence against women in rural and urban areas, the American researcher S.R. Benson (2009), in the process of interviewing victims of violence, found a number of problems: lack and delay of transport to the nearest shelter, slow police response and minimal medical care. Despite a number of progressive steps taken at the state level to make life easier for women, support for women and protection from violence – these problems have yet to be solved. Sh. Aytenova *et al.* (2022), studying the costs of combating domestic violence in Kazakhstan, identified the main current problems. As of 2021, spending amounted to 4.5 billion tenge, where only 17% is spent on social services for victims of domestic violence. That is, one of the main problems is the lack of funding for the work of social services (Dodonova & Dodonov, 2024). What is agreed and confirmed by the survey conducted in this study. At the same time, scientists focus on the fact that the availability of crisis centres in the country is 15%, which limits access to assistance for residents of remote rural areas. Some regions do not allocate sufficient funding for the implementation of holistic projects related to the problem of domestic violence. For example, in the Mangistau region, funding amounted to 2.6 million tenge, Zhambyl – 3.6 million tenge and Pavlodar – 6.9 million tenge. While in the Karaganda region – 125 million tenge, Almaty – 94 million tenge and West Kazakhstan – 81 million tenge. Researchers focus on the lack of relationship between the general situation with domestic violence and the activities carried out. Instead of a systematic approach, there is often a fragmentation of actions, which boils down to holding separate round tables and seminars. However, such activities are not always effective in reducing the level of domestic violence, as their results and implementation indicators do not always contribute to progress in this area. There are no procedures for compiling official statistics on psychological and economic types of violence, which creates gaps in assessing the overall situation with domestic violence in the country.

This study did not take into account such causes of domestic violence, which provokes an increase in cases of violence and the resulting consequences, such as the presence of firearms, which is another important risk factor in rural areas. A.L. Straatman *et al.* (2020), as a result of a study

of the lethality of domestic violence against women, determined that the possession of firearms significantly increases the overall risk and vulnerability to lethal domestic violence for women living in rural areas. It can be assumed that this aspect can also manifest itself in Kazakh society. Thus, risk assessment is of paramount importance both for identifying potentially lethal situations and for developing safety plans and risk management strategies. Identifying risk factors such as firearms is critical to determining the level of risk and the appropriate intervention needed to address it (Lynch & Logan, 2020). The study analysed cases of domestic violence against women, but it should also be taken into account that women in rural areas may have disabilities, belong to indigenous peoples or minorities who also need social assistance, which can also be considered a limitation.

Studying the characteristics of abuse of women in different countries, the researcher G. Hunnicutt (2022) in the process of analysis determined that when improving social assistance for women, one should “move to the depth, not the width of the problem”. Firstly, in order to improve the work of social services for female victims of domestic violence, it is necessary to minimize latency by raising the legal awareness of the population, strengthen social control and minimize impunity, and improve the legislative framework in relation to the consequences of domestic violence (Yara *et al.*, 2023). Although today there are many possible interventions, as a result of this study it was found that only a few of them are appropriate. The government of Kazakhstan needs to take the following measures to improve the analysis of cases of violence against women in rural areas of the country. First, fund research on women's violence in order to better assess the extent of violence against rural women in Kazakhstan. This aspect is one of the keys to the development of effective prevention policies and programs. Secondly, it concerns the reform of ingrained patterns of behaviour among rural men. Third, this includes the need for rural libraries where women can find resources ranging from legal aid to information about shelters, pamphlets, and books about abuse, as well as Internet access to find shelters and other security services.

Conclusions

This study on social work addressing domestic violence against women in rural Kazakhstan reveals complex challenges requiring multifaceted solutions. The survey of social workers provided critical insights into the barriers faced by rural women and the limitations of current support systems. The results highlight that women in rural areas are significantly less likely to seek help for domestic violence compared to their urban counterparts, with 89% of respondents confirming this disparity. This reluctance stems from various factors, including limited access to crisis centres, lack of information about available services (36% of responses), fear of social judgment (32%), distrust in law enforcement (18%), and economic dependence (14%). These findings underscore the deeply rooted societal and cultural barriers that perpetuate the cycle of violence in rural communities.

Social workers themselves face considerable challenges in assisting, with limited access to resources being the primary concern (48% of responses). Transportation issues (24%), communication problems (11%), and cultural differences (9%) further complicate service delivery in remote areas. These obstacles highlight the need for innovative

approaches tailored to the rural context. The survey also revealed promising strategies for improvement. Mobile assistance services emerged as the most supported solution (42% of responses), followed by the development of online resources (19%) and enhanced networking between organizations (30%). These findings suggest a shift towards more flexible, technology-driven approaches to overcome geographical barriers and improve service accessibility.

Despite recent legislative advancements, including the 2009 Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the 2024 amendments strengthening protections for women and children, significant gaps remain in the legal framework. The current legislation fails to adequately address the specific challenges faced by rural women, such as limited access to support services and economic opportunities. Moreover, the implementation of existing laws remains inconsistent, particularly in remote areas where awareness of legal rights and available protections is often limited. The absence of comprehensive data collection mechanisms, especially for psychological and economic forms of violence,

hinders the development of evidence-based policies and interventions. This gap in official statistics obscures the true extent of domestic violence in rural areas, potentially leading to an underestimation of the problem and insufficient allocation of resources.

In conclusion, while Kazakhstan has made strides in addressing domestic violence through legislation, there remains a pressing need for more targeted, comprehensive approaches that consider the specific challenges of rural areas. Future policy development should focus on improving access to services, strengthening the implementation of existing laws, enhancing data collection mechanisms, and developing prevention strategies that address the root causes of violence in rural communities.

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Conflict of interest

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Соціальна робота з домашнім насильством щодо жінок у сільській місцевості

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Анотація. Актуальність дослідження полягає в аналізі домашнього насильства щодо жінок у сільській місцевості, що може сприяти створенню вдосконалених систем підтримки та захисту жертв. Це дослідження було спрямоване на вивчення соціальної роботи та перешкод, з якими стикаються соціальні працівники при підтримці жінок із сільської місцевості Республіки Казахстан, які постраждали від домашнього насильства. У дослідженні використано порівняльно-аналітичні методи для вивчення кількісних показників та тенденцій домашнього насильства щодо жінок у сільській місцевості. Первинні дані були отримані шляхом опитування. Результати показали, що домашнє насильство щодо жінок у сільській місцевості Казахстану є поширеною проблемою. Офіційна статистика показує, що приблизно кожна 165 жінка зазнає домашнього насильства, але ці дані не враховують незареєстровані випадки через культурні та моральні бар'єри. Дослідження підтвердило підвищену вразливість сільських жінок і висвітлило додаткові проблеми, такі як культурні аспекти, географічна віддаленість, відсутність кризових центрів і недостатнє фінансування соціальних послуг. Важливі перешкоди включають обмежену обізнаність про ресурси, страх стигматизації та недовіру до послуг. Традиції та релігія в казахському суспільстві можуть увічнити насильство та обмежити доступ до допомоги. Аналіз законодавчої бази, зокрема Закону Республіки Казахстан «Про попередження насильства в сім'ї», показав, що, незважаючи на наявність комплексних заходів, їх реалізація перешкоджають різні фактори. В кінці дослідження надано рекомендації щодо покращення соціальних послуг у сільській місцевості, підкреслено практичне значення цього дослідження

Ключові слова: жорстоке поводження; захист жертви; заходи підтримки; неміські території; кризові центри