

# SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND OTHER FORMS OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN URBAN SPACES IN ALBANIA, 2019



**500 Survey Interviews** with women and girls in Shkoder and Korça



**Two Focus Groups** with 16 female participants of different backgrounds



**12 Structured Observations** and **two Safety Audit Walks**<sup>1</sup>

## The Study

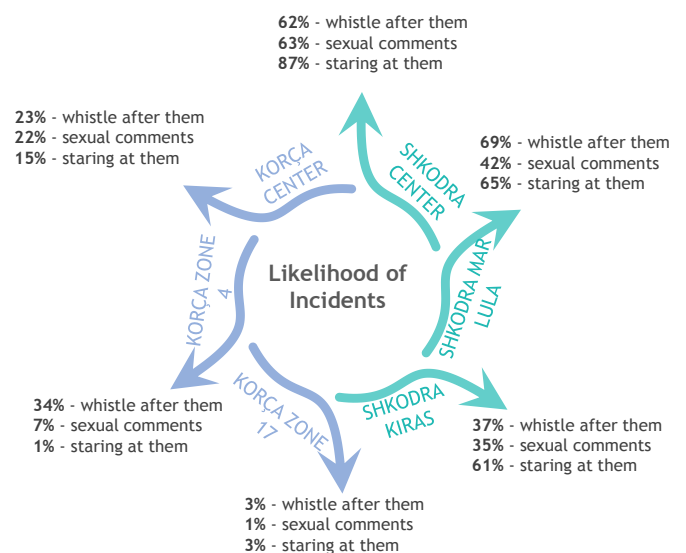
Violence against women is a human rights violation and is prevalent around the world, including Albania. It is estimated that 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner at some point in their lives.<sup>2</sup> Gender based Violence is defined as violence that is directed against a woman, because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately.<sup>3</sup> Violence against women includes, but is not limited to, physical, sexual and psychological harm (including intimidation, suffering, coercion, deprivation of liberty within the family, or within the general community, sexual harassment etc.). The wide spectrum of gender-based violence nowadays is often expanded to include violence that results from unequal power relationships between men and women.

This study looks at the different **dimensions of sexual harassment and other forms of gender based violence against Albanian women and girls in urban public spaces in Korça and Shkodra**. Particularly, focusing on women and girl's perceptions of safety and the impact this issue has on their lives, as well as the forms of sexual violence they experience in three areas per each municipality. The study also explores how the infrastructure in these municipalities influences women and girl's security and what strategies they have at their disposal to cope with sexual violence, and what can be done to make their cities and neighborhoods safer.

## Key Findings

Women and girls in public spaces of all selected areas in the two municipalities of Shkoder and Korça, **face numerous forms of harassment especially the ones of verbal nature**. Physical harassment is being reported as less common, however is also present according to many of respondents. Data combined from the two municipalities, paint a clear picture of the most prevalent issues in regard to harassment applicable for all zones in which the study was implemented (figure on the right).

It furthermore appears that outdated mentalities and the phenomenon of victim blaming are prevalent issues in Shkodra as well as in Korça. Out of all respondents, 40 per cent strongly or partly agree that "Girls/women who are sexually harassed or sexually abused provoke it themselves."



[1] Structured observations are observations of an area ,with the help of checklists, to assess its conditions in various aspects. Safety Audit walks are conducted by a group of women and girls in a certain area to assess, with the help of guidelines and checklists, what makes them feel unsafe and how an area can be improved.

[2] World Health Organization, Department of Reproductive Health and Research, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, South African Medical Research Council (2013). Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence, p.2. For individual country information, see The World's Women 2015, Trends and Statistics, Chapter 6, Violence against Women, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015 and UN Women Global Database on Violence against Women.

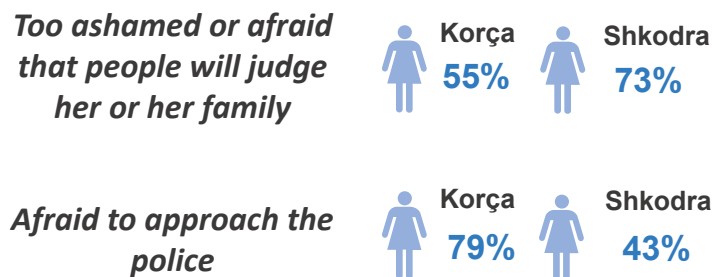
[3] Art. 3 d, Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence)

**If you, or someone you know, suffer from sexual harassment or violence, call the national helpline at 116117, or the Police at 112. You are not alone.**



Findings reveal that **16 percent of the 500 survey respondents declare to have been at risk of or exposed to sexual harassment or other forms of sexual violence in their lifetime.** However, results show that the culture of reporting sexual harassment and violence is low. There are various reasons that stand behind this phenomenon, such as lack of information on where to report and ask for help (94% of all respondents are not aware of the national helpline in Albania), lack of trust in the responsible institutions such as the Police and the fear of being labelled or judged. Despite the various efforts of different stakeholders to create mechanisms and instruments on reporting violence against women and girls, there exists a common belief women and girls share, on keeping violent episodes private and accepting it, in order to keep the family together.

*Women and girls who have faced harassment do not report the incidents because they are...*



Comparative data of both municipalities show that the most common issues which contribute to feeling unsafe in the neighborhoods are related to **a)** lack of effective and visible Police, **b)** groups of men hanging around the streets engaging with substance abuse, **c)** lack of public transportation.

### Key Recommendations for Shkoder and Korca Municipality

- Awareness raising activities to educate men, boys, women and girls alike about sexual harassment and violence, to combat outdated mentalities and gender stereotype-based thinking.
- Activities to encourage civic engagement and showing empathy and support for victims as well as activities or initiatives that create opportunities for women and girls to discuss the topic of sexual violence more openly.
- The municipalities must consider the report of this study, and its findings in all actions they plan to undertake, to improve the conditions of their cities, especially in regard to planned interventions in the selected areas that were part of this study.
- Local administrators who are in contact with community members, should have adequate knowledge on how to address women's and girls' concerns related to their safety in public spaces. This can be done through meetings and discussions that municipalities organize with communities during the planning for improvement of
- Referral mechanism against Domestic Violence (DV) in the two municipalities should address in a multi-sectoral response not only the DV cases, but also other forms of violence against women and girls, including sexual harassment and violence in public spaces.
- Specific measures as part of the multi-sectoral response for prevention and protection should be implemented including:
  - a)** Increasing the frequency of police patrolling in specific areas, **b)** Protection of personal data in case of reporting violent incidents, **c)** Adding data on sexual violence as part of the data and statistics of other forms of violence against women and girls, **d)** Improving the collaboration with NGOs who are service providers, coordinating awareness activities on different forms of VAWG and on the existing services.
- Municipalities must commit to, plan and budget for accessible, affordable and gender-sensitive public services including access to street lighting, sensitive policing, public transport, housing, etc.