

Translation from original version in Armenian

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**‘Whenever you enter a family, you must remember that you are the one whom the victim relies upon’
Argishti Barbaryan, Police Major, a man in a uniform whom children are not scared of**



The first case of domestic violence that Major Barbaryan witnessed was the most terrible. He received an alarm that a son was beating his elderly mother. Arriving at the scene, he saw the abuser, who was his age, sitting and crying, and the mother, who had severe mental health problems and regularly physically

abused her grandchildren. This time, the son intervened in the act of beating of his children by his mother and subjected her to violence for that.

This incident took place on the day of the entry into force of the [Republic of Armenia Law on prevention of violence within the family, protection of victims of violence within the family and restoration of peace in the family](#). “Psychologically, it was a very difficult case, because I clearly understood that everyone in this family needs help. Unlike other cases, when we simply had to draw a report, and the case would be handled only if a complaint has been filed, this family stayed in our focus for a year. We worked with both the son and the mother. Fortunately, the violence did not recur” - recalls the police Major Argishti Barbaryan, senior inspector of the Ararat regional administration's Artashat department for juvenile affairs and family violence prevention unit.

Why doesn't the community help the police?

The first work experience was in the community police. Now Major Barbaryan admits that the work of a community police officer was far from his ideas about the profession. Then he realized that it was this experience, particularly dealing with minors, that helped him in working in domestic violence prevention unit.



“Working in the family violence prevention unit is much more difficult because you understand that you are dealing with vulnerable families, where the victim is not only the one who is subjected to violence, but the whole family that witnesses the violence. When entering every family, you must remember that you are the one on whom the victim relies upon. This is an enormous responsibility, which is heavy, but

also sobering: you can't give in to your emotions because it can cost someone's life. Regardless of the situation, the key starting point for a police officer is: the person who commits violence is an abuser."- says Major Barbaryan.

During the years of working in the community police, Major Barbaryan dealt with cases of domestic violence, but both the perceptions and the legal mechanisms were different in those years. He recalls that before the adoption of the [Republic of Armenia Law on prevention of violence within the family, protection of victims of violence within the family and restoration of peace in the family](#), there were many cases when they went to the scene upon an alarm, witnessed the violence, draw a record, but the victim, due to some reasons, withdrew the complaint, and the abuser remained unpunished.

"Before the adoption of the law, 90% of cases were like that, and this is really not an exaggeration. Usually, after the victim withdrew the complaint, the work with those families ended, by and large. After the law came into force, the situation has visibly changed. The types of support for victims of violence, mechanisms for preventing recurrence of violence, as well as trust towards the police have grown." - says Major Barbaryan.

Along with this, he is concerned that most of the society still does not perceive domestic violence as a gross violation of fundamental human rights, and its consequences. Meanwhile, the [Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence and Violence against Women](#) clearly defines that states are obliged to create [effective mechanisms](#) to prevent violence, protect the victim of violence and ensure the adequate punishment for a perpetrator.

"As a result of misconceptions about domestic violence, we still have to deal with violence that takes place, although our main goal is to prevent it. The society, which must warn about the violence or its danger, is often indifferent, as it considers that problems in the family do not concern the society or community. However, I can state that the society is the first to identify the violence in the family, particularly against children, but it rarely sends an alarm." - adds Major Barbaryan.

He says that according to international practice domestic violence usually takes place for many years and cannot stay unnoticed by the neighbours and relatives of the victim, but they prefer to remain silent. And silence often costs lives. The European Court of Human Rights has examined [multiple cases of domestic violence](#) and inadequate actions of those responsible.

The Law is good, but it needs to be improved

Major Barbaryan notes that after the adoption of the law, the things started to change, but very slowly. Victims of continuous violence often continue not to speak about it, because services guaranteed by law are not yet fully provided.



One of the main gaps in the law is related to the provision of social services. It was planned that the network of shelters for victims of domestic violence would be expanded, but there is still no change. Especially in regions, women are very often reluctant to move to a shelter because of difficulties with children's school or kindergarten, or they are afraid of losing job after moving away from the community. That's why they prefer to stay with relatives or rent dwelling, although we always say to them that we can best guarantee their safety only in shelter.

According to him, the next major legislative gap is that there are no appropriate rehabilitation services for the victims, no perpetrators' programmes.

"Another issue is the accommodation of the abuser removed from the place of residence, who, actually, becomes homeless. According to the law, the police officer must remove the perpetrator from the residential area within two hours to ensure the safety of the victim. But at the same time, the police officer has to solve the issue of the perpetrator's residence who becomes homeless, and we do not have much choice in finding living place for homeless people. There is also a lot of red tape." - notes Major Barbaryan.

Another issue that he points out to is the effectiveness of restriction orders.

"Let's suppose that emergency restriction order is issued against the abuser and the latter is forbidden to approach the victim. Before, violations of these orders were common, because the abuser had no fear that he would be imprisoned. While the imprisonment of up to six months was envisaged, in case of emergency restriction order violation, as a rule, a fine was imposed. My experience shows that a fine is

not a strong measure for an abuser to stop the violence. Now, some changes have been introduced to the Criminal Code, and I am sure that tougher punishment will be an additional leverage to prevent violence”.

They still frighten children with the police: stereotypes that are created and which should be broken

There are many peculiarities in working with an abused woman or minor as Major Barbaryan learned from training courses organised by the Council of Europe. The trainings started in 2021 and will continue in 2022. Five groups of police officers have already been trained to handle domestic violence cases.

“Working with sexually abused women and minors, is the area which requires the utmost caution. During the training, we understood how to deal with such cases. For example, we learned that when a woman goes to the police, she should not be interviewed right away. Instead, a specially trained officer should talk to her in a safe environment, in an atmosphere of trust, so as not to put her under additional stress.”- Major Barbaryan says.

According to him, the skills acquired as a result of the courses, and the new approaches to working with families have increased trust in the police in the community, besides, the society is better aware of the law and respecting it. He recalls that in Artashat in 2018 about 20 cases of violence were registered, while in 2021 they were 67. Major Barbaryan indicates that these figures are not so much about the growth of cases but indicate that the police have started dealing with them. According to him, the society has started to trust the police more, but there are stereotypes that still hinder this process.

“We should keep in mind the stereotypes that people have and what they teach their children. It is surprising that the Soviet era tradition of scaring children with a police officer is still alive, whereas calling the police, reporting violence or other crimes, is considered shameful. How can a child for whom a person in uniform is an *El Cuegle (a master)* trust police officers, talk to them calmly?” - emphasises Major Barbaryan.

According to him, there is also a stereotyped attitude towards a person subjected to violence, especially in small communities: people don't want to be identified with the image of a victim, especially women who have been sexually abused. In this regard, the role of the media is of particular importance, as it can reinforce stereotypes or break them. With this aim, the Council of Europe has developed a special [guide](#) for journalists and media workers on gender equality and violence against women, which enables them to present the topics of violence in a professional and not sensational manner.

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