

Translation from original version in Armenian

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The weight and honour of shoulder straps: Major Lilit Jhangiryan, ‘social’ police officer of Sisian



Major Lilit Jhangiryan handled her first case of domestic violence four years ago. At that time she did not realise well what she was dealing with. Now, years later, even at night she is ready to put on her favourite uniform and go to the crime scene, monitoring the search and the work of the unit she leads. She can wait for hours until the victim is ready to speak. She knows everyone who is prone to violence in Sisian, but she is not a *family wrecker* for anyone in the community.

“Where the decisions of a police officer are well-founded and reasoned, and both the victim and the abuser are aware of their rights and obligations, no one will dare to say that the police officer was biased or abused his/her authorities.



On the other hand, knowledge of the law and the ability to act within it, makes them more confident about the lawfulness of the decisions made. Otherwise, the feeling that you could be wrong in matters

affecting a person's destiny will be intolerable.” - says Major Lilit Jhangiryan, senior inspector of the Sisian department of Syunik regional police department for juvenile affairs and family violence prevention unit.

Domestic violence is not a 'family issue'

Domestic violence, as such, received a legal formalisation in Armenia as late as in 2018, when the National Assembly adopted 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.](#)

Domestic violence is, first of all, a gross violation of human rights. To this end, the purposes of the [Council of Europe Convention on the Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence](#) are the prevention of violence, the protection of persons subjected to violence and the punishment of those who commit violence. It guarantees a multi-professional response and support mechanisms.



Major Jhangiryan has been dealing with cases of domestic violence since 2018. The first case that she had to handle concerned violence committed by a former son-in-law against his mother-in-law. She says that if she tries to assess her actions now, she will call them *very approximate*. The law was new, there were few mechanisms, and she was inexperienced. Due to experience that she gained, she can now orient quickly and take effective actions and, not the least, professionally analyse circumstances of a case.

“I can state confidently that if domestic violence is not prevented, it will get worse and more aggressive. That case, when the ex-son-in-law committed violence against the mother-in-law, later grew to repeated

violence, about 25 calls, which also spread to his ex-wife. Furthermore, the forms of violence change and aggravate, it starts from a slap and then goes to kicks or violent beating with the use of any object at hand. Therefore, the police officer always feels the burden of the question: how can I break this vicious circle?” - says Major Jhangiryan.

During this year, 13 new and 5 repeated cases of violence were registered in Sisian. In the last 4 years, only 2 arrests of abusers were made in Sisian, and Major Jhangiryan considers those the result of her personal efforts.

Imperfection of the law and impunity

Despite the adoption of the law, Major Jhangiryan believes that it still needs to be improved in order to meet international standards and be consistent with [4 pillars of the Council of Europe Convention](#).

She thinks that the loopholes in the law complicate the work of a police officer, and also the life of a victim.

“Under the new *Criminal Procedure Code* and *Criminal Code*, the police have been stripped of their investigative function. Now initiation of the proceedings is an investigative action. Actually, it turns out that victims do not know who can solve their problem. They have to tell different officials about what happened several times, and it victimizes them. Furthermore, prevention mechanisms have room for improvement. I am convinced that a fine will not deter the abuser and may increase the risk of violence recurrence. Abusers must know that any misconduct will threaten their freedom, otherwise they would consider themselves as unpunishable. Because the law is relatively new, inspectors are afraid to initiate a criminal case, to avoid a mistake, and judges are reluctant to issue protective orders. Still, my experience shows that in order to prevent the recurrence of violence, detention, even for 10 days, is the most effective mechanism.” - says Major Jhangiryan.

Her calling is ‘social’ police officer

Major Jhangiryan says that handling cases of domestic violence is the most challenging issue for a police officer. Hence, the police are instructed to draw up a record of the incident without looking into cause and consequence effect. She also adds that after the adoption of the law, it has been used only by the police, although its social support components and preventive intervention are very important, particularly perpetrator treatment programmes, which, unfortunately, are still applied inefficiently.



She says that while social services for victims have expanded, her experience shows that women are generally reluctant to go to shelters, and, as a rule, only apply for financial support provided by the state, in order to rent another dwelling or solve the most urgent social problems. They think that being away from the abuser for a while would solve their problems, and almost always refuse psychological support.

“As a person who works with people who are in traumatic situation, I can say that many women do not realize their psychological problems and condition. Many of them do not even know what psychological violence is. But it is obvious to me that in parallel with the legal assessment of the situation, serious psychological work should be done with both the victims and the abusers, and the witnesses, which are mostly children” - says Major Jhangiryan. She jokes that it is for this approach that the trainers of police officers often call themselves “social police”.

Major Lilit Jhangiryan believes that enhancing public awareness about the forms of violence and their prevention will help not only the police, but also victims of the violence. But there are also ensuing risks as coverage of the case of violence in media often harms more than helps. To avoid such cases, the Council of Europe has developed a [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.

Education as a lifeline

Major Jhangiryan says that no matter how much you have seen in your profession, you cannot ignore someone else's pain and suffering. Victim's troubles become yours as well, and all of a sudden, you are in much stress, too.

“I'm convinced that only proper education can help us, police officers, not to burn out at work, keep a cool mind, sober judgment. The more knowledge you accrue, the easier it becomes to find ways out of a situation” - says Major Jhangiryan.

She is one of 115 police officers who participated in training courses organised by the Council of Europe aimed at improving the capacity of police officers, in order to effectively apply international standards for violence against women and domestic violence, ensuring comprehensive response and protection mechanisms, a victim-centred approach and avoid re-victimisation of victims of violence against women and domestic violence.

Major Jhangiryan says that participating in training courses is not only an opportunity to acquire new knowledge and skills, but to create effective cooperation between colleagues as well.

“We had a very good experience. There is a joint chat group where we can share on a daily basis with colleagues from different regions participating in the training, discuss the cases we face, their peculiarities and solutions. This method of sharing experience is very promising, because cases of domestic violence are extremely different, have many specific features, and as there are various gaps in the law, continuous education and sharing of experience is the best option to avoid mistakes” - indicates Major Jhangiryan.

She assures that it is a constant dilemma for a police officer working on domestic violence, either act as a regular citizen, compassionate person, or act merely as the law prescribes, within the limits of the

mandate. Lilit says that when it comes to refusing the first approach and strictly complying with instructions, continuous education is crucial.

“I am the only woman in our unit and have the highest rank there. I understand that it is practically impossible to train all police officers all together and at the same time. And as a more experienced police officer of our unit I prefer being always present at all the scenes to help my colleagues in practice and share experience. This also helps to avoid legal mistakes in the future, which could be a loophole for the abuser to avoid punishment” - she says.

The weight and the honour of shoulder straps

Police Major Lilit Jhangiryan admits that the past year was the most difficult in her practice: the cases of violence were many and often recurring. Despite of this, she does not complain. She has never been late for work for almost 18 years. She will be on the scene at any time of the day or night. And with the experience gathered over the years, she admits that the weight and the honour of strips on her shoulders is paramount, and that the responsibility grows with each new asterisk.

Now Major Jhangiryan is looking forward for the rank of police lieutenant colonel and the new higher responsibility that comes with it.

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