

## Domestic child abuse and family realm in Albania

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### Abstract:

This paper brings new insights and further examines the data obtained from the National Survey of Domestic Violence, which is the most comprehensive source on the prevalence of violence against children in Albania.

The aim here is not to duplicate or overlap with the results of the survey but to enshrine subtle elements that characterize the violence against children. The analyses are focused to critically examine the frequency and characteristics of physical violence against children. This includes the calculation of many comparisons between the occurrence of violence and predisposing factors. From the statistical analysis results, it can be seen, that the number of respondents who nominated their respective mothers as offenders represent 70% of the total valid sample followed by their fathers and brothers/sisters with 46% and 38% respectively. It appears that the most frequent and sadly culturally accepted method of physical violence against children is slapping and knuckle beating which resulted in 89% of cases followed by hair tear and pushes by 60%, meanwhile other more extreme forms of violence occur to a lower rate ranging from 0.6% up to 20%. Interestingly the violence against children is predominantly high in Elbasan and Gjirokastra regions with an outstanding prevalence of 91% and 88% respectively. These scientific facts replace the old misconceptions that the domestic violence is more widespread in northern areas of Albania. The research findings reported here are critical to inform our efforts to protect children from children's exposure to violence.

**Keywords:** domestic violence, child abuse, family issues, perpetrator

### 1. Introduction

Domestic violence affects the lives of many people in Albania, including children. It is essential that professionals who work with children distinguish domestic physical violence against children, recognize the circle and effects of domestic violence, and therefore they mediate and provide necessary services as needed and appropriately.

Domestic violence places children at risk physically, emotionally, and developmentally. Violence is defined by World Health Organization (WHO) as "*The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation*" (Krug et al. 2002). This explanation includes also the level of possible or real violence occurred on children.

In Albania several sources indicate that domestic violence is highly prevalent (Somach, 2012, Haarr & Dharmo, 2009, Baba, 2004). Nevertheless, it can be argued that children are often purposely or

inadvertent victims of physical domestic violence. Yet these cases are poorly documented and the only sources of information on this phenomenon are very few specific reports on children violence and many generic studies and reports on violence against women. From these sources can be derived that the physical violence against children's is widespread. In 2004 and 2006 two UNCEF reports stated that children are violently affected in home at a rate of 34% in 2004 and 18.5% to 38.9% in 2006 (Baba, 2004; Tamo & Karaj, 2006). From National Survey of Domestic Violence is reported that 57.7% of children are being physically battered by a family member (Haarr & Dharmo, 2009). In a more recent epidemiological study (Balkan Epidemiologic Study on Child Abuse and Neglect – BECAN) on children violence conducted by Children's Human Rights Centre of Albania (CRCA) is preliminarily reported that the prevalence of physical violence among children is estimated at a rate of 59%, even though this is a generic estimate and not specifically related to domestic violence (CRCA, 2013).

From the above studies can be argued that National Survey of Domestic Violence is the most comprehensive source on the prevalence of physical violence against children to date in Albania (INSTAT 2009). The data obtained from this survey will be utilized here to further examine the situation of physical violence against children in Albania. The aim of this paper is not to duplicate or overlap with the results of the survey but to enshrine subtle elements that characterize the physical violence against children. The concrete purposes are focused to critically examine the prevalence and characteristics of violent offences against children, to recognize the real background of the issue, to evaluate the extent of violence against children in different regions of Albania, and to describe serious gaps in present information for social work research, planning and policy.

## 2. Methods

The National Survey on Domestic Violence comprised in a representation of population-based household survey administers at a national level with a consistent sample size of 2600 visited households. This survey was developed to describe the nature and prevalence of four different types of domestic violence as of psychological, physical, sexual and emotional. However, its scope was quite broad and here the focus will be given only to the physical violence against children. A child was considered suitable if he/ she was of an age 10-14 years and lived in the family. Each surveyed child was randomly selected during the household visits and a total of 991 children's have been interviewed (Haarr & Dharmo, 2009). The survey has a modular structure and from ten specific modules has been considered as relevant only three of them that include data on children abuse: i) *Module 8*: Module of Children Age 10-14 Years (MODSEL); ii) *Module 9*: Module of Domestic Violence toward Children Age 10-14 Years (MODDV\_CH); and iii) *Module 10*: Module of Using Weapons in Front of or Against Children (MODSALW\_CH). The selected modules specifications are as follows:

- Module 8 of the survey permitted the questioner to list each of the children ageing 10 to 14 years of age in the family, with a method of casually choosing 1 child in the family to complete the other Modules of the survey, respectively 9 and 10.
- Module 9 of the survey had 11 closed questions about experiences of children with domestic abuse to be completed by one child in the family between age 10 - 14 years. The

queries were settled to indicate the child's experience with violence by a family member; who was the perpetrator; how children behave; information on the physical abuse towards one's mother or other relatives; and if they testified the violence to an of the relatives, or others.

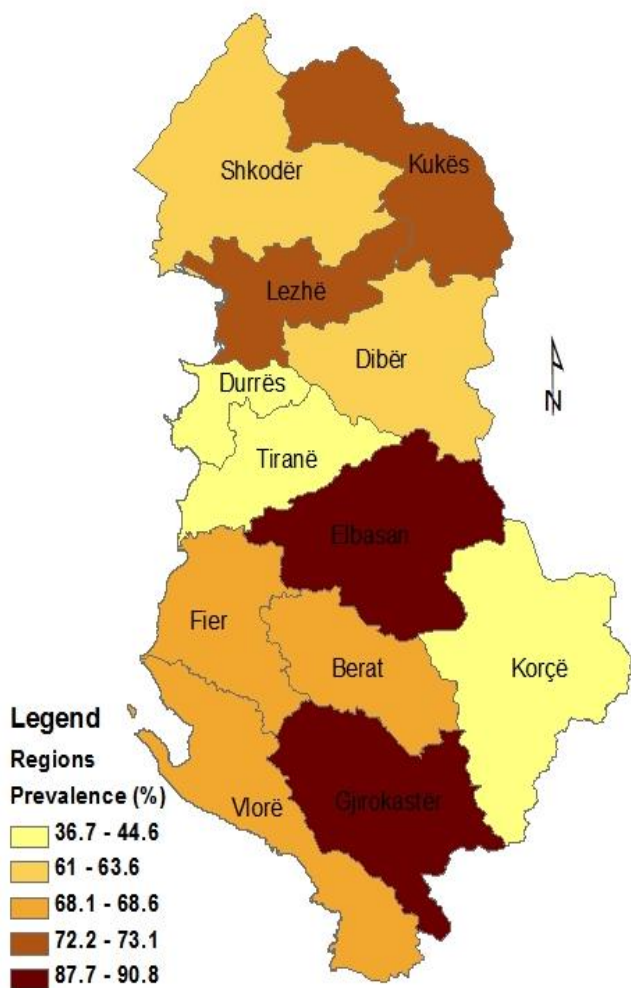
- Module 10 comprises of 9 close-ended questions related to use of weapons in front of against children to be finalized by 1 child in the household between age 10 - 14 years. The questions aimed to measure: if a child was a testimony of a family member being endangered or using a weapon against them by another member of the family; involvement or being threatened and or physically hit with a weapon; type of perpetrator; weapons linked damages; and judgements of using the weapons in the family to commit suicide.

From the selected modules related data sets have been retrieved from INSTAT, the data sets were combined and imported onto the statistical software. Statistical analyses were performed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 16 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA), STATA, version 11 (Stata Corp, TX) and ArcGIS, version 9 (ESRI). Questionnaire responses were coded and labelled, cases were divided into groups based on their gender and rural or urban location. Univariate and multivariate descriptive analysis have been performed. These comprise the usage of multiple response sets, cross-tabulations, comparisons charts and maps. The chi-squared test and t-test were used to determine whether the distributions of responses to the specific questions departed significantly from chance. The result is accepted as significant with  $p < 0.05$  and the probability for type I error was set at 0.05 for each test.

## 3. Results

The overall prevalence of domestic violence against children was estimated to be 64%, meanwhile the prevalence of physical violence experienced by children's in family setups was estimated to be 57.7%. The most affected regions are Elbasan and Gjirokastra with 90.8% and 87.7% respectively, followed by Kukes and Lezha with approximately 73% each. The regions of Berati, Vlora, Fier, Dibra and Shkodra appear to have a medium prevalence rate from 61% up to 68.6%, meanwhile Tirana,

Durres and Korca regions shows quite a low prevalence rate ranging from 44.6% to 36.7%.



**Figure 1:** Prevalence of domestic violence against children across regions

Physical violence seems to be associated with living in rural areas where the reported prevalence is 69%, whereas in urban areas is 59%. The prevalence percentage change among children’s living rural areas versus urban areas is statistically significant with a chi-squared test (1 df, N = 991) = 10.3,  $p < 0.001$ , confirming that children’s living in rural areas are more likely to be violated by family members than children living in urban areas.

It must be noted that the occurrence of violence against children within family setups is associated with larger families with an elevated number of family members. Generally, the violated children live within families with more family members ( $M = 5.17$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ ) than those that are not been violated ( $M = 4.85$ ,  $SD = 1.2$ ),  $t(989) = 3.74$ ,  $p = 0.000$ . In relation to the abuser about 63.8% (632 responders out of a total 991 interviewed) of interviewed children reported to have been at least once experienced violence from a family member. A

summary of multiple responses for the main abusing family members is given below in tab.1. The count column presents the number of children’s who nominated each of the six categories of family abusers. Thus, of the 632 children’s included in the analysis, 290 designated “father/stepfather” as an abuser, 447 nominated “mother/stepmother” as an abuser, 242 nominated “sister/brother” as an abuser, 36 nominated “grandfather/grandmother” as an abuser, 27 nominated “first grade cousins” as an abuser and 14 of them nominated “other relatives” as abusers. Thus, a total of 1.056 responses were generated from the sample of 632 children.

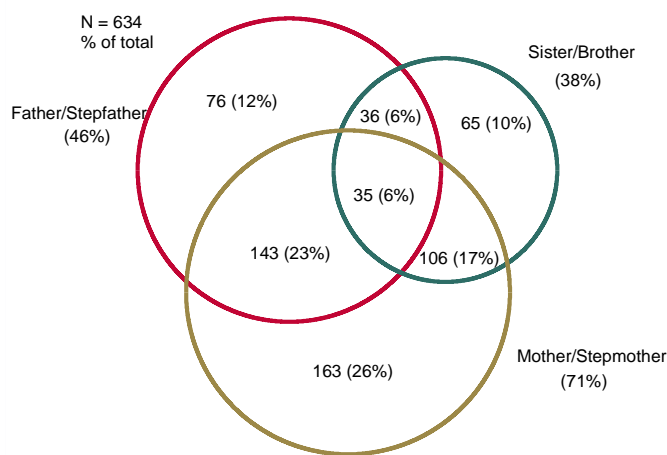
**Table 1:** Multiple Responses by family member abuser

Physical abuse by family members	Responses		Percent of cases
	Count	Percent	
Father/Stepfather	290	27.5%	45.9%
Mother/Stepmother	447	42.3%	70.7%
Sister/Brother	242	22.9%	38.3%
Grandfather/Grandmother	36	3.4%	5.7%
First grade cousins	27	2.6%	4.3%
Other relatives	14	1.3%	2.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1056</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>167.1%</b>

In terms of percentage from table.1 can be derived that mothers/stepmothers are mentioned as the main abusers with 42%, followed by fathers/stepfathers and sisters/brothers with 27.5% and 22.9% respectively. Other categories of abusers such as grandparents, cousins and other relatives show comparatively negligible percentages ranging from 1.3% to 3.4%. The percentage of cases column in tab.1 presents the number of children’s who nominated each of the six abusers (in the count column) as a percentage of the total valid sample. In the case of mothers, the 447 children’s who nominated their mothers as abusers, represent approximately 71% of the total valid sample (N = 632 cases), Fathers/Stepfathers 45.9%, Sisters/Brothers 38.3% and so on. Further analysis shows that there exist several relationships and interactions among the abusers.

In the Venn diagram depicted in fig.2 is indicated that the violence committed by different perpetrators overlaps substantially and that many children’s will be victims of the violence exercised by more than one of the family members. The numbers displayed

in the Venn diagram (see fig.2) represent the estimated count and percentage in each section of positive responses addressing the abuser. For example, 26% of children's experienced violence from the mother/stepmother but have not been subject of violence form other family members, 12% have been battered by their fathers/stepfather, 10% from sisters/brothers, 23% have been subject of violence from both parents, whereas 6% of them have been victim of all three types of family members violence. In the same fashion can be interpreted the results among the other intersecting niches of different abusers.



**Figure 2:** Relationship of the magnitude of violence committed by three main abusers.

Regarding the most frequent forms of physical violence experienced by children's a summary of multiple responses is given in table 2.

**Table 2:** Multiple Responses by physical violence type.

Physical violence types	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Hit with objects	127	11.8%	20.0%
Punched/Kicked/Slapped	563	52.2%	88.8%
Hair hank/push	380	35.3%	59.9%
Burns (e.g. with cigarettes)	4	.4%	.6%
Threatened (e.g. weapon/knife)	4	.4%	.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1078</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>170%</b>

From the table can be derived that the main types of physical violence experienced by the children's are punching/kicking and slapping has a high reporting

rate with 52% and accounts for 89% of cases, this is followed by hair hank and or pushing with 35% accounting for 60% of cases and been hit with objects by 11.8% accounting for 20% of cases. Burns and threatened by weapons and or knives even though very serious offences are been reported only by a small fraction of children's (0.4%, accounting for 0.6% of cases).

#### 4. Discussions

The findings of this study interestingly show that the violence against children is predominantly high in central and south Albania regions with an outstanding prevalence ranging from 88% to 91%. These scientific facts replace the old misconceptions that the domestic violence is more widespread in northern areas of Albania, at least related to violence against children. Results presented here are congruent with other studies in the country in terms of more violent physical events in the rural areas which thereafter are related to larger families in those areas (Tamo & Karaj, 2006; Haarr & Dhama, 2009).

The analysis exposed new facts about the children violence dynamics within the family members. It shows that the main perpetrators of violence are the very close members of the family (ordered: mother, father and siblings), meanwhile the other more distant family members (ordered: grandparents, cousins and relatives) exercise lower rates of violence. This internal violence dynamics might be explained by the fact described by Tamo & Karaj in 2006 that majority of adults maintain that "*physical and psychological violence has positive effects on a child's education*". Nevertheless, this concept might be consistent when both parents exercise violence against children's (23%, see fig.2), but it does not explain why mothers are the main violence perpetrator (26%, see fig.2). In relation to the later research suggests that the majority of child abuse is committed by mothers (Summers, 2006; May-Chahal & Cawson, 2005), even though the underlining factors leading to this might be related to fathers who are batterers and authoritarians and where women are violated by their husbands/intimates (Summers, 2006; Baba, 2004). The violence among siblings (10%, see fig.2) is a side of within family violence relationship that can be partially explained by sibling rivalry model suggesting that aggression between siblings reflects jealousy among them (Hoffman & Edwards, 2004; Felson, 1983). On the other hand there does exist a combined violence exercised over children's by siblings and parents (17% mothers together with

siblings and 6% fathers together with siblings see fig.2) it suggested by Felson in 1983 that conflicts are expected to become obvious if interference from parents is predicted because then younger siblings are eager to contest their more influential siblings. This recommends that siblings contest less when parents take a laissez-faire tactic because the younger sibling is required to give in (Felson, 1983). Even though this study did not focus on cross-comparisons between the perpetrators and violence types but was limited to the evaluation of main forms of physical violence. Other study confirms that when taking into consideration issues of violence, fathers or father surrogates are accountable for more severe physical abuse and mortalities than other abusers (Shusterman & Fluke, 2005).

Violence against children needs to become a priority in terms of domestic violence research in Albania. The above discussion is a simplistic way of explaining the physical violence dynamics against children's in family environments sine certain characteristics of the parents relationship, various aspects of parent child relations, characteristics of the sibling relationship and interactions with other close relatives are major components in explaining domestic violence against children's and it is a requirement that future research in Albania focuses on more holistic approaches to better understand the intersecting violence dynamics.

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