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Azeri journalists need to improve reporting of gender-related issues if domestic violence is to be tackled. Domestic violence was one of the main themes discussed at an August 30 round table on gender and the media organised by IWPR's Azerbaijani branch together with the Women's Crisis Centre in Baku.

Matanat Azizova, the director of the crisis centre, pointed out to the 17 participants, representing local media and NGOs, that of the various types of violence against women, only physical violence is recognised in law.

"Other types, such as sexual violence, are not considered violence when it happens between spouses," said Azizova.

She said the number of victims of domestic violence who've sought help at the crisis centre has been growing from year to year.

"Reading local media, one can see that even the amount of murders of one spouse by another has grown - which is due to the escalation of problems inside the family," continued Azizova.

According to IWPR Azerbaijan Country Director Shahin Rzayev, Azerbaijan has a long tradition of defending the rights of women, however, not all journalists report gender-related issues well.

"In Baku, journalists are more or less able to report about the problems inside families, but in the regions [this is not considered]...a real journalistic story," said Azizova.

Elchin Eldaniz, a journalist from the Aina newspaper, noted that images of metropolitan women on television can lead to difficulties in rural households, as local girls are influenced by the independent-minded women they see on the screen.

"Many channels broadcast soap operas daily, showing the 'cool life' that the women in those serials have. Young women take them as role models, which leads to conflicts inside families and even divorces," said Eldaniz.

The round table also discussed the limited opportunities open to women who want to pursue a career in journalism.

Another regional journalist, Vusala Dzhaarchieva from Zagatal, said girls from her village who want to study journalism are not able to do so because their families refuse to allow them to spend time in Baku.

"Me and my sister are the first to break this cycle in my village," said Dzhaarchieva.

Participants agreed that the more involved the media became in reporting gender issues, the more effective the work of NGOs in this field.

“When there are a lot of reports about violations of women’s rights, the authorities just have no choice but to react to them,” said Azizova.

“But the problem is that the journalists know less and less. When they turn to us for interview, I often notice that they have no previous information about gender issues.”

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