

[According](#) to NGO 'Union of Crisis Centres of Kazakhstan', about 400 women die from domestic violence in the country every year. Victims' applications to the police are either ignored or investigated in a slipshod manner. However, according to activists, crisis centres in Kazakhstan operate inefficiently, while human rights international organisations declare the standards of services provided to victims do not comply with international quality standards and their insufficient number.

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Crisis centres are meant to become a place where a victim can be isolated from an abuser, get psychological and legal aid. In Kazakhstan, according to the ministry of interior affairs, there are 40 such centres. According to the [report](#) of Human Rights Watch, this number is not sufficient for a country with over 18 million population.

The majority of crisis centres are non-state. Dozens of non-governmental organisations provide different kinds of assistance to violence survivors; however, their work, despite its significance, cannot be a full alternative to state services and crisis centres. Moreover, the employees of non-governmental crisis centres told HRW that the shortage of funding makes their services, including placement into shelters, much more difficult.

Zulfia Baisakova has been studying the problems of violence against women and children for more than 20 years. For a long time, she has worked in the non-governmental sector, and recently she has started to cooperate with state agencies. She is the head of the Union of Crisis Centres of Kazakhstan and the head of the crisis centre for victims of domestic violence in Almaty.

In 2019, 1,474 people, including 280 women and children who lived there, turned to this centre for help. The rest were consulted by a psychologist, lawyer or another specialist.

“When a person suffers violence, they feel fear, can fall into depression, have psychosocial somatic diseases. Children who witness violence have such diseases as enuresis, stuttering, depression, etc. In this regard, crisis centres do a great job. They also do prevention work, which no one else does in Kazakhstan,” Baisakova said.



Zulfia Baisakova. Photo: CABAR.asia

According to her, all crisis centres in Kazakhstan have different sources of funding, which has impact on the quality of services provided. If money are transferred under social state public contract, the funding is provided temporary from the contract award date till the end of the project.

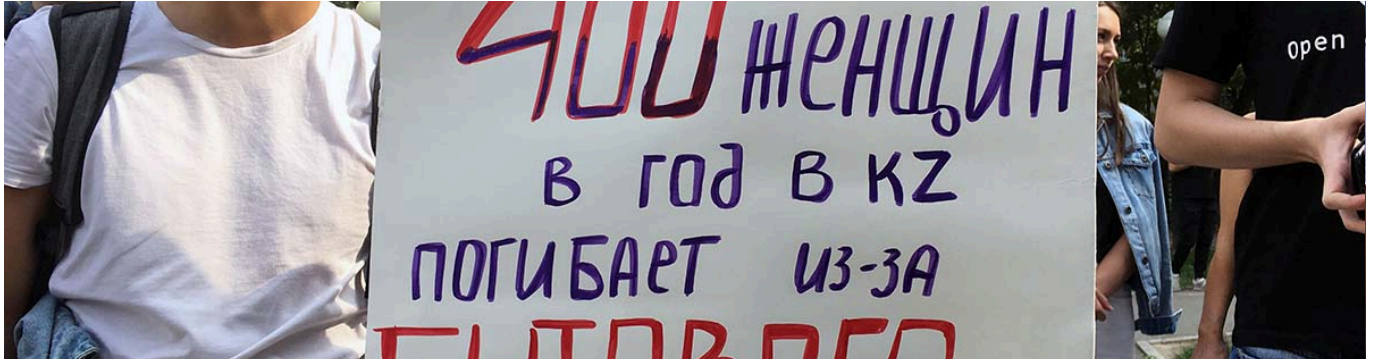
“In my opinion, this is very uncomfortable. There must be constantly functioning crisis centres that receive permanent financing to provide permanent services to the victims of violence,” Baisakova said.



Crisis centre for women in Almaty. Photo: CABAR.asia

Violence, pause, and violence again

Dina Smailova is the founder of the foundation Nemolchi.kz, which was based on the homonymous flash mob of sexual violence victims. She told her story on social media, after which the victims of violence in Kazakhstan started to seek her help. The movement turned into the foundation step by step and they defend the victims in courts at the expense of Facebook followers.



Self-Defence or Prison: How Victims of Violence in Kazakhstan Go to Jail?

This organisation and others that work against abuse of women have initiated the toughening of punishment for domestic violence and rape.

According to Smailova, the situation of violence against women becomes worse, while crisis centres are rather a shelter, which do not solve the problem of abuse.

“Once women are there, they use this time for a pause and then go to their partner violator again. They go to their husband even after stabbing. The majority of violence victims are dependent on their partners and husbands – it’s economic dependence, they get married early, they neither work nor study,” she said.



About It: Why Kazakhstan Still Does Not Have Sex Education at Schools?

Smailova emphasised that the state of Kazakhstan does not consider the rights of children and mothers. Domestic abuse cases rarely go to court; abusers are punished even more rarely. And violence victims are being blamed not only by relatives, but sometimes even from crisis centre employees.

Human Rights Watch has conducted a [research](#) in some crisis centres of Kazakhstan and found a range of problems. Many women who survived domestic abuse still do not know

where to seek help.

Poor security measures have been found in crisis centres. There are evidences that employees blame the victims of “provoking” their husbands and partners to abuse and persuaded them to reconcile with their abusers. According to the victims, centre employees told them they “should not drive their husbands anymore”; they were to blame for alcoholism of their husbands, or for “not obeying them”. Also, some centre employees admitted they invited husbands of victims to the centre to reconcile with them.

Zulfia Baisakova emphasised that the staff should be taught to avoid such cases. Public centres have money for that, while non-governmental centres usually do not provide for any training for their staff.

“The union of crisis centres holds training for their members only, for 18 people. The director is certainly has great responsibility to monitor the quality of services provided. However, not everyone is doing their job in good faith,” she said.

In villages, women still think they are born to serve their family and husband.

Dina Smailova cites as example the system of similar services in the United States. A woman can stay in a crisis centre there for three days only. She is provided with a lawyer, and all necessary procedures - medical, psychological examinations - are being held. The case goes through all legislative procedures and comes to court. If the court finds any serious violations, the victim receives a protection order and the abuser is bound to undergo psychological treatment and therapy.

“Here in Kazakhstan we just waste money. There should be treatment centres for men with alcoholism, gambling addiction, violence along with women's crisis centres. We spend money to provide some rest to these women instead of investing it to conduct a good research of the causes of violence. In villages, women still think they are born to serve their family, husband, and to suffer discomfort,” Smailova said.

According to her, the state needs to invest in promoting the ideas of gender equality and human rights. However, the situation in Kazakhstan is otherwise.

An image of a Kazakh woman

At the end of 2019, the feminist community of Kazakhstan took agitatedly the book written by the deputy of maslikhat (local representative body - *editor's note*) of Nur-Sultan, Karakat

Abden, 'You are the Kazakh woman. Be proud of it! 160 life hacks for a young woman'. It encouraged young women to know their place, which is next to a man who's superior to her.

"I wanted to tell girls that we have things to be proud of, to show our uniqueness and to encourage the girls to feel proud in any country of the world. Kazakh girls have never wanted to be in front of or contrary to a man, as it is in the west, and have never been feminists. We don't need it," Abden wrote after the publication of the book (author's spelling and style preserved).

In addition to the authorship and work at the maslikhat, Abden leads the women's institute of cultural and moral education 'Kazak Kyzy'. The curriculum, according to the deputy, provides for the training of girls of different ages. The main and most solicited modules, she said, are national and secular etiquette, personal development trainings, traditional arts and crafts, and games.

According to journalist Fariza Ospan, last year the women's institute received 17 million 544 thousand tenge (46.4 thousand dollars) from the national budget as indicated on the public procurement website. However, according to Abden, the book was published at her own cost.

According to female activists, the state supports development of patriarchy instead of distributing the ideas of equality rights and education for every member of society.

"We'll have even more violence against women in the society in this situation. We still teach women to spend all time cooking, to be dependent on their husbands, partners. We have held 36 people liable in courts. We've never given any money to the victims of violence. We've helped but said they should fight themselves, they could do everything themselves, to make them understand their value. We need to give them a chance to become independent, to get a profession, instead of providing fictitious assistance," Dina Smailova said.

Law in favour of women?

Back in 2012, the [message](#) of President Nursultan Nazarbayev regarding the "Strategy of Kazakhstan 2050" was about the importance of women's role in the society:

The state must strictly suppress egregious cases of sexual slavery, attitude to a woman as a commodity. We have many single-parent families in our country. The state must help mothers who bring up their children alone. We need to provide women with flexible forms of

employment, create conditions for domestic labour. The law, the state and I will stand for our women. We will create all conditions to improve the role of women in our country. A modern Kazakh woman must strive for building a career.

In 2016, the presidential decree “On approval of the Concept of Family and Gender Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030” contained support of women surviving violence. It reported 28 crisis centres (17 with shelters) in all the regions of Kazakhstan, with only 24 centres functioning back in 2006.

Also, the document mentions the improvement of activity of crisis centres, with no details, though.

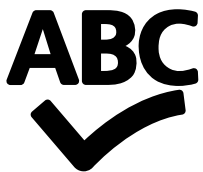
“Crisis centres will receive assistance in the form of state social order, state grants for socially significant projects in order to provide assistance to the victims of domestic violence,” the decree reads.

In 2019, the order of the president of Kazakhstan Kassym Zhomart-Tokayev to toughen punishment for domestic abuse and paedophilia encouraged female activists. However, the real situation is otherwise.

Amendments to the administrative code provide for the annulment of a fine for domestic battery and intended light bodily injury, and now domestic abusers face only a warning or a detention. According to the revised code, if the abuse and the victim have family relationship, the abuser can face a warning or administrative arrest for 10-15 days.

Lawmakers explained that fines have been removed for the sake of the family as this money is spent from the household budget.

This article was prepared as part of the Giving Voice, Driving Change - from the Borderland to the Steppes Project.



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