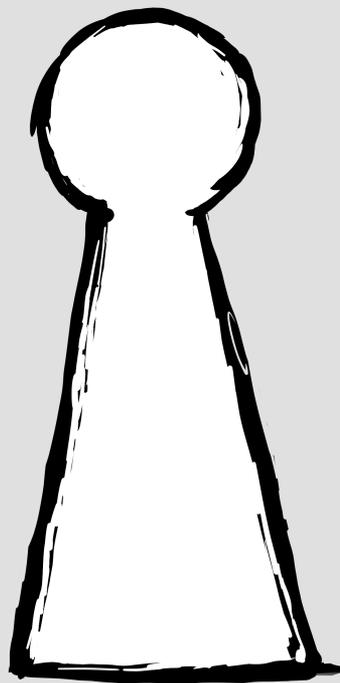


The “Queer Women of the North Caucasus” Project

**Violence against lesbian, bisexual and transgender
women in the North Caucasus region
of the Russian Federation**



Moscow 2018

VIOLENCE AGAINST LESBIAN, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER WOMEN IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS REGION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

A report on the results of a qualitative study of violence against lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the North Caucasus region of the Russian Federation

He pulled out a gun and put me down on my knees. He said: “I’m going to kill you now and nobody will find you. I’ll bury you in the garden”.

From the interview with A.

We urge States to ensure that human rights violations based on sexual orientation or gender identity are investigated and perpetrators held accountable and brought to justice.

UN declaration on sexual orientation and gender identity (article 12)

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Human qualities are in their very nature a mixture of good and evil. The rift dividing good from evil, which goes through all human beings, reaches into the lowest depths [of the human soul]...

Viktor Frankl. "Man's Search for Meaning"

Introduction

The relevance of this study became apparent when we started running the "Queer Women of the North Caucasus" project. During the 2017 and 2018 crises in the North Caucasus when reports of massive illegal detentions, torture and extrajudicial killings of LGBT+ people in Chechnya and then in other republics began, most of the applicants were homosexual and bisexual men. Appeals for help by lesbian and bisexual women were relatively rare. The "Queer Women of the North Caucasus" project itself was the result of the joint efforts of individual female activists in Russia and aims to support and protect lesbian, bisexual and transgender women. Over those two years, the activists involved in the project were able to gather a large amount of information confirming facts of violence against lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the North Caucasus. Any explicit support and assistance to lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the North Caucasus entails significant risks, primarily for the applicants themselves.

The atmosphere of fear, mistrust, and severe stigmatization, risk to one's life, blatant limitations on the rights of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, the absence of existing mechanisms to protect women's rights, the fact that discrimination against women is ignored and discrimination is justified, and explicit lesbo- / homo- / bi- / transphobia and harassment at the state level are all factors that do not allow lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the North Caucasus to find protection, let alone report acts of violence and discrimination against them.

In the study we use the term "lesbophobia" to denote uncontrolled negative emotions, any negative attitude (hatred, dislike, aggression) towards women, based on assumptions about their homosexual orientation¹. In addition, we use feminine forms to increase the visibility of the gender imbalance of violence. This approach provides an intersectional perspective² on the problem of violence against lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the North Caucasus and makes it possible to avoid instances of linguistic sexism.

We sincerely hope that the study will help to draw attention to the extremely vulnerable situation of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the North Caucasus and find ways to stop "honour killings" and violence against lesbian, bisexual and transgender women.

¹ Avoiding hate speech towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons. A guide for journalists. Compiled by Valery Sozaev, the Moscow Helsinki Group. – Moscow, 2013, p. 3

² Crenshaw, Kimberle. Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. University of Chicago Legal Forum 1989: 139–67

Chapter 1. Analysis of the problem of violence and the rights of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the North Caucasus republics of the Russian Federation

1.1. The rights of women and the LGBT+ community in Russia

Most human rights activists today find the general human rights situation in the Russian Federation alarming. According to reports presented to the UN Human Rights Council in May 2018, a stark difference between the views of human rights defenders and the official stance of government representatives is evident, not only in their assessment of the overall situation, but also in their approaches to the protection of human rights in Russia.

Thus, the national report prepared by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation, indicates that the Russian authorities are consistently working on improving and strengthening mechanisms for the protection of human rights³. At the same time, it is noted that Russian law prohibits any form of restriction of citizens' rights on the grounds of social, racial, gender, national, linguistic, religious, and any other affiliation⁴. However, the report itself does not provide enough information regarding the level of misogyny, xenophobia, lesbo- / homo- / bi- / transphobia in society, among the employees of the law enforcement and judicial systems, among officials, and in the media. Article 84 states only that "Reports of any violent acts against women are subject to verification by law enforcement agencies. Any established violent act is punished in the manner prescribed by law"⁵. **Although, as we shall see later, it is impossible or extremely difficult to identify recorded crimes against women and against LGBT + people in the official statistics, and therefore it is almost impossible to determine the level of hate crimes against LGBT+ persons in general and women in particular.** Indirectly, the lack of protection of women's rights is confirmed by the fact that "the Russian Federation is not a party to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention)"⁶. Officially, the Ministry of Justice explains this by saying that its provisions "are not in line with Russia's principled approaches to the protection and promotion of traditional moral and family values and the Concept of the State Family Policy of the Russian Federation until 2025"⁷.

In 2003, a monitoring report describing the situation of discrimination against women in Russia was published. It indicates that "despite the abundance of norms prohibiting discrimination, there is no mechanism for their implementation, in particular, no specific sanctions for violating the relevant provisions are outlined"⁸. Fifteen years ago it was obvious that "there are practically no regulatory documents directly aimed at countering discrimination, creating mechanisms for the elimination of discriminatory practices, and the restoration of violated rights"⁹.

³ National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21. Russian Federation, 7–18 May 2018, p. 3

⁴ National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21. Russian Federation, 7–18 May 2018, p. 7

⁵ National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to resolution 16/21 of the Human Rights Council. Russian Federation, 7–18 May 2018, p.10

⁶ National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to resolution 16/21 of the Human Rights Council. Russian Federation, May 7-18, 2018, p.3

⁷ National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to resolution 16/21 of the Human Rights Council. Russian Federation, May 7-18, 2018, p.3

⁸ Report on the observance of women's rights in the Russian Federation // Collection of reports on the human rights situation in the Russian Federation in 1999. M., 2000, p. 239.

⁹ Report: The discrimination of women in present-day Russia. Moscow Helsinki Group and partner organizations. Monitoring work coordinators: T. Lokshina, A. Novikova, eds S. Lukashovsky, N. Belenkina, 2003 <http://www.owl.ru/rights/women2003/discr-main.html>

Unfortunately, there have been no significant changes for the better in 2018. Moreover, women are becoming increasingly vulnerable to violence perpetrated by family members, the police, religious leaders, and employers. The Criminal Code of the Russian Federation does not include domestic violence in its list of crimes, which significantly affects the visibility of the level of domestic violence and the extent to which it is combatted. In July 2016, a law abolishing criminal liability for beatings without aggravating circumstances was passed, which meant that most of those instances were no longer a criminal, but an administrative offence. In January 2017, another amendment was adopted providing for the abolition of criminal liability for the beating of close relatives¹⁰. The restriction of women's rights was justified by a "concern" for their personal safety, reproductive health, as well as family and moral traditions.

According to alternative reports, "xenophobia is widespread in Russia: the homophobic statements and comments made by Russian officials and the media create fertile ground for widespread and constant intolerance against members of the LGBT community"¹¹.

1.2. The situation of women and the LGBT+ community in the North Caucasus in 2018

The existence of a significant gap between official statistics and monitoring reports of human rights organizations in the North Caucasus and in the Chechen Republic in particular is due to universal fear. "People still go missing in Chechnya. At the same time, a decrease in the number of recorded abducted and killed persons does not look reliable. People are afraid to contact law enforcement agencies and human rights defenders because they no longer believe that anyone can help them"¹².

Many independent reports and studies concerning human rights in the Russian Federation focus on the republics of the North Caucasus (research of the Heinrich Böll Foundation¹³, reports of the Russian LGBT Network¹⁴, the research report of the Legal Initiative¹⁵, materials of the Memorial Human Rights Center¹⁶ and the Civic Assistance Committee¹⁷ and others). The events of recent years show that the republics of the North Caucasus are becoming a special area where the human rights situation is catastrophic. The situation of women and LGBT+ people in the Chechen Republic is alarming. The Memorial Human Rights Center and the Civic Assistance Committee explain that the problem with discussing this issue is "the lack of sound information about what is happening, since in Chechen culture it is considered taboo to discuss relationships between men and women, children born out of wedlock, rape, not to mention the problems of the LGBT community"¹⁸.

Judging by the relatively scarce information which researchers and human rights activists are able to gather in high-risk conditions in the republics of the North Caucasus, people from vulnerable

¹⁰ Summary of stakeholders' information on the Russian Federation. Human Rights Council. Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review. Thirtieth Session, May 7–18, 2018, p. 9

¹¹ Summary of stakeholders' information on the Russian Federation. Human Rights Council. Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review. Thirtieth Session, May 7–18, 2018, p. 3

¹² Chechens in Russia. Criminal prosecution of residents of the Chechen Republic. The situation of women in the Chechen Republic. The issue of property in Chechnya. Edited by Svetlana Alekseevna Gannushkina. Memorial Human Rights Center, Civic Assistance Committee, 2014, p. 2

¹³ The life and situation of women in the North Caucasus (report on the results of the study), led by Irina Kosterina, 2015

¹⁴ "They told me that I was not a person, but a nobody, that it would have been better for me to be a terrorist than a faggot". Report on the facts of persecution of LGBT people in the North Caucasus region. Prepared by the "Russian LGBT Network" interregional public movement in cooperation with Elena Milashina, a special correspondent for Novaya Gazeta, 2017

¹⁵ The carrying out of female genital mutilation operations. Report on the results of a qualitative study in the Republic of Dagestan, 2016

¹⁶ Human rights violations in the North Caucasus. Memorial Human Rights Center. Prepared for the member states of the UN Human Rights Council in the framework of the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review at the UN, 2018

¹⁷ Chechens in Russia. Criminal prosecution of residents of the Chechen Republic. The situation of women in the Chechen Republic. The issue of property in Chechnya. Edited by Svetlana Alekseevna Gannushkina. Memorial Human Rights Center, Civic Assistance Committee, 2014

¹⁸ Chechens in Russia. Criminal prosecution of residents of the Chechen Republic. The situation of women in the Chechen Republic. The issue of property in Chechnya. Edited by Svetlana Alekseevna Gannushkina. Memorial Human Rights Center, Civic Assistance Committee, 2014, p. 23

groups increasingly face the violation of their rights and threats to their lives due to misogyny and lesbian- / homo- / bi- / transphobia.

The Russian LGBT Network, other human rights organizations, and independent media (Memorial Human Rights Center, Novaya Gazeta) confirm cases of forced disappearance and torture in the Chechen Republic on suspicion of being gay¹⁹. Despite the wide publicity and thorough documentation of cases of violence, harassment, threats, practices of arbitrary detention, other forms of ill-treatment, and excessive use of force by family members, law enforcement officers in Chechnya, and other individuals, the crimes are not investigated, and the perpetrators are left unpunished. One possible explanation of this situation is the fact that the LGBT fears becoming an object of discrimination and violence, and deeply rooted prejudices held by law enforcement officers²⁰. On the other hand, it is due to the active participation of the authorities in organizing “purging” campaigns and calling for the harassment LGBT persons²¹.

Another prominent reason is the lack of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, the state’s departure from the concept of human rights, which is enshrined in a number of international legal instruments ratified by the Russian Federation, including the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms²², and the inconsistency of the national legislation of Russia with international obligations to protect individuals from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity²³.

According to the “Life and situation of women in the North Caucasus” study published in 2015, 11% of respondents (women) in the Chechen Republic indicate that they are sometimes beaten, 28% receive slaps or jerks from time to time, and 8% state that they have been raped once or forced to have sex. 22% of women in Dagestan are sometimes forced to endure insults and criticism of their appearance and mental capabilities, 21% of the husbands of the women interviewed push their wives or slap them from time to time. In 12% of cases, women face irregular beatings. The percentage of women subject to physical violence in Kabardino-Balkaria is lower than in Dagestan or Chechnya, but beatings do take place there as well. 7% sometimes get slaps or pushes from their husbands, 6% have at least once been beaten more severely, with fists or objects, and 2% of respondents have been threatened with weapons or have received serious injuries. In Ingushetia, 14% of respondents claim that they have received slaps, pushes or kicks from their husbands once, 5% of women state that their husbands have threatened to take away or kidnap their children... In Chechnya, 27% of women admitted that they were married under pressure from their parents. This was the case with over 40% of women in the older age group (women over 61).²⁴

The situation in Russia as a whole is reflected in sufficient detail in the report of the Legal Initiative Project²⁵. Thus, according to the results of a large-scale survey of women's reproductive health conducted in 2011 by the Russian Statistics Agency together with the Russian Ministry of Health in

¹⁹ Summary of stakeholders’ information on the Russian Federation. Human Rights Council. Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review. Thirtieth Session, May 7–18, 2018, p. 4

²⁰ Summary of stakeholders’ information on the Russian Federation. Human Rights Council. Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review. Thirtieth Session, May 7–18, 2018, p. 3

²¹ “They told me that I was not a person, but a nobody, that it would have been better for me to be a terrorist than a faggot”. Report on the facts of persecution of LGBT people in the North Caucasus region. Prepared by the “Russian LGBT Network” interregional public movement in cooperation with Elena Milashina, a special correspondent for Novaya Gazeta, 2017, p. 3

²² Violence against women in the Russian Federation. Legal analysis of the situation. Report author: Yu.A. Antonova, Senior Lawyer, Legal Initiative Project, 2016, p. 8

²³ Summary of stakeholders’ information on the Russian Federation. Human Rights Council. Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review. Thirtieth Session, May 7–18, 2018, p. 3

²⁴ The life and situation of women in the North Caucasus (report on the results of the study), led by Irina Kosterina, 2015

²⁵ Violence against women in the Russian Federation. Legal analysis of the situation. Report author: Yu.A. Antonova, Senior Lawyer, Legal Initiative Project, 2016, p. 29-30

partnership with the United Nations Population Fund and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (USA)²⁶, more than a third of Russian women were subjected to verbal violence (38%). One in five women reported cases of physical violence (20%), and 4% of women said that there were cases in their lives when current or former partners forced them to have sexual intercourse against their will. However, only a small proportion of women turned to official institutions for help: 10% went to the police, 6% went to a medical institution and 2% spoke to a lawyer.

In order to understand the situation, one must take into account the possibilities (or lack thereof) of resolving a situation of violence. So, while in the central part of Russia women have more freedom in their decision to get a divorce, in the North Caucasus the decision regarding divorce must be initiated by the husband and/or approved by the older men in the family. Moreover, if the divorce is approved, the woman will face serious social stigma. In fact, a woman cannot make any decisions on her own. This situation is due to a process called “returning to traditions” that the Vainakhs never actually had... The cult of strength, power, and wealth was not characteristic of the relatively democratic traditional Vainakh society... A woman’s status in the family was high despite her secondary position. In the family, she was dominant: “Paradise lies under the mother’s feet” is a proverb often repeated by the Vainakhs. It was not considered possible to make a woman wear a hijab. Only the eldest man in the family could reprimand her. Shooting a woman with paintballs, admonitions and assault (which are both forms of harassment) would have been impossible in the past”²⁷.

In the “Chechens in Russia. Criminal prosecution of residents of the Chechen Republic. The situation of women in the Chechen Republic. The issue of property in Chechnya.” report by the Memorial Human Rights Center and the Civic Assistance Committee there is a section titled “The situation of women in the Chechen Republic revisited”. It provides detailed examples of the situation of women and has documented one of the first cases of persecution on the grounds of sexual orientation. In 2014 the following was documented:

1. In the Chechen Republic, a frequent occurrence are the so-called “honour killings” where men murder their female relatives for even slight deviations from the “norms of behavior for a Chechen girl”.
2. The independence of women may irritate men, and their dissatisfaction with a woman’s overly independent behaviour may lead to her being murdered.
3. The active and independent actions of a woman may cause a hostile reaction and lead persecution. Moreover, her loved ones may take the side of the persecutors out of fear for their own lives.
4. A woman who has a child out of wedlock becomes a complete outcast. Relatives may prefer to kill her and cover up what happened.
5. Men suspected of homosexuality were subjected to religious rituals of “purification”, “house arrest”, beatings, and received death threats from their relatives. Homosexual women were sentenced to death by their relatives²⁸.

It would be absolutely wrong to say that women and LGBT + people are subjected to violence and persecution only in the Chechen Republic. According to data published in 2015 by the Legal Initiative on Russia and “Caucasus. World. Development”, the Center for the Study of Present-day Global Issues and Regional Problems, the **practice of female genital mutilation in girls exists and is performed in Dagestan**. Practices of female genital mutilation are prevalent in localised areas, such as the Tsuntinsky

²⁶ The reproductive health of the population of Russia 2011. Report summary. Russian Statistics Agency (Rosstat). Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation. United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Department of Reproductive Health, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, USA (DRH /CDC). Information and Publishing Center “Statistics of Russia”, 2012,p.52-53

²⁷ Chechens in Russia. Criminal prosecution of residents of the Chechen Republic. The situation of women in the Chechen Republic. The issue of property in Chechnya. Edited by Svetlana Alekseevna Gannushkina. Memorial Human Rights Center, Civic Assistance Committee, 2014, p. 4

²⁸ Chechens in Russia. Criminal prosecution of residents of the Chechen Republic. The situation of women in the Chechen Republic. The issue of property in Chechnya. Edited by Svetlana Alekseevna Gannushkina. Memorial Human Rights Center, Civic Assistance Committee, 2014, p. 24-35

and Bezhtinsky areas (nearly every woman undergoes this operation; every respondent of this study from those areas has), the Botlikh district (almost full coverage), the Tsumadinsky and Tlyaratinsky areas (partially, about half). The practice is also found in the Gumbetovsky and Untsukul'sky districts, and according to some information, in the Tabasaran and Agul'sky districts. As a rule, the purpose of the circumcision is to control the sexual behavior of women. Such practices are given religious justification by the official clergy, who consider it a religious requirement (of the Shafi'i madhhab), which has "social and cultural value – in reducing divorce and immorality, and a medical justification – in restricting sensitivity and rabies in women"²⁹. It is important to add that, according to the results of the study, girls are circumcised between birth and 3 years of age, with rare cases of the age limit being raised to 12 years by the decision of the girl's mother or older female relatives on her mother's side (her grandmother or aunt)³⁰.

In March 2017, activists of the Russian LGBT Network began to document a wave of crimes committed by security forces against homosexual men in the Chechen Republic. Over the next 11 months, 200 complaints from all over the North Caucasus were recorded. In 71 cases, they were testimonies of victims of persecution and violence. As a result, the activists of the Russian LGBT Network and their colleagues were able to isolate identical threats and facts of persecution in the republics of the North Caucasus, as well as to document the torture and ill-treatment that took place in the secret prisons in the Chechen Republic³¹. The end of March and the beginning of April 2017, was a turning point for the entire LGBT+ community in Russia, when it became apparent that discrimination and stigmatization, actively supported by the internal policy of the state, turned into "purges", imprisonment, legalised torture and violence by law enforcement agencies committed on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. In its report, the Russian LGBT Network describes several waves of illegal detentions in Chechnya: from December 2016 to February 2017; from March to May 2017, in June 2017, in August 2017. According to human rights activists, on March 1, 2018, there were still people in the Chechen prisons who were accused of homosexuality³².

According to reports published by human rights organizations and initiatives, as well as the experience of recognised experts in the region, there were several prerequisites for the mass persecution of the LGBT+ community. The first prerequisite, which can be found in analytical reports, are ethnic traditions, where a special role is given to kinship and responsibility to the teip³³. However, for a long time they were indeed traditions, that is, a collection of ideas, rites, habits, and practical and social skills handed down from generation to generation, acting as one of the regulators of social relationships. They have a more complex structure than the rules implemented in the North Caucasus today. For example, according to the Vainakh traditions, a child belongs to the family of the father, but needs a mother up to 12 years of age and requires care from the father³⁴. Of course, such a tradition goes against the family code of the Russian Federation, discriminates against women, violates their rights and the rights of the child. However, it does not use any existing custom to as justification for depriving the mother of the

²⁹ Antonova Yu.A., Sirazhudinova S.V. The performance of female genital mutilation on girls. Report on the results of a qualitative study in the Republic of Dagestan. Legal initiative in Russia. Moscow, 2016, p. 43

³⁰ Antonova Yu.A., Sirazhudinova S.V. The performance of female genital mutilation on girls. Report on the results of a qualitative study in the Republic of Dagestan. Legal initiative in Russia. Moscow, 2016, p. 40

³¹ "They told me that I was not a person, but a nobody, that it would have been better for me to be a terrorist than a faggot". Report on the facts of persecution of LGBT people in the North Caucasus region. Prepared by the "Russian LGBT Network" interregional public movement in cooperation with Elena Milashina, a special correspondent for Novaya Gazeta, 2017, p. 2

³² "They told me that I was not a person, but a nobody, that it would have been better for me to be a terrorist than a faggot". Report on the facts of persecution of LGBT people in the North Caucasus region. Prepared by the "Russian LGBT Network" interregional public movement in cooperation with Elena Milashina, a special correspondent for Novaya Gazeta, 2017, p. 3

³³ "They told me that I was not a person, but a nobody, that it would have been better for me to be a terrorist than a faggot". Report on the facts of persecution of LGBT people in the North Caucasus region. Prepared by the "Russian LGBT Network" interregional public movement in cooperation with Elena Milashina, a special correspondent for Novaya Gazeta, 2017, p. 5

³⁴ Chechens in Russia. Criminal prosecution of residents of the Chechen Republic. The situation of women in the Chechen Republic. The issue of property in Chechnya. Edited by Svetlana Alekseevna Gannushkina. Memorial Human Rights Center, Civic Assistance Committee, 2014, p. 31

opportunity to participate in the life of a child who has not reached 12 years of age³⁵. A similar situation can be observed regarding collective responsibility, which is not identical to the mass detentions of relatives as hostages, arson, the demolition of relatives' houses, and the eviction of the families of Chechen militants³⁶.

Thus, the second prerequisite, which seems to us no less significant, is the stance of the authorities and their tolerance of the violent actions of law enforcement officers in the North Caucasus. According to the Memorial Human Rights Center, "for the period from 2013 to 2018, there were complaints of torture by investigating officers in Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria"³⁷. In the Chechen Republic, for example, it is officially allowed to use violence and fabricate criminal cases against citizens if "there is even the slightest resemblance to the Wahhabis"³⁸. In 2017, this practice was applied to LGBT+ people in the Chechen Republic³⁹ and in 2018 it continued to be used against human rights defenders⁴⁰.

When decisions about someone being a "disgrace to the family" went from being an internal affair of the family, clan, or teip, where it was still possible to use the human rights protection mechanisms provided for in the state, and fell into the hands of the authorities and security agencies acting at their own discretion, this was bound to have a negative impact on the situation of women and the LGBT+ community. One of the most notorious cases of the use of power by a law enforcement officer in his personal interests, associated with violation of women's rights, is the story of 17-year-old Chechen girl Kheda Goylabiyeva published by Novaya Gazeta on April 30, 2015⁴¹. The head of the Nozhai-Yurt police department, Najud Guchigov, decided to "take" Kheda as his second wife without her consent or the consent of her parents. Despite the wide publicity, the wedding took place and was backed by the President of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov. Pavel Astakhov, the Commissioner for Children's Rights in the Russian Federation, did not take any action to protect the girl. The bans in the Chechen Republic on the rite of abduction of brides and on marriages with minors were ignored. The protests of fellow villagers, the appeal of the head of the HRC Mikhail Fedotov to the Prosecutor General's Office, or the appeal of the Commissioner for Human Rights Ella Pamfilova to the leadership of Chechnya had no effect.

The second high-profile example is the story of Luisa Dudurkayeva, who secretly fled from the Chechen Republic in response to receiving threats after she had published some of her photos in an online group titled "Carthage". Officers of the law enforcement agencies of the Republic of Belarus were illegally involved in the detention of Luisa, and her family brought the girl home⁴². On September 15, 2017, the

³⁵ Why children in the North Caucasus always remain in the family of the father after a divorce, and why the court ruling means nothing. Mediazona. Maria Klimova. April 21, 2016. <https://zona.media/article/2016/21/04/elita>

³⁶ Counterterrorism in the North Caucasus: the perspective of human rights defenders. 2014 – first half of 2016. Report of the Memorial Human Rights Center, 2016, p. 27

³⁷ Memorial Human Rights Center. Violations of human rights in the North Caucasus. The report was prepared for the member countries of the UN Human Rights Council in the framework of the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review at the UN in May 2018. p. 3

³⁸ Alaudinov Apty Aronovich, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs for the Chechen Republic – Chief of Police. Police Major General. 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=W3GJT18PID4>

³⁹ "They told me that I was not a person, but a nobody, that it would have been better for me to be a terrorist than a faggot". Report on the facts of persecution of LGBT people in the North Caucasus region. Prepared by the "Russian LGBT Network" interregional public movement in cooperation with Elena Milashina, a special correspondent for Novaya Gazeta, 2017, p. 7

⁴⁰ Memorial Human Rights Center. The persecution of Oyub Titiev. <https://memohrc.org/ru/defendants/titiev-oyub-salmanovich>

⁴¹ The head of the Chechen police department decided to marry: help needed. Elena Milashina. April 30, 2015. <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2015/04/30/64035-glava-chechenskogo-rovd-zahotel-zhenitsya-trebuetsya-pomosch>

⁴² A Chechen woman who fled the country and received refugee status in Norway was detained in Minsk and handed over to her father. Novaya Gazeta, September 04, 2017. Tatyana Britskaya. <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/news/2017/09/04/135001-bezhavshuyu-iz-strany-i-poluchivshuyu-status-bezhentsa-v-norvegii-chechenku-zaderzhal-i-v-minske-i-vydali-ottsu>

girl and her parents were detained and taken to the police station of the city of Argun in the Chechen Republic where they spent nearly 24 hours⁴³.

In 2017, the Russian LGBT Network collected materials that testify to stories of “police and military officers” organizing “fake dates”, “blackmailing” and “extorting money in exchange for silence” from men suspected of being gay⁴⁴ since the late 2000s. In fact, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression were taboo topics in Chechen society and were rarely raised in public discussion. Now it is obvious that by 2016, law enforcement agencies invested with power began to solve "personal and family issues", which had previously been solved at the level of the family or the council of elders. With this approach, the tradition of “honour killings”, public condemnation, and violence became in fact obligatory by order of the security forces. And in an atmosphere of fear, not only for themselves, but also for their children, sisters, brothers and parents, the family often joins in the punishment of their loved ones. In their report, activists of the Russian LGBT Network note that the situation of lesbian and bisexual women is significantly aggravated by the general vulnerability of women, the substantial limitation of their rights and freedoms, and the fact that they “belong” to a family⁴⁵. Rare appeals for help from human rights organizations are explained not by the lack of persecution and extrajudicial killings of lesbian and bisexual women and transgender persons in the North Caucasus, but by how limited their opportunities are.

1.3. Legal assessment of the situation of LBT women in the North Caucasus

*April 12 (2018) was when I first became aware of a case of domestic violence where the husband beat his wife. Their female neighbour wanted to visit them, but her husband did not let her go, saying that it was a “family matter”. She then called the police. She reported that the rowdy man told the police that he had the right to make noise until 11 o'clock in the evening, to which the police replied that it was until 10 p.m. as of 2016. Then they asked if the spouses had any grievances against each other, the man answered that he did not, and the police left.*⁴⁶

Aida Mirmaksumova, Head of the Fathers and Daughters Project

It is difficult to collect statistics regarding the extent of violence against lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in Russia. On the one hand, no draft law on domestic violence was adopted (attempts to pass a law or submit a proposal were made in 1995, 1999, 2007). On the other hand, there is no anti-discrimination legislation in the Russian Federation. When materials of inspections on facts of violence (beatings, sexual assault, rape, intentional harm to health, murder) are investigated, only in isolated cases are the motives of “political, ideological, racial, national or religious hatred or hostility” or “hate or enmity

⁴³ A Chechen woman who attempted to flee to Norway is still at the Argun police station. "Caucasus. Realities." September 16, 2017. <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/28738966.html>

⁴⁴ "They told me that I was not a person, but a nobody, that it would have been better for me to be a terrorist than a faggot". Report on the facts of persecution of LGBT people in the North Caucasus region. Prepared by the “Russian LGBT Network” interregional public movement in cooperation with Elena Milashina, a special correspondent for Novaya Gazeta, 2017, p. 8

⁴⁵ "They told me that I was not a person, but a nobody, that it would have been better for me to be a terrorist than a faggot". Report on the facts of persecution of LGBT people in the North Caucasus region. Prepared by the “Russian LGBT Network” interregional public movement in cooperation with Elena Milashina, a special correspondent for Novaya Gazeta, 2017, p. 31

⁴⁶ The murder of a Chechen girl in Khasavyurt has brought back of the problem of domestic violence in the south of Russia. Magomed Tuae. April 14, 2018. "Caucasian Knot". <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/319120/>

against any social group" taken into consideration. However, even that wording does not clearly reflect the motive of hatred on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression.

Take for example the Republic of Dagestan. According to open-source statistics from January to October 2018, the number of appeals to law enforcement agencies under articles 105, 111, 116, 117, 119, 125, 126, 127, 130, 131, 132, 134, 136, 137, 138 of the Criminal Code The Russian Federation is 3400, with 774 cases filed under these articles (<http://dagproc.ru/vazhno/pravovaja-statistika/>), that is, 22.76% of the total number of appeals. How many of them were appeals of women, including LBT women, is impossible to say, since such an analysis has not been conducted.

Given this situation, we can only rely on data from human rights organizations in the legal analysis of the situation of LBT women. Undoubtedly, the data presented in monitoring and research reports is incomplete, since not all victims of violence turn to human rights organizations in the North Caucasus, especially considering that the working conditions of human rights organizations in the region are becoming more difficult and their possibilities are significantly reduced.

Thus, according to Aida Mirmaksumova⁴⁷, the leaders of the Fathers and Daughters project, "no one gathers official statistics of victims of domestic violence," and "far from every woman" goes to volunteers for help. More often than not, we learn of cases of violence "from lawyers, psychologists, friends, or social media."

In accordance with the jurisprudence, the victim herself must initiate legal proceedings, prepare the necessary documents, present evidence, defend her own interests, since violence against LBT women (as well as all women) belongs to the institution of private prosecution. This situation becomes a significant barrier to the realization of a woman's right to protection.

Since adats in the North Caucasus are esteemed no less highly (and are often considered more significant) than the laws of the Russian Federation, issues of violence against LBT women are solved outside the framework of the law. One of the most powerful reports on violence in the North Caucasus is a report on the results of a qualitative sociological research in the republics of Dagestan, Ingushetia and Chechnya (Russian Federation) from the "Killed by Gossip" Law Initiative⁴⁸. The authors of the report indicate that "honour killings" are not mentioned in the national law". What does exist is Article 105 of the Criminal Code, "Murder"⁴⁹. Moreover, according to the report, it is documented that:

1) the investigating authorities are unwilling to initiate and investigate such cases with due attention.

2) victims (or relatives of the victim) hardly ever turn to law enforcement agencies.

3) there are attempts to write off part of the honour killings as accidents and suicides in order not to initiate criminal proceedings involving murder

As regards legal proceedings, only 14 cases (42.4%) of the 33 cases identified by the Legal Initiative were brought to court: in 13 of the cases the accused was convicted of committing the crime, and in one case they were acquitted.

Additionally, if the victim starts to assert their rights, the case may be terminated in a court or through a pre-trial procedure according to Art. 446.2 of the Code of Criminal Procedure of the Russian Federation. Thus, the court may terminate the criminal case or impose a court fine on its own initiative or

⁴⁷ The murder of a Chechen girl in Khasavyurt has brought back of the problem of domestic violence in the south of Russia. Magomed Tuaeov. April 14, 2018. "Caucasian Knot". <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/319120/>

⁴⁸ "Killed by Gossip." Murders of women on the grounds of "honour" in the North Caucasus. Report on the results of a qualitative sociological research in the republics of Dagestan, Ingushetia and Chechnya (Russian Federation) Legal Initiative Project, 2018, p. 31

⁴⁹ "Killed by Gossip." Murders of women on the grounds of "honour" in the North Caucasus. Report on the results of a qualitative sociological research in the republics of Dagestan, Ingushetia and Chechnya (Russian Federation) Legal Initiative Project, 2018, p.20

on considering a petition filed by the prosecution, even if this was not the suspect's first accusation of inflicting beatings.

When LBT women do not find help and support among their relatives, which is often the case, some of them choose to run away. In essence, such an escape is a reaction to their inability to protect their right to life by contacting law enforcement agencies. However, in this case, the police takes the side of relatives. For example, one can find several stories in the public domain where women were put on the federal wanted list after their escape and the police facilitated the return of the women to their families even when there was reason to believe that their lives were in danger⁵⁰.

Thus, there is very little information regarding the position of LBT women in the North Caucasus, but there is a somewhat greater amount of general information on the situation of women in the region. To cover the real situation, it would be necessary to independently monitor crimes and violence against LBT women in the North Caucasus and find ways to fix them, as well as to look for legal means of protecting LBT women in the North Caucasus.

⁵⁰ The runaway girls from Chechnya ask not to look for them. Caucasus Realities. May 15, 2018. <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/29227519.html>

Chapter 2. Study of the problem of violence against lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the North Caucasus

2.1. Description of the problem

Just listen to any prophet and if you hear him speak of sacrifice – run. Run faster than from a plague. It stands to reason that where there's sacrifice, there's someone collecting sacrificial offerings. Where there's service, there's someone being served. The man who speaks to you of sacrifice, speaks of slaves and masters. And intends to be the master.

Ayn Rand. "The Fountainhead"

The problem of violence against LBT women in the North Caucasus is closely related to general violence against women in the Russian Federation as a whole and in the North Caucasus in particular. However, additional negative factors in the republics of the North Caucasus include the participation of law enforcement officers in the violence against women, entrenched traditions and customs, and the role of religious leaders. The situation of LBT women is complicated by the high level of lesbo- / homo- / bi- / transphobia in Russia. The region where the study was conducted has an even higher level of lesbo / homo- / bi- / transphobia. The complexity of the research issue is linked to the high level of stigma attached to homosexual, bisexual and transgender persons by society. Common and actively implemented punishments or ways of "correcting" a person's sexual orientation or gender identity take the form of physical, psychological, and sexual violence and harassment, which takes a toll on the mental health of LBT women. LBT women who are exposed to violence have practically no opportunity (at best they have extremely limited opportunities – in exceptional cases) to seek help, to be in a safe environment, and to receive competent psychological and legal support. In practice, there are no legal mechanisms which would protect the rights and freedoms of LBT women in the North Caucasus.

In light of these facts, the purpose of the study was to identify the violent practices used against LBT women of the North Caucasus due to widespread misogyny, lesbo- / homo- / bi- / transphobia. The aims of the study are:

- 1) to identify common forms of violence against LBT women in the North Caucasus region of the Russian Federation;
- 2) to determine the prevalence of violent practices against LBT women used to correct their sexual orientation or gender identity;
- 3) to assess the negative impact of violence on the mental health of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women;
- 4) to provide legal assessment of widespread violent practices against LBT women in the North Caucasus.

The study focuses on women from the North Caucasus who identify as lesbians, bisexual women or transgender women.

The subject of the study is the impact of various forms of violence against lesbian, bisexual and transgender women on the psychological state of the victims in the absence of legal defense mechanisms.

2.2. Research methodology

We encountered some difficulties when developing a research methodology. The first challenge was maintaining the confidentiality of the sensitive information and personal data of the respondents. To reduce the risk of personal data leakage or the study participants being identified, a coding system for personal data was developed. Personal data is encrypted in a unique code consisting of 8 characters containing primary data about the respondent.

The second challenge was creating a safe environment for interviewing the respondents. Due to the high risk of violence and harassment, some women would interrupt the interview without warning (this usually happened when it was not safe for the respondent to talk because their father entered or their husband returned). There was also a percentage of lesbian, bisexual and transgender respondents with whom we later lost touch. **Particularly difficult were cases where respondents stated that they were subjected to violence or torture, disclosed the risks they faced, and then disappeared.**

We also included transgender women in the study based on the fact that transgender women do not fit into the heteronormative matrix⁵¹, are subject to stigmatization and violence both from family and security forces, as well as from cis-gender LGB people. In the course of the study, the gender identity of the respondents was not called into question. An essential fact, which we believe is important to note, was that transgender men were not included in the study. Firstly, this was due to the fact that none of the respondents identified themselves as transgender men. Secondly, as far as the researchers are aware, none of those who have asked for help since 2017 during the crisis in the North Caucasus have identified themselves as transgender men⁵². It seems to us that this fact deserves a more in-depth analysis in further research.

Stages of the research:

The first stage. Prior to the study, we analysed the appeals for help received by activists of the “Queer Women of the North Caucasus” project earlier. The analysis of these stories and appeals formed the basis of the initial interview plan. At the very beginning of the study it was obvious that it would require creating a safe environment and establishing trust with the respondents. In addition, it was necessary to take into account the sensitivity of personal information that the respondents would not want to share due to risk to their life and religious or ethical considerations. Considering these factors, the method of focused non-formalised interviews was chosen. It is based on an approximate list of topics and questions that the researchers offered for discussion. Each interview took from 1.5 to 4 hours.

The second stage. The method was tested with two respondents, and it proved possible to collect sufficient information for the study, provided that the interview was supplemented with some basic questions about gender identity, sexual orientation, age, current location, and attitude to religion. In addition, we decided to use in addition standardised methods for assessing the psychological state of the victims of violence. These standardized techniques should be comprehensible, easy to implement, optimal in scope, and should meet the requirements for reliability, validity and reliability. Given that physical, sexual, and psychological abuse of LBT women can be an isolated incident which poses a risk to a woman’s life, or a systematic occurrence where the risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder in victims is present⁵³. Based on these provisions, the following techniques were selected: Beck's Depression

⁵¹ Judith Butler. Gender Regulations // “The Untouchable Stock” 2011, No. 2 (76)

⁵² This statement is based on the analysis of information available to researchers and is not a certainty.

⁵³ N.V. Tarabrina, A workshop on the psychology of post-traumatic stress. – Saint Petersburg: Peter, 2001, p. 272

Inventory (BDI-II)⁵⁴ and the Impact of Event Scale – Revised (IES-R)⁵⁵. The Beck's Depression Inventory (BDI-II) allowed us to assess depressive symptoms in female lesbian, bisexual and transgender survivors of abuse in the North Caucasus, and the Impact of Event Scale – Revised (IES-R) revealed the adverse emotional and personal characteristics which were developing as a result of the respondents' subjective perception of threat.

At the third stage of empirical research, the results obtained were analysed and correlated with the legal provisions of the Russian Federation.

2.3. Description of the participants and geography of the study

The study involved women (N = 21), who identified themselves as lesbians (most respondents (N = 17)), bisexual women (N = 3) and transgender women (N = 1) (a significantly smaller number). A substantial number of respondents sought the help of human rights defenders and received it on various requests (N = 18). Eleven of the participants of the study were able to move to a safe environment with a high degree of probability that they will avoid the risk of repeated acts of violence or honour killings. Among the participants of the study were those who came out to their family and with whom we subsequently lost touch for over a month; the researchers do not know what their fate was (N = 1). Also, one of the women died “of poisoning” in her father's house after a failed escape attempt. The remaining part of LBT women at the time of the publication of the results of the study experience continuing violence from relatives or third parties (N = 5) because they are suspected of having homosexual orientation or live a closeted life while in the North Caucasus (N = 3).

The participants of the study were lesbian, bisexual and transgender women from the Chechen Republic (N = 16), the Republic of Dagestan (N = 2), the Republic of Ingushetia (N = 2), and the Republic of North Ossetia (N = 1).

The respondents were aged 20 to 49 years old.

Of these, the majority of respondents (N = 15) identified as Muslims, 4 women identified as agnostics, 4 identified as atheists.

1 woman among the participants of the study has a child.

⁵⁴ Beck AT (1972). *Depression: Causes and Treatment*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. A and Beck AT, Steer RA and Brown GK (1996) “Manual for the Beck Depression Inventory-II”. San Antonio, TX: Psychological Corporation

⁵⁵ Melnitskaya T.B., Havylo A.V., Belykh, T.V. The Impact of Event Scale – Revised (IES-R) in relation to the radiation factor // *Psychological Studies: electronic scientific journal*, 2011, N 5 (19). Also, Tarabrina N. V., A tutorial on the psychology of post-traumatic stress. – Saint Petersburg: Peter, 2001 – p. 272

2.4. Overview of the interviews

2.4.1. Common forms of violence against lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the North Caucasus region of the Russian Federation

Brothers are cruel. They believe that they are men and they can do anything, that I should kiss their feet. But we have equal rights before the Almighty.

From the interview with I.

Before analysing the interview data, let us define the term “violence”. The basis of our understanding is the term “violence against women” suggested in Art. 1 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by General Assembly in its resolution 48/104 of December 20, 1993. So, “the term “violence against women” means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”⁵⁶. We have added the sexual orientation and gender identity of a woman to this description, as grounds for committing an act of violence.

According to Article 2 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, “violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:

(a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, genital rape, female genital non-spousal mutilation violence and violence related to exploitation;

(b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;

(c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.”⁵⁷

When analysing the interview materials that we were able to generate, it is often impossible to compartmentalise the types of violence, since physical violence and sexual violence cannot exist without psychological violence. In addition, it is necessary to take into account the general situation of women in the North Caucasus and understand certain family rules.

“Guys are of value, while girls will just get married and that's it” (Chechen Republic).

“My aunt believed that a girl could not even leave the house, as it is a disgrace to the family” (Republic of Dagestan).

“My brother had many privileges, and I was punished mainly for his misdeeds. In Chechnya, women and girls are not important” (Chechen Republic).

⁵⁶ The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by General Assembly in its resolution 48/104 of December 20, 1993. Article 1.

⁵⁷ The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by General Assembly in its resolution 48/104 of December 20, 1993. Article 2

"I didn't speak to my father directly. Traditionally, the conversation occurs through the mother" (Republic of Dagestan).

"I am the most undesirable child in the family - I am the third girl" (Chechen Republic).

"My father's relatives often said that a girl should be strangled at birth" (Chechen Republic).

"Mother said that a brother is like a second father, so he must be obeyed" (Chechen Republic).

"The only reason you are still alive is because I hope that you are not completely ruined and that someone will marry you" (Chechen Republic).

As for their upbringing, all the respondents talked about physical violence in the parental family. There are frequent references to physical abuse of the father to the mother and parents to children in the descriptions of family relationships.

"They beat me for my brother's misbehaviour as well as my own, but they never beat my brothers" (Republic of Dagestan).

"My father severely beat his children. One of my step-sisters said that his father threw them against the wall" (Chechen Republic).

"One of my father's traits was cruelty. He had been married several times. My mother was his sixth wife. I remember my father beating my mother and brother. My father beat my mother at night" (Chechen Republic).

"My father often beat my mother. My father is a very quick-tempered person. My relationship with my brother is either bad or nonexistent" (Republic of Ingushetia).

"My father often beat my mother. He knocked out all of her front teeth" (Chechen Republic).

At the same time, we would like to note that education remains an important value to mothers more often than for fathers.

"My mother was different. "What if marriage doesn't work out for you?" she would say. She valued education" (Chechen Republic).

"My mother always demanded that I should study well" (Republic of Dagestan).

Work, however, is a privilege for a woman. Work means more freedom, communication, and financial resources. All this increases the level of any person's independence. Access to this privilege is strictly controlled by the father, brothers, husband, and other guardians. Nineteen respondents have faced restrictions on the right to work from their families.

The oppression of women may take the form of coercion to wear a certain type of clothing.

"I prefer to wear trousers, but the Vainakh society does not accept this type of clothing for females" (Republic of Ingushetia).

"My father always forbade me to wear pants or short skirts and forced me to wear clothes that showed no skin" (Republic of Ingushetia).

“My brother and father forced me to wear a hijab” (Chechen Republic).

“I wore black clothes and did not wear a hijab. But my mother and father said that I would not go to work looking like that. I put on a black hijab. My father laughed at me and said that I had become a nun” (Chechen Republic).

In some cases, the widespread stigmatization of girls who grew up in other regions of the Russian Federation is evident. Four respondents were returned to their republics once they had come of age. Back in the North Caucasus they were faced with xenophobia and called "Russians" or "non-Muslims."

Lesbian, bisexual and transgender women are subjected to violence which is used against all women regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity if their family (or, in some cases, by security forces) recognise their behaviour is as disgraceful to the family, teip or republic. However, there are certain differences in the forms of violence that are used by family members and other persons as punishment for the romantic or sexual relationship of women with women or as methods of correcting women's sexual orientation and gender identity.

Thus, the main focus of the analysis of the materials received were the forms of violence associated with gender, sexual orientation and/or gender identity of women.

2.4.1.1. Life in the parental family

I will ask my mother to bury me behind the baseboard,” I once thought. “There will be no worms, no darkness. Mom will walk past, I will look at her from the gap, and I will not be as scared as if I were buried in the cemetery.

Pavel Sanaev. "Bury Me Behind the Baseboard"

A common thread in stories about family, upbringing, and relationships with family members, is the issue of psychological violence. Here we consider psychological violence in the family not as a single incident, but as long-term and systematic actions by family members aimed at respondents and expressed in verbal aggression (statements aimed at humiliating, offensive, negatively undermining their self-esteem and self-respect), domination (restrictions on freedom of movement, control of privacy, of communication with others, of clothing, and of interests, destruction of personal belongings, forced isolation). All of the respondents spoke about the different forms of such psychological violence. In other words, 100% of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women talked about systematic and recurring psychological violence in both their parental family and in their marriage, unless the marriage was with a gay man from that region in order to conceal their sexual orientation. Virtually any member of the parental family could be a source of insults and humiliation: the father, the mother, the brothers.

“My mother never said kind words to me and I always thought it was normal for all girls. Later, a friend told me about the relationship she had with her mother, and I was surprised to learn that a mother can hug and kiss her daughter”(Republic of Dagestan).

“In my family I was forbidden to take my own photos or talk to friends my father didn't approve of” (Republic of Ingushetia).

“My uncles, aunts, and cousins often called me a “little man” or a “vagabond”... I tried to right myself and even wear dresses” (Chechen Republic).

"Mother always said that I was ugly and called me a slob ..." (Republic of Dagestan).

"When I could not solve a problem, my mother locked me in the room and I could not get up from the desk until I solved it" (Republic of Dagestan)

"My mother said: "You are my property, I will do what I want with you and you will do everything I say." Just like that. "When you get married, you will do what your husband tells you. You can have neither your own opinion, nor your views. You are, generally speaking, nobody and nothing, you are our possession. That's it." (Chechen Republic).

"My father always told me: "You will never achieve anything" (Republic of Dagestan)

"They sent me to a gynecologist several times to check whether I was a virgin or not" (Chechen Republic).

Facts of domination (restrictions on freedom of movement, control of privacy, of communication with others, of clothing, and of interests, destruction of personal belongings, forced isolation) often appear the stories of lesbians, bisexual women. This applies to all women in the region regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Signs of such psychological abuse occurred every interview (100%).

One such example is the control of the movement and location of women by men in the parental or, in some cases, in the paternal family. Such control does not bear much similarity to the usual reasonable restrictions on the independent movement of children, especially since we are talking about women who have reached the age of majority. All respondents without exception (100%) spoke about explicit rules for obtaining permission from family members to leave the house or restrictions on the use of transport, the possibility of leaving the house only when accompanied by older women and/or brothers. With that, we will restate that all the participants of the study are adult, legally capable individuals.

"I can only go out before dark. Now, for example, it's 5 p.m. and I should be at home. Dad forbids to go to cafes. I can only go out to the shop, but that's because I work there. I secretly meet friends whenever I can" (Chechen Republic).

"My father says: "If I ever see you in a taxi, you will stay home for the rest of your life" Chechen Republic).

"I was never allowed to go out after 8 p.m." (Chechen Republic).

"You cannot go to another country on your own, of course. I have to be back home before 8 pm and spend the night only at home. I can't go for a walk with anyone in the evening, only until 6 p.m. I can be out with my older female relatives until 9 p.m." (Republic of Dagestan).

"You can't take a taxi. You can only take the bus if there are adult women there. If a bus is full of men, you can't go. I secretly bought a car once. I studied in another region and that's where I bought it. When my brother found out, I lied that the car was not mine. We had a terrible row. I managed to sell it quickly" (Chechen Republic).

"Just going out and walking along the street ... was not an option at all" (Republic of Ingushetia).

"We can't just go out and go somewhere without getting permission. And that permission is also not always granted" (Republic of Ingushetia).

"I had to talk to my mother a lot to persuade her to let me go and study in another city. Of course, I remained under the supervision of my relatives while I was there" (Republic of Ingushetia).

“They didn't let me out of the house. The only time I was able to move about freely was when I left to study in another region. The usual rules applied: don't walk down the street, don't smile. Sometimes I asked to stay over at my friend's house who lived next door” (Chechen Republic).

Control over women's communication is common in the North Caucasus. **It is practically impossible to ensure that messages are not read by their father, mother, brothers, sisters, or distant relatives.** Dues to significant restrictions to their freedom, the private lives of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women mainly revolve around the Internet. Thus, the correspondence, telephone conversations, and social media accounts are perhaps the most vulnerable aspect of the system of security and survival which they have had to create for themselves. But even before relatives discover some romantic correspondence or see photos which “defame their family” on social media, all spheres of women's communication are monitored by male guardians (their father or brother) and their mother on a daily basis.

“Talking to boys has always been forbidden” (Republic of Ingushetia).

“From grade 9, they checked all my messages and all my contacts and social media” (Republic of North Ossetia).

“By the end of my schooling, I was hardly ever let out of the house. I could only meet up with a friend who lived next door” (Chechen Republic).

“They took my phone away even before I got married. My brothers found out that I had put up photos which showed my face on social media. They said that I was a whore and that I show myself to guys. That time I went 9 days without a phone” (Chechen Republic).

Family members controlling what women in the North Caucasus wear is a common occurrence⁵⁸, judging by the respondents' answers.

“I would go to work in the morning and my father would check the length of my skirt and whether I'm wearing a headscarf. I would take off my headscarf when I was in the taxi. Clothes had to be loose-fitting and boring” (Chechen Republic).

“There are restrictions and control over what we wear. When I visit my family I wear clothes that show no skin. Trousers can't be worn, unless it's with a very long, loose-fitting top. I was forced to wear a headscarf when I was 13 to 14 years old, but I stopped wearing it as I got older” (Republic of Dagestan).

“He put all my clothes in a pile, put them in plastic bags. They collected everything and put it in that thing for garbage in our back yard. They put all my things there and burnt them” (Chechen Republic).

Of all the respondents, only one said that

“There are no explicit restrictions” (Republic of North Ossetia).

⁵⁸ "Women's dress code Kadyrov style". Lily Palveleva. Radio Liberty. March 11, 2011. <https://www.svoboda.org/a/2334558.html> and "Paintball on Putin Avenue": In the center of Grozny, the shooting of women without headscarves continues. Pavel Nikulin. Memorial. Human Rights, September 13, 2010 <http://old.memo.ru/d/55333.html>

It is important to note that the situation with controlling women's clothing and appearance poses an even greater risk to transgender girls and women in the North Caucasus.

"When I first went to school, I realised that I liked women's clothes. On September 1, I put on my mother's pointed, high-heeled black shoes. I wore them to my first day of school. When I returned from school, my mother saw me in those shoes. She took them off me right in the middle of the street and started beating me with them. I still have scars on my back, little holes made by the heels. Her daughter-in-law ran up to us and pulled my mother away from me. She would have killed me otherwise" (Chechen Republic).

As for physical violence, all respondents spoke of beatings, slaps, and blows (100%).

"My father and brothers beat me as a child when I was disobedient: my father kicked me a couple of times, hit me over the head with a shoe, slapped me; my older brother could hit me and insult me. He always humiliated me with words; my second brother would also hit me on the head with a slipper" (Chechen Republic).

"My mother beat me with a rolling pin if I didn't clean well enough. She hit me on the hands. My hands still hurt in those places" (Republic of Dagestan).

"My father called me and I came up to him...I tried to dodge the blow. He hit me in the face. Then he dragged me by my hair. He punched me in the chest and body" (Republic of Ingushetia).

"When I saw my brothers, I thought that was the end of me... would kill me here and now. But no. They just beat me up severely. Nothing else" (Chechen Republic).

"He entered the room holding a belt. He started to beat me with that belt. It had this metal clasp. He hit me all over my body with the belt... on the head. For a long time I had marks on my face" (Chechen Republic).

"My father was drunk. He sometimes drank a lot. I asked him to stop drinking and he punched me in the nose" (Republic of Dagestan).

"My mother would beat me every time I broke a rule" (Chechen Republic).

"I tried to be a well-behaved child, but when I was a university student I wanted to express myself more to my parents as well... my father could beat me for that" (Republic of North Ossetia).

"My mother and father beat me from the age of 5. They beat me for nearly everything: when I made too much noise, when I got bad grades at school. My father beat until the day he died. In recent years, my mother had mental health issues, and she often beat me for no reason. When she would get furious, she would hit me over the head and didn't understand where she was hitting; she beat me with her hands. She once choked me till I fainted" (Chechen Republic).

"I had a guitar, they hit me with it right on my hip and I still have some kind of... not a scar, but like a ball" (Chechen Republic).

Moreover, 1 of the 21 respondents reported sexual abuse by a family member. Their uncle systematically committed sexual assault against a minor. He threatened the girl that if she told her relatives (going to the police was not an option, especially since the girl was a minor), then she herself

would be punished. As a result, the sexual abuse lasted several years. **When the girl's family learned about the sexual abuse, they accused her of disgraceful behavior and sexual immorality.**

"One evening my uncle entered the room when no one was home. He walked over to my bed and started running his hand down my back. I pushed his hand away and pulled the covers over my head. I was so scared that I couldn't scream or call for help. He threatened me by saying that if I told someone, he would strangle me..."

...I was on the phone in my room. He walked in and started insulting me. He called me a whore and immediately started beating me. He took my phone away and began to kiss me by force. I started crying. I asked him not to do that. He kept beating me and repeating that I should be afraid of him. He said he would be watching me..."

...I often dreamt it would all end when he got married..."

...After he got married, I had to help his wife take care of the children. One evening I had already put the baby to sleep. I heard that he came back home. I wanted to run away quickly, but I couldn't get out. He turned off the lights, closed the door to the room. He grabbed my arm and pulled me towards him. When I begged him to let me go, he began to beat me, then he hugged me. I managed to escape that time..."

...One of my female relatives later said that she knew this about him since I was not the first. But she also asked me not to tell anyone, because if it comes out, he will be killed" (Chechen Republic).

2.4.1.2. Disclosure of sexual orientation and gender identity. Lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the North Caucasus region of the Russian Federation being outed or coming out to their parental families

I came to terms with the fact that sooner or later we would be found and killed.

From the interview with Y.

A life of absolute secrecy and isolation from their community is not something anyone can achieve. The respondents have repeatedly indicated that some of their close friends knew of their sexual orientation or gender identity. They are mostly people who are part of the LGBT+ community themselves (N=2).

"If my relatives find out, they will kill me. They will not forgive me" (Chechen Republic).

"My family knew nothing, only my friends did" (Chechen Republic).

"If they had found out, my brothers would have killed or injured me" (Chechen Republic).

Some respondents are confident that their family has some suspicions about their sexual orientation (N = 3).

"They asked: "Are you a lesbian by any chance? You walk like a boy" (Chechen Republic).

"My cousins suspect something, and so does my older brother. He once asked: "Is she even normal?" (Chechen Republic).

"My mother once said that I talk to my female friends as if I were their husband" (Chechen Republic).

"They're on to something because I am a tomboy and don't want to get married. But you're not a thief unless you're caught" (Republic of Ingushetia).

"I hide everything, but my mother was suspicious" (Republic of North Ossetia).

Three respondents spoke about their experience of coming out to some family members. Very few people come out if their lives are at risk.

"I opened up to my cousin. She is also gay and she took it well" (Chechen Republic).

"My younger sister knows and she accepts me" (Chechen Republic).

"I thought I was already safe and told my mother. At first she said she would accept me and that no one else should know. But then she just handed me over to my brothers" (Chechen Republic).

Of the 21 respondents, 16 were outed. In other words, approximately 76% of the lesbian, bisexual and transgender women who participated in the study have experienced public disclosure of information about their sexual orientation or gender identity without their consent. **Moreover, women are most commonly outed in one of two ways: when relatives go through their private correspondence (by taking away their phone or secretly reading their messages) or through the stories and rumours they hear from people they know or the women's exes.**

"A female friend of mine posted my intimate photos in a social media group. This is how my family found out" (Chechen Republic).

"My sister told my mother that I was a lesbian, to which my mother said: "That's not possible, my daughter can't be a lesbian". Like, don't be silly" (Chechen Republic).

"I fell in love with my female friend and, well, opened up to her. But she made fun of me and started telling everyone about what I am. Some of my relatives figured it out from there. That's it" (Republic of Ingushetia).

"The phone rang. My brother was on his phone at the time. It turned out that my girlfriend's mother read our messages and decided to call my parents" (Chechen Republic).

"My brother found a message from a girl in my phone where she wrote about her feelings for me. He told our mother, and she cursed me" (Chechen Republic).

"It turns out that my brother looked through my phone while I was sleeping and there were photos on there. Photos of me and some women" (Chechen Republic).

Disclosing information about a woman's sexual orientation or gender identity against her will has dire consequences for her. It is important to note that an interview is an effective method of research only if it is used to study people who are living. That is, in the context of this study, we can only assess the consequences of coming out or being outed by analysing the experiences of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women who actually survived. One form of punishing women for romantic or sexual

relationships with women in the North Caucasus is an “honour killing”. **We would like to point out that by the time we were interviewing the 21st respondent, 8 women had shared that some of their female friends, relatives, or neighbours had been killed by their male relatives for behavior that “brought dishonor to the family”.**

“All the men in the family get together. All the older men in the family (grandfathers, uncles, fathers, older brothers) discuss what punishment to choose for a woman for her misbehavior. If they find out that she is a lesbian, there are two main possibilities: killing her or forcing her to marry. In my family a woman can be killed even when someone says they’d seen her wit ha man. It’s dishonor to the family, so they can kill a girl for the smallest things” (Chechen Republic).

For lesbian, bisexual and transgender women the consequences of being outed are reduced to beatings, isolation, and humiliation in their parental families. Every one of the 16 women who had been outed talked about an increase in violence against them after their brothers, fathers, or mothers became aware of their sexual orientation. Perhaps the most common reaction (excluding beatings) was forced marriage. However, we have to take into account the fact that we cannot objectively determine the extent of honour killings in the North Caucasus and cannot obtain any reliable information about the respondents with whom communication had been lost after the interview.

“When my father found out, he kept repeating that this was not possible, kept clutching his head... then he beat me and me in my room. I was there for about 24 hours. He took my phone away and said I didn’t need it anymore. Six months later they gave me a push-button phone. They let me go to college, but I would run off because everyone was looking at me, whispering and laughing. My father said: “If you don’t want to go to college, you’re getting married”. I didn’t tell him why I stopped going to college or the beatings would continue... He said: “You filthy whore, it’s your own fault”. I said it wasn’t like that and that it was hard for me. He raised his hand and hit me so I’d stop talking” (Republic of Ingushetia).

“My brother became suspicious of my relationship and began to watch me and check my phone several times a day. I tried to delete my messages as soon as I received them. But one day my brother was in the room when I got a message from her. He heard the sound and asked me to give him the phone. I didn’t give it to him because I knew the message was from my girlfriend and I was afraid. He started hitting me on the head and face. He obviously took my phone away. After that, I was under arrest and without a phone up to the very day I got married” (Chechen Republic).

“I was locked up at home. The summer had passed and I’d spent a year at home” (Republic of Ingushetia).

“When they found out that I was a lesbian, they locked me in the room where they were doing repairs with nothing but a blanket. They let me go into the kitchen and the toilet when no one was in the kitchen... I must have lived there for several months without anything, until my father bought a sofa to put there” (Chechen Republic).

“My brother said: “You are a disgrace to our nation and to our family. You have to be killed” (Chechen Republic).

“From that day I was under house arrest. I was there for about six months, until my wedding day. I was locked up in the village where my brother lived. My brother decided that I would no longer live with my mother, because my mother was too soft with me. I was forbidden to go out even accompanied by other relatives” (Chechen Republic).

“My brother jumped up and grabbed a hammer. He started smashing the furniture and the TV with that hammer. He screamed at me to put the phones on the floor. I was very scared and I did. He smashed the phones with the hammer. Then he began to beat me with his free hand and threaten with the hammer ”(Chechen Republic).

“On that day my mother beat me severely. My father said that people like me are not fit to live. My uncle said that he is personally ready to kill me if I get caught again” (Chechen Republic).

“My brother came home from work and started looking for me. He found me with my girlfriend. We were walking down the street. He began to beat me, hitting me over the head and punching me in the face... in the middle of the street. My cousins brought me home. My brother said that he would kill me, that he would take me to the outskirts of the city and kill me there. I was a disgrace to the family and a constant problem” (Chechen Republic).

“My brother got down on his knees next to me and gave the gun to me... he started crying, I swear he was crying as he said: “I promised our father that I wouldn’t kill you. I beg you, shoot yourself, just shoot yourself!” And I ...I was like a zombie by then. I handed the gun back to him and said: “If you want to kill me, do it yourself. I’m not going to shoot myself”. And he was like: “If you shoot yourself, it will all be over. We’ll tell everyone it was an accident” (Chechen Republic).

One of the most common methods of correcting a person’s sexual orientation is compulsory treatment at the Center for Islamic Medicine or inviting the mullah for a kind of exorcism ritual – “casting out the jinn”. Many parents, even the ones who have a university degree, turn to "experts on the casting out of jinns". The girls themselves often believe in jinns and even think that their sexual orientation is a result of their being possessed by a male jinn who has fallen in love with them and is causing them to be disgusted with men. Five respondents in total had undergone a jinn exorcism after their relatives found out about their sexual orientation. If the exorcist tells the "guardians" that the girl is possessed by a jinn, she then begins compulsory treatment. And if he (exorcism specialists in the North Caucasus are all men) believes that she is “clean”, the girl has no way of justifying her orientation.

“First of all, the prayers are very loud... They laid me down and covered my whole body with a green cloth. He told me to lie still and keep my arms and legs close to my body. They put headphones on me and held down my hands and feet. It lasted about 10 minutes. That’s what it felt like. If I moved my finger or hand away from my body, it meant there was a jinn inside me. It was so hard. My head started to ache because of the screaming and I had a panic attack. When the screaming in the headphones stopped and I regained consciousness, the mullah said that I needed something stronger. He asked my parents if they agreed to it and they obviously did. Then the mullah took me by the hand, straddled me and held my hands down with his feet. He picked up some kind of tool. I think it was some kind of plastic rod. He started drilling it into my ear and ripped some skin out. I started screaming in pain, but the mullah said: “It’s not hurting you, it’s hurting the jinns”. He started shouting: “Tell me your name!” and “Tell me who you are!” When he got off me, he told my parents that the jinns were still inside me, that he could see it in my eyes. He picked up a wooden stick and started hitting me on my arms and legs. It was not as painful. Then he started pressing down on... well, different parts of my body. He’d dig the stick between my ribs. I can hardly remember what I was saying, but I was even ready to say that I was a camel if he would only stop. At one point I couldn’t bear it any longer and I shouted: “Let me go, it hurts”. It all lasted for several hours” (Chechen Republic).

“Yet another mullah came to our house. He made me breathe in some putrid smoke. This mullah said that I had to visit him constantly” (Chechen Republic).

“Some of them said that I needed a ritual to “purifying me of demonic blood”. To do this, my parents pierced the skin on my back with needles and made small cuts on my arms and legs. They took

something like... a vacuum to get the blood out. After that, they filled a bathtub with very salty water and I had to lie there" (Chechen Republic).

"My mother was with me. They brought in the mullah. He laid me down and started screaming in my ear. I had to stay calm. Much depended on his words. If he says that I am possessed by jinns, they'll send me to the Islamic Centre. If he says that I'm not possessed, it means I'm immoral" (Chechen Republic).

Punishments and corrections of transgender women by family members are brutal. They include close and distant relatives.

"My relatives said: "Let's go and eat khinkali". It's my favorite dish. They took me to the forest and sat me down next to a large tree. They tied my hands and put a grenade in my hands. They said that when I got tired and dropped the grenade, I'd blow myself up. I sat there for two hours. I cried a lot, begged the Most High to forgive me for my sins. I thought I was going to die. My relatives seemed to have left, but then they came back.

They brought me home and beat me in the bathroom. They put a gun in my mouth. They stuck my head in the towel to strangle me. They put a towel in my mouth. They put a plastic bag over my head. My oldest uncle asked me to fetch him a beer from the store and said that he would kill me later. My own brother was there and saw it all. I ran to him and begged him to spare me. I said: "You are my brother, please don't let them kill me. I'm your brother". My mother was at work at that time and my sister called her and told her what was going on... My mother thought that I was possessed by a demon and that I had to be saved" (Chechen Republic).

2.4.1.3. Marriage as an inevitable outcome and a form of punishment

Nine of the respondents are or had previously been married. Moreover, respondents aged from 20 to 22 believe that their university studies allow them some time before they get married, but once they have received their degree, their marriage will be a very pertinent matter for their parental family. Only one respondent who is 27 years old believes that her parents are aware of her plans to devote her life to her career. There are two types of marriage arrangements for lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the North Caucasus: forced marriage and "cover-up" marriage, that is, a marriage the goal of which is to gain minimal autonomy and reduce the risks of violence or murder as a result of their sexual orientation or gender of identity being disclosed. It is important to note that 7 out of 8 forced marriages were initiated after the woman came out or was outed. **Having received "evidence" of the woman's sexual orientation, such as romantic messages, personal photos, or a call from their neighbours or relatives, parents or brothers made a decision regarding the woman's marriage. The girl's opinion is not taken into account, and often causes a wave of violence.**

"When I found out about the wedding, I started crying... I was hysterical. But my uncle said that I was ungrateful and that I should be beaten more and killed, that I should be buried instead of being married" (Republic of Ingushetia).

"My brother said: "If you don't marry a normal person, then I will kill you myself" (Chechen Republic).

"I did not see my husband until the day of the wedding" (Chechen Republic).

"I cried and begged my mother. I said that I was her daughter and asked why she was doing this to me..." (Chechen Republic).

"My second cousin kept saying that I should be married off. He believed that I didn't need to study. He then came over and said that he found a wealthy man for me" (Republic of Ingushetia).

"My parents decided that getting married a second marriage and having children would correct my sexual orientation" (Chechen Republic).

The concept of "marriage" requires some clarification in the context of this study. In the North Caucasus, only religious marriage is recognised. A formal marriage in a civil registry office does not always take place and is usually only done when a child is born. The interviews have shown that a woman's consent is not always a prerequisite of marriage. Certain media publications confirm this information⁵⁹. When a couple enters into a religious marriage, the mullah may issue a marriage certificate which is kept by the husband. In Chechnya, for instance, the certificate includes the following information: who issued the certificate, its number; the full name, date of birth, and passport number of the husband and wife, their citizenship and place of birth; information about the two male witnesses on the groom's side; information about the "guardian" (the woman's father or brother), the "guardian's" degree of kinship to the bride and the amount of the kalym (the bride price); information about the person authorizing the marriage and the signatures of all men (the husband, the guardian, the two witnesses and the person authorizing the marriage). As you can see, the bride's signature is not part of the document, and it is evident from the document itself that it is similar to a sales contract. **The amount of the kalym, according to interview data, varies depending on the "quality of the bride" and the generosity of her fiancé (from 10 thousand rubles to 50 thousand rubles).** However, a certificate is not always issued, and in practice it serves to document the act of transferring the "guardianship" of an adult woman. This kind of document confirms that women are equated to objects or possessions.

At the same time, 3 out of 21 respondents were not the only wives of their husbands at the time of the interview (3 of the 9 respondents who were or are married, which makes 30%). This means that 14% of the total number of respondents are second wives.

It is obvious that forced marriage condemns a woman not only to an unhappy life, but also to sexual and often severe physical abuse, which will continue in her new family. However, the humiliation and abuse a woman goes through somewhat changes its shape in marriage, especially if the spouse finds out about his wife's sexual orientation. This state of affairs can have serious consequences for the woman: she could face "honour killings", being sent back to the parental family, beatings, sexual violence, a total ban on seeing her children and participating in their upbringing, systematic rape, and anything the husband's imagination can come up with.

"Marriage? What kind of life is that? You're always under pressure from your husband, you have no right to do anything and no voice, you can't make decisions. We are very vulnerable: if your husband beats you and you want to leave, everyone on the husband's side and on the girl's side will be against it. Being a "fallen woman" is serious stigma. But he can do anything he likes: cheat on you, humiliate you" (Republic of Dagestan).

⁵⁹ Sergey Khazov "I was given away as though I were a commodity". Stories of Chechen lesbians. Radio Liberty, October 20, 2018. <https://www.svoboda.org/a/29552698.html> Also, "It just happened..." What came of the marriage proposal of the Chechen Chief of Police to the 17-year-old Hede Goilabiyeva: Lifeneews channel has published an interview with the bride. Elena Milashina. New Newspaper. May 13, 2015. <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2015/05/13/64111-171-tak-uzh-slozhilos-8230-187>

Forced marriage is often possible due to the fact that a woman's will is seriously undermined, help is almost impossible to obtain, and a request for help itself is a considerable risk. When the husband receives the rights to "guardianship" over the woman, he is in fact able to do anything that he sees fit. A woman's opinion, even if she has given birth to a child, has no value at present. Her opinion and wishes are not taken into account. All of the respondents who have had the experience of such a marriage describe psychological, sexual, and physical abuse by the husband and his relatives.

"I was immediately taken to the village. I lived there for six months. I didn't have things of my own, the conditions were harsh. My duties were to clean the house, to cook for the whole family, to clean all the family members' shoes every night, and clean up the yard daily. In reality, I was a servant in the house" (Republic of Dagestan).

"I don't have a phone of my own. My husband and his mother control everything" (Chechen Republic).

"I cannot leave the house without my husband or mother-in-law" (Chechen Republic).

"When my parents decided that I had to get married, I felt like I didn't care anymore. I didn't care what they did to me. I cried for several days before the wedding and at the wedding, too" (Republic of Dagestan).

"The first time I was raped was in the first few days after the wedding. I told him that I didn't want to have sex with him. But on the third day after the wedding, he did it. That's how things are. He covered my nose and mouth with his hand, I started to choke. I started bleeding. I don't remember why there was blood, whether it was because of my screaming or because he was hitting me on the face" (Chechen Republic).

"I was blamed for the fact that we didn't have children. To everyone, it's my fault" (Republic of Dagestan).

"He beat me every week, he beat me and raped me. Neighbors would sometimes help me by calling his brothers. His brothers would come over to talk some sense into him and after that he would return home again" (Chechen Republic).

"I once went to the store and didn't notice that my hijab came off a bit and some hair was showing. He shouted at me and started beating me right in the middle of the street. He hurt me so much that I couldn't get up for a few days. He was a boxing coach. Whenever I'd start arguing, I'd immediately be knocked out" (Chechen Republic).

"I remember, he screamed that he would slit my throat. I fainted from the blows and only recovered in the hospital. My mother-in-law called an ambulance because she thought I was dying" (Chechen Republic).

"On the first wedding night, sex didn't work out. Neither for me nor for him. He cut his hand to prove to everyone that I was a virgin. A female relative came with me, her job was to check the sheets" (Republic of Dagestan).

"My husband was terrible. He beat me almost every day. First, he hit me on the face with his hands, and then with a stick. He came up with some rules of behavior and if broke them, he would beat me with a stick three times" (Chechen Republic).

"After the baby was born, I started complaining to the brothers. When he found out that I was doing that, he beat me as punishment" (Chechen Republic).

"He (my husband) beat me while I was pregnant and shouted that he did not want this child. He was hoping I'd have a miscarriage. He wanted me to have an abortion" (Chechen Republic).

“My husband thought that I had some kind of “demonic eyes”. I just always looked him straight in the eye. Then he thought that my behavior was unusual for women because I didn’t gossip or discuss everyone. He said I was possessed by a jinn and took me to that Center of Islamic Medicine to get rid of the jinn” (Chechen Republic).

The second marriage option is a “cover up” marriage. It aims to hide and minimise suspicions about their sexual orientation. Of all the fictitious marriages of the respondents (N = 6, given that some respondents were married more than once), half, as the respondents themselves believe, can be called successful (in other words, these marriages somehow made their lives significantly safer). **This fact indicates that not only heteronormative men, but also gay and bisexual men live out the cruel ideas of the patriarchy.** They continue in their attempts to establish full control over their wives and to commit violence against them. Many respondents consider such a marriage option to be an opportunity to improve their lives, but there are some limitations. In the Chechen Republic, a couple must be tested for HIV before marriage. Since women enter into a “cover-up” marriage mainly with homosexual and bisexual men, the risks of the test coming back positive is somewhat higher, and if that is the case, the marriage does not take place.

“I’d already found a husband for myself and was courting me. My mother and brothers agreed to the marriage. But then it turned out that he was HIV-positive. Of course, my relatives immediately decided such a wedding was impossible. So all I was left with was my wedding dress” (Chechen Republic).

In addition, the future spouse should not arouse suspicion among female relatives. That is, no one should know of his sexual orientation.

“My brother found everything out and said that if I did not marry a “normal person”, he would kill me himself. He said he didn’t need such a sister” (Chechen Republic).

“My brother was totally against my marrying Sasha (the name has been changed) because he didn’t believe it was real. He said that no one would want to marry someone like me. He swore that he would check on us all the time until I got pregnant, and only when I get pregnant will he believe that my husband and I are sleeping together” (Chechen Republic).

“My brother found out everything about my husband. He’s a police officer and he can check these lists (she is referring to the lists of LGBT people in the Chechen Republic, which, according to many, are managed by security forces). He called him and said that if my husband does not bring me back to the family, he knows what will happen to him” (Chechen Republic).

In such marriages, lesbians, bisexual women get a certain level freedom only if their husband treats them well. However, the influence and control of their relatives decreases only if the couple moves to live in a different region or country and remains closeted, that is, hides their sexual orientation. The consequences of such a marriage vary. A lesbian or bisexual woman may become a typical victim of domestic violence or face significantly increased risks if she discloses her sexual orientation to her husband; a favorable outcome would involve the couple making a joint effort to keep their boundaries and continue to live a double life. The woman may face psychological, economic, physical, and sexual abuse from her husband and his relatives.

“On the day I was to present my graduation project, Oleg (the name has been changed) severely beat me. He hit me on the head and face. I stayed at home beaten up and with a concussion” (Republic of Dagestan).

“His mother said: “Your wife should only listen to me. She is too modern. I will teach her. She is a nobody” (Chechen Republic).

“I got pregnant. He screamed that he did not want this child. Having an abortion when you’re married is just not possible here. So that people wouldn’t talk, they took me to this building... and performed the abortion. I felt awful. I don’t even know if these people were trained medics” (Republic of Dagestan).

“His sister (my husband’s sister) slept in the room and on the same bed as me. I slept with my back to her. And he slept in the same room as his mother and brother. It was difficult to endure. They knew that I had no mother. They threatened to return me to my father, and there I wouldn’t be able to leave the house unless accompanied by my brother” (Chechen Republic).

“My husband made me change my clothing style completely. I started wearing scarves, long skirts and long-sleeved tops. This was very inconvenient to work in” (Republic of Dagestan).

Since the husband and his relatives, and sometimes the parental family, continue to exercise total control over the woman’s life, there remains a high risk of her personal information, such as her correspondence and interaction with women, being uncovered. According to the interviews, in such cases the woman is most likely to face a punishment chosen by her husband.

“He got out screenshots of my phone and read the messages on my computer. He sat me down and made me read them outloud. He called me names. Then he started blackmailing me, saying that if I left him, he would tell my brothers. He swore that I would not leave the house again because everyone would know that I was a lesbian. Then he decided that in order to reduce my “sexual activity” I needed to be circumcised” (Republic of Dagestan).

2.4.1.4. Divorce. Return to the parental family

There’s no point in going for a walk when there’s nowhere to go.

Katherine Webb. “The Unseen”

Judging by the interviews, divorce in the North Caucasus is not uncommon. It may seem easy enough: the husband just has to say that he is leaving his wife. But as we analysed the data we received from the respondents, we found that even in marriages that are a result of an arrangement between the partners and even when both parties agree to the divorce, it is only possible if both the woman and the man have moved to a safe place (relatively safe, as female relatives will normally search for the women for a long time and resorted to all possible methods; more on that below) and severed all contact with their relatives.

“My husband has been denying me a divorce for many years. My attempts to persuade him just make him furious” (Republic of Dagestan).

Another way of getting a divorce is turning to their parental family – their father or brothers – and asking them to step in and take them home. But the divorce itself is a stain on the family's reputation.

“For a long time my mother didn't allow me to come back home. She was ashamed. But after I almost died, the elders of the family gathered together and sat talking for a long time until they decided that there needed to be a divorce” (Chechen Republic).

“I called my father and complained to him, but they said I had to be more patient because I'm too modern. I started calling them on the fifth day [of my marriage]” (Chechen Republic).

“I asked my brother to get me out of there and he began to scream that he would kill me. My brother said that if I returned to my parents' house, he would kill me because he's sick of me” (Chechen Republic).

“When he (the husband) beat me, I told my brother and father that he was using drugs. I returned home to my mother and father several times. But they always sent me back. They said: “Our mothers also suffered, and you have to endure this, too” (Chechen Republic).

“After 4 years I realised I couldn't stand it any longer and called my mother. I asked her to take me away from my husband. My mother replied that she didn't see a reason for divorce because she “didn't love her husband either. Everyone lives like this” (Republic of Dagestan).

“My mother thought the idea of a divorce was preposterous. No one saw that my husband was with another woman” (Chechen Republic).

We would also like to note that all respondents who for various reasons experienced a divorce in the North Caucasus noted that they had been stigmatised by their families and by society. Even a failed courtship is reason enough for a woman to be shamed, bullied, or humiliated. After a divorce the woman can only live with her father's or “guardian's” family.

“After the divorce was finalised, my brother blamed me for it” (Chechen Republic).

“Even six months after the divorce I would only go out to sweep the yard and would immediately go back in afterwards. I could only look at the closed gate” (Chechen Republic)

“Staying at home is boring, so I started playing videogames. My brother saw that I was talking to some other online players. He immediately started beating me. He pushed me against the wall and started choking me. I started fainting. Our mother walked into the room and pushed him away” (Chechen Republic).

2.4.1.5. Running away from home and its consequences

Prisoner resistance merely justifies an ever-fiercer imprisonment in the minds of the prisoners.

David Mitchell. “Cloud Atlas”

Running away from home is considered one of the most serious "misdemeanors" for a woman in the North Caucasus. Deciding to run away means not only putting oneself at risk, but also completely severing ties with one's family if the escape is successful.

"I don't want to live my life on the run. What kind of life is that? That's no life" (Chechen Republic).

"I can't leave my mother. She lost everything because of me" (Chechen Republic).

In the interviews, the issue of running away from home came up frequently. Based on the interview data, decisions about escaping are made abruptly and, as a rule, the women assess the risks to their life as substantial. **Of all the respondents who attempted to run away, only one had a specific action plan. The remaining cases (N = 15) look like spontaneous decisions made as a last resort to save their lives. In one case, a lesbian woman managed to persuade her parents to let her go, but her parents were not aware of her sexual orientation.**

In the case of lesbian and bisexual women, running away not only implies punishment, but often becomes nearly impossible due to widespread economic violence. Of the 20 lesbian and bisexual women in the study, only 4 have some economic freedom, that is, they can choose their job, earn money and spend it on their needs. The remaining 16 women either cannot work because they do not have permission from their "guardian" or are not allowed to independently spend the money they earned. As for the transgender woman, she had the opportunity to work and spend money at her discretion before she was outed and persecuted, during her escape, and after she managed to get off her relatives' and persecutors' radar.

Another factor complicating the escape is the fact that a woman belongs to her "guardian". For example, some respondents noted that it was almost impossible for a young woman to obtain an international passport without the permission of their "guardian" in the Chechen Republic, and traveling by taxi towards the border is complicated. Husbands, brothers, and fathers organise the search for fugitives using all available means: they submit applications to law enforcement agencies, accuse them of theft, call their friends in high places, and mobilise members of the diaspora throughout Russia and abroad. The woman is viewed as an object, and this determines the methods used to search for her.

"I saved about 15 thousand rubles. I got on the bus and went to Krasnodar Region (the place has been changed). There I checked into a hostel. I thought I would find a job there. Two days later, someone started knocking on my door. My relatives came in. They forced me into their car. There were people on the street, but nobody helped. It all happened quickly" (Republic of Ingushetia).

"They got me when I had already arrived in France (the country has been changed) even though I was travelling to see my husband. My distant relatives who lived there locked me in their house. I lived like that for about 6 months. I was only allowed to speak to my mother on the phone when my uncle was in the room. Then they decided they would drive me home. My visa had already expired. They drove me back with some kind of documents about my return to Russia" (Chechen Republic).

"My mother asked to visit me. I missed her so much. When she arrived, she asked me to come home to sort some documents out. When I saw brothers there, I realised that they would take me away" (Chechen Republic).

"I stole my passport back. I went to a friend's house and thought that I could cross the border. But I couldn't. I stayed at a hostel because I had to stay somewhere. My brother arrived there three days later. He took away my passports, phone, and money" (Chechen Republic).

"I didn't care. It was as though I wanted to be found and killed already. I packed a bag and set off hitchhiking. I got to Rostov (the city has been changed). I slept in the woods – climbed up a tree and spent the night there" (Chechen Republic).

Lesbian and bisexual women who have tried to run away and whose relatives have become aware of their sexual orientation face significantly higher risks. **One respondent who participated in an interview after a recent escape has disappeared and we have no information about her whereabouts. Another respondent died (according to the woman's relatives, she "died of poisoning").** The women whose escapes took place long before the interview said that they had received serious death threats.

"After I ran away, my brother said: "You should have died". He asked me to kill myself so that he didn't have to dirty his hands. He wanted it to look like an accident" (Chechen Republic).

"My brothers threatened me by saying that if I left home, they would find me and kill me. Or they would hire someone to kill me two thousand euros" (Chechen Republic).

"He (the brother) attacked me and started beating me up. I screamed and fell to the floor in pain. I was taken to the hospital. The doctors said that there was some kind of rupture... " (Chechen Republic).

"The father: "If this happens again, we will have no other choice but to kill you because you are a disgrace to us and to our clan. Don't you dare to do it again because we will find you and kill you. It wouldn't be hard for us to do. " And my mother said that it wasn't worth waiting and that I should be killed now" (Chechen Republic).

2.4.1.6. Persecution by law enforcement officers and other persons

Any man who has once acclaimed violence as his method must inexorably choose falsehood as his principle.

Alexandr Solzhenitsyn. Nobel lecture

Not so much is known about the persecution of lesbian, transgender, and bisexual women in the North Caucasus. There are some publications in the media about women being persecuted by their relatives, but judging by the results of the interviews, escapes are not the only situations where law enforcement officers may be involved. The first piece of information about so-called "lists of lesbians" surfaced in the autumn of 2017. It should be noted that there is no accurate information about this. However, in their stories women mention that they warned about this on social media and in "gay chat rooms". Others say that their friends' brothers or husbands who work for law enforcement agencies have told them about these lists. According to some respondents, January 2018 saw another wave of detentions of women suspected of being gay. Judging by available reports⁶⁰ and the interview data, transgender women in the North Caucasus are persecuted as much as homosexual men. It can be assumed that this is due to security forces' and decision makers' limited knowledge and understanding of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

Families themselves would contact law enforcement agencies mainly in cases where they were looking for lesbian and bisexual women who had run away from home. Thus, the interactions of the respondents and law enforcement agencies can be put into two categories: formal, such as when their relatives file a missing person report (the women are filed as "missing persons who have no contact with

⁶⁰ "They told me that I was not a person, but a nobody, that it would have been better for me to be a terrorist than a faggot". Report on the facts of persecution of LGBT people in the North Caucasus region. Prepared by the "Russian LGBT Network" interregional public movement in cooperation with Elena Milashina, a special correspondent for Novaya Gazeta, 2017

relatives on the territory of the Russian Federation”), and informal, when women are illegally detained or identified using information collected from ticket sellers, hotel and hostel operators, and banks.

In the first case, information is sent to all regions of the Russian Federation, and police officers start looking for them with enviable persistence. And when they find the women, information about their whereabouts is sent to their relatives even when the woman makes an official request for police officers “not to disclose their locations to their relatives or persons who filed the missing person report”. The interviews contain information about 4 cases in which women were detained at a police station until their relatives arrived. Police officers would hand those adult women over to the people who, according to the women, posed a threat to their lives.

In the second case, the relatives themselves come to the place where the woman lives or has run away to and take them away using force.

However, some respondents also described cases of detention (in the Chechen Republic) by law enforcement officers, accusations of being gay, torture, and blackmail. Of all the respondents, 3 were victims of persecution by the law enforcement agencies of the Chechen Republic on the suspicion of a homosexual orientation or gender identity.

“The security officials took me away because I put up a female friend at my place. I couldn’t say no to her. But I didn’t know she was trying to run away either. I only realised it when I started asking her questions. I told her that she could spend one night at my place, but that she would have to go back afterwards because they’d find her in no time and she wouldn’t have anywhere to go. She left. But someone hacked her social media page where she mentioned me to someone... Some security officials broke into my house and accused me of being a lesbian and of kidnapping their sister. They interrogated me and put me through psychological torture. Since then I was on their radar and they kept detaining me. When they were looking for this gay guy, they detained me and beat me up, but I don’t have any marks left. They dug needles under my fingernails” (Chechen Republic).

“They (the security officials) connected wires to my pinky fingers, put a basin of water in front of me, and said they would electrocute me. They beat me with their fists and hands and spat in my face. Then they called in my older brother and mother and said: “Bring your sister some men’s clothes”. They filmed everything on camera and wanted 120 thousand rubles for this video. My family paid the money” (Chechen Republic).

Lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the North Caucasus are subject to violence not only from relatives and security officials. Undoubtedly, being outed significantly increases the risk of being targeted for persecution by those whom we named “other persons” in the heading of this paragraph. These are men (the interviews only contained stories about men) who bully, sexually abuse, and torture women if they have information about their sexual orientation.

“In 2013 I was kidnapped. They hit me over the head with a gun butt. I woke up in a car with tinted windows. They touched me. It was like they’d injected me with something and I couldn’t fight back. They took me to Dagestan. They dragged me out onto a deserted beach. They beat me up, called me names, and threatened to rape me. They tried to rape me. I ran away covered in blood and sand, my clothes torn. It’s a long story. It was a place where women worked, well, for money... I asked them to help me. They took me to the city, to Makhachkala. They gave me some clothes and washed me, but didn’t let me stay at the hotel. They called me a druggie. I asked them to let me make a phone call and one older man let me use his phone (Chechen Republic).

"I was with my girlfriend when I received a message on social media that was a plea for help. The girl was asking me to help her get to Moscow... She said that they'd found out about her friend who was married, and that she was in danger now, that they could kill her... I couldn't help her, but I told her whom she could go to for help. I don't know what happened next. But I knew who she was even though we never used our real names. She comes from a wealthy family... Then there was a rumour going around that they disappeared somewhere in Moscow... A week later my girlfriend called me and said that security officials were interrogating everyone who helped those girls... A man started calling me. He sounded like a Chechen. He was asking about the girls. He threatened that he would figure everything out and find them and said that I was their accomplice... Some time later we learned that they'd been found. One of them was returned to her husband and no one saw her again. They say that the other one was beaten up by the security officers... she's scared to leave the house now" (Chechen Republic).

"I received a call from a blocked number. There was a rough male voice on the other end of the line: "Seda? Kerim's daughter?" (the names have been changed). I thought it was a friend of my father's who couldn't reach him. But where did he get my number? "Yes. Shall I put him on the phone?" "Why are you bringing such disgrace on your family? I know where you live and work. My job is killing people like you in the forest." I hung up. A few days later I went to the store near my house. I noticed a car driving slowly next to me. The driver lowered the window and ordered me to get into the car in Chechen" (Chechen Republic).

It is particularly important to focus on the problem of the sexual abuse of girls and women in the North Caucasus. This is of great importance for understanding the situation of women in this region in general, not only lesbian, bisexual and transgender women. In the process of the study we have come across the stories of the sexual abuse of girls not only because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. **Two respondents out of 21 talked about sexual abuse in their childhood and adolescence by people who were not family members.** This topic is extremely taboo and we realise that not all girls and women want to talk about sexual abuse, including abuse that happened when they were adults, even after we have established trust.

"Since I was a child, I remember that my brother's friends were trying to lure me into the forest. I was a tomboy. They tried to get me to take my clothes off and have sex with them. It was only later that I realised this. I was 11 at the time. I didn't tell my brother because I was too shy" (Chechen Republic).

"I went to school. We always used the same route. We always took the same bus. We knew all the drivers. But one of them turned out to be some kind of... Anyway. I was standing next to him. The drivers are in this transparent cabin and there's a place for a passenger to stand next to them. That's where I was standing. I looked over to him and saw something between his legs. I thought it looked like a doll's arm. I was in elementary school back then. I can see that it's a doll's arm. He's looking right at me and I'm watching the doll's arm. The way he looked at me... and his hand moving. I still remember it" (Republic of Dagestan).

"There had been one attempt. He was about my age. He grabbed me in an abandoned house and tried to have sex with me. I was scared. He took his underwear off. I fought back and managed to get away" (Chechen Republic).

"When I was a student, we were sent to a mountain village for work practice. It so happened that we were free to come and go as we pleased. This one guy offered to drive me back home. I had some inner resistance, but he was insistent. That's where it happened. He tried to rape me on the way home. There were two parts to it. We were on our way when I started getting carsick. I threw up on the backseat. I was too embarrassed to say anything. He stopped the car and started cleaning up the backseat. He said it was alright and offered me to get in the front seat so this wouldn't happen again. We kept going. He

stopped the car. That's when the first attempt started. He started undressing me. I was crying and shouting. I said I was a virgin and I had to get married. I was so scared – terrified. Something made him leave me alone. We continued driving. Then he made a turn. It was very rough and nothing could stop him. I kept saying: "Why me?" It's embarrassing, I don't know how I got in there, but I ended up between the seat and the glove compartment. He couldn't get me out. I don't know how I came up with this, but I started shouting that I've got tuberculosis. I started coughing, coughing really bad, making a lot of noise. That's what saved me. He sprung back... He followed me for a few months after that. It was the first time I'd experienced violence from a man" (Republic of Dagestan).

2.4.2. Analysis of the psychological state of lesbian, bisexual and transgender survivors of hate crimes, violence, and harassment

I fought it until I was 16 or 18, I believed that there would be "magical transformation

(Republic of Ingushetia)

The thought of suicide was entertained by nearly everyone, if only for a brief time. It was born of the hopelessness of the situation, the constant danger of death looming over us daily and hourly...

Viktor Frankl. "Man's Search for Meaning"

Describing their psychological state, many respondents (N = 12) use the word "hopelessness", note a constant feeling of fear and the absence of meaning in their lives, and talk about death.

"There's no point in living, being, going on. I'm going to die like this" (Chechen Republic).

"I always think about how my freedom is going to end and I may be taken back home. It's a life of fear. It feels hopeless" (Republic of Dagestan).

"Bottling these feelings up is painful" (Chechen Republic).

There is a qualitative difference in the psychological state of the respondents who have been in a safe place for a long time.

"For the first time I was able to breathe deeply and feel free. I'd never felt that way before" (Chechen Republic).

At the same time, the interview data shows that 10 out of 21 respondents have or did have thoughts of suicide. Seven out of 21 women attempted suicide. Two respondents starved themselves. Six lesbian and bisexual women practiced self-harm.

"I felt so awful that I wanted to do something... to make it better... and I didn't care. I knew that they could call me a whore and kill me for it" (Chechen Republic).

Three of the 21 respondents talked about how their brothers or mothers were persuading them to commit suicide.

Unfortunately, the risks faced by the respondents during the course of the study did not allow us to deeply assess the degree of influence the violence they experienced had on their psychological and emotional state. However, some of the participants of the study (N = 6) were able to answer questions on two short but fairly reliable diagnostic tests, Beck's Depression Inventory (BDI-II)⁶¹⁶² and the Traumatic Event Rating Scale (Revised, IES-R)⁶³⁶⁴, in addition to the main study. Beck's Depression Inventory (BDI-II) allowed us to assess depressive symptoms in female lesbian, bisexual and transgender survivors of abuse in the North Caucasus, and the Impact of Event Scale – Revised (IES-R) allowed us to identify adverse emotional and personal characteristics which were developing as a result of the respondents' subjective perception of threat. Since the number of participants was too low for a statistical analysis, we carried out a qualitative analysis of the results.

According to the results obtained by using the BDI-II method, 3 out of 6 respondents are diagnosed with symptoms of severe depression. Explicit depressive symptoms include constantly feeling down, an evident loss of interest in everything they had liked before, increased fatigue, suicidal thoughts, low self-esteem, excessive and irrational feelings of guilt, anorexia, and a number of other signs. The remaining 3 participants in the study showed a moderate level of depression, which indicates that it is progressing.

The IES-R data indicates that

1) on the "Intrusion" subscale, the answers of 5 respondents speak of nightmares, obsessive feelings, images or thoughts associated with a possible repetition of the violence they had experienced. In other words, the psychological defense mechanisms of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women are not coping. Trauma has become a part of the women's daily lives.

2) on the "Avoidance" subscale, 5 respondents indicated a high level of overexerting their psychological defenses. This means that the women's minds are looking for ways to mitigate the trauma, avoid anxiety, and reduce the feeling of their life being at risk.

3) on the "Hyperarousal" subscale, 4 girls scored particularly high. This indicates that the process has taken over the autonomic nervous system. This leads to anger and irritability; a hypertrophied reaction of fear; difficulty to concentrate; psychological and physical arousal due to the recollection of violence; insomnia.

4) the overall level of development (an integral indicator of PTSD progression) is extremely high for all 6 respondents. A normal score is 33 points, while the women scored between 72 and 102 points. Such a state of affairs obviously requires the help of PTSD specialists.

Thus, even with a comparatively small number of study participants, the destructive effects of hate and abuse on the mental health of lesbian, bisexual and transgender abuse survivors are evident. The depth of trauma and the sense of helplessness and hopelessness become the platform for the development of post-traumatic stress disorder, which is otherwise called the "Vietnam Syndrome" or the "Afghan syndrome." The repeated and compulsive reproduction of a traumatic event in one's mind, combined with the stress and intensity of the anxiety that comes with it, does not allow lesbian, bisexual

⁶¹ Beck AT (1972). *Depression: Causes and Treatment*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

⁶² Beck AT, Steer RA and Brown GK (1996) "Manual for the Beck Depression Inventory-II". San Antonio, TX: Psychological Corporation

⁶³ Melnitskaya T.B., Havylo A.V., Belykh, T.V. The Impact of Event Scale – Revised (IES-R) in relation to the radiation factor // *Psychological Studies: electronic scientific journal*, 2011, N 5 (19).

⁶⁴ Tarabrina N. V., *A tutorial on the psychology of post-traumatic stress*. – Saint Petersburg: Peter, 2001, 272 pages.

and transgender women to escape from this violence even if they run away or move to a safe place. The objective risks of being found out and outed only serve to exacerbate the negative effects of PTSD.

As for the data collected through the interviews, it is necessary to pay special attention to the high level of internal lesbo- / bi- / transphobia among lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the North Caucasus. Only 2 out of 21 respondents displayed no evident lesbophobic, biphobic, or transphobic attitudes towards themselves.

Their high level of internalised lesbo- / bi- / transphobia significantly makes the already unfortunate psychological and mental state worse.

2.5. Legal assessment of the situation of hate crimes and violence against lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the North Caucasus

The Chechen Republic guarantees equality of rights and liberties of individuals and citizens... Man and woman have equal rights and liberties and the same opportunities for their realization.

Article 16. The Constitution of the Chechen Republic

The information and facts collected in the course of the research indicate a gross violation of the rights and freedoms of women in the North Caucasus and harassment and crimes against lesbian, bisexual and transgender women. At the same time, opportunities for applying for qualified legal, medical, and psychological help are extremely limited.

In the case of physical violence in the family, lesbian, bisexual and transgender women do not seek medical care because they are forbidden to do so by their “guardians” or because they fear attracting attention to themselves. Psychological assistance is replaced by the religious practice of casting out jinns. Legal protection cannot be ensured due to the entrenched misogyny, lesbo- / homo- / bi- / transphobia of law enforcement officers and decision makers in these agencies and in the region as a whole. Moreover, it is often the security forces themselves who organise persecution.

The study documented facts of beatings and other forms of physical violence that caused physical pain. The perpetrators of this violence are fathers, mothers, brothers, husbands, and security officers. In each case, investigation, additional research, and inspection are required. However, even the data available suggests that the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation classes a significant part of the violent actions as a crime.

Physical, sexual, and psychological violence from the so-called “guardians” (beatings using objects or their hands, suffocation, etc.) and informal groups that persecute lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, may be classed as Battery (Article 116 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), Intentional Infliction of a Grave Injury (Article 111 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), Intentional Infliction of Injury to Health of Average Gravity (Article 112 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), Rape (Article 131 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), Violent Actions of Sexual Character (Article 132 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), Threat of Murder or Infliction of Grave Injury to Health (Article 119 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), Illegal Performance of Abortions (Article 123 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), Abduction (Article 126 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), Illegal Deprivation of Liberty (Article 127 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), Invasion of Personal Privacy (Article 137 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), Violation of the Secrecy of Correspondence, Telephone Conversations, Postal, Telegraphic and Other Messages (Article 138 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), Incitement

to Suicide (Article 110 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), Torture (Article 117 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation).

Judging by the interviews, part of these acts are committed on the grounds of hatred or enmity against lesbian, bisexual and transgender women. There are also examples when acts are committed by a group of persons in collusion. These are aggravating circumstances characteristic of acts which dangerous to society.

Since violence aimed at lesbian, bisexual and transgender women is taking root in the North Caucasus, the danger of such practices lies in the fact that the entire lesbian, bisexual and transgender community lives in a situation of anxiety and total fear for their lives and the lives of their children and loved ones. It is important to note that when respondents were asked why they didn't seek help from law enforcement agencies, they would laugh and act surprised, saying: "You don't understand. Things don't work this way here..." The victims of violence responded that appealing to the law enforcement agencies would only worsen their situation and "bring more disgrace to the family".

As for one of the rather unique practices of violence, "casting out jinns", according to statistics, exorcism qualifies as Fraud (Article 159 Part 5 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation) associated with the deliberate failure to execute contractual obligations in the area of entrepreneurial activity, if this act caused significant damage. Nevertheless, the Centre for Islamic Medicine LLC located in the city of Grozny (Address: Kalinin st., 36, Grozny, Chechen Republic, 364030), which carries out "86 health care activities, 86.10 Activities of hospital organisations, 86.21 General medical practice, 86.90.9 other activities in the field of medicine"⁶⁵, does not have a license to carry out medical activities and yet is in full operation.

Domestic violence is an alarming problem throughout the whole of Russia. As such, there is no concept of domestic or family violence in the Criminal Code of Russia: the law does not distinguish between crimes committed against family members and other persons. Domestic violence falls under Art. 111 of the Criminal Code (intentional infliction of grave bodily injury causing an impairment of health), Art. 112 (intentional infliction of bodily injury of average gravity) and Art. 115 to 119. In the North Caucasus, the dependent position of women in the family makes it absolutely impossible for them to protect themselves even within the framework of these articles of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

Article 116 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (Battery) no longer makes it possible to bring to account a person who committed this offense if it did not cause harm to the health of their relatives. After the phrase "in respect of close family members" was excluded from the article, only beatings through ruffian-like motives or by reason of political, ideological, racial, national or religious hatred or enmity, or by reason of hatred or enmity with respect to some social group will remain criminally punishable. The authors of the project of decriminalising beatings of family members suggested referring to the Administrative Code, Federal Law No. 326 from 03.07.2016 on the partial decriminalisation of battery. Article 6.6.1 of the Administrative Code provides that in the case of battery, the guilty party may receive an administrative fine of 5 to 30 thousand rubles, an administrative arrest of up to 15 days or up to 120 hours of compulsory labour. According to the authors of the draft law, in the event of repeated battery in the family the victim can take advantage of article 116.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation which also introduced by the decriminalisation law package on July 3, 2016, - "battery by a person subjected to administrative punishment". This article does not imply imprisonment. In turn, the Chechen Republic, for example, has introduced "Commissions for the reconciliation of families". This work is supervised by the Department of the Administration of the Head and Government of the Chechen Republic for Relations with Civic and Religious Organisations. Thus, women do not have the slightest

⁶⁵ open source information found in the Russian National Classifier of Types of Economic Activity (OKVED)

opportunity to stop violence against them. Such a commission will return a woman to her abusive husband.

One of the most challenging problems is the legal treatment of psychological violence. The ban on the wearing of certain clothes, the use of certain types of transport, pressure and control are hardly reflected in the laws of the Russian Federation. A review of court practice in cases involving restrictions on the wearing of religious clothing, a ban on make-up, a ban on driving, and other restrictions for women shows that there is critically little case law on these issues and the court has no principled position on these issues. However, based on the fact that

1. In the Russian Federation recognition and guarantees shall be provided for the rights and freedoms of man and citizen according to the universally recognized principles and norms of international law and according to the present Constitution.

2. Fundamental human rights and freedoms are inalienable and shall be enjoyed by everyone since the day of birth.

3. The rights and freedoms of man and citizen shall be directly operative. They determine the essence, meaning and implementation of laws, the activities of the legislative and executive authorities, local self-government and shall be ensured by the administration of justice.

4. The State shall guarantee the equality of rights and freedoms of man and citizen, regardless of sex, race, nationality, language, origin, property and official status, place of residence, religion, convictions, membership of public associations, and also of other circumstances. All forms of limitations of human rights on social, racial, national, linguistic or religious grounds shall be banned.

5. Man and woman shall enjoy equal rights and freedoms and have equal possibilities to exercise them⁶⁶.

The ban or restrictive actions related to obstacles to the realisation of their rights by lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the North Caucasian Republics of the Russian Federation is nothing but a violation of the rights and freedoms granted to man by birth and guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation.

Since in practice one republic in the North Caucasus has a “special legal status” and defines itself as “the Chechen Republic (Nokhchiin Republic) – a democratic, social law-governed state with a Republican form of government. **The sovereignty of the Chechen Republic is expressed in the possession of the full authority (legislative, executive and judicial) outside of the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation and outside the authority over objects of shared jurisdiction between the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic, and is to be an inalienable part of the Chechen Republic⁶⁷**”, we will consider the provisions on human rights in the Constitution of the Chechen Republic (as amended on: 07/20/2018) of March 23, 2003⁶⁸ separately:

1. All are equal before the law and in the courts of law.

2. The Chechen Republic guarantees equality of rights and liberties of individuals and citizens regardless of sex, race, nationality, language, origin, property or position, place of residence, religious affiliation, convictions, membership of public organizations, and any other circumstance. It forbids other forms of discrimination of citizens on the basis of indicators of social, racial, national, language and religious affiliation.

⁶⁶ Art. 17 – 19, Section 2 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation

⁶⁷ The Constitution of the Chechen Republic of March 23, 2003 (as amended on: 07/20/2018)

⁶⁸ Art. 16 of the Constitution of the Chechen Republic of March 23, 2003 (as amended on: 07/20/2018)

3. Man and woman have equal rights and liberties and the same opportunities for their realization.

In this case, we are faced with a paradox: the rights of women are enshrined in law and guaranteed by the state, but their application and the mechanisms of protecting their rights are not only ill-considered, but simply remain a dead letter, being replaced by Sharia law or the verbal instructions of high-level individuals.

All of this demonstrates the extreme limitations of the existing mechanisms for the protection of the rights and freedoms of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the North Caucasus.

Conclusion

There is no "human rights issue" in this country, as everyone leads the most dignified and happy life.

Blaine Harden. "Escape from Camp 14"

This unique study certainly does not reveal the complexity of the issue of the forms of violent practices and the rights of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the North Caucasus. One of the most vulnerable and closed communities in Russia is effectively a hunting target. These studies are imbued with a sense of hopelessness and powerlessness. Life in a tough patriarchal society where there are no rules and even the law is advisory in nature, where anyone can pose a threat (a mother, father, sister, brother, girlfriend or any unfamiliar person) leaves a severe imprint on one's physical, social and psychological state. In their responses, the respondents often mentioned that they needed psychological assistance (N = 11), legal assistance (N = 6), medical assistance (N = 4), help in finding and moving to a safe place (N = 9). At the same time, queer women themselves cannot turn to law enforcement agencies, medical and social institutions for help as they believe it will only increase their risks and aggravate the situation.

The level of patriarchy in the North Caucasus is so high that the status of women, and especially lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, is no higher than the status of the furniture in a man's house. Appointing "guardians" to adults who are able to recognise the consequences of their actions and control them and depriving them of all rights is not only a violation of human rights, but is also clearly criminal in nature. Honour killings are so widespread that it is not currently possible to assess the scale of the problem. The women who tried to run away because their homo- or bisexuality was discovered, would suddenly die of "pneumonia", "kidney failure", or "poisoning." At the same time, a wave of sympathy on the part of society is directed specifically towards the murderers who have been "dishonoured". In turn, when officials in the central part of Russia are made to comment on violations of the rights of women and girls, they speak of "bigotry" and the "personal affairs of citizens"⁶⁹. And when they are asked about the persecution and torture of LGBT+ people, they evade the question or start issuing threats⁷⁰. Such a response clearly illustrates the failure of legal mechanisms meant to protect lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the North Caucasus.

According to the study, lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the North Caucasus are subjected to physical violence (beatings, pushes, blows with objects, etc.) by members of the parental family (mainly fathers, brothers and husbands), security officials (torture, beatings, detention), and other persons (specially organised groups and individuals). Moreover, the law enforcement officers and the individuals who commit these violent acts are men. Practices of corrective sexual violence that takes the form of rape by security officials or individuals, or forced marriage. Systematic psychological abuse (coercion, control, threats to their life, "house arrest" and forced detention, humiliation and insults) by family members (mainly fathers, brothers, mothers, husbands), informally organised groups and security officers.

There are also several characteristic forms of violence that are used for punishing a woman for her sexual orientation and gender identity or for correcting it: the practice of "casting out jinns", illegal detentions and torture, shaving the woman's head, forced detention and illegal restrictions of liberty (in the parental house or the police station), honour killings, and forced marriage.

⁶⁹ "Astakhov has called marriage to minors the norm" by LENTA.RU May 14, 2015. <https://lenta.ru/news/2015/05/14/astakhov/>

⁷⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wnrubLay5qY>

Meanwhile, from the interviews we obtained the following data on the forms of violence and their prevalence:

Table №2

Forms of violence	% of LBT women in the North Caucasus ⁷¹	of the 21 respondents
Experience (or have experienced) physical violence in their family	100 %	21 respondents
Experience (or have experienced) sexual abuse in their family	29%	6 respondents
of which took place in the parental family	5%	1 respondent
of which took place in the marital family	24%	5 respondents
Experience (or have experienced) psychological abuse in their family	100 %	21 respondents
Experience (or have experienced) physical violence from other persons	24 %	5 respondents
Experience (or have experienced) sexual abuse from other persons	14 %	3 respondents
Experience (or have experienced) psychological abuse from other persons	43 %	9 respondents
Experience (or have experienced) physical violence from law enforcement officers	14 %	3 respondents
Experience (or have experienced) sexual abuse from law enforcement officers	10 %	2 respondents
Experience (or have experienced) psychological abuse from law enforcement officers	38 %	8 respondents
Were outed	76 %	16 respondents
Attempted to run away from home	76 %	16 respondents
Were exposed to the practice of “casting out jinns”	24 %	5 respondents
Do not have economic independence	81 %	17 respondents
Experienced sexual abuse as a child	10 %	2 respondents
Experience restrictions on their employment	90 %	19 respondents
Experience restrictions on wearing secular clothing (skirts, jeans, T-shirts, etc.)	95 %	20 respondents
Experienced direct incitement to suicide	14 %	3 respondents
Were married by force or under threat	38 %	8 respondents
Of these marriages took place after the woman had been outed	88 %	7 respondents

⁷¹ % of the participants of the study

Reported honour killings of their female relatives or friends	38 %	8 respondents
Are not the only wives of their husbands	14 % of the total number of respondents and 30% of respondents who are or have been married	3 respondents
Face substantial obstacles in obtaining a divorce	78 %	7 of 9 respondents

Lesbian, bisexual and transgender women have a high level of internalised homo- / bi- / transphobia (its nature is most often religious). Queer women who are survivors of violence display symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder or a moderate or severe depressive state, and suicidal behavior.

The “Violence against lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the North Caucasus region of the Russian Federation” study is the first attempt not only to study the problem, but also to document the violence against queer women in the North Caucasus by the end of 2018. We do not exclude the possibility that “survivor bias” hindered us from uncovering some forms of violence and making an in-depth assessment of the prevalence of “honour killings” and arrests of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women. As such, we analysed the experience of survivors at the time of the interview, but we know practically nothing about the experience of those who were killed or those who committed suicide.

In the modern legal conditions that are emerging in the North Caucasus and in Russia as a whole, legal mechanisms for protecting lesbian, bisexual and transgender women from violence, violations of their rights, and restrictions on freedom are ineffective. These mechanisms are not only ineffectual, but also increase the vulnerability of the queer women in the North Caucasus.

Thus, the goal of the research has been achieved. We believe it is crucial to develop mechanisms to protect the rights of queer women in the North Caucasus on the basis of the data obtained, in order to save many lives from murder and persecution. We believe that the materials collected and the contribution of the brave and strong women of the North Caucasus whose lives are under threat daily will serve as the foundation for combining the efforts of lawyers, human rights activists, and psychologists to change the situation for the better.

P.S. Regarding the future

It is this spiritual freedom – which cannot be taken away – that makes life meaningful and purposeful.

Viktor Frankl. " Man's Search for Meaning"

At the end of each interview, we tried to ask the lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the North Caucasus about the future. At least one of the participants in the study can no longer answer this question.

"It's hard to say, but not in this country. Homosexual people will not be free here. I want to live freely and live safely" (Republic of Dagestan).

"To hide and live with my beloved [woman], to have a child" (Chechen Republic).

"To find fulfillment in my profession. I'm also thinking about my personal life – I will not marry to please someone" (Republic of Ingushetia).

"I'll make a movie one day. I've dreamt of making a film since I was a teenager. I'm going to look for a male friend I can marry and have a child with, and then everyone will get off my case. I'll get married and move far away. I'll live with my family. With my best friend who can protect me. He will take my beloved as his second wife" (Chechen Republic).

"I would like to leave this republic in the near future, start my small business and live peacefully with my beloved" (Republic of Ingushetia).

"To leave the country and live with my mother, to work" (Chechen Republic).

Glossary of the study

Abuse – the wrongful and excessive use of a person, often for unjust or inappropriate gain. It can manifest itself in many forms, such as physical or verbal abuse, trauma, assault, violation, rape, unfair actions, crimes or other types of aggression.

Biphobia – a bias towards bisexual people, which is based on myths, stereotypes, or lack of reliable information.

Bisexual (pl. bisexuals, bisexual persons) – a person who is physically, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to both men and women.

Coming out – the process of a person opening up to others about their homo- / bisexuality or transgender identity. This process begins with the person accepting themselves and may continue their whole life as a person may come out to every new person they meet.

Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity – any difference, exclusion, restriction or preference based on sexual orientation or gender identity, with the goal or effect of humiliating or diminishing the right to equality before the law or equal protection from the law, or acceptance, use or the equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Feminine forms – feminine nouns derived from single-root masculine nouns denoting males with the addition of a feminine suffix. Typically, feminine forms are used to denote a profession, social affiliation, or place of residence. Their appearance and use is due to extra-linguistic factors and are connected with requirements of gender-correctness.

Feminism – a spectrum of ideologies, political and social movements aimed at achieving equality of political, economic, personal, and social rights for women.

Gay – a homosexual man who recognizes his sexual orientation.

Gay chat rooms – communities and groups in messengers, social media, and forums, for communication between LGBT+ persons.

Gender expression – an external manifestation and demonstration of one's gender identity in accordance with a “female” or “male” role through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice, as well as compliance with the culturally determined characteristics of females and males.

Gender identity – an individual's perception of their inner characteristics of gender, which may or may not coincide with the sex assigned to them at birth. This includes the perception of one's both and other manifestations, such as clothing, speech, and behavior.

Hate crimes – criminal offenses committed on discriminatory grounds. Hate crimes include harassment, threats, property damage, assault, murder, or any other criminal offense when the victim, place, or target of the crime is chosen because of their real or attributable connection, affection, support, membership, or affiliation with the LGBT+ community. The suspicion that motive for the crime was the victim's sexual orientation or gender identity has to be justified.

Heteronormativity – a model of a social structure in which marriage is possible only between a woman and a man. Other civil relationships also take into account the gender normativity of the subjects, and the civil rights of all persons of non-standard gender are negatively affected to some degree; the obligatory heterosexual lifestyle prescribed by society and the state for all people.

Homophobia – uncontrolled negative emotions (fear, disgust, anger, etc.) towards lesbians and gays.

Homosexual people – a collective term for gays and lesbians.

Honor killing – the murder of a family member, most often (but not necessarily) a woman, committed by relatives for bringing “dishonour” or “shame” to the family. “Dishonour” or “shame” usually refer to actions that are prohibited in this culture: adultery, premarital and extramarital sex, rape, sexual relations with partners of the same sex, apostasy.

Institutionalized homophobia – discrimination of people on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, normatively enshrined at the level of state institutions, churches, the media, etc.

Intersectional approach – an approach in which classical conceptualisations of oppression in society, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, do not operate independently of each other. They interact with each other, forming a system of oppression, in which there are many types of discrimination.

LBT women (queer women) – in this study, women who identified themselves as lesbian, bisexual and transgender women.

Lesbian – a homosexual woman who admits her sexual orientation.

Lesbophobia – uncontrolled negative emotions (fear, disgust, anger, etc.) towards lesbians.

LGBT+ community – a group of people united by the fact that their behavior, lifestyle and/or sexual orientation, and gender expression do not fit into the framework of the heteronormative model of the world and the heterosexual cultural matrix.

Misogyny – a term denoting hatred and hostility or deep-rooted prejudice against women, woman-hating. It manifests itself in the form of discrimination based on gender, degrading women, violence against women or the sexual objectification of women.

Openly gay, lesbian, bisexual – a person who openly identifies themselves gay / lesbian / bisexual in their personal, public, or professional life.

Outing – the public disclosure of personal information about a person’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity against their will and consent. It is not the same as a voluntary coming out.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – a non-psychotic delayed reaction to traumatic stress (such as natural and man-made disasters, combat, torture, rape, etc.) that can cause mental disorders in almost any person.

Queer – a term denoting any model of behavior and identity that does not correspond to the traditional patriarchal model.

Self-harm – deliberate damage to one’s body for internal reasons without direct suicidal intent. Self-harm occurs as a symptom of many psychological disorders. The risk of suicide is high among people who practice self-harm. It is associated with major depressive disorder, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder.

Sexism – prejudice or discrimination of people on the basis of sex or gender.

Sexual orientation – one of the components of a person’s sexuality, defined as a relatively stable emotional, romantic, sexual or erotic (sensual) attraction of an individual to other individuals of a particular gender.

SOGI – sexual orientation and gender identity.

State-sponsored homophobia, homophobia supported by the state – support for homophobia at the state level through the criminalisation of homosexuality, support for laws restricting the rights of LGBT people, tacit approval for the use of hate speech against LGBT people by government officials.

Teip – a unit of organization of the Vainakh peoples (Chechens, Ingush, Batsbi).

Transgender people – a collective term for people whose gender identity is not the same as the gender assigned at birth. This term may include, but is not limited to: cross-dressers, transgender people, and other gender-nonconforming persons.

Transphobia – a term for various types of aversion, hatred or rejection towards transgender people and/or being transgender.

Vainakhs, Veinakhs (Chechen *Vainakhs*, Ingush *Veinakhs* – “our people”) – an endo-ethnonym for Chechens and Ingushs created at the beginning of the 20th century. In modern Caucasian studies it refers to most speakers of the Nakh language: the Vainakhs of Chechnya and Ingushetia.

Violence – the deliberate use of power or physical strength, whether it is real or in the form of a threat, against oneself, another person, a group of people, or a community, which results in (or there is a high degree of likelihood of this) bodily injuries, death, psychological trauma, developmental disabilities, or other kinds of damage.

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