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CENTERS OF SOCIAL SERVICES AS SUBJECTS OF SOCIAL AND LEGAL ASSISTANCE TO WOMEN AFFECTED BY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Анотація. У статті здійснено теоретико-аналітичний аналіз центрів соціальних служб як важливих суб'єктів соціально-правової допомоги жінкам, які постраждали від домашнього насильства. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена тим, що домашнє насильство в сучасних умовах є складною соціально-правовою проблемою, яка порушує фундаментальні права людини, негативно впливає на фізичне й психологічне здоров'я жінок, дестабілізує сімейне середовище, посилює соціальну ізоляцію постраждалих осіб і створює ризики для дітей. Особливої гостроти ця проблема набуває в умовах воєнного стану, внутрішнього переміщення населення, економічної нестабільності, зростання психологічного навантаження на сім'ї та посилення соціальної вразливості жінок, які потребують не лише кризового реагування, а й комплексного соціально-правового супроводу.

Мета статті полягає в аналізі ролі центрів соціальних служб у наданні соціально-правової допомоги жінкам, які постраждали від домашнього насильства, з'ясуванні основних напрямів їхньої діяльності та окресленні перспектив удосконалення соціально-правового супроводу постраждалих жінок. Методологія дослідження ґрунтується на використанні комплексу взаємопов'язаних наукових методів: аналізу нормативно-правових актів у сфері запобігання та протидії домашньому насильству, узагальнення наукових джерел із проблем соціальної роботи, соціально-правового захисту, підтримки жінок, материнства й дитинства, структурно-функціонального аналізу діяльності центрів соціальних служб, систематизації основних напрямів соціально-правової допомоги та узагальнення сучасних статистичних даних щодо мережі спеціалізованих служб підтримки постраждалих від домашнього насильства та/або насильства за ознакою статі в Україні.

Наукова новизна статті полягає в уточненні ролі центрів соціальних служб як базової ланки соціально-правової допомоги жінкам, які постраждали від домашнього насильства, та в обґрунтуванні їхнього місця в системі міжвідомчого реагування. Доведено, що центри соціальних служб виконують не лише функцію надання окремих соціальних послуг, а й забезпечують первинне виявлення проблеми, оцінювання потреб постраждалої жінки, інформування про її права й доступні механізми захисту, сприяння отриманню правничої допомоги, перенаправлення до спеціалізованих служб підтримки, соціально-психологічну підтримку, кризове реагування та подальший соціальний супровід. Схарактеризовано основні напрями соціально-правової допомоги: інформаційно-консультативний, соціально-діагностичний, правозахисний, соціально-психологічний, координативний, профілактичний і супровідний.

У висновках установлено, що центри соціальних служб є важливими суб'єктами соціально-правової допомоги жінкам, які постраждали від домашнього насильства, оскільки поєднують функції первинного реагування, соціального захисту, правового інформування, психологічної підтримки, перенаправлення до спеціалізованих служб і соціального супроводу. Ефективність їхньої діяльності залежить від доступності соціальних і правничих послуг у територіальних громадах, кадрової спроможності фахівців, чіткості локальних маршрутів допомоги, сталого фінансування та налагодженої міжвідомчої взаємодії. Перспективами вдосконалення діяльності центрів соціальних служб визначено розроблення локальних маршрутів допомоги постраждалим жінкам, посилення співпраці з поліцією, службами у справах дітей, закладами охорони здоров'я, освіти, центрами безоплатної правничої допомоги й громадськими організаціями, а також підготовку фахівців на засадах травмоінформованого, гендерно чутливого та правозахисного підходів.

Ключові слова: домашнє насильство; жінки; міжвідомча взаємодія; правовий захист; соціальний супровід; соціально-правова допомога; центри соціальних служб.

Abstract. The article provides a theoretical and analytical examination of centers of social services as important subjects of social and legal assistance to women affected by domestic violence. The relevance of the study is determined by the fact that domestic violence in contemporary conditions is a complex social and legal problem that violates fundamental human rights, negatively affects women's physical and psychological health, destabilizes the family environment, intensifies the social isolation of survivors, and creates risks for children. This problem becomes particularly acute under martial law, internal displacement, economic instability, increasing psychological pressure on families, and the growing social vulnerability of women who require not only crisis response but also comprehensive social and legal support.

The purpose of the article is to analyze the role of centers of social services in providing social and legal assistance to women affected by domestic violence, to identify the main areas of their activity, and to outline prospects for improving the social and legal support of affected women. The research methodology is based on the use of a set of interrelated scientific methods: analysis of legal and regulatory acts in the field of preventing and combating domestic violence; generalization of scientific sources on social work, social and legal protection, support for women, motherhood and childhood; structural and functional analysis of the activities of centers of social services; systematization of the main areas of social and legal assistance; and generalization of current statistical data on the network of specialized support services for persons affected by domestic violence and/or gender-based violence in Ukraine.

The scientific novelty of the article lies in clarifying the role of centers of social services as a basic link in the system of social and legal assistance to women affected by domestic violence and in substantiating their place within the system of interagency response. It is proved that centers of social services perform not only the function of providing individual social services but also ensure the primary identification of the problem, assessment of the needs of the affected woman, provision of information about her rights and available protection mechanisms, facilitation of access to legal aid, referral to specialized support services, socio-psychological support, crisis response, and further social case management. The main areas of social and legal assistance are characterized: informational and consultative, social and diagnostic, human rights protection, socio-psychological, coordination, preventive, and support-oriented.

The conclusions establish that centers of social services are important subjects of social and legal assistance to women affected by domestic violence, as they combine the functions of primary response, social protection, legal information, psychological support, referral to specialized services, and social case management. The effectiveness of their activities depends on the accessibility of social and legal services in territorial communities, the professional capacity of specialists, the clarity of local referral pathways, sustainable funding, and well-established interagency cooperation. The prospects for improving the activities of centers of social services include the development of local referral pathways for assisting affected women, strengthening cooperation with the police, children's services, healthcare and educational institutions, free legal aid centers, and non-governmental organizations, as well as training specialists on the basis of trauma-informed, gender-sensitive, and human rights-based approaches.

Keywords: centers of social services; domestic violence; interagency cooperation; legal protection; social and legal assistance; social case management; women.

Problem statement. Domestic violence is a complex social and legal problem that violates fundamental human rights, negatively affects women's physical and psychological health, destabilizes the family environment, intensifies the social isolation of survivors, and creates risks for children. This problem has become particularly acute under martial law, when social tension, economic instability, forced displacement, psychological exhaustion of families, and women's dependence on the abuser have increased.

According to the Law of Ukraine «On Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence», domestic violence includes acts of a physical, psychological, economic, or sexual nature committed within the family, within the place of residence, or between relatives, former or current spouses, regardless of whether they live together [1]. The Law of Ukraine «On Social Services» defines the legal and organizational foundations for providing social services to individuals and families in difficult life circumstances [2].

In this context, centers of social services act as important subjects in identifying cases of domestic violence, assessing the needs of affected women, providing information and counseling, ensuring social case management, referring survivors to specialized support services, and coordinating interagency cooperation. Their activities are not only social but also human rights-oriented, as they aim to restore

violated rights, ensure access to legal aid, crisis intervention, psychological support, and a safe environment.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The problem of social and legal assistance to women affected by domestic violence is interdisciplinary and is considered within the fields of social pedagogy, social work, law, psychology, gender studies, and public administration.

The theoretical and methodological foundations of social work with various categories of clients were developed by O. Bezpalko, I. Zvierieva, A. Kapska, L. Mishchuk, V. Polishchuk, V. Syniov, and S. Kharchenko. Issues of social and legal protection of children and youth were studied by I. Kovchyna, Zh. Petrochko, and V. Shtyfurak. The content and forms of social and socio-pedagogical work with the family were highlighted by T. Aliksieienko, V. Kravets, and I. Trubavina. Certain aspects of social and educational work with women were analyzed by T. Zharovtseva, K. Levchenko, A. Liakisheva, I. Parfanovych, and T. Poberezhets. The organizational and methodological foundations of the activities of centers of social services for families, children, and youth were considered by V. Stynska, S. Tolstoukhova, and A. Sheremet [9].

The works of I. Zvierieva and H. Laktionova are important for the problem under study, as they reveal the content and organization of social work with various categories of clients, including women. These studies present models of social services common in foreign practice: shelters for women, telephone support services, information centers for women, multidisciplinary women's centers, assistance centers for young mothers, services for overcoming women's unemployment, and others [9]. H. Tymoshko paid special attention to the activities of social services for women, mother and child centers, social dormitories, and centers of socio-psychological assistance for persons in difficult life circumstances [9].

In the context of the problem under study, the article by V. Stynska is particularly significant. Using the example of Ivano-Frankivsk region, it analyzes the activities of family socio-psychological rehabilitation centers as institutions that provide comprehensive social, psychological, pedagogical, medical, legal, and rehabilitation assistance to persons in difficult life situations, including those caused by domestic violence [10].

The National Report based on the monitoring of specialized support services for persons affected by domestic violence and/or gender-based violence emphasizes the need for further development of the network of specialized services, strengthening their integration into local response mechanisms, improving interagency cooperation, ensuring staff capacity, and expanding survivors' access to crisis rooms, shelters, day centers, mobile teams, and primary socio-psychological counseling services [6].

At the same time, the analysis of scientific sources shows that the activities of centers of social services in the field of social and legal assistance to women affected by domestic violence require separate scholarly consideration. Their functions, areas of activity, mechanisms of interaction with specialized support services, and possibilities for improving social and legal support for affected women remain insufficiently specified.

The purpose of the article – the purpose of the article is to analyze the role of centers of social services in providing social and legal assistance to women affected by domestic violence, to identify the main areas of their activity, and to outline prospects for improving the social and legal support of affected women.

Presentation of the main research material. Social and legal assistance to women affected by domestic violence is based on the combination of social protection, legal information, psychological support, crisis intervention, and interagency cooperation. It involves not only responding to the fact of violence but also creating conditions for restoring the safety, independence, social activity, and legal capacity of the affected woman.

The legal basis for the activities of centers of social services in this field is the Law of Ukraine «On Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence» [1], the Law of Ukraine «On Social Services» [2], the Procedure for Interaction of Entities Implementing Measures in the Field of Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence and Gender-Based Violence [3], as well as the State Social Program for Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence and Gender-Based Violence for the Period up to 2025 [4]. The Procedure for Interaction of Entities defines the mechanism of comprehensive response, which involves public authorities, local self-government bodies, the police, social services, healthcare and educational institutions, children's services, free legal aid centers, and specialized support services [3].

Thus, the regulatory and legal framework defines centers of social services not only as providers of social services but also as an important link in interagency cooperation in the field of identifying, responding to, supporting, and accompanying affected persons. Within this cooperation, centers of social

services ensure the initial contact with the affected woman, assess her needs, provide information about available protection mechanisms, organize assistance, and refer her to the relevant response entities.

According to the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, as of May 2025, there were already 1,132 specialized support services for affected persons operating in Ukraine. These included 59 shelters, 109 day centers for socio-psychological assistance, 108 crisis rooms, 718 mobile teams of socio-psychological assistance, 117 specialized primary socio-psychological counseling services, 12 call centers/hotlines, and 9 other specialized services. In the first quarter of 2025, 14,362 persons received qualified assistance [5].

In the system of assistance to women affected by domestic violence, centers of social services perform a number of interrelated functions.

First, they perform an informational and consultative function, which consists in providing a woman with information about her rights, opportunities to receive assistance, and the procedure for applying to the police, the court, the free legal aid system, healthcare institutions, shelters, crisis rooms, and mobile teams.

Second, they perform a social and diagnostic function, which involves assessing the needs of the affected woman, determining the level of danger, and identifying the presence of children, as well as housing, financial, medical, psychological, and legal problems.

Third, they perform a human rights protection function, which includes facilitating access to primary legal aid, assisting with documentation, preparing applications to relevant authorities, and explaining the procedure for obtaining protection mechanisms and social guarantees.

Fourth, they perform a socio-psychological function aimed at crisis counseling, emotional support, stabilization of psychological condition, development of a safe behavioral strategy, and overcoming social isolation.

Fifth, they perform a coordination function, which involves cooperation of centers of social services with the police, children's services, healthcare and educational institutions, free legal aid centers, non-governmental organizations, shelters, crisis rooms, and mobile teams.

Sixth, they perform a support function, which consists in long-term assistance to a woman after her initial application: support in employment, restoration of documents, arrangement of social benefits, resolution of housing issues, enrollment of children in educational institutions, restoration of social ties, and development of a life strategy free from violence.

Thus, the functional role of centers of social services in the system of assistance to women affected by domestic violence lies not only in the provision of individual social services but also in ensuring primary response, social and legal protection, interagency coordination, and further support for the affected person. This approach is consistent with the provisions of the Law of Ukraine "On Social Services" and the Procedure for Interaction of Entities Implementing Measures in the Field of Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence and Gender-Based Violence [2; 3].

The effectiveness of implementing these functions largely depends on the availability and accessibility of specialized support services in territorial communities, to which centers of social services can refer affected women according to their needs and level of danger. Therefore, analyzing the current state of the network of such services in Ukraine is important for understanding the practical potential of social and legal assistance.

According to the results of national monitoring of specialized support services conducted by the National Social Service of Ukraine, in January 2025, 1,126 specialized services were recorded in 23 regions and the city of Kyiv, providing services in at least 647 communities and 684 settlements [6].

This indicates that the network of specialized assistance actually covers the territory controlled by the Government of Ukraine and includes both large cities and small settlements.

One illustrative example of specialized assistance to persons affected by domestic violence is the Kyiv City Center for Gender Equality, Prevention and Counteraction to Violence, which has been operating since 1998. Within the activities of the Center, affected persons can receive socio-psychological, informational, consultative, and crisis assistance, including the services of specialists, crisis rooms, and shelters. This experience confirms the importance of comprehensive support that combines primary counseling, safe temporary accommodation, and further support [5].

At the same time, the activities of individual centers should be considered in the context of the nationwide network of specialized support services.

The data presented indicate that Ukraine has formed an extensive network of specialized support services for persons affected by domestic violence and/or gender-based violence. At the same time, the existence of such a network does not reduce the role of centers of social services but, on the contrary, strengthens their importance as a basic link of social and legal assistance at the level of the territorial

community. It is centers of social services that often ensure the primary identification of the problem, assessment of the needs of the affected woman, determination of the further assistance pathway, referral to specialized services, and social support.

In this context, the integration of centers of social services into local mechanisms for responding to domestic violence is particularly important. The National Report based on the monitoring of specialized support services shows that the effectiveness of their activities depends on stable funding, staff capacity, established interagency cooperation, and clear referral of affected persons between assistance providers [6].

The practical significance of such cooperation is confirmed by the experience of the regional Center for Socio-Psychological Assistance in the village of Verkhovyna, Verkhovyna district, Ivano-Frankivsk region, with a Mother and Child Department for temporary accommodation of women with newborn children and pregnant women who have found themselves in difficult life circumstances that prevent them from fulfilling their maternal function. The Center demonstrates that assistance to women and families in difficult life circumstances should be comprehensive and include not only social counseling but also psychological, pedagogical, medical, legal, and rehabilitation support [10].

In the system of social and legal assistance to women affected by domestic violence, an important place is occupied not only by centers of social services but also by related specialized social institutions to which affected women may be referred according to their needs. One such institution is the Social Center for Mother and Child, a temporary accommodation facility for women in the seventh to ninth months of pregnancy and mothers with children from birth to 18 months of age who have found themselves in difficult life circumstances that prevent them from properly fulfilling their maternal responsibilities.

The activities of Social Centers for Mother and Child are related to the issue of social and legal assistance to women affected by domestic violence, since some of these women may simultaneously experience motherhood, housing instability, economic dependence, psychological crisis, and the need for safe temporary accommodation. In such cases, centers of social services can conduct an initial assessment of the needs of the affected woman, inform her about available types of assistance, facilitate access to legal and psychological support, and refer her to a Social Center for Mother and Child or other specialized services.

The main tasks of Social Centers for Mother and Child are to provide social, psychological, legal, and socio-pedagogical support to mothers in overcoming difficult life circumstances; prepare mothers and children for adaptation to society; create favorable conditions for child development; and protect the rights and interests of women and children temporarily residing in the institution.

Open materials of the National Social Service of Ukraine and monitoring reports confirm the continued functioning of Social Centers for Mother and Child in certain regions of Ukraine, in particular in Kherson, Poltava, Cherkasy, and Khmelnytskyi regions.

Thus, Social Centers for Mother and Child should be considered an important element of the institutional network of support for women and children, supplementing the activities of centers of social services in cases where a woman affected by domestic violence needs not only counseling or legal assistance but also temporary safe accommodation and comprehensive social support.

The content of the activities of these centers directly correlates with the needs of women affected by domestic violence, since their typical tasks include socio-psychological diagnostics, psychological and pedagogical assistance, socio-medical rehabilitation, corrective and restorative work, adaptation to the family environment, legal support, and other types of assistance [10]. Thus, the regional experience of Ivano-Frankivsk region confirms that effective social and legal assistance to affected women requires not isolated services but a holistic system of support in which centers of social services perform coordination, diagnostic, human rights protection, and supportive functions.

In the activities of centers of social services, social and legal assistance to women affected by domestic violence may be implemented according to the following algorithm:

1. initial application by a woman or identification of a case of domestic violence;
2. ensuring confidentiality, safety, and prevention of retraumatization;
3. initial counseling on rights, available services, and possible forms of assistance;
4. assessment of the needs of the affected woman and, if there are children, the needs of the child;
5. identification of risks and the need for crisis intervention, shelter, or a crisis room;
6. development of an individual assistance plan;
7. provision or organization of social, psychological, legal, medical, and other services;
8. referral to specialized support services, the police, free legal aid centers, healthcare institutions, and children's services;
9. social support and monitoring of the situation;

10. support for social adaptation, restoration of resources, and independence of the affected woman.

This algorithm corresponds to the multilevel logic of socio-pedagogical support substantiated by V. Stynska. At the macro level, assistance is ensured through state policy and legislation; at the meso level, through the activities of social services, institutions, organizations, communities, and specialized facilities; and at the micro level, through direct individual work with the woman, her child, family, and immediate social environment [9].

Despite the positive dynamics in the development of the network of specialized services, the activities of centers of social services in the field of social and legal assistance to women affected by domestic violence face a number of problems. These include uneven access to services in communities; insufficient number of shelters and crisis rooms in some regions; workload of specialists; the need for specialized training of social workers; complexity of interagency cooperation; low level of legal awareness among some affected women; women's economic dependence on the abuser; and stigmatization of seeking help.

The UNFPA report «Voices from Ukraine 2024» emphasizes that the war has increased the risks of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, and has also complicated access of women and girls to support due to lack of resources, housing instability, displacement, financial dependence, and insufficient awareness of available services [8]. This confirms the need to strengthen the role of centers of social services as an accessible primary link of assistance in territorial communities.

Promising areas for improving the activities of centers of social services include: creating local referral pathways for affected women in every community; strengthening cooperation with the police, children's services, healthcare and educational institutions, free legal aid centers, and non-governmental organizations; training specialists to work with cases of domestic violence based on trauma-informed, gender-sensitive, and human rights-based approaches; developing crisis rooms, shelters, mobile teams, and day centers; ensuring women's access to legal aid, psychological support, and social case management; intensifying preventive work; and forming zero tolerance for domestic violence.

Conclusion. Thus, centers of social services are important subjects of social and legal assistance to women affected by domestic violence. Their activities include information provision, counseling, needs assessment, crisis response, social support, referral to specialized services, facilitation of access to legal aid, psychological support, and coordination of interagency cooperation.

Current statistics show that Ukraine has an extensive network of specialized support services for survivors, including shelters, day centers, crisis rooms, mobile teams, primary counseling services, and hotlines. At the same time, the effectiveness of this network largely depends on how well centers of social services are integrated into local response mechanisms and how effectively they carry out needs assessment, referral, social support, and human rights protection assistance.

Further research should focus on developing a model of social and legal support for women affected by domestic violence in centers of social services of territorial communities, as well as on defining criteria for the effectiveness of interagency cooperation in the field of preventing and combating domestic violence.

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