

# III

## Violence against Women in Various Socio-political Contexts

### 1. Family

#### Domestic Violence

The prevailing notion of male dominance and traditional patriarchal practices lead to domestic violence, especially when husbands believe that their wives are not respecting or obeying them. An old traditional Korean proverb, which is still in use in North Korea, states that “Man in the family is like a god.” During marriage, a wife is under the authority of the husband and she has to perform her wifely duties adequately. NKHR’s interviews revealed that husbands beat their wives quite often only because their wives raise objections to them. Among the 25 North Korean interviewees, all 25 witnessed domestic violence in their neighborhoods; seven witnessed their parents’ domestic violence, and six directly experienced domestic violence. Considering the fact that the interviewees were reluctant to reveal their experiences with domestic violence, it can be assumed that more than those who stated that they suffered from domestic violence actually did.

#### Testimonies

**Youngju LEE** (Female, born in 1968, escaped in 2002)

- A man who lived across from my home worked at the National Security Agency, but

he drank and physically abused his wife every day. The son in that household couldn't do anything to protect his mom. No one could stop him from abusing her because it was a domestic problem. It was none of my business. It was the husband hitting his own wife. Who would want to intervene with someone else's family affairs and try to stop the violence?

**Sukju KIM** (Male, born in 1956, escaped in 2007)

- It is common to see men beating up women. I've seen countless cases where women get beaten up because they talk back to their husbands. Husbands hit their wives by saying, "How dare you talk back to me?" Wives are not allowed to make objections to their husbands in North Korea. Violence against women is widely accepted at home and even in the society. Women that get beaten up by their husbands are not viewed as women. Many people think men hit their wives because they are not ladylike and thus, they deserve to get beaten up.

**Gukwha** (Female, born in 1972, escaped in 2009)

- I often witnessed my father abusing my mother badly. I was only a child, so I didn't get to stop my father from hitting her so I just sat and cried. There is no system to call the police to report domestic violence. My mother would get beaten up, but she had to stay home. My father was very picky about everything. He would kick a dining table if he didn't see a spoon. Now that I think about it, I think my mother died from a stroke because my father hit her hard.

- I met my second husband through a matchmaker. He started to abuse me right after we got married. I didn't move when he abused me. Some tried to stop him from hitting me, but I couldn't report to the police station. Women are ashamed by the fact that they get beaten up by their own husbands. He would call me a moron and beat me up.

**Mincheol KANG** (Male, born in 1976, escaped in 2007)

- My parents fought intensely. My father was close to being an alcoholic. When my father got drunk, he would hit my mother and when he became sober, he would apologize. My mother filed for divorce, but the court rejected her petition. I felt sorry for the women who lived in my town. They couldn't even breathe when their husbands said something to them. It was okay to starve their children, but it was, by no means, unacceptable to starve their husbands.

**Okju LEE** (Female, born in 1956, escaped in 2005)

- I lived with my husband for 20 years. Except the first year of our marriage, he abused me and cheated on me. My kid was only 5 at the time, but he still vividly remembers his father hitting me. He was abusive even when he was sober. It got loud when he beat me, so he decided to pinch me everywhere instead of hitting me. My whole body was

bruised and I had to cover myself before going outside.

**Kumbong PARK** (Female, born in 1965, escaped in 2005)

- On the second day of our living together, my husband hit me for not being a good cook. I should have left him then, but I stayed with him because I wasn't smart enough. I knew I had to financially support my parents if I went back to their house. I didn't want to take the responsibility to take care of my parents at that time, so I just decided to live with my abusive husband. I got beaten up by him for the next three years until I finally decided to run away from him.

### **No Legal Protection from Domestic Violence**

The state's decision to look the other way is a significant problem contributing to widespread domestic violence. The perception that the state should not intervene in private family matters is rampant in North Korean society. All North Korean interviewees responded that reporting domestic violence to the police is preposterous. Even if witnesses or victims of domestic violence report it to the police, the police completely disregard the case and send them back home. Women, when battered by their husbands, regard themselves as a disgrace to their families and thus tend to conceal it from their neighbors. North Koreans even believe that women deserve to be beaten by their husbands. These women often do not know how to seek legal protection or how to cope with the abuse; they cannot help but accept the violence as their fate. The lack of appropriate measures by the state on behalf of victims of domestic violence has spawned more practices of violence towards women.

### **Testimonies**

**Hyang LEE** (Female, born in 1975, escaped in 2006)

- In North Korea, men punch their wives right away when they get upset. We don't have domestic violence centers that women can report to. There is no center that solves and manages public quarrels; it is not surprising that there is no system that handles domestic fights. Even the victims think domestic violence is not a matter that can be solved by others or social centers. When the door to China opened, battered women were the first ones to consider leaving North Korea as a means to get away from their abusive husbands. When it was impossible to defect to China, women just stayed with their abusive husbands and got beaten up. When husbands abuse them, women usually run away from their husbands for a while and return home when their husbands are in a better mood. There were no laws that could solve or improve situations for women. If women report to the police, husbands go to the police station, write a letter of self-criticism and get reprimanded by the police officers. That's all. Nothing gets better.

**Sukju KIM** (Male, born in 1956, escaped in 2007)

- The police station doesn't interfere with domestic problems unless someone gets

killed. I've seen a case where a wife's brain got damaged because her husband threw an ashtray at her head. Even in that case, the husband just went to the police station, wrote a letter of self-criticism and got discharged without any punishment.

**Mincheol KANG** (Male, born in 1976, escaped in 2007)

- If a wife reports to the police because they get beaten up by their husband, police officers would blame the woman for the violence by saying, "Your husband probably beat you up because you deserve it. Unless your husband is mentally ill, you are the one who should be blamed." One out of 10,000 women would report to the police station. If women report to the police, they would be laughed at by the police.

**Chohee MIN** (Female, born in 1967, escaped in 2002)

- In North Korea, there is no word that describes domestic violence. When women report domestic violence to the police, they laugh at them. They sarcastically say, "Aren't you ashamed to let the whole world know that you get beaten up by your husband?" Unless someone gets killed, it is ridiculous to report. No one teaches you at school that men can get punished only when a complaint is filed. No one is aware that women can use legal powers to punish their husbands. At school, we are only taught to memorize the 10 Principles for the Establishment of the One Ideology System and we are fully aware of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il's life and achievements, but we are not taught about our own civil rights.

Domestic violence is clear discrimination against women and a violation of their human rights. However, as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women expressed its concern, there is a lack of awareness and recognition that domestic violence is a form of discrimination against women and a violation of their rights. In addition, North Korea has not taken any steps to prevent violence against women, provide protection, support and rehabilitation services to victims, punish the offenders and train public officials including law enforcement personnel to be fully sensitized to all forms of violence against women.

### **Stereotyped Roles of Men and Women in the Family**

Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State. North Korea also adopted the Law on Sex Equality on July 30, 1946 and Article 1 stipulates, "Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the state's economic, social, cultural and political life." The Family Law also provides that the husband and the wife shall have equal rights within the family.

The family plays a major role in the development of each family member's conformity with societal standards and also has a profound influence on individuals and on all other units of society. In short, individuals learn social and moral standards within the family from birth. In North Korea,

however, the family is one of the places where practices of violence against women occur most frequently. North Koreans, from birth, are raised in a male-dominated society and learn stereotyped roles of men and women within the family. For instance, husbands form the center of the family and exert absolute authority in family decision-making, whereas wives take care of the household and are taught to respect and unconditionally obey their husbands. Since childhood, North Koreans see their mothers grant unwarranted respect and obedience to their fathers. This perpetuates the cultural assumptions in North Korea that women are not independent beings but rather the property of men, and it is tacitly understood that they must be obedient and passive.

In addition, male preference is prevalent in North Korean society and often manifests itself in neglect, deprivation or discriminatory treatment of girls in various settings, including in schools. As in other Asian countries, a preference for sons exists because they carry on the family line. The general belief that a woman's success in life totally depends on her marriage and that she does not need higher education, makes women more dependent on men.

### **Testimonies**

**Sookyung HEO** (Female, born in 1973, escaped in 2005)

- My father moved to North Korea from China in the 1960s. My father was deeply influenced by the Chinese culture. He cooked for us and did chores around the house like many Chinese men. When my father helped my mother with housework, our neighbors made fun of us. People said, "When a man enters a kitchen, his penis gets cut off" and an old lady who lived across from our house insulted us by saying, "What's the use of a woman? You should take advantage of her and make her do all the work!" My friends' fathers sat around, smoked and did nothing around the house. Women had to work full-time and take care of the household as well. Housework belonged to the mothers.

**Kumbong PARK** (Female, born in 1965, escaped in 2005)

- North Korean men look down upon women too much. It is common for men to call women names like "bitch," "whore," "tramp" and "cunt." The notion that women can be treated inhumanely is prevalent in North Korean society. It was impossible for my parents to get into disputes because my mother never confronted him. When my father raised his voice a little and gave her a dirty look, my mom would hide in the corner. Even when my father does something wrong, my mother would always say "yes" and obey him. My mother was afraid of my father because he had an angry, determined look in his eyes.

- In North Korea, a husband and a wife do not hold equal status. Women have to live in full submission to their husbands. All North Korean men look down upon women. Women are not allowed to talk back. If women retort, their husbands use violence to tame them. Gender discrimination and violence against women are common in North Korea. Almost all men think women must be submissive.

- In North Korea, it is only natural to want a son. When parents raise a son, they pay

attention to every little detail so they can provide him with the best, but when parents raise a girl, they are only concerned about marrying her off to a good man. When kids reach the age to enter college, they prefer to send their sons to college, but not their daughters.

**Hyunye KIM** (Female, born in 1989, escaped in 2009)

- North Korean text books do not teach women to be submissive to men, but in real life, men demand absolute obedience from women. Women are not allowed to talk back to their husbands. Women have to be meek and submissive to their husbands. Women are expected to look up to their husbands, cook for them and take care of them. When a man helps his wife with housework, people call him a loser.

**Choel KIM** (Male, born in 1971, escaped in 2000)

- I remember some old sayings that are discriminatory towards women like “Women only listen when they get beaten up,” “It is impossible to drive a wedge completely with a weak hammer,” and “A dictator is needed for a household to prosper.”

**Shinmin** (Male, born in 1990, escaped in 2007)

- There is a widespread consensus that women must obey men at all times. Men are treated better because they are the ones that carry on their family line. Women have to accommodate their husbands’ requests and respect them.

**Okwha** (Female, born in 1979, escaped in 2009)

- We learned about North Korea’s Law on Sex Equality at school, but no one takes it seriously. I think it is human instinct and only natural for women to cherish their husband regardless of what they learn at school. Everyone around me revered their husband so I just thought it was normal.

**Youngju LEE** (Female, born in 1968, escaped in 2002)

- My father was the first one to taste and eat good food in my family because we all looked up to him as a god. Even when we were suffering from food shortages, my father ate rice. The rest of my family ate corns. As a matter of fact, a husband is always put first in his family. Men are only responsible for public affairs, but women are responsible for both public and domestic affairs. Some men help their wives with housework, but those men receive criticism and insults from others for doing women’s work. Men are often referred to as a god and thus, all women must submit to their husband.

**Yosep BAEK** (Male, born in 1984, escaped in 2003)

- I think it’s a cultural practice and traditional norm for women to live under their husband’s rule and domination. Some say “When a hen cries louder than a cock, that

family fails.” We use this idiom a lot. People also say, “Family fails when a woman flaps her skirt.”

**Younwha** (Female, born in 1973, escaped in 2003)

- In North Korea, girls learned to be feminine and ladylike. They are demanded to practice proper virtues and devote themselves to their in-laws. They said it is not necessary for girls to receive university-level education. I often heard people say, “What’s the point of girls studying?”

**Heesook KIM** (Female, born in 1945, escaped in 2002)

- I failed to give birth to a son and my mother-in-law made my life miserable. After giving birth to my second daughter, she poured seaweed soup on me. Because my husband is the eldest son in the family, my mother-in-law wanted a son more than anything. They want sons because they are the ones that carry on their family name. If you only have daughters, the family line will come to an end. They also prefer to have a son because the first son in the family is responsible for taking care of his parents when they are old.

### **Recent Change of Gender-based Roles in the Family**

Despite these negative reports, however, it is important to note that since the 1990s famine women have started to raise their voices in the family. As state factories and enterprises closed down during that period and men could not work anymore, women had to seek food and eventually became breadwinners for their families. They began to sell goods in the market, and suddenly it was the men who stayed home waiting for their wives and doing household chores. In some cases, though, wives had to shoulder the double burden of both housework and earning a living, which took its toll physically and mentally. On the whole, however, because women had to engage in economic activity, they also began to have access to and control over economic resources. Even though we cannot assume that domestic violence has decreased due to these recent trends, most North Koreans in the interview did state that a woman’s status in the family had improved as a result of the shift in gender roles.

This improvement, however, has not been extended to society at large as women still suffer under systematically restrictive cultural practices. As women began to travel to other regions to find goods and sell them in the markets, in fact, violence against women by third parties increased. To avoid these practices of violence, some women started to look for male partners for protection but instead fell victim to other forms of violence because of them. Other women chose to earn money through prostitution as a means of survival.

### **Testimonies**

**Sookyung Huh** (Female, born in 1973, escaped in 2005)

- It’s a little different now. So many things changed after the ‘Arduous March.’ Men now go to marketplaces to buy food and cook at home. It’s a huge change. Since the

beginning of the 'Arduous March' in the late 1990s, mothers (women) started making money by selling merchandise at marketplaces and fathers (men) started doing housework. Men now cook and serve their wives when they get back from marketplaces.

**Youngsook KIM** (Female, born in 1957, escaped in 2009)

- It is still common for women to think that they should respect men but it's not the same as before. Now, men take women's responsibilities of domestic work. It was a disgrace for men if they helped out their wives at home, but men cook at home because women make money through market activities. This new trend is now widely accepted by both men and women.

### **Divorce**

While getting a divorce was almost impossible in the past, it became comparatively easier to get a divorce after the great food shortage in the 1990s. This was not because of changes in divorce laws but because it became easier to bribe judges with cigarettes or alcohol for divorce papers. As the economic situation for women slightly improved in the 1990s, they were able to flee from domestic violence by bribing judges to obtain a divorce. Because there are no appropriate legal channels among police and law enforcement institutions, help centers or other organizations, women must resort to illegal means to escape from domestic abuse.

### **Testimonies**

**Youngok KIM** (Female, born in 1959, escaped in 2008)

- A couple next door fought a lot. The wife sold vegetables in a market, but the husband hit her by accusing her of adultery. When women get beaten up, they can't report. It's the same even now. They just have to live with them or petition for divorce at the court. I've filed for divorce. I got beaten up when I went back home after filing for divorce. If women bribes officers with alcohol and cigarettes, it might work, but without bribing, officers would not interfere with family affairs.

**Kumbong PARK** (Female, born in 1965, escaped in 2005)

- The man I used to live with wanted to get divorced with his ex-wife, so he gave a lot of money to a judge. People usually give Chinese cigarettes to judges. It's like that in North Korea. We give cigarettes and even rice. These days, if women earn a lot of money, they divorce their husbands by bribing judges.

### **The Absence of Women's Sexual and Reproductive Rights**

The fundamental dignity that women have as human beings requires that women not simply be regarded as child bearers and rearers but as complete individuals entitled to govern their own desires. The inability to control the very functions that differentiate women biologically from men

is in itself a violation of human rights.<sup>9</sup> In North Korea, women's sexual and reproductive rights are totally ignored, subsequently leading to the deterioration of women's health. North Koreans are not provided with sex education at schools and are not taught that men can practice contraception. In fact, asking a man to use contraception seems abnormal in North Korean society.

Traditionally, the woman's role is to bear children, but if North Korean women choose to use contraception illegally, they sometimes have to bribe doctors to obtain it. Most use diaphragms without knowing about its side effects. When inserting fitting rings, doctors do not give them any information about the side effects of the rings and some women suffer from severe pain after the insertion.

When contraception fails, women easily decide to have an abortion as it is not considered to be a serious matter in North Korea. Indeed, some interviewed women had more than ten abortions. Doctors do not give women any information about the risks of undergoing an abortion and also perform abortions without administering anesthesia. The lack of health information leads to gross misperceptions, including the belief that an abortion makes a uterus clearer and healthier. Women who cannot afford to bribe doctors use unverified home remedies to avoid pregnancies which also contribute to physical complications and poor health.

In addition, marital rape is not recognized as a crime in North Korea. In fact, the concept does not even exist: among North Korean interviewees, no one knew or had heard of marital rape. They insisted that marital rape could not constitute rape as wives are not entitled to refuse sexual intercourse with their husbands.

### **Testimonies**

**Gukwha** (Female, born in 1972, escaped in 2009)

- Women use contraceptive fitting rings in North Korea, but I've never used it. Women are the only ones responsible to use contraceptives. When I came to South Korea, I found out that men use condoms.

- I've had two abortions. I got the first abortion after I had my first child and I got the second one before I came to South Korea. I got pregnant eight months after giving birth to my first child so I decided to get an abortion when the embryo was one-month old. I went to see an obstetrician and paid 3,000 won. I couldn't go to a hospital. She was a retired doctor but I just went to her. It was very painful and couldn't suppress the pain. When I asked for anesthesia, the doctor told me anesthesia is not used for abortions. I got an abortion for the second time in August, 2009 in China. I went to a retired doctor again. She was about 60 years old and I paid 25 yuan. 100 Chinese yuan was about 15,000 North Korean won.

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<sup>9</sup> E/CN.4/2002/83, para.95.

**Okju LEE** (Female, born in 1956, escaped in 2005)

- I had three daughters. My parents-in-law wanted me to have a son, but I refused to have more kids because I couldn't even feed three kids. My husband didn't like it when I used a contraceptive fitting ring so I couldn't use it. There were no condoms. Men never used any contraceptives.

- I've gotten abortions 11 times. I walked miles to get abortions. The hospital was located in downtown and was very far from where I lived, but I walked home right after I got abortions. When I was 37, I had an abortion in January and it was extremely cold. I got really sick that day, but my husband was away for a winter military training and I had to suffer from high fever alone. I almost died that night. I got abortions two to three times a year.

**Choel KIM** (Male, born in 1971, escaped in 2000)

- I knew women used contraceptive fitting rings. In 1983, we could buy condoms at pharmacies. But women are the ones that use contraceptives. After having an intercourse, men would make their wives run or drink cold water to stop them from getting pregnant.

**Sunok PARK** (Female, born in 1949, escaped in 2009)

- Men never use condoms. Women use fitting rings. I heard there are fitting rings that last 3 years. My daughter got her fitting ring out after having it for 4 years. I heard women's back hurts when they use fitting rings.

- I got an abortion at a hospital when I was young. Doctors rarely use anesthesia. It is common for doctors to secretly perform abortions at home. Sometimes women put an egg in glacial acetic acid for 24 hours and eat it to avoid pregnancy. They try all kinds of methods at home because they have no money to go to a hospital.

**Hyang LEE** (Female, born in 1975, escaped in 2006)

- I've heard of contraceptive fitting rings. After the 1990s, birth control pills were brought in from China. I got to know about them because some people tried to sell them to me. There are some people that use birth control pills, but most of them use contraceptive fitting rings. Women can buy birth control pills at markets without doctors' prescriptions. It is common for women to use fitting rings when having an intercourse.

- Many women get abortions even in Pyongyang. Some get it done at hospitals and some get it done at home. It is illegal to perform abortions at home and it is legal at hospitals. After the 'Arduous March' era, many doctors lost their jobs. Women who wanted to get abortions paid the doctors with money, rice and other things. Some of my friends told me about their abortion experience and told me it hurts a lot. I heard it's good to get abortions because the uterus gets clean.

- In North Korea, there is no such thing as rape between husbands and wives. I had no

idea that the word, marital rape, could be used between husbands and wives. They are married, how can a husband rape his wife? Such concept is absent in North Korea. Women just think it's their fate.

**Sukju KIM** (Male, born in 1956, escaped in 2007)

- Women use contraceptive fitting rings. Women often suffer from a back pain and their organs get weak. Because it hurts so much, they go to hospitals to get them out. It feels comfortable when the ring is out, but then women get pregnant and go to hospitals to get abortions. At that time, doctors at hospitals didn't perform abortions. So women went to obstetricians and gave them money or rabbits. They told women to bring big rabbits by telling them that a rabbit's internal organs resemble the internal organs of the humans. They said they need to do experiments on rabbits and then perform abortions. There was an obstetrician that I was close to and I ate rabbit meat a lot because she had many rabbits at home. I've received rabbits from her right after she received them from her patients. I don't think she actually did experiments on rabbits.

**Youngsook KIM** (Female, born in 1957, escaped in 2009)

- When a husband rapes his wife, it is not considered as a rape. Women just have to understand her husband's sexual urges and accommodate his requests.

**Sookyung Heo** (Female, born in 1973, escaped in 2005)

- Women think they have to obediently do everything their husbands tell them to when it comes to their sexual relationship. There is no such thing as rape between husbands and wives in North Korea.

In the national report submitted to the Universal Periodic Review of the United Nations Human Rights Council which was held in December 2009, North Korean authorities claimed, "Under the Government's policy on public health which focuses special attention on the promotion and protection of women's health, and the reproductive health strategy, all women are under the responsible care of household doctors, obstetricians and gynecologists, which help improve their health steadily. More than 98 percent of pregnant women receive the assistance of professionals in child delivery."<sup>10</sup> With regard to abortion, North Korean authorities also stated, "According to Directive No.16 of the Ministry of Public Health (March 28, 1996), abortion is

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<sup>10</sup> **National** Report Submitted in accordance with Paragraph 15(A) of the Annex to Human Rights Council Resolution 5/1," A/HRC/WG.6/6/PRK/1, para.69.

restricted to the extent possible. Only in the following cases, artificial abortion is permitted at the request of the woman herself and by the decision of doctor's consultation: a case where pregnancy may not be maintained because of disease or may arouse a social problem because of illegality.... a case where the unborn baby is diagnosed deformed."<sup>11</sup> However, the North Korean women who were interviewed stated that they had not been assisted by household doctors or obstetricians. Also, in contrast to the claims of the North Korean government, women stated that they could easily bribe obstetricians to unofficially perform abortions, sometimes even in the doctors' own houses.

### **Sub-conclusion**

North Korean authorities insist that gender equality has been achieved and even go so far as to say "Equality between men and women has been realized in such a degree that the word 'discrimination against women' sounds unfamiliar to people now. Sex equality being not confined to simply equality, the policies and legislation of the State reflect the concept of attaching more importance to women, and their enforcement is now a natural ethical obligation and a life tone of the whole society going beyond the limit of legal obligation."<sup>12</sup> However, this is far from the truth. The international community has expressed concerns that North Korea is not aware of the existence of domestic violence and that, as a result, there is a lack of specific legislation to deal with all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, and a lack of prevention and protection measures for victims.<sup>13</sup> Special Rapporteur Vitit Muntarbhorn also consistently expressed his concern that the issue of sexual violence had not been dealt with adequately.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, what North Korean authorities see as gender equality is only women's active participation in social affairs, which produces the double burden of domestic labor and social work and neglects or ignores domestic and social practices of violence against women. The stereotyping of women as caregivers and homemakers also has serious consequences, as it encourages dependency on men and hinders women's ability to access equal rights.

Long-lasting ideologies that perpetuate cultural practices that are violent towards women at all levels, including the domestic, are not private matters but matters of national concern. If the

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<sup>11</sup> **Consideration** of reports submitted by State Parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Initial report of State Parties, Democratic People's Republic of Korea," CEDAW/C/PRK/1, para.191.

<sup>12</sup> **Ibid.**, para.72.

<sup>13</sup> **Report** of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women," A/60/38, para.55; Report on the Thirtieth and Thirty-first Sessions," E/2004/22, para.522.

<sup>14</sup> **Human** Rights Situations that Require the Council's Attention, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Vitit Muntarbhorn," A/HRC/10/18, para.42.

North Korean government truly acknowledges the problems of the out-dated feudalistic idea of predominance of man over women—as mentioned in their national report to the CEDAW Committee in which North Korea spoke of the ill treatment of women, including being “traded like goods”—it should take appropriate and strong measures to eradicate violence against women and cease to tolerate domestic abuse simply because it is labeled a private matter.<sup>15</sup>

Cultural practices that are violent towards women in the family calls for strong intervention by the State in order to change the general public perception of the traditional patriarchal system because it is certainly not feasible for the North Korean people, who are blocked from accessing any news outside of North Korea, and who are not able to compare their cultural or systematic practices to those of other States, to change such perceptions by themselves. North Korea has a duty to take all measures to eliminate practices which cause violence against women in the family, to discourage stereotyped roles for men and women, and to pursue gender-equality in all spheres including the domestic. It should also redress the imbalance of authority and responsibility between men and women in the family and develop and introduce policies and legal programs for husbands to view their wives as equal partners worthy of respect. Finally, the state should also encourage the establishment of help centers, prosecute perpetrators of sexual violence, and protect victims of violence.

## 2. Community and Society

### 1) School

#### **Lack of Education on Gender Equality**

There is no doubt that education policies play an extremely important role in combating and eradicating ideologies that perpetuate cultural practices that are violent towards women. In NKHR’s interviews, all North Koreans stated that they had received gender equality education at school, but the problem lies in the fact that North Korean educators only emphasize Kim Il Sung’s achievement of promulgating the 1946 Law on Sex Equality. This means that the education curriculum on gender equality merely focuses on the ideal of female participation in government, and though all North Koreans are taught the Law on Sex Equality at school—which states, among other things, that women are granted equal rights as men and that human trafficking and polygamy are prohibited—they are not taught how the law is actually related to their lives. Finally, North Koreans are taught that women should serve as a “wheel of the revolution” and make meaningful contributions by working diligently and actively participating in the public sector. This

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<sup>15</sup> CEDAW/C/PRK/1, para.70.