

Chapter 8

Women in Lithuanian society

Giedrė Purvaneckienė

Participation in decision making - the prerequisite for gender equality. In all the countries of the world, women are in the minority in governing structures and at the decision-making level. Even in the country with the most gender equality, Sweden, where women have achieved parity in the Cabinet of Ministers (where both women and men each constitute 50%), 43% of members of parliament and 41% of local government officials are women. Nevertheless, in most countries more and more women are coming into office. The majority are not simply seeking power. They are striving to change society in such a way that members of both sexes would feel secure and comfortable living in such a society. It is often necessary to change political priorities in order to achieve this and it is apparent that the politics of countries with more women in government better protect women's interests and reflect their standpoints on societal values.

Currently, women in Lithuania do not have adequate influence over policy making, but the situation is beginning to change for the better. In 1996, the highest level of women's representation in parliament among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe was achieved in Lithuania (18.1%). Soon after, Estonia (18%) and Latvia (17%) reached similar levels. Of course, this cannot yet be compared to Sweden (43%), Denmark (37%) or Finland (37%).

It is important to note that Lithuania always surpassed its Baltic neighbours on this issue, and it was first among the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe in advancing gender equality. More recently, Latvia and Estonia have been gaining momentum. After the last parliamentary elections in

Latvia, three of the 12 cabinet ministers and three of the six state ministers were women. There is only one woman out of the 15 members of the Cabinet of Ministers in Lithuania.

Women's health problems. On average, women in the world live four to five years longer than men. In Lithuania, this difference is much wider. The largest difference between male and female life expectancy, 12.1 years, came in 1994. Since then, life expectancy has increased. For men it has grown more quickly. In 1998, the average male life span was 66.5 years, while the average life span for women was 76.9 years (a difference of 10.4 years).

Obviously, this difference alone shows that in Lithuania women's health is far better than men's. Nevertheless, this better state of health is to a large extent determined by the difference in men's and women's lifestyles. Women smoke and consume alcohol far less than men. Women's mortality through accidents, poisoning and trauma is four times lower than for men. Suicides were 5.4 times rarer among women than among men in 1998. And, women are afflicted with tuberculosis, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS more rarely than men.

Nevertheless, women do have specific health problems, many of which are related to reproduction. The health of future generations depends on women's reproductive health, so particular attention must be paid to this area. One of the most important health problems among women in Lithuania is anaemia during pregnancy. The incidence of anaemia had risen significantly and only began falling in the last few years. In 1980, 2.9% of pregnant women had

Currently, women in Lithuania do not have adequate influence over policy making, but the situation is beginning to change for the better.

anaemia and in 1990, 5.6%. After 1990, this figure began to grow rapidly and reached a peak of 36.1% in 1995. Then cases of anaemia began to slowly decline, reaching 32.3% in 1998. That is to say that a third of all pregnant women were anaemic. Such a high rate of anaemia is most likely associated with insufficient nutrition, which is more a social problem than a medical one, but a serious health problem nonetheless.

Another problem is the high abortion rate. The absolute number of abortions fell by 1.7 times between 1992 and 1998, but the ratio remains very high, at 56.9 abortions for every 100 live births in 1998. There are many educational programmes which have helped to lower the abortion rate, but it continues to be much higher than in developed countries. Insufficient use of contraceptives and the lack of sex education hinder essential progress in this area. It is in these areas that Western countries have been able to achieve and sustain a low abortion rate. For example, the ratio of abortions to 100 live births in 1997 was 17.3 in Finland, 22.1 in Iceland and 23.4 in Norway.

Between 1990 and 1998, the incidence of malignant breast tumours among women increased by 1.42 times, ovarian and uterine cancer by 1.24 times and cervical cancer by 1.25 times. It is important to bear in mind that the diagnosis of cancer in women is often (42%) very delayed (III-IV stage). The situation may become much worse if primary gynaecological care becomes less available.

Since 1990, there has been an ongoing trend to reduce the number of beds in in-patient gynaecological care. So far it is difficult to judge whether such a reduction is adequate to the present need for care or not. From Soviet times Lithuania inherited an over-supply of hospital beds generally in the health care system. Nevertheless, the intention to abolish maternity wards in small towns where less than 300 infants are being born annually is motivated only by the current economic difficulties. It may have painful consequences for the health of mother and child and may even lead to an increase in maternity-related mortality.

Education. Education is one of the areas in which the women of Lithuania - and the whole of Central and Eastern Europe - have made the most progress. Women in Lithuania are literate and have equal opportunities with men to education. They put much more effort into striving to attain a higher level of education than men. During the 1998/99 school year,

50.7% of all students enrolled in educational institutions were women. If the number of boys and girls enrolled in primary and secondary schools was equal (50%), at the higher education level women outnumbered men. Women comprise 65.2% of all college students and 57.8% of all university students. Only in vocational schools are women in a minority, where they constitute 39.2% of all students.

Women's mortality through accidents, poisoning and trauma is four times lower than for men.

Interpreting these figures, it is obvious that young men tend to be oriented towards fields associated with physical labour whereas young women are drawn more to the service sector. Among those who chose to study service professions women account for 84.7%. Most women surveyed at vocational schools during the 1998/99 school year chose trade or business specialities, although they made up only 24.2% of all students selecting this area. A large number of young women prefer to study household economics - here they made up the majority of students, at 61.4%.

Young men and women studying at colleges also chose different programmes. Most women studied health care (91.9%), teaching (91.8%) and business studies (78.4%). In contrast, young men chose engineering most often, where they represent the majority of students (71.3%). In transportation and communications, 69.3% of students are men. The next most popular field for young men is business studies - although here they account for only 21.6% of students.

A similar tendency in choosing a speciality is seen among university students. Most female students chose teaching, where they comprised 79.6% of students. Most male students chose to study technical sciences, where they represented 70.1% of students.

Although the absolute majority of primary and secondary school teachers were women, 63.5% of secondary school headmasters were men.

Certainly, 'female occupation' and 'male occupation' stereotypes have an impact on these preferences. There is, however, no doubt that young men are more likely to choose fields that promise a better paid job in the future. Most indicative in this respect is the fact that men are very rarely inclined to become teachers. Although this profession is not stereotypically 'female', it is clearly not promising in terms of wages and career opportunities.

In recent years, more and more women have been seeking academic degrees. If in 1993 34.0% of all doctoral students were women, in 1998/99 this percentage grew to 51.8%. The number of women achieving a doctoral degree is increasing much more

slowly, but nonetheless steadily. In 1993, 33.9% of those holding a doctoral degree were women, while in 1988 this figure grew to 36.4%. It has been more difficult for women to attain higher degrees, but their numbers among habilitated doctors are also increasing (from 10.8% in 1993 to 14.5% in 1998).

The teaching profession is considered to be the most female-dominated. Indeed, in 1998, 77% of all teachers were women. Women made up an even higher percentage of primary and secondary school teachers, at 86%. Women are also in the majority among teachers at schools of professional and college education - 63% and 68%, respectively. Nevertheless, men dominate among those teaching at universities, where women account for 41% of all teachers. Despite the fact that women gain success in education, the attainment of positions in the managerial hierarchy was very uneven, even in the areas where they dominate. Although, as was mentioned above, the absolute majority of primary and secondary school teachers were women, (men made up only 14%), 63.5% of secondary school headmasters were men. It is even more difficult for women to hold high academic posts. In 1998, 31.4% of associate professors and only 9.5% of professors were women. In the entire history of the universities of Lithuania, a woman has never been a rector. It is men who therefore dominate in the decision-making process even in education, the sphere in which the greatest proportion of women work.

Women in the labour market. Until 1996, women made up more than half of the workforce. Between 1996 and 1998, their share in the labour market fell slightly, and in 1998 reached 47.5%.

Women enter the labour market with a higher level of education than men do, but this does not adequately determine their position in it. As is the case in many countries, both a horizontal and a vertical segmentation of the labour market by gender is characteristic in Lithuania. This means that most women hold

Employed and unemployed women and men by education, 1998 (%)

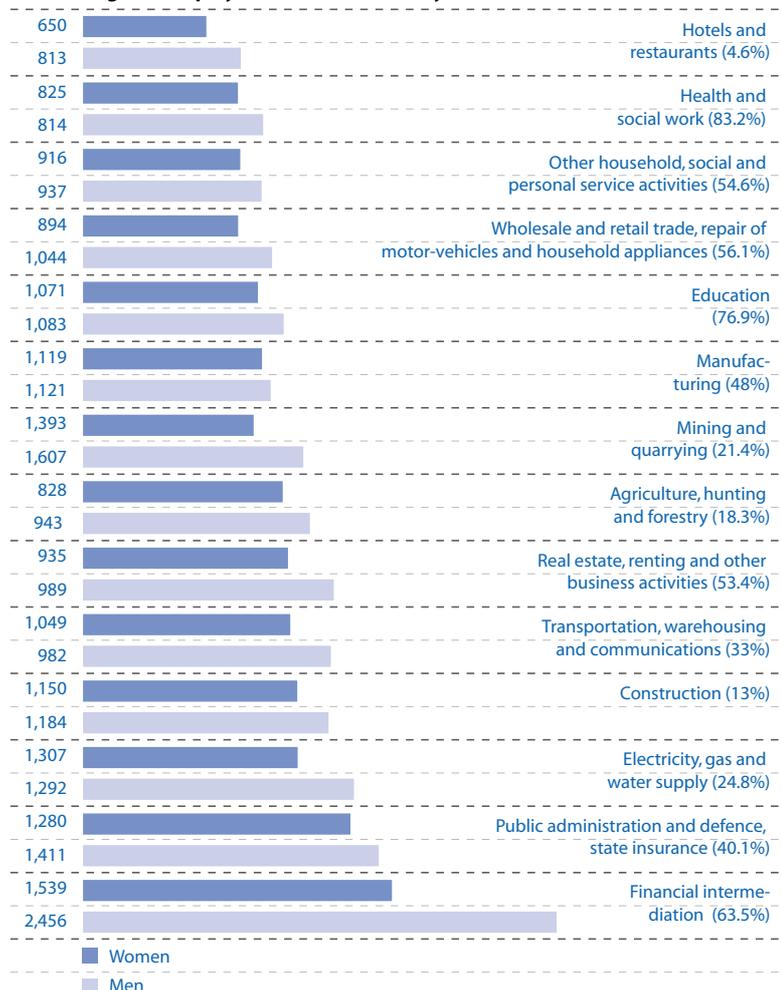
	Employed		Unemployed	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Higher/University	25.7	19.5	9.1	6.2
College	28.0	20.3	24.3	16.3
Vocational	15.8	28.4	23.9	32.3
Secondary	19.9	18.6	30.4	24.9
Nine-year	7.1	9.1	10.9	15.8
Primary (or none)	3.5	4.1	1.5	4.4

jobs in less prestigious (and less well-paid) sectors, and occupy lower positions (or perform work that is less well-paid) in these same branches. A vertical segmentation of the labour market according to gender is easily demonstrated by a comparison between men's and women's average monthly wages in different branches of work.

Statistical data show that in no economic sector do women earn more than men. On average,

Women enter the labour market with a higher level of education than men do, but this does not adequately determine their position in it.

Gross wages of employed men and women by economic sector, October 1998 (LTL)



* In brackets, proportion of women in total employment (%).

In the EU, women earn 25% less than men

Women in the European Union earn an average of 25% less than men, as shown by a recent survey ordered by the European Commission (EC).

Women in the former East Germany, Denmark and Sweden were luckiest in this respect –the least inequality with men exists in these countries. The largest gap between wages earned by men and women is in Greece, the Netherlands and Portugal.

It was stated in the conclusions of the EC statistics institution EUROSTAT that, “the average woman in the EU has a long way to go before she gets paid the same for her work as the average man”.

In Greece, the country lagging farthest behind in this respect, women earn only 68% of what a man would earn for the same amount of work, while women in the former East Germany earn almost 90% of what a man would earn.

Reuters-BNS, Verslo Žinios, 10 June 1999, Nr. 111 (550), p. 7.

women make only about three-quarters the amount men make. In 1998, women earned an average of 77.2% the amount earned by men. The smallest difference between wages was in agriculture, hunting and forestry (women were paid 95% the amount paid to men), while the greatest difference was in financial intermediation (65.4%). This, of course, does not mean that women are paid less for doing the same job. It means that women hold lower positions in the same sectors. For example, there are only 35.7% of women among high-ranking managers and administrators, whereas they make up 83.4% of common employees.

Moreover, women make up the majority of employees in the lower-paid sectors, with only one exception. Women dominate in financial intermediation (63.5%), where wages are the highest. Nevertheless, this figure does not have an impact on the general distribution of wages, since only 1.2% of the total employed work there.

Although it is not popular in Lithuania to work part-time, more women (55.2%) than men had a shortened workday in 1998. It appears, however, that a shortened workday is not correlated with responsibilities in the home. Women working a shorter workday made up 12.3% of all working women and 10.3% of married women. One can guess, therefore, that mostly women work shortened days because of a lack of available work and not out of devotion to their families.

The differences between the positions of women and men in the labour market are similar across Central and Eastern

In no economic sector do women earn more than men. In 1998, women earned an average of 77.2% the amount earned by men.

Europe. In most of these countries, women make up half of the workforce, yet their average salary comprises only three-quarters of that of men. The smallest gap in earnings was in Yugoslavia where women in 1998 earned 90.9% of what the men earned. In Hungary the gap was 90% and in Slovenia 85.4%. As in Lithuania, most women living in the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe work in the public sector, whereas more men work in the private sector. The only exception is Hungary, where more women work in the private sector and male employees dominate in the public sector. Similar tendencies are seen in Western countries as well. Gender-related segmentation of the labour market is also seen in Nordic countries, the

region which has achieved the most in terms of equal opportunity between the sexes. For example, men working in industry in these countries earn an average of about 11-12% more than the women do.

The reasons for such labour market disparities were partially disclosed by a representative survey which analysed the experiences of Lithuanian university graduates. The survey took place in 1996, 2.5 years after the individuals entered the labour market.

More women than men started working in the public sector at the beginning of their career, while more men began working in the private sector. More women worked as employees, especially in the public sector, while many more men held executive positions. Taking into consideration that such a position pattern was being developed only two years after beginning a professional career, we can conclude that vertical segmentation in the labour market appears very early. At the time of the survey, the difference between the mean salary of female and male graduates was greater than the national average.

Positions occupied by university graduates after 2.5 years of employment (%)

Position	Men	Women
Employer, owner, self-employed	12.2	2.8
Executive officer in the public sector	7.2	3.0
Employee in the public sector	33.9	64.3
Executive officer in the private sector	15.8	2.8
Employee in the private sector	23.9	22.6
Other (labourer, member of the agricultural community, freelance, etc.)	7.0	4.4

Graduates' average salaries 2.5 years after graduation from university

	Total	Men	Women	Women's salaries com-
	(LTL)	(LTL)	(LTL)	pared with men's (%)
All respondents (survey data)	657.45	835.5	460.13	55.07
Employed full-time (survey data)*	659.61	825.7	537.31	65.07
Statistical data, April 1996	612	709	534	75.31

* In order to avoid the influence of different working conditions, the average salaries of those respondents working full-time are presented.

Even having excluded those graduates who do not work full-time or are on maternity leave, the average salary earned by women remains lower than the average salary earned by men.

While women choose educational subjects which subsequently allow for employment in the lowest paid economic sectors, an uneven division of family responsibilities also plays role in the earnings gap between genders. Married women earned less than single women in 1998, whereas married men earned more than single men. A whole 25% of female respondents were on child care leave at the time of the survey, while not one of the men had taken advantage of this right. It is obvious that women take full responsibility for taking care of the children in Lithuania.

Further analysis of the reasons behind the differences between graduates' wages have revealed less significant, but nonetheless influential, factors. More men than women worked while studying, and this is also associated with higher wages after graduation. Also more men than women worked in fields other than those they graduated from, and this tendency was especially evident in education. Women had lower expectations for work than men did; they expressed a higher satisfaction with the position they occupied and the salary they received for the work they performed. Nevertheless, even the combination of all these factors does not fully explain such a great difference in career achievements over such a short period of time. Apparently, employers' reserved or even negative attitudes toward women also play a very important role. Seventeen per cent of female graduates report having experienced direct discrimination from employers because of their gender.

We know not only from surveys of graduates, but also from experience, that men practically do not take advantage of their right to child care leave. For women, returning to work after child care leave is difficult not only because of lost or outdated qualifications, but also because of deficiencies in the child care system. Since 1990, the number of pre-school institutions plunged by more than 50% in several years, and in rural areas by more than 75%. In 1998, the number of pre-schools continued to fall. The sit-

uation is not much better for summer recreation or after-school activities for children. Such conditions obviously hamper the full participation of women in the labour market.

Unemployment. University graduates did not have a hard time finding work compared to people with lower education. According to the results of the survey, only 0.48% of all graduates could not find any work. However, generally speaking the problem of unemployment is becoming more and more acute. There is not a great difference between the number of unemployed men and women. According to data from the Labour Exchange, the number of

unemployed women has been exceeding that of men since 1994, and made up 51.2% in 1998. The unemployment level among women is also slightly higher (6.6%) than that among men (6.2%). Data from a labour force survey conducted by the Department of Statistics, on the contrary, revealed more unemployed men (56%) than women.

The situation is similar in most of the countries of Eastern and Central Europe. The largest proportions of unemployed women (more than 60%) in 1998 were in Ukraine and Poland. Women made up a little less than half of the unemployed in Estonia, Romania, Slovenia and Hungary.

When discussing the problem of unemployment, it is important to raise the question about the unemployment of women living in rural areas, as well as analyse the employment situation in rural areas in general. First of all, it is necessary to take into consideration the concept of unemployment and the definition of employment. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), individuals over the age of 14 engaged in any type of work that lasted at least one hour per week, and for which they received payment in cash or in kind (food or other products), or from which they made a profit and were considered to be working people. Small farmers of working age who did not have any other source of income other than their land were also classified as working people, irrespective of whether or not they used part of their produce themselves or sold it. Even subsistence farmers, therefore, are ascribed to the category of working people according to this definition.

It is possible that such definitions for the unemployed are suitable for Western European countries, where only a small percentage of the population are engaged in agriculture and where farms are suffi-

Income of working people living in rural areas, May 1998 (%)

Income per month	Women	Men
No income	5	7
Up to 100 LTL	6	8
101–200 LTL	20	15
201–400 LTL	38	35
401–600 LTL	24	22
601–1000 LTL	6	10
More than 1000 LTL	1	3

ciently large. However, this is not suitable for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, especially Lithuania. In 1997, 22% of all working people in Lithuania were farmers, in Latvia 18% and in Estonia 9%. Meanwhile, in the United Kingdom, for example, only 2.1% work in agriculture, in Belgium 2.7%, Sweden 3%, Germany 3.3% and Switzerland 3.5%. Such a large disparity between the regions can be explained by the fact that large farms dominate in Western Europe. Agriculture there is more technologically advanced, and therefore less labour intensive, than in Lithuania or elsewhere in Eastern and Central Europe. In 1998, there were 347,000 small farmers with up to three hectares of land registered in Lithuania. According to the ILO's definition of the unemployed the majority of these small farmers should be considered employed.

According to data from the Labour Exchange, 5% of all women and 10% of men of working age are unemployed in rural areas. According to the labour force survey these figures for women and men are 10.7% and 14.7%, respectively. In both cases the number of women who are not working is much lower. However, these figures do not reflect the actual situation. In order to evaluate the true number of unemployed people in rural areas it would be necessary to perform an extensive analytical survey based on separate sociological surveys.

According to a labour force survey conducted in May 1998, the distribution of the income of working people living in rural areas revealed that 31% of women and 30% of men earned less than 200 LTL (US \$50) per month. Meanwhile, 69% of women and 65% of men earned less than 400 LTL per month. So many people

living in rural areas have very low incomes even though official unemployment is less prevalent there than in the cities. The majority of farmers do not pay social insurance contributions, because small farmers can provide themselves with essential food products, but their earnings are so meagre that they cannot afford to pay voluntary social insurance payments. As a consequence, most will not be eligible for old age pensions and will not receive suitable health care.

Summing up the position of women and men in the labour market, one can conclude that although women attain a higher education men progress in their careers more quickly, occupy higher-standing positions and earn greater salaries. Special programmes for changing the position of women in the labour market are necessary, not only because from a human rights standpoint income-earning opportunities should be equal for all people

irrespective of gender, but also because women more often than men are the only breadwinners for their children. In 1989, 12.9% of families registered in Lithuania did not have a father, and 1.36% had no mother. The number of children whose parents are divorced or single steadily rises. At the same time, the number of mothers having to provide for their children alone is also increasing. Poverty studies show that incomplete families are among the most impoverished. According to a household budget survey of the Department of Statistics (first quarter, 1999), households with the lowest income per person were those that consisted of a single adult with children.

Personal security. Most women in Lithuania are worried about their personal security. According to the 1997 national survey 'Violence Against Women', personal security is 'very important' to 61% of women and 'important' to 32%. Only 46% of women said they feel secure in their own home at any time of the day (or night).

Women feel least secure in their neighbourhood after dark. Even so, most women are in these situations quite often. More than half of working women find themselves in such situations daily and another quarter at least once a week. Three-quarters (75.3%) of all women in Lithuania feel insecure in at least

How secure women feel in various situations and the incidence of these situations (%)

Situations	How often these situations occur				
	Very uneasy	Uneasy	Daily	Once a week	Once a month
Walking alone in your neighbourhood after dark	19	45	33	19	11
Waiting for or going alone by public transport after dark	16	41	12	16	8.3
Waiting for or being in the elevator, or climbing staircases alone late in the evening	12	34	18	10	6
Remaining alone at home late in the evening or at night	8.9	30	18	12	12

one of the situations mentioned in the table. Younger women feel more secure in all of these situations. Women living in cities feel the least secure in public places, while those most afraid of being alone at home in the evening or at night are women living in rural areas.

This feeling of insecurity forces most women to complicate their lives and take extra security measures. Only 8.1% of women ever walk past a group of drunken men; only 7.3% choose to go by the shortest route, even if it isn't well lit; only 14% walk confidently behind teenagers or young men; and only 16% feel completely secure going out in the evening.

Only a minority of women in Lithuania, however, are in the habit of carrying some means of self-defence with them; 27.3% always carry some means of self-defence, 5.5% often do and 12% do sometimes. More than half of women never carry any means of self-defence. Women who have experienced some form of violence from male strangers are most likely to carry self-defence tools with them. Self-defence classes are not popular; only 2.4% of women (mostly aged 18-29) have ever attended a self-defence class to improve their security.

Most women in Lithuania, therefore, do not feel secure in public places and this hinders their freedom to act and live the way they want to. Approximately two-fifths of women change their lifestyles if it means they feel safer. In an attempt to feel safer, women employ the tactic of avoidance – that is, they try to circumvent places where they think danger might be lurking. At the same time, only a few arm themselves with an active means of self-defence.

An absolute majority (79%) of women think the safest place for them and their children is the home. Most adult women, 63.3%, admit to having experienced male violence at some point in their lives after

Most adult women, 63.3%, admit to having experienced male violence at some point in their lives after the age of 16.

the age of 16. Only 11% were victimised by strangers, while 8.2% of women were victimised by friends and 14.4% by relatives or acquaintances. Most women, however, fall victim to violence in the home: 42.2% of women who were married or were living with their partner at the time of the survey had at one time or another experienced violence from their husband or partner. Of women who were divorced or separated, 53.5% had been victimised by their ex-husband or partner. The results of the survey show that, by far, the place women are least secure is in their families.

It is difficult to compare this with data from other countries. National representative victim surveys on violence against women like this have been performed in only a few countries in the world. Among the countries of Europe, a similar survey was performed in Finland and its timing coincided with the Lithuanian survey. We can therefore compare some of the results from the two surveys.

Comparing the results of the studies, it is clear that Lithuanian women are victimised by men much more often than women in Finland. A similar percentage of victims contact the police. An especially important problem for Lithuanian women is violence within the family; all forms of violence occur much more often within the family in Lithuania than in Finland.

Approximately one-tenth of married Lithuanian women had at one time or another experienced sexual abuse from their husbands; that is, through physical violence or threats, they were forced to engage in sexual intercourse. Sexual abuse and rape are also widespread outside the boundaries of the family.

Seventeen per cent of women admitted to being sexually abused by their dates. It is interesting to note that the incidence of abuse by dates was about the

A comparison of the results from victim surveys carried out in Finland and Lithuania, 1997 (%)

Adult women who have experienced violence at least once

in their lives from the time they turned 16 years old

	Lithuania	Finland
Total	63.3	40
Victims who contacted the police	10.6	12
Women who experienced violence outside the immediate family:		24
from strangers	11	
from friends	8.2	
from acquaintances or relatives	14.4	
Married women or women living with a partner who were victimised by their husband / partner:	42.2	22
physical violence	38.1	20
sexual abuse	9.9	6
threats	33.5	9
Divorced or separated women who were victimised by their ex-husband / partner	53.5	50

Violence and sexual abuse experienced by women in Lithuania (%)

Sexual abuse experienced by adult women at least once in their lives from the time they turned 16 years old	Stranger	Friend or relative
Touched, kissed, groped or fondled in an unacceptable manner against your will	22.0	15.0
A man forced or attempted to force you to have sexual intercourse by threatening behaviour or using moral or physical abuse	15.8	10.0
A man forced you to have sexual intercourse by knocking you down or causing you pain in some way	2.1	1.9
A man forced you to have sexual intercourse against your will by threatening you in some way (verbally, with an instrument or other object or with a weapon)	1.7	1.0

same in all age groups. On the other hand, the younger the women, the more likely they were to be victimised by strangers, acquaintances or relatives. These two comparisons of incidences of abuse depending on age allow us to assume that the rate of abuse is rising in Lithuanian society.

This survey revealed that violence in the home and sexual abuse are very pressing problems in society. It also confirmed the results of other studies, namely that only about a tenth of violent crimes against women are reported to the authorities. The results of this survey also confirm the connection determined by other research that violence is much more prevalent in families where the husband and/or wife come from violent homes.

It is not easy to overcome violence against women. First of all, the Lithuanian people have a patriarchal mentality; the victim is often blamed for the violence she has experienced. On the whole, society is not inclined to meddle in 'family affairs'. According to the results of a public opinion poll conducted in 1997, most Lithuanians felt that the single entity responsible for stopping violence in the home was the family itself. Lithuanian laws, especially those that regulate criminal trials, are not disposed to overcoming violence toward women. There is no way to protect the victims of domestic violence. In the face of pressure from others, many victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse often change their testimonies or decide not to press charges against their assailants. There are not enough shelters for the victims of violence. There are no institutions or specialists to whom victims can be directed for treatment.

Violence is probably the most menacing problem that women face today. Nevertheless, the first steps toward solving this problem have been taken. The most progress in this area, of course, has been made by non-governmental women's organisations, which have initiated scientific research, distributed educa-

Most Lithuanians felt that the single entity responsible for stopping violence in the home was the family itself.

tional literature, organised conferences and training, and founded crisis centres and shelters. Such activities are usually supported by international organisations. It is important to mention, however, that municipal police departments are also taking the initiative and are establishing shelters for victims of domestic violence.

Currently, victims of domestic violence may seek refuge in five shelters and three lodging shelters. Two shelters have been established by municipalities (in Vilnius and Vievis), one by the Church (in Vilnius) and two by municipal police departments (in Šiauliai). Lodging shelters have also been established by municipalities (in Vilnius and Klaipėda), as well as by municipal police department (in Panevėžys). The Crisis Centre founded by the non-governmental organisation Vilnius Women's House, as well as a psychological consultation centre in Jonava and a family relations office in Pasvalys provide consultations by specialists to victims of domestic violence. The municipal police departments in Šiauliai and Panevėžys have also established consultation centres. There are psychological telephone helplines in five of Lithuania's cities and the municipal police have created 40 telephone trust lines.

Many of these initiatives are still in the very first stages of their development, so it is still difficult to make judgements about their effectiveness in helping women who have suffered violence. Of the aforementioned establishments, the Vilnius Women's House Crisis Centre has the greatest experience. It helped 490 women between 1996, when it was first founded, and February 1999. The Vilnius Shelter for Battered Mothers and Children was established at the end of June 1998. During the first six months, 22 women and their children were lodged there and of these seven left the pension after putting their lives in order. Another 57 women received help in the form of consultations.

The network of organisations helping victimised women is slowly expanding, but this is not enough to put an end to violence against women. It is necessary to analyse and change laws; to continue to educate society and foster the intolerance of violence; to create and propagate special training programmes for law and order officers as well as for health care and social workers; and to continue to expand the network of institutions helping the victims of violence.

The preparedness of society to solve women's problems. In recent years, inequality between the genders and women's problems have been discussed far more often than during the first years of independence. During the latter period, even the briefest note about these problems rarely appeared in the news. Changes in society's opinions can also be felt, and there are fewer and fewer voices urging society to 'close' women off in the family. Many factors are influencing these changes. The reality of life has helped to rid society of an idealisation of the family unit which portrays the model of man-provider and woman-housewife. The number of women's organisations have grown and increased in strength and have done a great deal in terms of education. The European Union's standards and international initiatives have forced the government to consider the situation. Government policy has also had quite a sizeable influence. What is most important, however, is that women elected to the Seimas (parliament) are working actively to help solve the problem of equal rights and other problems which women face. One of the greatest achievements of this group is the adoption of a law on equal opportunities.

The Seimas adopted the Law on Equal Opportunities in December 1998.

Laws on equal opportunities for men and women exist in various forms in many countries. They usually focus on regulating labour relations. These laws have the oldest traditions in Nordic countries, where the first laws on equal rights were adopted approximately 20 years ago: the Danish Act on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in 1978, the Iceland Equal Rights Act in 1976, the Norwegian Equal Opportunities Act in 1979, the Finnish Act on Equality between Women and Men in 1987, and the Swedish Act on Equality Between Men and Women at Work in 1980.

The first such law in Central and Eastern Europe was adopted in Lithuania. The Seimas adopted the Law on Equal Opportunities in December 1998. Amendments of other laws pertaining to it were also adopted. Years of hard work culminated in the adoption of the law defending women's rights to equal opportunity. Women's organisations spoke about the necessity for such a law for the first time back in 1992. With support from the United Nations Development Programme in Lithuania, the first project of equal opportunities law was prepared in 1995. It took three years of work, however, before the final law was accomplished. After the parliamentary elections in 1996, significantly more women became MPs and they have united to form a Group of Women Parliamentarians.

This law is significant in that it defines sexual discrimination

Lithuania was also one of the first countries to set up an office on women's issues in government.

and prohibits it. It regulates relationships in labour and education. Among other articles, the law contains an article prohibiting sexual harassment, which caused a great deal of heated emotions in the media.

This law came into effect on 1 March 1999. The most important impact of this law is on long-term education. It will promote, and oblige people to respect, the idea of equal rights reflected in the Constitution. Employers will be discouraged from announcing job offers based on gender rather than competence. Working relationships will have to become business-like, and not be based on a person's sexual pretensions. In addition, educational institutions will no longer be able to create exclusive conditions for members of either of the two sexes.

In line with this law, the office of an Equal Opportunities Ombudsman has been set up. So far, the law has had a hard time finding its way into the legal system. Meanwhile, the office has begun its work and there is faith that equal opportunities for men and women will be fully assured de jure and prerequisites for their de facto actualisation will be created.

Action Plan for the Advancement of Women and its implementation. An Action Plan for the Advancement of Women has been created and is being applied in many countries. The United Nations First World Conference on Women, which took place in Mexico in 1975, prompted the creation of such plans by adopting a World Plan of Action directed the improvement of the position of women. Following this example, countries began to create their own national plans of action and programmes. Lithuania took part in such an international forum for the first time after having regained its independence at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995). It was this conference which inspired the creation of a national Action Plan for the Advancement of Women, approved by the government in November 1996. In this respect, Lithuania was one of the first countries in Central and Eastern Europe to take this step.

Nevertheless, the implementation of this plan has faced difficulties, because the government did not foresee funding for this process. The new government which emerged after the elections in 1996 adopted a plan of action for the realisation of the programme and provided funding for some parts of it. This plan is being realised through the co-operation of governmental and non-governmental organisations. The parts of the plan that pertain to

Law on equal opportunities of the Republic of Lithuania

1 December 1998, No VIII-947 Vilnius

<...>

Article 2.**Definitions**

As used in this Law,

1. Equal opportunities means implementation of human rights guaranteed in international instruments of human and civil rights and in the legislation of the Republic of Lithuania.
2. Violation of equal rights for women and men (discrimination) means passive or active conduct expressing humiliation and contempt, also the restriction of rights or granting of privileges by reason of the person's sex, except when relating to:
 - 1) the special protection of women during pregnancy, childbirth and nursing;
 - 2) compulsory military service prescribed by the law exclusively for men;
 - 3) different pensionable ages for women and men;
 - 4) requirements for safety at work applicable to women, aimed at protecting women's health owing to their physiological properties;
 - 5) specific work which can be performed only by a person of a particular sex.
3. Sexual harassment - offensive conduct of sexual nature, verbal or physical, towards a person with whom there are work, business or other relations of subordination.

Article 3.**The Duty of State Government and Administrative Institutions to Implement Equal Rights for Women and Men**

Within the limits of their competence state government and administrative institutions must:

- 1) ensure that equal rights for women and men be guaranteed in all legal acts;
- 2) draw up and implement programmes aimed at changing public attitudes about the superiority of one sex over the other;
- 3) in the manner prescribed by the law, provide assistance to the programmes of public organisations, public institutions, societies and charitable foundations which assist in the implementation of equal opportunities for women and men.

<...>

Article 6.**Discriminatory Acts of an Employer**

The acts of an employer shall be deemed discriminatory if, because of the person's sex, he/she:

- 1) applies to an employee less (more) favourable terms of employment or payment for work;
- 2) in organising work, creates worse (better) working conditions for an employee;
- 3) imposes a disciplinary penalty on an employee, changes working conditions, transfers him/her to another work or terminates the employment contract;
- 4) persecutes an employee who has filed a complaint because of discrimination.

Article 7.**Discriminatory Acts in Educational and Scientific Institutions**

1. The acts of educational and scientific institutions shall be deemed discriminatory if on grounds of sex:
 - 1) different requirements are applied in respect of men and women for admission to schools or study programmes, for drawing up curricula or for the assessment of knowledge;
 - 2) different opportunities are provided for choosing a special area of study.

Article 8.**Discriminatory Advertisements**

It shall be prohibited to specify requirements in job advertisements or education opportunities advertisements giving priority to one of the sexes, with the exception of the case referred to in item 5, paragraph 2 of Article 2, and to request information from job seekers about their civil status, private life or family plans.

Article 9. The Rights of a Person Who Is Being Discriminated Against

A person who thinks that discriminatory acts specified in this Chapter have been directed against him or that he has become the subject of sexual harassment shall have the right to appeal to the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman.

<...>

**Official translation.*

changes in the law and to education are being implemented most successfully. Of course, too little time has passed to expect major changes, but the foundation for such changes is quite solid.

In most countries, specially established divisions in government, of so-called national machinery, are responsible for the implementation of the Action Plans for the Advancement of Women. National machinery differ from country to country in terms of organisational structure and scope of responsi-

bility. In some countries there are separate ministries on women's issues (in Europe, for example, in Austria and Luxembourg), while others have equality or women's issues ministers without ministries. More than 30 countries have ministries with titles that encompass the issues of women or gender equality (in Europe, for example Germany, Belgium and Ireland).

Nevertheless, this process has not yet been established in all Central and Eastern European countries which

have one common feature; the national machinery does not reach the highest levels of government. Among the countries of this region which have achieved progress in establishing such national machinery, are Slovenia and Lithuania. Slovenia was the first to establish one of the strongest governmental Women's Policy Offices. Lithuania was also one of the first countries to set up an office on women's issues in government. In 1994, the position of State Counsellor on Women's Issues was established. At this time, the State Counsellor on Foreign Relations and Relations with NGOs is responsible for these issues. Moreover, positions responsible for gender issues have been created in the Ministry of Social Security and Labour and the Department of Statistics. The Ministry of Social Security and Labour formed an inter-ministerial commission for the monitoring of the implementation of the Action Plan for the Advancement of Women.

Women's NGOs. The number of NGOs related to women's problems has recently been increasing. These NGOs are gaining momentum and becoming more and more important to society. In the last couple of years, the establishment of local NGOs has been more prevalent.

According to data from the Lithuania's Women's Information Centre, there were 63 women's NGOs in existence on 1 January 1999. Not all are registered with the Ministry of Justice or at municipalities. Some do not even need to be registered as they are subdivisions of international organisations or universities (the Women's Studies Centre, for example), as well as women's subdivisions of political parties, although the latter are not legally ascribed to non-governmental organisations.

There is no umbrella organisation encompassing all women's organisations in Lithuania. The

Women's NGOs functioning in Lithuania*

1. Local women's organisations – 20 (3);
2. National women's organisations – 23 (12):
 - 2.1. General (representing many interests) – 5 (4);
 - 2.2. Interest groups – 6 (1);
 - 2.3. Service groups – 2 (0);
 - 2.4. Groups representing professional interests – 10 (4):
 - 2.4.1. Women's groups in trade unions – 3 (3);
 - 2.4.2. Professional associations – 7 (1).
3. International subdivisions of women's organisations – 10 (0);
4. Women's Studies Centres – 4 (1);
5. Political women's organisations (The Women's Party and women's subdivisions in other political parties) – 6 (5).

**Not all women's organisations strive to help achieve equal rights or equal opportunities for men and women. For this reason, the number of organisations seeking these goals is indicated in parentheses.*

Lithuanian Women's Association embraces 12 member organisations. Eighteen women's organisations partake in the activities of its co-ordinating council, founded in the autumn of 1998. The Women's Information Centre works as a mediator in collaboration between all the women's organisations in the country.

Thanks to the work of women's organisations, certain changes have been made in Lithuanian society. The point of view of the government and of society on equality and equal rights is changing. These problems are being discussed in the media more often. Laws are being changed. Most women's organisations are managing to unite and put pressure on governing institutions. For example, co-operation between women's organisations has speeded up the adoption of the Law on Equal Opportunities. A protest against quotas established for men during the entrance examinations at the Kaunas Institute of Technology in 1998 was successful. Due to the pressure of women's organisations these quotas were abolished.

Changes in the position of women in society today are happening quickly, in comparison with the first years of independence. There is no doubt, however, that there are still many unsolved problems.