

Social Exclusion, Gender, and Second Chance Schools

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Abstract

Original Research Article

This study investigates the social exclusion of Albanian migrant women, with a particular focus on the discrimination and violence they experience in the workplace and within the family. Their attendance at Second Chance Schools (SCS) enhances their socialization and contributes to a shift in mindset, helping them break free from entrenched gender norms and reducing social inequalities. The research is based on a qualitative methodology, using semi-structured interviews with 12 women from Albania who live, work, and attend a Second Chance School in Rhodes. The findings reveal that Albanian migrant women recognize and condemn physical violence, but tend to overlook more insidious forms of gender-based violence, such as control, coercion, and sexual abuse. Gender roles appear clearly defined in Albanian families, with women—despite working and contributing financially—remaining confined to the private sphere, while men occupy the public domain. The role of the woman's family of origin extends beyond upbringing, as their response to domestic violence can delay or even prevent a separation, trapping women in abusive relationships for years. The study concludes that Second Chance Schools play a crucial role in effectively addressing social exclusion, helping women overcome obstacles, build self-confidence, and integrate into society.

Keywords: Social Exclusion, Social Inequalities, Gender-Based Violence, Gender Discrimination, Albanian Migrant Women, Second Chance Schools.

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INTRODUCTION

Social exclusion is a complex and dynamic concept that arises from an interplay of multiple factors, including discrimination, prejudice, economic inequality, and restricted access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and employment (Anderson, 1999). It emphasizes the structural and systemic nature of exclusion, recognizing that it is not merely the result of individual failings, but is often deeply embedded within social institutions and frameworks. Members of marginalized groups frequently encounter barriers and inequalities that are rooted in biased ideologies, influenced by characteristics such as gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, and disability. These forms of exclusion are typically entrenched in society, often accepted without verification or critical scrutiny (Cortes and Pan, 2017). Vulnerable groups often face a multitude of barriers that limit their access to adult education. Economic inequalities can serve as a major obstacle. Language barriers further deepen exclusion, as adult learners from non-dominant linguistic groups may struggle to find suitable programs. Discrimination and prejudice can also deter participation in education and training initiatives, making individuals from marginalized backgrounds feel unwelcome or

devalued (Crowther, Maclachlan, & Tett, 2010).

Discrimination and stereotypes are issues that further perpetuate the social exclusion of vulnerable groups. Adult learners who face discrimination based on factors such as age, gender, race, or disability may internalize negative perceptions about themselves, which can affect their self-confidence and motivation to participate in learning (Kapitsinis, 2012).

To address the social exclusion of vulnerable groups, inclusive curricula were developed, along with culturally responsive teaching methods and support services that meet the diverse needs of adult learners (Beder, 1999).

Theoretical Framework: Social Exclusion and Gender

Gender-based discrimination, in particular, arises from the dominant gender order and the socially constructed identities of individuals—that is, the values, roles, and the social and cultural meanings that society assigns to the biological differences between women and men (Kouroutsidou & Raptis, 2021). Such discrimination is further reinforced through the process of gender socialization, through which individuals learn and

internalize culturally defined behaviors that mirror prevailing notions of femininity and masculinity (Bourdieu, 2007). An individual's gender socialization refers to the way in which they learn and internalize the dominant values of the gender order of the society or culture to which they belong, ultimately leading them to act in accordance with these values (Lips, 2018).

Gender-Based Violence: Global and Cultural Dimensions

Violence against women constitutes a serious and pervasive threat on both global and European levels. Within the European Union, data reveal that one in three women has experienced some form of gender-based violence in her lifetime, while 35% have endured abusive behavior from a current or former partner (GGEFP, 2023:11). Violence can be physical, manifesting as pushing or hitting with hands or other objects. It can also be psychological, including control, coercion, intimidation, and general psychological pressure. A particular form is economic violence, whereby women and girls are deprived of financial resources or access to them, resulting in their disempowerment and dependence on male "providers" (Sarmiento, Acosta, Roth & Zambrano, 2014:48). More broadly, violence against women is a cross-border and global issue. Women experience multiple forms of visible and invisible violence, many of which are intertwined with the institution of the family and social stereotypes (Poteyeva & Wasileski, 2016:1).

Case Study: Patriarchy and Gender in Albanian Society

Gender roles are rigidly structured in Albanian society, with men dominating and women being taught to obey the authority of their male relatives. This patriarchal social structure is particularly pronounced in the northern regions of the country, where people still adhere to a set of unwritten laws¹ that endorse and legitimize female subservience (Poteyeva & Wasileski, 2016:5). In Albanian families, women appear to be closely associated with the domestic sphere and child-rearing, in contrast to men, who operate entirely within the public domain—even if their actions are sometimes indirectly shaped by female initiative (Doja, 1995:653). Anthropological studies describe Albanian society as patriarchal, with women being directly dependent on their husband's family (Young, 2000:13, as cited in Vullnetari, 2012:170). Many of the values that determine women's position within the Albanian family structure persist, while others are being challenged or transformed through contact and the development of social networks in the host countries of migration (Vullnetari, 2012:182).

Education as a Pathway to Social Inclusion

Education refers to the development of skills in individuals that are essential for meeting the needs of

society. It plays a critical role not only in personal development but also in fostering social cohesion and inclusion. For socially marginalized individuals—such as migrants, refugees, minorities, and people with disabilities—who either experience or are at heightened risk of exclusion, education can serve as a transformative tool.

According to Beder & Valentine (1999), promoting equal access to adult education and lifelong learning opportunities is a fundamental strategy for addressing the educational disparities faced by marginalized populations. These opportunities not only provide individuals with essential knowledge and competencies but also empower them to participate actively in social, cultural, and economic life.

A significant example of such an approach in Greece is the establishment of Second Chance Schools (SDE). These institutions offer an alternative educational pathway to adults who have not completed compulsory education or who face social exclusion (Triantafyllidou, 2021). The primary objective of SDEs is to provide learners with access to basic education, vocational training, and key social skills, thus enhancing their capacity to reintegrate into the labor market and society more broadly.

SDEs are open to a diverse range of participants, including migrants, individuals with disabilities, the long-term unemployed, and others who face structural disadvantages. By aligning the educational content with the local labor market and community needs, these schools promote both personal empowerment and professional development (Sapountzaki, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

Research Objectives and Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives of Albanian migrant women living and working in Rhodes regarding gender-based discrimination and gender-based violence. The research is guided by the central question:

"What forms of gender-based discrimination and violence are experienced by Albanian migrant women in Rhodes?" In particular, the study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are the participants' perceptions and lived experiences of gender-based violence?
2. What forms of discrimination have they encountered in the workplace?
3. How do they view the role of education, empowerment, and female solidarity in overcoming gender inequalities?

The broader aim of the study is to contribute to greater awareness around gender discrimination and violence, to encourage the prompt identification and reporting of abusive behaviors within the community, and to promote

¹ This set of unwritten laws is known as the "Kanun." The laws of the Kanun govern human relationships within Albanian society and are closely linked to the disadvantaged position of women.

These norms were formulated and codified as early as the 15th century. For more information, see: https://www.cerge-ei.cz/pdf/gdn/rrc/RRCVI_54_paper_01.pdf

the empowerment of migrant women through education and collective support.

Methodological Approach

This research adopts a feminist qualitative approach, which is considered especially appropriate for investigating sensitive social issues and marginalized voices (Paraskevopoulou-Kollia, 2020:27). Feminist research prioritizes the lived experiences of women, allowing them to articulate their own narratives and challenge dominant gender hierarchies (Lokot, 2021:2).

Sampling and Participants

The study's qualitative sample comprises of 12 Albanian women attending the Second Chance School (SDE) of Rhodes. All participants were over 25 years old. Sampling was conducted via the snowball method, a qualitative research technique used to collect information from hard-to-reach populations. This particular sampling procedure is considered suitable for studying sensitive and delicate topics such as violence (Isari & Pourkos, 2015:82).

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The qualitative data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in the context of focus groups. This method offers significant advantages as it fosters a friendly atmosphere, facilitates discussion and participation of all participants, while also serving time efficiency (Isari & Pourkos, 2015:8108). Two focus groups were formed, one consisting of five and the other of seven Albanian migrant women.

The interviews were conducted between February and March 2025 at the premises of the Second Chance School of Rhodes and during hours suitable for the participants to be excused from their educational obligations. All discussions were audio-recorded using specialized equipment, ensuring accurate capture of the participants' speech and facilitating faithful transcription and subsequent analysis. The transcribed interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, which is a flexible and widely recognized method for identifying, analyzing, and presenting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis involved coding the data through multiple stages, aiming at the gradual refinement and analytical development of codes into broader themes that highlight the core experiences of the participants. The process of multiple coding ensured a detailed and precise analysis, clearly reflecting the multifaceted experiences of the Albanian migrant women. Through the progressive organization of codes into thematic categories, the central issues concerning gender discrimination and gender-based violence were revealed.

Throughout the research, all ethical principles were strictly followed, including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and the respectful handling of sensitive content.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Experiences of Gender-Based Violence

This thematic section explores the experiences of Albanian migrant women with regard to gender-based violence. The qualitative analysis brought to light two key subthemes:

- a) the awareness and knowledge of gender-based violence incidents within their communities, and
- b) the influence of the family on women's decisions to remain in or leave abusive relationships.

Regarding the first category of responses, it became evident that several of their compatriots had experienced violence within the family. The following interview excerpts are characteristic:

"A girl at work showed up wearing makeup, even though she never wore any. I thought she must have been beaten, since she never wears makeup... They find excuses to hide it, because they don't want others to know what's going on at home. I asked her, and in the end, she told me..." (Participant 9, Group A).

"My aunt's husband is an alcoholic. Many times, we brought her home beaten, and the next day she would come back like a little child, crying to return..." (Participant 3, Group B).

In some cases, there was intervention, while in others there was not, as they stated they were afraid to interfere in a family's affairs, believing that the couple would find a solution on their own.

"Last year, a woman living in Rhodes, who didn't have legal papers, told me that her husband was hitting her and that she wasn't doing well... I helped her, I had some contacts through my job, I knew a lawyer, and I spoke to him about her... I opened the doors for her to get help, but in the end, she didn't go..." (Participant 11, Group A).

"You get yourself into trouble... You can't easily give your opinion... Because her husband might confront my husband and tell him that I led her astray..." (Participant 5, Group B).

Regarding the second category of responses, it appeared that for many years women endured continuous physical abuse within their marriages, often with the tolerance of the family and relatives of their husbands. Additionally, it was found that some participants did not intend to divorce in order to avoid family criticism. The following interview excerpts are characteristic:

"These behaviors were evident from the beginning. He had hit me from the start, when we were engaged... I saw it too, but my parents pressured me... My parents got along well with his family, and no one thought about how I was feeling..." (Participant 6, Group A).

"I was determined to divorce... I couldn't take it anymore. One day he came with his brothers, picked me up from work, took me home, and beat me in front of his parents because I had a female friend at work... They did nothing..." (Participant 3, Group A).

"Even now, there are girls who experience violence at home, but their parents say, 'We gave you there, so there you will stay...'" (Participant 9, Group B).

"Usually, when you tell your parents you want to divorce, they tell you not to break up your home; it's a shame."

(Participant 4, Group B).

Children seem to play a decisive role in the continuation of a violent relationship, while fear for their wellbeing can delay a separation. The interviewees who experienced years of violence in their relationships did not separate immediately because they were thinking about their children and waited for them to grow up.

"From the beginning, I wanted to divorce, but my son was ill and I waited for him to grow up. My child's life was more important. He was not violent towards the children, only towards me." (Participant 1, Group B).

"I was with my daughter, and she saw me covered in blood and hid under the table crying... She was my strength... That night, I left... I took the two children, and we slept outside a supermarket. Later, a woman I didn't know took me in for two weeks. I left without knowing where I was going." (Participant 7, Group A).

"When you have children, you only think about them and cannot leave... You think about the children and that it's a shame." (Participant 12, Group A).

Gender-based violence manifests through abusive behaviors that are perpetuated over time within or outside the family setting, affecting the mental and physical health of girls and women, as well as their future development on personal, social, and economic levels more broadly (Kouroutsidou & Gasouka, 2021:139).

Violence can be physical, manifesting as pushing or hitting with hands or other means. It can also be psychological, including control, coercion, intimidation, and general psychological pressure. A particular form is economic violence, where women and girls are deprived of financial resources or access to them, resulting in their disempowerment and dependence on men as "providers" (Sarmiento, Acosta, Roth & Zambrano, 2014:48).

More broadly, violence against women is transnational and global. Women experience multiple forms of both visible and invisible violence, many of which are intertwined with the institution of the family and social stereotypes. Despite the strengthening of the movement to end violence against women in many countries around the world, there are still countries where the issue is ignored or minimally addressed (Poteyeva & Wasileski, 2016:1).

Gender Discrimination

The second thematic axis examines issues related to the discrimination experienced by Albanian migrant women. Specifically, the qualitative analysis highlighted aspects concerning:

- a) racist behavior and discrimination based on gender, and
- b) beliefs about gender roles within the family.

Regarding the first category of responses, it appears that the discrimination they experienced occurred mainly during the early years of their stay in Greece and was attributed to both their nationality and their gender. They faced racism and jealousy from female colleagues. Moreover, female solidarity in the workplace seems to weaken, possibly due to the competition that develops among women. The following excerpts from the interviews are indicative:

«I've quit a job because I felt I was facing racism. I was treated differently because I was from Albania. I couldn't

stand it, so I left.» (Participant 8, Group A).

«I have experienced discrimination in hospitals and public services—because I'm from Albania...» (Participant 6, Group B)

«As a woman, I've been through difficult times. I have experienced a great deal of racism in the workplace more than other women...» (Participant 2, Group A)

«In the kitchen, no matter how good you are, you're a woman — you're always one step behind.....» (Participant 4, Group B)

«I don't have the position at work that I should have because I'm a woman. Now things have changed a bit, but in the past...» (Participant 10, Group B).

The participants' responses coincide with the findings in the literature on gender discrimination, according to which racism is a "pervasive social phenomenon" created by emotions such as fear, contempt, and suspicion towards individuals who differ in terms of their cultural or physical characteristics (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991: 30). It constitutes a form of oppression that is continuously exercised at an interpersonal level through economic, political, and cultural institutions (Speight, 2007: 129).

"Patriarchal structures and the asymmetrical distribution of power between genders, as socially constructed and accepted, perpetuate gendered perceptions that divide the sexes by privileging men and marginalizing women (Deus & Gonzalez, 2018: 12). Consequently, a significant number of women experience discrimination and encounter barriers to their personal and professional development (Mahbub & Hasan, 2014: 69)

In the second category of responses, which focused on beliefs about gender roles within the family, it becomes evident that participants were raised in a patriarchal context defined by clear and rigid gender norms. Within this framework, men are afforded privileges and positioned as role models, while women are expected to be obedient to men and to uphold virtues such as modesty and morality. The following interview excerpts are illustrative:

"Men are selfish. That's how they were raised. They say, 'You can't manage without me'... They don't want you to be independent." (Participant 8, Group A)

"I am considered a good woman when I do what my husband wants. This belief has been passed down to many Albanian women..." (Participant 5, Group B).

Within the family, women are naturally assigned roles that men are unable to fulfill. For most women, the home is their domain, while men occupy the public sphere and bear the responsibility of work.

"Yes, the woman is supposed to do all the housework. The man comes home from work, eats, and rests..." (Participant 11, Group B)

"The woman takes care of the children, the house, everything. I believe the woman carries most of the responsibility, while the man only has his job..." (Participant 1, Group A)

For many women, the husband had a say in their appearance and clothing, but they viewed this as a normal situation, based on the belief that the man knows more and can be trusted. At the same time, displays of jealousy from their partners are seen as a natural consequence of their own behavior, and they believe they are to blame.

"If he doesn't like something I'm wearing, he tells me to take it off, and I agree with him. ... About everything he says, I think he's right. I don't want to provoke him..." (Participant 8, Group B)

"I don't like that he gets jealous, but I don't say anything... When others tell me I look nice, he gets jealous. He doesn't say it, but I can see it on his face..." (Participant 7, Group A)

"He might sometimes comment on my behavior... Why did you talk, why did you laugh, but okay, I don't do it again if it bothers him..." (Participant 12, Group A).

The narratives of Albanian immigrant women reveal the extent to which traditional gender ideologies continue to shape women's identities and roles, especially within immigrant or culturally conservative communities. Furthermore, they demonstrate how patriarchal expectations are transmitted across generations and contribute to the maintenance of power imbalances within the private sphere of the family.

A similar view was also highlighted in the research by Cerrato & Cifre (2018), who reported the unequal distribution of household responsibilities to the detriment of women, as on average, women participate twice as much in domestic tasks compared to their male partners, who tend to engage more in traditionally male household activities such as repairs (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018:7). Thus, a pronounced domestic inequality is evident, a situation that hinders the achievement of gender equality and confines women to traditional roles. Patriarchy² strictly defines stereotypes³ of masculinity and femininity, which foster unjust power relations between women and men. The practices of controlling and subordinating women vary according to the norms of each society, but a common element across all is male dominance (Rawat, 2014:44).

The Role of the School in the Empowerment of Women

The third thematic axis investigates the attitudes and responses of Albanian migrant women towards gender-based violence, with a focus on two crucial aspects: a) women's solidarity and mutual support, and b) the role of education in the empowerment process.

With regard to the first category of responses, the importance of empowerment, women's solidarity, and support emerged as key factors in enabling a woman who is a victim of gender-based violence to react. The following excerpts from the interviews are characteristic: "In our everyday life, we see many women suffering. But we need to help them lift their heads..." (Participant 6, Group B).

"When a man is weak and the woman is stronger, violence is the only way he can bring her down psychologically... we, as women, need to stand by each other and offer support..." (Participant 2, Group B).

Regarding the second category of responses, it appeared

that their decision to attend the Second Chance School at an older age fulfilled an unmet need for education during their teenage years. It changed their way of thinking and behavior through interaction and communication in the host country. The school became a very important source of experiences for the Albanian migrant women. The following excerpts from the interviews are characteristic:

"I had always longed to go to school... School changed my life. I really enjoy it..." (Participant 1, Group A).

"My children supported me in coming to school..." (Participant 11, Group B).

I wanted to finish school. But everyone around me kept saying, 'Why do you need school? Even the other one who finished—what did she achieve?'" (Participant 8, Group A)

"I came to fulfill my dreams. I've always wanted to become a kindergarten teacher... I will continue even after school.. .." (Participant 6, Group A)

"My partner supported me to come to school; he pushed me... He tells me to do whatever makes me happy....." (Participant 10, Group B).

An indication of the progress and empowerment they experienced through their social interactions, work, and overall living conditions in Greece is also reflected in the attitude of their family members and partners towards their decision to attend school. The positive interactions and support they experienced through these social connections reflect a sense of community and mutual understanding that can significantly enhance the learning experience. Such support from family members and partners is especially valuable in adult education, where learners bring diverse life experiences and perspectives to the classroom, enriching discussions and learning activities (Tett et al., 2017).

Interaction between instructors and peers is a critical factor in creating an ideal learning environment. Instructors play a crucial role in shaping inclusive behaviors, thereby enhancing peer interactions within the classroom. This dual support system can significantly influence the persistence, resilience, and success of adult learners in achieving their educational goals (Kapitsinis, 2012).

CONCLUSION

The most important finding of this study is the emergence of internalized patriarchy. While the women involved in the research appear to demonstrate autonomy and self-determination, they subtly remain subject to male dominance and often yield to it in order to maintain peace within the household and in their personal lives. This reflects a form of concealed patriarchy, in which women perceive themselves as being in control, while in reality, they continue to accept male superiority (Bloom, 2008). Violence against women, structural inequality, and power imbalances create the conditions for their social subordination. Consequently, such violence constitutes a violation of human rights and represents an extreme form of discrimination against women. Gender-based violence

² When referring to patriarchy, we mean a social system that is structured and perpetuated based on the axis of male dominance over society and culture. In the patriarchal system, men enjoy privileges in all areas of life, while women and girls are expected to obey the man who is the head (Benstead, 2021:236)."

³ Stereotypes of accepted masculinity and desired femininity are cultivated in both men and women through the process of socialization (Rawat, 2014:44).

encompasses all acts linked to gender that cause—or are likely to cause—physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm to women and girls. It also includes threats, coercion, and arbitrary deprivation of liberty, and these acts may occur in both public and private spheres of life (Elsberg & Heise, 2005).

Domestic work continues to be regarded as a “woman’s responsibility,” and the “double day / double shift” of labor remains a persistent reality for women. This situation reflects a deeper entrenchment of women in the private sphere, resulting in significant psychological and physical burdens. At the same time, it highlights the limited participation of men—particularly fathers—in domestic responsibilities and child care (Maratou-Alipranti, 2007). Consequently, the central challenge lies in achieving the genuine empowerment of women, which requires a transformation in prevailing mindsets and the dismantling of entrenched gender norms. Participation in education, interaction with Greek peers, and access to employment opportunities are all promising practices that can help counter patriarchal structures. In particular, adult education fosters social integration and raises awareness of gender equality, women’s rights, and the institutional resources available to support victims of gender-based violence.

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