



# GIRLS' GUIDE

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# Introduction

This comic book is for you – for women and for girls, for those who stand for social justice and face barriers and injustice every day.

The comics was created with the belief that women and girls need more information, support, and resources in order to realize and protect their rights, which is fundamentally important for equal participation in social, economic, and cultural life.

Existing social and structural barriers, caused by gender-based discrimination, often limit women's opportunities and reduce their access to resources and decision-making processes.

In today's world, especially in regions where the ramifications of conflict and social inequality are still painfully tangible, information is power – and having this power means you can effectively protect yourself and those around you.

The choice of the comics genre is driven by unique ability of this particular medium to combine text and visual imagery to address complex social issues. The use of visual storytelling allows readers not only to receive information but also to understand it, relate it to their own experiences, and perceive the real dimension of the problems.

The topics discussed in this publication are not accidental. They are based on meetings and creative workshops with the participation of women and girls living near the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL).

Within the framework of this process, participants expressed in their comics the issues that trouble them most in their daily lives including but not limited to gender-based violence, unequal labor, limited professional opportunities, health concerns, and other structural barriers. These very topics were chosen as the main content of the comics, reflecting not only individual stories but also collective experiences.



Thus, this comic book serves both as an educational resource and a creative format aimed at raising awareness, providing information, and supporting the fight for equality for women and girls. It is based on the local context and the voices of the participants; it is a book of stories told by women and girls.

# **What constitutes (gender based) violence against women?**

Gender based violence is an umbrella term and implies any form of harmful action which is carried out against person's will and consent and is based on socially constructed (gender based) differences between men and women (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, n.d.).

Any person with any gender identity could be the victim of violence, but women are most common victims of gender based violence. So, gender based violence and violence against women are two terms that are often used interchangeably, since most of forms of violence against women are usually gender based and affect women disproportionately.

Gender based violence arises when society defines gender roles not on the principal of equality, but the principal of subordination/submission.

Forms of gender-based violence:

1. Physical abuse – physical harm (battering, beating etc.).
2. Sexual abuse – forcing or coercing a person to engage in unwanted sexual acts or behavior.
3. Psychological abuse – humiliation, blackmailing, threatening, isolation. Example: your partner keeps telling you that you are incapable of doing anything without him).
4. Economic abuse – control over one's financial resources, unequal distribution of financial profits, forbidding to work. Example: your husband/partner restricts your access to shared financial resources and/or forbids you to work.
5. Cyber abuse – control over other's social media, threats of disclosing personal information. Example: ex partner of yours threatening you of uploading your private images.
6. Coercion – physical and psychological coercion that leads to person losing autonomy and control over their actions.

Other forms of abuse include forced marriage, restriction of other's access to recourses, services and information, harassment in public transport, stalking, technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV).

Act of abuse or violence can be committed by any person: a current or formal partner, family member,

colleague, classmate, friend, or individuals acting on behalf of cultural, religious, state, or sub-state institutions.

## **How are violence and abuse linked to social norms?**

Societies often generate inadequate expectations about how women and men should behave. Frequently, there is a societal expectation that a woman should be obedient and submissive, while a man should be strong and in control of every aspect of a woman's life. Often, when a woman defies these expectations, she becomes a victim of violence. In this way, society effectively "punishes" women for their independence and disobedience.

Like all forms of violence, gender based violence is a matter of power. It is rooted in a sense of superiority and the intent to assert that superiority - whether in the family, at school, in the workplace, in society, or within the state as a whole.

In some families, violence is considered "normal" or "a private family matter," which hinders open discussion about the problem. Stigma and the justification of the perpetrator are also part of this dynamic.

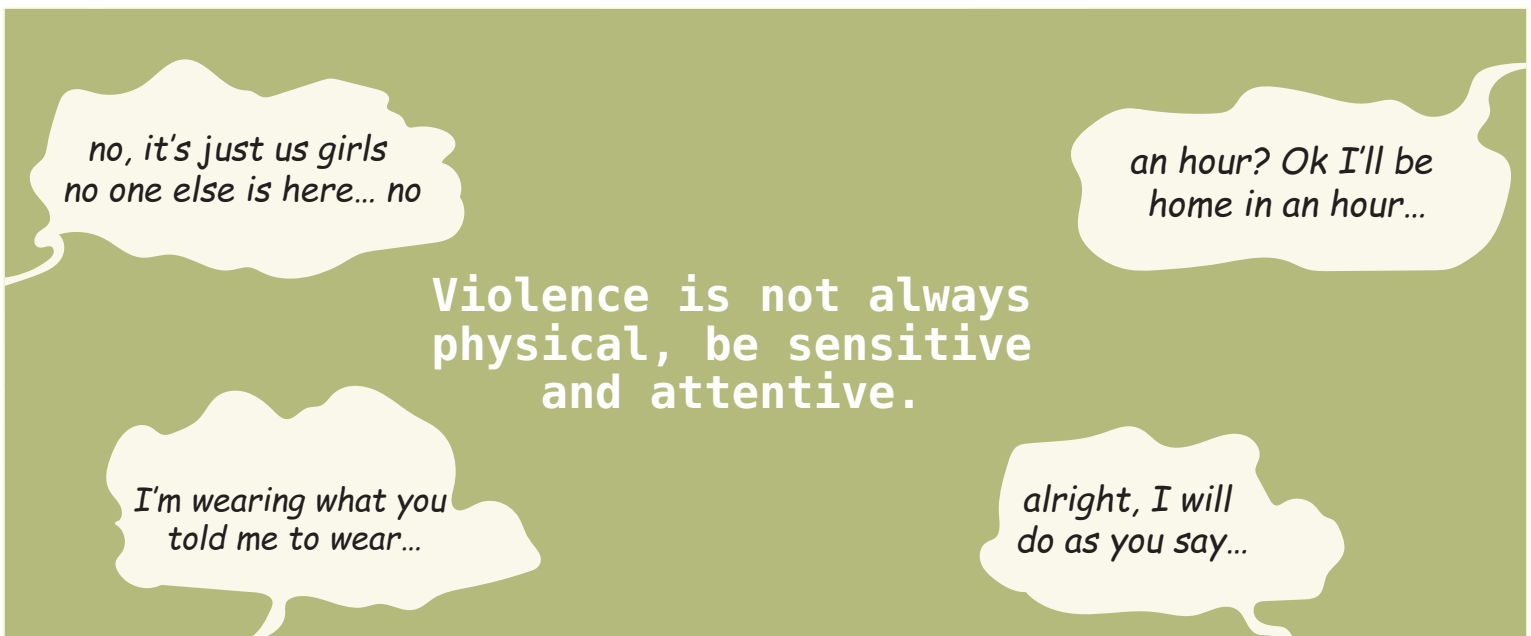
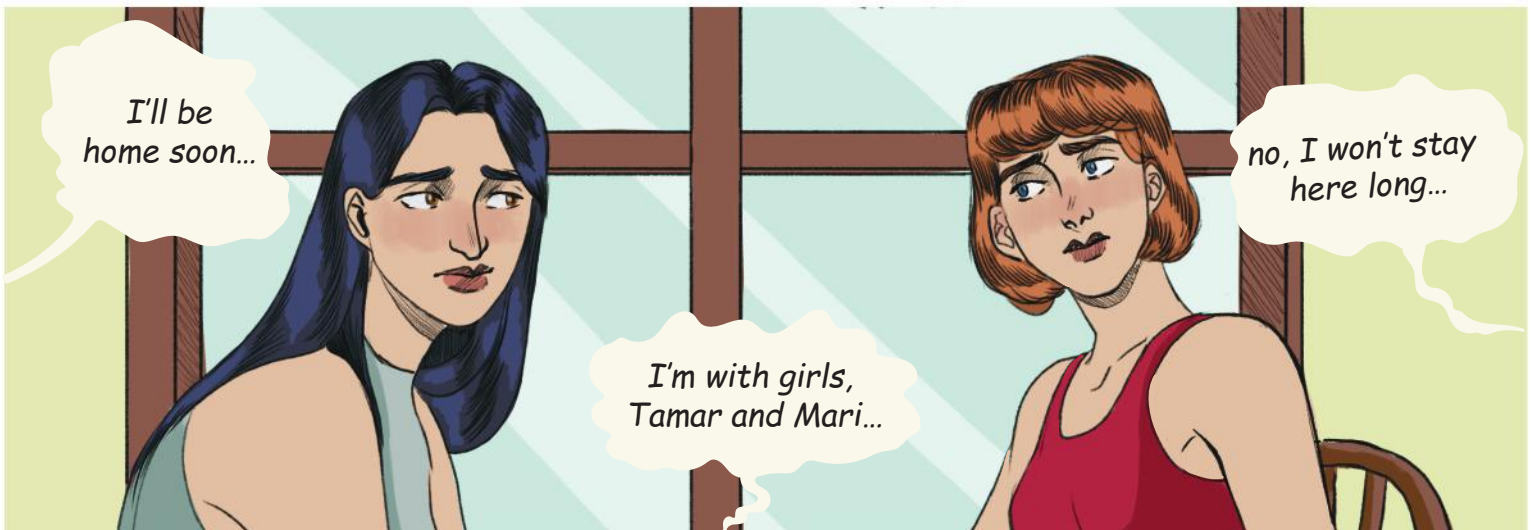
## **Facts and statistics:**

- According to the National Study on Violence Against Women conducted by UN Women, every second woman in Georgia has experienced at least one form of violence in her lifetime, and every fourth woman has experienced sexual harassment (UN Women, 2023).
- According to 2024 data, 10,964 cases of domestic violence were reported in Georgia, including 8,224 cases of psychological violence and 2,479 cases of physical abuse (Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, 2025).









# Identification, reporting and prevention of abuse

## *How to identify the victim of violence?*

Violence is often unnoticeable, but there are signs that may indicate the threat:

- Victim has frequent mood swings, may arrive late or suddenly cancel the meeting.
- Anxiety, low self-esteem, sudden crying.
- Hides hands and other parts of body, explains away bodily injuries or wears unusual clothings or items (sunglasses indoors, long sleeves in summer etc.).
- Often checks phone or says that she needs to explain where she is to someone.
- Spouse/partner tries to control victim, restricts communication with friends.
- Victim often blames herself for her partner's actions and says "she is the one who forced the partner to act like this".

Domestic violence can be expressed in various ways, for example, violence against a child, violence between partners, violence among family members (e.g., between siblings, between a father and daughter-in-law, and others), and violence of a family member towards adult family members.

## *How to prevent and fight against abuse?*

- Violence is a crime. To report a crime we can call 112 or download the mobile application, where we can press SOS to send a signal for immediate help. The application is free and available in Georgian, English and Russian languages.

We could also:

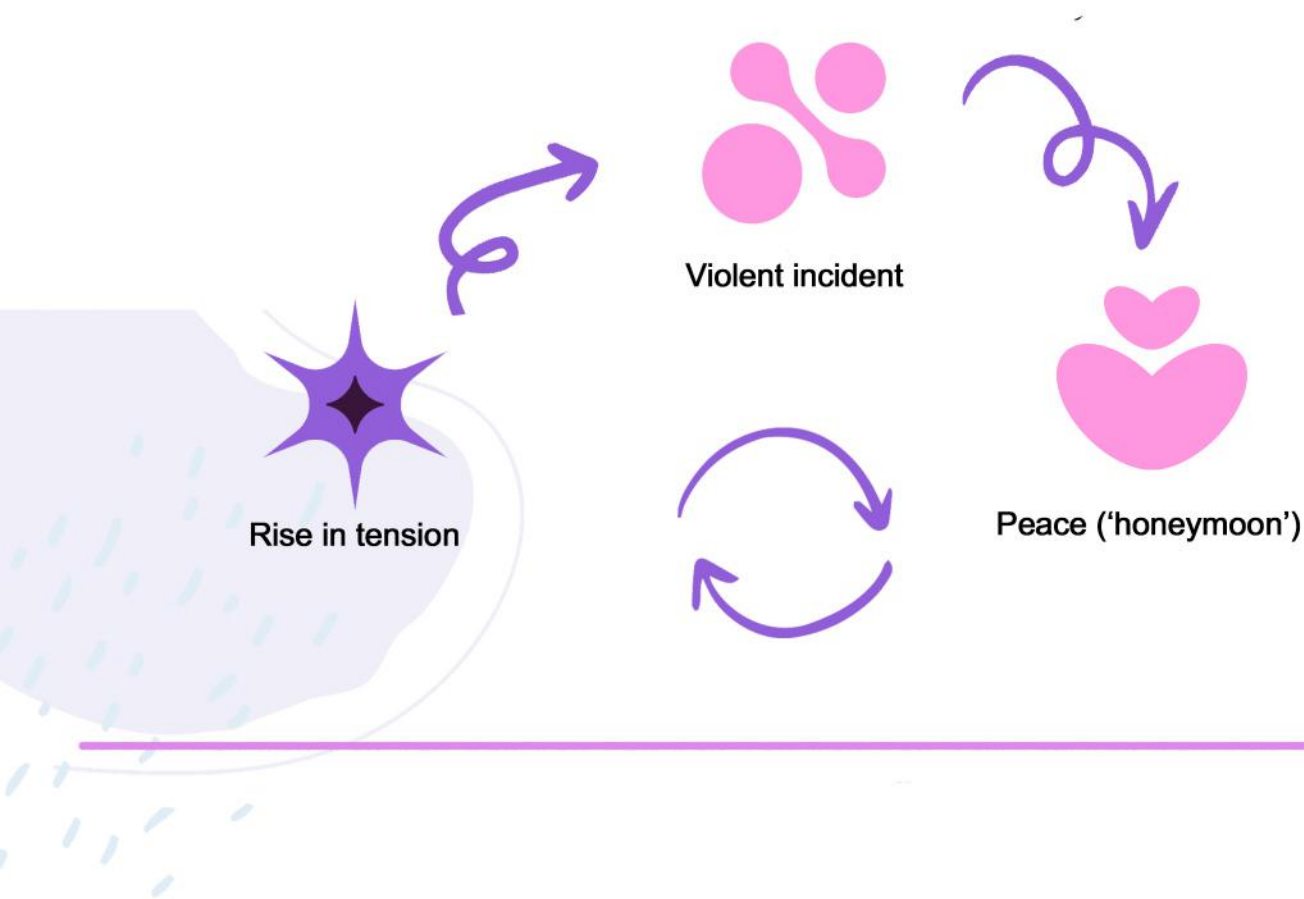
- Call the hotline number for victims of abuse – 116 006. Here you can also leave anonymous message.
- Contact NGOs or community organisations that can provide free psychological and legal assistance.
- Download Safe You app, which can help us to report abuse immediately with SOS button or sharing locations with trusted contacts. The app can also record, save and send sound (Abramian, 2021).
- Hold conversations around violence and disseminate information to reduce stigma.



*If you are experiencing any of the issues listed below, seek support and counselling by using the most convenient services from the list provided above:*

- *Physical pain which is caused by the action of a partner/family member.*
- *Someone touching parts of your body that makes you feel uncomfortable.*
- *Jealousy over personal matters (example: spending more than usual amount of time with friends) expressed through violent actions.*
- *Control over your personal information, correspondence, social media etc.*
- *Using your financial resources without your permission or preventing you from using your own monetary resources.*
- *Intentionally damaging your property and/or items/equipment.*
- *Attempts to isolate you from your family and friends.*
- *Pressure and threats that someone will harm you or hurt themselves because of your actions.*
- *Forcing you to take medication or preventing you from taking it.*

*Common behavior that is usually shared across most abusers is called "the cycle of abuse". Cycle of abuse is characterized by sudden mood changes, from violent to apologetic, honest promises that everything will change. Abuser can demonstrate love and care, especially in public spaces and towards others, which makes it difficult to convince the victim to leave the abusive relationship (Peace Over Violence, n.d.).*



## ***How to break the cycle of abuse***

*While in the cycle of abuse, you may feel trapped, not knowing how to get away from an abusive partner. However, with some planning and support, you can break the cycle and leave abusive relationship. Here are five steps which can help you break the cycle:*

*1. Identifying and facing abuse: identification is the first step. You will not realize you need to leave abusive relationship unless you acknowledge the violent nature of your relationship.*

*2. Seeking support: talk to trusted friends, family members or therapist. If you consider using the legal protection, you may need legal aid – contact organization providing human rights protection.*

*3. Using available resources: there are crisis centers and shelters for victims of violence across the country. Shelters provide temporary accommodation including food, hygiene products, and basic necessities for victims and their children. Victims/alleged victims can also access above listed services for free.*

*Addresses of crisis centres:*

*Tbilisi – Budapest st. 28; Kutaisi – Dumbadze st. 59 – 61; Gori – Barnovi st. 9a; Ozurgeti – Griboedovi st. 21 – apartment 1; Marneuli – Rustaveli st. 41, apartment – 48.*

*4. Entering therapy sessions: individual or group therapies can help you cope with your thoughts and emotions, develop an escape plan for yourself.*

*5. Leaving safely: develop a safe exit plan. Collect important documents and designate emergency contacts, save money and pack essentials. Plan where to go.*

## ***How do we prevent domestic violence?***

*- With education – we learn and teach others that violence is unacceptable.*

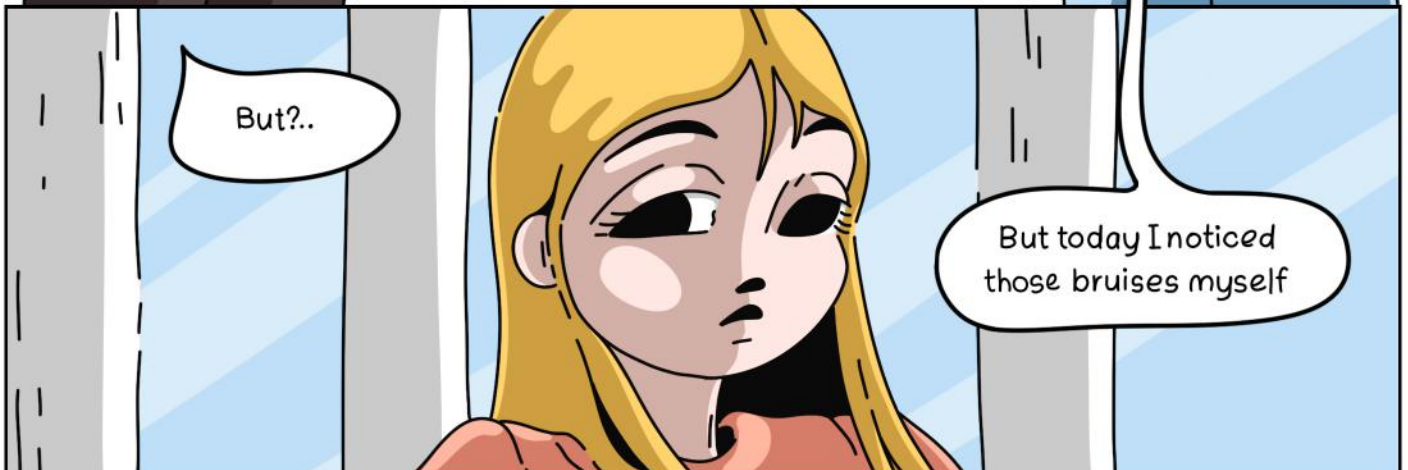
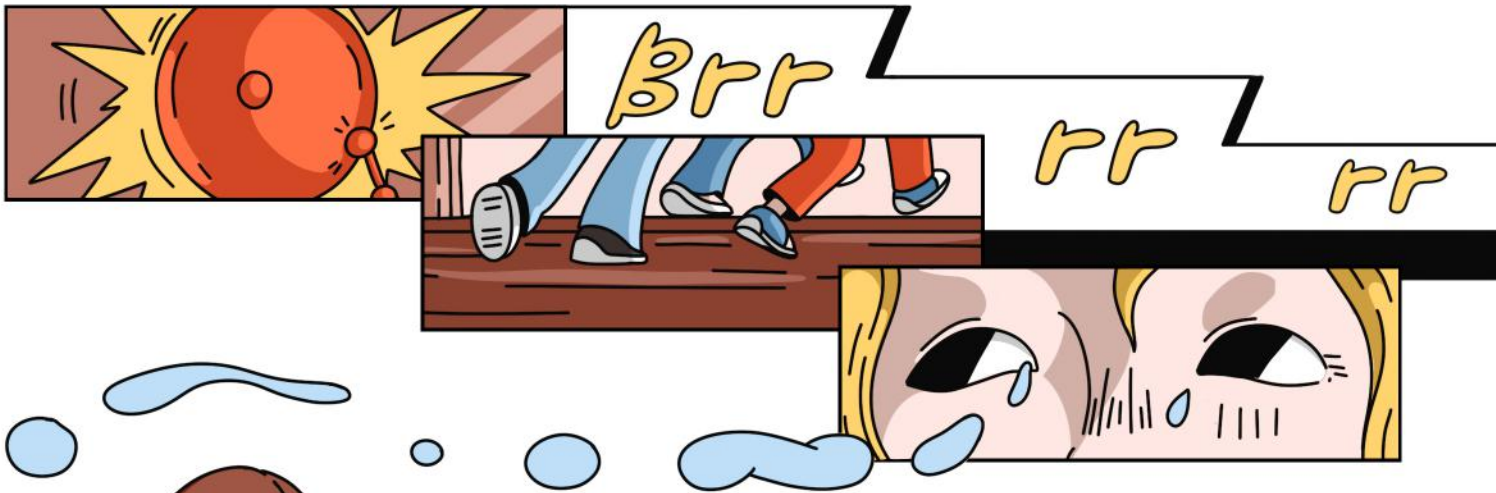
*- With support – we listen to victims of violence. We do not blame them. Instead we offer help and support.*

- By speaking up – we publicly discuss the issue.

**Facts and statistics:**

*Remember never to judge the victim of violence. According to research conducted by “Women Against Abuse”, victims need at least 7 attempts to escape abusive partner (women against abuse, n.d.).*









# Unequal pay and unpaid domestic work

In Georgia, women are often employed in low-wage sectors, such as education, healthcare, social services, and others. These fields are frequently and stereotypically referred to as *female jobs*, which, in turn, contributes to the relatively low pay associated with these positions.

There are instances where women and men are employed in the same position, or their responsibilities are identical, yet the woman receives lower pay than the man - this is called the gender pay gap.

- The gender pay gap shows the difference between what women and men earn. There are several ways to measure it, but it generally reflects unequal pay for similar work, differences in job duties, working hours, and opportunities for advancement. For example, a woman and a man may both work as managers in the same organization, yet the man receives a higher salary or is promoted more quickly.

The simplest way to calculate the gender pay gap is to compare monthly income for men and women. Based on the monthly salary, as shown by the Labor Force Survey data, the gender pay gap in Georgia in 2020 amounted to 37,2 % (UN Women, 2020).

## ***What causes gender pay gap?***

- Stereotypes: man is a bread winner and deserves more.
- An employer's belief that career breaks - due to pregnancy or caregiving responsibilities - may make a woman less productive.
- Work hour flexibility does not take caregiving responsibilities into account - for example, school and kindergarten schedules.

## ***What is unpaid labor?***

Unpaid labor is daily care work for which we may not receive payment, but which is essential for the functioning of the family and society. Examples include cleaning the house, preparing meals, childcare, and caring for the sick. In Georgia, this is mostly considered the responsibility of women.

On average, women spend less time on paid work per month than men. This can be explained by a combination of factors - especially the fact that women are primarily responsible for unpaid labour.



It is critical to consider this fact when it comes to the pay gap. Therefore, to calculate the gender pay gap more accurately, we need to look at the hourly wages of men and women. This is called the raw hourly gender pay gap, reported 17.7 percent in 2020 in Georgia (UN Women, 2020).

### ***How does unpaid labor limit women?***

When woman spends majority of her time on unpaid labor:

- She does not have any time left for education, leisure or hobbies.
- Finds it difficult to learn a new profession.
- Becomes financially dependent on others.
- In Georgia, women spend five times more hours on unpaid labor than men (UN Women, 2022a).

### ***International examples – how can we forge changes?***

- In Sweden and Norway, for instance, the equal sharing of responsibilities between parents is more common. Fathers are granted paternity leave, encouraging the distribution of caregiving duties (Statistics Norway [SSB], 2016).
- France provides state-supported universal kindergartens and parental subsidies. In various European countries, these subsidies are provided until the child reaches full age, essentially compensating parents for childcare and ensuring a safe environment.

### ***Why should we speak up about this issue?***

Because this kind of labor is “invisible,” but its cost is very real. Economy cannot be fair or equal without recognizing women’s unpaid labour.

### ***What can we ask for?***

- Equal distribution of labour within household.
- Public kindergartens with schedules adapted to working hours, and care services for the elderly.
- Legally guaranteed parental compensation.







Do not dedication and commitment that women pour into their work deserve a fair compensation?

# Physical and mental health of women

## *How does gender affect health?*

The health of women and girls is directly linked to their social roles and gender expectations. Women especially those living in rural areas and from low-income groups often lack access to high quality healthcare services. This is particularly evident when it comes to reproductive and sexual health services, such as gynecological check-ups, contraception, and safe childbirth.

## *Domestic labour and health risks*

Women are often responsible for unpaid household chores - caring for children, the elderly, and the sick, cooking, and cleaning. This work is physically and emotionally exhausting. Constant fatigue, working in hazardous conditions (e.g., cleaning with powerful chemicals), insomnia, and neglecting their own health can lead to chronic illnesses and mental burnout.

Often, women do not fully acknowledge their exhaustion or seek help because society views the distribution of these responsibilities as unacceptable.

A time-use survey shows that 66% of Georgia's population is engaged in unpaid household activities. This figure differs significantly between women (88.3%) and men (39.6%). The highest participation rate is among women living in rural areas - 90.3% (UN Women, 2022b).

## *Mental health and experiences of women*

The factors that affect women's mental health are as follow:

- Child delivery and motherhood: women are often affected by postpartum depression after child birth, followed by anxiety, which is usually untreated, since seeking for help is stigmatized.
- Stereotypes: gender based expectations suggesting that woman should always be happy and caring – which prevents women from talking about their feelings.
- Abuse: gender based abuse often leaves women with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety. Psychological support after traumatic events is unavailable to many.



## ***How does environment affect health?***

*Women, especially those in rural areas, often live in environmentally risky conditions - such as polluted water, inadequate sanitation, and harmful fuels (for example, wood and open fires in kitchen) - which increase the risk of respiratory and other diseases. Since they are mostly responsible for managing the household and family spaces, they face these risks on a daily basis.*

## ***How can we contribute?***

- Sharing the information: speak openly about health issues, especially about mental health.*
- Breaking the stigma: consultation with psychologist or gynecologist should not be stigmatized.*
- Demanding changes: healthcare that is widely available and suitable for all groups across the country (both rural and urban population).*

## ***Facts and statistics:***

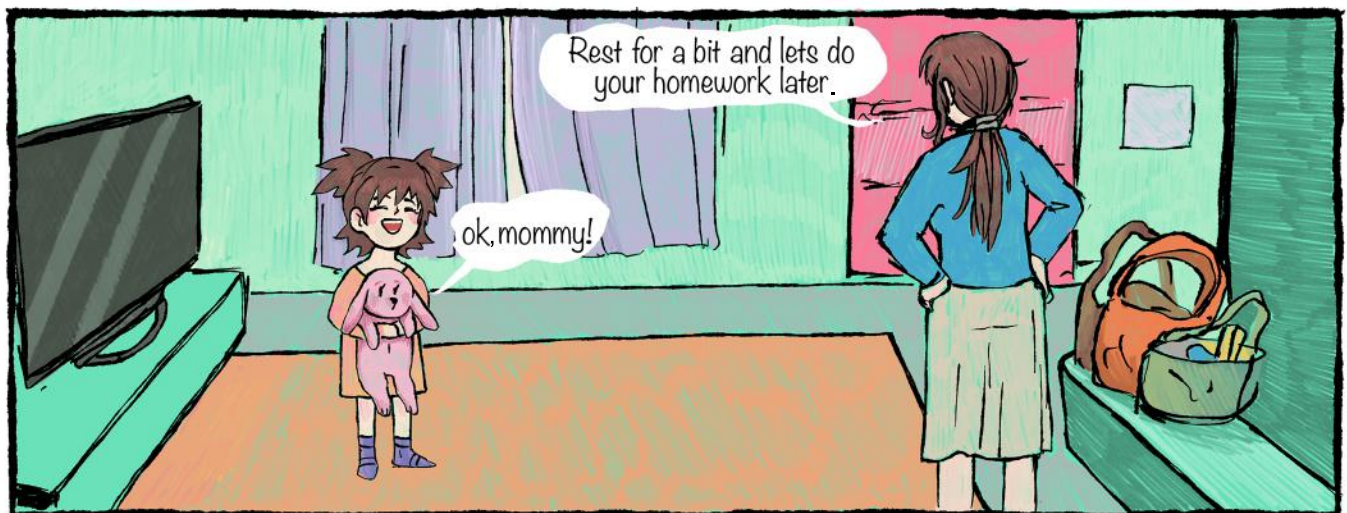
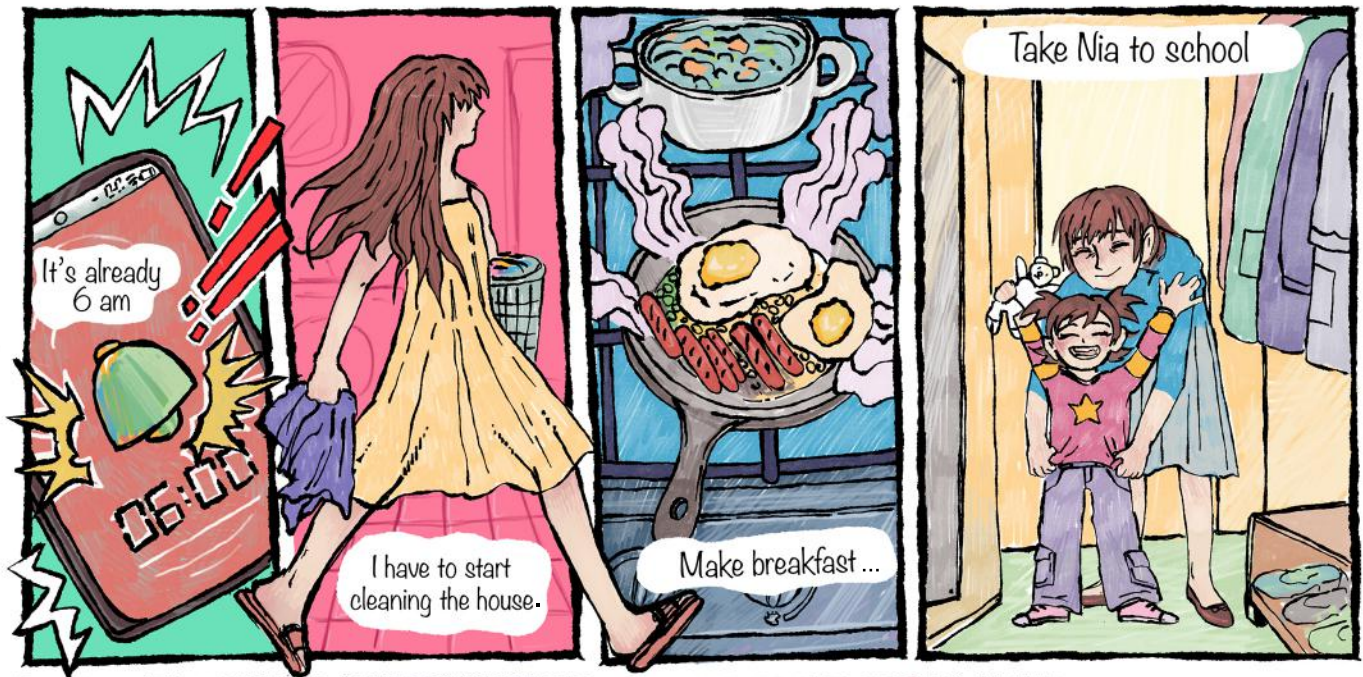
- In Georgia, women employed full-time spend an average of 2.7 hours per day on unpaid activities - five times more than full-time employed men, who spend only 0.5 hours on such tasks.*
- Men spend an average of 4.7 hours per day on leisure, which is 0.8 hours more than women, who spend 3.9 hours on leisure activities.*
- In Georgia, 80% of mothers are involved in childcare - related activities, which is more than twice the rate of fathers - 37.6% (UN Women, 2022b).*

## ***Breathing exercise to reduce stress***

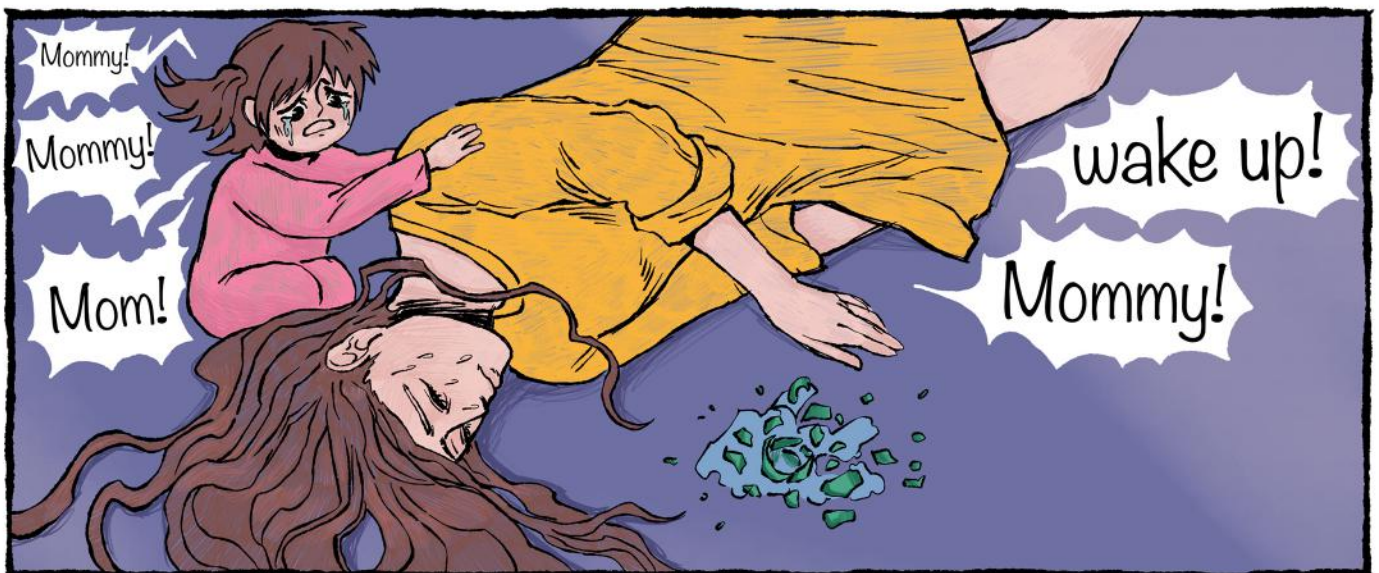
- 1. Sit comfortably or put your feet on the ground*
- 2. Close your eyes and concentrate on breathing.*
- 3. Take a deep breath with your nose and count to 4.*
- 4. Hold your breath for 2 seconds.*
- 5. Breath out from your mouth, count to 4.*
- 6. Repeate this cycle 5 – 7 times.*

*This simple exercise will help you reduce stress level, and calm your mind and body.*





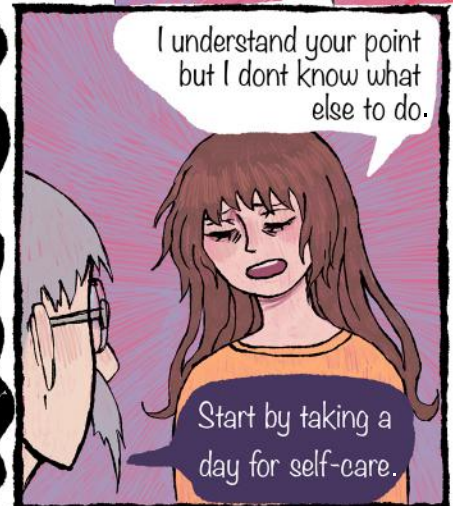
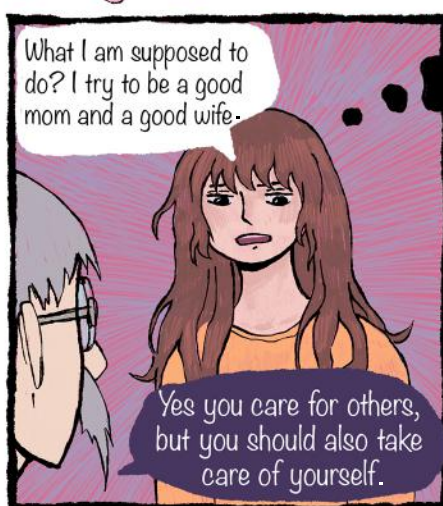
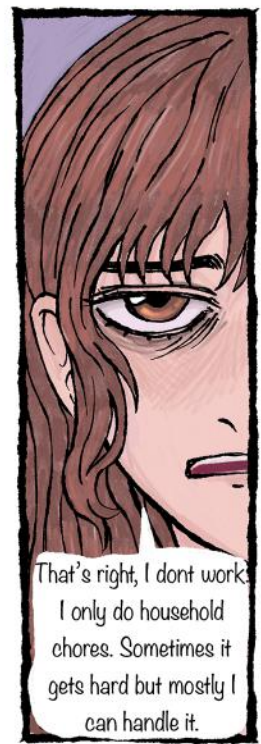
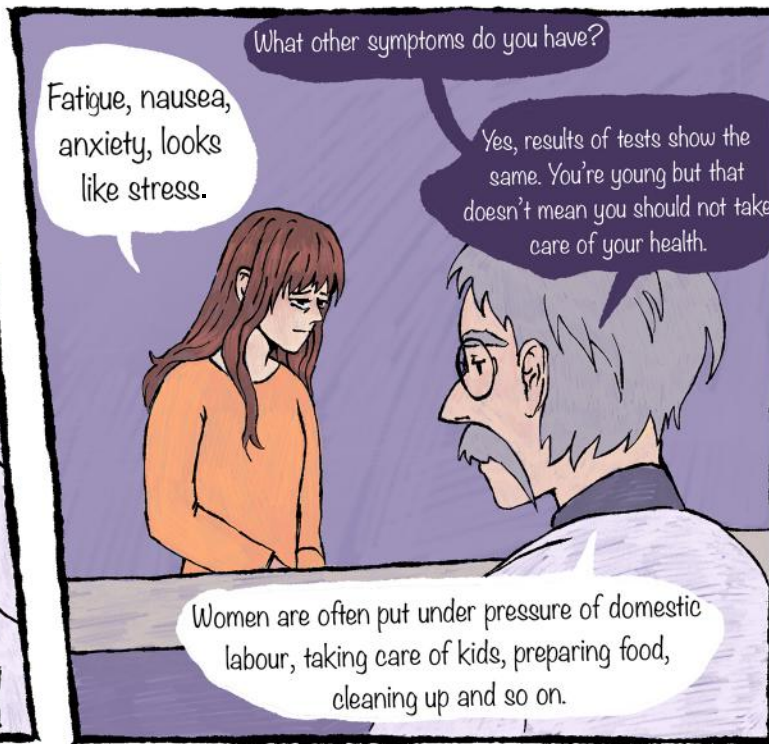




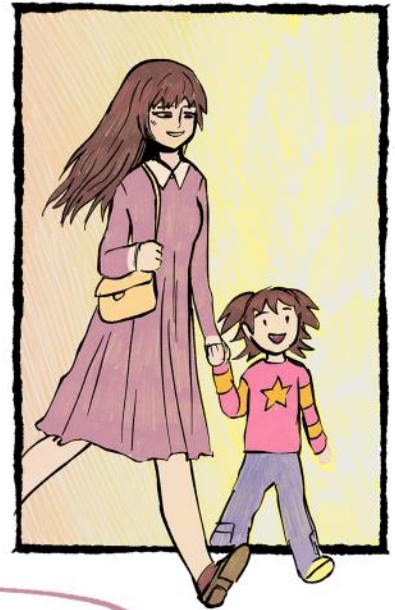
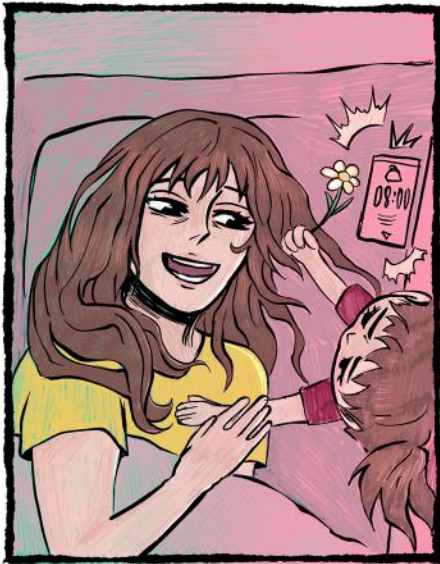




At the doctor's office





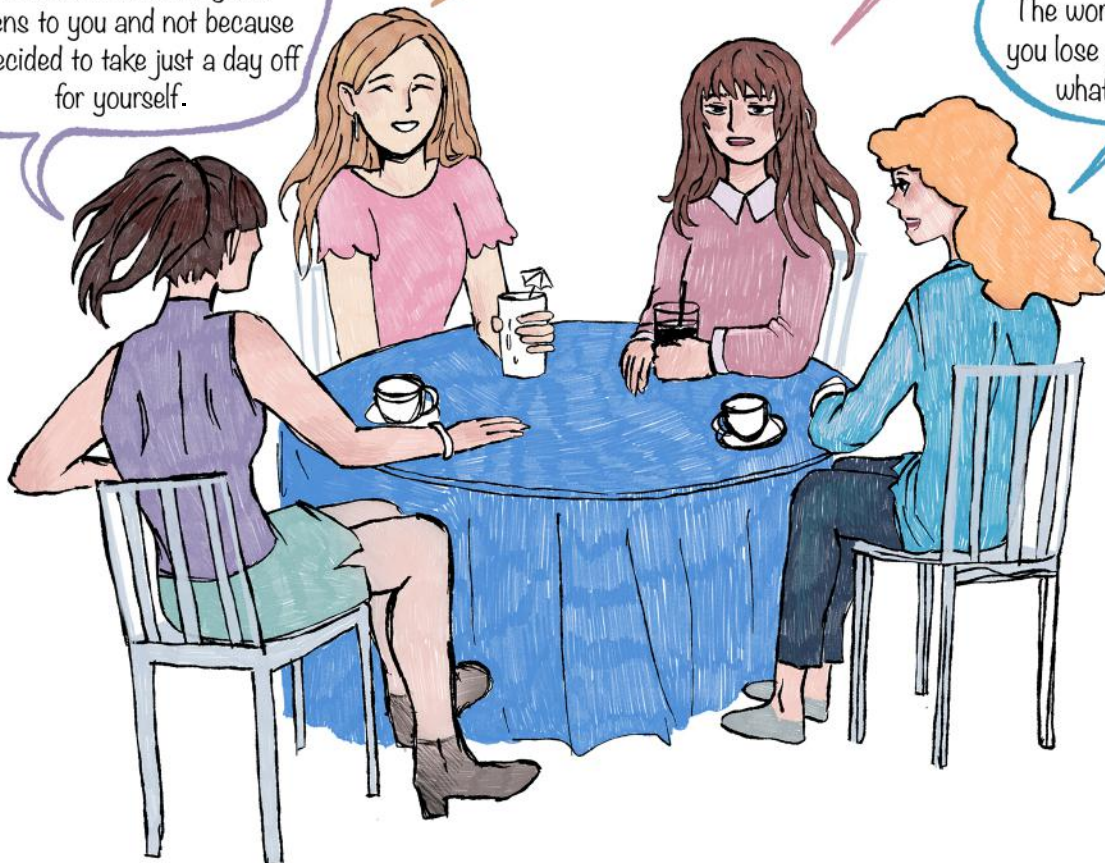


I can't remember the last time I slept more than 6 hours. I was always in a hurry to get everything done on time and I forgot to take a moment for myself.

Nia looks up to you, shouldn't you show her how to take care of herself? Domestic labour is usually invisible. Even your husband who comes home tired may not understand how much you have done for the family that day.

—being a mother doesn't mean ignoring your health. She will suffer more if something bad happens to you and not because you decided to take just a day off for yourself.

The work never ends—if you lose yourself in it, then what's the point?



# Gender based stereotypes and occupations

## *What is a stereotype?*

Stereotype is a belief and expectation about people based on their group identity (such as gender or ethnic background) and not on who they truly are as individuals.

Here are some of the examples of stereotypes:

- "Women are emotional and not suitable for positions in leadership".
- "Men are not suitable for care related and household work".
- "Girls don't like and can't do math".

## *What does a gender-based stereotype mean?*

A gender stereotype is an expectation that society places on a person simply because they are a woman or a man. Gender stereotypes often begin in early childhood - starting with the toys children are given to play with (dolls for girls, cars for boys), colors (pink for girls, blue for boys) and other unnoticeable signals given by parents, teachers and society.

## *How does this affect out career choices?*

Expectations of society are often constructed in such a way that people unconsciously choose a path "acceptable" for their gender roles. For instance:

- Boys are often encouraged to pursue engineering, programming, business administration.
- Girls are expected to seek jobs in teaching, healthcare, art.

Many girls may never realize that they could have become great engineers or scientists because nobody ever told them that it was possible.

## *What is the source of stereotypes?*

Gender stereotypes derive from:

- Cultural traditions - "man is a breadwinner", "woman is a housemaid".
- Media - commercials, movies, magazines where women are usually portrayed as mothers, teachers, doctors or nannies. While men are portrayed as "problem solvers", scientists, engineers.



- Education systems - attitudes formed in school and university toward a specific discipline or subject;
- Experience - from childhood and family.

### ***Why are not there many women scientists?***

There is a false belief that women lack logical thinking and scientific skills – something that is completely wrong and irrational. Truth is that women often face difficulties in their environment:

- Less encouragement at school and family. Boys are often told to be the hope of the family, while girls are considered the ones who will be married away.
- Less opportunities, support and scholarships in technical (STEM) fields.
- Discrimination in academic environment, sexism and humiliation of women in male-dominated fields.
- Weaker institutional memory as women were only granted the right to study at universities in the late 19th century. Historically, the fields of science and technology had been male-dominated, and women often lacked the opportunity to access education and participate in research.

All of these creates structural and cultural barriers that make it difficult for women to advance professionally, regardless of their skills.

In her book “*A Room of One’s Own*” Virginia Woolf emphasized that women need their own space and financial independence in order to study, conduct research, and create. She believed that women's talents were often lost because they lacked access to education, as well as the time and resources to develop their interests. This idea remains relevant to this day - women in science need not only access to education, but also an environment where they have time, space, and support.

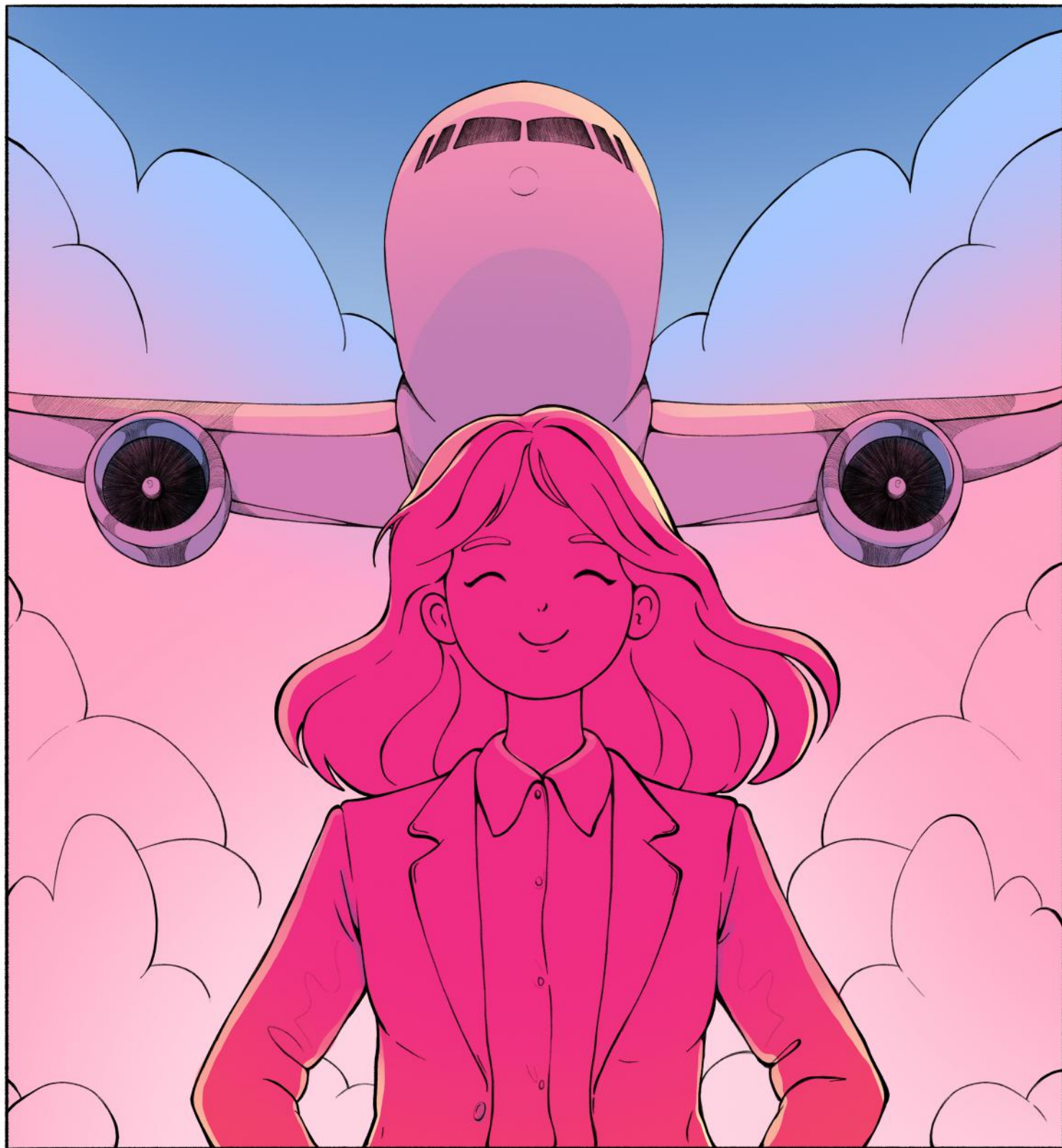
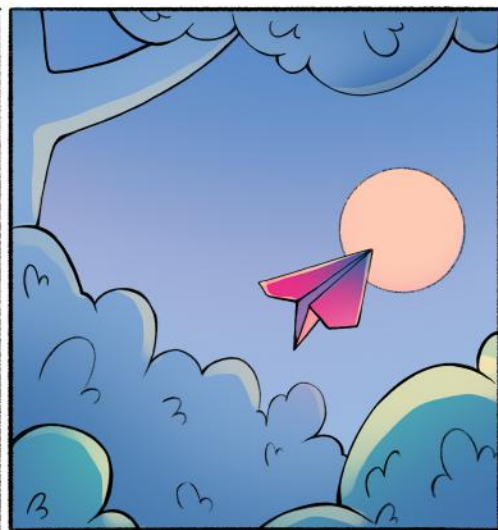
### ***Gender stereotypes fail to reflect reality? Why is that?***

- Female IT specialists, economists and leaders do exist - they often remain invisible to wider public.
- Every person, despite gender, can have talent and courage in any field. Skills and potential do not have a gender. Science and progress is for everyone.











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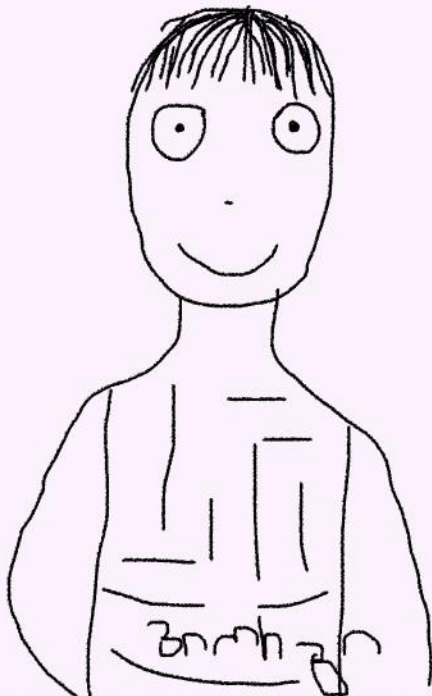
**Participants in the  
comics workshops  
who inspired this  
guide book**



Natalie



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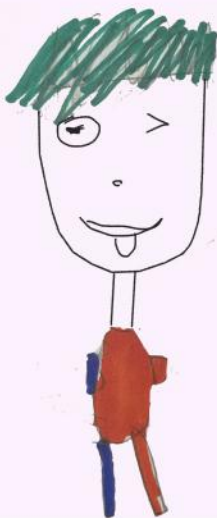
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