

# *Gender-Based Sexual Violence Against Teenage Girls in the Middle East*

***A comparative situation analysis of honour violence, early marriages and sexual abuse in Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Yemen***

*Compiled by Pernilla Ouis and Tove Myhrman*



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Research Leader: Pernilla Ouis

Project co-ordinator: Tove Myhrman

Editor: Edith E. Karam

Save the Children Sweden in co-operation with:

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**Save the Children Sweden**

Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa

P.O. Box: 113-7167

Beirut – Lebanon

[www.scsmena.org](http://www.scsmena.org)

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## Acknowledgements

During a journey to the Levant on June 2002 I disclosed, to fellow travellers, my great interest in learning more about the daily lives of adolescent girls in the Middle East. Having an academic background in women's rights and now an active participant in the field of children's rights, I found the concealed life of the Muslim woman and child enticing to investigate. So many prejudices against young women, especially "the other one", flourish all over the globe. Since little research had been done on this issue, I felt quite motivated to go ahead and discover more.

With my fellow traveller Dr Pernilla Ouis, who worked at Lund University in Sweden at the time, we spent hours on the road in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, sharing different perspectives on the "passage" from being a girl to becoming a woman.

It was then that we decided to document the lives of these woman and girls in the region. The child's right to participation and non discrimination, central in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, were highlighted and discussed amongst female adolescents in Jordan, Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Yemen. These teenage girls had the chance to voice their thoughts in a strong, assertive way and in 2005 *Woman or Child: Voices of teenage girls in the Middle East* was published. The result was positive and the book was greatly demanded by universities, and various institutions. This interest made it possible to print, at a later stage, a less academic version for purposes of study.

Around the same time, late 2005, we broadened our research and delved further into the issue of girls, this time approaching the subject from a non-violence angle. Cases of sexual violence that include sexual abuse, early marriages, and honour violence are demoralizing and keep societal changes out, forcing people to act within the required social status-quo framework. Ambitious to initiate a three year project with two stages: one year assessment and two years of implementation, we tried to obtain some external funding but had no success. However, we did not allow the lack of funding to become an obstacle to our work and began a one year project with women research institutes in Beirut, Jerusalem and Sana'a. Working together, each of us coming from very different academic backgrounds and cultures was indeed challenging and a learning process for everyone!

Now with the exciting result in hand I would like to thank Dr Pernilla Ouis, research leader, Tove Myhrman, project co-ordinator and Ghada Yassin, senior programme manager, for their never ending interest, energy and patience, without whom this book would have never come through!

Beirut, December 15, 2006

Elisabet Brunnberg Johnsson  
Former Regional Representative of Save the Children Sweden, MENA

## Background

Save the Children Sweden fights for children's rights, a mission that is somewhat of a challenge to live up to in certain countries where Save the Children Sweden has offices. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is a challenging region; history has been volatile for centuries and politics unstable for decades. In MENA there is also an amalgam of modernity-related issues and problems: political, social, financial and environmental, sometimes very similar to problems faced in other developing and third-world countries.

From my perspective as a woman that was born and raised in the Middle East, in order for the region to sort its priorities and identify key areas of development, there needs to be an understanding and commitment to rights-based approaches; high levels of coordination, learning and exchange of experiences both within the region and with other regions of the world, in addition to a willingness and acceptance of 'change' as an inevitable factor for meeting the challenges of the modern world.

Save the Children Sweden has consciously chosen to address new and untraditional issues related to the development of child-rights since the inception of its programmes in the MENA region. At Save the Children Sweden, we choose not to stand still while children's rights are violated under any pretext, whether political or social. The signing and endorsement of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) by all governments of the region certainly provided a platform for this kind of work by NGOs active in this field. Save the Children Sweden linked-up with partners and like-minded organizations to carry on development, implementation, follow-up and documentation of qualitative work with and for children.

The work we have chosen to do with and for teenage girls in the region is another demonstration of our commitment in speaking up on issues related to this group of children. That is exactly the point: to say they are children and push governments that have signed the CRC to view them as such and provide them with their rights. This does not lighten the responsibility shouldered on parents, teachers, NGOs and other sectors of society towards this age group. There are thousands of girls in the MENA region that are denied their right to participation, education, play, and self-expression. They are forced into early marriage and used as domestic labourers in their own homes. In a situation of conflict or political instability, they pay a higher price. Violence against them is commonplace; they constitute a large proportion of sexual violence victims and ultimately honour-related killings.

Yet, as is always the case with Save the Children Sweden's work, we also see strengths and opportunities. We believe the voices of these girls constitute a great force that will eventually be listened to and taken seriously. Although many of the girls we have managed to reach will not be children anymore within the coming few years, those that are growing up into their teenage years may still have the opportunity to be part of a positive change and to recognize their dreams, concerns, and aspirations. Many organizations in civil society agree with this outlook and have agreed to join our work and in many cases have themselves

taken the lead in opening, bit by bit, the tight lid that has been traditionally put on girls and women's issues in the MENA region.

Three countries were involved in the production of this research: Lebanon, the occupied Palestinian Territories, and Yemen. We recognize the high levels of work and commitment by organizations in many countries throughout MENA and would have liked for more countries to be included. Numerous countries have achieved tremendous results for women and children, and we would like to acknowledge civil society organizations in Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia that could not be reached due to restrictions on funding. Needless to say, our partnership with three organizations in three countries from the MENA has provided us with a working model and the possibility for future exchange and mutual learning among the countries. We hope that the three participating organizations share with us the usefulness of this experience and will continue working accordingly.

I would like to thank and give recognition to the colleagues and partners that made this possible. Thank you to Elisabet Brunnberg Johnsson, Tove Myhrman and Pernilla Ouis: you have been brave, insightful and committed to girls issues throughout your involvement in the MENA region. I would also like to thank the Lebanese Centre to Resist Violence against Women (LECORVAW) in Lebanon, the Woman Studies Centre in Palestine, and the Gender-Development Research and Studies Centre Sana'a, University in Yemen: our partnership with you have brought us even closer to achieving our goals for children's rights. I would also like to thank the girls, boys and families that agreed to take part in this research, we are going to try to visit you again and share with you the results of our work.

We hope this report and future work on girls and boys issues will be another step in reassuring children that there are organizations working for their rights and willing to break the silence surrounding violence against them. As has always been the case, our reports are used in further advocacy and raising awareness. We hope this report will be used to achieve these ends and become a welcomed addition to the information package of human rights, women's rights and children's rights agencies in the MENA region, Sweden and the rest of the world.

Jerusalem, December 14, 2006

Ghada Yassin

Senior Programme Manager for Save the Children Sweden, Jerusalem Office

Chapter One

**A New Approach: Gender-Based Sexual Violence as a Violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**

By Dr Pernilla Ouis  
School of International Migration and Ethnic Relations, Malmö University,  
Sweden

*The creation of a project: The situation of teenage girls in the MENA region and Save the Children, Sweden's commitment*

Working for the rights of girls in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has been Save the Children Sweden's priority for the last years. Teenage girls in the region are predominantly exposed to severe violations of their rights according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The present project was initiated in order to produce a situation analysis on girls exposure to gender-based sexual violence in the region, as a continuation of work previously initiated about the struggle for girls rights in the MENA region. Examining the situation of teenage girls from a child rights perspective is an innovative and constructive approach that is perhaps a more successful strategy to deal with the issue than using the regular gender perspective. Teenage girls are children, and as such, are entitled to special rights. The project focused on three particular types of sexual violence against teenage girls in Lebanon, the occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) and Yemen:

- *Honour violence*: In, what we can refer to as, honour-cultures children are threatened by or exposed to violence in issues related to their sexual morality and general behaviour. In each country concerned here, a number of teenage girls are being killed annually. It should be noted that honour violence is not a sexual-violent act in itself, but is violence based on controlling the sexuality of females.
- *Early marriages*: Marriages involving young teenage girls can be interpreted as cases of sexual violence; they are often forced or arranged. The fact that many countries from the MENA region have sanctions in their legal systems that allow children below the age of 18 to marry is rather worrying and troublesome. It is widely accepted, and moreover sometimes expected of girls to marry before they are 18 years old.
- *Sexual abuse*: In addition to honour violence and early marriages, children are also being exposed to incest, sexual exploitation and abuse by adults in their close social environment. In this research project, we have chosen to classify all sexual activities by adults directed towards children as "abuse" and hence an act of violence. Our position is that children are

unable to give consent to, or even understand, sexual relations with adults. Consensual sex between teenagers is not included in our definition of sexual abuse in this report. Since sexual relationships outside wedlock are associated with strong religious taboos in this mostly Muslim setting, sexual abuse in the MENA region is a particularly problematic topic for children.

The abovementioned forms of violence are related to sexuality, while only the two latter forms are sexual activities as such. Still, we categorize all three forms as *sexual violence*. Furthermore, since we are analysing these forms of sexual violence from a gender perspective, we can conclude that this violence is gender-based. Although boys are also victims in honour-cultures, in the sense that they somehow are forced to “guard” and commit acts of violence against their sisters, we believe that the victims are primarily girls. We are concerned that girls are the most marginalised group in the region because they often face discrimination as females and as children. To focus too much on boys and other victims in honour cultures such as homosexuals, we believe would be another betrayal against the girls in the region.

It should be stated that sexual violence against children exists in all societies around the world and is not a particular problem restricted to the MENA region. However, each society has its particular cultural-logic and mechanisms in the field of sexuality that have to be discerned and acknowledged. Some trends are general and almost universal, such as patriarchy, as well as the shame and trauma associated to the victim of sexual abuse. This study emphasises analyzing in-depth gender-based sexual-abuse in the MENA region, rather than comparing the different problems between various cultures regarding this issue. Had our ambition been to compare various cultural traits and the problems of sexual violence between societies we would have had to conduct this study in a different way. Sexuality is often a controversial and charged topic touching the inner and existential aspects of our identity. Therefore, we are aware of the sensitivity of the subjects addressed in this report that include, gender roles, family building, religious morality, identity and kinship relations. Since this is a thorough analysis some of these aspects are criticized in the way that they are exploited for legitimising sexual abuse, for instance, Islam might be used to legitimise honour violence. By acknowledging this in our study, we do not say however, that Islam accepts honour-violence. Close kinship relations might be used as a method of psychological pressure on girls to marry early. Discussing this is not a criticism of kinship societies but only on some aspects of its practice.



## Methodology of the project: Primary research

Three local partner organisations and associated researchers conducted this situation analysis regarding the three forms of violence found in Lebanon, the occupied Palestinian Territories, and Yemen. The research was carried out through a co-operation between researchers and local civil society institutions with a gender and child rights approach. I was assigned by Save the Children Sweden to be the research leader for the entire project, responsible for giving feedback and support to the three countries. Through working with local partners on the situation analysis, we provided them with a starting point on how to work on this issue and gave them insight on the problems and measures to combat it. The result of the situation analysis and collection of teenage girls voices on this matter is intended for use to influence high-level stakeholders, who in the long-run may change legislations and attitudes towards children. The research provided us with the background needed to legitimize and set a base for future work on the rights of all girls, accordingly to highlight the extent of sexual violence against them in the region. The following objectives were addressed in each situation analysis:

- What is the *extent* of the problem (i.e. the three forms of violence: violence in the name of honour, early marriages and sexual abuse) in each country?
- How do young teenage girls *experience* their situation in relation to these forms of sexual violence?
- What are their *opinions* regarding the three forms of sexual violence?
- What are the *causes* of the problem?
- What are the *measures* taken to combat the problem?
- Who are the *actors* (national and international) working against this form of sexual violence and child rights violations?

The methods used, to gather information for the analysis, were both primary research and the use of secondary sources for background (desk review, see below). For the primary research, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and the collection of life stories were applied. Initially, it was also suggested to distribute questionnaires, but none of the researchers chose this approach due to time limitations. The researchers interviewed girls (the target group) in the FGD in order to ensure children's participation in the narratives of their situations. This kind of qualitative method provided insights into the experiences, opinions and views of teenage girls in the region from an insider's perspective. Girls were guaranteed anonymity for ethical reasons, i.e. giving them fabricated names and omitting details that could reveal their true identities. The sessions were tape-recorded, transcribed into Arabic and translated into English. It was advised to have the assistance of note-takers during the actual meeting to identify the participants and observe body language in addition to other expressions of

their feelings. These notes and the transcriptions of the tape facilitated the identification of statements to each individual participant. The partner organisations in each country were active in the field work together with the researchers.

The teenagers (approximately between 12 and 18 years old) were selected in co-operation with the partner organisation. The selection of participants was done in order to get a broad sample according to the following *defining variables*:

- *Sex*: It was suggested to have separate FGD for female and male teenagers. The male opinions, perspectives and experiences are important since we are dealing with gender-based violence in patriarchal communities.
- *Age*: To see whether or not experiences of the interviewees depended on their age.
- *Marital status*: Marriage implies a sexual experiences, and possibly early or forced marriage.
- *Education and employment of parents*: To understand if the problems of the children related to the educational or social level of parents.
- *Locale*: To find out if trends can be identified based on urban, rural or camp settings.
- *Religion*: The majority of the interviewees would be Muslims, since this is the predominant religion in the region, but interviewing other religious groups, such as Christians, was seen necessary to see whether or not sexual violence is linked to religion.
- *Tribal affiliation*: Researchers were interested in identifying family and “tribal” background of participants; however this variable proved too sensitive to identify.

Participants in the FGD and in life-stories introduced themselves according to the defining variables. In the beginning of each FGD, the members of the group promised not to reveal to others what had been said in the sessions in order to create an atmosphere of trust. Everybody was informed that they could refer to personal experiences as something that happened to “a friend”, and that private or very traumatic experiences were not expected to be discussed in the session. The setting created at the FGD was of trust, tranquillity and security. It should be noted that the participants in the FGD were not selected according to having experienced sexual abuse themselves. Rather to identify how knowledgeable the average female population is in their knowledge and understanding of sexual violence. However girls chosen to share their life-stories were selected based on having personal experience of sexual violence. The method was designed so that girls could speak freely about their experiences and thus with a sympathetic, non-judging approach share their voices.

The questions in the FGD were semi-structured. Some guiding questions were asked, but flexibility was given to the researchers, i.e. full attention to what was being said and additional probing, follow-up questions were of uttermost importance. The following guiding questions were suggested for the semi-structured interviews in the FGD:

- What is your experience of the so-called honour culture? Do you know of any cases of violence in the name of honour?
- What is your opinion of honour? Is it good or bad?
- What is your experience of early marriage? Are there cases of forced or early marriages that you know about?
- What is your opinion on early marriages? Why do you think it is happening?
- What is your experience of sexual abuse? Do you know of any sexual abuse cases?
- Why do you think sexual abuse is happening?
- Could the honour culture lead to sexual abuse and violence? Why or why not?
- Do you think early marriage is a form of sexual violence? Why or why not?
- How can we combat sexual violence?

The research teams sometimes added other questions or put emphasis on particular problems. For instance, in the Lebanese study the researcher added three interesting questions to male teenagers: 1. how they would react if their sister was sexually abused 2. how would they react if their sister had voluntary sex, 3. If they (the male teenager) were subjected to rape, would they report or tell someone about it. These questions added deeper dimensions to the FGD and were welcome contributions. The research teams were each advised to conduct twelve FGD, allowing up to four of those groups to consist of male teenagers only. Furthermore, five life-stories of individual teenage girls were to be collected by each country. In every chapter from each country respectively, the researchers explained the particularities of their methodology and sample, however in general this was the approach decided and used. In summary, 384 teenagers participated in the FGD, within this project, to express their views and experiences on sexual violence, 119 children in Lebanon, 127 in the OPT, and 138 in Yemen. Despite being a qualitative study, we believe a substantial number of adolescents have been able to express themselves on the issue of sexual violence.

### **Desk review: Secondary sources for mapping sexual violence**

Prior to the primary study, researchers were requested to conduct a desk review, using secondary sources, of previous research done on gender-based sexual violence in their countries; this research has been

incorporated in their subsequent chapters. They were asked to review existing research projects, reports and statistics in each country so that they had substantial background information and could therefore draw on already existing research results. Round table discussions with various official representatives as well as NGOs were necessary to complement the statistics. What measures are being taken by the authorities to combat sexual violence against children in each country? Which attitudes towards crimes in the name of honour, forced marriages and sexual abuse are prevalent among the public? The researchers should also investigate projects aiming at empowering girls, raising awareness and advocating for combating sexual violence against girls. Do such activities exist, if yes what are the experiences and results and who are the actors? Stakeholders for protection of children from sexual violence were identified.

The topic of investigation was problematic and a sensitive task for the researchers, but they all did a pioneering and heroic work in exploring these themes. The objectives and methodology of each situation analysis were similar, but the final results and chapters may contain differences compared to each other. All researchers, partner organisations and representatives from Save the Children Sweden met in Cyprus from November 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>, 2006. The partner organizations and consulting researcher of each country presented their reports for comparison and discussions. Measures to combat the problems faced were developed and discussed during the workshop that proved to be constructive with many fruitful outcomes. A network was created among the participants and other key actors in order to promote this issue and bring it to the forefront.

### **Introducing the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a tool for combating sexual violence**

In this study we are dealing with three forms of sexual violence: honour violence, early marriage and sexual abuse, from a human rights' and particularly child rights perspective, as articulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989. Lebanon and Yemen have signed and ratified this convention, with some minor reservations not directly relevant to our topic. OPT is not recognized as a state and cannot sign the convention, nonetheless President Arafat endorsed it for Palestine during his lifetime. By tackling gender-based violence against teenage girls from a child right perspective, we are aiming at avoiding the usual discussions between the East and West on sensitive gender questions and rather focusing on examining the issue from a child-rights perspective. Subsequently, although this is a gender issue, we believe tackling this issue using the CRC will have a more powerful result. In short, it is obvious that certain articles are violated when sexual violence is committed against children, as will be apparent

reading the reports from the three countries. However, I will introduce these studies by pointing out the aspects of gender-based sexual violence that violate the CRC.

Choosing to base our research on the CRC has certain consequences. The first is that the research becomes *normative*; meaning that the result can be measured against the CRC. This differs from the normal scientific stance towards objectivity and neutrality. However this approach does not mean that the research is unscientific in its method and analysis, only that the results are compared to the CRC. Secondly, this approach provides an *action-oriented research*; its results aim at bringing about social change. Save the Children Sweden works for the rights of the child, hence the research must be used to achieve this mission. We hope that this report will be an invaluable contribution to the struggle against sexual violence. A third consequence of our child rights' approach is that we have chosen partner organisations and researchers with *human right agendas*.

### **Gender-based sexual violence as a violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**

The first article in the CRC defines a child as every human being below the age of eighteen years. This is perhaps the most fundamental principle to bear in mind, since we discovered within this project that teenage girls, i.e. female children, are viewed as adult women in regards to sexuality. An example of this is when young girls (who are in fact children) are married and becoming mothers themselves, which is analysed in the project under the heading of “early marriage”. The outcome of a previous research project for Save the Children Sweden in the MENA region on teenage girls was my book entitled *Woman or Child? Voices of Teenage Girls in the Middle East* (2005). The title captures the problems of children in various cultures worldwide to be perceived and treated as what they are, that is as *children*. Much of the specific problems are linked to the fact that they are considered as adults in their societies. The most extreme example of this problem is with child-mothers and child-labourers, nevertheless children in honour cultures also face the same set of problems. Children are seen as morally mature and are expected to adhere to a strict moral code in honour societies. They are not excused because they are children. Generally, “childhood” has been described as being a Western concept, however all signatories of the CRC have agreed to this concept and recognized that special rights for children are beneficial for their development as human beings. The difficulty to accept the first and most fundamental principle often leads to the violations of many other articles as a logical consequence.

The second article guarantees the child freedom from discrimination on any grounds, including sex, religion, ethnic or social origin, birth or other

status. This project examines a typical form of gender-based discrimination. This is not to say that boys do not suffer from the same kind of problems: Boys are also subjected to sexual abuse, early marriages, and are also oppressed by honour-values. Like girls, boys are also victims however we have chosen to focus this study on teenage girls only, because we feel they have been neglected in child right issues in the MENA region. Moreover, we believe that girls carry a heavier burden, in the honour-culture, and pay a higher price in early marriages than boys.

The main point of the third article in the CRC is that “In all actions concerning children ... the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration”. In cases of early marriage we can conclude that it is not in the best interest of the child. Sexual violence and exploitation are cases of children being objectified and neglected in their status as human beings.

Responsibilities of safeguarding the interest of the child is raised in article 5, that says: “States Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child, to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention....” Parents and guardians have an important role in protecting children from sexual violence. However in the MENA region parents, in some sense, misunderstand their responsibilities as they sometimes force their children into early marriage as a mean of “protecting” them. Sexual abuse often happens within families. Furthermore, honour related violence against girls is almost always committed by family members. Their role and neglect must be emphasized, which can be seen as a violation of article 6 in the CRC that discusses support for the survival and development of children. Honour violence that sometimes leads to killing jeopardizes the survival and development of girls. We can conclude that all forms of sexual violence threaten the child’s life and development and are against the best interest of the child.

Articles 12-14 deal with issues that include the child’s right to express his or her view, freedom of thought, and having access to information... These articles have been violated in the case of forced marriages and sexual intercourse with children; where the voice and opinion of the child is not heard, but rather ignored. However, not all child marriages are by definition forced since it may be easy to convince a, per definition “naïve”, child to marry. Again, we stress the role of parents in such situations and children’s trust and dependency on them. The decision regarding who and when to marry is fundamental to each individual’s life, and should be taken by mature adults, free from any kind of pressure, neither physical nor

psychological. Child marriages, involving persons below the age of 18 years violate these rights. In the countries examined in this study, marriage is permitted for children 18 years old and younger. In connection to these articles from the CRC, it can also be noted that most Muslim states do not recognize the child's right to freedom of religion as expressed in article 14.

It is important to stress parents' responsibility regarding sexual violence against girls in the region. Article 18 in the CRC discusses the role of parents and guardians noting that: "States Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern. For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible."

The article also indicates the role of governments to ensure that parents have access to facilities needed to care for their children. Our research reveals that political instability and economic underdevelopment sometimes cause parents to force their daughters into early marriages. It is the responsibility of governments to provide welfare structures for its citizens and children however the role of parents must not be neglected.

Article 19 deals with violence and stresses that each child has the right to protection from "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child." Since commercial sexual-abuse is not a major problem in the MENA region, it is important to focus on the role of parents and guardians in domestic gender based sexual violence. When it comes to honour-related violence, which could be seen as "tradition", article 24 is applicable. The UN considers honour-violence as a harmful traditional-practice but has predominantly focused on the issue of female genital mutilation (Connors 2005: 29). This article articulates the right to health, access to health services and protection from traditional practices prejudicial to the health of the child. Thus, children should be protected against harmful-traditions and honour-related violence such as early marriages that can be categorized as such: traditions with negative consequences for children's health. The medical risks of early pregnancy

and childbirth are well documented, but we also want to emphasize the psychological aspects of a “stolen childhood”.

Articles 28 and 29 examine the right of the child to education on the basis of equal opportunity. Through our research we have discovered that punishment against girls who refuse to marry the husband chosen for them, or that violate other codes-of-conduct expected by their parents regarding their behaviour with men, include house-arrest and denial of education for honour related reasons. Again we find cultural-specific traits in gender-based violence violating basic child rights. Furthermore, in practice an early marriage is a denial of the right to education unless the state can provide schools for young mothers. However, such policy might be contradictive to the struggle of increasing the age for marriage and can be seen as controversial in this perspective.

Article 31 supports the child’s right “to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.” Furthermore States Parties should “respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.” Girls in honour-cultures are denied leisure time, or to play with boys, as they are kept inside and are subjected to strong moral rules. Playing and some movements are seen as inappropriate even for very young girls. Playing games and bicycling are examples of leisure’s that are not always accepted for girls in many honour-societies because of the fear that the girl may “lose her virginity” during such activities.<sup>1</sup> In my previous study in the region based on interviews with teenage girls, one important opinion expressed by girls from several settings was their wish for society to accept the idea of friendship between girls and boys, so that they could play and interact with each other. This can be seen as their wish to be perceived as children by society rather than sexual subjects, especially at such an early age; according to the CRC this wish should be encouraged. Moreover, the girls’ right to rest, play and leisure is violated because they have to stay inside their homes in order for them to be “good girls”. At home, they are often expected to carry out rather heavy domestic work; this links us to the next article (number 32) in the CRC expressing: “States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.” This article also says that the state shall set minimum ages for employment and regulate working conditions. Teenage girls in MENA are often required to

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<sup>1</sup> The issue of the existence of a hymen and the idea that virginity can be “lost” is questioned in modern medical research. It has been recognized that no “hymen” exists, but rather a small fold of mucous membrane in the vagina, see Cinthio 2007.



do unpaid, domestic work. In my opinion, this is a form of child labour, but somehow neglected in the formulation of this article. Domestic work affects the child's education, health and development negatively and should not be forgotten in this context.

Articles 34-36 deal directly with various forms of sexual abuse against children. Because of the topic of this report, these articles are quoted in full below (note: short version of the CRC):

*Article 34* "States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. For these purposes, States Parties shall in particular take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent: (a) The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity; (b) The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices; (c) The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials."

*Article 35:* "States Parties shall take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form."

*Article 36:* "States Parties shall protect the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare."

Children have the right to protection from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. However, sexual abuse of children may be considered "legal" when it is committed within the framework of marriage and thus hidden from public view. We suggest that such marriages, whether forced, temporary, or tourist marriages involving children is a form of sexual abuse and violates these articles in the CRC. We are aware that this suggestion may be seen as controversial since such marriages are legally accepted in the MENA society. In the *First World Conference against Commercial Sexual Exploitation* in Stockholm 1996, the question whether or not early and forced marriages are a form of sexual abuse against children was debated. The issue was controversial among the Arab delegates, but Suzanne Mikail from End Child Prostitution Child Pornography and Trafficking (ECPAT) stated that "if we identify prostitution as an economic transaction with no consent from the child, then the situation could be identical to forced marriages. There is no consent, and it is an economic transaction because the deal is done through the parents." (Hamdan 2002) Parents are important stakeholders in combating sexual violence, but the legal system is also responsible for sexual abuse of children if they do not increase the legal age of marriage to 18.

As will be evident in this study, the societies in the MENA region have weak resources to deal with victims of sexual abuse. In honour-cultures

victims are usually blamed for being sexually assaulted or raped, rather than the offender. In some cases, victims of crimes prefer to be imprisoned since this may be the only way to protect themselves from violence and killing in the name of honour. Article 37 deals with juvenile justice and could be applicable in the case of imprisoning the victims of sexual abuse, stating that: “No child shall be subjected to torture, cruel treatment or punishment, unlawful arrest or deprivation of liberty. Both capital punishment and life imprisonment without the possibility of release are prohibited for offences committed by persons below 18 years. Any child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child’s best interests not to do so. A child who is detained shall have legal and other assistance as well as contact with the family.” To imprison victims year after year is definitely a crime against the CRC. This issue must be taken into consideration when combating sexual abuse in the MENA region.

## Islam, traditions and legislation: the context of human rights' conventions in MENA

In addition to the CRC and Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), there are a number of international conventions that deal with the rights of women and children in relation to early marriage and sexual abuse.<sup>2</sup> However, some Arabic and Islamic countries have made reservations to the CRC and CEDAW. The three countries in our study have not made any reservations applicable to the articles raised here, but the general objections from Arab states is that the articles can only be accepted if they are not against the Islamic Law: the *sharia*. This poses a problem of how to interpret the Islamic Law? Whose interpretation shall we rely on? Traditionally sharia has been interpreted only by men, but we are also faced with the differences of the four schools of thought within *Sunni* Islam in addition to *Shia*

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2 There are certain international agreements that deal with gender based violence. Agreements regarding early marriages include the following: Article 16 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states: (1) Men and women of full age ... have the right to marry and found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. (2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending parties. Similar provisions are included in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Article 1 of the 1956 Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery includes in the institutions and practices similar to slavery: Article 1(c) Any institution or practice whereby: (i) A woman, without the right to refuse, is promised or given in marriage on payment of a consideration in money or in kind to her parents, guardian, family ... Articles 1, 2, and 3 of the 1964 Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages state: (1) No marriage shall be legally entered into without the full and free consent of both parties, such consent to be expressed by them in person ... as prescribed by law. (2) States Parties to the present Convention shall... specify a minimum age for marriage ("not less than 15 years" according to the nonbinding recommendation accompanying this Convention). No marriage shall be legally entered into by any person under this age, except where a competent authority has granted a dispensation as to age, for serious reasons, in the interests of the intending spouses ... (3) All marriages shall be registered ... by the competent authority. Article XXI of the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child states: Child marriage and the betrothal of girls and boys shall be prohibited and effective action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify the minimum age of marriage to be 18 years. The International Planned Parenthood Federation's Charter on Sexual and Reproductive Rights (1995) also highlights a number of human rights that is integral to women's sexual and reproductive well-being. These include:

- the right to equality and to be free from all forms of discrimination
- the right to freedom of thought
- the right to information and education
- the right to choose whether or not to marry... found and plan a family
- the right to decide whether or when to have children
- the right to be free from torture and ill treatment
- the right to health care and health protection.

interpretations. However, in most Arabic countries traditions and customs mean more to people than Islam, but in relation to laws and conventions Islam has a higher legitimacy. I therefore suggest the following hierarchy in legitimacy:

1. Traditions (*urf*)
2. Islam (*sharia*)
3. Laws (*qanun*)
4. International conventions

This model was confirmed by other researchers, during discussions at the workshop held in Cyprus. There are cases that clearly violate the CRC: for example if the law in Yemen stipulated that the legal age for marriage is 18, some parents would lie about their daughters date of birth in order to marry her earlier, in violation of the set law. Today we see that the application as well as the law itself is influenced by religion and customs. This problem is further explored in the three research reports. To bring about change, it is imperative that the conventions be addressed and we lobby for the legal system so they conform to the signed treaties. A sign of modernization is that laws become more important than customs and religious-laws; thus the work towards an adherence to principles in the CRC and a change in the legal system is not useless. Furthermore, it is a new discourse emerging connecting Islam to human rights; subsequently, Islam, laws and conventions together can be powerful against customs to create a better situation for teenage girls in the MENA region and therefore need to be analysed in detail.

Religion is a double edge sword in the battle against honour-crimes. The Islamic rule in sharia can be applied as an Islamic tool for categorizing honour killings against the religion and the religious law, according to *sura* (chapter) 24 in the Holy Quran, demands that accusations of adultery be supported by four witnesses of the actual sexual act. Unfortunately, these kinds of interpretations are seldom applied. Instead religious establishments of both Muslim and Christian scholars and politicians, often choose to support honour crimes in the name of sexual morality and set regulations against premarital sex in order to control who is allowed to marry. An example from the OPT study is of Palestinian priests supporting the killing of Christian-Palestinian girls having relationships with Muslim boys as a message for others not to become involved in such relationships. It seems that the honour ideology somehow finds resonance with religious moral laws within all religions, not only Islam.

It should be stressed that the moral ideals against sex outside wedlock should not in any sense support honour crimes; however many religious scholars still make this connection. It is alright to follow the moral that sex belongs to marriage; the problem is in the sanctions taken against those who are suspected of breaking these moral rules. We, at Save the Children

Sweden, do not encourage promiscuity or loose sexual relations among teenagers, in fact we emphasise the right for children to be children and not sexualised or married at an early age. It should be noted that in the West, we have a tradition of Protestantism operating with individualist feelings of *guilt and innocence*, while in the Middle East, both Christianity and Islam, are coloured by the collectivist *honour and shame* dichotomy. In the West the individual often feels guilty regarding what is right and wrong, hence disciplining the individual through feelings of bad consciousness. In the honour-culture however, shameful deeds can be practised if hidden from the public eye. This can be interpreted as encouraging hypocrisy, but it is a structure that releases people from feelings of guilt and provides a space of freedom if actions are kept in secret. However, the honour culture seems to be repressive at large, since the victims of sexual assault are accused it makes it difficult for them to talk about their experiences or the assault against them. Furthermore, the families of a sexual abuse victim are also tainted and stigmatised.

In practice, customs still seem to have higher legitimacy than religion, although I believe a shift of positions will come due to Islam. In our research, parents proclaimed honour violence as being against the religion and suggested combating such acts with religious sanctions against sexual criminals. The OPT study examines Islam as a tool for gender equality since it moralises against both sexes and ascribes the same sanctions towards them. In practice, as demonstrated through the experiences of girls, only the female part is blamed however. Consequently, Islam can be used as a tool in combating honour violence, and has been used for this purpose in Jordan. The strict rules regarding sacredness, privacy and integrity can be applied to condemn the spreading of rumours and gossip in the name of honour. In Islam, it is a sin to spy on others and spread gossip, however the same principles make it harder for children to speak up against sexual abuse in their homes, since such matters are often referred to as “private” and hence to be solved in the private sphere without interference of the wider society. The assault can then continue in secret. Furthermore the religious stress on “obedience” of children and wives to fathers and husbands, as pointed out in the Palestinian report, make it problematic to speak up in cases of sexual violence. Another dilemma related to Islam, discussed in the situation analysis here, is that in the sharia “rape within marriage” is an unknown concept since women must be sexually-accessible to their husbands. Young wives are therefore exposed to repeated sexual abuse in their marriage, as demonstrated in the life stories quoted from Yemen. There are no rules in the Islamic religion that encourage early marriages, however none condemn it either leaving religion open for interpretation regarding the suitable age for marriage. Subsequently, religion can be used both for and against sexual violence within marriages.

The legislation on honour crimes and sexuality is influenced by religion and traditions, as demonstrated in the three desk reviews. Originally, the laws on passion crimes have been influenced by the laws of the colonial powers and are not from the sharia as such, but are nowadays used as an excuse for lenient punishment for honour-criminals.<sup>3</sup> The law stipulates that the extenuating circumstances for the criminal are that he has lost his sanity seeing his wife having intercourse with another man and kills her. This excuse, however, is hardly ever the case in honour crimes, since such crimes are not usually committed because a man finds his wife in bed with another man; however honour-crimes are excused using the notion that the killer was in a state of “fit or fury” and therefore is sentenced to lenient punishment. Moreover, the rule that adultery is a crime and against the law is a view abandoned in the West in the course of modernization, but still existent in the MENA. In Western countries, adultery is considered a private matter rather than a criminal act against the law. Such changes to the law would make sexuality enter the sphere of private-morality rather than being a public issue that falls in the field of legislation. Consensual sex is not equal to sexual abuse of children by adults. In Islam, a way of having “legal” consensual sex is to engage in an Islamic marriage (*orfi* marriage), as documented by the OPT report. Islam can be used to give legitimacy and blessing to consensual sexual intercourse, in cases where laws and families are opposing such unions. However, the same practice can be exploited for sexual abuse and prostitution.

Legislations against sexual abuse and violence against women and children need to be strengthened in the region. The three chapters in this volume give examples of laws that are discriminatory towards women and children. Even in countries such as Lebanon that stands out as being the most modernized country in our study, legislations are strongly influenced by religion and traditions. Therefore, their quest for a unified (secular) civil law for personal status should be taken seriously. In OPT, the laws are confusing but still the same discriminatory traces are apparent in their legal systems, apart from the recently established laws by the Palestinian Authority, Gaza also follows Egyptian law and the West Bank practices Jordanian legislation in certain matters.

Our recommendation to use the CRC for combating sexual violence against teenage girls must be considered in light of the above mentioned realities of customs, religions and legislations. CRC has been successful in promoting new legislations against trafficking and child prostitution in the region, as discussed in the chapters here. Since such laws exist, they also have to be applied and interpreted to include sexual abuse, violence in the name of honour, and early marriage as forms of sexual violence. The

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<sup>3</sup> This law is deduced from the French Penal Code of 1820 into the Ottoman Penal Code from 1958 (Abu-Odeh 1996: 143-144).

women's movement in the region is working for legal changes that promote gender equality. This struggle must be supported, laws must be developed that apply despite religion and customs, and the CRC must act as the frame of reference applied in combating such problems.

### **Final remarks**

A child rights approach to combat gender-based sexual violence is advocated in this project. We have set out to identify and map out cultural-specific forms of sexual violence in the MENA region: honour violence, early marriages, and sexual abuse. The mechanisms and characteristics are different from other regions and cultures in the world. By listening to the opinions and experiences of teenage girls on these issues, we hope to have facilitated a process of change. The honour ideology seems to increase the risk of sexual violence rather than protect children.

I would finally like to express my gratitude to all researchers and partner organisations involved, as well as to all within Save the Children Sweden. I know this has been a difficult subject to tackle. Hopefully stakeholders, campaigns and various projects will find this volume useful in the struggle against sexual violence in the region.

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## **Modernization in a Multi-Religious Society: Sexual Violence against Female Teenagers in Lebanon**

By Dr Rafif Rida Sidawi

Lebanese Council to Resist Violence Against Women (LECORVAW)

### **Introduction**

This report addresses three types of sexual violence that teenager-girls in Lebanon are subjected to: early marriage, “honour” based violence, sexual abuse and other forms of sexual violence against young girls. Presenting these three types of violence only, does not refute the presence of other forms of abuse practiced against children and teenagers in general. More than ever, children around the world continue being among the most marginalized social groups, due to their weak position within the family and the community. Today, children in developing countries face different challenges, such as wars, racial discrimination, migration, homelessness, aggression, foreign occupation, in addition to poverty, economic crises, indebtedness, weak growth, hunger, environmental degeneration, illiteracy, in addition to diseases, malnutrition, lack of safe water and other child-related basic services.

In the Arab countries in general, including Lebanon, children and teenagers are often excluded from economic analysis, a continuum of a civilization that discriminates against them in all aspects of life, because, along with women, they constitute a lower cast in the prevailing and rooted culture. The latter is used in its classical aspect as defined by anthropologist Edward Taylor, “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Burnett 1871: 1).

Therefore, the focus points of this report, i.e. teenagers and girls, are mainly due to two essential factors: First, male and female teenagers, generally in the Arab region and particularly in Lebanon, constitute a societal power. Although the percentage of youth in most Arab countries was remarkably low for the period of 1975 to 2000, they remained relatively high in the majority of countries. Children 0 – 18 years old constituted approximately 46.5 per cent of the total Arab population in 2002. The age group 12 to 17 made up 14.4 per cent of this figure, with the lowest being in Qatar 8.3 per cent and the highest, 16.6 per cent in

Syria<sup>4</sup>. Concurrently, the percentage of teenage girls, 15 to 19 years old, reached 9.5 per cent of the total number of women in Lebanon, estimated at 1,885,563 females, in comparison to 10.2 per cent males, 1,868,222, from the same age group<sup>5</sup>.

Second, the gender-based theoretical background of this report, aims to achieve the following three objectives:

- Attempt to understand the phenomenon of sexual violence against girls in Lebanon, its boundaries and causes
- Identify the experience of teenage girls in light of the three forms of sexual violence practiced against them, in order to integrate their personal points of view in the study.
- Examine the possibility of using the present study in developing intervention policies and programs to combat sexual violence against girls, based on the problems of gender and teenage years.

### Theoretical and conceptual framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on a gender background that considers gender in terms of socio-cultural determinants of a person belonging to either sexes (male or female), and that differ from the biological determinants which are innate in a person. Hence gender is neither the sex nor the woman; it is the social roles of men and women in society. The distribution of these roles makes it possible to perceive the different relations between the two genders, and the reasons behind this unbalanced relation in an attempt to amend and develop it in pursuit of equality.

This gender-based theoretical background permits a reading of gender-based discrimination between men and women in Lebanon, as it is related to violence against women and girls, and namely sexual violence perpetrated against teenage girls. “The future social roles of women and men are modelled today as we infuse the minds of teenagers, male and female, of what opportunities and capacities are available before them”<sup>6</sup>. These roles are still ruled by gender based discrimination in the upbringing of children and teenagers, namely in light of differences between women and men consecrated by the laws, traditions and customs prevailing in the

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<sup>4</sup> “Statistical Report on the Situation of Arab Children, Manual for the Development of Arab Children, Arab Council for Childhood and Development”, Cairo, 2006, pp. 31-32

<sup>5</sup> “National Study on the Living Conditions of Families for 2004” (primary results), Central Administration for Statistics, Republic of Lebanon, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> *Al Fatat Al Arabiya Al Mourabiqa: Al Waqe' wal Afaq – Taqrir Al Mara'a Al Arabiya* (“The Arab Teenage Girl: Realities and Perspectives - Arab Woman Report”), vol. 1, Tunis, Kawtar, UNFPA and EU, p. 38.

cultural and religious heritage of the Arab communities, including Lebanon.

The Rapid Appraisal Approach was adopted in this research and was based on two main complementary means: library research and field survey. The desk research included the phase of statistical data collection, research and studies available on sexual violence, in order to deduce the basic information in these references. This phase also incorporated the collection and review of legislature related to this phenomenon, with an attempt at appraisal reading in order to uncover the gaps at the legislative level.

### **Gender-based discrimination in Lebanon**

Gender-based discrimination does exist in Lebanon. It results in multitude forms of gender-based violence against women, the most prominent being sexual violence against girls and women. Women in Lebanon account for more than half of the residing population estimated at 3.8 million residents: 50.2 per cent female and 49.8 per cent male. There are visible improvements during the last few years in the laws and legislatures related to the situation of women and children: increased enrolment in educational institutions, gradually increasing involvement at work, improved levels of health services available to women hence noticeable improvements in health and reproductive data, and reduced mortality rates among infants in Lebanon from 65 per thousand in 1960 to 28 per thousand in 2002<sup>7</sup>. However, women and children in Lebanon still lack some of their basic rights, namely those related to families, such as the right to participate, freedom of expression, and protection from family violence. Lebanon endorsed the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women in 1996, but made reservations on the following articles:

- Section 2 of article 9 of the Convention, offering the women equal rights to men in regards to passing citizenship to her children;
- Sections (c), (d), (f) and (g) of article 16 related to personal status, i.e. equal rights in marriage, the right of the mother to matters related to her children, rights related to guardianship, equal rights to choose the surname, custody over and adoption of children.
- Section 1 of Article 29 related to conflict resolution

The first and second reservations are enshrined in the Personal Status laws regulated by confessional laws in Lebanon, which hosts 18 officially recognized confessions. Therefore, Lebanese citizens are not subjected to

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<sup>7</sup> “Statistical Report on the Reality of the Arab Child, Manual for the Development of Arab Children”, Arab Council for Childhood and Development, Cairo, 2006, p. 41

one Personal Status Law, but each of them abides by the laws of his or her confession, and appeals to the courts of the said confession.

Although Lebanon ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991, resulting in numerous legislative changes in Lebanese laws rendering them more in line with the principles of the CRC, a number of loopholes remain in the Personal Status laws pertaining to each confession. These laws are positively biased towards the male in addition to civil laws in the Lebanese Civil Code that are prejudiced against women, the Lebanese Penal Code, some labour and social security laws. These loopholes continue to support the traditional culture that suppresses the freedom of girls and women to fully perform their roles equally to men in both public and private lives. In addition some of these loopholes contribute to the gender-based violence practiced against girls and women in the private sphere. This male biased culture reproduces itself through the family.

Consequently, gender-based discrimination in Lebanon results in a multitude of forms of gender-based violence against women, the most prominent being sexual violence against girls and women fuelled, as previously mentioned, by a fertile soil of the legislative framework on the one hand and the prevailing attitudes on the other.

### **The legislative framework**

The Penal Code stipulates the protection of the child from all forms of sexual abuse, enforcing penalties on their perpetrators, namely in the cases of crime committed against minors (rape, seduction, profligacy, incitement to adultery, offence to public morals, and child prostitution). Law no. 414, of 2002 permitted the Lebanese Government to ratify the optional protocol of the CRC related to selling children, child prostitution and children's pornographic material. The reality however, reveals a number of rape cases and other forms of sexual violence that are not reported, due to the tight relation between these cases and the notion of social stigma, "dishonour", and the lack of empathic behaviour within the legal system. The following legal articles are among the laws that reflect the limitation of "honour" or "dishonour" concerning girls:

Article 514 (and subsequent in the Penal Code) specifies that whomever shall abduct a girl or a woman through deceit, or by violence or coercion and whomever shall seduce a girl by a promise to marriage and shall deflower her shall be imprisoned. However, article 522 of the same law offers the perpetrator a window of escape from the penalty or its execution, should there be an authentic marriage contract between the perpetrator of either of these crimes mentioned here above, and the abused girl; then the prosecution shall be ceased. If the crime had been

sentenced, then the sentence is withdrawn. This article exonerates the rapist from any sentence should he marry the raped victim. This is a blatant discrimination against the woman, as most often the rapist uses the concept of “honour” and “scandal” to which the victim’s parents are so attached, to wed her and escape any punishment. The girl is turned into a scapegoat, paying with her life and future to uphold traditions, customs, and discriminatory laws against her.

Articles 487, 488 and 489 of the Lebanese Penal Code related to adultery and contradictory to the international declarations and treaties: adultery is defined as sexual intercourse by a married person with a person other than the spouse. Consequently, in order for adultery to occur there should be sexual intercourse with a person other than the spouse, a genuine marriage and criminal intent. Nonetheless, these conditions are insufficient to prove adultery of the husband, which is linked to two other conditions: adultery must occur at the conjugal home or the husband shall take, publicly, a concubine (article 488 of the Penal Code). These laws are thus discriminatory between men and women, for they penalize the woman if the first three conditions are available, regardless of whether adultery occurred at the conjugal home or somewhere else; whereas they penalize the husband only if adultery takes place at the conjugal home. In other words, a husband that has sexual intercourse with a woman other than his wife in any place other than the conjugal home is not legally considered an adulterer, whereas the same woman with whom the man had sexual intercourse, both partners in the same action, is considered an adulterer. The unjust discrimination is also evident in the punishment imposed on the husband and wife. The wife is sentenced to prison for three months up to two years, whereas the man is sentenced to one month up to one year imprisonment (articles 487/section one, and 488/section one of the Penal code).

The article related to “honour crimes”, i.e. article 562 of the Lebanese Penal Code, includes discriminatory stipulations between men and women: the man may benefit by this article if he surprises his wife or any of his ascendants, offspring, sister in flagrant crime of adultery, or in the situation of illegal intercourse, and shall kill either of them inadvertently. Most often, perpetrators of these crimes are male members of the victim’s family, and they are often penalized with mitigated sentences or could even be exonerated by the courts with the excuse of defending the honour of the family which is considered a extenuating circumstance.

Based on these facts, it is possible to say that these laws incubate violence, especially since all matters related to families, i.e. marriage, divorce, custody and inheritance, fall under the jurisdiction of the confession to which every citizen belongs. Because of the particularities relating to personal status in every confession, early marriages in Lebanon still legally

exist in contradiction to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), particularly since Lebanon made reservations on article 16 of the Convention. The laws of some Lebanese confessions allow girls to marry at the age of 9, in the case of the Shiite Jaafari sect, or between the ages of 12 and 14 years within the Catholic and Orthodox confessions (Armenian and Syriac) and the Anglican sect. The negative complications related to early marriage are common knowledge: the girl is ignorant of the functions and effects of marriage, the coercion and prohibitions imposed on the girl by her parents, forcing her to accept the partner chosen for her. In addition to the violence implicit in the conditions of marriage, there is also the violence inherent within divorce conditions. Divorce, invalidation, or annulment of marriage presents different conditions for men and women in the different confessions. In most confessions the common components remain in favour of the man while restricted for women. The same applies to the custody of children; custodianship over children is transferred to the father at a very early age: maximum seven years for boys and nine years for girls of the Orthodox, Sunni Hanafi Sect and Druze confessions, and two years for boys, seven years for girls following the Shiite confession Jaafari sect. Within the Catholic confession, the age is not determined because catholic courts take the interest of the child into account.

### **The prevailing attitude**

Lebanon is an Arab country representative of the duality of cultural and social values upheld by its citizens. This duality mirrors the Lebanese cultural structure, characterized by an internal schism due to the particularity of its historical openness to the West, at a time when this structure failed because of multiple historical and social conditions, namely the economic subordination to what is called the imperialist countries of the West. Therefore, the basic characteristics of individuals in Lebanon can be described as dual, dissimilar, to themselves and others, presenting an irregular moral plurality. Modernism in the West is a historical process of accumulation through the construction of formalized laws within the State. Conversely, our Arab societies, which reproduce the western model of modernism, remain subjugated to the values of patriarchal domination, specifically with the encumbered process of state modernization, and what it implies in means of complete and total transfer to the system of citizenship and law. The failure to dismantle the patriarchal system in Lebanon represents one of the many aspects of the fiasco in emancipating the society from the patriarchal system, whose negative effects touch the weaker categories of the society, generally women.

Modernization, as a historical process, is based on three essential characteristics summarized by Hisham Sharabi: rationalism, scientific knowledge, and systematic methodology. "Traditionalism" presents

opposite values: irrationality, current customs, and inherited beliefs. In order to establish the pillars of modernism (Sharabi 2002: 36), traditions need to undergo serious dislodging. But “dislodging” traditions incurs a number of social, cultural, economical, and political difficulties or obstructions, which translate into a deformed modernism in Lebanon and other third-world countries, where aspects of modernism imported from the West coexist with elements of customs. Hence, dual cultural values and moral standards prevail in the Lebanese society in guiding the community and individuals.

The report, *Al-Sharaf fi Lubnan: Maḥbūmah wa Dalalatoh* (“Honour in Lebanon: Understanding and Indicators”) was based on focused discussion-sessions with a number of mothers and fathers (Sidawi 2005).<sup>8</sup> It showed that the concept of honour, as perceived by the parents in the different Lebanese Muhafazas (regions), is a modernistic view that transcends discrimination between girls and boys but in its depth, only proves the scattered aspect of these views because of their load in traditional customs that limit honour to the girl’s sexual behaviour.

Although the sample illustrated that 78 per cent of women were either conservative liberals or radical,<sup>9</sup> they still showed a duality in their attitudes, especially since the majority strongly believed in their role as spokesperson and trusted guardian of honour, in addition to their responsibility to uphold and protect the name of the family by preserving themselves.

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<sup>8</sup> They included 30 couples from different confessions and regions in Lebanon from the age groups 30-35 years to 61 years old and above, with children from both sexes, ages between 8 and 16 years old.

<sup>9</sup> For the purpose of the research, the trends and positions of the sample members were categorized in three directions: the conservative direction that does not recognize the total equality between boys and girls, openly and explicitly adopting the concept of men’s guardianship over women; they also adopt violent solutions, such as the killing of the girl if she was deflowered. The Liberal Conservative direction, where modern lifestyles and new roles for girls are accepted, such as pursuing higher education and business, areas that until recently, were limited to men, freedom to leave the house, as well as respecting the rights of individuals, male or female, as a pillar of equality between the sexes within the family and in public life. Nonetheless, they are not totally liberated from traditional patterns in the division of work between men and women in the community and within the family, and subsequent stereotyped roles for both sexes. The liberal position of some sample members included two directions: one direction identified certain values that girls should not adopt, such as “excessive” freedom, i.e., from the parents’ point of view: going out at night or returning home late unless for work related reasons, loss of virginity, etc.; the second direction stressed on certain values and stressed on the stereotype role of men and women, for the latter are housewives in the first place, responsible for the upbringing of children and their behaviors, but maintained their allegations of complete equality between the sexes. The radical direction, on the other hand, includes those who expressed total acceptance of the same values for male and female, unconditional equality between the sexes, the insignificant importance of the girl’s virginity, and the non-limitation of the family’s honor to the woman’s sexual behavior.



Expressions such as “I will raise my daughter like I was raised” and “If my daughter makes a mistake, I will blame myself” were repeated by women, showing their fear that a girl may lose her honour and reemphasizing the role of guardianship that the man plays rendering him responsible for eradicating any dishonour, represented by the body of the girl or woman. Therefore it did not come as a surprise that some women were inclined to leave the final decision regarding the daughters “dishonour”, to their husbands. Some women said, “I will try to stop my husband from killing [her]. But if I fail, then I will leave the matter to him” or “... if he refuses, then all is in the hands of the Almighty” and “I leave the matter to my husband”.

The social fabric of Lebanon is undoubtedly very diverse, affecting the family system and its variations, as well as its traditional system, especially with the major technological advancements and the influence of western globalization on cultural dimensions. Changes affecting the family also touch on the traditional ways of upbringing-children, especially with relation to the stereotyped roles of men and women, sons and daughters. This globalization however, has not planted the foundations of modern culture that consider gender roles as a social outcome. On the contrary, the traditional culture remains dominant linking gender to biological functions. This function is transformed into the cultural pillar of education and upbringing, based on gender differentiation, regardless of all the changing aspects of a family on the one hand, and the changing methods of upbringing the children on the other. Therefore, Lebanon is host to two contradictory phenomena's: honour crimes and cohabitation, though both are limited and not widely spread.

### Honour violence

In Lebanon there are still crimes being committed, generally by men, in the name of honour: “honour-crimes”. In Lebanon between 1958 and 1967 the court ruled 125 honour-crimes,<sup>10</sup> an average of 12.5 honour crimes per year, and between 1995 and 1998 Lebanese courts ruled on 36 cases (Moughayzel & Abdel Sattar 1999) an average of 12 crimes per year. Simultaneously, in Jordan an average of 20 women are killed yearly in honour-related crimes, considered to be the highest in the world in comparison to Jordan's population of five million.<sup>11</sup>

It is worth noting that although there is statistical data regarding this phenomenon, it does not often represent the full-scope of the problem.

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<sup>10</sup> Legal study by Mona Zuhail Yacub, included in the book *Ces Morts qui nous tuent* (“These Deaths that Kill Us”), Younes Massoud, Al Massar edition, Beirut, 1999, pp. 188, 190.

<sup>11</sup> *As-Safir* Newspaper, Beirut, 14 February 2001

There are some crimes that are not labelled as honour-crimes but rather as natural-unintentional-accidents, such as falling off a balcony, car accidents, suicides, and other accidents with concealed criminal aspects. There are also crimes that are not reported because the victim survives.

Persisting honour crimes is a result of tribal values that render the woman the symbol of the man's honour. Hence, a man is forced to defend his honour by protecting her, controlling her, and jealously keeping her in a continuum of the patriarchal authority in the family. Honour is a tribal value related to family groups, social reputation among people, such as revenge, hospitality, generosity and other attributes. Women are tools that do not exist outside the frame of the tribe; the entire value of the woman is limited to her hymen. Her virginity is the honour of men. Therefore, honour crime is "the retrieval and prohibition of a woman who tried to belong to herself, or who was seduced; it is an act to constitute a tool owned by the tribe, whose property is transferred to the husband in exchange of an advantage, an amount of money or effects by a father, a brother, or an uncle" (Hijazi 1998: 10).

These tribal values continue to prevail within the Lebanese society, although the extended family is less common. On the contrary, these values prevail within the nuclear family. An example is the values of marriage, which remain a means for social equality among families. The girl is thus transformed into a main tool for alliances and preservation of the family's privileges. She will feel, more than the man, the impact of breaking up with family traditions, since this breaking up indicates an ambition to achieve a personal value which contradicts family traditions that toil to own the individual and confiscate their freedom, namely girls. A girl continues to represent the honour and dignity of the man, her discipline remains his charge, be it a father, a brother, or later, a husband. Her behaviour can jeopardize the honour of the entire family.

From a total of 36 honour crimes ruled in court between 1995 to 1998, 22 were committed by brothers against their sisters, 7 by husbands against their wives, 6 honour-crimes were executed by fathers, and one by a woman's son. Consequently figures show that most honour crimes are committed by men against women. The study that provided these figures demonstrated that "there were no murderers from among the relatives or the cousins, as was the case some 30 years ago" (Moughayzel & Abdel Sattar 1999: 41). This illustrates the changes that touched some elements of the honour crimes phenomenon, such as the reduction of murderers from outside the nuclear family; a sign that family tribalism predominated by the larger family is now fading. Nonetheless, these notable changes do not alter the sociological dimensions of honour crimes, or the essence of this phenomenon in relation to the patriarchal system and tribal values that

tie honour to the sexual behaviour of women, especially since these values still persist in countries from the MENA region.

This reality is corroborated by the legal files, from the courts of cassation in the different Lebanese Muhafazas (regions), on the killings of women made available to the Lebanese Council to Resist Violence against Women. Crimes were committed between 1998 and 2002 against 27 women victims. Reviewing these files showed that 78 per cent of motives cited by perpetrators were “reclamation of dignity” or “bad behaviour of the victim”, while 22 per cent cited other motives, namely family problems that forced a woman to desert her home or file for divorce.

The motive given by the perpetrator, “reclamation of dignity” or “bad behavior of the victim” meant in the different cases the defloration of the girl, pregnancy due to adultery, or marriage without the consent or knowledge of her parents. In the cases of married women, the perpetrator confessed doubts that the woman had committed treason even if there was no concrete evidence to support their case and suspicions. It is worth noting that in the cases of married women, the brother was the one to punish his sister by killing her, either with or without the knowledge and instigation of the husband.

In regards to the 22 per cent of crimes that perpetrators did not cite the abovementioned motives, generally the reason was the husband doubting his wife’s behavior. However, information taken from the official files quoted witnesses claiming the families of the husbands, that killed their wives, were facing numerous problems. The latter included, but were not limited to: the wife had to leave the conjugal house, reject the violence exercised by the husband against her, and file for divorce. These facts were used by husbands to justify their crime in “doubting their wife’s behaviour”.

These 27 crimes show that minors (under 18 years old) were killed at the rate of 18 per cent but the bulk of the killings (42 per cent) were committed by youth between the ages of 20 to 24, while 40 per cent of victims were above the age of 24. These elements combined only reflect the difficult and suppressive conditions under which girls live throughout the different phases of their lives. Of the victims recorded, 22 women (81 per cent) were married or have been married; 38 per cent married before turning 16 years old.

### **Early Marriage**

The percentage of married women and previously-married women between the ages 10 and 19 was much higher than among men: 2.6 per

cent women compared to 0.2 per cent among men. Between the age group 15 to 19 years old the percentage of married woman is 5.3 per cent compared to 0.4 per cent for men.<sup>12</sup> These numbers prove the existence of early marriages in Lebanon and also indicate that girls marry earlier than boys. This reflects the customs, traditions and belief that marriage shelters girls, protecting them from drifting into extra-marital sexual relations. It also reemphasizes the conviction in the traditional role entrusted to woman: namely, the limited biological-role of childbearing. The different studies on early marriages demonstrate that this is an issue found in a number of Arab countries and there are consequences on the woman that include increased levels of illiteracy among them, increased mortality rates of mothers, increased fertility rates, and other problems that hinder the advancement and development of a society.<sup>13</sup> The psychological and health effects of early marriages on girls, justify describing it as a form of sexual abuse against girls and teenagers.

### Sexual abuse

Rape and sexual harassment against girls and women in Lebanon fall under gender-based societal violence. Because this topic is one of the undeclared taboos it is difficult to find statistics on these two types of violence in Lebanon. Nevertheless, sources from the Directorate General of Interior Security Forces illustrated that girls and women are subjected to sexual violence in far greater percentages than the different forms of violence perpetrated against men. The Directorate categorizes crimes, committed in the Lebanese society under the following categories: rape, sexual harassment, injury and incapacitation, confinement, confinement or

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<sup>12</sup> The 2.6 per cent of females represents the total number of married women between 10 and 19, out of the total female age bracket [10-19] (= the column "married" divided by the column "total" for "total females"). Same applies to the males figure of 0.2 per cent. As for the age group [15-19], the same reasoning is used to show that the share of married females between 15 and 19 out of the total females in this age group ([15-19]) is 5.3 per cent. The male figure of 0.4 per cent means that males aged [10-19] are married. The age group [10-19] has a percentage less than that of the [15-19] marriages due to the fact that the base (total populations figure) is not the same; the result is a weighted average of the 2 sub-age groups ([10-14] and [15-19]), as the first sub-age group has a lower percentage, it causes the total female percentage to drop. Thus, the [15-19] age group marriage percentage is based on a base of 9,165 marriages and the [10-19] age groups marriage percentage is based on a base of 9,380 marriages.

<sup>13</sup> Review of *Athar Al Zawaj Al Mubakkir Al Injab wa Sibhat Al Tifel Al Awal fi ba'd Buldan Al Watan Al Arabi – Dirassa Mouqarana*, (“Impact of Early Marriage on delivery and health of the first born in some countries of the Arab World – Comparative Study”), Muhammed Najib Abdul Fattah Ahmed and Alya'a Awad Ali; and the study *Al Mubaddidat Al Thaqafiyah wal Ijtimaiyah Lil Zawaj Al Mubakkir wa Bid' Al Injab fi al Yaman* (“Cultural and Social Determinants of Early Marriage and the Start of Childbearing in Yemen”), Suleiman Faraj Ben Azoun et al., First Arab Conference for the Health of Family and Population, Arab League, Department of Social Affairs, Arab Project for the Health of the Family Unit, Cairo, 13-16 May 2006.

abduction, kidnapping, kidnapping by parents, battering and harm, defloration, murder, attempted murder. Crimes registered between 2002 and 2006 revealed that perpetrators and victims of non-domestic violence among adults are generally men. In the last five years 6,186 persons have been victims of these criminal acts; 924 (15 per cent) women compared to 5,258 (85 per cent) men and 4 cases of unspecified sex. Perpetrators of these crimes also tend to be mostly men, out of 9,227 criminals 95 per cent of non-domestic crime perpetrators are men, compared to 5 per cent women perpetrators. Generally, this corroborates the male aspect of violence in Lebanon. The same observations regarding non-domestic violence among adults applies to minors. The number of minors that are perpetrators of non-domestic crimes between 2002 and 2006 reached 806 minors: 26 (3 per cent) girls and 780 (97 per cent) boys. Minors committed acts of crime against 609 victims, 514 (84 per cent) male and 95 (16 per cent) female.

Furthermore, perpetrators and victims of domestic violence among adults are generally men. The number of victims registered between 2002 and 2006 was 1,501 victims, 734 (49 per cent) women, (51 per cent) 765 men, and 2 unspecified. Perpetrators of domestic violence among adults were 2,034 criminals, 1714 (84 per cent) men and 318 (16 per cent) women. In two cases, the sex of the perpetrator was not specified. The majority of juvenile perpetrators of domestic violence are also male. 111 minors were perpetrators of domestic-crimes of who 86 (77 per cent) were boys and 25 (23 per cent) girls. However, the number of female-minors that were victims of this violence exceeded that of males: out of 83 minors that were victims of domestic violence, 52 (63 per cent) were girls compared to 31 (37 per cent) boys.

**A case of incest**

Teenage girl aged 14

By Dr Rafif Rida Sidawi

Lebanese Council to Resist Violence Against Women (LECORVAW)

“I grew up in my uncle’s home in Syria. I didn’t grow up in the presence of my mother because she abandoned me and my brothers when I was eighteen months old...my father was in jail at that time. My uncle’s family didn’t treat me well...they were constantly hitting me, forcing me to do a lot of house work, and depriving me of many things such as clothes. As for my brothers, they were distributed, each one of them in a different house owned by my uncle. When I turned three I met my father who had just come out of jail. I lived with my father and brothers in my uncle’s house. I remember my father having a big fight with my older sister that led her to run away to Lebanon.

Through the family's intervention my father moved with us to Lebanon to stay in the North. At that time, I turned four years old.

One night...I was almost four years and a half then, my father entered the room where my sister and I used to sleep. He called me, and when I didn't answer he pulled me from beside my sister and put me on a mattress on the floor, and he slept in my place on the bed next to my sister who was sixteen at the time. In the morning, I asked my sister why my father slept next to her...then she told me that he was doing "bad things" to her. Our father used tough measures to make sure we did not reveal his secret...for example, he used to tell me that I didn't have identification papers so he could catch me and throw me into the sea next to our house. It was not long before my father's habit of molesting my sister passed on to me and I was still at this young age. The first time it happened I was playing when he called me and made me enter the bedroom...after that he took my brother. He asked me to take off my clothes. I thought he wanted me to take a shower...but he made me sit on the bed and he took off his trousers and then he began to do "bad" things to me. He didn't allow me to scream silencing me by covering my mouth with his hands...then I began to cry. I told my maternal aunt about what happened and I also told her that he threatened me with a knife. As for my sister, his molestations towards her did not stop either. He was constantly calling my older sister to sleep next to him...I would pretend to sleep but I was always crying. My sister and I were too scared of him. At the end, my sister got pregnant. She spent the period of her pregnancy in a monastery, and the new born was adopted by some family. Once, he violated my cousin and that made my maternal aunt lose her mind. So, she took legal action against him and he was put in jail. After being raped by my father, my cousin began revealing our secret in the neighbourhood in order to dishonour us because of what my father had done.

My difficult childhood led me to want to be alone most of the time...I adore sitting alone and looking at the sea. In many instances, I wished to be with my mom and dad. In many instances, I wished that I could meet my father in the first years of my childhood...I remember how happy I was when I met him. But my suppositions came to nothing. When I used to be alone, I couldn't stop thinking of what happened to me, and my sister's situation, and what is happening to us... many times I even wished I could kill him even if they were to sentence me

to the death penalty.

I'm still very angry, and I regret that I wasn't stronger than that. I am not thinking anymore about killing him but I am trying to forget what happened, and to think about my future. It is right that a human being is forbearing, but I won't be able to forgive him. I won't pardon him. I wish to see him only from afar."

These figures show that most perpetrators of violence among minors and adults, domestic and non-domestic are male. Additionally, the victims of these crimes are generally male, except in the case of minors that are victims of domestic violence where the percentage of female victims exceeded that of male victims. Data from the Interior Security Forces regarding victims (adults and minors) of domestic and non-domestic sexual violence, demonstrate that girls and women are mostly subjected to this kind of violence, as shown in the following tables:

**Table 1: Number of victims of non-domestic sexual violence according to sex and age (2002 - 2006)**

	<b>Rape</b>	<b>Sexual Harassment</b>	<b>Defloration</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Adult Female</b>	37	1	26	64
<b>Minor Female</b>	12	1	9	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>Adult Male</b>	17	-	-	17
<b>Minor Male</b>	10	-	-	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>27</b>

**Table 2: Number of victims of domestic sexual violence according to sex and age (2002 - 2006)**

	<b>Rape</b>	<b>Sexual Harassment</b>	<b>Defloration</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Adult Female</b>	38	-	16	54
<b>Minor Female</b>	10	1	13	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Adult Male</b>	10	-	0	10
<b>Minor Male</b>	3	-	-	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>13</b>

These figures underestimate the reality of sexual violence against girls and women, because this form of violence is often unreported due to its connection to social stigma and “dishonour”. However, this data does reflect the existence of this form of gender-based sexual violence, and hence the subjection of female teenagers to it more than male teenagers.

### **Methodology**

Focus groups were created to talk with girls between the ages of 12 to 17. The choice of sample groups was governed by a number of variables including: sex, confession, educational and professional levels of parents, rural and urban geographical areas. The girls were selected representing the two main religions in the Lebanese community, Islam and Christianity and coming from different social classes (determined by the educational and professional levels of their parents). Parents occupation were classified into seven categories: High-level commercial and services (specialized teaching at university or high school, management of banks and companies, major trades, etc.), Mid-level commercial and services (non-specialized and lower level teaching, secretary work, accounting, and similar); Small and marginal activities (housekeeping, cafes, concierge, ambulant vendors, etc.), Unskilled workers (workers at printing presses, digging, agricultural workers, etc.), Unemployed (or for mothers the term “Housewife”), Skilled workers (smiths, carpenters, hair dressers, plumbing, etc.), and Other (including retired or deceased parents).

The field survey covered 12 discussion groups from the different Muhafazas (regions) in Lebanon. Three groups were teenage boys asked about their opinion on sexual violence against teenage girls in Lebanon. The survey also included five individual meetings with girls and women who had suffered in their teenage years, of sexual violence (based on the three types of sexual violence identified in the survey). These constitute



solid foundations and support for the research which is qualitative rather than quantitative.

Discussions within the focus groups revolved around opinions and experiences relating to the following three categories: honour violence, early marriages and sexual abuse. Girls shared their opinions regarding the topic of sexual violence in addition to its impact on their personal lives. Their opinions mapped the totality of their perceptions regarding this phenomenon its limitations, causes and means of combating it. The same issues were addressed in the focus group discussions with male teenagers in order to be able to form a framework permitting to identify the differences and similarities in opinions between boys and girls. This qualitative indicator could be used to identify gender-based differences in upbringing teenagers.

Teenage girls and boys also discussed the concept of “honour”, girl’s honour and boy’s honour, in addition to extramarital sex. This was used as qualitative indicator in extracting the “unspoken” during focus groups, hence what teenage girls and boys store in their minds as stereotypes regarding the roles played by the two genders.

One of the difficulties that emerged during focus group discussions was selecting a sample according to the agreed variables, namely the social condition of teenage girls. Preliminary, the group was to include married teenage girls, however these cases were impossible to find especially due to the limited time allotted for field work. The second difficulty was the reluctance of teenage girls to get involved in certain aspects of the discussion. These aspects were faced with increased sensitivity, which culminated in four girls leaving the group (from Tripoli and North Lebanon), reducing the group to six girls.

It was difficult to find married girls between the ages of 12-18 to participate in the individual interviews, during the time allotted for field work. Instead two older women who had married at an early age were interviewed.

Concurrently, the thirty-three day Israeli aggression against Lebanon, that began on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July paralyzed field work. Even after the cessation of hostilities commuting between the regions turned out to be almost impossible because of the severe damages inflicted on the infrastructure (namely bridges and roads) that sustained heavy targeted Israeli bombing.

## **Characteristics of the research sample**

The sample consisted of 119 teenagers of both sexes between 12 and 18 years old. The sample was divided into twelve groups: 9 female groups and 3 male groups, representing the entire Lebanese territories.

Description of female groups:

- Eleven females from Beirut, predominantly Muslim with the exception of one Christian. Three belonging to the age group 12 - 13 years, two from the age group 14 -15 years, and 6 belonging to the age group 16 -18 years old. All of the girls unmarried.
- Six unmarried females from Beirut, all Christian. One girl belonging to the age group 12 -13 years old, one to the age group 14 -15 years old, and four to the age group 16 -18 years old.
- Seven unmarried Muslim females from the rural town of Sawfar in Mount Lebanon. Six of the girls aged 14 -15 years; one belonged to the age group 16 -18 years old.
- Eleven unmarried females from the urban area of Nabaa in Mount Lebanon, two of the girls Muslim and nine Christian. Four females between the ages 12 -13 years, 5 between 14 -15 years old, and two between the ages 16 -17 years.
- Six unmarried Muslim females from the northern city of Tripoli in Mount Lebanon. Four females belonged to the age group of 14 -15 years old, and 2 to the age group of 16 -17 years old.
- Eleven females from the urban city of Hawsh Al Umara in the Bekaa region. Four females belonged to the age group 14 -15 years old, and seven to the age group 16 -18 years old. Nine females were of Christian faith, two of Muslim faith; all were unmarried.
- Fifteen unmarried females from the rural town of Roumine in South Lebanon, all Muslim. Eight females belonged to the age group of 14 -15 years old and seven to the age group of 16 -18 years old.
- Fourteen females from the urban suburbs of Shiyyah in the Southern Suburbs of Beirut, all the girls Muslim and unmarried. Seven females belonged to the age group of 12 -13 years old and seven to the age group of 14 -15 years old.
- Non-Lebanese female group. Nine Muslim Palestinian girls from the Burj el Shemaly camp in South Lebanon. Eight females belonged to the age group 16-18 and one to the age group 14 -15 years old. Eight of the girls were engaged to be married.

Description of male groups:

- Twelve boys from the Muhafaza of Beirut. All Muslim, eleven boys between the ages 16 -18 years old and one boy 14 -15 years old.
- Ten Muslim boys from Beirut. Six boys belonged to the age group of 14 -15 years old, and four to the age group 16 -18 years old.

- Seven boys, all Muslims, from the urban area of Shiyyah in the Southern Suburbs of Beirut. Two belonged to the age group 14 -15 years old, and five to the age group 16 -18 years old.

The total number of female teenagers in the groups were 90, 72 per cent Muslims and 28 per cent Christians. 17 per cent of the girls belonged to the age group 12-13 years old, 42 per cent to the age group 14-15 years old, and 41 per cent to the age group 16-18 years old. Comparatively, the total number of male teenagers in the groups was 29, all Muslims. 31 per cent of the boys belonged to the age group 14-15 years old and 69 per cent to the age group 16-18 years old.

### **Educational and professional levels of parents**

The majority of female teenagers belonged to families whose parents (mother and father) had a low-level of education. From the 180 parents of the female teenage girls in the groups: 50 per cent had achieved primary education or below, 33 per cent of the parents attained mid-level and higher schools, and 17 per cent pursued a university education. Higher education registered its lowest levels within the groups of North Lebanon (predominantly Muslim), the southern suburb of Beirut, and among the group of South Lebanon which included Palestinian females, predominantly Muslim.

The occupation of fathers in the female groups was concentrated in mid-level commercial and services employment (27 per cent) skilled workers (26 per cent) and unskilled workers (16 per cent). The fathers with higher level activities were the groups from Beirut: 27 per cent of fathers predominantly Muslim in comparison to 16 per cent of fathers predominantly Christian. Whereas in the groups of fathers from the Bekaa (predominantly Christian) and the South (predominantly Muslim), they practiced mid-level activities. Unskilled employment of fathers was concentrated in the South Lebanon group of non-Lebanese females: Palestinians (55 per cent) and in the predominantly Muslim group of Mount Lebanon (28 per cent)

The percentage of working mothers in the female groups was 20 per cent (90 mothers). Mid-level commercial and services employment harvested the higher percentage of working mothers' activities (11 per cent). The higher percentage of working mothers was amongst the predominantly Christian Bekaa group, 54 per cent working mothers: 11 women. In the predominantly Christian group of Beirut and the predominantly Muslim group of the North there was a total of 34 per cent working mothers in each group, (6 mothers). The predominantly Muslim group of Beirut attracted the highest percentage of high-level activities, followed by the

predominantly Christian Bekaa group where 9 per cent of working mothers were engaged in high-level positions.

The total number of the male-teenager-groups parents was 58, and registered an elevated percentage of university graduates – 43 per cent, contrary to the sample of females where university graduate parents was less. It is worth noting that the percentage of university graduate parents was concentrated in the 2 groups of Beirut in comparison to the group from the southern suburb.

The percentage of working fathers in high-level positions was 51 per cent compared to 24 per cent of fathers working in mid-level employment. It is worth noting that the two Beirut groups attracted the highest percentage of fathers working at high-level activities compared to the Southern Suburb group. 58 per cent of fathers from the first male-group in Beirut had high level positions, compared to 80 per cent from the second Beirut group, and 0 per cent from the Southern Suburb of Beirut.

The percentage of working mothers in the male groups was 17 per cent (29 mothers) from the Beirut groups. None of the mothers in the Southern Suburbs groups were employed. 60 per cent of the working mothers were involved in mid-level commercial and services employment, whereas 40 per cent were employed in higher-level commercial and services activities,

### **Experiences and opinions on honour violence**

Field work showed that the culture of honour prevailing within the society restricts the life of teenage girls and boys. Moreover, this culture which discriminates against boys and girls incites more dissatisfaction amongst girls. From the sample, 24 per cent of boys showed they are dissatisfied with the culture compared to 58 per cent of displeased girls.

Discrimination between the two sexes and subsequent restrictions on the girl's freedom were among the leading reasons why teenage girls were dissatisfied with the prevailing honour-culture. The following are examples of their comments on the matter:

#### Beirut Group, predominantly Christian:

*“There is some repression. We are expected to be extremely careful in our behaviour, to the extent we are no longer ourselves. We are limited to specific behaviours.”*

*“People will talk about the girl, whether she respected the prevailing rules or not.”*

*“People translate our behaviour as they wish.”*

*“Sometimes, they even judge a girl by her attire.”*

Mount Lebanon Group, predominantly Muslim:

*“Values are necessary, but when misunderstood, they become wrong. When a boy is 16 years old, he can do whatever he pleases contrary to the girl.”*

*“A girl is not allowed to stay out later than 11:00 pm. A boy may party till dawn. This is wrong. Parents should know what [kind of children] they raised, and trust their children.”*

South Lebanon Group, Palestinians predominantly Muslim:

*“I wish I were a boy; being a girl makes me a prisoner in my house.”*

*“I would like to be able to get out of the house, this is the problem.”*

*“At home, they do not provide for our needs because we are girls. They yell at us, they don’t treat us like parents [should], they don’t allow us to go out. They force us to stay at home.”*

*“They do not allow us to work outside the house; whereas the boy may work anywhere he pleases.”*

North Lebanon Group:

*“We are not allowed to befriend boys, even a school mate. If I stand with my colleague outside school, my female friends would criticize me and slander me.”*

*“I was talking to my brother who just returned from abroad. People thought he was a stranger and reported me to my parents.”*

Some girls did not express any dissatisfaction regarding the honour culture they are living in, giving the following reasons:

Southern Suburb of Beirut Group, predominantly Muslim:

*“We respect the culture of honour because these are rules to which we should model our behaviour. It does not cause us any problem.”*

*“We are proud of our culture, especially if we look at the West and see the social problems resulting from their freestyle-living.”*

*“Our culture saves us the trouble that the West is facing.”*

*“Our freedom is limited, but that is better. Abroad, if a father beats his son, the latter can sue his father. This is too much.”*

Beirut Group, predominantly Muslim:

*“I need to make the other respect me and instil a positive image of myself in the other. I need to be decent, and preserve my dignity and that of my parents.”*

*“I keep away from every man whom I feel is trying to contact me”*

*“I choose good company and keep away from hazards. It is said that a girl can spoil another girl, and a boy can spoil another boy.”*

*“I abide by the laws of the society.”*

North Lebanon Group, predominantly Muslim:

*“We respect these values and we don't feel any pressure.”*

Bekaa Group, predominantly Christian:

*“The girl has the right to wear what she likes, but there are limits that she needs to respect. I am not bothered by the limits on the girl's dress code. Nothing in this culture bothers me.”*

A number of qualitative indicators showed an internalization of the honour culture in boys and girls, rendering the latter more submissive to restrictions imposed on them. The internalization raised two issues:

1. The deeper the internalization of the traditional concept of honour, the higher the submission to the status quo.
2. Satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the culture of honour does not translate necessarily in rebellion or rejection of it.

Opinions and positions of teenage girls and boys regarding the three forms of sexual violence reflected some of the restrictions imposed on teenage girls impacting their lives as a result of the honour culture. Comparatively, some quality indicators disclosed what the teenagers omitted to mention about their life experience.

### **Internalization of honour values**

A number of qualitative indicators deduced from field work indicated internalization within teenage girls regarding the traditional concept of honour, although 58 per cent were dissatisfied with it. Most of the girls in all groups defined honour as a person's dignity, politeness, morale, self

respect, respect of others, self-esteem, conscience, loyalty, and pride. Consequently, 92 per cent of the 90 girls identified honour as related to human values and morals. Only 8 per cent linked the concept of honour to sexual behaviour. This small percentage considered honour as virginity (sex), and it was focused mainly in the North Lebanon group that is predominantly Muslim (6 per cent) and Mount Lebanon group, predominantly Christian (2 per cent).

Conversely, honour in its general value and morale related concept soon gave way to honour linked to the girl's sexual behaviour. This became more obvious when they were asked whether they differentiated between the honour of girls and boys and expected behaviour from the different genders. The results were that 67 per cent of girls differentiated between the honour of a boy and a girl, 12 per cent considered them similar but commented that they were viewed differently in the eyes of the community, and 21 per cent did not differentiate between them. The last percentage was shared between the Bekaa group (12 per cent), Muslim Beirut group (7 per cent) and Christian Beirut group (2 Per cent).

The Bekaa group was the most steadfast in their position that the behaviours of girls and boys should be similar: both sexes need to be polite, to respect each other and to have high ethics. The majority of other groups acknowledged common moral standards between the two sexes, but specified stricter behavioural standards for girls related to their virginity, and did not break away from the stereotypes linking the honour of the girl to her virginity and placing the boy as the guardian of that honour.

	<b>Moral standards</b>	<b>Honour-related standards</b>
Opinions on girl's behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Should not be mellow or easy</li> <li>▪ Should respect herself</li> <li>▪ Should speak properly</li> <li>▪ Should dress, walk, and behave moderately</li> <li>▪ Should not raise her voice or answer back to those older than her</li> <li>▪ Should not go to the "wrong" places</li> <li>▪ Should be polite and respectful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Should not commit a mistake</li> <li>▪ Should preserve herself</li> <li>▪ Should not accompany a boy to his house</li> <li>▪ Should not allow a boy to get close to her</li> <li>▪ Should protect herself from wrong</li> <li>▪ Should preserve her honour.</li> <li>▪ Should not talk to a boy and should walk with her head down.</li> </ul>
Opinions on boy's behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Should not harass or tease girls</li> <li>▪ Should respect himself</li> <li>▪ Should not curse</li> <li>▪ Should not raise his voice against his father</li> <li>▪ Should avoid wrong places</li> <li>▪ Should be polite</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Should preserve the family's honour and that of his sisters.</li> <li>▪ Should not cross the line with girls.</li> <li>▪ Should not molest a girl, and should help the girl avoid molestation.</li> </ul>

The girls that rejected honour crimes pointed out that these crimes are an expression of "ignorance", are "harmful to society religiously and legally", are "malicious", and that "men have no right to kill", that matters cannot be solved through violence but dialogue. However, they subconsciously assumed that the acts of the girl were dishonourable. Consequently, in all groups, girls repeated expressions denoting their position, considering the behaviour of the girl as "wrong", blaming parents sometimes for this "wrongdoing", but stressing that this fact should not give the parents any right to kill the daughter that did "wrong". Girls said the following:



*“When a wrongdoing affecting honour occurs, there is a motive behind it.”*

*“The girl needs to choose her friends in order to avoid risks and mistakes.”*

*“My family taught me to respect myself. If they taught me not do something wrong I don’t do it.”*

*“If a girl commits a “mistake”, parents should be understanding and teach her how to behave.”*

*“Even if the girl commits a “mistake”, nothing justifies the crime.”*

*“A girl should not be “held accountable” before rumours about her are verified.”*

*“Parents are to blame. If there was trust between them and their daughter, the “mistake” could have been avoided.”*

Two girls stood out from the entire sample of females (90 girls), since they did not consider the girl’s behaviour as being “wrong”. One of the girls from Bekaa said that “the girl is not the only symbol of the family’s honour. Boys commit many dishonourable acts but are not blamed”. The other girl, also from the Bekaa group said that “society has evolved and parents have to adapt to this change.”

Remarkably it is the groups that had the highest percentage of girls voice their dissatisfaction about the honour culture that a shift in positions emerged. Indeed, the percentage of dissatisfaction and uneasiness with the culture of honour increased enormously to reach 100 per cent in the groups of Mount Lebanon (both predominantly Muslim and Christian).

100 per cent of the girls in the Southern Suburbs of Beirut group, predominantly Muslim, showed complete satisfaction with the honour culture. This was in contrast to the Palestinian group from South Lebanon, also predominantly Muslim, the two Mount Lebanon groups, predominantly Muslim and predominantly Christian, and the predominantly Christian groups from Beirut who all showed 100 per cent dissatisfaction with the honour culture. Some groups were more varied in their opinions: 80 per cent of the girls in the South Lebanon group expressed their satisfaction with the honour culture, while only 60 per cent of the girls in the predominantly Muslim Beirut group were happy with this culture. Less than a third (27 per cent) of girls in the predominantly Muslim group from North Lebanon were content with the honour culture, and only 7 per cent of the girls in the predominantly Christian group in Bekaa said this culture pleased them.

Girls that expressed a positive opinion regarding the honour culture defined honour as sexual behaviour. The following was stated by the girls in the groups:

Mount Lebanon group, predominantly Christian:

*“A girl without honour has no reason to live.”*

*“Honour is important for the girl to preserve her dignity.”*

*“Honour is necessary for the girl in order to face up to the man.”*

Palestinian group, predominantly Muslim:

*“Honour is the girl’s weapon.”*

*“Honour is good for the girl to preserve herself.”*

*“A girl needs to do honourable and correct things.”*

Mount Lebanon group, predominantly Muslim:

*“Honour protects the dignity of the girl.”*

*“Honour renders a girl’s reputation good in community.”*

*“Every girl should be proud of her honour.”*

*“If a girl is honourable, she can proudly face people.”*

This line of thinking was shared in the rest of the groups who said:

*“Honour is good because it allows a girl to preserve herself.”*

*“Without honour, a girl has no dignity.”*

*“A girl’s virginity is part of her honour. If she loses it, she is responsible for not preserving her honour.”*

*“If a girl loses her honour, she loses everything.”*

*“If a girl loses her honour, she could deviate from the right path.”*

Asked whether or not they would report if raped, 56 per cent of girls said that they would report it, whereas 17 per cent said they would not

denounce it and 27 per cent did not answer. The 56 per cent stating they would report such a case illustrates a positive trend that there are girls who believe denouncing a rape would stop the rapist. However the percentage of girls who would not denounce it if they were raped, and who were embarrassed to answer the question, demonstrates how deeply embedded the internalization of social concepts is within girls rendering them the exclusive preservers of honour. These beliefs generate fear, namely from parents. The latter was expressed in the North Lebanon group, predominantly Muslim, who unanimously announced that they would keep it from their parents, suffer beating, or even cope with their parents' belief that it was consensual than report being raped. Other girls in other groups justified covering up being raped due to fear they would ruin their parents reputation.

The following expressions illustrate that in many cases the girl is blamed for cases of sexual harassment:

*"If a girl does not handle her honour properly, she sends messages to the boy that she is open to harassment."*

*"Boys hear that there are bad girls, so they try harassing them, maybe the girls accept it."*

*"A girl who is sexually harassed is not tough enough."*

*"There are bad boys without good morals and girls who display behaviours that encourage boys to sexually harass them."*

*"If a girl accepts to be chatted up, hassled, it could lead to sexual harassment. In this case, the girl should show that she is not open to this behaviour and does not offer any chances."*

One girl from the sample refused to blame girls saying:

*"A girl could be veiled, and still be harassed. It is the parents who raise boys and make them believe that they can do anything they like, and hence the feeling that they can harass girls."*

The trend of blaming the girl emerged among the group of Palestinians, who suggested that a girl must be "decent" if she means to combat sexual violence, as one stated:

*"A girl should not wear eye-catching clothes, and should walk and move appropriately."*

This trend of blaming the girl was mostly found in the reasons offered by the Palestinian girls and their position on this subject when asked if their sister had been raped and lost her virginity. Responses included:

*"I will be ashamed to walk among people...I would stay home and avoid talking to others because they will make fun of me."*

*"They will speak badly of me, my raped sister and my other sisters."*

*"My reputation will be tainted too...if a girl is raped the honour of the entire family is tainted."*

*"No one will knock at our door and marry either one."*

Teenage boys showed dualism in their positions regarding honour, which reflected their indoctrinated honour values. Some boys showed supportive positions for girls as 83 per cent expressed that girls should be able to lead their lives like they do and rejected forced early marriages, sexual harassment, and the violence of honour crimes. 52 per cent of boys showed greater understanding if their sister was raped. The positions of teenagers on this hypothetical question varied between empathy, violence and the traditional position, also riddled with moral violence. 52 per cent of teenagers were empathetic, voicing their support for the victim, helping her through the trauma of rape, and prosecuting the rapist. 14 per cent of teenagers held a traditional view on this issue, wanting to avoid gossip amongst the community, thus attempting to cover up the situation through arranging a marriage between the rapist and the girl. 3 per cent held rather violent positions such as wanting to kill the rapist. 31 per cent chose not to respond to the question.

Different indicators consolidated this finding regarding dualism in the standards of boys: 62 per cent of the male sample group differentiated between the honour of girls and boys. Positions regarding the loss of virginity changed if the girl had given her consent, or if it was the result of rape. Empathy which prevailed in all three groups of boys in relation to the hypothesis of their sister being raped and losing her virginity was soon changed when they assumed their sister had consensual sex and lost her virginity. The position varied from understanding (in the sense he does not interfere in the affairs of his sister or her private life), the traditional stance (this is wrong and should be corrected), and the violent position (abuse the sister mentally, physically, or even kill her). In the first Beirut group 8 per cent of the boys showed understanding of their assumed sisters' choice, while 33 per cent held a more traditional stance and 59 per cent took a violent position on the situation. In the second group from Beirut, 10 per cent displayed understanding while 40 per cent held the traditional position and 50 per cent said they would react violently. In the group from

the Southern suburbs of Beirut 72 per cent did not answer the question and 28 per cent stated they would react violently.

### **Opinions and positions regarding the three forms of sexual violence**

Opinions and positions of female teenagers, vis-à-vis honour crimes, early marriage and sexual harassment are reflective of their experience. One girl recalled an attempt at sexual harassment against her. The majority of girls expressed their frustration with the comments and pestering by males, while being quite aware of the differences between chatting up, sexual harassment and rape. Focus group discussions showed that sexual violence against girls, in the forms of harassment and rape, are quite common in society. Teenage girls from all the groups concurred that they were aware of cases of sexual harassment in real life, and through media (newspapers, television and namely journals, foreign movies, and talk shows.). Female teenagers in the groups of the Bekaa, South Lebanon (Lebanese) and the Southern suburbs of Shiyyah all agreed that such cases are alien to their environment, but are rather frequent in the larger cities like Beirut. Lebanese girls from the South claimed the men of the village “preserve and protect the girls of the village”. The predominantly Christian group from Mount Lebanon explained they were aware of sexual harassment cases, as one girl stated, “at school and in social establishments, we hear these stories...my girl friend had a similar experience”.

The children gave various reasons for harassment. They believed it was because the guy is mentally sick, that girls encouraged harassment, frustration that boys experience, macho values, TV, internet, movies, and reasons that include vengeance against the girl to ruin her reputation, hereditary conditions inherited from the father, boys trying to mimic what they see.

Male groups seemed more informed about sexual harassment cases through the media. The group from the Southern suburbs of Beirut mentioned that sexual harassment occurs quite often in their community. Many blamed this phenomenon mainly on repression and deprivation while also on psychological psychosis or mental sickness.

All girls in the different groups seemed informed about crimes committed in the name of honour, but did not consider themselves threatened or concerned by them. This could be explained by the fact that these crimes are not as widespread as sexual harassment in Lebanon. The two groups from Beirut read about honour crimes in the newspapers and magazines, and heard about it through stories told. They considered them crimes committed in “closed villages” but not in their community. The remaining groups gave numerous examples of violence against girls, spanning from

psychological violence to physical violence, which could start with battering and end up with murder. A girl going out with a boy could result in her father or brother beating her; she could be secluded in the house and denied education. If a girl returned home late, she could be abused. A wife cheating on her husband could lead the husband to kill her. If a guy flirts with a girl, it could result in a fight between him and the male members of her family.

Palestinian girls seemed unaware of crimes committed in the name of honour. They pointed out that their community greatly mistrusts girls, which results in abusing her but not killing her. Examples of such abuses included “husbands suspecting in their wives”, the girls considered suspicion a form of abuse, in addition to beating. Girls in all groups, regardless of their age, religion, region and educational level of their parents, all condemned honour crimes. However, they did not confess to being themselves subjected to “honour-related” bodily violence.

83 per cent of the boys in the male groups rejected honour crimes. Supporters of these crimes were concentrated in the first Beirut group (33 per cent of the 12 males in this group); in the Southern suburbs of Beirut group (14 per cent of the 7 males in this group). Support, however was limited to the situation of conjugal infidelity.

Girls in the different groups seemed familiar with cases of early marriage. Nonetheless, they noted that these kinds of marriages have decreased consequently to developments in the situation of the girl, and complexity of life. They also noted that forced marriage has declined since girls are now more capable of expressing themselves than before. Girls considered the reasons behind early marriage to be the ignorance of parents and the girl, as well as the mentality which views marriage as a form of protection for the girl and her reputation. Other reasons include parents marrying their daughters for money, or because of relations. Girls invoked cases of blind love that push young girls to marry sometimes without the consent of their parents. The groups most aware of early marriages were the Palestinian group, the group from the North and the two groups of Mount Lebanon. However, 93 per cent of the sampled girls opposed early marriage, and refused to embark on that experience. The 7 per cent of girls supporting early marriage were from the two South Lebanon groups (Lebanese and Palestinians).

The following opinions were given by girls that opposed marriage:

*“Early marriage is a liability on the girl.”*

*“It hinders understanding in the couple.”*

*“A girl should enjoy her life before a lifetime commitment.”*

*“Have pity, the girl is too young to take on the responsibility of a house and children.”*

*“This girl should have experiences with men to know which one to choose as a husband.”*

*“A young mother could raise her children wrongly.”*

*“At an early age, a girl does not know right from wrong.”*

*“A girl could be at risk or contract a disease.”*

*“A girl is tied up too early.”*

*“The girl could regret it later.”*

At the same time some girls from the predominantly Muslim groups of South Lebanon were supportive of early marriage and expressed the following arguments:

*“Many girls married at an early age and lived happily.”*

*“Long ago, they used to marry early. Today, they say that early marriage is shameful and disgraceful, why?”*

*“Early marriage allows a girl to go out with her fiancé or husband without falling victim to gossip.”*

Nonetheless, girls differentiated between forced marriage imposed by parents, and marriage consented by the girl. Therefore, 76 per cent of girls did not consider early marriage consented by the girl as a form of sexual violence, compared to 24 per cent of girls who considered early marriage as a form of sexual violence, regardless of circumstances. Comparatively, 31 per cent of boys considered early marriage as sexual violence if it was forced, whereas 69 per cent considered it sexual violence in all its forms. The following reasons were given:

*“The girl is not ready for pregnancy and sex, her body is not completely formed yet”*

*“Her husband will not understand her or respect her way of thinking, considering her too young and hence generating violence, in addition to the feeling of estrangement that the girl could experience.”*

This was confirmed in a life story told by a 40 year old divorced woman. At the age of 15, her father forced her to marry an older man. She recounts her story:

*“Since the moment I married, I kept telling myself that I will not stay with this man who is completely different from me, in character, environment and age...I felt humiliated because I was losing my dignity gradually. But I was keen on preserving this dignity, though I was so young. I was a very sensitive girl. When I used to complain to my mother, she begged me to be patient and to humour my husband or else we, my family and I, would become material for gossip. I had my two children by “mistake”. I did not know anything about sex, contraception and the sort. But talking to my neighbours opened my eyes, for they were all older and more experienced. Early marriage slewed my dreams. What I lived through in my married life is unbearable: the way my husband moved around in the house was like electricity burning through me. His words cut through my flesh like knives. At the age of 20, I suffered from nervous problems and became addicted to tranquilizers. These pills protected me from myself and from the idea of suicide which haunted me...death became something I longed for. I was most hurt by the feeling of time passing by, the feeling that my teenage years and my youth were being wasted. I cried whenever I saw a young couple in love, feeling sorry for myself the way I was living...a life void of love and tenderness. I even lost some of my senses. My husband killed me emotionally and sexually. I turned all my feelings to my children.”*

The distinction made by girls between forced early marriage and consensual early marriage reflects their understanding of violence based on the lack of respect the opinions of others, and on subjugation and dominations. This was evident in answers provided during the brainstorming sessions on violence. This 22 years old was married at the age of 15, against her parents will. She divorced a few months ago. Her life story shows that parents and the prevailing culture share the responsibility for sexual violence in the form of early marriage, even when the girl chooses this path consensually. She shares her story:

*“I married for different reasons...be it the dreadful financial situation of my parents, and my wild love for my husband. But the main reason is that I wasted myself [meaning she lost her virginity with her finger] when I was in the shower. I thought that a girl should settle for whoever accepts her, especially if she is no longer a virgin”.*

She blames her parents enormously, especially her mother who was harsh and merciless, she constantly hit her daughters. The mother was neurotic and forced her daughters to work in order to exploit them financially. This girl began working at the age of 10 as a cleaner, then at a sewing factory. She described her father as a “poor man” adding:

*“If my mother was a good mother, if she gave us all the necessary love, then none of this would have happened to me. It is said that a girl has only her husband...I say that the girl has only the house of her parents. This is the home that nurtures children. My parents were also separated, as is my situation now with my husband and children. Consequently, I did not receive the necessary tenderness and care.”*



The boys sampled did not have different opinions about early marriage than those shared by the girls. All three male groups rejected the idea of early marriage for the same reasons invoked by girls.

### Combating sexual violence

The girls in the female groups suggested the following to combat sexual violence:

- Raising awareness of parents, young boys and girls on the hazards of sexual violence
- Dialogue and understanding between parents and children.
- Organizations to raise awareness in the different regions.
- Schools to raise awareness and provide sexual education.
- Awareness through media.

The group from North Lebanon proposed enacting severe laws against sexual violence. Suggestions were mainly focused on the sensitizing role of schools, media, and social establishments to openly discuss the issue of violence. The main focus was to target parents, then teenagers of both sexes. For their part, males concentrated on awareness campaigns targeting the different social, regional, and age groups.

Girls from the different groups held positive attitudes opposing the three forms of sexual violence against teenage girls in the form of sexual harassment, honour crimes, and early marriages. Moreover, 80 per cent of these girls concurred that the culture of honour begets sexual harassment and violence against girls.

The position of males regarding these three forms of violence was not less positive, except regarding the subject of honour crimes which was supported by 17 per cent of males, but only in cases of conjugal infidelity. In comparison, girls rejected honour crimes under all situations. 66 per cent of males found the honour culture responsible for sexual harassment and violence, whereas this percentage rocketed remarkably among girls to reach 80 Per cent. However, an internalization of the culture of honour in boys and girls was possible to detect under the surface, limiting honour to girls and their behaviour, namely sexual, and subsequent self-imposed behavioural restrictions on the girls, and a conviction within boys that they are the guardians of the girl's honour. The percentage of boys believing that honour is good reached 77 per cent compared to 23 per cent who considered it both good and bad. Boys who totally supported the culture of honour justified themselves as follows:

*“Without honour, family trees would become ambiguous.”*

*“Honour is necessary in a community.”*

*“Honour is both good and bad. Disrespecting it leads to dishonour, clinging to it leads to isolation.”*

*“Honour is good but it is a liability at the same time.”*

### **Mrs S early marriage**

By Dr Rafif Rida Sidawi

Lebanese Council to Resist Violence Against Women (LECORVAW)

Mrs S is 22 years old. When I met her, she was taking care of her sister’s son, who is almost 2 years old. Mrs S got married at the age of 15. She has been divorced for three months now and has two kids: a 5 year old girl and a boy aged 3. She gave up her right to raise them in order to make her husband accept divorcing her.

Mrs. S shares her story: “I am 22 years old now I married at 15 because my father’s financial status was very bad, therefore I thought of getting married like every girl does, in order to be protected. We are three sisters...I fell in love with my husband who was 25 and insisted on marrying him, although my parents refused at the time. But finally they accepting, disavowing themselves from all responsibilities. They told me to take care of myself and my situation and explained to me that I have to assume the responsibility of my choice. So I got married for many reasons: My parents’ financial status and my big love to my husband. But the main reason is that I damaged myself with my hand [meaning she lost her virginity with her finger] when I was in the shower. I thought that a girl should settle for whoever accepts her, especially if she is no longer a virgin

Before my marriage, I stayed at my husband’s parents’ house for four months, because my decision concerning my marriage without my parents’ content was like running away in order to get married. Immediately after I got married, I became pregnant with my daughter. My husband was very violent towards me...he was hitting me too much. It didn’t start with the marriage but before it. I was very jealous, especially because he had amorous relations with many women outside of marriage. When I had my daughter I realized how much I loved him at a time he didn’t feel the same...he married me just because he wanted to have a family. Although he treated me badly, and despite being exposed to beatings by him, I kept on loving him. But suddenly, after four or five years of marriage, my love towards him turned to an aversion. I decided to divorce him, but unfortunately it was after I had two kids.”

she was a severe and unmerciful mother. She used to hit her daughters and was constantly nervous. She forced her daughters to work in order to take advantage of the financial income. Mrs. S began working at the age of ten. She worked as a cleaner and then in a tailoring factory. As for her father, she described him as a man with a weak personality adding:

“If my mother was a good mother, if she gave us all the necessary love, then none of this would have happened to me. It is said that a girl has only her husband...I say that the girl has only the house of her parents. This is the home that nurtures children. My parents were also separated, as is my situation now with my husband and children. Consequently, I did not receive the necessary tenderness and care.”

I now live at my sister’s house. She takes care of me and she is not avaricious at all. This care allowed me to realize the difference between my status now, compared to when I lived in my marital home where I was less than a showpiece, because a showpiece has value, while on the contrary, I was not given any consideration.”

When I asked her to evaluate her experience with of marriage, she answered: “I think that early marriage deprives a girl of her life...she enters a prison...while on the contrary, growing up lets the girl gain the necessary maturity and experience that makes her capable of taking sound decisions, and maybe that would make her more capable to sacrifice. I wish that I could move on in my marital life just for the sake of my kids. But I couldn’t handle living under those conditions any longer. I’ve lost that capability to support...maybe if I was older, I could somehow hold on despite the situation and try to satisfy my husband and understand him through other ways.”

Mrs S considers her experience has caused her great pain, especially on the psychical side. And everything has escalated because of the two children whom she didn’t want living in a broken family, and with a father who keeps inciting them against her. The presence of her children is what caused her all this psychical hurt. If she didn’t have them she would not be as anxious or regretful about her divorce. Also she would not care about what her husband says about her. Mrs S concluded by saying that this experience was too severe, and she could never imagine forgetting what had happened to her.

Mrs. S was not suffering from the honour culture in her home, it seems her mothers main concern was taking financial advantages from her daughters work. Mrs. S has been deprived of her right to an education, she did not go to school and she can barely read. But Mrs.

S has deduced the honour culture from the society because she clarified that when she lost her virginity, her basic worry became finding someone who would protect or accept marrying her. Her ex-husband accepted this especially since, as she explained, he belongs to a socially lower class similar to the social class she belongs to. The disadvantages of Mrs S's early marriage were manifested by the emotions she felt that blinded her, and the narrow opportunities she saw for herself which of course did not serve her well being.

### Reflections from fieldwork

Girls from the different groups have been socialized with the normative standards of honour. However, the level of acceptance of this internalization of values reveals relations to whether the girl accepts or rejects the status quo. The level of internalization increases in the groups where educational and occupational levels of parents decrease, in rural or urban poor regions. Teenage girls submit to the culture of honour and comply by its protocol in groups with low educational and occupational levels of parents, such as the predominantly Muslim groups of North Lebanon, the Southern Suburbs and Palestinian group, in addition to the predominantly Christian Mount Lebanon Group. All these girls come from poor, popular areas. The educational and professional levels of parents in these groups is low, none are university graduates with the exception of the Palestinian girls groups where university graduate parents account for approximately 5 per cent. Parents involved in marginal activities accounted for 50 per cent in the North Lebanon group, 27 per cent in the Mount Lebanon group, 22 per cent in the Palestinian group, and 14 per cent in the Southern suburb of Beirut group. Girls from these four groups believed that their parents and the culture of honour both aim to preserve and protect them, this can explain why although some girls were dissatisfied with the honour culture they considered it as a good element.

The girls in these four groups stressed on focusing awareness campaigns towards parents as a means to combat violence. They explained that the lack of openness, dialogue and understanding between parents and child often leads to physical violence. The female focus groups described it as follows:

#### Southern suburb of Beirut Group:

*“Sometimes, a girl is unable to defend herself; she informs her parents of what happened to her, but the latter beat her though she is the victim...because of values and shame, they beat her.”*

North Lebanon Group:

*"We are afraid of our parents...they beat us."*

Palestinian girls in South Lebanon Group:

*"Girls should not be beaten, if their behaviour is suspicious."*

Mount Lebanon Group:

*"If I tell my parents that I was sexually harassed, they punish me."*

*"If a father learns that his daughter went out with a boy, he beats her."*

Only 15 per cent of girls did not limit honour to the girl's sexual behaviour, compared to 6 per cent of the male sample. Some of the reasons given by the girls included:

*"Honour is good if it gains the respect of others and bad if it leads to disturbance and violence."*

*"The concept of honour should be defined in such a way it is accepted by all."*

*"Honour is a nice word, but it is bad in our community because it applies the law of the jungle."*

*"Honour is connected to people. A bad person has bad honour and a good person good honour."*

*"Honour is good but becomes bad when we misunderstand it."*

*"Honour is as good or bad as it is implemented. It all depends on the person."*

*"Honour is good if both girls and boys are able to preserve their dignity but it is bad if they misunderstand it."*

These girls were focused mainly in the predominantly Muslim groups of Beirut (54.5 per cent) and the predominantly Christian Bekaa group (45.5 per cent). The parents of both groups had higher levels of education also, mothers were primarily employed in higher level positions as opposed to the other groups.

Findings among the male groups revealed that submission to the honour culture is given more importance in poorer areas. Only 24 per cent of males expressed their dissatisfaction with the honour culture: the majority (21 per cent) belonged to the group of males from the southern suburbs of Beirut whose fathers had low educational and professional levels, compared to the two groups of Beirut. A dualism in positions emerged among the males from the southern suburb of Beirut group, which included the highest percentage of males dissatisfied with the culture of honour, but who still considered honour to be good. In their eyes, honour which limits their liberty is related to the restrictions imposed on girls in their environment “values imposed on girls bother us”. However, abiding by these rules encourages their preservation rather than bypassing them, notwithstanding the discomfort resulting from the pressure these values impose.

Some indicators that highlighted the pressure imposed on these boys became evident in the answers given to the hypothetical question regarding the manner in which they would deal with rape: would they announce it or not. Only 28 per cent of the boys said they would announce it compared to 52 per cent who would not and 20 per cent who refrained to answer. Zero per cent of boys from the southern suburbs of Beirut said they would announce their rape, while in the first Beirut group 50 per cent said they would not report rape as opposed to 25 per cent who would report it and 25 per cent that did not answer. 50 per cent of boys from the second Beirut group stated they would report rape compared to 20 per cent that would not and 30 per cent who did not answer the question. Some of the reasons for keeping the rape a secret, given by the boys from the Southern suburbs of Beirut group, were as follows:

*“It is a catastrophe, I will not tell.”*

*“If I announce it, I renounce my dignity.”*

*“I hide it to preserve my reputation.”*

*“I would not tell, because if I did when I walk on the street people will say: this is the guy who was raped.”*

*“I will not announce it because no one would have the courage to walk in public.”*

Boys and girls have internalised the culture of honour which consecrates the stereotyped roles and the lesser role of women, even though girls are dissatisfied with this culture that limits their freedom in comparison to boys. A teenage boy enjoys more independence in his daily life than a girl does. Conversely, criticism of the culture does not reflect the development or evolution of gender-awareness among teenagers in the different groups.

On the contrary, submission to the culture of honour prevailed, although at different levels among the rich and average classes on the one side, and the poor classes on the other; the variable of rural versus urban areas did not play a major role in the submission. The highest levels of submission were registered among the group of Palestinian girls, which is the poorest group with the lowest educational and professional levels of parents.

There is a deep internalization of the traditional concept of honour amongst the male and female teenagers, which drives female teenagers not only to submit to the standards of this culture but also to assume the responsibility of any behaviour that contradicts it. The position that personifies this attitude is most represented in the story of a 19-year old suffering from mental retardation, which resulted, as medically proven, from her difficult life conditions. Notwithstanding her condition, she was raped at the age of 16 by four guys who deflowered her and paid her 1,000 Lebanese Pounds as a reward (less than one US Dollar). The mother stitched the hymen, the main symbol of the honour culture in our community, but this girl still blamed herself for the rape, “I was most bothered with myself, how could I do this? How did I sell my body to these people?”

Another girl 14-years old was sexually harassed by her father since her childhood, as was her sister who was pregnant with an incestuous child, representing a second pattern of societal violence which puts the responsibility on the victim, even if just a child. Another teenager was saddened by the behaviour of her maternal aunt, who instead of taking them in, showed them open aversion, “she has long exposed us in the neighbourhood and sneered at us and our father”.

The story of this teenage girl reflects yet another pattern of societal violence which blames the victim. She had not reached the age of 18 when she became emotionally involved with a guy who ran a whorehouse without her knowledge. She says:

*“They took us in for investigation. I did not know that this guy who I loved was using his home for prostitution...I thought that he was just a bus driver and what hurt me the most was the way he lied during the investigation...saying I consensually had sex. I was sentenced for prostitution and led to a juvenile prison. I spent a month and a half there before they released me. No one from my family came to pick me up. My brothers did not acknowledge me. My mother did not come to visit me.”*

## Conclusions

Results of the field work show an increased awareness among teenage boys and girls of the risks resulting from the phenomenon of sexual violence in all three forms studied in this research. This became obvious in their

knowledge that sexual violence against girls is a violation of their child rights, and their knowledge of its negative effect on the life of the girl, her family and community. Male and female teenagers considered that crimes perpetrated in the name of honour are an expression of ignorance and backwardness. They opposed early marriage for girls, based on its negative impact, but also on the family as a whole (relation to the partner and children). Teenagers showed great consciousness of the need to fight sexual violence in the forms of harassment or rape and to denounce the rape as well as the rapist. All these positions are considered qualitative indicators of the increase in awareness most probably related to the widespread of media in a globalizing world, and subsequently important sharing of information. These positive trends however, failed to cover the lack of interest in the phenomenon of violence against girls in Lebanon. This shortcoming was most evident during the focus groups and the surprised reaction and embarrassment noted among teenagers who seemed unaccustomed to discuss similar issues in public, though varying in degree. Moreover, the position of teenage girls and boys was short of neutral regarding gender-based discrimination and its relation to the three forms under study of sexual violence. Shortcoming touches also the official position, despite the remarkable progress noted at the legislative level, and subsequent ratification by Lebanon of the CEDAW in 1996 and the CRC in 1991, as previously mentioned, due to the negligence in addressing the different legislative gaps.

Concurrently, a parliamentary Committee for Women and Child Affairs was established as well as a Higher Council for Childhood within the Ministry of Social Affairs, and an increase in the number of community organizations showing interest in addressing all forms of discrimination against women, and ensuing forms of violence against them and children. The expanding official and NGO efforts remain partial with regards to sexual violence against teenage girls since it is considered, in light of the prevailing attitude, as an invasion of the “private circle” and which occasionally refuses to recognize the existence of this violence.

Moreover, sexual violence, with the exception of violence in the form of early marriage, remains within the realm of taboos, and hence, it is difficult to assess its prevalence in Lebanon. Consequently, we resorted to the archives of the Internal Security vested with the authority to investigate all complaints related to sexual assaults against children and minors.

Achievements in the field of sexual violence against girls in Lebanon, in addition to achievements at the legislative level, are limited to preventive and protective measures divided amongst the pertinent ministries, Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education, as well as some non-governmental organizations and coalitions.



The role of the Ministry of Social Affairs is divided into three levels:<sup>14</sup>

- The Ministry's Centres for Development Services, distributed all over the Lebanese regions. These centres and their professional frameworks monitor cases that were subjected to sexual violence or who are at risk of sexual violence, through scheduled activities and programs, and then direct them to relevant NGOs.
- Contracts with a number of NGO experts in the protection of child sexual abuse victims, in exchange for providing day-care specialized services.
- The Ministry, through contracts, supervises indirectly internal care services provided by some NGOs to children victims of, or at risk of sexual abuse.

Decree no. 10227/97 regulated the new pre-university public education curricula. The health education curriculum addresses health education of children at the different pre-university levels. However, the sexual education chapter for the elementary levels did not address the children's means of self-protection vis-à-vis harmful behaviours or situations. It only mentioned some issues of sexual education within the scientific subjects and only at advanced levels of studies<sup>15</sup>.

The intervention of some NGOs operating in the field of sexual abuse are limited to preventive services (global and specialized), rehabilitation programs (professional, psychological and sociological), reintegration programs, care and hosting, awareness, protection and reform, in addition to legal assistance and reception of complaints. The services of these NGOs cover children of both sexes. Nonetheless, and even though these organizations receive all cases indiscriminately from the different regions, confessions, and nationalities, they are concentrated in specific geographical regions and hence fail to cover the entire Lebanese territory. Moreover, their numbers are insufficient to provide for the needs in the field of sexual abuse of children; some even lack the expertise in following up on abused children.<sup>16</sup>

Coalition organizations are more focused on awareness and on lobbying to protect the rights of children and eliminating all forms of discrimination against women. They aim to achieve complete equality between men and women, which in the long term would limit some forms of sexual violence against teenage girls, since this phenomenon is related to the prevailing gender stereotyping.

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<sup>14</sup> Refer to *Awda' Al Atfal fi Lubnan* ("Situation of Children in Lebanon"), the third national report 1998 – 2003, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Beirut 2004, Ministry of Social Affairs and Higher Council of Education, p. 195.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid p. 196

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 196

### **Sexually abused and abandoned**

By Dr Rafif Rida Sidawi

Lebanese Council to Resist Violence Against Women (LECORVAW)

“I am the youngest girl in my family which is made up of my mother and her three kids, one of whom died. They are my maternal stepbrothers, because my Syrian father was dead while my mother was pregnant with me. I was born and I didn’t meet my father, but I always felt my mother and brothers aversion towards me because my father was treating them badly and he filled my mother’s life with bitterness.

My problem began a short while ago, when I met a guy and fell in love with him. This guy became my refuge...I would leave the house for hours and even weeks to stay with him. I loved him from the bottom of my heart. He was a bus driver who worked in Beirut on the North line. At that time, my mother placed an investigation suit against me. One day he took me along with him saying he wanted me to meet a friend (girl) of his. When I entered his apartment, there were many guys and girls taking drugs and alcohol. He closed the bedroom door and he raped me. I felt a lot of pain and disappointment. That happened a few months ago...I wasn’t eighteen yet. In the morning, while I was with him in the bus going from the North to Beirut, an army checkpoint stopped us. I didn’t have identification papers so they took us in for investigation. I didn’t know that this guy who I loved was using his home for prostitution, intoxication and drugs. I thought that he was just a bus driver, and what hurt me the most was the way he lied during the investigation saying I came with him in full acceptance, and that I consensually had sex. I was sentenced for prostitution and led to a juvenile prison. I spent a month and a half there before they released me. No one from my family came to pick me up. My brothers did not acknowledge me. My mother did not come to visit me.

Everyone denied me...a month ago I turned 18...I still think of my ex-lover and cry. I think about how I trusted him and how he cheated on me. All my life, every time I love someone, he cheats on me. I feel that the entire world hates me. I wish that I can kill my ex-lover. I am now very nervous and very regretful. For example yesterday, when these memories began passing through my mind, I began to hit my head on the wall. I wanted to see my mother hoping that she would forgive me, because she used to warn me about men...she used to always tell me that once a man gets what he wants From a girl he abandons her. I didn’t give any importance to what she said, but now I realize how true this is. I definitely will not trust any man again... I wish that I can go out from the institution and go back home.”

## **Recommendations**

Developing a policy to combat sexual violence against teenage girls in Lebanon requires the involvement of all decision-makers, and all those who could influence the process: public institutions, NGOs, United Nations agencies, and foreign NGOs. However, taking into consideration the particularity of the phenomenon and the fence of silence surrounding it, this policy must include three trends: preventive trends that aim to put a stop to violence against girls; protective trends that aim to look after girls that have been abused; and remedial trends that aim to limit the phenomenon of sexual violence. In practice, all three trends interact and complement each other.

Ignorance about the reality of sexual violence and its risks are among the main obstacles to combating it. Hence the importance of working to include this phenomenon in the agenda of issues that society needs to tackle, and make it a focus topic in public discussions. This would render it easier to get the public and the main stakeholders involved. The following summarizes the most important steps that should be undertaken:

- Organize awareness raising campaigns to include the largest target group that aims to inform citizens of the nature and particularities of the problem and the risks involved for the girl and the community, now and in the future.
- Recur to audio-visual and written mass media means
- Organize conferences at schools, universities, NGOs and relevant administrations.
- Print and distribute promotional and instructive brochures and posters.
- Utilize international events dedicated to this phenomenon, and organize activities around them with the help of relevant parties.

Protecting abused girls requires the involvement and encouragement of specialized NGOs. It translates in increasing their numbers, and supporting their specialized frameworks (female social guides and psychotherapists).

The remedial trend is a long-term process. It interacts with the protective trend and the efforts needed to change stereotyped roles. It is required to plan counter-offensives against the prevailing trends of consecrating stereotyped roles and inferiority of women. This could be achieved through initiating monitoring bodies entrusted with amending the stereotypes on women in school books, to involve the National Committee for Women Affairs and the Educational Centre for Research and Development, Family Planning, the Lebanese Women Council, in addition to some experts and researchers. Also, monitor the image of

women portrayed in the media, by the Council of Media or women committees.

On the legislative level, there is a need to update laws related to the protection of women and children, and initiate legislations developed pursuant to the ratification of the CRC and CEDAW by Lebanon. The loopholes in the personal status laws which are ruled by the different Lebanese confessions and are pro-male, the presence of laws unjust for women in civil laws, namely the Penal Code, and some laws of Labour and Social Security still constitute sources that support the traditional culture that restricts girls and women and their capacity to exercise their roles to the fullest, compared to men, in the private and public life. This reality indicates an urgency to improve laws that are unjust to women and children, and which contradict international treaties. Legislations enacted for the benefit of children include:

- Decision no. 288 – 14/2/1994 related to medical ethics, and which instructs physicians to report to relevant authorities cases of incarceration, abuse or deprivation which befall a minor and which they might have encountered while performing their work.
- Law no. 414 dated 5/6/2002 which allows the Government to ratify the optional protocol of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, related to trafficking of children, child prostitution and child pornography.
- Law no. 422 dated 6/6/2002 related to the protection of juveniles in violation of penal laws and juveniles in danger. Youth are considered in danger under the following circumstances: if a juvenile is a victim of sexual assault or physical abuse beyond what is permissible by customs as harmless disciplinary means (Article 25). Law 422 instated the legal power of a juvenile to press charges, and permitted the judge to intervene in these situations (Article 26).

In conclusion we recommend that the following actions are taken:

- Give NGOs working on child rights the capacity to press charges when the rights of the child are violated.
- Eliminate Lebanon's reservations on the Convention to Eliminate all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- Increase the minimum age for marriage in Lebanon under all confessions to 18 years old.
- Issue a unified civil law for personal status
- Amend articles 487 / 488 / 489 / 522 of the Lebanese Penal Code.
- Ensure that national policy's to combat sexual violence against teenage girls are accompanied by an upgrade of the pro-male legislative framework, in order to attain equality between the two sexes.

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*Chapter Three*

**Political Instability and Nation-Building: Sexual Violence against Female Teenagers in the Occupied Palestinian Territories**

By Dr Ayesha Al-Rafai  
Women Studies Centre

**Introduction to the Palestinian context**

Palestine shares with its Arab counterparts a strong ideology of male superiority emphasizing dominance, physical strength and male honour. Concepts of male honour and entitlements are culturally accepted to the extent that sexual violence goes unpunished because the integrity of male honour hinges on female body and sexual behaviour. The rape of a female or even suspicion of illegal sexual or emotional relationships stains the honour of the husband and or family, including in cases where the perpetrator is a family member. In all cases the female victim will likely face punishment as a way to re-purify and restore the family's honour. Punishment may include her marriage to the perpetrator (rapist), and or varying degrees of violence against her, including her murder known as: honour killing.

Within this context honour killing is a rite of purification. Failing to bleed on the wedding night is a sign of impurity that can lead to honour killing to erase the shame of not bleeding to account for the girl or women's virginity. The tribal group in the Arab social system view failure to bleed as a stain that needs to be washed in blood. The notion of purity and impurity is closely linked to this ritual that is rooted in the tribal behaviour and institution. To sacrifice a woman stained by rape or adultery is to give back to the tribe (family) its purity, therefore its honour. To re-establish the purity order in the tribe patriarchal lineage, men reaffirm their control over women and their conformity to the doctrine of patriarchy.

These beliefs are mirrored in the Palestinian tradition and legend. In the shadow of a man, life deserves living and is liveable; this is one of many similar sayings in the rhetoric of patriarchy and social rite that Palestinian girls are taught to believe and internalize since their early childhood. Another harsher proverb that expresses the fear and worry girls' presence bring upon the family and, dictates the two only choices available to girls according to societal rules is: "either man or grave". This saying deprives a girl completely from all human rights both sexes are entitled to under all treaties. Another maxim that sets the rules for treating women according to the sex of the child they bear, inciting pride and nobility to those who bear boys and disgrace and humiliation to those who bear girls, is: "the

belly that bears boys feed it with lamb meat and the belly that bears girls beat with a stick and feed it old meat with no regret". Likewise, legitimisation of honour killing is well articulated in the Palestinian culture. One proverb says "if your sister dies your honour is preserved" another is "two compel death: land and honour". Honour of a man, as addressed here, is not assessed or measured by his own self, identity, individual achievement, or capabilities but rather in his ability to control and monitor the behaviour of women within the boundaries of his kinship.

Community tolerance of sexual violence is evident by the poor or total unresponsiveness of systems and services. Sexual violence that occurs in certain settings or forms is not recognized as "sexual violence" by law or religious interpretations such as in the case of marital sexual violence. Moreover, evidence provided by victims is often considered insufficient for a conviction. What is worse is that victims themselves do not come forward out of fear of being punished by the criminal justice system in addition to the social system.

Towards materialization, politics of gender discourse and social instruments impacted negatively the potential and space of manoeuvre on the topic of gender based violence narrowing it down to a minimum, particularly its sexual facet. Denial of its occurrence, insistence on the sacredness and secrecy of private spaces and family life, and the shame associated with revealing it have been phenomenal tools put in operation for engendering hegemony and perpetuating masculinity reinforcement and tribal dominance.

This study aims to map out gender based sexual violence against Palestinian teenage girls, looking into their perceptions and own experiences of sexual abuse, early marriage, and honour related crimes. Giving, primarily, teenage girls the chance to voice their opinions and also their male counterparts and parents when needed. Additionally, this study examines national efforts invested in combating sexual violence.

### **Sexual violence operationalised**

In some countries, up to one-third of adolescent girls report forced sexual initiation. Nearly one in four women may experience sexual violence by an intimate partner in her lifetime. The World Report on Violence and Health released by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2002 draws from the information, findings, and insight of over 160 experts from approximately 70 countries and from published literature on violence. The report offers the following definition of sexual violence: "Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in



any setting, including but not limited to home and work” (Jewkes, Sen, and Garcia-Moreno, 2002). UNICEF (2000) defines gender-based violence as “violence involving men and women, in which the female is usually the victim and which arises from unequal power relationships between men and women”.

An integrated approach to these definitions allows our operationalisation of gender based sexual violence to include honour violence, early marriage and child sexual abuse.

### Conceptualization: An ecological model for analysis

In order to prevent the occurrence of sexual based violence circumstances and factors influencing the reason it takes place must be understood. We chose to use an ecological model as part of the framework for our discussion because it allows us to include risk and protective factors from multiple domains in a rather integrative approach. Thus, if there is evidence from psychological models about individual risk factors and from feminist models about societal risk factors, it can all be incorporated in the same ecological model. Building such a model offers a framework for understanding the complex interplay of relationships, be it individual, social, political, cultural, and environmental factors that influence sexual violence. We use the four-level ecological model presented in the *World Report on Violence and Health* for this discussion (Dahlberg and Krug 2002). The levels of the ecological model are the following (Jewkes, Sen, Garcia-Moreno, 2002):

- Individual-level influences are biological and include personal history factors that increase the likelihood that an individual will become a victim or perpetrator of violence. Factors that may influence an individual’s behavioural choices that lead to perpetration of sexual violence include drug use, attitudes and beliefs supporting sexual violence, impulsive and other antisocial tendencies, preference for impersonal sex, hostility towards women, childhood history of sexual abuse, and witnessing family violence.
- Interpersonal relationship-level influences are factors that increase risk because of relationships with peers, intimate partners, and family members. A person’s closest social circle (peers, partner, and family members) can shape the individual’s behaviour and range of experience.
- Community-level influences are factors that increase risk based on community and social environments and include an individual’s experience and relationship with schools, workplaces, and neighbourhoods. For example, lack of sexual harassment policies in the workplace can send a message that sexual harassment is tolerated, and that there may be few or no consequences for those who harass others.

- Societal-level influences are larger, macro-level factors that influence sexual violence such as gender inequality, religious or cultural belief systems, societal norms, and economic or social policies that create or sustain gaps and tensions between groups of people. For example, rape is more common in cultures that promote male sexual entitlement and support an ideology of male superiority.

Social support for violence manifests in its high tolerance in the Palestinian society, as typified in the "obedience" expected from a child to his parents and from a woman to her husband. Thus justifying and legitimising use of various forms of violence as disciplinary measures in cases of non-compliance. Furthermore, hostility towards children is a common practice and corporal punishment is still a widely accepted practice in the public and private sphere alike. Therefore, public antagonism and blame of an honour crime victim of sexual violence falls in shape.

Societal attitudes towards the crime of rape is characterised by culture of silence, blaming the victim, secrecy, mother's guilt, and specific job relatedness (WCLAC 2005). Individually and together, these normative constituents, shaping societal attitudes toward the crime of rape, contribute to perpetuating the problem with serious implications for the national development agenda whereby women who make up half the population are consistently and systematically constrained by socially created hindrances. More and above, by silencing voices against perpetrators who in their vast majority are male supremacy as opposed to female inferiority is nourished, reinforcing the already poor status of women and hindering development objectives even more.

At another level, the political upheaval and economic hardship of the Palestinian life bear heavily on the psycho-social integrity of the individuals (children, and adults) who experience aggression themselves and or witness violence committed systematically and continually against their loved ones and or strangers. Alongside, there are the occupational policies of sieges and separation boosting violence even more. The tightening restrictions on the movement of men forced many women out of their domestic spaces to seek employment to sustain their families while their unemployed husbands stay at home. This sudden reversal of gender roles disrupts the family dynamics and overturns the stability of inter-family relationships. Men feeling insecure about their status in the family and frustrated by feeling helpless and powerless become violent to assert control over the family and regain power. This places both males and females in alarmingly charged situations and gives rise to all forms of violence within society including sexual violence of which women are the prime victims.

Gender based violence is sustained by the prevailing state of lawlessness and lack of people's confidence in the judicial system, executive system (police), physicians and health establishment, involved NGOs, alternative formal bodies particularly political parties, and religious establishment and its directives, which are being used rather ambivalently in this regard. So at the time when religion, for example, is being claimed to be the prime instrument for justice enforcement, selective implementation of its directives furthers women subjugation and gender-based sexual violence committed against them by freeing the male perpetrators off their dues as stated in that same religion. As a result, resorting to traditions and reference to tribal systems is gaining momentum as the alternative means for keeping social stability and order. This system is patriarchal, undemocratic and disempowering to women and therefore perpetuates their stagnation even more.

Sexual violence in the form of early marriage is particularly severe as it is shrouded by legal sanctions that permit children to marry at an age below 18 years. This is coupled with a culture that promotes sexual obedience of the woman, including the child involved in early marriage, to her husband as an integral part of her religious duty and marital obligations. The ecological model is in concordance with a comprehensive human rights approach with particular reference to child rights in our case that not only addresses an individual's risk factors, but also the norms, beliefs, social and economical systems that create the conditions for the occurrence of gender based sexual violence, particularly against teenage girls.

### **Honour violence**

Annually, a number of teenage girls and women are being killed under the claim of "honour". Police reports in Palestine for the years 2000 to 2005 document the killing of 46 females in honour crimes, 12 of which were killed in the year 2005 alone. Conversely, in 2005 women rights organisations reported the killing of 27 women: 17 in the West Bank and 10 in the Gaza Strip. In 2006 a total of 29 cases were reported: 19 in the West Bank and 11 in the Gaza Strip. Nevertheless for various reasons, police records had no documentation of honour crimes in the year 2006; neither did the Ministry for Women Affairs (*Al-Quds* Newspaper, 2006).

At another level Al Jareeri and Shadid (2006) compiled 12 cases of teenage girls and women killed in the name of honour, in addition to 5 killed in domestic violent crimes in the West Bank alone between February 2005 and August 2006. Means of killing ranged from poisoning, stabbing, shooting, and throwing from a high-place. The data presented in the table below is the outcome of personal efforts in daily screening of local newspapers for reporting on honour crimes, as well as direct contact with key informants in local communities. While the presented data cannot be

claimed complete, it can be considered reliable. As it pertains to honour killing the question of completeness is a grey area because of under or misreporting of the honour violence as was strongly argued by Shalhoub Kevorkian (2004) in her analysis of honour crimes, who took this a step further by questioning the police files and documentation process of women killings in general. She maintains that in many cases, the reasons of death as stated in police records are not the real ones, as they are vaguely and imprecisely stated in a way that makes identification of honour related crimes and segregating them from non-honour ones an impossible task. Speaking of data reliability, the fact that it has been collected by professional counsellors working in a key women organization in the West Bank, whose primary mission is combating gender-based and sexual violence, puts these professionals in an advantaged position of having access to first hand information and gives good reason for regarding them as credible sources.

**Table 1: Declared honour related crimes in the West Bank between February 2005 and September 2006**

No	District	Age	Perpetrator	Means of killing	Reason for killing
1	Hebron	28	Brothers	poisoning	Pregnant from <i>Orfi</i> marriage
2	Ramallah	23	Father	Beating on the head with a heavy metal bar	Christian fled with a Muslim to marry against the will of her family
3	Bethlehem	18	Father	Stabbing	Run away from home for 3 months for unknown reason
4	Tulkarem	21	Brother	Strangling	Rape & pregnancy by own father
5*	Jerusalem	28	Mother & brother	Poisoning	Suspected sexual relation with uncle
6*	Jerusalem	19	Mother & brother	Poisoning	Suspected sexual relation with uncle
7	Nablus	27	Husband	Pushed from height	Suspicion of extramarital

					relationship
8	Ramallah	32	Brothers	Poisoning	Pregnancy and suspected sexual relationship with landlord and others
9	Jenin	24	Father	Shot in the head	Presence of an emotional relationship
10	Jenin	22	Brother	Strangling	Unspecified
11	Nablus	10	Mother's cousin	Strangling	Sexual assault
12	Qalqiliya	18	Father	Unknown	Unspecified

Source: AlJareeri and Shadid (2006). Unpublished unofficial compilation based on media and personal communications.

\* The two girls from Jerusalem were sisters.

A few years earlier, Shalhoub Kevorkian (2001) conducted her research on honour crimes aiming to assist victims of honour related violence and raise service providers and policy makers awareness toward generating social responsibility for putting an end to pertinent crimes. The author categorizes this violence into four forms: the first wherein the woman believes she is constantly under the threat of being killed despite there being no act taken against her by anybody. In the second form the woman receives actual threats of killing expressed in verbal or nonverbal hints and clues. In the third, there is an unsuccessful attempt of killing the women. The fourth form however is where killing actually happens.

The study investigates the cases of 69 women who urged by their fear to be killed under the so called "honour" claim, sought help from the Women Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) in the period 1/7/1997 to 1/11/1999. The report embodies analysis of interviews conducted with heads of tribes, community leaders, in-charge police officers, judges, medical doctors, lawyers and significant others. In addition, it also examines and verifies relevant information as documented in official records at the police authorities, Ministry of Health, Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, and lawyers working on criminal law.

Out of the 69 females, 38 women were single, 5 engaged, 9 married, 9 divorced, and 8 abandoned. The ages varied with 1.6 per cent being under 3 years old, 37.9 per cent between 14 and 20 years, and the remaining aged 21 and older. This together with the victim's internal personal records

supports the conviction that a considerable majority were female children who came from families with bad or very bad socio-economic status (Shalhoub Kevorkian 2001). Women that sought help from WCLAC did so because of rape, miscarriage, sexual abuse by family member, pregnancy out side of marriage, loss of virginity, suspension of emotional relationship, presence of emotional relationship, and those who had run away from home. From her clinical experience Shalhoub Kevorkian argues that sexual abuse and rape were the cause for most of the cases of miscarriages, pregnancy out of wedlock, and loss of virginity loss. Around a third, 30.9 per cent, did receive actual threats of killing expressed in verbal or nonverbal hints and clues, while 11.8 per cent were subjected to failing attempts of killing such as being stabbed. Regretfully, however, three women did actually lose their lives because of this.

### Early marriage

In Palestine, the most recent national demographic and health survey (DHS) carried out in the year 2004 reported the median age of females first marriage as 18 years, akin to the median age reported in the 2000 survey. First cousin marriage<sup>17</sup> accounted for 27.4 per cent of all marriages in Palestine: 24.6 per cent from the West Bank and 32.2 per cent from the Gaza Strip in 2004, compared to 28.2 per cent, 26.4 per cent and 31.4 per cent in 2000, respectively. 4.8 per cent of Palestinian women were married for the first time at the age of 14 years or less, 9 per cent at the age of 15, 13.1 per cent at 16 years, 13.3 per cent at the age of 17 and 14.1 per cent at the age of 18. In total 54.3 per cent of Palestinian women experienced early marriages. The first national survey on youth completed by the Palestinian CBS in the year 2003 showed that 20.9 per cent of the total number of boys, compared to a total of 17 per cent of girls, dropped out of school. The main reason (46.5 per cent) girls dropped-out of school was due to early marriage (46.5 per cent), whereas the main reason that (32.9 per cent) boys left school was because of poor academic achievement records (PCBS, 2004). (PCBS, 2005 Demographic and Health Survey 2004, unpublished data)

In regards to the age-gap in marriage, 15.8 per cent of all marriages, registered in the Islamic courts countrywide in 1999 illustrate that Palestinian men typically married younger women with a 10 year, or more, age-difference. Correspondently in the same year, 19.5 per cent of these marriages ended up in divorce. These percentages are reportedly similar to those of the three former years: 1998, 1997, and 1996 (PCBS, 2001). In its third report the Social Monitor noted that more than half of the marriage contracts were authorised between individuals under 25 years of age and that more than a quarter of the divorced women (27 per cent) are 20 years of age or younger compared to 4.9 per cent of their male counterparts.

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<sup>17</sup> Please note that consanguinity applies to other blood related mating as well

Al-Rifai & Sayej (2006) in a pioneer qualitative study recently completed for the Ministry of Social Affairs addressed reproductive and sexual health education needs of vulnerable youth. Respondents both youth and professionals working in the targeted centres, provided an accurate definition of early marriage stating many of its disadvantages and impact on women's mental, social, and physical well being and its role in bringing marriage to a halt. Professionals described early marriage as "the biggest crime against the girl child" while a male youth described it as "humiliation to the girl and injustice to the boy." Elaborating on this later point brought up in the male focus group discussions, showed that boys in this group were able to see the tremendous pressure put on the girl right after her wedding day to get pregnant and the huge control and abuse she is usually subjected to by her husband and in-laws, as all forms of humiliation an older girl would not submit to. Nevertheless, youth groups were torn between their personal beliefs and knowledge concerning early marriage, and the societal pressure and partiality regarding it.

An earlier study in Gaza Strip conducted by Ghali for the Women's Affairs Centre, examined sharia marital court records of the five districts in Gaza for the months of June, July and August in 1994 and 1995. A total of 4,352 marital contracts were reviewed, almost 42 per cent involved a woman less than 18 years of age, while 9.4 per cent involved a man aged less than 19 years old. Discussing her findings, Ghali found that more than 40 per cent of women and 3 per cent of men registered in the sharia marital records, reviewed in the study, were under the legal marital age. An explanation she provides to this, is that discretionary authority is granted to the court judge under the law to conclude a marriage as young as 12 and 9 years for boys and girls, respectively, should he believe that the concerned boy or girl is 'mature enough' to be married or under 'very special conditions' whereby marriage will be a form of protection for the concerned (Ghali 1999). The minimum marital ages in West Bank are 16 years for Muslim males and 15 for females, and in Gaza 18 years for males and 17 for females. Among Greek Orthodox Christians in both regions, the minimal age for marriage is 14 years for males and 12 for females.

Despite the tremendous effort invested so far, primarily by civil society organisations in awareness raising towards social and legislative improvements in this matter, early marriage is still a widespread phenomenon in Palestine and amendments regarding the legal age for marriage are still strongly resisted by community leaders, legislators and policy makers more than other population segments.

### **Sexual abuse**

Tamish (1996) was the pioneer Palestinian researcher to address, discuss and investigate sexuality, sexual behaviour, and perceptions including

sexual assault issues directly, openly and publicly in her qualitative study that she undertook in the form of workshops. In the study report, she describes 54 workshops carried out throughout Palestine. Male and female participants were within the age range of 12 to 50 years. She found out that overall, participants were receptive to sexual issues and were aware of the significance of sexuality education at all levels. This corresponds with the results Nabris, Aweideh and Abdo came up with ten years later (2006) when they asked 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade school students about their willingness to participate in a sexuality education program. A majority of positive responses were received from students in both grades with a higher propensity among the older ones (58 per cent compared to 75 per cent) and significant differences on behalf of girls amongst the younger group wherein 41 per cent of the boys compared to 70 per cent of the girls were interested to participate. Interestingly, Tamish's study revealed more openness to participate in workshops and react receptively to sexual matters among Muslim religious women than among Christian or secular others.

Al-Rifai (2004) carried out a literature review of the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy: MIFTAH. The focus of the review was reproductive Health of Palestinian Women. The fifth chapter in the report examined gender-based sexual violence as incorporated in the relevant studies. Seven studies were identified and reviewed. Chronologically ordered, these start with El-Haj Yahya and colleagues (1995) who have completed a household survey investigating a total of 1,153 adolescent girls. Participants were asked about having experienced any kind of violence within the last year prior to the survey. Concerning gender-based sexual violence specifically 7.4 per cent of the study respondents reported being sexually harassed by a brother at least once compared to 5.2 per cent reporting that the extent of harassment came up to the level of an attempted rape. Alarming, 4.3 per cent reported being raped by their fathers. When asked whether they knew of other girls with similar experiences, 20.6 per cent said they knew girls who had been sexually harassed by their brothers while 13.2 per cent reported knowing girls raped by their fathers.

In the years 1998 and 1999 El-Haj Yahya conducted two national studies about intimate-partner violence. 2,410 married women participated in the first study (1998) while the equivalent to three fifth of the first sample (1,334 girls) participated in the second study (1999). Results from the two national surveys support the belief that sexual violence within marriage is condoned as it involves social and religious rights a woman owes her husband. High percentages of women in the two studies had forced intercourse more than once during the year prior to the study.



In 2000 El-Masri conducted the first qualitative study on sexual abuse (assault) in the form of life stories of 20 women victims from various forms of sexual violence inflicted upon them by various male family members. The prime emphasis of the study was to construct a deep understanding of the socio-cultural and economical context within which the assaulted women lived. The major findings cored around the role of patriarchal system, social, legal and judicial instruments put in service to propagate consistent demeaning of women. In 2001 the Women Affairs Centre investigated gender-based violence including gender-based sexual violence in the Gaza strip. A total of 670 married women were investigated. The study revealed that 62 per cent of the sampled women had experienced one or more forms of violence. Sexual assault in particular was experienced by 14.2 per cent of the women. Young age of the couple was associated with higher levels of all forms of gender-based violence including sexual, suggesting early marriage as a disposing factor in sexual assault within marriage.

The Al-Rifai & Sayej (2006) vulnerable youth study investigated the respondents' perception of sexual violence. Analogous informative responses came from professionals and youth when they were asked about the meaning of sexual violence. Youth were even more advanced in their understanding as participants in one of the male groups agreed that "forced marriage is a form of sexual violence". Another interesting response was that the majority of youth were convinced that sexual violence occurs primarily among males, which could be related to their life experiences in dorms, in social care centres, as well as their socio-economic backgrounds.

The latest macro-level update on sexual violence was reported in the National campaign against gender-based violence launched lately in Ramallah city, West Bank by the Forum of Civic Society Organisations working on and attended by a wide range of key stakeholders. According to the Ministry of Women Affairs data on gender-based violence, a total of 12 women were raped between May 2004 and December 2005: five in the West Bank and seven in the Gaza Strip. 20 cases of attempted rape were reported: 3 in the West Bank and 17 in the Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, 101 cases of sexual abuse (assault) were documented: 90 in the West Bank and 11 in Gaza Strip. There were 126 cases of attempted suicide: 62 in West Bank and 67 in Gaza Strip. According to the same source, police reports however, documented 135 cases of violence against women during the two months of September and October, 2006 alone (*Al-Quds* Newspaper, 2006).

Musleh and Taylor (2005) addressed the question of domestic violence and abuse against children in the national position paper on child protection for the Secretariat of the National Plan of Action for Palestinian Children.

Of the 365 abused children assisted by the Ministry of Social Affairs in the year 2004, 165 were physically abused, 18 were sexually abused with 10 coming from Qalqilya Directorate alone, and 182 were mentally abused. Notably no details regarding the sex of the victims or perpetrators were provided. The study however, suggests a relationship between domestic violence against children and lower socioeconomic status of the family. It states that 80 per cent of the boys who have stayed at the Beitunia Government Centre for Child Protection come from poor or dysfunctional families. Some were held in Israeli jails as prisoners, while others had run away from home, and some were street beggars.

### **The flower of Palestine: Sexual abuse of a child**

By Dr Ayesha Al-Rafai,  
Women Studies Centre

Jeeda is the eldest of two brothers and one sister. The socio-economic status of the family is very poor. Up until the year 2000 the family lived in the old city in two dark and muggy rooms below street level, to which a small kitchen and a bathroom are attached. In spite of this, the family was living happily surrounded by many relatives. Nevertheless a few months before Al-Aqsa Intifada in the year 2000, their life changed dramatically. The mother was about to visit her sick grandmother in Jerusalem. Having fixed her children's affairs and left them under the care of their grandmother, Jeeda's mother thought everything would be all right when she returned home later that day.

Jeeda, 5 years old at the time, was enrolled with her cousin in the nearby kindergarden where they would go and return together everyday except that day. Returning to her home alone, she was called by a young boy in his twenties nearby her house. She knew him as the neighbour's son and a worker in the bakery and felt it was okay to go to him. The minute she was close enough he pulled her into a dark walkway undressed her, threatening her with a knife. He raped her vaginally and rectally with his penis and fingers individually and collectively over and over again until she was bleeding. Then he left her and ran away. She managed to walk home but fainted right after her grandmother opened the door. Terrified by the scene, the old woman called the father to come home urgently for it seemed to her that Jeeda had been beaten up on sensitive parts of her body and needed to be taken to the emergency care.

The father having seen Jeeda's condition, figured out what had happened and took her to a gynaecologist. Upon medical examinations Jeeda was diagnosed as a case of rape and was reported to the police who came to the hospital where Jeeda was being

operated to repair the vaginal and rectal tears resultant from the brutal sexual attack. She stayed in hospital for three days. Her condition was serious to the extent that only the police were allowed to visit her, bringing in potential perpetrators so that she could identify who did this to her. She identified the boy who had raped her and immediately he was taken to jail. Commenting on this with elaboration the mother said:

“I was so relieved to see the police investigating this matter and thanked God that her right would not be wasted and the criminal would be punished. It is not his first time anyway...once he dragged a little girl my daughter's age behind a mosque and tried to rape her. However, she was lucky. Her mother saw him so she silently and quickly took her back before he could hurt her. Unlike my poor daughter who he slaughtered! Nevertheless, he is being punished as he deserves. He was given a life sentence, but he escaped with other prisoners in the first Israeli incursion of the city...employed by the Israelis as a spy to inform them of the exact places of those they wanted to assassinate...he was found out later by the Muqawimeen [resistance] and ended up killed and burnt in one of the camps...the undignified death he deserves for his crimes.”

Obviously, macro-level factors which are the societal-level influences in the form of the societal norms, have largely shaped the experience of Jeeda. Community support for violence manifested in its high tolerance to the extent of keeping silent about it, as can be concluded from the mother's explanation that the boy had previously attempted to rape another child a few months before Jeeda's experience. Had the proper action been taken then, Jeeda could have been saved from going through the brutal experience that has changed her life forever. When she was asked about the people's reaction she confirmed that:

“People were overwhelmingly reassuring. We received support from people across the country including President Arafat himself who moved us to another, better house to help Jeeda forget by being away from the venue where she was raped...especially since his parents, who are our next door neighbours, were rude enough to give us angry looks whenever we saw them.”

As can be read in the words of Jeeda's mother, public position and community leadership was quite supportive to the child and her family, but the question is whether they would have received such support had Jeeda been a teenage girl or would she have been accused then as having tempted her perpetrator? Having received such support, although Jeeda's family felt they are not alone in the battle, did it make their trauma any less? “No”, the mother answers. Today after seven years, every time they go to visit her siblings or parents she

At another level, it negatively influenced her own sexual life with her husband, maybe as a means of subconscious self-blame and punishment, very much ingrained in the Palestinian female upbringing and psyche of a mother. She now despises sex and sees it as a source of pain and trauma more than anything else. She has lost her sexual desire, which is affecting their family life and the overall relationship of the couple. Regarding her daughter's sexual life in the future, the mother hopes doctors are truthful when they say that Jeeda's hymen shall re-build itself, because she was still very young when the attack occurred. However, what has happened cannot be obliterated from her and people's memory. She says: "What can I say when she grows up and someone comes to ask for her hand in marriage? I still cannot find the answer."

What is quite depressing, in the words of Jeeda's mother, is that they are all concerned about how Jeeda will fit in society and what would be the best answer to satisfy her future husband. However, no worries were shown about Jeeda's own mental, emotional or psychological well being. With this question, the conversation with the mother ended heavily charged with emotions, worries and fear of an unsure future for a child that whose innocence and childhood were stolen too early.

As for Jeeda, she has completely lost every sense of security. Only a few people can make her feel safe. These do not include her parents for she no longer feels they can protect her especially now that they are always nervous. She explains:

"I used to feel safe with my grandmother and sleep in her lap up until she passed away a year ago. Now, I can no longer sleep alone in the room with my little sister...I have constant nightmares that wake me up trembling with fear. I always dream of him and see him holding a knife forcing me to keep silent or threatening to kill me, and sometimes all my family. I wake up so scared and run to my brother's room and slip into the bed beside one of them. Only then I feel safe again and can continue sleeping."

Jeeda's insecurity is also evident when she says: "people say he is dead now. I was so happy to hear that. Nevertheless, I feel he is still alive and will capture me one day. I see him in my teacher and I hate her a lot for that". One of the serious post-traumatic symptoms Jeeda is experiencing is denial of the rape itself. She talks about it selectively. She circumvents the actual rape and jumps to the aftermath. Describing the experience, she says: "He told me to come and made me sit on the ground then I do not know what happened..."

He hurt me badly and then ran away. I went home bleeding and very scared. I cannot remember where the blood was coming from...maybe from my face....”

After seven years, Jeeda still needs counselling as mirrored in her words below:

“When I talk about it with you [her counsellor] I feel safe and do not have any nightmares. I feel I was guilty about what happened to me, because I responded to him when he called me. When I remember that I feel sad and lonely... very lonely and I cry for ever”.

Her suffering and loneliness is not an internal feeling only, as she has no friends to play with or talk to unlike at her old house, which she misses very much and wishes to go back to despite the painful experience and memory. She believes neighbours where she currently lives reject her and do not want their children to mingle with her because every time she goes to ask about one of the girls she is given all sorts of reasons justifying their unavailability. Some girls said it frankly to her face “we do not want to play with you”.

She has also lost her ability to concentrate and articulates it very clearly as she says;

“At school I am not doing well because I forget a lot of what the teacher says and cannot follow her through. In class, I remember him and see his face everywhere. When the teacher notices that my mind is somewhere else she shouts at me I hate her and feel she is with him. I try to ignore all that but cannot. What I do is go to the toilet wash my face and come back”.

Seven years after the catastrophic sexual assault, Jeeda walks heavily and helplessly and the child in her is dead. With such an image, a child survivor like herself deserves and must be protected against discrimination and stigmatization to regain as much as possible her mental, emotional and psychological well-being. More attention needs to be paid to Jeeda's mental health needs. Still experiencing such strong negative emotions is indicative of the serious deficit in psychosocial counselling in her area.

A benchmark study by Nabris, Aweideh and Abdo (2006) amongst school children in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades, for the Women's Studies Centre, investigated the perceptions of students on various forms of violence and sexuality issues in addition to their own experiences of sexual abuse. A total of 787 boys and girls from Jerusalem (63 per cent) and Hebron (37 per cent) directorates took part in the study: 438 girls and 349 boys. Data revealed considerable divergence in the perception of sexual abuse held by 6<sup>th</sup> graders compared to the 9<sup>th</sup>. While the younger groups perceived sexual assault to imply touching sexual organs (25 per cent), or nudity in the presence of others (15 per cent), a vast majority did not have a clue (64 per cent). Comparatively, 9<sup>th</sup> grade students believed sexual assault is expressing admiration using nice words (28 per cent), expressing admiration using rude words (23 per cent), touching a female (45 per cent), or rape (51 Per cent), while 10 per cent did not specify and responded "other". The 6<sup>th</sup> grade students were asked whether or not one sex is more vulnerable to sexual abuse than the other is. 70 per cent of the respondents from both sexes thought that both were equally vulnerable (75 per cent girls: 63 per cent boys) while 19 per cent believed that only girls are vulnerable and 12 per cent thought that only boys are vulnerable.

Conversely, students from the 9<sup>th</sup> grade were asked whether or not they think boys are vulnerable to sexual abuse; a total of 57 per cent responded positively to this with 69 per cent believing that it is less risky for boys than for girls, with insignificant difference between responses obtained from the two sexes. Participants were asked further if they know of someone who was sexually assaulted. The survey revealed a marked increase in the number of sexual assault cases that children knew about the older they were (in the higher classes: 32 per cent in the 6<sup>th</sup> while 70 per cent of 9<sup>th</sup> graders). This may be because of increased openness of children to talk about having gone through such experiences as they grew older. On the other hand, it could simply mean that the actual occurrences of sexual assaults truly rise as children mature and develop sexually. Differences between the sexes were insignificant particularly among the 9<sup>th</sup> graders (Nabris, Aweideh and Abdo 2006).

Ninth grade students specifically were asked about if they experienced any sexual assault during their childhood. Of those who responded, 13 per cent reported having been sexually assaulted. Asked about how they reacted, all said they tried to resist, 57 per cent were so scared and escaped, 86 per cent told a parent while 24 per cent gave in, either because of extreme fear or because of being completely ignorant about what was happening.

Similarly, preliminary findings from a study conducted by the Women Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) reported in their later

investigation, attitudes towards sexual and physical violence including its sexual form in Palestine and reported the following statistics.

<b>Form of abuse</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
Physical abuse	60.0%	26.7%
Sexual harassment	21.6%	50.6%
Sexual abuse	25.0%	22.0%

The study targeted male and female children 14 and 15 years old, selected from schools. The highest form of violence was physical violence 60 per cent for boys compared to the corresponding percentage of 50.6 per cent for sexual harassment amongst girls. Notably, sexual abuse was quite similar among both boys and girls with the percentage of 25 per cent and 22 per cent respectively (WCLAC 2005).

### **Public opinion and attitudes towards gender-based sexual violence**

A few years later, in the year 2005 the same women centre (WCLAC) carried out a benchmark qualitative study to investigate Palestinian public opinion and attitudes towards gender-based sexual and physical violence. This was an outcome of the ongoing debate on the draft proposal of the Criminal Law put before the Palestinian parliament for endorsement. In turn, the debate itself emerged from the apparent contradiction in the terms of reference employed in revising and developing different articles the Law encompasses on the one hand and contradictions between different articles within the Law itself on the other. Congruent with its realm of interests and operations, in this study, the centre opted to address five challenging topics on gender based violence: sexual harassment, rape within the family, rape by strangers, wife battering, and raping wife. To this purpose, a total of 48 focus group discussions were held throughout Palestine, the results of which were highly insightful and informative. Below is a summary of the key findings pertinent to our study.

Initially, participants expressed astonishment and often discomfort about bringing up the issue of sexual harassment. Nevertheless, some scrutiny revealed broad awareness about sexual harassment, its definition, and forms of expression. There was also recognition of its presence as a phenomenon in society. In spite of that, participants were in dissonance concerning proper means for tackling the issue, with responses ranging between safeguarding its privacy and dealing with it within private spaces and familial networks, to criminalization by law with some imprisonment proposals for periods ranging between 6 to 12 months. Alongside, there were calls for investing in preventive measures with emphasis being placed on community awareness and sensitisation campaigns particularly within schools and civil society organisations and networks.

As per reasons for sexual harassment, some participants said it is due to immorality of some individuals who express their instinct immorally. While for others, the phenomenon is strongly connected with the amounting aggression and systemic humiliation Palestinian People are increasingly facing through the Israeli occupational practices. These they believe influence the Palestinian psyche from the perspective: "oppression of the oppressed", with sexual harassment being one manifestation resultant from the cycle of oppression.

In all group discussions on the issue, participants were able to mention one or more real cases of rape they personally knew had happened within their local communities with victims being from both sexes and perpetrators being in same instances family members while other times strangers. This suggests that the problem does exist in the Palestinian society and the Palestinian public recognizes its existence. Particularly however, rape of male children and societal leniency in dealing with it, was underscored as the prime hindrance for combating it socially and legally.

Rape within marriage remains the most debatable and eccentric proposal in this study. This stems primarily from the adopted interpretations of sexual relations in religious texts, whereby the wife is expected to be sexually available to her husband whenever he desires regardless of her own will. Such interpretation fall in shape with patriarchy and its means of entrenchment in the Palestinian psyche.

Focus group discussions on rape within marriage revealed great congruence in the views held by men and women participants in the two regions of Palestine: West Bank and Gaza Strip. Initially, they both shared complete denial of its presence and voiced full rejection to the idea of addressing it, which many thought was a western concept. Gradually, however, religion-bound recognition surfaced. A man from Nablus was quoted to have said, "sex during menstruation is rape", while another man from Hebron stated, "anal sex is rape". A third man from Khan Younis declared that "a woman who is forced into marriage is raped". This corresponds with the vulnerable youth group's study of Al-Rifai and Sayej (2006) wherein one teenage boy depicted forced marriage as an act of sexual violence. For a southern West Bank woman "sex in Ramadan or during the woman's menstrual cycle is rape".

At another level, a group of men from Gaza agreed that the first sexual encounter on the wedding night usually takes the form of rape. Sharing a similar view, a woman from Gaza elaborated that "men rape their wives on the wedding night to confirm their masculinity and virility". Nevertheless, such assertions did not contribute to an advanced position concerning legal treatment of the matter. Almost all were reluctant to any suggestion



that addresses forced marital sex as a public affair and preferred sex education as the alternative corrective measure in this regard. Furthermore, the significance of keeping marital life within the private space, safeguarding privacy and preventing "scandals" were universally stressed with reference to sharia courts or specialized service institutions being the favoured options by the vast majority. This presents evidence of the extent to which "honour culture" is engrained in the Palestinian mentality and canon (WCLAC 2005).

The study concluded that currently the overall climate is unfavourable for criminalising wife rape. Beyond the marital arena, stipulated legal amendments concerning the crime of rape placed special emphasis on three prime issues. First: the law must serve the victim within his or her individual capacity as a person regardless of sex, since both males and females are subject to rape. Second: the punishment should be more capital in cases where the perpetrator is a relative or the guardian of the victim, and when he or she (the victim) is a child under the age of 18. Third: part of the punishment the perpetrator must undergo is psychotherapy and rehabilitation care as part of his or her treatment towards societal reintegration (WCLAC 2005).

## **Methodology**

This descriptive qualitative study adopted an eclectic approach in collecting the information sought to answer questions of interest. This was deemed appropriate for providing insights about the experiences of Palestinian girls, in addition to hearing their opinions and views from an insider's perspective, facilitating the construction of an informative portrayal on the three forms of gender based sexual violence comprising the prime thematic areas of investigation. Three qualitative methods were employed including focus group discussions, life stories, and interviews.

*Focus group discussions:* Based on 5 predetermined demographic defining variables, 15 focus group discussions were held throughout the West Bank northern, middle and southern zones with 6, 4, 5 sessions in each zone respectively, proportionate to population size in each as in the national statistical records. By population category, 11 were held with adolescents; 8 with girls and 3 with boys. The remaining 4 sessions were equally distributed between both sexes of married adults parenting at least one adolescent. By locale, classification was made in congruence with the nationally adopted one as city, camp, and village for comparative purposes when amenable.

Table two shows the details of the focus group discussions conducted in circumstances of political and socio-economic instability in 14 different

locales between the 28<sup>th</sup> of June and 20<sup>th</sup> of August, 2006 wherein a total of 127 adolescents and 38 adults from both sexes took part.

**Table 2: Distribution of focus group discussions in West Bank zone, locale**

West Bank Zones			Sex & number of participants	
Northern Zone			Adolescents groups	Parents (adults) groups
City	Village	Camp		
Jenin	-	-	9 Males	
	-	Jenin	15 Females	9 Females
Nablus	-	-	14 Females	
-	Beit Fourik	-	9 Females	
-	Anabta	-	8 Females	
Middle Zone				
City	Village	Camp	-	-
Jerusalem	-	-	-	16 Females
-	El-Esawiyeh	-	10 Males	-
-	-	Shou'fat	12 Females	-
Jericho	-	-	11 Females (Christians & Muslims)	-
Southern Zone				
City	Village	Camp		-
Hebron		-	14 Females	-
	Yatta	-	13 Females	-
Bethlehem	-	-	-	6 Males (Christians)
-	El-Khader	-	-	7 Males
-	-	El-Fawwar	12 Males	-

- *Life stories*: Four life-story interviews were carried out with and about victims of sexual abuse and honour killing. Victims of rape and sexual abuse and or their families, do not want to talk about the event because of all the negative emotions it rejuvenates in them including: tremendous pain, shame, guilt, sorrow, bitterness, prejudice, and partiality.
- *Semi-structured interviews*: Early marriage as the third form of sexual violence within our conceptualization was investigated by interviewing eleven women of different ages who were married in childhood (at the age of 18 or younger). Four of the women interviewed were Christian and seven Muslims. Four interviews were completed with representatives

of key civil society organizations. The initial plan was to also interview representatives from the government sector, particularly the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social unit at the Palestinian Legislative council. However due to a strike regarding salaries taking place, access of potential interviewees for the government sector was denied, and therefore they were not included in the study. Completed interviews were carried out with key professionals in the following NGOs: the Palestinian Working Women Society for Development, Women Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, Palestinian Counselling Centre and the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (MIFTAH).

Focus group discussions were completed by 3 teams of two, a total of 6 members including the principal researcher who gave team members one day training on technical, practical, and ethical aspects of this particular research including purpose, target population, focus group discussion skills, and fieldwork management. In the beginning of each session a code of ethics was established and agreed on.

Impediments to implementation were primarily related to the Palestinian situation and the exceptional political instability and mobility restrictions enforced by the Israeli occupation during the data collection phase of this study. Often the team was turned back on checkpoints, field workers were held for hours by Israeli soldiers on their way to the field, under various claims and fabrications all compelling the rescheduling of interviews and delaying fieldwork. The strike regarding salaries by the Government sector began blocking access to government and NGO officials we aimed to interview. Furthermore, the topic of investigation itself was especially cumbersome; people were hesitant to participate in interviews or focus group discussions. Some participants even withdrew during the sessions. Life stories in particular were often rescheduled because people were reluctant to talk about their own sexual-related traumas and would either not show up after having agreed to participate, or refuse to participate from the start. Gaining access to the cases was a problematic issue in its own right and so required utmost effort in networking and confidentiality assurance.

### **Attitudes towards honour killing**

The group of women from East Jerusalem abridged the motives behind the prevalent negative position society takes towards honour killing to camouflage predominantly male crimes manipulating the social system blaming the female on every form of sexual violence. They see the burden of maintaining “family honour” as being man-made to perpetuate control and subordinate women. An angry teenage girl questioning the legitimacy of the “honour” concept altogether, bringing to sight the hegemony and

gender inequity embedded within it as she asked, “who said I am happy to carry the responsibility for his honour? What about my own honour? And whose honour is harmed when he misbehaves sexually?”

Another girl from Hebron also questions the concept of honour as she asked her fellow participants what honour they saw in the murder of Kariman<sup>18</sup> last summer. Telling her story she explained: “Kariman was a divorced young woman who was in love with a good guy to whom she married the “*orfi way*”<sup>19</sup>. When she became pregnant her husband came to her family asking to announce and register the marriage in the formal and traditional way. He was told to come back the next day for their answer. He returned to find her funeral awaiting him after she was forced by her brothers to eat poisoned-food right after he had left them the previous night. What was the answer to that? The brothers were interrogated for a couple of weeks and then set free under the claim of honour killing. Because there was no evidence that she was married, even though everybody knew the whole story including the brothers themselves who felt threatened and wanted to cling to the sense of control and domination. This drove them to commit their crime, manipulating the so called concept of “honour” for regaining power and asserting control. This was all faced with nothing but silence and some municipal discussions at best adding nothing more than new material to the backyard gossip and rumours in the village.

Suggested alternatives stressed religious education as a vital instrument in combating honour crimes, which is not in operation yet but could be introduced to the agenda, particularly since recent awareness projects are increasingly networking and investing in the religious establishments and enlightened individuals within it towards similar interests. Bearing in mind the fact that there was always consensus among participants concerning the wrongness of the claim that honour killing is Islamic according to the text of the Quran, potential success of pertinent efforts could be reasonably high. This could apply to all, especially when observing that Christian and Muslim girls are being killed under the same conceptualization of claiming honour. An example of this is in the case of a 24 year old Christian girl from the northern West Bank town whose pictures semi-dressed, were sent out on Bluetooth mobile phones by a Muslim man, from a nearby camp, who was supposed to be her lover. With the pictures all over the place, the police called her and her father for interrogation where she admitted the pictures were hers and declared the name of the man who did this. To clean the disgrace caused to the family, the father shot her in the head and is locked up since, for committing an honour crime. Nevertheless, article 98 of the Jordanian criminal law has

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<sup>18</sup> Fake name of the victim fabricated to guarantee anonymity of the victim.

<sup>19</sup> *Orfi way* is a secretive marriage agreed upon by a man and a woman without necessitating any legal marriage obligations and rights such as marriage contract registration, announcement or dowry. Children born to this marriage, however, are recognized in the Islamic law. Lately, such controversial type of marriage is on the rise in many Arab countries in the region particularly in universities and to a much lesser extent in schools. In Palestine, this still is a new practice

easing conditions for those that commit a crime under severe anger resulting from unrighteous and dangerous action committed by the victim killed. Under this article, the father is expected to be released within a few months. Bearing in mind the fact that the law is a reflection of its writers

and implementers, whose mentality is largely shaped by ingredients of the prevalent culture, the question is therefore better directed at the socio-cultural fabric rather than narrowly confining it to the realm of misinterpreted ill-applied Islamic instructions.

Participants were asked what they considered to be the factor driving people to kill, under the claim of honour. There was a wide agreement that it is primarily fear of damaging the family's reputation, scandal, and therefore entailments associated with people knowing about the act of sexual violence. That is to say, if an act of sexual violence remains a secret, regardless of the extent of severity and harm it brings to the victim, she would not be killed. This is the case when sexual abuse occurs within the family, where secrecy of the assault is cautiously preserved by the perpetrator who is often the male guardian or any person next of kin. Therefore, one can regard "honour crimes" as being a result of social-pressure.

### **Definition and prevalence of sexual violence**

Some informants were keen on a precise definition of sexual violence. Men from a village in Bethlehem said it is any aggressive act subjected to a weak person from a stronger one with the latter being mostly male versus female. They acknowledged sexual violence within marriage by defining it as "an aggressive act assumed by someone perceived to be the stronger against the body of another perceived to be the weaker". Christian men from Beit Jala expressed their belief that all forms of sexual acts are considered sexual violence if they take place against the person's will and if they cause that person any agony. However, they believe this is very rare in the Palestinian society, even though there has been a slight rise in this happening compared to the past. Others proclaimed that much of it could be hidden producing false perception. Both groups expressed that they found both genders equally at risk, as one man explained "an old man raped a young boy this year". The rhetoric in this group implies an interesting meaning using the word "person" instead of "woman" and the word "raped" instead of "assaulted" suggesting gender neutrality regarding potential victims of sexual violence. Accepting sexual violence as "rape" but not as "assault" holds an inclination for tolerance of sexual violence as long as it does not mount up to the level of rape.

According to East Jerusalemite women sexual violence ranges between words, looks, touches to full intercourse (i.e. rape). It is an aggressive

behaviour of which the vehicle is sex and has nothing to do with gratification of sexual desire or pleasure. It is only about power, fear and taboos. It is an antagonistic act meant to scare and insult the victim, and harm her physically, emotionally and psychologically. They further agreed on three prime issues. First is that gender-based sexual violence takes place more within family boundaries than outside, which allows the perpetrator to plan his assault as he knows a lot about the life of the victim. Second is that boys actually experience sexual violence more than people tend to think. Nevertheless, sexual violence remains more devastating to girls than to boys because the concept of honour is closely tacked to virginity. Third, the Israeli occupation plays a key role in promoting sexual violence in the form of prostitution among Palestinian teenage school girls as part of their occupational policy in the city.

Teenage boys from East Jerusalem had no clue what sexual violence was, a few participants thought it was rude gazes and words told to girls in the streets. The majority however, agreed that it is all about “girls spoiling one another...when a well-behaved girl is influenced and dragged into bad behaviour by an ill-behaved one.” Responses as such, indicated that the term needed to be explained to participants in order to proceed with confidence about proper and shared understanding of the meaning. Teenage girls from rural Hebron defined sexual violence as illegal sexual relations and any act introductory to sexual relations, including secretive meetings between a male and a female. Their counterparts in Jenin however considered rape and love affairs between boys and girls as two different forms of sexual violence. Nablus girls held the broadest view of the concept, defining it as any verbal or physical act of sexual purpose that may occur between a male and a female wherein she is forced to take part. They gave the example of one girl who was sexually assaulted by boys from a nearby village who threw their mobile numbers and letters at her while she walked from her village to that of her school. Congruent with their definition, they consider the boys' behaviour as an act of sexual violence because the girl had no say in it and this was forced upon her.

### **Causes of sexual violence against teenage girls**

East Jerusalemite women and some men from rural Bethlehem explained that ignorance and oppression were the predominant reasons for sexual violence, especially in regards to girls that are systematically discriminated against, discouraged, and unable to share their worries or fears with others, including family members. This is a matter of gender-based inequality in the societal level, ecological influences in the ecological model of this study. Similarly, the community level influences mirrored in this group identification of social tolerance to sexual violence and absence of legal disciplinary measures against perpetrators as key components in the

causation cycle. A 42 year old woman explained that “as long as he knows [the perpetrator], he shall get away with it, he will do it”.

On the other hand, most men in rural Bethlehem believed that sexual violence in the public sphere is not prevalent in the Palestinian society, with the exception of rude words and comments or gazes adolescent boys give to teenage school girls. In that sense, girls are more vulnerable to sexual violence than boys are. Therefore, while this group recognised that sexual violence takes place in the private sphere within marriage, they took an opposite position to its occurrence in the public sphere.

Adolescent girls from rural Hebron believe that girls have to dress-up properly to avoid sexual violence including at home, explaining that a girl's body can be sexy and tempting even to her brothers and that it is a matter of instinct. In the Jericho mixed-religion teenage girls group one Muslim girl said:

*“I believe the way a girl dresses makes every difference to boys. I was even told this by my male co-workers...they told me that the Islamic dress code in itself sends a “keep away” message regardless of how decent or not the girl wearing it might be, contrary to the modern western dress that sends out an invitation to everyone.”*

Another girl from the same group disagreeing with the former stated:

*“I do not think it is a matter of how you dress. My friend was attacked [attempted rape] on her way to school while she was wearing her school dress, which is quite decent as we all know. In fact, she was lucky to be saved by people who happened to be passing by and heard her screaming. What happened to the young man? Absolutely nothing, he ran away and she and her family decided to keep silent about it to avoid scandal and reputation disfigurement. Now she is much more cautious, scared, and insecure..”*

Another Christian girl from the same group sees causes of sexual violence from a different perspective expressing it as a:

*“Sense of inferiority implanted in the girl since childhood making her more vulnerable, feeling weak, and unsure of herself and her behaviour, which puts her in a disadvantaged position as boy's sense this, and so attack her sexually. Also, the boy is fully aware of the societal forgiveness for his misbehaviour and that all the blame will be put on the girl and not him. This makes the idea of sexually abusing a girl easy and appealing to men.”*

Boys from El-Esawiyeh in East Jerusalem agreed on two main reasons for sexual violence, as one boy explained:

*"Primarily it's the way girls dress which is often too tempting for men...also it is because of the discrepancy in upbringing boys and girls wherein girls are brought up to be weak and passive while boys are brought up to be strong and proactive."*

Another less popular view coming from the same group was that:

*"A boy may sexually harass a girl only for the sake of revenge if he attempts to engage in a relationship with her and she refuses. Others simply try to mimic what they see here and there."*

Teenage girls from Beit Fourik, a northern village near Nablus, believe that:

*"Moving away from religion and obsession with the western lifestyle makes girls and women preoccupied with superficial ideas in life that have no substantial purpose. Adding to this the fact that psychological creation of the female makes her emotional and less wise in dealing with men, and so she is often unable to predict their hidden targets which could sometimes be quite evil."*

Their counterparts from Hebron brought in another interesting dimension to this as one said:

*"In addition to benefits, technology has its disadvantages too. Western satellites are growingly invading our culture and homes. Sex satellite channels, CDs, and internet access especially available to boys are all factors contributing to sexual violence."*

### **High vulnerability of teenage girls to sexual violence**

Overall, participants were in conformity in relation to this notion. The vast majority believed that girls are more prone to sexual violence than boys. Reasons they gave to this included:

- Girls are weaker bodily and emotionally.
- Demeaning upbringing of girls compared to boys, makes them unable and scared to say 'no' to males generally and authority figures especially.
- Girls dress in a way that provokes men sexually.
- Girls are more sexually-attractive than boys.
- Rural girls are more submissive than urban girls which put them in dual risk of sexual violence.
- Girls pay a high price if people find out they have been assaulted, which engenders fear and silence in the assaulted girls, this in turn expands duration and severity of the assault and makes them easier targets for perpetrators.
- Girls are more available in hidden private spaces where there are no witnesses or where witnesses are forced to silence which keeps girls vulnerable to sexual violence perpetrators within the family.



- Parents often fail to recognize the needs teenage girls have upon maturity, keeping their emotional and psychological needs unfulfilled weakens them before any temptation coming from the opposite sex.

Two male teenage groups, one from the Hebron district camp and another from Jenin, considered teenage boys and girls at an equal risk of sexual violence. The main two justifications participants gave were first, that boys are more accessible to strangers in the public space and second, that sexual violence against boys has no physical honour-related outcomes such as loss of virginity or pregnancy. This makes boys a less risky more tempting option for perpetrators, and so increases their potential to become a target. One 15 year old boy explained “most important is that it [sexual assault against boys] has nothing to do with the family honour”. Teenage boys from Jenin gave the example of a 14 year old boy that was kidnapped and sexually assaulted by a group of married and single men. Although they were all caught by the police, nobody knew or cared about what happened to them. While everybody sympathised with the assaulted boy one participant asserted that had he been a girl, every kind of allegation would have been put on him.

A woman participant shared the story of a teenage girl who was married to her cousin, as an example of cases regarding virginity being a tool for judging a woman’s purity. On the wedding night, the girl did not bleed therefore her husband looked upon this as sign that she was not a virgin and subsequently divorced her the very next day leaving her pregnant. Upon giving birth, it was proved that she still had her “elastic-type hymen”, which tore only on delivery presenting evidence of her “decency and social fitness”. Learning about this, the husband regained faith in her and wanted her back but the case was not so for her. To that participant, this was an evident act of gender-based sexual violence. Having failed to bleed on the wedding night was considered a sign of this woman's impurity that lead to her punishment.

### **Extent of sexual abuse within the family**

Most groups denied the presence of sexual abuse within the family, or minimized the extent of it. However probing questions urged most participants to speak their minds and expose reality. Gradually, recognition of the presence of sexual abuse within the family was discussed with special emphasis on existing discrepancies in its presence and the severity of it between one community and another. The two male groups, one Muslim rural and the other Christian urban, from the south declared that this form of sexual violence is rare in their communities. They shared the belief that sexual violence tends to be more prevalent in crowded dwellings such as in camps and poor city neighbourhoods.

### **Maram: The way to prostitution**

By Dr Ayesha Al-Rafai,  
Women Studies Centre, OPT

Maram is the youngest of five siblings living in a dysfunctional family. Her parents, both teachers, were always fighting and did not control the behaviour of their children in any way. The house was always in complete chaos. The father had a bad reputation since he was always having affairs with several women, one of whom was her uncle's wife, causing her parents to divorce temporarily when she was six years old. Maram never felt loved or cared for by any member of her family. She does not recall being hugged or kissed by any of them.

Maram's first sexual related encounter was at the age of five when she was playing with her cousin aged 10. He tried to sexually harass her by touching her private area and forcing her to take off her underwear. At the age of 11 she found her 20 year old sister in bed with her 16 years old female cousin in a lesbian sexual encounter. The same year her cousin aged 16 forced her into having oral sex. At the age of 15, things worsened as she was chased by a 24 year old guy who was on drugs and involved in car burglary's. Under his insistence, she gave him her home phone number and gradually ended up getting involved with him. At first, she did not want to engage in a sexual relationship keeping order to preserve her virginity, so he convinced her to have anal intercourse with him. This was the case for six years until she became a 21 year old university student. During that period he exploited her completely by introducing her to many men like him. She would go to their houses and into their cars and sell them sex "always from behind only". In the meantime, he finally left her and found another girl to marry. As for Maram, gradually her circle of clients broadened extending to the university campus. The more she became wanted, the more she felt at risk. She did not want this life for herself. All she wanted was love, care and attention. Things she could not get at home.

Once, her period was late for a week which worried her and urged her to find professional consultation from an NGO that worked with women. First, she wanted to check up that she was still a virgin since she had only engaged in anal-sex therefore her hymen might still be intact. Secondly, she wanted to learn how to get out of the mess she had become involved in. The check-up illustrated that she had lost her virginity a long time ago. She is now receiving consultation sessions to help her change and make a new start in life. Reflecting on her life experience Maram Says:

“I looked at sex as a means to feel loved and cared for. Things I terribly missed at home to the extent that I used to ask men I sleep with to embrace me so that I could get a sense of love and warmth. However, what I found out was that I was losing dignity and sense of self worth. I was feeling cheap and low...I hated it. Now I am in a healing process. It is not easy I have become addicted to sex but I keep myself busy and when it gets too hot I masturbate and feel relaxed afterwards. The main thing is that I do not go back to it”.

Maram's story fits the ecological model. The four levels of influence and risk factors belonging to the multiple domains of individual, relationship, community, and societal influences were all available to make her a serious victim of sexual violence. At the individual level, she grew up in an emotionally and psychologically violent family with minimal sense of love

and care. Then she had a history of sexual abuse, having been sexually attacked by her cousin more than once, plus having witnessed her lesbian sister and cousin in what she perceived as a sexually violent act. Then she became involved with this offender who dragged her into prostitution due to the community influences including tolerance of sexual assault, poverty, absence of support from police or judicial system and no community sanctions. Maram was mostly influenced by the culture that promotes male sexual entitlements and supports an ideology of male supremacy. This has placed her in constant fear and worry allowing the youth she became involved with to betray and rape her frequently without Maram being aware of what was really going on and what were the consequences. In spite of this depressing picture, Maram was lucky in that she still has a chance to pull herself out of this situation, finish her studies, and benefit from the services and counselling care she is receiving in the women NGO where she was interviewed.

Cases of this type of sexual abuse known and recounted by participants:

- A teenage girl living with her uncle's family, following the divorce of her parents, was sexually assaulted by her cousin and subsequently by the uncle himself after seeing his son raping her. After continued assaults the girl threatened her cousin that she would inform his mother. In return, he fabricated stories of her misconduct claiming that she was looking for sexual relationships with boys. The outcome was that they threw her out of the house onto the streets, even though the mother and the whole neighbourhood knew the truth. Now nobody knows anything about her.

- One female counsellor tells the story of a 26 year old university student whose wedding was to take place in a week. Full of fear, confusion and shame she explained that she had been sexually assaulted systematically by her brother since the age of 14 and did not know if she had lost her virginity in the interim. The girl recounts, "my fiancée says I am cold sexually, but the truth is that I am always over-occupied with the dreadful idea of having lost my virginity because of my brother's systematic assault of me for over 12 years of my life".
- A teenage girl in a Jerusalem neighbourhood became pregnant as a result of her father's systematic rape. The mother found out and hid her daughter from public sight until she gave birth, and gave the baby to the Israeli social services department for adoption.
- Two single sisters aged 18 and 28 from an East Jerusalem suburb were forced to eat poisoned food by their mother and brother after finding out they were systematically sexually assaulted by their uncle (mother's brother). The reason given for killing the girls was defending the family honour.

These cases testify how the concept of honour is closely linked to the notion of purity and impurity. Consequently sacrificing a woman stained by rape or adultery is viewed as returning "purity" to the tribe (family) and therefore its honour.

### **Recognition of early marriage as a form of sexual violence**

Addressing early marriage as a form of sexual violence was bewildering and surprising to most participants. Women from East Jerusalem were primarily reluctant to visualise early marriage as an expression of sexual violence. Rather, they made it something that is moral, especially given the socioeconomic and political circumstances in Jerusalem, looking at it as a protective and support apparatus to the girls at a time of heightened vulnerability, as well as social and political insecurity.

Men in rural Bethlehem however, held a less abstract view regarding this. They agreed that if the girl consented to the marriage then it could not be considered as violence in any way. Nevertheless, if she was forced into marriage, they accepted that it was violence of different forms, including physical, psychological, and sexual. Conversely, Christian men from the south also were in dissonance here, a minority regarded early marriage as a form of sexual violence, while the majority did not. As for the rest of the groups, there was a wide consensus that early marriage is a case of complete emotional, social, and physical pre-maturity of the girl. Some went further to declare it as violating her human rights as a child, including her right to education.

One teenage girl described early marriage as a state of gender imbalance meant to perpetuate male supremacy and domination through the “prolonged weakening of women involved in these marriages.” In Jenin for example, the study targeted teenage girls in a camp locale and teenage boys in a city locale. Both sharing the same position regarding early marriage, one girl expresses her view:

*"Marriage under 17 is a fatal mistake girls always regret...I imagine at the time, they only think of the white dress, the gold, and the wedding party. However, once this is over the girl is shocked knowing the tremendous duties and obligations she has towards her husband and his family including the pressure of becoming pregnant as soon as possible once she is wed."*

Comparatively, teenage boys in the same directorate explained their position:

*"There is often a big difference between the age of a husband and his wife in early marriages which causes a broad cultural gap between them both, because it is like they come from two different worlds. Additionally, the woman is then a child giving birth to a child which causes a lot of health problems...also she is forced to grow older than her age."*

Eleven women were interviewed about their early marriage experiences, seven of them Muslim, while four Christian. Age of marriage for these women ranged between 14 and 17 years old. None of the eleven women took the decision to get married, and half were not even consulted about it at any point. Except for one case, the male guardian (father, big brother, or eldest uncle from the father's side) took the decision of completing the marriage. One woman who was married at 14 said, "I did not want to get married that young but they forced me into it. I asked them to let me finish school at least. But I was the only one hearing my voice." Another one married at the age of 15 tells the story of her marriage explaining:

*"I always looked older than my age, so a lot of people asked for my hand in marriage. However, my cousin from my mother's side insisted most and my father was completely against it. He said I would be married to the first next one. My husband came next and I was pre-given to him."*

Only one woman had a clue about what would happen in marriage including in terms of the sexual relationship. The rest were completely surprised. One woman disclosed, “I was so ignorant to the extent that on my wedding night, after the party was over and everybody had dinner, I wanted to go back home with my aunt.” Another one reveals, “I did not think about what will happen. All that mattered then was the white dress and being the centre of attention.” A third woman who got married at the

age of 15 bitterly said, "I knew nothing at all which brought my marriage to an end after three years only most of which I spent at my parents home."

Few women viewed the narrow age gap between their children and themselves as a point of strength in early marriages, because it allows friendship rather than parental authority-based relationships between the two. However, the girls' ignorance and her lack of preparedness to assume due responsibilities, duties, and full control of the in-laws was viewed as the primary point of weakness that broadened potential conflict and ruined the life of the new family since the girl found herself in a situation where she felt helpless, stupid, and abused. One woman bitterly said, "my parents married me off and went back abroad which made me feel tremendously weak and vulnerable." All the women, with the exception of one, explained that they were scared about their wedding night and first sexual encounter. Here are some of the depictions the women gave when talking about their experiences:

*"I did not understand what was going on. I cried a lot that night. Thereafter, I felt very embarrassed at every sexual encounter for about a year of my marital life."*

*"I was not prepared in any way. I cried a lot and begged my husband to take me back to my parents."*

*"It was so unfair. I knew nothing. I was in such bewilderment."*

*"I knew what was to happen because I had a cousin who got married right before me and she told me all about it."*

*"Fear and confusion was what I felt then. All I could see was a monster attacking me. I felt frozen with shock."*

*"I could not handle it because I knew nothing about it and so did not know what to expect and how to respond. I rejected it completely. It made me feel miserable and helpless."*

The first sexual encounter in early marriage, as a potential experience of sexual violence, was addressed. For three women it was a violent experience, one suffered of bleeding due to bad vaginal tear and was taken to hospital for repair. Another describes it as a night of challenge and testing, rather than a night of enjoyment and setting ground for a future happy life explaining, "he wanted to pass his virility test and I needed to pass my virginity test...therefore, fearing failure, I was too scared and he was too wild". The third expressed it with less detail stating that it was, "violence in every way. No doubt about it."

Five women had a milder experience, despite acknowledging the psychological trauma they had experienced. Three women described their first sexual encounter as a smooth healthy one. As for the consequences of the couple's first sexual relation on their sexual life later on, one woman described it as "whatever you build foundations [first encounter] are the most important. If they are laid down right, all goes well...if not, it shall always be shaky."

Despite disparities, when the women were asked whether they would get married early again if they went back in time, none of them responded positively. This first hand data gathered from victims of sexual violence in the form of early marriage gave credit to the argument leading this part of the study addressing early marriage as a form of sexual violence.

### **Protection of teenage girls against sexual abuse**

The four adult groups, including the group of Christian men, agreed that the Islamic dress code and its promotion of dressing modestly is generally highly protective of teenage girls and women. They also agreed there should be sex-education and awareness programmes at schools and community levels for enhancing collective consciousness concerning sexuality matters including sexual violence. This was believed to gradually engender heightened public intolerance of sexual violence including honour killing and sexual abuse.

All groups expressed their dissatisfaction with the current role of the school system regarding this matter, seeing it as being completely absent at times or very minimal. All participants stressed the importance of integrating sexual-violence awareness material into the school curriculum. This brings into questioning the reasons behind the arbitrary storm against the Palestinian Ministry of Education a couple of years ago when it published its first teacher guidebook on reproductive health education wherein sex-education topics were integrated. Women groups in particular highlighted open channels of communication and friendly relationships between mothers and teenage daughters as key protective apparatus. One woman described such intact relationships as "the girl's real immune system". They added however, that close monitoring and adequate discipline for teenagers of both sexes is a further must-use protective instrument.

Going back to the argument regarding Islamic dress, as stated above, this is believed to be rather problematic for a number of reasons. First, it assumes that victims of sexual assault are only mature females who are strangers to perpetrators and are "improperly" dressed. Second, it accepts that the purpose of sexual violence is to gratify the perpetrator's sexual drive as aroused by tempting dress. However, to what extent does

evidence from the ground support these assumptions? Within the framework of this study alone, there were cases wherein women or girls who were dressed “properly” according to the Islamic dress code were sexually harassed or raped. Additionally, teenage participants objected to this dress code argument based on their experiences such as the attempted rape of a “properly dressed” friend of one of the participants from the Jericho group. Moreover, there were cases where the victim was as young as five years old. Furthermore, participants reiterated real life stories of sexual assault among males of different ages. Lastly, sexual violence within the family where girls usually dressed in a “decent” manner, is evident in a number of honour crimes where the perpetrators are close family members, thus again proving the dress-code argument as not standing alone.

### **Sanar: The rape and killing of a girl**

By Dr Ayesha Al-Rafai,  
Women Studies Centre, OPT

The first day of this school year witnessed the brutal sexual attack and subsequent murder of Sanar: a 10 year old girl living in a northern Palestinian village together with her family comprising two boys and four girls, including her, in addition to the parents who only completed preparatory school. Sanar’s father is a Palestinian labourer who was given permission to work behind the green line in Israel. He stays there and comes home only once every two weeks. Sanar was in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade and the 5<sup>th</sup> amongst her siblings.

No salaries and subsequent teachers strike brought all children including Sanar back home early only after half an hour of their departure to school. With nothing to do, she agreed to register for a Quran memorizing competition with her cousin. She dressed up the usual proper way for a village girl: a blouse and a skirt with trousers underneath. Since she was going to the mosque she wore the traditional veil for the first time and went to her aunt's house to pick up her cousin and go. That was the last time she was seen alive.

After two hours of no news, the mother began worrying about Sanar who did not return. She looked around the house and in the neighbourhood calling her and asking everybody she met if they had seen her. Gradually everybody who learnt about her disappearance joined the search group in the small village. Eventually, her clothes were found torn apart scaring the mother to death and leading her to cry, as she knew then that her child had been hurt. However, her only wish as she expressed it was that “if her destiny is to die so shall God's will be. But all I pray for is that her chastity is not touched” she stops and then adds “Thank God. The doctor who examined the corpse when we found her said her hymen was intact and untouched”.



In less than an hour Sanar's dead body was found. Police investigations lead the crime of sexual assault and murder.

When he saw Sanar walking towards the unpaved rarely used walkway, a shortcut to her aunt's house, he followed her until they both became invisible to the neighbourhood. Then he attacked her, took off her clothes. When she started screaming, pushing him away he pushed her and hit her with a stone on the head making her unconscious after which he raped her rectally until she started to regain consciousness when again he hit her on the head with a stone but harder this time so that her skull broke. Up to that moment she was still alive he told the police. Next, he used her headscarf and strangled her with it until she was completely dead. To conceal his crime, he dragged her body, threw her behind a hill, and covered her with dry plants and rocks.

People in the village wanted to kill the criminal, and started to talk about his deviant sexual behaviour and assaults of many male and female children in the village whose families kept secret to maintain the "family honour". The boy had frequently stolen women's underwear, put up to dry in the front or back yards of the houses in the village, then randomly spread them around in many places. Police officers were informally aware of his behaviour but since no formal complain was made by the affected individuals or families no action was ever taken against him.

The criminal's general behaviour was known to be aggressive and antisocial, especially after his face and hands got burnt and badly disfigured from an explosive object he found and touched in the valley two years ago. Today, three weeks after the crime, young girls in the village are very scared. Most of them do not want to go out or get involved in any activity for fear of going through what Sanar had experienced. People bitterly regret not having reported or acted against his smaller assaults, which could have prevented this brutal one. The perpetrator was placed in the delinquents home and is waiting for a trial. His family was expelled from the village. They fled to a nearby village but were rejected there too, and finally re-settled in a village further away where people were not aware of their son's story.

to the criminal, who was one of those that had joined the search group. He was a child too, only 17 years old and a first-degree cousin of the victim's mother. First he denied being involved then finally admitted to committing

Sexual violence as an act that brings agony and pain to the victim, and explicitly holds a power imbalance negatively charged situation that has nothing to do with the way a victim dresses. Rather, it is a case of human

rights violation whereby the more powerful person aims to assert power and control over a weaker one; this explains sexual abuse, such as rape in times of war. It also allows further understanding of sexual abuse against children of both sexes, including within the family.

### **Social handling of and responsibility towards victims of rape**

Participants of all groups generally agreed that society places all blame and responsibility of rape on the victim. Given that the victim is most often a female, this would then reveal the ideology of male inherent entitlements and females ineligibility. Men in rural Bethlehem asserted that the losses are not only for the girl but also for her family, because even if and after she is killed her family's status and reputation are stained, and this is irreversible and continual. One man in his forties questioned the fact that a man who is a rapist, is released with no punishment which does not abide with Islam, adding that the Quran is very clear about an equal punishment for the same crime regardless of sex. In the same line of thought, one teenage girl from Nablus expressed her dissatisfaction with the social handling of rape as she said, "not only does he [the rapist] get away with his deed, but letting him and sometimes forcing him to marry his victim is an acceptable and encouraged practice...it is as if the rapist is awarded a "prize" in return for his crime. As per the victim, nobody cares about how she feels about it. On the contrary, she is expected to be grateful to him for accepting to marry her after having gotten what he wanted from her without marriage but still behaved as an honourable man afterwards!"

Christian men in Beit Jala brought into play love affairs and or sexual relationships between Christians and Muslims as a contributory factor in sexual violence as antagonistically expressed in the form of honour killing. To this, they testify an honour killing case that occurred in 2005 of a Christian teenage girl, who was in love with a Muslim and ran away with him to marry against the will of her family, but was brought back to them and killed shortly after by her father, for insisting on marrying her Muslim lover. This shows that honour killing applies equally to Muslim and Christian Palestinians.

When asked about whether or not they consent to the way society handles the question of rape, men's responses were rather dispersed compared to victim-centred women responses. Particularly, Christian men highly critical of marrying the victim off to her rapist, were ambivalent about this matter. On the one hand, they believe it should be dealt with on a case by case basis because as one of them explains, "it can be that a teenage girl tempts someone and brings it upon herself that he eventually rapes her." A second opinion was that "a just law must be in place and enforced", and a third proposed that there needs to be "some kind of rehabilitation available to heal the victims and protect them." The last idea expressed by

this group was that “perpetrators should be offered counselling and treatment because they are sick people and cannot be left out there without counselling, since that may lead to them harming more people.” As per the rural men's group they all disagreed with the way society handles rape and suggested that there should be counsellors to work with the victims alongside public awareness and sensitization campaign. However, it can be argued that the expressed views are largely cosmetic especially when we notice that a good sum of honour killing cases take place in rural communities.

### **State responsibility towards the question of sexual violence**

Participants in all groups expressed their great disappointment with the role that the Palestinian Authority plays in this regard. Some saw the existing socio-cultural norms and structures ingrained in the Palestinian psyche, mentality, and social heritage as being the greatest hindrance to progress. They also described the tribal system and traditional community leaders as being examples of the “most rotten apparatuses” typically used in sorting out sexual violence matters instead of the legal and legislative systems, even though these also rather behind. To this end, they urged Palestinian legislators and policy makers to introduce imperative legislative amendments for pertinent items in the criminal law and family law, towards equal punishment for the same crimes regardless what the gender of the accused is.

Integrating sex-education in the school system and accommodating the material taught to various age groups was identified as another responsibility of the state. Complementary to this, participants suggested that the state should put into place sensitization programmes on sexual violence, particularly sexual assault and rape for teachers and other professionals within the formal educational system with clearly defined budgets allocated to this purpose.

### **Key actors working against gender-based sexual violence**

Data generated under this section was collected on a one to one basis and presented thematically as yielded by the conducted interviews. The Forum for Violence against Women is the leading national body addressing gender-based violence. It includes 13 Palestinian NGOs of which 6 are particularly focused on gender-based sexual violence. These are the Women's Studies Centre, Palestinian Working Women Society for Development, Women Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, Palestine Counselling Centre, Family Defence Society, and Sawa centre. The Palestinian family Planning and Protection Association and the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (MIFTAH) are also active players amongst civil society organisations

concerning this issue. Collaboratively, the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Women's Affairs, and Police are all involved in tackling gender-based sexual violence from its realm of operation and action.

All actors integrate a child-rights approach in their work by claiming international treaties including the CRC as their reference document. This is not the reason for the huge gap between what these treaties recommend and the reality we are faced with, especially as people living under an occupation that systematically violates our basic human rights every single minute. This is one fact we cannot detach ourselves from. On the other hand, interviewees consider the prevalent Palestinian culture and the way it views children as a major barrier to such integration. In Palestine, the child is still seen as part of the family's possessions where it is okay for her or him to be marginalized and even abused within the "protected" private space where the less powerful, including children, are taught silence and obedience.

### **Activities and advocacy programs in operation**

- Awareness raising programs and sensitization campaigns: In the work of national organizations, activities and programs of this kind are ranked first in terms of scope and magnitude. Despite many years of work on this matter, progress and impact remain rather modest, a concern that was articulated by a number of interviewees who questioned the depth, quality, effectiveness and coordination between key players.
- Psychosocial counselling services: These services are provided by a few NGOs that are particularly specialised and equipped in their human and material resources individually and programmatically. Service components and emphasis vary between group, individual or family counselling, via face-to-face interaction or hotline when anonymity is desired.
- Establishment of Palestinian Authorities protected shelter homes: So far, there are two functional shelters in the West Bank: the first established in Nablus by the family Defence Society and another in Jericho founded by the Women Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling which is currently preparing to establish a third shelter in Bethlehem. All are being run and managed in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs. However one professional explained that procedures and protocols followed in client referral are subject to criticism by some of the women NGOs, noting that investigation procedures should follow rather than precede intervention, because this exposes the victim and puts her in a critical and sometimes dangerous position, especially if the decision was not admitting her to the shelter.

- Advocacy and lobbying for legal amendments in family law and criminal law: National committees have been formed and laws have been drafted, however the draft criminal law was enacted in the first reading only taking into account some of the amendments introduced by civil society organisations while leaving out others of significance, particularly articles dealing with the child and women. Women organizations are persistently working on attaining full endorsement of the introduced amendments. To this end, significant effort is being invested by the Women Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling in conducting a national qualitative study for assessing the Palestinian women's status under the Criminal Law project, to come up with significant suggestions for necessary amendments in light of expert's opinion guided by that of the public. Notably, the vast majority of the introduced amendments lie within the realm of gender-based sexual violence.

As can be concluded from the activities reported by the NGOs, interviewees, and stated above, service delivery is largely focused on the aftermath of violence, implying that only a fraction of abused children are known and have access to services. This is especially true when violence occurs within the family boundaries, where people tend to obscure violent events for the shame assigned by societal attitudes on both the victim and the perpetrator alike in the case of sexual violence. Alongside, societal tolerance for emotional and physical violence against children within the family is very high; obedience is regarded as an obligation that a well-behaved child owes his or her parents and older members of his kinship network. Given this understanding, such forms of violence are perceived as disciplinary measures that are legitimate and private family affairs. Defined as such, emotional and physical violence are specifically immune against all attempts for assisting abused children and therefore perpetuate their vulnerability. The only exception however, are cases of severe physical violence that the police gets to know about and refers to the Ministry of Social Affairs to make the legal action of removing the child from the family and placing him or her in the respective Government Centre for Child Protection.<sup>20</sup>

## Recommendations

### Policy level undertakings

- Join the already existing Women's Forum for Violence against Women to develop national action plans addressing gender-based sexual violence that identify comprehensive programmes and opportunities for action across sectors, including sexual and reproductive health, education and life skills, women and child rights, justice, and livelihood support.
- Networks and partners interested in funding and investing in building and or strengthening ownership of relevant national frameworks,

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<sup>20</sup> There are only two Government Centres for Child Protection in the West Bank; one in Betunia for boys and another in Bethlehem for girls, both are relatively new and have commenced functioning only in the year 2003 and after.

initiatives, and developing the capacity of country partners, governments, NGOs (particularly women's organizations), and the United Nations system to ensure the centrality of gender based sexual violence in poverty reduction strategy papers, sector-wide approaches, country, and regional strategy papers.

- Establish systems for data collection to monitor gender based violence including its sexual facet, attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate it. Surveillance is a critical element of a public health approach as it allows trends to be monitored and the impact of interventions to be assessed. Responsibility for such surveillance should be explicitly given to an institution, agency, or government unit, in order to ensure the use of a standardized methodology and the establishment of mechanisms to guarantee that data will be disseminated and used properly. Building capacity in surveillance including the use of surveys, is an important element in this.

#### Direct support for children

- Make schools safe for girls and boys: primary and secondary school systems should be heavily involved in providing a safe place, including eradicating teacher violence as well as engaging in broader anti-violence efforts, such as creating a model child-parliament where the child is taught assertiveness, leadership, and other skills that can enable him or her to positively object to the authority of older people when needed.
- Strengthen formal and informal support systems for children living with violence, such as secured shelters for severe cases.
- Prioritize the prevention of child sexual abuse. The health and educational sectors need to develop the capacity to identify and deal with child sexual abuse. This will require protocols, training, and resources for health workers. Similarly, teachers and other education professionals need training to recognize child abuse, as well as protocols and policies for referral to medical or social services. Schools should also provide preventive programmes and counselling wherever possible.

#### Knowledge dissemination and capacity building

- Capacity-building of all stakeholders involved in the prevention and response to gender based sexual violence, in addition to engaging significant influential others such as progressive religious figures.
- Ensure the full and active participation of youth, women, and other vulnerable populations in the development of comprehensive national action plans that address gender based sexual violence.
- The health and educational sectors need to develop the capacity to identify and deal with child sexual abuse. This will require protocols, training, and resources for health workers.
- Similarly, teachers and other education-professionals need training to recognize child abuse, as well as protocols and policies for referral to health or social services.

- Schools should also provide preventive programmes and counselling wherever possible.

Advocacy and raising awareness

- Intensify national efforts to end impunity for perpetrators by strengthening the legal and judicial systems, enacting and enforcing progressive legislation, and providing national justice systems including police forces with the necessary resources to prosecute cases of gender based sexual violence.
- Enlist social, political, religious, and other leaders in speaking out about violence against women. People, particularly men, in positions of authority and influence (e.g. political, religious, and traditional leaders) can play an important role in raising awareness about the problem of gender-based violence, challenging commonly held misconceptions and norms, and shaping the discussion in ways that promote positive change. Coordinated action by coalitions or alliances of figures from different sectors may be a more effective approach than identifying the issue with a single figure or sector.
- Promote gender equality, women and child human rights among youngsters of both sexes. Gender-based violence is an extreme manifestation of gender inequality that needs to be addressed urgently; as such, violence in turn perpetuates this inequality. The unequal status of women is also associated in a variety of ways, with domestic violence and with women's responses to that violence. Empowerment programs for young and teenage girls will enable them to acquire new skills and employ them in their daily life interactions.
- Strengthen behaviour change, communication, and other measures that preserve and restore positive social values and change harmful beliefs and practices to protect against gender-based sexual violence and strengthen the protective capacities of families and communities with special emphasis on children.
- Advocacy by leaders and other respected figures can make a big difference in “breaking the silence” and creating social spaces for discussing the problem within families and communities.
- Empower all means of media to educate and advocate opposing gender based sexual violence against children.

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*Chapter Four*

**Development Struggles versus Poverty and Traditions:  
Sexual Violence against Female Teenagers in Yemen**

By Research Leader: Dr. Ishraq Ahmed Al-Eryani and Research Team: Dr. Arwa Al-Azzi, Dr. Ilham Al-Eryani, Dr. Suad Al-Sab'a, Dr. Najat Sayem  
Gender-Development Research and Studies Centre, Sana'a University,  
Republic of Yemen

**Background**

In 1991 Yemen ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Later it ratified two optional protocols to the Convention regarding sale of children, child prostitution and sexual abuse. Ratification of these documents constituted the main incentive for social researchers and those interested in children's issues to address and make suggestions, which resulted in the activation of official and private movements on different levels. Thus, on the government side, the Supreme National Committee for Human Rights was formed in 1998, the Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood was formed in 1999, and the Social Welfare Fund was established in 1996. New departments concerned with women and children in different relevant ministries were also created. As for the private sector, numerous civil society social charitable organizations working in the field of woman and child rights were formed, reaching 247 organizations and unions by the end of 2002 and the process is continuing.

Yemen's ratification of these documents motivated a similar movement in the field of legislation represented in passing the Social Welfare Law (1996) and its amendment in 1999, in addition to the Law for Handicapped Care and Rehabilitation (1999) and establishing the special Fund for Handicapped Care and Rehabilitation (2002) culminating in passing of the Child Rights Law (No. 45/2002) which encloses the provisions and stipulations of the CRC.

In 1998, the Arab Conference on Child's Rights was convened in Sana'a addressing a number of issues related to the present and future of Arab children. The conference issued "The Sana'a Declaration for Arab Child Rights" and plan towards its implementation between 2000 until 2010 which represents a unique opportunity to become interconnected with the global concern on child rights as an inseparable part of human rights. Objectives of the declaration focus on enforcing the concept of child rights to every child below 18 years of age without discrimination due to race, colour, gender, language, religion, social or political opinion, wealth, birth, or any other status. Another objective is to enact legislations for child rights activation to guarantee full care and protection in all fields

including health, social life, suitable education, and protection from all forms of exploitation, violence, harassment, physical and psychological abuse, especially for children in difficult conditions and children with special needs.

### **Rights of the girl child in Yemeni national laws**

In respect to this subject, we will focus on discussing the rights granted to female children in Yemen under the national laws and legislative provisions, including: the mothers right to the custody of her child being the designated guardian as stipulated in the Personal Status Law. The law sets forth some conditions that must be met by appointed child guardians, the mother being the most suitable if she proves her capacity for custody and therefore attaining custody for a period of 10 years. The guardian is obligated to bear financial responsibility for the child. The right to compulsory and free education, the right of having access to health and social services, and the right to benefit from social security are other directly related laws including the Law for Juvenile Care. All these laws protect female children's rights and keep them away from the dangers of negligence and exploitation, but the level of enforcing of these laws varies. Legal provisions related to child's rights are inconsistent and dispersed among different laws, because children needs are related to different aspects of human activities whereof we need to have unified national childhood legislations.

Some factors reveal the deficiencies in the systematized protection of the child's life including the current legislative provisions on the rights of the child that do not complement each other or set forth priorities. Many of these provisions do not foresee guarantees or inhibitive penalties to ensure real and complete protection, and no discrimination between rural and urban female children or between male and female children in rural and urban areas. The imposition of traditional views through the social customs and traditions in addition to the adoption and application by the lawmakers of certain concepts and opinions about female children, may be seen as problematic. Therefore, the level of enforcement of the laws related to the rights of female children becomes negatively affected by these stereotypes. Thus, some of the guardians believe that they are the only ones who have the right to decide the fate of their daughters in matters such as allowing them to go to school or forcing them into early marriages, especially in rural areas. They also interfere, despite the lack of knowledge, in selecting schools or professions for their daughters according to their wish and not to their daughters' preference, or they oblige their daughters to work during childhood.

### Girl child and social upbringing in the family

The family is one of the most important institutes of social upbringing. It has a major role in satisfying material and spiritual needs of female children and nurturing them educationally, socially, culturally and psychologically. From an early age girls are prepared for, what is considered the most important role in life, the reproductive-role, with the primary goal of getting married. Girls are taught that the reproductive-role grants a woman a special place in her family and society, and that her femininity and beauty are the most important characteristics and qualities. These ideas are reflected in gender roles that the community allocates which are distinct for women versus men. This upbringing establishes the stereotype for gender roles and makes these conceptions prevalent in the general public behaviour. Discrimination in upbringing grants male children better care than female children reflected through the less attention, education, nutrition, and even some financial rights given to girls.

Some of the values in the family and social value system treat a woman as private parts (*awra*) which should be concealed; therefore families prefer to marry off their daughters at an early age due to the assumption that marriage is a haven for women. Families with many daughters are assigned reduced superiority and low status. From a young age, girls are trained household chores, while the participation of boys in domestic work is diminished because it is considered improper work for males and purely a female task. Some social studies revealed this problem in the relation-system, which diminishes the concept of participation and dialogue and gives priority to male power and domination, where female children sometimes are treated with austerity and violence.

One can find that family upbringing, especially in rural areas and amongst poor families in urban areas, is tough on female children who suffer from some physical, bodily, and psychological abuse, which assumes many forms including failure to provide health care or appropriate nutrition, physical punishment, pushing girls towards early marriage in many cases to elderly men, under despotic family and economic conditions.

### Honour violence

In the Arabic language, honour (*sharaf*) is defined by superiority, high place, and glory, and it gives high importance to noble origin and ancestry. There are two other concepts related to the notion of honour, one of them disgrace (*a'ar*), which in the Arabic language means curse and shame and it is used for discrediting. The other concept in Arabic language is repute (*ardb*), which includes personal effects, body, soul, origin and family, making a person either proud or ashamed. The linguistic concept of

repute leads us to the materialistic and moral human possessions, starting from oneself, origin, merits and evils, then capital and property. Based on this, we can understand that any violation of this repute causes disgrace and defiles the person's lineage exposing him or her to defamation. Honour (*sharaf*) is glory and eminence related by ancestry, and disgrace (*a'ar*) is shame, which also means an act of treason.

Generally, moral values and particularly the significance of honour represent one of the most important criteria against which individuals are evaluated. Honour issues in traditional societies are not related to individuals but to social groups. So, the concept of a woman's honour is an extended idea in traditional societies, it does not affect only the woman's family but also her tribe or clan. Therefore, to preserve her honour, not only should a woman not have a sexual relationship outside wedlock, but she should not mix with strange men or enter romantic relationships before marriage. Moreover, she must wear clothes which cover her face and whole body when leaving the house. A married woman should not leave her house without her husband's permission except for legitimate reasons.

A problem with the subject of honour is narrowing it down only to women, thus the prevailing point of view is that violation of a girls' honour is the violation of honour for family and the whole tribe. This dictates cleansing the disgrace through killing the girl or burying her alive, which is how it was done during Pre-Islam when newborn girls were buried alive. But today there is a difference; in Pre-Islamic times fathers were burying their infant daughters who were not aware of life, but today fathers are burying their daughters in the prime of the girls youth due to the common understanding of honour. The issue of women's honour is in the domain of culture, religion and law in Arab and Islamic communities, which fosters the culture of violence and subjugation against women. Women's existence is diminished to being a sexual symbol, which signifies family or tribal honour because the concept of honour in this society has become considered as being similar to common property, which is under guardianship of brother, father, husband, brother-in-law, or other male relatives. This reality indicates that a woman is confined to her body, which is restricted to its sexual dimension, therefore the common concept of honour focuses on this sexual idea at the expense of other dimensions of women's entity and existence. Some of the laws, customs, and traditions that are more powerful although unwritten laws, back up this idea: ownership of a woman, where only her body matters.

In Yemen, approximately 400 killings were registered between 1996 and 1998. The lack of, or even non-existence of official reliable statistics in Yemen on honour crimes and crimes related to women issues in general was pointed out in a study conducted on this topic in Yemen by Dr. Al-

Sharjabi (2005), through sampling health workers, police officers, judges, lawyers, and deputy prosecutors. It was revealed that honour cases usually do not reach the police or the court; furthermore, in Yemeni law the concept of women's honour is extended beyond preserving her chastity, virtue and refraining from committing adultery. It relies on tribal sources much more than religious or human rights sources. This can be seen in Article 40 of the Personal Status Law No. 20/1992 and its amendment in Law No. 27/1998 which prescribes a woman to obey her husband on matters that are of interest to the family, especially in the following:

- Moving with him into the family house, if she does not stipulate in the marriage contract remaining in her or parental house; in such cases she should make provisions for her husband to live with her and to have spousal relationships.
- Be prepared to have intercourse with her husband.
- Obey his orders, which are not offensive, and perform household work in her husband's house equally with others.
- Not leaving the house without her husband's permission or for legitimate or conventionally recognized reasons, which do not breach her honour or her responsibilities towards it, especially if she goes out to take care of her capital or to work, which was agreed upon and does not contradict Islamic law. The legitimate reason for a woman to go out is to take care of her disabled parents when there is nobody else to serve them except her.

Field interviews with judicial, police and prosecution employees indicated that the majority of crimes committed against women are in one way or another related to issues of honour. One of the investigation officers pointed out that from 50 cases there is 1 not related to honour, and where the villain is not a relative of the victim. In spite of all this, a lot of honour crimes are not registered as crimes, rather as natural death, if registered at all, especially if the crime was perpetuated via strangulation or poisoning. On the other side the majority of crimes committed against men are not related to honour issues. Thus, among every 50 crimes against men there would be only one related to honour. Nevertheless, male victims of honour crimes are not killed or assaulted by their relatives, as is the case with women. Instead, men are exposed to beating or killing by the relatives of women who are caught in the act of adultery with these men or who are suspected of having illicit sexual relationships with them.

There are numerous parties who commit violence against women under the pretence of practicing immoral behaviour. These can be classified under the following three groups: general public or neighbours, policemen and, family or relatives. There are a lot of cases when policemen and plain-cloth agents arrest women on accusations related to honour. This happens either because men and women who are not related to each other are alone

in a public park, car or place of recreation, or when they are discovered in a house, hotel or something similar.

Policemen and plain-cloth agents act under the two articles of the Crime and Punishment Code, namely, Article 270 mentioned before and related to violation of honour, and Article 267 related to adultery which has no legitimate proof and prescribes to penalize the perpetrators of adultery through three years in jail. In case there is lack of evidence, castigation is applied foreseen by the Islamic legislation or if there is no legitimate proof to administer the punishment prescribed in the previous article if the court is convinced by the evidence presented that adultery took place. This leads to unrighteous blemishing of many women's reputation, and exposing men and women to beating and other violations based on suspicions, which have turned out to be erroneous later. In addition some policemen and agents take advantage of these two articles for practicing corruption and embezzlement, though some of them are not even acquainted with the texts of these articles and act based on personal judgment, cultural, and traditional provisions or inherit these practices from the previous jobholders without relying on legal texts. One of the female health workers said that "policemen consider all women as indecent...therefore they need to be educated by all possible means about women's rights. If there is a strict law, nobody would impinge upon the others, but unfortunately the policemen consider themselves as power which has the right to do anything" (Sharjabi 2005).

### **Early marriage**

Early marriage is defined, according to the CRC as marriage that takes place before the age of eighteen. In the first field study about early marriage conducted by the Gender-Development Research & Studies Centre (previously known as the Women Studies and Development Centre) at Sana'a University in 2005 which covered the governorates of Al-Hodeidah and Hadhramaut, the following outcomes were revealed:

- The percentage of early marriage among women reached 52.1 per cent and among men 6.7 per cent.
- Early marriage is one of the main factors for female drop-out from school and their deprivation of education.
- There is a link between early marriage and each of the following: increase in divorce (which is high among women who get married early), recurring marriages, and polygamy: it happened more than once when a man married a girl under 18 years.
- Experiences of women who were married before turning 18 years old, clarified that they were not prepared for sexual relations with their husbands. They were lacking information about physical relationships, reproductive, and sexual health. Also, they were suffering from lack of



skills and capabilities necessary for taking care of children, which led to depression and anxiety in young mothers. Young wives under 18 years of age felt insecure which consequently had a negative impact on developing feelings of affection and peace of mind.

- Early marriage isolates women and limits their movements subsequently reducing their skills for facing difficulties protecting themselves, and exposing them to physical and psychological abuse.
- Families consider girls as a burden, which they need to rid of, and this leads to early marriages of girls.
- The majority of girls are married off without their consent, so they see marriage as coercion.
- Majority of families, especially in Wadi and desert areas in Hadhramaut, do not show any love or affection to their daughters during their upbringing because they believe that displaying these feelings would spoil the girl's relationship with her future husband and in-laws.
- 19 per cent of maternal mortality falls on women between the age bracket of 15 to 19.
- The ration of miscarriages for women under the age of 18 is 0.8 per cent and for women over 18 is 0.56 per cent.
- 65 per cent of women do not receive any kind of treatment for gynaecological disorders.
- Fistulas, anaemia, and malnutrition are widely spread among young wives (who are expected to become mothers).
- The government has not undertaken any steps to enforce the provisions of international treaties ratified by Yemen that include the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), especially in what is related to amending the minimum age for marriage in the Personal Status Law, which represents one of the forms of violence against youngsters, boys and girls.
- Organizations and individuals advocating for women rights are working to legally establish the minimum age for marriage at 18 years.
- Civil society is fully aware about the issue of early marriage.

The main factors and changes which influence early marriages can be summarized as follows:

- The spread of education for the whole population, particularly girls, which raises awareness about different detriments and dangers of early marriage.
- The increased cost of living and economic requirements for creating a new family in a time when the community in general, and especially in urban areas, is witnessing an attempt to change the composition of family's from being an extended family (where all live in one house and the head of the family covers all expenses, especially when his sons have no income), to a nuclear family (where the husband provides for his wife and children).
- The minimal marriage age established at 15 by the Personal Status Law.

The majority of answers received reflect the influence of education that effects their understanding of early marriage as taking place before the age of 15 (in urban areas) and at least 13 (in rural areas). In addition to this, some of the sample indicated that the suitable age for marriage is after 18 “once a girl finishes high school” and for a boy at 25. No one supported marriage before 15. We observed some rare cases of marriage at a very early age (8 or 9), which was common in the past. We can derive the rarity of such occurrence from the answers of the sampled regarding the suitable age for marriage and from the low number of marriage-cases at this age that they have information on. At the same time, many of the respondents (especially married) indicated that the age of a girl is not as important as her ability to assume responsibility for the household.

Furthermore, some adolescent girls encourage early marriage irrespective of their knowledge of its negative social, health and mental consequences. This type of thinking illustrates the approach to upbringing of female children in Yemen, which is characterized by despotism and intimidation; a culture that does not encouraging dialogue. Also, this way of upbringing enforces the decision-making role of men in the family and affects the level of girl’s self-confidence and the soundness of her societal relations with others (e.g. her husband or in-laws). Also, because of this approach girls cultivate a feeling of self-contempt, downgrading themselves and developing negative stereotypes that suppress their spirit of initiative and enterprise in the future. In addition it triggers an internal struggle in girls that leads to anxiety. This will be negatively reproduced in the girl’s future attitude towards her own children, because the girls’ approach to child rearing will greatly depend on her own childhood experience. Thus this approach to upbringing is passed on from generation to generation.

Based on the results of the above mentioned study, implementation of the national awareness-raising campaign about risks of early marriage is underway in Yemen. The results of the study about violence against women in Yemen, undertaken by Sharjabi in 2003, spelled out early marriages as being one of the direct causes of domestic violence. Women, especially from the governorates where rural and tribal characteristics prevail, indicated that early marriage represents one of the most important causes of violence against women and frequent disputes between spouses, which leads husbands to carry out psychological and physical forms of violence against their wives (Al-Sharjabi 2003).

Furthermore the applied study, about the forms of violence against women in Yemen, confirmed marrying males at a young age leads them to practice physical violence during spousal life (Al-Mutawakeel 2002: 18). Outcomes of the field study conducted by the Gender Studies and Research Centre in 2004 indicated several causes and motives that include propensity of the poor towards marrying off their daughters early to

alleviate financial burden on the family and expenses on education. The majority of families in Yemen believe that early marriage for girls safeguards and maintains family honour. Low-income families with many children suffer from the high cost-of-living and tend to marry off their daughters early to get rid of this burden. Drop-outs from schools are another reason for early marriage. Generally, educated families do not marry off their children whether boys or girls, until they finish their education, while uneducated or low-educated families tend to marry off their children at an early age, especially those from rural areas.

The concept of “marriage tourism” has surfaced throughout Yemen especially during the summer season when tourists flock to Yemen<sup>21</sup>. The number of Yemeni females engaged to males from neighbouring Gulf countries has increased over the last few years. The poverty of the girl's family and the suitor's wealth are major incentives in contracting marriage, even if the male is considerably older than his bride-to-be. The Yemeni Government has committed to using all mechanisms available to stop such criminal processes.

#### **Marriage between a young girl and an old man**

By the Yemeni Research Team,  
Gender-Development Research and Studies Centre, Sana'a University

“I got married at 11. It was my maternal uncle who married me off. He found the 50 year old groom through his connections. Marriage for avarice. My uncle got a bribe of 200,000 Rials and my father got 160,000 as preconditioned money and 300,000 in gold [dowry]. Now it is six years since I got married and divorced, I have a daughter from my ex-husband. I was very young and did not understand life or the meaning of having a family. My husband was married before me to three women and has 15 children...he is well off. I entered their family and did not know their life.

“On the day of my marriage I still had not reached puberty. He had intercourse with me on our first night together, and of course I did not know what a man does with a woman, or how to act... he penetrated me painfully and I felt terrible that night, I thought he was going to kill me when he took me by force. I tried to defend myself on that night and I could not and then I fainted and lost my consciousness and recovered only in the morning. He continued to have relationships with me on the second and third day and was doing

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<sup>21</sup> Gulf Tourists “are they people of lust and corruption” Hakim Almasmari & Staff August 31, 2005-Yemen Times. Marriage for Yemenis a passport to wealth By Observer Staff Jun 11, 2005, 14:49

it two or even three times a day. It was like being cut and he was insisting on doing it daily and I was begging him and trying to delay it so that he would not get close to me, but he was persistent in what he wanted. Of course, he is a man and he did not marry me for love but wanted me for his own pleasure...my pain and anguish did not matter to him. Three months after marriage I felt like I'd been butchered and could not tolerate it any longer. I tried to tell him that I am young but it was beyond my power to protect myself or to persuade him. Everything was as he wanted; if he felt like having me he would, despite what I wanted. I lived with him for two years, it was like living in hell. His other wives treated me very badly ...he would go to them and leave me alone with no one to talk to, making my life unbearable...but I kept going.

After I gave birth he began to treat me better than before and he wanted me to become closer and closer to him to the point that he would own me. He demanded we have a treaty of disavowal between my parents and me, so I could not have any links with them. Actually, he was a trouble-maker and wanted to challenge them. He left and was sending me 20,000 Rials every seven months, and by the time he sent it, I was already in debt for the same amount. My daughter wanted milk and clothes and so did I. Now I'm back at my parent's house...it's been eight months and he does not remember me. Before I got divorced, I would constantly feel dizzy, faint, and lose consciousness... I went to traditional healers (by Quran) and they told me that I had psychological problems. My husband knew from his other wife that I went to my house so I quarrelled with her because she informed him. He called me and I told him that I was tired and he was the reason for that. He started shouting, slandering, and denying that he had done anything, and told me that I should praise God because he tolerated me for so long and that nobody could live with me or bear me. Why should I praise God for that? There is nothing wrong with me, thank God I'm a normal person. I was like a slave to him. I have been humiliating myself all this time only because I wanted to live and be married like other women. He threatened that if we divorced he would challenge my parents, and I was afraid he would take my daughter from me. So, I thought it over and asked him to revoke the divorce, and he told me that I should go to his village and not have any contacts with my parents, or leave the house.

I hated him...whenever he would come close to me during intercourse I would not feel happy or relaxed at all. He was pleasing himself and thinking only about seeking his own satisfaction. He is an old man so how could you expect him to give pleasure in a sexual

relation? There's been a big break in our sexual contact. For over a month we would sleep next to each other expect him to give pleasure in a sexual relation? There's been a big break in our sexual contact. For over a month we would sleep next to each other without anything. Only in the first three month of our marriage it was very bad, and then for one year and a half we enjoyed happiness and relaxation and respect in words and deeds. Now my father is spending on me and on my daughter, and, thank God, my father is working and my brothers also, and by God's grace, they provide clothes and milk and all that my daughter needs."

### Sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse is a sexual relationship between a child and an adult by use of force to give sexual pleasure to the latter. This is the scientific definition of this abuse, which is also known as entering into an intimate relationship by adults and pre-adolescent children, who are not aware of the nature and substance of this relationship and are below the age of consent, with the aim of satisfying sexual needs and desires of the violator. Greatly alarming is when this takes place within a family, which is a torment in violation of all taboos and social norms as well as shocking to all fundamentals about the function and structure of the family on which the society stands. It is known as incest which is defined as a sexual relationship between close relatives including minors of both genders.

#### Incest in a traditional setting

By the Yemeni Research Team,  
Gender-Development Research and Studies Centre, Sana'a University

"I am 18 years old and I have six siblings: three brothers and three sisters. My father is educated...he is a military man. My mother is illiterate. I studied until I reached the 6<sup>th</sup> grade then my brother brought me to my father from Taiz to Sana'a. My parents are divorced...my father lives in Sana'a and is not married. When my parents divorced, I was still in my mothers' womb, then I lived with my mother and her brothers in Taiz. I was alone and my brothers were living with my father in Sana'a...my older sister who is divorced stayed with him for less than a month.

My father is evil by nature and he wanted me. Once he caught my elder sister when she was 9, and he was beating me and trying to catch me. He was getting up in the morning and waking me up telling me to come to him. If I refused, he would beat me. He tried four times with me, and was beating and assaulting me. The first time, he tied

my hands and feet and assaulted me...the second time he threatened me with his dagger and tied my mouth and menaced me. I told my brother of the first time and he did not believe me and the second time I told my girl friend. My father would lock the door when assaulting me...I was afraid that he would only beat and tie me. I was sleeping with my father in one room, but he did not allow my sisters to stay in the same house...some of them were working in the factory, and my brothers worked too... one of them is an officer. My father stayed at home, and because he is a colonel, he continued receiving a salary.

I was thinking of running away. Once I woke up before the prayer at dawn...I opened the door and got out. My father lives on one street and my sister on another, so I walked from 9:00 to 12:00 until I reached my sister's house. My sister is divorced and she has four daughters...my father assaulted her when she was 9 in the same city because our mother was divorced to him. When my mother sent me to Sana'a I thought I would be staying with my sister, not with my father...it was necessary for me to come to Sana'a because there were problems. When I escaped to my sister's house, my father came and accused me of having a relationship with my brother...he threatened me with his dagger and the landlord of my sister's house called the police and my father was taken to prison. Then my brother and I were summoned to the police station and he reported that our father was threatening me with the dagger, but my father said that he was the one who raped me and my brother was detained. My elder brothers stood by my father and also accused my brother. My mother could not come from Taiz to act as a witness against my father, and I am here for nine months. My elder brother who is working in the factory came to visit me and told me that I made a mistake because I went to the police station and they blamed my brother and released my father because they were afraid of him. They bailed my father out, and nobody knows about my story.

My father was hanging a rope in the kitchen and threatening to hang me if I did not agree. He would do it with me [sex] one time every day. My father was always cursing and talking dirty and sleeping then in the morning he wanted to do it with me. I was like a servant day and night. He was doing it with me violently and quickly. In the police station he confessed about assaulting me and I do not know how they released him. The cousin of my sister's husband is interested in me and he will marry me when I get out of here...he knows everything. Now I am happy, thank God. I do not recognize my father, and if I could, I would kill him to calm down.”

The only study we were able to access, and that focuses on the issue of child sexual molestation in Yemen, is the study conducted by the Women's Forum for Training and Research about the forms of child sexual abuse and exploitation. The sample of this study is composed of 65 per cent females and 35 per cent male children: 10 per cent in the 7 to 9 age bracket, 9 per cent between the ages of 10 to 13, and 50 per cent in the age bracket 14 to 17 years. Places of practicing this business included hotels, private houses, places of employment, abandoned sites, and parks. The highest ratio took place in private houses for reasons that include secrecy, discreetness, fear of disclosure and scandal. Types of abuse included the following: child molestation, lewd acts, rape, all of which led directly or indirectly to children falling into the enslavement of sexual exploitation and trafficking.

The study did not record many cases where children had been used to produce pornographic material, because according to the sampled children such pictures are easily accessible through the internet. Pornographic TV channels are widely available without any control over their impact on minors, which turns children into an easy prey for gangs involved in child sexual exploitation. With regards to sex-tourism, the study confirmed that Aden witnessed a high increase in sexual trade of mostly girls less than 18 years of age. Many gangs involved in child sexual exploitation and trafficking are targeting girls' schools. Also, those involved in sexual trade provide false identification cards and documents confirming that the girls have attained the age of maturity to ensure their entry into different places to perform prostitution without obstacles. Although Yemeni laws ban prostitution and child trafficking, there are numerous gaps and flaws. Thus the Yemeni Penal Code outlaws and foresees punishment for prostitution of girls and keeps silence about prostitution of boys (Women Training and Research Forum 2005).

Family's are amongst factors that push girls towards prostitution (ibid). There was a case of a girl convicted as a result of sexual exploitation by her father who sexually assaulted and then exploited her for prostitution in hotels.<sup>22</sup> Also, there is an indication that child labour constitutes one of the main factors for child sexual exploitation.

### **Objectives of the study**

There are no accurate statistics on sexual violence crimes. Any attempt to conduct a comprehensive field survey and attain approximate numbers on the extent of this phenomenon is difficult, due to the secrecy surrounding the perpetrator and victim of such crimes. This study is limited to qualitative aspects of crimes related to sexual violence, derived from the opinions of the sampled group of children, composed of victims of

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<sup>22</sup> This information was received during the interview with (woman) Judge Ms Afrah Baduelan (the Head of the Juvenile Court)

violence and children who were not exposed to such crimes. Similarly, it was difficult to find a sample of perpetrators of sexual transgressions.

The present study is considered a preliminary reconnaissance study of sexual violence against adolescent girls in Yemeni society. Its primary objective is to find out the level and extent of the three identified problems in Yemen (honour crimes, early marriages, and sexual abuse) through recording the stories shared by the sample, from six governorates covered by the study, viewing their recurrence as indicators measuring the spread of this phenomenon in the opinion of the sampled groups, in addition to the level of consciousness and vision of adolescent girls regarding their situation in relation to these problems and the degree of their suffering from them. Also, the study tried to discover the causes of each problem and ways to resolve it from the point of view of the victim. Overall, this study aimed at finding responses to the directives on the extent, causes, experiences and opinions of the three forms of sexual violence in Yemen.

## **Methodology**

Six governorates were selected to reflect the diversity and differences in terms of geographic profile (coastal, mountain, desert areas), size of cities (including the cities with the highest population), size of requirements, and intensity of social pressure on the girls. The selected governorates are: Sana'a, Aden, Taiz, Al-Hodeidah, Hadhramaut, and Ibb. The study employed the following methodology:

- Intensive focus group discussions<sup>23</sup>: a method for extracting information reflecting the community culture about sexual violations against women (male culture) from the point of view of the sampled and their standpoint with regards to this culture.
- Study of life stories: Eleven case studies: this method gives an opportunity for those sampled to speak freely about their lives and elaborate on information without intervention from the researcher.
- Meetings: with the sampled in some relevant governmental authorities and non-governmental organizations (Higher Council for Childhood and Motherhood, Yemeni Women Union).

Sample group of the study includes boys and girls from the urban and rural areas between 12 and 18 years old. The total number of sampled children is 138, divided into 12 focus groups for girls and 4 focus groups for boys. Four variables were considered in this study: age, gender, area (rural/urban), and marital status.

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<sup>23</sup> Focus group discussion is an unofficial interactive discussion led by the specialized researcher (facilitator) who facilitates the discussion and participates in it. Usually encompasses 6-8 persons (sampled). Its objective is to collect qualitative information about the subject and their opinions determined by the researcher. The facilitator entices the sampled to share information and to express their opinions freely about the determined subject.



**Table 1: Distribution of the focus groups by governorate, number, gender, and marital status**

Governorate	Group #	# of Group Members	Area	Gender/ Marital Status
<b>Hadhramaut</b>	One	8	Seyoun (urban)	Males/single
	Two	11	Al-Ghurfa (rural)	Females/ Married
	Three	7	Seyoun (urban)	Females/single
	<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>		
<b>Sana'a</b>	One	13	Sana'a (urban)	Females/single
	Two	11	Saywan (urban)	Males/single
	Three	7	Habra (rural)	Females/single
	<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>		
<b>Ibb</b>	One	8	Ibb (urban)	Females/single
	Two	7	Al-Hamami (rural)	Females/single
	Three	9	Ibb (urban)	Males/single
	<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>		
<b>Al-Hodeidah</b>	One	8	Al-Hodeidah (urban)	Females/single
	Two	6	Al-Marawa (rural)	Females/ Married
	<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>		
<b>Taiz</b>	One	11	Taiz (urban)	Females/single
	Two	7	Al-Huban (rural)	Females/single
	Three	8	Al-Huban (rural)	Males/single
	<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>		
<b>Aden</b>	One	10	Dar Saad (urban)	Females/single
	Two	7	Al-A'mad (rural)	Females/single
	<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>		

**Table 2: Sample distribution by focus groups defining variables**

Governorate	Age Variable		Gender Variable		Regional Variable		Marital-Status Variable	
	12-15	16-18	Male	Female	Urban	Rural	Married	Single
Hadhramaut/Seyoun	11	15	8	18	15	11	11	15
Sana'a	11	20	11	20	24	7	3	28
Ibb	10	14	9	15	17	7	-	24
Al-Hodeidah	6	8	0	14	8	6	6	8
Taiz	16	11	8	18	11	15	-	16
Aden	8	9	0	17	10	7	-	17

**Sample distribution by educational level of the sampled and their parents**

Governorate	Educational Level										
	Sampled		Father				Mother				
	High	Basic	Illit.	Univer.	High	Basic	Illit.	Univer.	High	Basic	Illit.
Hadhramaut/Seyoun	8	15	3	4	1	11	10	-	2	10	15
Sana'a	10	20	1	4	7	20	-	2	1	11	7
Ibb	13	11	-	2	3	1	18	-	-	2	22
Al-Hodeidah	3	11	-	2	-	9	3	2	1	2	9
Taiz	20	7	-	8	2	6	11	2	2	4	20
Aden	11	4	2	4	2	1	10	1	1	1	14

**Experiences of honour violence**

The children were asked if they had heard or experienced honour violence. They reported a number of incidents including:

- Killing.
- Disposal of a newborn.
- Violent beating.
- Torture and burning.
- Poisoning.
- Expelling a girl from the house.

The teenagers recalled several real cases of honour violence:

*“Yes, one got pregnant from adultery, and her relatives when she delivered disposed the newborn.”*

*“One misbehaved with her teacher and her father married her off to a madman.”*

*“One girl ran away with a man because her father refused to marry her off to him because he is notorious. When her father knew, he had a stroke and died and her mother disavowed her and deprived her of inheritance.”*

*“One girl entered into a relationship with a boy and when her brothers knew, they detained her at home and electrocuted her.”*

*“I know a girl, sixteen years old, who was going out with a boy. Her brother learned about it and beat her and prohibited her from going to school and now she is detained at home.”*

*“There is a girl who was studying at school in the afternoon...some boys were bothering her and she started to befriend them. Her father knew about this and prohibited her from leaving the house at all.”*

*“One woman took her daughter to take a lab test, and the result came pertinent to one pregnant woman. Her father got enraged instantly and killed her, and later discovered they were given the wrong result.”*

*“A girl in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade married secretly and got pregnant...the boy refused to marry her officially. Her father instigated an abortion for her and took her back to school but the principal refused to accept her.”*

*“One girl befriended two girls with bad reputations...they were taking her out with them from school. Once they took her by a Land Cruiser to the hotel and then called her father; he came and saw her naked and killed her.”*

*“There was a good girl, who once went to visit her relatives. She saw her cousin in the street. He insisted to go with her along the seacoast, where he raped her and abandoned her there. Some people found her and took her to the police station, and when her father was called, he disavowed her, so her married sister took her in and now she is living with her sister.”*

*“I know one girl who was having a relationship with a boy...he was taking her out...they would go for a walk together, to the castle. Once her brother saw them and beat her up and prohibited her from going out. Now she is locked up for six months in one room.”*

*“A fifteen year old girl had a relationship with a boy and got pregnant. Her parents beat her and made her marry him.”*

*“One girl was accused on the pretext of honour so her father poisoned her, but she did not die...instead she suffered of a stroke and is now slightly paralyzed, even in her speech, and lives with a female relative. Her father disowned her and her husband divorced her.”*

*“There is this one girl who was deceived by a boy who deprived her of her honour... they were caught by the police...her father tried to kill her, but the police interfered and the girl married the boy.”*

*“This father was living with his only daughter who was always going out and would tell him she was going to study with her girl friends. One day he followed her and saw her going into a hotel. He went in to the hotel and requested for a “beautiful girl”...they offered him his daughter. He killed her inside the hotel and ran away.”*

*“There was a boy who touched a girl and her brother found out about it, so he loaded the pistol and attacked the boy, but in the last moment he was stopped by God’s grace.”*

*“One girl was killed by her father. Her father saw her walking with a boy watching the cattle...people told him that the boy had done something with his daughter...so the father picked up the rifle and killed her. She was only 16 years old.”*

*“This girl was called to take care of her aunt who just had a baby...the girl became involved with her aunt’s son and got pregnant from him...she was taken to a doctor, because they thought she was sick, and the doctor told them she was pregnant...so her parents beat her and forced her to marry the boy.”*

*“One student, our classmate, made acquaintance with an owner of a bookshop...one day she did not return home until late...her mother came asking about her and we did not know anything. Later the principal warned us not to go to the bookshop...we found out that the owner took our classmate to a hotel...she was absent for three days, and her mother expelled her from their house.”*

*“We heard about one girl who had a love-relationship with her teacher...then he married her and divorced her quickly, because he married her under pressure from her family.”*

*“One girl fell in love with a boy and got pregnant...her parents pressured him into marrying her...they are still married...I don’t know if they have any problems.”*

From the children’s descriptions it can be derived that killing was not commonly practiced, as girls recounted more cases of less violent forms of punishment. Some comments included:

*“There are problems related to honour, but killing happens rarely.”*

*“Usually it is covered-up and the punishment is limited to detention at home, beating, and deprivation from education.”*

*“One girl was seen going out and laughing with boys on the street, so her brother left her at home and prohibited her from going to school.”*

It should be stressed that the following kinds of punishment are defined as honour violence, according to the children's experiences:

- Detention at home.
- Deprivation.
- Depriving a girl of her inheritance.
- Expelling a girl from school.
- Prohibiting a girl from using the telephone or from going out.
- Permanent insults.
- Coercing a girl to marry a person with whom she had a relationship.
- Coercing a girl to marry any person selected by her father, even if he is old, mentally retarded or crazy.

Girls that are accused of breaking the honour code are subjected to violent sanctions. These categories of sanctions were expressed in the words of children from different age-group samples:

*"She is exposed to corporal, physical and moral violence, for example if her brother sees a man flirting with her he will beat the girl and detain her at home."* (12 -15 years)

*"She will face physical and moral violence from her relatives and moral violence from the society."* (16 -18 years)

*"She will face violence through restrictions and beating."* (Male group)

*"She will be exposed to violence to bring her back to the righteous path and violence is something normal because it is honour and our religion says that doing something forbidden is wrong."* (Male group)

*"It differs depending on the viewpoint of the girl's parents. If she is not innocent, she will face violence and she deserves it, because it is honour and she has disgraced her parents in the eyes of people."* (Female group)

*"She will be exposed to restrictions and beating."* (Urban group)

*"She will be exposed to violence from her father or brother: physical, moral and corporal violence. Even a stranger will beat her. Once I saw in the market a woman who was walking and laughing, so somebody slapped her and she was put into prison."* (Urban group)

*"It depends on her relatives...if she repents and becomes respectable they stop and do not mistreat her."* (Urban group)

*"If she does not prove that she is innocent then she is exposed to bodily, moral and corporal violence from her relatives and moral violence from others, because they view her in a humiliating way, talk about her and ostracize her."* (Rural Group)

*“She is exposed because she has infringed the honour of her relatives and this is something, which cannot be forgotten.”* (Rural Group)

*“They insult and offend her even when she requests something.”* (Rural Group)

*“She is exposed to violence especially if people do not stop talking about her and her misbehaviour is not forgotten.”* (Unmarried group)

The children discussed whether or not the girl was to blame or if there were false accusations against her causing the girl to lose her honour and suffer consequences of violence such accusations may have. The fact that those girls themselves take responsibility and the blame is a sign of internalisation of honour values. They had different views and experiences on what happens to a girl that has lost her honour in the eyes of others:

*“A respectable girl does not trespass even if she is accused of having a bad reputation.”*

*“Sometime a girl is subjected to accusations because of how she walks...people might think she is not respectable because she exposes her charms*

*“Sometimes a man takes picture and threatens her, and she becomes a prostitute.”*

*“Sometimes when a father throws his daughter out of the house, or if she runs away...then maybe she will become a prostitute out of her own free will.”*

*“Some girls are exposed to violence, because men think that she is a bad person.”*

*“She might make a mistake but it does not mean that she is available to every man.”*

*“She might be exposed to violence if she is put into prison.”*

*“Yes, she is exposed, but if she repents and becomes respectable, no.”*

*“She is exposed to violence if she leaves the house without protection, if her family does not protect her and stand by her.”*

*“Is she is respectable than she will not be exposed to violence.”*

One of the topics debated in the focus group discussions was what would be the fate of a girl that is accused of lost honour and expelled from her house. Would she be forced into prostitution? The teenagers shared some experiences on this issue. The younger group of children between 12 and 15 years old said they “did not know” while others said “she might repent and correct her behaviour or she might go astray if her family is notorious.” The older teenagers between the ages 16 and 18 said she

would be forced into prostitution if she did not receive any support and protection from the family. While others said they did not think the girl would be exposed if she repented. These were some responses from the focus groups:

Male group:

*“Yes, if there is no follow-up from the family, especially if she faces scorn from those around her.”*

*“Maybe she will not go to prostitution because her father will find out about her and then will control and watch her.”*

Female group:

*“If she wilfully did the wrongdoing, she will continue, or if she faces social pressures more than she can bear”*

*“She may repent and correct her behaviour.”*

*“Maybe, if her parents expel her, she may go to prostitution”*

*“Yes, if she needs money and nobody agreed to marry her and nobody stands by her”*

*“She will not deviate only if her family is disrespectable”*

Urban group:

*“Yes, she is exposed if there is no support and protection from the family.”*

*“She is not exposed if she repents.”*

*“If she misbehaved wilfully, she will continue acting in this way”*

*“If she faces social pressures beyond what she can bear.”*

*“She will not deviate if she is oppressed...of if her self-confidence is strong.”*

*“If a girl feels that she is cheap or if it is fine for her to do these things.”*

*“She will deviate, especially if she finds bad girl friends that will encourage her.”*

*“Sometimes accusations scare her and she quits and repents”*

*“Yes, she will deviate if her parents do not watch her”*

*“Yes, some girl’s say that there is nothing left, let me sell myself.”*

Rural group:

*“She may repent and correct her behaviour.”*

*“She will deviate if her family is bad”*

*“It is not a must that she goes to prostitution because it will lead her to punishment and prison.”*

*“We did not hear about any girl who misbehaved and became a prostitute.”*

*“She may commit suicide rather than take refuge in prostitution.”*

*“Maybe if nobody marries her she becomes an object of desire for men because they consider her easy.”*

Single group:

*“Yes, she may go astray if she faces social pressures more than she can bear.”*

*“Yes, she may deviate if she is banished by people around her and feels contempt.”*

Married group:

*“She will not deviate if she is strong.”*

*“She will not deviate if she finds support from her family.”*

*“It is not necessary if she made a mistake once, she will continue doing it forever”*

The suffering of an adolescent girl accused of misbehaviour is not limited to damaging her reputation, but also involves the feeling of oppression due to a woman being blamed for any mistake, which is also a source of permanent distress. Social perception of honour issues being linked to females only, forces girls to exercise the utmost caution and reservation in the way they behave since it is easier to blame them than it is to put the blame on men. Also some families prohibit their girls from working in places where men are since if she works with men, people will say that she does not have a good reputation thus limiting the girls’ chances to get a decent source of income and violates her right to life.

The answers of the sampled prove that honour crimes exist and are quite spread, though they are enshrouded by great secrecy. The sample groups explained that killings are done in great secrecy by the relatives in fear of



disgrace, which will haunt the family if the reason for killing the daughter, sister, or wife is exposed. Families are scared that if the community finds out it will affect the family's stability and the chances of their other children (male or female) in getting married. Moreover, it is not acceptable in Yemen to kill a woman in front of other people. Secretiveness is to such an extent that only parents and brothers know about the killing or sometimes very close relatives (maternal or paternal uncles and aunts). The killing is covered by stories that the daughter, sister, or wife died after getting sick. This secrecy is pertinent only to Yemeni families with regards to killings on the pretext of honour while in other Arab societies relatives are keen on announcing the killing to inform the community that the disgrace was cleansed. Mostly cases of known killings in Yemen (in hotels or apartments) are attributed to uncontrollable rage and the feelings of hurt dignity and honour more than the desire to announce that the disgrace was washed away. One girl explained, "most of the times it is kept a secret to protect one's reputation." Another girl recounted that even if her husband found out that she is a "bad girl", he would not discredit her immediately, rather wait a few months and then tell her parents that they did not get along and divorce her, because marriage happens within the family and nobody wants to disgrace the other, and even if he is a stranger and a respectable man, he will not disgrace her.

### Opinions on honour

In the discussions about honour it was important to identify what the teenagers themselves felt about honour and how they defined it. Many children viewed honour as fundamental in their lives and a basis for social relations:

*"Honour is the basis of life."*

*"Death is better than life without honour."*

*"Dignity."*

*"Reputation for the girls and obedience to parents for boys."*

*"Abiding by traditions, religious and socially accepted behaviour."*

*"Refraining from making friends with bad girls and ill-reputed people."*

*"Girl's shyness."*

*"People should attest the girl's good behaviour."*

*"Obedience to parents in all that they ask."*

*“Good reputation and absence of relations with men.”*

*“Social opinion about the girl.”*

*“Reputation...honour is like glass, if broken it does not come back.”*

Many linked honour to the relationship between girls and boys as defined under the following qualities:

*“To preserve chastity and virginity.”*

*“A girl should be innocent...a girl of the house.”*

*“A girl should stay at home and leave only when necessary, and always with her parents’ permission...she should not leave her home at late hours.”*

*“For a girl, not to get married without parents consent [secret marriage].”*

*“Honour is something which a woman possesses and not morals.”*

*“Honour of a girl is to be controlled, well-mannered, pious, observing prayers, obedient.”*

*“If a girl from our place goes to study to Seyoun without consent of her parents, people talk about her and say that she is not respectable.”*

Some answers put emphasis on the girls’ appearances in public:

*“Abstaining from relations with boys or communicating with them, including not responding to men in the street.”*

*“Not to laugh...observe a moderate dress code and not decorate themselves.”*

*“Walking without turning her head... no chewing gum and smoking.”*

*“Walking in the street modestly...without showing hands or turning heads or dressing in tight clothes...and wearing a full veil.”*

There was a slight difference between the two genders, where the boys emphasized the following honour qualities:

*“Honour does not relate only to girls but also to boys going out with friends and not abiding by the norms of the Islamic teaching...drinking alcohol...flirting with women.”*

*“They shouldn’t smoke without the parents’ permission.”*

*“Lack of care for the offspring and lineage characterizes dishonourable persons and honour means for boys and girls protection of his or her reputation and self dignity and capital.”*

The girls presented diverse answers regarding honour and the criteria in terms of the behavioural patterns which they consider related to honour or to its infringement, and what puts an adolescent girl in a situation where she can be accused of misbehaving by the family and society. However, all children agreed on similar definitions of honour. Some related the concept of a girl's honour to the opinion of people irrespective of whether or not she indulged or was involved in activities incompatible with honour, or if done secretly.

The children explained that a girl is accused of breaking the code of honour whenever she shows any kind of interest in the opposite sex, such as calling boys on the phone, wearing make-up, lewd movements, declaring her love, or corresponding with boys. Moreover, some behaviour was interpreted as showing interest in boys such as talking to a stranger, going to the park without a chaperon, laughing in the street, wearing perfume, sitting at the window, or following the fashion. These are activities that normally are not necessarily linked to having an interest in boys. Even ordinary social relationships can be questioned such as going out with married women on occasions and ordinary conversation with men. The following are experiences shared by some of the girls sampled:

*“I was in literacy class and the principal called me to ask about one student. My father picked up the phone and it was a riot why a man is talking to me, so my father beat me up and cursed me, and even my sisters accused me of immorality, and until now I am under siege and always accused.”*

*“In our place a girl is prohibited to work in a department where there are men, and if a girl works with men, they say that she is ill-reputed and if a girl talks to a man she is indecent.”*

*“Even not wearing a veil when hanging laundry on a line is viewed badly.”*

Social culture related to honour was reflected in the answers of the females. Thus, girls deprive themselves from going out or following the latest fashion trends to avoid accusations that they have behaved in an improper dishonourable manner. Females considered wearing veil and the traditional costume (*abaya*) as important characteristics to illustrate that they are respectable girls, though some of them said that dress alone is not necessarily the proof of morals and a girl's decency.

The girls from the rural areas put great importance on dress and movements as determinants or considerations for accusing an adolescent girl in wrongdoing against honour. While the sampled in urban areas

believed that fornication, secret marriage, going to hotels or similar places, and relationships with boys as being the factors that can lead to accusations. Fornication and secret marriage were not mentioned as being the main determinants for girl's accusation by the sample from the rural areas, maybe because such phenomena are not common in rural areas, or because the rural community was underrepresented in the sample. The married and unmarried members of the sampled group agreed on the aspects considered as leading to accusations against girls honour, although some of them inclined to see fornication as a key reason.

The majority of females sampled agreed that society focuses on the honour of females, which leads them to feel oppressed. Answers to the question concerning the level of suffering and punishment related to violating honour criteria, revealed that most anguish befall women. As one of the sampled girls noted, "a girl is blamed in all cases even if she is raped... they will point fingers and ask why she went out." Another girl explained that "family honour can be violated only by a girl and that is why she is the source of anxiety in the family when she goes out with her friends".

A girl is also blamed when there is no man living in the house to take care of her requirements (such as father, brother or husband because of emigration). She can even be blamed for wearing an embroidered costume (abaya) as one of the girls from Hadhramaut pointed out, "the society will call a girl who wears such clothes indecent names because it is decorative." The same applies for wearing an embroidered face veil which is considered to be similar to alluring men and tempting them, a rural girl explained, "these are not bought by decent girls. When a girl follows fashion it is not respectable."

Another girl from Hadhramaut recounted that "it is not desirable for an unmarried girl to go out with married ladies to attend weddings" and is viewed by some as damaging her reputation. Even following fashion trends is considered by some people as behaviour that is harmful to the reputation. The majority of sampled males and females coincided that an adolescent girl who looks at a boy or talks to him is violating her honour irrespective of the way she looks or the topic of conversation. Some of the sampled men mentioned that one of the female unmarried teachers was exposed to cursing and beating by her father and brothers who had doubts about her behaviour and began spying on her because she was talking to the male school principal who called her on the house phone to ask about one of her students.

Similarly, one of the sampled females said "the society disregards boy's misbehaviour saying that he will grow up and become wise tomorrow...but a girl will suffer all her life for one mistake". However,

boys mentioned that many parents are covering their daughters mistakes in fear of scandal and hoping to find a groom. Boys are very much concerned about outside appearances of a girl and the extent of her covering. Here we can identify a clear gender-based difference.

According to the social concept, wrongdoing by an adolescent girl blemishes her honour and exposes her to violation of her rights as a child jointly by the family and the community. Thus, she will be exposed to beating, torture, home arrest, and deprivation of education. Also a girl might be expelled from her home or escape from it fearing punishment which will expose her to the danger of slipping into prostitution, or she might be married off to the perpetrator, an older man, or even a mentally retarded or madman. The community plays a role in punishing an adolescent girl by humiliating her and it may even reach the point when the school administration will not allow the girl to continue her studies.

Moreover, the fact that girls are accused of dishonourable deeds and may be exposed to sexual abuse was indicated in the answers of the sample. The answers of the sampled girls to a question regarding the extent to which girls are exposed to sexual harassment, were similar imposing the fault on a girl for not abiding by the dress code or walking seductively. No responsibility was placed on the second party, as if the girl were a devil attracting men to deviation and evil, rather than both being responsible for it. The younger children did not believe that girls who have lost their honour are exposed to sexual assault, as one stated “maybe she is respectable and is facing violations...I don’t think she is exposed at all, maybe she is oppressed.” While the older had a contrary opinion, “yes, she is exposed to violations because of social pressure. She is exposed to it if she does not respect social values. Some people think that a respectable girl is not exposed to sexual abuse even if she is blamed for her bad reputation.” Answers differed depending on gender:

*“A respectable girl is not violated even if she is blamed for having a bad reputation. Yes, she will be violated because she becomes an object of desire for others...boys will start to bother her and try to get acquainted with her because they are sure that she has become easy if she does not have sufficient protection from her family.”* (Boy)

*“A girl is violated if she allows so... if she makes a mistake and tries to become respectable, her honour is already broken and people will say that she does not have honour and is easy...the community subjugates.”* (Girl)

The groups sampled expressed that punishment is important to prevent honour crimes, however held reservations about killings. It has to be stressed that what the children referred to as “punishment for breaking the honour” is what we have labelled as honour violence, so in a way they are suggesting to combat honour violence with more honour violence. Some

children were very harsh in their judgments and suggestions for punishments:

*“Killing, is justified...think about the poor fathers’ state! How can he live after his honour is gone?”*

*“Killing is better especially if the father is not able to see whether or not the girl repents.”*

*“Killing is a must even if the government is against it.”*

*“It is preferable to apply the appropriate Islamic provisions... lashing singles and stoning those who are married.”*

*“Killing is necessary if she breached the family honour.”*

*“Beating, flogging, torture, and detention at home.”*

*“A boy should be killed if the girl is killed...punishment is a must.”*

*“If you act wrongly you should be punished.”*

*“A girl should be killed after fornication. She should be killed or penalized because she breached the family and tribe honour. If there is mercy, it is good, but if honour is lost, it is better to kill than to live in disgrace.”*

Others promoted milder forms of punishment:

*“Detention is important but for a certain period.”*

*“Prisons should be designated for such cases.”*

*“Fathers should not do it. The government should set limits.”*

*“Prohibiting her from studies or from going out.”*

*“It is necessary to punish in order to discourage, but punishment might be different.”*

*“No to killing and burning.”*

*“Punishment is necessary for cases of honour, but killing is difficult.”*

*“It is better to be discreet and come to a common understanding with the boy...marry them even if they will get divorced shortly after.”*

*“Punishment is necessary, but there are some girls that also need guidance and good control.”*

*“Killing of the perpetrator.”*

*“Killing only in cases of adultery.”*

*“Punishment without killing by a parent.”*

*“Punishment is a must but views about killing should be revised.”*

*“Punishment is necessary and fathers know better what type of punishment...it is best to apply the provisions of Islamic legislation.”*

Only a few showed an understanding attitude towards the girls:

*“If she gets raped she should not be punished, the perpetrator should.”*

*“Killing is a scandal, everybody would know.”*

*“Repenting and showing mercy.”*

*“Attention to the upbringing is the solution and there is no benefit from punishment.”*

There was no clear distinction in opinions according to the variables of age, urban/rural, gender, and marital status; however the majority in urban areas recommended applying Islamic provisions adopted by the government. It is noteworthy that many of the girls were in favour of harsh punishments such as killing and lashing. Understanding attitudes towards parents and family of the girls became apparent as one recounts, “in cases of fornication it is difficult for fathers to bear, because the community turns away from them since their honour is violated.”

Opinions of the sample groups on whether or not honour crimes are justified revealed that many approved killing as punishment for adolescents that enter illicit relationships. Only a small number of the sampled mentioned that both parties should be killed. However, we noticed that many of the sampled prefer applying the Islamic provisions and designating good prisons for such cases of misbehaviour, different from their views regarding fornication that ranged from punishment by severe beating to temporary home arrest. Accusing girls for being the only reason for such crimes by behaving in a seductive manner, makes them permanently scared and secluded, thinking that her body is the only influential cause for lewd desire. For this reason, girls are always concerned with the subject of body, including how to cover it, protect it

from exposure, and considerations about the length of her costume and full veil.

This widely spread social concept of honour demonstrates that children (mostly girls) in the Yemeni society are constantly exposed to great pressure from families and community to abide by a strict behaviour-code in order to preserve their reputation. Also it may be assumed that there are cases of children being exposed in one way or another to serious punishment. Among these types of punishment are penalties that violate child rights defined in the CRC.

### **Reasons for honour crimes and how to combat it**

Some of the girls explained that they sustain great pressure with regards to going out and speaking with men, co-education or mixing with men at work. It makes them an easy prey for any youth who can talk romantically and some of them slide into mischief, which leads to strict limitations imposed on girls such as prohibiting them from going out. Some of the sampled females revealed that some adolescent girls fall in love with their male teachers because they are the only men with whom they have contact.

The children believed reasons for honour violence are mainly connected to the family's reputation:

*"Fear of losing her reputation...being disgraced."*

*"Warning to her sisters."*

*"Father's feeling of defeat in the way he brought up his daughter."*

*"Loss of the parents place in society ...spoiling the family or tribe reputation."*

*"Infringement of the whole family's honour."*

*"Fear of people's conversations...gossip."*

*"To show others that disgrace will not be left without a reaction."*

*"To prohibit the spread of such problems in the community...it's a warning to others."*

Some children regarded the lack of understanding and awareness by parents as a major reason for honour crimes:

*"Lack of awareness in fathers about appropriate types of punishment."*

*"Lack of closeness with children."*



*“Rage.”*

*“Bad friends.”*

*“Ignorance or neglecting children.”*

The sampled suggested a number of solutions to combat honour violence, including education, religious awareness, and family giving more attention to their sons and daughters. Children suggested ways that parents can combat honour violence:

*“Education...religious education.”*

*“Dedicating more attention in upbringing their children.”*

*“Getting to know the girls’ friends.”*

*“Conducting seminars for parents to raise their awareness.”*

*“Following up on their children and developing closer relationships with them in order to limit their involvement in committing crimes.”*

*“Abiding by religion in girls’ upbringing...strengthening faith in God.”*

*“Raising parent’s awareness on how to deal with children as friends.”*

Some of the sampled mentioned that if parents trust their daughters and give them some freedom, it might decrease the rate of honour crimes. The majority of females agreed on the necessity for families to trust their girls and not restrict them, while males mentioned the importance of filling spare time with meaningful activities and facilitating marriage through lowering dowries. All the sampled coincided that marrying the wrongdoers to each other is the best solution. At the same time, some of them thought that the state should bear the responsibility of punishing males and females that have behaved sinfully and to establish good reformatories for such cases so that they are not exposed to violations in regular prisons. They urged for a more understanding attitude:

*“Granting children trust, because increased pressure on girls leads to such crimes.”*

*“Not to rush in making decisions.”*

*“Forgiveness...giving children another chance.”*

*“Limiting dowries to facilitate marriages.”*

*“Making young people work when idle...or building clubs and stadiums for youth to keep them busy”*

### **Experiences of early marriages**

The children knew of many early marriage cases. The children described several cases of marriage and childbirths of teenage girls in their close social environment:

*“One girl was 14 and got married. Now she has a son and she is still a child herself”*

*“One girl was married to her cousin when she was only 17 by coercion and now she is pregnant and hates her marriage.”*

*“We have cases of early marriage especially between cousins”.*

*“My uncle’s 13 years old daughter was married off to her cousin aged 25. She hates him and she is not agreeable.”*

*“There is a boy, 16 or 17 years old, married to a girl who is either 13 or 14 years old...they have a son now, but we do not know if there are problems between them.”*

*“One girl was married off by her parents at 14...she gave birth to her first child normally but with the second child she almost died and is still in the hospital...they say she is better now.”*

*“One of my relatives has married off his two daughters simultaneously. One is 14 and another is 16 because they were both proposed to at the same time.”*

*“A 25 year old man married this 12 year old girl...now she is 20 and is still immature. She gave birth 2 years after marriage.”*

*“One father married off his daughter against her will, and after 2 years there were major problems between him and his son-in-law, and he forced them to divorce. Although by then his daughter had fallen in love with her husband.”*

*“We know one girl about 18 years old, who was married off by her brother because she was an orphan, to a wealthy man aged 30. Her brother took all her dowry money to get married. She refused to get married but her brother forced her. The man married her to have children, but she did not get pregnant after five years, so he divorced her.”*

*“My classmate, who is 15, was married off by her father to a married man with children. She does not have a good life. Her husband left her a house and moved to the US.”*

*“My sister got married seven years ago when she was only 12. She married a man who already had three wives. Her life was very miserable, and now she is divorced and has a daughter.”*

*“One girl was married to her cousin...she was only in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and did not know anything...now her life is very difficult.”*

*“My maternal uncle’s daughter is going to marry in one week her cousin in Saudi Arabia. She is 15...her father said that her husband would take care of her.”*

*“I know one girl who got married at 15 and she did not get pregnant for two years until now...her in-laws gave her different medicines so that she can get pregnant.”*

*“One man married his five daughters at a very young age in order for them not to break his honour if they were late in getting married.”*

*“I heard about one girl living in our neighbourhood who got married when she was only 12... she was not happy in her marriage and got divorced. Now her father wants to marry her off for the second time and she is still only 12.”*

*“One 15 year old girl was coerced by her father to marriage. Her father said that he had given his word and that’s it. During her wedding she was crying.”*

*“My maternal uncle’s daughter got married at 11.”*

*“My six sisters got married between the ages of 10 and 11.”*

*“Yesterday one girl got married...she is 13 and the man is older than her...because if the first suitor comes and a girl does not get married they say that she refused her fortune.”*

*“One girl got married young and died during childbirth.”*

Some children explained that one of the reasons for early marriage is so that they can take care of in-laws:

*“In our area this father married his son who is only 12 years old and still playing, to a girl who finished high school, so that she can serve his mother.”*

*“One 15 year old boy was married by his father to a young girl because his mother was sick and needed somebody to serve her.”*

The children also gave economic reasons for early marriages:

*“This man older than 60 years married a girl of 15...they had many problems...her father married her off against her will because of the groom’s money.”*

*“There was a 12 year old boy whose father married him to a 15 year old girl because her father has the American nationality, so his son can go to the United States.”*

*“One girl aged 10 was married off by her mother. She stayed with her husband for two months before getting divorced. Now she is married for the second time”*

*“One pretty girl aged 12 got engaged to her cousin, who paid 500,000 Rial. Her father said that it was not enough and refused. Than another man of 50 came and paid one million, which was accepted by her father and he married her off.”*

*“One man was sick and borrowed money from another man. The man [who was sick] had a daughter of around 16 whom he married off against her will to repay the loan. She always shouts at her husband and does not want him.”*

*“I know one man who borrowed money and could not repay it. So he married off his daughter to the creditor and she was divorced in six month. Now she is a divorcee and is not older than 11 or 12 years”*

*“There was one emigrant with money and cars. He married an 18 year old girl without her consent, but her father married her off anyway against her will. After two months they divorced.”*

The main negative effect children identified in early marriages was the health aspects:

*“One week ago I went with my mother to the hospital to visit her friend and next to her was this young girl around 17 years old and her husband who is old. She could not get pregnant and when she finally gave birth, her uterus was removed completely. The doctor said that it was the biggest mistake her getting married.”*

*“My friend got married when she was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. She got pregnant and had a miscarriage because her uterus could not bear the pregnancy.”*

*“One of my female relatives got married at 14...her first child is mentally retarded.”*

Responses of the sampled and their personal knowledge reveal that in cases of early marriage girls suffer in many different ways. Among directly painful consequences for the girl, we found that the most prominent problem is the suffering caused by sexual relationships, which was mostly pronounced in the life stories. This is in addition to depriving a girl from enjoying her childhood and exposing her to the risk of death as a result of complicated pregnancy and childbirth, common at early age. There are several other problems that affect the well-being of girls manifested in marriage by coercion equally to their peers or older men, and there is deterioration in health due to early pregnancy and childbirth. Moreover, a

girl is required to bear household responsibilities beyond her capacity especially when the reason for her marriage is to take care of the elders at her husband's house. Another misfortune which befalls them is divorce or a miserable family life marred by everyday conflicts with their husbands or in-laws. All these sufferings contradict their rights as children granted by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Sufferings which afflict offspring's, husbands, in-laws, and the girls themselves include children who are born deformed or with health disorders, who in the majority of cases do not find proper care for their sound upbringing due to the young age of mothers and their limited experience. Another consequence is daily conflicts and squabbles because the young age of the wife or husband and their limited experience in life does not help them take precautions against preventing problems, which in turn reflect negatively on the gratification in family life for one or both spouses.

### Opinions on early marriage

Previous studies undertaken by the Gender-Development Research and Studies Centre at Sana'a University in 2005 in the governorates of Hadhramaut and Al-Hodeidah, which covered 1,495 life stories, revealed that the spread of early marriages in Yemen ranges between 52.1 per cent for women and 6.7 per cent for men. The children had different views regarding when an early marriage occurs. Some defined it as marriage before the ages of 13 and 15 while others viewed the age as young as 9 years old. Some said that early marriage is not related to age but to the ability of a girl to assume responsibility. Thus, it was common knowledge that early marriage is defined as marriage below the age of 18. Some children that approved early marriages gave the following reasons:

*"Early marriage is a must for a girl who behaves badly and flirts with boys. It is better to get her married."*

*"If a girl wants to get married, it is better than making a scandal."*

*"Sometimes they are compelled to marry off a young girl because it is necessary, like in the case of an orphan that does not have a dwelling and is living in misery in people's houses or in cases when the girl wants to get married."*

The sample groups did not have a homogenous opinion regarding early marriage. In general, there was a clear split in the opinions of the sampled with the majority of urban participants considering early marriage as an unsound practice, while the majority of rural participants advocating for it. However, most groups of children were against it because they believed that a girl-child is not ready or fit for childbirth, and will not be a good

mother for her children or be able to deal with her in-laws properly which could lead to divorce. These were some of the views shared by the sampled:

*“It is oppression for a girl because she is not prepared physically and sometimes dies while giving birth.”*

*“She has problems with her husband and his family and gets divorced.”*

*“Fear of wrongdoing sometimes dictates marriage before she is ready to bear responsibility.”*

*“Early marriage leads to continuous childbirth and increase in the population numbers.”*

*“It should not be allowed because it deprives a girl from enjoying her childhood.”*

*“It is not right because she cannot bring up her children properly.”*

*“Problems which occur between her and her husband are not good for young children, who will be listening to their parents quarrelling...this will lead to family problems.”*

*“A young girl creates problems with her husband and her mother-in-law and her parents... in-laws quarrel because she is still not reasonable or mature enough.”*

It was discussed whether or not early marriage is considered a form of sexual violence. The majority of the sampled believed that if the marriage was consummated with the girl's consent, it does not represent sexual violence, however if it was against the girl's will then it is violence. Some of the sample groups indicated certain cases when early marriage becomes sexual violence, such as marriage to an old man or when intercourse takes place for the first time without a girl's consent (by force). Some of the sampled considered early marriage as sexual violence, underlining that the objectives of marriage to a young girl are not built on family. In addition, some of them emphasized that a young wife sometimes does not know what marriage means: “If the first intercourse happens by violence it is a violation even if marriage is by consent.” One child questioned: “Why should he marry a young girl?” Also, we got an indication that the majority of sampled females did not consider early marriage as sexual violence if it is a legitimate marriage and happens with the girl's consent.

### **Sexual abuse and accusations of adultery**

By the Yemeni Research Team,  
Gender-Development Research and Studies Centre, Sana'a University

“I got married by force at 11. I did not even reach puberty, and when he came to me on the first night, he took me by force. After some time I ran away with my girl friend. My friend went to Sanaa, and I went with my other friend to Aden. My friend introduced me to her brother who told me he would marry me...he showed me a paper and told me it was a marriage contract...I believed him. I stayed with him for one year and then got pregnant...he didn't want to have a child, he wanted to kill our child!

Neighbours told me that he was fooling around with me and that he was not married to me. To avenge him, I reported him to the police, and the police seized both of us and imprisoned us for adultery. The judge sentenced me to stoning until death, however because he had done this to someone else before me, they reduced my sentence to four years in prison. During my time in prison I gave birth to my daughter. After serving time at prison Ms. Afra'a received me and now I am here since January 2006.”

In the interview with the juvenile centre principal, we learnt that most families were informed that their daughters were staying at the centre. The principal noted however that if she were to hand over the girls to their families, they would be killed on the pretext of honour especially the cases of girls with whom we had met.

### **Causes of early marriage and ways to combat it**

Based on answers given by the sampled to this question, we can conclude two main causes: social and economic. Social causes from a girl's perspective include: fear of spinsterhood following a prevailing belief that if a girl refuses the first suitor seeking her hand she will “turn down her fortune”; girl's desire to get married, and escape family problems (such as stepmother) or the constant nagging that she has become old and is still not married; ignorance (early age) and becoming excited with the gold and clothes offered; girl's idleness at home, especially if her parents do not allow her to continue education. The children stated that when a girl reaches the age of 20, she already is too old for marriage.

Additional causes of early marriage include the parents fear that a girl, or boy, will misbehave or deviate and incur disgrace; desire to protect a girl; fathers wish to ensure his daughters future and make sure he is alive to

see his grandchildren, lack of awareness about the dangers of early marriage. In addition, there are cases of early marriage that happen to rectify breaches of honours. Another reason is to help the husband's parents with housework or taking care of the elders of their household.

Economic causes for early marriage include poverty, greed to lay hands on the girl's dowry, the father needing the girl's dowry for marrying her brother, balancing his expenses, or alleviating financial burden. The sampled had different opinions regarding reasons for early marriage and if they are justified or not. Some consider it justified without any restriction or condition and accept the causes of early marriage mentioned above as adequate reasons. Others justify early marriage on the condition that the girl and boy are qualified to get married. Some from the sample group found early marriage can only be justified under certain circumstances that include: protection from deviation if its signs appear (though some did not see it as adequate justification because family should improve a girl's upbringing), to assist the boy's parents, to protect a girl, when a girl creates many problems and is willing to get married; when a girl's parents are poor and want to provide her with a better standard of living; family problems and girl's wish to escape from them; when a girl is an orphan and does not have anywhere to live. Others find that early marriage is completely unjustified, because it can expose a girl to death, because she is still a child, or because it impedes a girls' education. As one girl explained, "a young girl needs somebody to educate her. A young girl cannot bear pregnancy and childbirth. Children will go astray because she cannot discipline them."

The sample group suggested a long list of solutions and remedies for curbing early marriage. This list included:

- Giving girls attention in educational institutes and providing female teaching staff.
- Poverty alleviation.
- Continuous education for both genders.
- Social lobbying for setting a safe age for marriage.
- Religious education through mosque preachers.
- Educating youth and parents about health, social, and other consequences of early marriage.
- Engaging all means of mass media in raising awareness.
- Conducting seminars, TV shows, and producing illustrated stories displaying detriments of early marriage.
- Organizing meetings with specialists for expounding dangers of early marriage.
- Providing recreation facilities, clubs for youth, and activities to occupy their spare time.
- Placing a law prohibiting the marriage of minors and creating job opportunities.



## Experiences of sexual abuse and how to combat it

According to the answers given by the sample groups, their understanding of the concept of sexual abuse can be categorized under two forms of abuse:

- Cases where consent of one of the parties is not present ranging from rape to sexual relationships between spouses without wife's consent and sexual molestation.
- Cases where full consent of both parties is in place, such as adultery, or sodomy, or secret marriage.

The following are examples of what children considered to be cases of sexual abuse with no distinguishable difference between the various groups of teenagers:

- Taking satisfaction by force / Rape.
- Kidnapping or assaulting a young girl.
- Violating girl's honour.
- Having intercourse with wife without her agreement.
- Flirting with a woman without her consent or vice versa / Seduction.
- Secret marriage.
- Sexual assault of a woman for lust.
- Fornication or sodomy without consent.
- Sexual molestation.
- Indulging in relationships prohibited by religion.
- Sexual perversion.
- Marriage by coercion.
- Illegitimate relationships even with consent.

When the sampled were asked whether they knew of any sexual abuse cases, they described cases of young children (mostly girls) that had been exposed to rape by strangers or relatives. Although it is difficult to determine how wide spread such cases are, based only on the information supplied by the sample group, we can confidently state that there are such cases in Yemen. The life stories we have collected confirm this statement.

Cases mentioned by the sampled clearly demonstrate that the majority of victims (who are children) lose their life after being raped due to the perpetrator's eagerness to conceal the crime. In the cases we observed one can find psychological impact affecting both male and female children, violation of their rights, dignity and right to a secure and happy life. Therefore assault of children causes psychological disorders affecting them for their whole life and in some cases turning them into criminals and

perpetuators of assault against other children. The children recalled several cases of sexual abuse.

Age group 12 -15 years old:

*“We know one pretty girl whose father refused to marry her off when she was young...she stayed with him until she became 30 years old...one day he drank a lot and raped her. Then he buried her in the yard but the police found her body. He denied what happened at first, but then confessed.”*

*“This one boy raped his sister...she began to scream and her father came and saw what was happening...it turns out the boy was watching pornographic films.”*

*“One man asked the parents of a girl for her hand in marriage, but they refused...he then kidnapped the girl and raped her.”*

*“One youth took an 8 year old boy and was raping him...a man discovered this and the perpetrator was sentenced to death.”*

Age group 16 – 18 years old:

*“This 5 year old girl went to her neighbour’s house...their 19 year old son was alone at home, he raped the girl and threw her into the water tank. The girl’s mother informed the police, her brother had seen her go to the neighbours. The police searched and found the 5 year old dead in the water tank. The boy was taken to prison and the girl’s parents demanded for the death penalty...even his mother supported it.”*

*“A 6 year old was taken by this man and raped under the staircase...her father filed a case against him and now it is pending in court.”*

*“Two young girls were abducted by a man who raped them. One girl died and another lost consciousness...the man thought both had died, dug a hole to bury them...the girl who was alive climbed out and reported what had happened to the police.”*

Male group:

*“This 15 year old unemployed boy was taken by his father to an old man so that he could teach him a profession...instead of this man teaching the boy, he would give him money every day and assault him. One day the boy slept in the mosque and this man violated him and they were caught.”*

*“One adult raped a 16 year old boy...people saw what had happened and reported it to the police. The man was imprisoned for 6 months only!”*

*“One youth assaulted his sister...he was armed. His mother reported what happened to the police and he was caught.”*

*“One day this father raped his daughter...her brother saw what had happened and called his mother, who was divorced from the father. She informed the police and he was detained.”*

Female group:

*“I was buying ice when this man did something nasty to me...he put his hand on my bottom...I got very scared, I cried and went to my mother...she told my brother...so he went out and beat the man...and then all the men from our street beat him.”*

*“In Al-Sha’ab in Ibb there were four girls whose brothers and father were abroad. There was a criminal gang in our street...they entered their house through a window and raped the girls.”*

*“This alcoholic father, who was also a drug addict, raped his two daughters aged 8 and 12...then he left and nobody knows where he is. The girls paternal uncle insisted on marrying the girls to his sons...their mother-in-law tells their story to everybody who she talks to...and the two poor girls look like they are mentally affected.”*

Urban group:

*“A mother sent her 9 year old daughter to buy her a chador there was nobody in the shop... they closed the door on the girl and more than one person raped her...one man who had seen her enter the shop informed the police...by the time they found her she was dead in a sack.”*

*“One of our neighbours’ relative who was 8 years old, went to buy ice-cream...the shop owner raped him and he died. The man was executed because the parents of the boy were adamant.”*

*“There were two small girls who got used to buying ice-cream on their way from school. Once one of them went alone and the shop owner took her inside and locked the door and raped her. The police detained him for 3 months and then he came to an understanding with the girl’s parents...he paid them 150 thousand and they gave up their honour.”*

Rural group:

*“This one girl was violated...she got pregnant and after giving birth a woman came and adopted the boy... he is 5 years old now.”*

*“There was one girl called Hanan who was kidnapped then returned to a small shop owner. Her father blamed the shop owner for raping her, but the man told them to examine the girl... she turned out to be a virgin but one of her kidneys was stolen.”*

*“One of our classmates in the fourth grade disappeared...after a while she was found under a tree...nobody knows what happened to her exactly.”*

*“A 5 year old girl lost her parents...a man found her and raped her. It was clear she had been raped but her parents denied this.”*

Unmarried group:

*“One female doctor from Aden left her 5 year old daughter with the neighbours. When the neighbour woman went out leaving the girl with her husband, he assaulted the child to death.”*

*“There was this boy whose father did not marry him, so he raped his 9 year old sister.”*

*“I know one lady in our vicinity who has two daughters aged 9 and 10. There is a bad gang in our area...they abducted the girls and raped them. The girls were scared but their mother does not care because she is too busy and does not believe them.”*

*“This father raped his 9 year old daughter...she went and told her neighbours...they did not believe and told her to leave the window open so that they could see if it happens again. They caught him raping her and now he is in prison.”*

*“One 2 year old girl was raped by a labourer repairing the street. She died, and the labourer is in prison now.”*

Married group:

*“This man found a young girl and raped her. When the police caught him, he told them that he had fallen in love with her... how can he love her? She is still a child!”*

*“A 6 year old girl lost her parents... when they found her she was in a bad state and stained with blood. It is clear that she was raped but her parents claim everything is fine.”*

*“One man found his son raping his sister...he took the pistol and killed them. They were watching pornographic films.”*

The sample groups offered a number of reasons for the problems of sexual violations including:

- Expensive dowries and delay in marriage.
- Co-education.
- Parents’ negligence towards children and lack of attention to girls.
- Weak religious feelings and recklessness towards values.
- Non-existence of awareness.
- Pornographic films.
- Avenge father.

- Problems between neighbours.
- Bad company and corrupted friends.
- Lack of strictness in girls and bad interpretation of their behaviour.
- Shortcomings in the upbringing of children and lack of follow up.
- Intake of drugs and alcohol.
- Idleness.
- Girl's going out alone.

Based on the answers of the sampled, we can conclude that the majority of crimes entailing sexual violations against children are perpetuated by: relatives (cousins, brothers, or fathers) neighbours, friends, or strangers. As the following girls explained:

*“Relatives more often commit such crimes because we trust them and they enter the house whenever.”*

*“In our rural areas most cases are done by relatives, such as cousins since girls are not usually going out...so usually youths from relatives might assault her but even strangers might.”*

*“Anyone can assault a child, relatives who come into the house...or even when one sends a child to them...some can inflict a disaster.”*

Many of the sampled said they believed watching love stories and sex on TV channels exposes a lot of young people to the danger of deviation because they do not have sufficient capital to get married due to the expensiveness of dowries. Consequently, this sometimes leads them to rape the people closest to them. In fact these offenders are not necessarily poor, most criminals that violate children have psychological disorders, or were exposed to violations in their childhood that haunts them all their life, and they cannot overcome this through psychiatric treatment.

The children had many suggestions on how to prevent sexual abuse. Their suggestions however did not question the honour ideology or explicitly view children as victims, but rather as active agents in sexual abuse. Thus their suggestions were directed on how to watch children, rather than directed to the adults committing sexual abuse against children:

- Watching children when they interact with adults and when they watch TV.
- Being alert of the children's friends.
- Separating children in their bedrooms.
- Good upbringing of children, especially girls.
- Not allowing girls to go out a lot.
- Not allowing girls to go visit their friends alone.
- Not allowing girls to sit together with male relatives alone.

- Importance of having a man at home if father lives abroad.
- Dressing modestly and strictness in their behaviour and interactions with men.
- Avoiding mixed education in schools.
- No conversations between boys and girls.
- Vigilance for any dubious signs of behaviours in girls and if so, informing mothers.
- Keeping children busy during the summer holiday.
- Advising children not to go to places they do not know.

Other suggestions given related to education, awareness-raising, religion, facilitating of marriage and to keeping boys busy:

- Raising awareness through media.
- Applying the Islamic provisions.
- Faith, then enlightenment.
- Religious education and good rearing / Punctuality in prayers.
- Religious education and revealing types of punishment in Islam.
- Conducting educational seminars.
- Preparing brochures about this issue / Education.
- Health education about sexually transmitted diseases.
- Treating children well and not scolding them.
- Follow up on the part of parents.
- Opening clubs and places for recreation to keep the youths busy during summer vacations.
- Finding jobs for young men because unemployment is high.
- Prohibiting alcohol.
- Facilitating the marriage process and marrying poor youths / Lowering dowries.

Some of the sample groups indicated that laws in Yemen dealing with punishment for sexual violations against children are very strict. Thus capital punishment was administered to the perpetrators of child sodomy or rape of young girls in more than one governorate (Taiz, Hadhramaut, and Aden). Another problem is incest (fornication with close relatives prohibited for marriage) which is largely taboo due to lack of evidence on fornication with persons unsuitable for marriage (close male relatives, father, brother).

## **Recommendations**

As we have mentioned before in the theoretical framework for this study, the state has made some efforts and arrangements to curb sexual violence against children. However, these measures, especially the ones related to honour crimes and early marriage, face many difficulties resulting from the social culture which refuses to allow the state control of punishing

children, considering that only parents have the right to bring up children and rectify their behaviour. In addition focus group discussions proved that the sampled support the idea that parents should be the ones punishing their children because otherwise children would be exposed to violations in prisons. This social culture also obstructs ratification of some laws in the Parliament.

On the other hand drawbacks in legislation with regards to protection of children rights, is accompanied by the problem of non-compliance with active law for reasons that include: male domination in the process and places of decision making, the spread of illiteracy among women (about 70 per cent), and the inherited traditional culture viewing women as male property therefore the males should decide their destiny.

The government is trying to deal with these issues gradually. Many of the government agencies have been modernized to address these issues and to set up bodies and departments for women and children affairs in the relevant ministries. Such bodies include: the Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood, Ministry of Human Rights, National Women's Committee, Gender-Development Studies and Research Centre at Sana'a University, and non-governmental organizations, that include: Yemen Women Union, Arab Sisters Forum for Human Rights, and Women Assembly for Studies and Training. The arrangements undertaken to tackle these issues encompass:

**Information:** A number of studies and researches were implemented to address different facets of women and children issues. For example, the Higher Council for Women and Children prepared studies on violence against children, children in prisons, and street children. The Gender-Development Research and Studies Centre at Sana'a University conducted a study on early marriages and other studies about violence against women. Other bodies and civil society organizations have also carried out numerous studies about violence against women.

**Legislation:** The studies and researches undertaken by different agencies played a role in improving the legislative framework for women and children issues. The outcomes of the studies were presented to the relevant bodies, including the Parliament, which helped to shed light on the problem and pave the way for issuing necessary laws, many of which have already been passed. In addition, many concerned agencies are revising the articles in valid laws related to children and their rights. The Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood in cooperation with civil society organizations succeeded to designate a special section to "Crimes of Child Exploitation" in the Crime and Penalty Code.

- **Capacity building:** The Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood has organized a number of training courses for different groups concerned with child rights and violence against children. Some of these included a training course for media workers on how to address these issues in media; a training course for policemen with the Ministry of Interior on how to prevent shortcomings in security dealings with these type of crimes and to train them how to deal with juveniles; and training for social workers from the Ministry of Social Affairs, judges, prosecutors, and lawyers on how to handle juveniles. The Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood has worked on modernizing the offices of prosecutor's dealing with juveniles in nine governorates and organized guidance courses for juveniles and their supervisors. Joint efforts between the Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood, concerned ministries, government bodies, and civil society organizations dealing with children's issues resulted in the formation of the National Network for Combating Violence against Children. The Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood is planning on launching a national free hotline line for receiving calls from children about cases of abuse they face and reporting them to the concerned parties. This is in addition to the hotline in the Ministry of Human Rights that is specialized for the subject of child trafficking. Also, there are hotlines established by the Arab Human Rights Foundation and by the Yemeni Society for Psychological Health in Aden.
  
- **Awareness raising:** The outcomes of different studies and researches were used to prepare and implement extensive awareness raising campaigns in various governorates, especially regarding the subject of early marriage. The Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood issued a reference guide on addressing child right issues for educators and mosque preachers. These measures, mentioned above, are an indication of the huge efforts still needed in the field of child rights. This aspect will be finalized and documented in the framework of this study and the workshop will be organized to widely present these efforts, with participation of the officials and concerned parties working for children issues.

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By Dr. Husnia Al-Kadri, Executive Director of the  
Gender-Development and Studies Centre at Sana'a University

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Chapter Five

## **The future: how we will combat Sexual Violence against Children**

By Tove Myhrman

Regional Programme Officer at Save the Children Sweden, MENA region

### **Save the Children Sweden's vision**

Save the Children Sweden is a political and religious unaffiliated, broad based democratic movement. We fight for children's rights in Sweden and the world. Save the Children Sweden is guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We use four working methods in our fight for children's rights:

- *Advocacy and awareness raising* to influence practices, behaviours, decisions, attitudes and perceptions in society as well as economical and political decisions.
- *Research and analysis* to obtain knowledge, facts, and methods as a precondition for being able to wield influence and make a difference. We base our work on active monitoring and analysis of development, in addition to current research and practical experience. We also support and implement surveys, evaluations, and studies, as well as develop and test methods and tools.
- *Direct support* activities are implemented for children to create knowledge and developing methods that can be used in our advocacy work to disseminate children's views on their situation and their suggested solutions, to pursue cases of principal nature that may lead to reforms of significance for many children, and to establish credibility as a basis for our continued discussion.
- *Knowledge dissemination and capacity building* in areas related to the rights of the child and child development, legislation, and policy, in addition to methods and approaches to work. We facilitate knowledge dissemination and information sharing and provide a forum for meetings.

Save the Children Sweden has been active in the Middle East since 1963 when we opened our first office in Yemen. Today we have offices in Yemen, Lebanon and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, in addition to our regional outreach which includes more countries.

### **The rights of the girl child**

While working in the Middle East and through discussions with girls from the region, we have discovered that there are extensive violations of girl's rights in Lebanon. In 2005 we published the first study about the situation

of girls in the region. In this study the girls themselves expressed how they have less freedom than boys to move around outside the house and participate in decision making within family and society. Girls many times have large work loads as they have to carry out heavy housework duties. In addition to this, while implementing projects we discovered that activities and projects targeting children usually attract boys rather than girls. There are a number of reasons why girls are excluded in these activities and projects. When activities for children are set up they end-up being activities that boys enjoy and can participate in since girls are not allowed to go out on their own or participate in activities to the extent that boys are, in addition girls are not encouraged to interact with boys. Subsequently, this limits the possibility for girls to participate in these projects. To change this situation, Save the Children Sweden has initiated projects that encourage and make it possible for girls to participate. For several years, we have cooperated with the Ministry of Education in the West Bank and implemented a project aiming to empower girls. The project is carried out in the Ministry of Education schools during girls' ordinary school days. As almost all girls in the target group (12 to 16 years old) attend school, the majority of them are reached. In Gaza we have arranged summer activities especially for girls, in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs. The activities have been hosted in areas where parents feel comfortable to send their daughters. In Lebanon one of Save the Children Sweden's local Swedish branches has supported a local Lebanese NGO to set up activities that are enjoyable to girls and have given them the possibility to express themselves.

Furthermore, during our work we identified rights violations that girls are exposed to which are hardly spoken about, especially different forms of sexual violence. At Save the Children Sweden, our work gives special focus to combating violence against children. Our global planning documents state that our overall objective in the fight against violence is that children and young people are protected from violence and that those who are exposed must receive the support and recognition they need. In our strategic document for the Middle East we state that sexual abuse, crimes in the name of honour, girls and boys in protective detention, in addition to child and forced marriages are generally recognised as forms of violence. Laws against these practices should be adopted and implemented. Carrying out a situation analysis has been the first step towards achieving these objectives. The intention of the research was to create a solid basis of knowledge around the occurrence of honour violence, sexual abuse, and early marriage: all phenomena that violate child rights. Save the Children Sweden wants to discover the facts surrounding this issue so to define methods that combat child rights violations. We saw the advantage of finding regional similarities and working methods to create a network of organisations that have the knowledge and aspiration to fight for the protection and rights of girls.

### **Conclusion from a workshop: how to improve the rights-situation for girls**

Save the Children Sweden works in partnership with local organisations as we believe they have the best competence to combat child rights violations and will contribute to sustainable improvements in their countries. It is our local partner organisations, Le Corvaw in Lebanon, Women's Study Centre in the OPT, and Gender Development Research and Studies Centre in Yemen that have in cooperation with Save the Children Sweden's gender consultant Dr. Pernilla Ouis, completed the research in each of the three countries. In November 2006 when the research studies were finalised, Save the Children Sweden hosted a regional workshop inviting experts, staff, and, researchers from those partner organisations. During the workshop we discussed regional trends and similarities around the issues of honour violence, sexual abuse, and early marriage. Save the Children Sweden hoped the workshop would facilitate regional exchange on these problems and discuss methods to combat them. Even though no children participated in the workshop, their recommendations derived from the research focus group discussions were given great importance. Parts of the discussions are described below and summarised with suggested action points for us all to consider in our future work. The information is presented in accordance with the four working methods of Save the Children Sweden.

A consensus was made among professionals that gender discrimination is one of the root causes for sexual violence against girls. Combating violations against girl's rights is given very little attention in the public agenda. At the same time restricted rights for girls to participate and develop also offers them limited possibilities to demand for their rights. Working against sexual violence of girls should therefore be part of a larger struggle against this discrimination. One problem that was identified is that most efforts by NGOs and stakeholders in the area are rehabilitative measures. Therefore Save the Children Sweden and our partners aim at developing methods for preventing sexual violence.

#### **Advocacy and raising awareness**

Children from the three countries researched, showed they were knowledgeable, to various degrees, on the issue of sexual violence. Many of the children especially from Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian Territories were aware that such violence is an infringement of their rights. On the other hand, there were children especially from Yemen but also the other countries, who stated that early marriages or honour violence, are not necessarily bad. It was also clear, in all the countries, that both boys and girls often blamed the violated girl for the violence committed against

her, especially when discussing honour violence or sexual abuse. The children said that the girl had dishonoured herself or her family and therefore a family member was forced to use violence against her to restore the lost-honour. Also children said that girls were sexually abused because they misbehaved or dressed inappropriately.

The research showed that girls who were aware they had been abused found it very hard to report on the fact because of fear and lack of support given to them. The family of the girl, or the girl herself, normally preferred not to speak about the exploitation. As described in this study, the girls might even be married off to the abuser to preserve the girl and family's honour. This form of response makes it difficult to combat the problem because the society puts the blame on the girl instead of prosecuting the violator. Experts from the three countries identified this situation as one of the root causes of sexual violence. Accordingly they defined the need for raising awareness amongst children and adults as being a very important method in combating sexual violence. By raising awareness the aim is to shift attitudes from seeing preserved honour as more important than creating rights-based protective structures for children.

The experts pointed out that raising awareness among children can be done most efficiently through education in schools. Sex education should include components of child right including the right to protection from abuse, early marriage, and violence carried out in the name of honour. It was identified that there is a need for producing qualitative material to support teachers in this matter.

It is important to work with parents and the society at large, since guilt for the abuse is mostly put on the girl by either her family or the society. A real need for public campaigns combating sexual violence was identified by the experts. The overall aim of such campaigns was set to reduce sexual violence of children. At the same time it was acknowledged that campaigns would, as a first step, make people aware of the problem and bring it up in the public agenda. The importance of opening up discussions about the girl's right to protection and participation is more important than preserving traditions of honour. This was defined as the most important issue of a public campaign. At the same time it was pointed out that the campaign needs to target the public in such a way that the recipients can digest its message. For example, when discussing early marriage the experts knew from their experience that many parents consider arguments around negative health effects as more important than arguments surrounding the girls' right to education or participation. Health arguments are therefore more efficient when aiming at immediate results. At the same time, none of the rights can be seen as more important or relevant than others. The challenge is therefore designing a campaign that successfully argues for

visualisation of all the rights stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The importance of raising awareness among religious leaders was pointed out by the Yemeni partner organisation, but also emphasised by the participants from Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian Territories. The need to discuss the similarities of the Convention on the Rights of the Child with the religious texts was seen as key. There are interpretations of the Quran that match with the CRC and stipulate protection of children as part of the Quran's message. By making religious leaders aware of such interpretations they could become advocates for girls right to protection and non-discrimination. Making religious leaders part of campaigns is vital as these leaders have great influence in their communities. The experts from Yemen had good experience with such work. In addition to religious leaders, other officials such as staff at the Ministry of Education, Majors, and Parliamentarians were seen as important people to lobby towards. The opportunity to use media and develop material, such as information leaflets and posters, to get the message out to a wider public was emphasised during the workshop.

Even though it was agreed that change of attitudes is most important in combating sexual violence, participants from all three countries pointed out the need for reforming national laws. The CRC was seen as an instrument that could be used in multiple ways. It could be used to outline what national laws should include to guarantee the child rights perspective, for example setting the age for marriage to 18 years as stated in the CRC. Managing such law-reform campaigns should include efforts targeting decision makers to whom the CRC should be presented as internationally agreed upon standards, which their countries have ratified. The partner organisations also identified other international instruments, such as international events for child and women's rights, to be used in the campaign work.

In conclusion Save the Children Sweden and its local partner organisations should:

- Carry out an awareness raising campaign aiming to create protective structures for children. Such campaigns should make people aware of the existence of sexual violence, the harmful effects on children and the child's right to protection from it. The target groups should consist of both children and adults.
- Increase cooperation with influential people, such as religious leaders and other stakeholders, who could facilitate the change of attitudes.
- Develop material that target children and adults in raising awareness of sexual violence. Such material should provide information and open discussions on how to prevent sexual violence and support children who have been abused.

- Save the Children Sweden and its local partners should support and lobby the Ministry of Education and other education providers, in order to develop a curriculum that includes sex education. Such education should include education on children's right to be protected against sexual violence.
- Save the Children Sweden and its local partner organisations should advocate for laws that are in accordance with the CRC and thereby protect children from sexual violence. The laws should equally apply to all children and ensure that the child victim is not blamed.
- Save the Children Sweden and its local partners should lobby decision makers and executing powers for the implementation of such laws.

### **Research and analysis**

The experts recognized the importance of research in documenting the extent and various forms of sexual violence. Such information is useful in order to draft recommendations on how to combat violations and set-up protective structures for children. Research findings also provide the basis for awareness raising campaigns amongst parents and community members in addition to lobbying for decision-makers to enforce law reforms.

Experts from the different countries discussed the need to investigate the best-interest of abused children. They outlined the need for shelters to protect girls that have been sexually abused or are under threat of honour violence. Also acknowledged are the difficulties faced by children seeking help alone, because often the child is forced to leave the family and society to seek protection. Research indicated that the abuser is often a close family member and often the only solution is separating the child from the threat within his or her family. This is seen as being in the best-interest of the child, even though the separation itself might be traumatising for a youth. It was generally agreed that societal structures punishing the abused child and forcing him or her to seek shelter while the abuser goes unpunished sends the wrong message. It was thereby recognized that the concept of the best-interest of the child should be investigated further to explore more child-friendly solutions.

In conclusion Save the Children Sweden and its local partner organisations should:

- Continue researching sexual violence to be able to use the findings for designing and developing best-practises of protective structures for children.
- Continue to research sexual violence in order to be able to use the information in awareness raising campaigns aiming at attitude change.
- Continue to research sexual violence in order to build strong arguments against it, including advocacy work for law reform.



- Investigate the definition: best-interest of the child, in order to develop the most child-friendly ways to implement it.

## Direct support

The importance of having girls as the focus point in the work against sexual violence was highlighted by Save the Children Sweden and agreed upon by local partner organisations. During the discussions concerning direct support to combat sexual violence, it became clear that this method general should include work against gender discrimination. Facilitation of activities that empower girls to participate was pointed out as necessary. Experts from Yemen highlighted that access to education for all girls is the most important part of empowering them. They explained that an increased number of girls in schools would lead to a reduction in early marriages and other kinds of violations against them. With a strong educational background, a girl would be able to have more self confidence, stronger opinions, and be able to stand up for her beliefs. Subsequently, part of the work against sexual violence should include monitoring and advocating for girls access to schools. The participants from Lebanon and Palestine emphasised the importance of giving girls possibilities to learn about, and discuss their rights with peers.

During the workshop, Save the Children Sweden presented a model called *Ellen-groups* that have been successfully developed and used in Sweden. The model targets gender discrimination under the CRC framework and targets girls between 13 and 15 years old. The Ellen-project provides girls with access to adults who have time to listen to them and take what they say seriously, which is a commodity that many young people do not have. The groups should have two female discussion leaders aged between 19 and 25 years; they are not supposed to be too old in order to be able to connect with the world and views of the teenagers and not create a feeling of alienation due to the age difference. The leader's main role is to listen to the girls but also to steer the conversation, lead the discussions, and give everyone the equal opportunity to talk, while treating participants with equal respect. The girls that join the Ellen-groups are obliged to listen to each other and to respect the confidentiality of what has been said in the meetings.

The Ellen course is based on the following nine thematic areas:

- 1.Me, Myself, and I: about self-confidence
- 2.Same/Different: about prejudice and discrimination
- 3.Girl Power: about girl's rights
- 4.Slim + Pretty = Happy: about beauty conceptions
- 5.Love, Love, Love: about love, relationships, and sex
- 6.Together, Alone: about friendship and bullying

7. Listen!: about young people's right to have their say
8. Happy Families: about parents
9. A Matter of Life and Death: about existential questions

There is an Ellen-handbook that provides discussion material on each theme. However, since the material had been produced for the Swedish context some of its content might need to be adjusted to the Middle East and North Africa region. The local branch of Save the Children Sweden in the city of Lund has done such work in cooperation with the NGO Women's Humanitarian Organisation in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon. Save the Children Sweden MENA has also developed some material that could be used as part of Ellen-group discussions. This material is published in the child-version of the report *Woman or Child?*<sup>24</sup>

Ellen has its particular pedagogical models and exercises, such as "getting to know each other," to be used during the first meeting. Another method is the value clarification exercise, a way of initiating a discussion in which there are no clear-cut answers. The method is based on asking the participants to decide what they think about various statements. In the handbook these value clarification exercises are motivated as follows: They are democratic because everyone is active, even those who do not usually participate in discussions have to express their opinion. The participants become more conscious of what they think and what their standpoint is on various issues. They are given the opportunity to express and question their own opinions, and to reflect on and clarify the values they believe in. It leads to more self confidence, as the girls have to illustrate their standpoint by taking up physical positions that generate strength. Girls have the right, just as much as boys, to take up space! The method is not about reaching an agreement as to what is right and wrong; instead, it is about giving space and time to different points of views and encouraging diversity. In the school world, questions tend to be about giving answers that satisfy the teacher, an approach which does not stimulate pupils to be creative or inquisitive. This model is the opposite and was welcomed by the partner organisations who found it useful for the Middle Eastern context as it empowers girls and makes it possible for them to question their own cultural norms. This could be of particular interest for Yemen and other countries where girls have expressed that they agree to harsh punishment of females in order to restore her and the family's honour.

Ideas around self-help groups for children who have been sexually abused, under pressure to marry early, or under threat of honour violence were also discussed. It became evident that there is a lack of help-lines that children can call for support and also a need for shelters where youths can seek protection if they are under serious threats of sexual violence.

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<sup>24</sup> Women or Child? Voices of teenage girls in the Middle East, Save the Children Sweden MENA-region 2005

In conclusion Save the Children Sweden and its local partner organisations should:

- Acknowledge the importance of girls' right to education in order to combat sexual violence. Activities should include setting up best-practises for how to make access to schools possible for girls and advocate authorities and decision-makers to implement this.
- Facilitate the development of best-practises for activities that aim to empower girls and make them active participants that can express themselves. Implementation of Ellen-groups can play an important role in achieving this.
- Develop best-practises for children who have been exposed to sexual violence. The best-practise should be used in advocacy efforts for implementing hotlines and shelters so that all children have their right to protection guaranteed.

### **Knowledge dissemination and capacity building**

A consensus was made among all participating countries that there is a need to work with adults to reduce violations of girl's rights in society. The experts from all the countries outlined the need for capacity building of adults to be able to deal with children and have the know-how on preventing sexual violence and supporting children who have been exposed to such aggression. This capacity building should include training of social workers, teachers, and psychologists so that they can set-up protective structures, identify victims and be able to give them the appropriate support.

The experts noted the shortage of, and need to develop material that highlight the harmful effects of sexual violence against children and the child's right to protection. Training on this material and other methods that teach children about their right to protection from sexual violence, was identified as an important part in capacity building of teachers, social workers, and staff of organisations that deal with children.

In conclusion Save the Children Sweden and its local partner organisations should:

- Carry out or facilitate training of professionals on how to set-up structures that prevent sexual violence to the largest extent possible.
- Build the capacity of professionals so that they can detect and support children who have been, or are exposed to sexual violence.
- Produce material for teachers, social workers, and other adults on how to teach children about their right to protection.

## Contributors

*Dr Esbragh Ahmed Al-Eryani* obtained her PhD in 2003 at Ain Shams University in Cairo. She is an assistant professor of Social Psychology, and head of the research department at the Gender-Development Research and Studies Centre, at Sana'a University. Dr. Al-Eyrani led the research team in the situation analysis of Yemen. The rest of the team included *Dr Arwa Ahmed Al-Izzy*, *Dr Elham Abullah Al-Eryani*, *Dr Suad Salim Al-Saba* and *Dr Najat Sayem Khalil*, all of them affiliated researchers at the Gender-Development Research and Studies Centre at Sana'a University.

*Dr Ayesha M. Al-Rifai* has a PhD in Health Policy from the City University in London. She is presently Vice Dean at the Faculty of Education Sciences, Ramallah Women Training Centre, West Bank, UNRWA.

*MA Tove Myhrman* has a Masters degree in Political Sciences from Uppsala University. She was head of Save the Children Sweden's Jerusalem office from 2004 to 2005, and worked as Save the Children Sweden's Regional Programme Officer with a focus on protection in 2006. She co-ordinated this project.

*Dr Pernilla Onis* has been a consultant for Save the Children Sweden in the Middle East and North Africa region since 2004 and was the research leader for this project. She has a PhD in Human Ecology from Lund University and is presently a researcher and senior lecturer at the School of International Migration and Ethnic Relations at Malmo University in Sweden.

*Dr Rafif Rida Sidaoui* is a freelance sociologist affiliated with The Lebanese Council to Resist Violence against Women. She obtained a Doctorate in Sociology from the Lebanese University of Beirut in 2001. Her special research field is development and literary criticism.

## **Partner Organizations:**

### **Lebanese Council to Resist Violence against Women**

In 1997 the Lebanese Council to Resist Violence against Women (LECORVAW) was founded in Beirut, in response to the alarming rate of violent acts against women in Lebanon. LECORVAW supports women and girls who are victims of such crimes by offering them legal and social support.

### **Gender-Development Research & Studies Centre**

The Gender-Development Research and Studies Centre (G-DRSC), was established in June 2003 within Sana'a University. The organisation is engaged in a program that teaches, research and outreach on women, gender and development issues in the Yemeni society. G-DRSC uses gender analysis to investigate material and ideological relations of gender affecting men and women in Yemen and the MENA region. It is particularly concerned that there are institutionalized gender inequalities for women and seeks to expose and transform these to create a more just society. With the overall gender specific framework, G-DRSC highlights both the need for specialized academic degrees awarding studies in gender and development, and integrating gender analysis in faculties of Sana'a University and other fields. G-DRSC cooperates with INGOs and the UN agencies to conduct research and studies on gender-related issues

### **Women's Studies Centre**

The Women's Studies Centre (WSC) works for the promotion of women and girls rights in the Palestinian society. WSC strives to change policies at the governmental level as well as transforming the prevailing societal attitudes towards the status and rights of women and girls. In order to achieve these goals, WSC has committed itself to realising the following mission statement: Raise societal awareness that will lead to equal opportunities on the economic, social, political and legal levels. Build the capacity of individuals who have a potential to become leaders with the responsibility for facilitating and creating equal opportunities in the society. WSC has an office in Jerusalem.