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Azza Charara Baydoun

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Corresponding author: Azza Charara Baydoun

Author contact: [azzabaydoun@gmail.com](mailto:azzabaydoun@gmail.com)

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## Family Violence in Men's Accounts: Implications for Action

Azza Charara Baydoun<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This article presents some of the results of a qualitative study that was conducted within the framework of the strategy implemented by some Lebanese women organizations; namely engaging men in their efforts to combat family gender-based violence. In order to gain a more comprehensive view of the dynamics of violence against women in their families (than that obtained solely from recounts of women victims /survivors of violence that was researched in numerous previous studies conducted in Lebanon), the researcher listened, in an in-depth interview, to eleven wife batterers describing their versions of why they were indicted before the Lebanese court, or why they were seeking psychological help, depending on their case. Qualitative discourse analysis of the recorded free speech and recounts of these men was performed in an attempt to understand their respective family dynamics as manifested by the psycho-social factors around which revolved their recounts; thus laying the ground for understanding the practical implications for the intervention of different stakeholders involved in combating gender-based violence, namely, the psycho-social agents for the rehabilitation of the perpetrators, the judiciary and the women organizations.

### Keywords:

**Domestic violence, Lebanese law, judiciary practices, women NGO activism, social rehabilitation.**

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<sup>1</sup> Researcher on women's affairs and gender issues ([www.azzacharabaydoun.wordpress.com](http://www.azzacharabaydoun.wordpress.com)).

Contact: [azzabaydoun@gmail.com](mailto:azzabaydoun@gmail.com)



## Introduction

### *Women Have Spoken Out...*

From the moment they were given the opportunity to speak out on the subject of family violence, women have not ceased to do so. The disclosures began with women's testimonies at the 1995 Arab Women's Tribunal held in Beirut as a prelude to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, known as the Beijing Conference (Sidawi, 1998). As work to break the silence about family violence was set in motion, opportunities to speak on the subject multiplied. Subsequently, women's statements – especially from survivors of family violence – have reached a diverse audience.<sup>2</sup> Women's grievances have been expressed in testimonies and documented in field studies; they have inspired works of art and literature, mostly from women's perspectives.<sup>3</sup> All of this has created the impression that women's voices dominate the subject. However, some women's organizations<sup>4</sup> today are attempting to engage men in their activities to achieve gender equality in general and fight violence against women in particular. Consequently, men are being given a voice in the discussion, in an attempt to further enrich it.

### *... Now Men*

This article presents some of the findings of a qualitative study<sup>5</sup> conducted within the framework of engaging men in Lebanon. The study aims to draw a more complete picture of what happens

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2 This audience includes health workers (doctors and nurses), legal professionals (judges and lawyers in civil and religious courts), and social workers, as well as professionals in the security, legislative, media, educational, and academic fields.

3 See bibliographies in Baydoun (2010, pp. 19–69) and Usta and Wetheridge (2010). See also Baydoun (2015, pp. 207–226) and El Kadri (2011).

4 One of these organizations is the ABAAD (Dimensions) Resource Center for Gender Equality (which sponsored this study). The establishment of its Men Center – dedicated to men who voluntarily wish to rid themselves of their propensity for violence against women – is perhaps the most important effort to engage men. See [www.abaadmena.org](http://www.abaadmena.org); for activities aimed at engaging men and organized by KAFA (Enough) Violence and Exploitation, see [www.kafa.org.lb/StudiesPublicationPDF/PRpdf-55-634898043414321442.pdf](http://www.kafa.org.lb/StudiesPublicationPDF/PRpdf-55-634898043414321442.pdf).

5 The full text of the study is available in Baydoun (2017). To contact the author, refer to [www.azzacharabaydoun.wordpress.com](http://www.azzacharabaydoun.wordpress.com).



in families where domestic violence takes place. For the purpose of the study, eleven men were interviewed. Of these, nine had received sentences pursuant to Law No. 293/2014, also known as the Law on the Protection of Women and Family Members from Domestic Violence.<sup>6</sup> The remaining two were seeking the help of a psychologist to rid themselves of the violence they practiced against their wives. We met each of the men twice.<sup>7</sup> The first meeting was an open-ended interview, during which each man described his current situation and recounted the life trajectory that had led him either to stand trial or to seek psychological help. The second interview was somewhat structured, and was designed to collect demographic, personal, and familial information about the interviewee.

By analyzing the men's accounts, this article seeks to diagnose the psychosocial state behind the factors they invoked to "justify" their violence. Subsequently, the article draws out the implications of the findings in relation to three concerns: Psychosocial rehabilitation/psychological help offered to defendants

- Judicial practice within the framework of Law No. 293/2014
- The work of women's governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in relation to this law, and the repercussions of its implementation

To that end, we present the reader with a general profile of the men who have spoken out – i.e. our interviewees – and we outline the relational, familial, and social contexts surrounding them according to their accounts.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Lebanese parliament passed Law No. 293/2014 on April 1, 2014, and President Michel Sleiman signed it on May 8, 2014. The final version of the law was published in the Official Gazette on May 15, 2014. To view that version, see <https://lp.gov.lb/Temp/Files/9d879de2-285b-4217-abc8-866e7a3f42ac.doc>.

<sup>7</sup> The interviews were held at the premises of ABAAD, a non-governmental organization. The researcher/writer along with Danielle Howayek, a lawyer from ABAAD and one of its founding members, conducted the interviews. Interviews were recorded in nine cases, with the interviewees' consent. The recordings were destroyed after their content had been transcribed.

<sup>8</sup> We had the opportunity to refer to the documents from the civil trials that led to the interviewees' convictions. We also used other documents from their case files that the interviewees provided at our request.



## I. Findings and Conclusions<sup>9</sup>

### *Men Differ.*

#### *Couples' Characteristics and Circumstances*

The interviewees are men aged between 31 and 53 years (the arithmetic mean exceeded 45 years of age). Their wives' ages range from 21 to 51 years (the median was 40). The age difference between spouses ranges from three to 14 years (the median was three). Around two thirds of the couples married before the age of 30, and around 80% of the wives were under 25 when they married. The duration of the marriages ranges between four and 32 years (the median was 16 years).<sup>10</sup>

These numbers show that most of the interviewees reached adulthood some time ago. Nevertheless, they have not developed peaceful forms of communication that would enable them to resolve family disputes in an adult manner. On the contrary, these men resort to violence against their wives. It is also evident that the wives have not "gotten used to" violence and are not willing to do so. Accordingly, each filed a lawsuit against her husband pursuant to Law No. 293/2014.

The findings of our qualitative study demonstrate that any man can commit violence against his family. Such men are present in all age groups, sociocultural classes, geographical regions, religious affiliations, educational backgrounds, and professional positions. Furthermore, they may have any personality type or psychological disorder. No categorization is excluded. Our findings also demonstrate that violence is committed regardless of whether both spouses come

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<sup>9</sup> The findings of qualitative studies cannot lead to generalizable or definitive conclusions. However, they can prove the invalidity of generalizations: if a single case diverges from a finding that is otherwise general to all research subjects, then it is sufficient to negate the validity of any generalization.

<sup>10</sup> All of these findings show that the interviewees tended to marry young, and to take young wives compared with the average marriage age of Lebanese females, according to official general surveys from the past three decades.

See Central Administration of Statistics ([www.cas.gov.lb](http://www.cas.gov.lb)).



from the same or different geographical origins, were born to the same or different religious denominations, or have similar or differing educational levels and parental backgrounds.

As previous studies have found, women who are empowered by education, work, and high social standing and women who lack such privileges may all become victims of family violence. There is a popular belief that women who work outside the home or have higher educational attainments than their husbands intimidate the latter. However, this belief is negated by the almost perfect balance between housewives and working wives (i.e. who work outside the home) among the wives of the men we interviewed. The converse is also true: housewives are not helpless, nor are they compelled to accept violence as their fate.<sup>11</sup>

### ***The Significance and Implications of These Differences***

The distribution of men revealed above renders all men equal as regards family violence, whatever their social category. This means that those accused of family violence, however distinguished they may be, cannot hide behind their affiliations in order to deny committing violence. Therefore, it is unacceptable that the parties before whom complaints are brought (whether judges, security personnel, caseworkers, lawyers, health workers, or other professionals whose jobs bring them into contact with female survivors of family violence) should subscribe to the common belief that men from certain categories are “too noble” to commit violence. Members of the security forces, for example, must not assume that a wife who files a complaint against a violent husband is “lying”: even if the husband is e.g. a doctor who graduated from a prestigious university, he can still commit violence.

### ***...Yet These Men Are Similar***

Although our interviewees differ in their personal and demographic traits and family circumstances, they exhibit similarities in their rationalizations of the violence they practice

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<sup>11</sup> These findings only describe the sample population in this study, and should not be generalized. However, they coincide strikingly with the findings of cross-sectional studies that other researchers have conducted on women and girls who have survived family violence and received help from programs to end such violence (Sidawi, 2002; Charafeddine & Succar, 2008; Succar, 2008; Baydoun, 2010).



against their families, particularly their wives. This part of the study describes the dynamics that govern relationships among members of families where there is domestic violence.

### ***The Wife: Fantasy Versus Reality***

Each interviewee told us the story of how he got married – a story that did not end with the couple living “happily ever after.” The majority had married “for love.” Their in-laws’ acceptance of them had been difficult and not wholehearted. Each man had wanted a young, “inexperienced” partner whom he could “bring up” or “raise” himself. He had conjured an image of an ideal wife, only to quickly discover that the woman he had married did not resemble that ideal. He had also found that his plan to “raise” his wife to conform to that ideal was hindered by many challenges, the most significant of which were “defects” in her personality, her parents’ persistent “interference” in the couple’s life, and his in-laws’ support for their daughter’s opposition to his “educational” project.

### ***Who Is the Ideal Wife?***

The interviewees express a desire to have exclusive “ownership” of their wives. They expect the latter to be ready to cater to their every need – and their needs are many. They entail carrying out daily household chores, ensuring a suitable environment for the husband’s emotional and sexual demands, improving the husband’s self-image, and burnishing his image in front of their families and social milieux. Consequently, a woman must obey her husband without reservation, hide his weaknesses, and disregard his mistakes in order to maintain his dignity and manhood, especially in front of their children and both spouses’ families. Conversely, a woman who reveals her husband’s faults – which includes complaining of his violent treatment – is deemed to be negligent of her marital duties and challenging her husband’s masculine authority.

Does this ideal wife resemble their wives in reality? The interviewees complain that their wives fall short of female ideals: they leave their houses unclean, are generally poor cooks, are lazy, and depend on female relatives or housemaids. Most of the wives are mothers but do not



deserve that title, and are unsatisfactory sexual partners. Most importantly, they defy their husbands' authority. Many interviewees describe their wives as "mannish": they attribute to them traits that are supposedly privileges reserved to men, and this leads the husbands to feel that their own manhood is defective. They consider their wives' manly traits to be not only a lack of femininity, but also a trespass against their own masculine identity. It seems as if the men's possession of manly traits is only made possible by their wives' lack of such traits: if a woman possesses male traits, she is "a man," and if the wife is "a man," then the husband must be "a woman" (verbatim). According to all interviewees, this is a major insult which requires a "natural" manly reaction: violence, in all its forms. The same goes for a woman who behaves inconsistently with her husband's assumptions regarding gender roles and traits.

### ***Childish Manhood***

#### ***What mentality and psychological basis lie behind these men's ideas and attitudes?***

Each interviewee's words reflect a childish perception of his male identity, and of the meanings of masculinity and femininity. This perception is childish in the sense that it remains frozen in the moment when the child first realizes his sexual identity<sup>12</sup> – his realization that he is male. We describe the interviewees' gender identity as childish because they believe that masculinity and femininity are not only totally separate, but also opposites.<sup>13</sup> In other words, batterers deem women to be the opposite of men (and men the opposite of women), and they consider that femininity and masculinity are mutually exclusive

Consequently, our findings allow us to formulate the following proposition regarding some of the reasons behind marital violence: a wife batterer suffers from a gender identity crisis – i.e. a

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<sup>12</sup> According to psychoanalytic theory, for instance, male sexual identity is formed during early childhood at the traumatic moment when the boy discovers his mother's "castration." Other psychological theories (such as social learning theory) consider that male identity is formed over a longer course of development.

<sup>13</sup> This finding also repeatedly appears in various forms in a recent study conducted in four countries: Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, and Morocco. It especially appears in the qualitative study conducted in Lebanon, where most male research participants, particularly migrants, drew a direct link between the wife's financial contribution to the family on the one hand, and on the other a decline in the husband's masculinity, a drop in his familial and social status, and a decrease in his authority over family members. Some even directly linked this to increased family violence. See Keedi, Yaghi, and Barker (2017).



crisis that affects his innermost conviction that he is a man. His conviction of his own gender identity is fragile due to its need for consolidation from an external source: his wife. On the one hand, his idea of manhood is built on superiority over his wife; on the other, it requires her to fit his stereotype of women and to respect patriarchal gender roles. As a result, the absence of both these conditions in his wife undermines his confidence in his own male identity.

### ***Wife Batters and Women's Changing Condition***

The interviewees appear unaware of the changing conditions of contemporary women. They are oblivious that women today no longer resemble their traditional image. Field research and studies<sup>14</sup> have detected indicators of a change in women's realities, and indeed Lebanese society is promoting this change. This is manifested in policies adopted by governmental organizations and NGOs, and in the strategies, plans, and programs they have implemented in an attempt to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and establish gender equality and equity in all aspects of women's lives.

Nevertheless, our interviewees are slow to assimilate the psychological and relational implications of the changes in women's conditions, and are unable to adapt their own cognitive structures to these implications. They cannot discern their wives' behavioral signals, or the verbal, corporeal, gender-related, and emotional expressions that prefigure their wives' behavior. Each of the interviewees seems unaware of his wife's relatively low tolerance threshold for the violence he exercises, a threshold that he must not exceed, especially since she is now able to file a lawsuit against him (i.e. following the passing of Law No. 293/2014).

Thus, some of the reasons behind the gender identity crisis that wife batterers suffer include their failure to assimilate their wives' lived reality, and their adherence to ideas and attitudes that do not resonate with that reality. Indeed, it seemed to us that the interviewees were unaware that their wives could now take care of themselves financially, received emotional support from their milieu, and could therefore refuse to be subjected to violence. (In this respect women now have what their mothers lacked – the latter were raised, for instance, to accept their

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<sup>14</sup> For example, see Baydoun (2007, Part Three) and Baydoun (2015a, pp. 46–70).



“fate” and to stay in the marital home at all costs, even to the point of death.) Furthermore, suffering women are now offered more concrete support through governmental organizations’ and NGOs’ readiness to lend them an ear. The support of the state, and of its judicial and security institutions, has materialized in the adoption of Law No. 293/2014, which grants women unprecedented access to solutions that punish criminal batterers. The interviewees’ obliviousness of these change is perhaps based on a belief that their wives’ “insubordination” is circumstantial and will disappear with the disappearance of what the men believe to be its source: the provokers. These provokers include in-laws; NGOs entrusted by the judiciary to follow up on court decisions; the state, which “meddles” in family affairs; lawyers and judges. Each of our interviewees harbors strong feelings of hatred against all these alleged “provokers.”

## **II. Implications**

### ***Implications for Psychosocial Rehabilitation***

The husbands who constitute our sample population want to exercise authority over their families. Each also wants his wife to respect her social role under the patriarchal system. These men display outmoded attitudes that no longer coincide with the reality of contemporary women. They seem unmindful of the changes in women’s conditions and of the new place women hold in public discourse. We do not claim that wife batterers are the only people<sup>15</sup> to hold such outmoded beliefs and attitudes. Nevertheless, we believe that batterers differ from other men and women in that their discriminatory ideas, beliefs, and attitudes cross the line into committing violence. Although such beliefs and attitudes constitute a prerequisite for the exercise of gender-based violence, not all people who adopt them necessarily commit violence.

Most batterers blame their psychological regression on their current circumstances and the decline of their social standing. Their financial capabilities have deteriorated, and so has their ability to sustain their families and maintain their quality of life. When financial support and sustenance (the core of the idea of manhood in patriarchal societies) are impaired, it strikes to the

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<sup>15</sup> See Baydoun (2007, Part Three) and the references listed in footnote 11 for documentation of all the research on gender trends conducted in Lebanon and Arab countries.



heart of such husbands' identities.<sup>16</sup> In some cases this unleashes a destructive anger that seeks an outlet. The wife is the least costly available scapegoat – or at least, that is what these men believe.

In this vein, some of the interviewees maintain that the violence they exercise is quasi-impulsive. They have no control over it; it simply “happens,” just as it “befalls” their wives. Their violence results from overwhelming circumstances, and/or from their wives' and children's unsympathetic consequent behavior, and so on. The excuses are unending. Others deny having committed violence against their wives at all. Still others have completely “forgotten” the arguments that preceded the eruption of violence, and are surprised that their wives remember them. All in all, most of the interviewees underplay the importance of their own violent conduct. They claim that their actions are no different than any other man's. All men hit their wives; but their own wives have behaved scandalously by publicly reporting the violence, rather than keeping family life private as women should.

### ***Violence Is Unjustifiable***

The above account in no way justifies the violence these men exercise. We do not accept the husbands' (circumstantial) excuses (or their more deep-rooted justifications), which hold women responsible for the violence inflicted on them. The stance we have adopted is not based solely on principles derived from feminism, but rests on several indications that disprove the interviewees' claims. First, wife batterers are not the only people affected by the circumstances and excuses they offer: they are not the only ones who experience unemployment, nor are they alone in their inability to achieve the quality of life they desire. However, they are the only ones to commit violence.

The most important indication that men's violence against their wives can be contained comes from two of our interviewees. These two men have admitted their violence and are currently seeking psychological help, as mentioned previously. They have been clinically diagnosed with psychological disorders, which they could have used as an excuse for committing violence if

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<sup>16</sup> See Keedi, Yaghi, and Barker (2017).



they had wanted to do so. Another argument they could have used is that each of their fathers treated his family violently. Thus, both men's behavior is an imitation of their fathers as role models; this narrows their responsibility for their own violence, to a small degree. Nonetheless, both men have taken a mature decision: they have rejected their own violence, refused to give in to illness, and refused to yield to the example their fathers set. Instead they have chosen to seek help to change their violent behavior. Each attributes this behavior to a weakness in his own masculinity. They describe violence as the "shameful solution" – a solution unworthy of their manhood.

These two men set an example of a mature, unchildlike choice in dealing with violence. They present an alternative to the other men's tendencies to deny, underplay, or practice violence and to describe it as a "natural" exercise of their rights. The two husbands have neither given in to their harsh external circumstances nor yielded to the internal forces that give rise to violence. On the contrary, they are endeavoring to transform their violent behavior and taking practical steps in that direction.

In addition, the fact that women are reporting the violence they are subjected to and resorting to the police and judiciary, albeit limitedly, indicates that they are no longer willing to sacrifice their own well-being for their husbands' social image. They are no longer keeping quiet and accepting violence as their inescapable fate. Accordingly, during rehabilitation, wife batterers must be offered a chance to activate their capacity for reality-testing. They must be given room to review their ideas about gender in relation to meanings, values, and judgments regarding men and women, their roles, and interrelated family relationships, in addition to the current social, legal, economic, and political implications of those ideas. In other words, wife batterers must reexamine their gender stereotypes in light of men and women's current realities, with the intention of abandoning childish perceptions and adjusting their image of their wives to fit that reality.

### ***Speaking and Remembering***

In a legal context, we believe that speaking out against family violence is an appropriate gateway to psychosocial rehabilitation. On the one hand, it enables the redefinition of violence,



which can take on different meanings and forms depending on its repercussions for the perpetrator and the victim/survivor. Such redefinitions aim to elucidate the beliefs and attitudes behind the violence, rethink our society's tolerance of it, and subsequently refuse its normalization. On the other hand, speaking about violence addresses wife batterers' "amnesia" about the violence they have committed and their disregard for the harm they have caused their wives. Furthermore, "remembering" the violence one has committed, whatever its form and magnitude, is necessary in order for the perpetrator to take responsibility for his actions. Psychosocial rehabilitation includes the idea that for a batterer to be capable of changing and learning, he must play an active role in his own personal transformation. Both remembrance and admission are essential for understanding the present and drawing a roadmap for the future.

### ***The Motives and the Gain***

What motivates batterers to undergo psychological treatment or psychosocial rehabilitation? What do they gain?

We find that, thanks to psychosocial rehabilitation, perpetrators of violence gain the opportunity to understand the losses they suffer because of their own violent behavior. These losses are directly related to batterers' psychological well-being. They include the suffering that results from their leaving home and being separated from their children. They also include the money spent on lawyers' fees and alternative living arrangements, in addition to the harm caused to the perpetrator's reputation. Rehabilitation allows a batterer to realize that society and the state regard his actions as violence that entails legal, social, and psychological punishment. Thus, rehabilitation constitutes a precious opportunity for batterers to acquire behaviors that enable them to avoid such punishments and repercussions in the future. (For example, rehabilitation trains batterers to manage their anger, to deal non-violently with stimuli that frustrate them, to resort to peaceful verbal exchange within their families, etc.)

These men are in a state of emotional and cognitive ambivalence that is psychologically painful. As a result, most of them experience somatization manifested in physical pain, bio-



functional disorders, or sleep disorders, among other things. Therefore, in order to attain stable psychological well-being, wife batterers must discuss their state with a therapist/counselor who can be an empathetic and neutral witness to their malaise. In addition, we find husbands' and wives' respective accounts (recorded in litigation documents) of their shared life circumstances to be largely contradictory. This contradiction is probably the result of a decline in communication and trust within the couple. For this reason, we encourage couple therapy, as it prompts spouses to notice transformations in one another and helps to activate and maintain those transformations. When taken seriously by both spouses, couple therapy presents them with an alternative to violence: non-violent exchange. With the help of the therapist/counselor, they experience the possibility of such mutual exchange. As the therapist/counselor becomes a neutral witness to non-violent conversations, a new course devoid of violence is charted for their relationship.

### *Implications for the Judiciary*

Studies on femicide within the family have shown that this crime is an outrageous outburst that concludes years of invisible, normalized, continuous, and escalating violence against a female family member (Baydoun, 2008, p. 159). This formed the basis of the argument presented by the National Coalition to Legalize the Protection of Women from Family Violence demanding that a law be passed in Lebanon to protect women from family violence. Not only does Law No. 293/2014 punish perpetrators of family violence, but it also deters likely perpetrators, and when victims resort to this law it can put an end to an escalation of violence that might otherwise culminate in murder.

Studies have also revealed that caution is called for in the aftermath of a wife's reporting of violence. This is because the perpetrator perceives his wife's reporting of violence outside the family (especially to the police or judiciary) as a betrayal, an act of disloyalty to his love, and a declaration of war. During the interviews we conducted, the interviewees' words reeked of anger, and they admitted feelings of hatred toward their wives as well as a desire for revenge. Similarly,



studies on femicide show that many husbands kill their wives while still on trial or immediately following the issuance a judgment such as a restraining order (Baydoun, 2008).

Consequently, to the external observer, Law No. 293/2014, which supposedly protects women, seems to incite more violence. (Some of our interviewees explicitly stated this.) Hence the critical importance of effective measures both to provide wives with protection guaranteed by the state, security forces, and social institutions, and to provide conditions favorable to the sustainable cessation of the perpetrator's violence. We consider the most important of these conditions to be the psychosocial rehabilitation of the batterer, an option stipulated under Article 20 of Law No. 293/2014. Indeed, women's NGOs that combat violence against women and are working on amendments to Law No. 293/2014 wish to make such psychosocial rehabilitation mandatory (not left to the judge's discretion).

### ***The Definition and Forms of Violence***

Although we now have a more or less lucid definition of physical violence, we lack an accurate operational definition of emotional and other forms of violence invoked by feminist discourse during the past 20 years. These forms include psychological, sexual, economic, and legal violence. Studies have identified all of these forms in the experiences of women who have reported family violence. However, public discourse denies these forms of violence, and this denial is manifested in most of our interviewees' refusal to acknowledge them. Therefore, special effort must be made to formulate definitions of these terms, especially since some judges have begun speaking about these forms of violence and in some cases have even issued judgments based on indications of them. Such definitions can be established with the help of the verbal and other means of expression available today through "old" and "new" media (electronic communications, photographs, documentaries, etc.) Such definitions can also be formulated on the basis of relevant legal documents, as well as literature and research that tackles violence against women and focuses on female victims of violence. Countries that have already adopted similar laws have accumulated operational definitions of emotional and other forms of violence, and of the means of proof of their occurrence. We can draw on these definitions in order to formulate our own.



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*The Law's Implementation and the State's Responsibility*

*A genuine review of perpetrators' attitudes and violent behaviors requires special care from the judiciary and needs to be taken seriously by the state. How can this be achieved?*

Several of our interviewees claimed that they had been treated unjustly, each for different reasons. It was claimed, for example, that the court had not investigated the wife's allegations seriously, and thus the man's indictment was unfounded; the judge had not given him the opportunity to explain his side of the story; the judge had been influenced by an intervention on behalf of the plaintiff (*wasta*). Because of the peculiarity of the relationship between plaintiff and defendant in family violence cases, it is vital to be aware of an accused husband's feeling that he has received unjust treatment: the defendant can easily and excessively harm the plaintiff to avenge her lawsuit against him. Therefore, it is not inconsequential that the defendant himself should be persuaded by the court's judgment.

This places greater importance on tangible evidence than in other types of case. We believe that the judiciary's credibility requires the development of an effective mechanism for the expeditious and accurate investigation of plaintiffs' claims. The aim is to avoid the issuance of unfair judgments, whatever proportion they constitute of the more general judgment. Courts must exert every effort to minimize mistakes in the application of the law. This includes the behavior of security forces in police stations, officers charged with notifying judgments, and those entrusted with enforcing them.

After Law No. 293/2014 was approved and judges began to apply its provisions – particularly Article 20, which authorizes the judge to recommend that the accused should undergo psychosocial rehabilitation – some judgments stipulated that such rehabilitation be conducted under the supervision of KAFA (Enough) Violence and Exploitation, an NGO. In other words, courts entrusted this NGO with certain tasks for the enforcement of relevant judgments. This demonstrates that courts themselves are not sufficiently equipped with the structure or personnel to apply Article 20. KAFA was charged with supervising perpetrators' psychosocial rehabilitation and following up on families' subsequent situations.



However, the approval of Law No. 293/2014, and the enforcement of relevant judgments and measures, has resulted in a situation with which NGOs cannot adequately deal, due to their limited abilities and resources. These organizations should not shoulder such tasks alone, especially since it brings them face to face with perpetrators who harbor strong feelings of hostility against them (Baydoun, 2016, pp. 238–239). Since NGOs lack the resources required for the optimal accomplishment of these tasks, they also become exposed to harsh criticism from opponents of Law No. 293/2014. Having passed Law No. 293/2014, the state is responsible *de jure* for providing the human, material, and financial resources needed for its implementation, albeit in cooperation and partnership with women’s organizations that have preceded it in this area. We believe that the law’s successful implementation is no less critical than its initial adoption. Every effort must be made to achieve this success.

### ***Coordination Between Courts***

This study further reinforces a common observation: divorce, custody, and alimony (in addition to other matters under Lebanese religious courts’ jurisdiction) are causes of marital disputes leading to violence. Thus, we can expect an overlap between the scope of civil courts’ and religious courts’ authority as regards the protection of women from family violence. Indeed, we sensed this overlap during our interviews; some interviewees even used this overlap to bolster their own positions. Additionally, most interviewees preferred to resort to religious courts, since these courts do not include violence among the basic grounds for divorce or separation – the solution which battered wives seek most often.

The plurality of authorities in family matters calls for coordination between them, and for the issuance of a memorandum of understanding that adopts a unified stance. This memorandum of understanding should specify the points which all religious courts<sup>17</sup> endorse, and those upon

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<sup>17</sup> There are 15 different religious courts in Lebanon. For example, in a discussion between feminist activists and religious judges from all religious denominational courts, every person present, without exception, condemned family violence against women. They also condemned marital rape. Most of these men held leading positions in their respective religious courts. See Baydoun (2015b, pp. 152–161).



which religious courts and civil courts agree. This would prevent husbands from evading the legal repercussions of the many forms of violence they exercise, including (but not limited to) physical, economic, and emotional violence. For the time being, this memorandum must also cover disputes arising in interfaith marriages, as well as custody and divorce (among other things), until such times as Lebanon's legislators issue a civil family or personal status law granting all citizens equal rights and responsibilities. Moreover, an "honor code" must be drawn up between these courts to establish justice as their main goal. This undoubtedly implies supporting victims, rather than promoting the interests of certain parties on the basis of religious affiliation, irrespective of their position in the issue at hand.

### ***Justice and the Proper Implementation of the Law***

From our interviewees' words, we sensed that family, religious, and political allegiances pervade the judiciary as well as the security forces, and that these allegiances affect the personnel of such institutions with striking ease. As a result, our interviewees do not trust the integrity of the judiciary or the institutions that assist it.

One might argue that the influence of such allegiances is characteristic of a widespread mentality whose transformation will take a long time. This mentality is reflected in negative opinions of the judiciary and of all courts, whose personnel are widely suspected of corruption and of succumbing to political intervention.<sup>18</sup> It also evokes gender-based prejudice in relation to women and women's issues. This mentality, while common, is not universal.<sup>19</sup> In addition, we

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<sup>18</sup> In a survey conducted by Ipsos Marketing and KAFA, 60% of respondents accused civil courts of corruption, while 42% accused religious courts of corruption. However, religious courts were accused of prejudice against women far more often than civil courts were (82% and 38% respectively).

<sup>19</sup> For example, according to the 2016 Arab Opinion Index, Lebanese citizens' trust in the judiciary varies as follows: 6% fully trust the judiciary; 25% trust it; 37% do not trust it at all; 1% gave no answer. The percentages of citizens who believe that the principle of fair trial through the implementation of the law is applied are as follows: 52% believe it is not applied; 29% believe it is not applied to a certain extent; 17% believe it is applied to a certain extent; only 2% believe it is really applied (Arab Centre for Research



sensed specific apprehension about Law No. 293/2014. Some of the interviewees expressed great vexation and even dread of the material and emotional consequences of the law’s enforcement. Hence, Law No. 293/2014 will serve a deterrent function – as every law does – once these consequences become widely known. Only after this knowledge has become widespread will Law No. 293/2014 become part and parcel of the public mentality and come to replace the discriminatory attitudes (e.g. normalization of family violence) that were widespread prior to its enactment. Such knowledge conveys an explicit message: violence against women, the normalization of family violence, and criminal batterers’ escape from punishment are no longer acceptable in our society.

***Implications for the Women’s Movement***

It is a known fact that the enactment of Law No. 293/2014 resulted from the feminist struggle to combat violence and discrimination against women in Lebanon, a struggle that lasted more than two decades.<sup>20</sup> Women’s organizations are fully aware of the importance of following up on this law’s implementation, and they are doing so with great vigilance. This vigilance has been reflected in their mobilization of the media and their public calls for action (through demonstrations and protests, for instance) to champion the triumph of victims/survivors over perpetrators.<sup>21</sup> Serious consideration of the law’s proper implementation is not only necessary for

and Policy Studies 2016). The abovementioned survey on family violence in Lebanon presents the following findings as regards the two types of court in Lebanon:

Would file a complaint to	Civil courts	Religious courts
Resulting judgments are		
Fair	45%	41%
Unfair	38%	42%
Don’t know	17%	17%

See Ipsos Marketing & KAFA (Enough) Violence and Exploitation (2016).

<sup>20</sup> The struggle of the National Coalition to Legalize the Protection of Women from Family Violence is documented on the website of KAFA, the coalition’s head ([www.kafa.org.lb](http://www.kafa.org.lb)).

<sup>21</sup> Women’s organizations are following up on the judiciary’s application of Law No. 293/2014. They also express their opinions on the judgments rendered by the judiciary, and voice any objections to such judgments through all available methods of communication and through public activism. We refer the



the simple administration of justice, which is continuously sought for all. From a feminist point of view we regard the administration of justice in cases of family violence as an especially critical matter, since the just implementation of Law No. 293/2014 will prevent the issuance of adverse judgments by those who opposed the enactment of the law and are now “lying in wait” for it with the intention of voiding it of its content or even rescinding it (Baydoun, 2015b, pp. 96–124).

Efforts toward the just implementation of Law No. 293/2014 greatly help to establish a firm foundation for the desired strategic change:<sup>22</sup> rendering civil law the final point of reference to address domestic violence against women. This law constitutes practical proof that a civil law can successfully deal with family matters. Consequently, the road leading to the enactment of Law No. 293/2014 sets an example for women’s movements seeking a unified civil law on personal status to replace the many current religious and discriminatory laws. These laws rationalize and legalize violence and discrimination against women, and discriminate between different categories of women (of different religious affiliations) within the same state.

One of the most important findings of our study is that Law No. 293/2014 has a direct effect on men who have been accused of violence against their wives. These men were the first to experience the exposure of family practices that until recently were considered private and not open to public scrutiny. They suddenly found themselves facing the state as well as judicial and security institutions, which intervened in what had previously been deemed private family matters. For a long time these husbands had kept their behavior hidden, but they now came to realize that their violent behavior within their families had psychological, social, relational, and material repercussions that could turn their lives upside down.<sup>23</sup> The involvement of the public sector in family matters is one of the most important outcomes of the Lebanese women’s

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reader to women’s organizations’ websites and social media pages, which document such objections and events.

<sup>22</sup> This is not the desire of anti-violence activists alone. In the survey by Ipsos Marketing and KAFA, almost half of respondents would advise family violence victims to file a complaint. Around 30% said they would intervene and call the police. By contrast, only 13% would advise victims to keep quiet, have patience, or endure. Finally, 5% would advise them to get a divorce or leave home.

<sup>23</sup> These repercussions are determined by a high authority: civil courts, which protect women as individual citizens who are equal to men in their right to justice. On the other hand, religious courts, which follow religious rules, promote men’s interests over women’s on the basis of sacred tenets that are impossible to change. For example, see Baydoun (2015b, pp. 125–161) and Baydoun (2015a).



movement's struggle. The movement has been incessantly trying for more than two decades to place responsibility for family matters on the shoulders of the state and its institutions. This responsibility includes the prohibition of both violence and discrimination against women within the family.

By highlighting the impact of Law No. 293/2014 on batterers in particular, the women's movement is continuing the work it started more than two decades ago when it declared war on violence against women. The cultural/educational outcome of making the personal and social repercussions for the batterer publicly known is just as important as bringing female victims' suffering to light and spreading a culture of non-violence. Just as the strategy of breaking the silence around violence against women contributed to the enactment of Law No. 293/2014, so the strategy of spreading information about the law's consequences for male batterers will help to restrain men in general from resorting to violence. Was such restraint not one of the most important reasons for the law's enactment?

The implementation of Law No. 293/2014 contradicts the famous saying that a change in mind-sets must precede any change in the law.<sup>24</sup> The more information is disseminated about the legal consequences of men's violent behavior within their families, the more batterers will be restrained, and the wider the culture of non-violence will spread. This will be effective within the framework of efforts in this direction by women's organizations, both governmental and non-governmental.

### ***Engaging Men and the Women's Struggle***

During the past 25 years, men and women have taken turns to speak about family violence. In the past, men's discourse was dominant.<sup>25</sup> However, during the last 20 years, women have raised their voices, which subsequently seemed to pervade public discourse. In this study, in an attempt to break the "dominance" of women's accounts of family violence, we listened to men,

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<sup>24</sup> This refers to an Arabic saying that one must change mind-sets before one changes laws or texts.

<sup>25</sup> This is reflected in one of Al-Mutanabbi's poems, which states that honor is only protected by women's "blood being spilled," in other words, through so-called honor crimes.



specifically wife batterers. Our study revealed, among other things, a divergence between men and women, especially batterers and their victims, in their views, attitudes, and behaviors regarding family violence. This divergence is clear when men and women define violence, choose who to blame when rationalizing it, and diagnose its causes and the factors that facilitate its occurrence. The divergence on all of these issues causes disagreement over the solutions to family violence.

Batterers and victims are not the only parties who have differing accounts of violence, nor are they alone in suggesting solutions to this issue. On the one hand, batterers' stances replicate the discourse of the patriarchal gender order and its major protectors: religious institutions, which the Lebanese Constitution vests with the handling of personal and family affairs. On the other hand, the women's movement, women's organizations, and their allies in civil society organizations support women who struggle to put an end to the different forms of violence and discrimination they are subjected to. These actors seek the enactment of a civil family law that accords with the conditions of present-day families and is consistent with family members' changing roles. Hence, women's organizations find themselves in opposition to religious institutions,<sup>26</sup> which deem these organizations' activities an infringement of their privileges in this area.

As for the state and its judicial, security, and social institutions, they stand midway between the women's movement on the one hand and religious institutions on the other. Their perception of their own role in protecting female citizens remains ambivalent and unsettled, inclining alternately to each party's discourse. This ambivalence is manifested at every legislative turn relating to women's lives and affairs.<sup>27</sup> For their part, women's organizations actively anticipate legislative initiatives and follow the parliament's, judiciary's, courts', and security forces' work on an almost daily basis. Through such activities, these organizations are supporting the civil state to replace religious institutions as regards the handling of family matters. This is manifested in legal,

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<sup>26</sup> See Baydoun (2015b, pp. 96–124).

<sup>27</sup> One example of such hesitation in legislation is the repeal of Article 522 of the Lebanese Penal Code – which exempts rapists from punishment if they marry their victims – even though two other articles that contradict the repeal were retained (see Hamzi, 2017). <http://legal-agenda.com/article.php?id=3867>



security, and social interventions against gender-based family violence. The women's movement considers the improvement of the performance of state institutions in these interventions to be critical, since such improvements help to drive the state away from control by religious institutions. They also consecrate the state as the body that handles all citizens' family and personal affairs, as should any civil state whose constitution demands the promotion of equality between citizens and the elimination of all forms of discrimination.

## Conclusion

The qualitative study on which this article is based is the first Lebanese study to listen to men speaking about family violence. Coupled with previous studies on the same topic whose sample populations are women, our study's findings help to draw a clearer picture of the dynamics governing violent families.<sup>28</sup> While studies whose sample populations are female bring the victim into focus, men's accounts highlight women's resistance to the violence perpetrated against them. By engaging men, this study not only brings the adversary's discourse to light, but also reveals the cultural, legal, and political dimensions of family violence. These aspects are more or less muffled in women's accounts,<sup>29</sup> but they almost always surface in men's accounts of family violence.

The emergence of these cultural, legal, and political dimensions in men's accounts allows us to understand the dynamics that govern the relationship between "private" family matters and "public" social matters. We witnessed the different forms of intervention by legal, judicial, security, and social institutions that deal with family violence. Consequently, as we addressed the implications – the topic of this article – we underlined the weaknesses and possible defects in legal, psychosocial, and feminist approaches to dealing with gender-based family violence. These weaknesses and defects need to be addressed and these approaches rectified or improved.

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28 Perhaps the most important outcome is the description of women who are subjected to violence not only as victims, but also as survivors. Reading studies conducted with survivors, one can sense that the accounts of the men we met corroborate such women's accounts. This is true despite the men's efforts to give accounts that contradict women's.

29 These accounts are prevalent in studies on family violence. For example, see Usta and Wetheridge (2010).



Furthermore, the study of family violence from batterers' point of view has shown that the opening up of yet another front in civil society political activism is in order. This new front consists of upholding the status of secular civil laws over sectarian laws by highlighting the former's effectiveness in addressing family violence and establishing security for family members. The state's success in protecting women from family violence would constitute a major step forward. It would liberate women (as well as men) from the dominance of religious institutions and take them into the state's care, reinforcing their citizenship and placing a solid milestone on the road to gender justice.

This study was conducted within the framework of a larger project that aims to engage men in women's struggle against gender-based violence and discrimination. Adopting activism to end violence against women as an entry point to feminist struggle has proven to be effective in mainstreaming women's issues in public discourse in our society. This may be further enhanced if the adoption of the strategy of engaging men in women's struggle against gender-based violence is elevated to the political level. To that effect, efforts need to be made to consolidate the alliance between feminist and other civil organizations as well as secular political parties that oppose gender-based discrimination. Unlike previous alliances in the recent history of feminism, this should take the form of a partnership, rather than postponing the solution of women's issues until other concerns have been resolved.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> This is a reference to the feminist activism that was prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s under the auspices of national and leftist parties. Feminist issues were suppressed at that time because they evoked contradictions between men and women – contradictions that were considered “secondary” to “primary” issues such as national liberation, the victory of the proletariat, etc. Women were supposed to postpone struggles that concerned secondary contradictions; men and women were supposed to join efforts until the primary contradictions had been resolved. See Baydoun (2002, pp. 11–24).



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