

# Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Law Enforcement in Lebanon

**Omar Nashabe**

*Slowly, it dawned on me that nothing was more important than stopping violence towards women – that the desecration of women indicated the failure of human beings to honor and protect life and that this failing would, if we did not correct it, be the end of us all. I do not think I am being extreme. When you rape, beat, maim, mutilate, burn, bury, and terrorize women, you destroy the essential life energy of the planet. You force what is meant to be open, trusting, nurturing, creative, and alive to be bent, infertile, and broken.*

Eve Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues*

Gender-based violence (GBV) is often considered a private or family matter caused by insignificant misunderstandings and is often ludicrously justified by traditional patriarchy that links masculinity with violence. Such perceptions are not only used to decriminalize serious physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, economic, and societal offenses and limit the reporting of such dangerous violations of fundamental rights; such perceptions are also widely employed in male-dominated societies, such as Arab societies, to downplay the profound damage caused by GBV, especially to women and girls.

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women of 1993 defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”.

In Lebanon and the Arab region, acts of violence against women range from rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, and trafficking. There is also a high prevalence of unrecorded and unreported forms of GBV related to abortion, child marriage, arranged marriages, and homophobia.

Law enforcement agencies are not just responsible for discovering, deterring, rehabilitating, or punishing people who violate the rules and norms governing society; their duty is also to protect the victims and survivors of these crimes. To address this gap, the Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) offered a training program on GBV response to Lebanese law enforcement officers in 2017 through a

project funded by the Dutch Embassy. Both male and female police officers participated in this training, which included various subjects and culminated in a training of trainers, giving law enforcement agencies the ability to continue training other officers following the completion of this project.

This special issue of *Al-Raida* describes IWSAW's initiative to strengthen security sector responses to GBV. But before describing and discussing the Lebanese Internal Security Forces (ISF) training in-depth, Kate Rougvie's article provides a contextual overview of gender norms in Lebanon, specifically hegemonic masculinity, and how these norms are reinforced and shaped by Lebanon's highly militarized police force. She explains the impact of these norms on law enforcement agencies' capacity to respond to gender-specific needs, and their impact on Lebanese society more broadly. Rougvie argues that a targeted dilution of the hegemonic masculinity within the ISF would not only reduce gender inequality within the force and improve responses to GBV, but would also have an impact on society more generally.

Following Rougvie, my article discusses the procedural and structural challenges we faced while conducting this training with the Internal Security Forces (ISF) and General Security (GS) officers. Officers expressed concerns about the scarcity of resources that prevent them from adequately responding to GBV cases, and complained about the mediocre quality of social and health services available for survivors of GBV. Finally, officers admitted feeling overwhelmed by the workload of such trainings, which are often conducted after or in-between their scheduled work shifts.

ISF commanding officers who participated in the training also contributed to this special issue with two articles, both translated from Arabic. The first, by Colonel Ziad Kaedbey, describes the ISF's human rights perspective in responding to GBV in Lebanon. The second article, by Colonel Elie Al Asmar, discusses joint initiatives between the ISF and NGOs aimed at improving responses to GBV. This issue also includes a focus on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) mandate for Security Sector Reform (SSR). Manar Zaiter's article examines state obligations to, and compliance with UNSCR 1325 (2000) requirements to promote and institute protection mechanisms for women and girls from GBV.

Brigitte Chelebian, another project trainer, argues in her piece that one of the most harmful types of GBV in Lebanon today is human trafficking. The article considers the impact of the Syrian crisis on trafficking in Lebanon, and highlights some of the current initiatives fighting human trafficking.

This special issue ends with the proceedings of a roundtable discussion that marked the culmination of the project. Roundtable participants included experts and trainers from the project, civil society actors, ISF and other security sector officers, and training participants themselves to discuss the training, best practices and challenges, and future work to prevent and respond to GBV in Lebanon.

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