

# Exploring Gender Norms in the Lebanese Internal Security Forces

**Kate Rougvie**

*He said: 'They tell me they fear the sound of your heels'. I told him: 'It's OK with me! It's OK with me if they hate me, but I'll never accept that they disrespect me'.*

**General Dalal Rahbany (Rtd),**  
First female Director General (Acting)  
of the General Directorate of General Security  
of the Lebanese Republic

Feminist scholarship focusing on security, gender, and conflict indicates gender norms that privilege the masculine and inferiorize the feminine are particularly pronounced within militarized security institutions (Whitworth, 2004). The male-dominated security sector promotes a particular type of masculinity (Connell, 2005), which reinforces gender-blind security institutions (Bastick, n.d.; Valasek, 2008; Enloe, 1983; Enloe, 2007). In this article, I will explore the ways in which this dynamic is produced in the context of Lebanon. I will investigate how social constructions of gender are reinforced by, and shape the nature of Lebanon's highly militarized police force, and the potential impact of this on its capacity to respond to gendered needs. I will begin by demonstrating the importance of gender perspectives to security theory and discourse. I will then explore the ways in which gender norms manifest in the militarized Internal Security Forces (ISF) and the reasons for, and the impact of this manifestation on their capacity to be a gender-responsive institution. Such an analysis will touch on the role of the police in preventing and responding to gender-based violence (GBV), and women's participation in the ISF.

The methodology for this study involved a literature review and key informant interviews (KII). The literature review included both academic scholarship and gray literature such as United Nations (UN) and non-governmental organization (NGO) publications. The review revealed a dearth of scholarship linking gender and the security sector in the context of Lebanon. As such, this research draws from the formative scholarship of a former Lebanese American University (LAU) master's degree thesis (Samaha, 2013), which focused on women in Lebanon's ISF – one of Lebanon's policing bodies. In response to the dearth of available sources specific to gender and security sector reform (SSR) in Lebanon, I analyze and use literature from multiple fields, including feminist security theory (FST); gender norms in Lebanon; and security, SSR, and politics in Lebanon. Gray literature helps to

contextualize information on issues such as GBV in Lebanon; the Syrian refugee crisis; women's rights in Lebanon; and human rights issues associated with the police in Lebanon.

As part of this research, semi-structured interviews with key personnel were carried out in Beirut. Four respondents with thematic expertise - notably SSR and the ISF; gender and the security sector; women's own experiences and perceptions of women in the security sector; men's experience and perceptions of women in the security sector; and gender norms (with a focus on masculinities) in Lebanon - were targeted for interviews. The first interviewee - a research expert in criminal justice and part-time faculty member at LAU - provided nuanced observations on the security sector in Lebanon (hereafter called Respondent 1). The second, a program manager at ABAAD- Resource Centre for Gender Equality and expert in masculinities and gender equality (Respondent 2) - focused on masculinities in Lebanon, and their impact on gender equality. The third - an expert on SSR and women's involvement in the ISF - offered key observations on institutional attitudes towards gender and women in the ISF (Respondent 3). The fourth interview was conducted with General Dalal Rahbany, a retired officer of the General Security (GS) of the Lebanese Republic, a second policing body in Lebanon, and the first and only woman to have achieved the rank of Director General (Acting) of the GS. General Rahbany shared rare reflections on her unique lived experience in a position of power within the security sector in Lebanon. The final two interviews were conducted with male ISF personnel - one Sergeant and one Sergeant Major.

Semi-structured interviews were used to purposefully allow participants to guide the interviews according to the issues they felt most important; this also helped ensure that the male perspective was captured for comparative purposes. Due to time constraints, few interviews were conducted with police personnel. Interviews were intended to be explorative in order to provide insights and begin to build an understanding, rather than seeking to establish generalizable claims.

In addition to key informant interviews (KII), two focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted with students and other participants. This study would have been strengthened by interviews with female members of the ISF and further interviews with male ISF personnel. Interviews with women who had accessed police services, would have been highly informative, however, they were not undertaken due to security and ethical concerns.

### **Women and the Security Sector**

Security studies is a historically male-dominated field. This has produced a male-biased conceptualization of security that has, in turn, deeply normalized hegemonic gender norms - especially masculinity - in both the discourses and practices of conflict, peace, and security (Pettman, 1996; Blanchard, 2003). This traditional understanding of security is state-centric, focusing on national security, sovereignty, and the absence of armed violence, and this has shaped the ways in which SSR has been approached (Kunz & Valasek, 2012). It is rooted in masculine ideals that essentialize men and women, and privilege normative masculine values, such as strength, objectivity, aggression, power, and independence while devaluing those commonly associated with women, for example, being emotional, compassionate, working collaboratively, being physically

weak, and being non-violent (Tickner, 1988). This creates a patriarchal, hierarchical, and authoritarian system of security governance that legitimizes and encourages military action (Blanchard, 2003). In turn, this reinforces gender norms and power imbalances in militarized societies that discriminate, most commonly, against women (Enloe, 1983). Gender norms are the social constructs which define and shape these 'feminine' or 'masculine' qualities and roles ascribed to men and women, or, as Enloe explains: "packages of expectations that have been created through specific decisions made by specific people" (Enloe, 1990, p. 3).

Being state-centric, rather than people-centered, traditional security does not consider the different security needs of women, men, boys, and girls, all of which are equally important to achieving security and sustainable peace – in worst-case scenarios, state-centric concerns consider women's experiences irrelevant to the question of security (Blanchard, 2003). Based on such understandings, security sector actors tend to marginalize gender equality and other gendered security issues – including GBV – that are often exacerbated in conflict settings (Bastick et al., 2007). This is important because, as Valasek explains: "Not only do women, men, boys, and girls experience security differently, but key challenges to state security in post-conflict contexts are also linked to gender and require gender-responsive SSR" (2007, p.153). Sexual violence, domestic violence, and other forms of GBV are deeply destabilizing to the security of a nation, and can be both a result and a driver of conflict (Bastick et al., 2007). Thus, SSR that is gender-blind will lack a vital piece of the puzzle necessary to achieving security and sustainable peace in conflict-affected states, and will deepen gender imbalances at the societal level (Valasek, 2007).

In the case of Lebanon, traditional notions of security appear to prevail. Both interviews with male police personnel, and the interactions I had with youth during the course of my work, indicated that police and young people alike may share a common understanding of security. When asked whether 'we all' face the same security concerns, participants in the interactive lectures did not immediately identify gendered differences in the threats and vulnerabilities experienced by men, women, boys, and girls in Lebanon. For example, GBV was not mentioned without prompting. 'Security issues' appeared to center around bombings, robbery, physical assault (against men), and corruption. Youth participants did, however, strongly agree – when prompted – that GBV is a serious problem in Lebanon. There is little evidence to suggest that those at the tactical or operational level of the ISF consider GBV prevention and response a key institutional responsibility, though a number of small-scale, specialized NGO initiatives have been conducted in recent years to train the ISF on some aspects of GBV response (Various interviews, February 2016). Thus, it would appear that GBV is not generally considered to be a 'security issue', and that naturalized understandings of security in Lebanon are in line with those propagated by traditional security theory.

The ISF is responsible for maintaining, "security and order, and combat[ing] crime through effective investigations, crime prevention, and arrest[ing] perpetrators" (Samaha, 2013, p. 44). The aim of the ISF is, "to meet the expectations of citizens and have their complete trust" through a combination of maintaining security; combating crime; law enforcement; protecting people and property; protecting rights and freedoms; facilitating daily lives; and making the best use of resources (Internal Security Forces Code of

Conduct Article 7) – compliant with common understandings of police work. However, the ISF is by all appearances a military institution. The ISF uses camouflage uniforms, military grade weapons, and military vehicles. As Respondent 1 stated: “[The ISF] [is] a paramilitary force... their structure and system is more a military system than a civil service system (Respondent 1, personal communication, February 2016, Beirut). ISF officers also begin their training in the same military academy as the Lebanese Armed Forces, and follow the same curriculum. Only after this do they complete specialized police training (Respondent 1, personal communication, February 2016, Beirut).

Military training is grounded in traditional notions of security and as a result, military institutions often perpetuate approaches that inferiorize women and promote harmful masculinities based on the essentialization of men and women’s ‘nature’. Whitworth (2004) describes military training as commonly involving “violently misogynist, racist, and homophobic messages delivered through the basic training, initiation, and indoctrination exercises” (p.152). Although I was unable to access information around the specifics of military training for ISF officers, Respondent 2 stated that no women have accessed this training (personal communication, February 2016, Beirut).

Moreover, the military (or militarized institutions) produces and glorifies hegemonic masculinity – which is, as Connell explains, a concept that has been used to describe “the most honoured way of being a man, it require[s] all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimate[s] the global subordination of women to men” (2005, p. 832). It does so by, “offering men unique resources for the construction of a masculine identity defined by emotional control, over heterosexual desire, physical fitness, self-discipline, self-reliance, the willingness to use aggression and physical violence” (Hinojosa, 2010, p. 179). Respondent 2 remarked, in reference to interventions aimed at promoting positive masculinities in the ISF: “The hierarchy, the disciplinarian mentality, the obedience expected, the domination of the institution by men, this makes work on masculinities even more important, and even more difficult” (Respondent 2, personal communication, February 2016, Beirut). This sentiment was echoed by Respondent 1, who claimed that those who do not conform to masculine behavior within the ISF would be deemed, “weak and insignificant” (Personal communication, February 2016, Beirut).

In 2008, the ISF Code of Conduct (CoC) was developed; it provides an interesting example of one source of (recent) ISF training and policy. It mentions gender on two occasions. The first states that: “Police members will not practice any form of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, confession, region, national origin, gender, age, social status or any other basis” (Internal Security Forces Code of Conduct, Article 11). The second refers to the protection of human rights and contains a similar reference. Women are mentioned twice; first with regards to ISF behavior – whereby ISF personnel should not, “undermine public trust [by]... appearing drunk, frequenting shady, disreputable places, gambling and betting, and associating with women of ill repute” (Internal Security Forces Code of Conduct, Article 24), and later stating that personnel should, “rush eagerly to help children, women, and elderly and disabled persons to cross overcrowded and dangerous places” (Internal Security Forces Code of Conduct, Article 19).

The omission of clauses relating specifically to key policing issues such as women's rights; gender equality; mechanisms for preventing, reporting, and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse by the ISF; and the need to recognize and appropriately address cases of GBV demonstrates the gender-blind nature of ISF security and policing priorities. I posit that the inclusion of a reference to 'women of ill-repute' could even increase prejudice and discrimination against women and reinforce patriarchal attitudes toward acceptable female behavior. The second reference, though it does recognize that each aforementioned group experiences heightened vulnerability, fails to recognize the very different ways in which each group experiences risk, and presents women, children, persons with disabilities, and elderly persons as a homogenous group with limited agency, and might even indicate the infantilization of women. Therefore, if the CoC is one basis for police training and resultant attitudes, one might tentatively conclude that discriminatory gender norms and masculine interpretations of security have a significant influence over police conduct.

Training for ISF personnel averages around 4-6 months in total (Various interviews, February 2016), and neither of the two ISF personnel I interviewed had received more than eight months of training in the course of a 10- and 12-year career, respectively. This limited training might allow for a wide 'margin of interpretation' of laws and policies by law enforcement, guided by beliefs and attitudes rather than policy – as Respondent 2 stated: "The importance that they place on th[e] law and those procedures will still be dictated by the gendered attitudes of the individual. These are still people carrying out the law, not a machine" (Personal communication, February 2016, Beirut).

Moreover, when asked whether men and women were equal in Lebanese society, both ISF respondents answered in the affirmative. However, when asked which qualities might be attributed to a woman respected by society, both responded that she must, first and foremost, obey her husband. While the Sergeant Major stated that sexual harassment and rape was a threat faced by women, he stated that this was linked to socio-economic status and that women preferred to deal with such issues within the family (Personal communication, February 2016, Beirut), while the Sergeant stated that violence against women was not widespread (Personal communication, February 2016, Beirut). Therefore, while interviewees demonstrated an awareness of some forms of GBV, they also indicated a broader lack of awareness of the institutional responsibility of the security apparatus to respond to such issues and increase the knowledge and awareness of GBV.

Gender responsiveness is not only a case of knowing how to respond to gendered needs, but is also contingent upon the capacity of a security force to establish two-way communication with the civilian population. This means, as Naraghi-Anderlini (2008) explains: "enabling women and men to determine the security threats they perceive or experience, and eliciting from them the range of solutions that could be sustainable in their context" (p.107). The military nature of the ISF may mean that their accessibility or connection to the community is limited, resulting in low levels of trust. Camouflage, arms, and a military mentality may limit the ISF's propensity to promote community ownership as, "the military is not supposed to deal with the civilians, the military is supposed to deal with other militar[ies]" (Respondent 1, personal communication, February 2016). As Cynthia Enloe (2007) explains, a militarized police force is

problematic because, “to police officers, the message is: Your fellow civilians are the Enemy” while for civilians policed by militarily-equipped police, the message is: “Your local police see you as threats” (p. 19). This may be one reason why most people in Lebanon do not trust the police. A study by Geha (2015) revealed that while many said they would report a crime to the police, “being willing to turn to state security institutions to address crime is not the same as trusting them. The ISF is the least trusted state security institution, being trusted by just under half of the respondents” (p. 4). My interactions with youth echoed this sentiment, voicing an almost unanimous feeling of distrust towards the ISF. Paradoxically, both male ISF personnel I interviewed felt that they were trusted and respected by civilians, particularly by youth. One added that women feel, “comfortable and at ease in seeking assistance” (Sergeant, personal communication, February 2016, Beirut), indicating a disconnect between ISF self-perceptions and the perceptions of the ISF through the lens of the civilian population.

A further reason for distrust may be the dearth of women in the ISF. Evidence shows that the presence of women can increase a sense of trust – not only because women and girls may feel more comfortable reporting crimes to a woman, especially GBV, but as a result of the stereotypical qualities expected of women. It is a common perception in many societies that by ‘nature’ women are less aggressive, gentler, and more compassionate than men, and they have been shown to use less deadly force and employ more effective communication skills – this translates into accessible security personnel (Bastick, n.d.). While I argue that these qualities are socially constructed and learned rather than innate, this perception may, nonetheless, be a useful tool for increasing trust in the police. The danger in this discourse lies in the use of this argument as a justification for increased recruitment of women, due to the risk of reinforcing gender stereotypes, and the removal of responsibility from male ISF officers to transform their own views and beliefs toward gender.

As Khattab and Myrntinen note, “Lebanese perceptions of security institutions include confessional and political power structures comprising mostly male-dominated patronage networks, and a ‘masculine’ public image, which is reflected in perceived behaviours and responses” (2014, p. 1). Therefore, if distrust – as a result of male dominance and masculine, militarized mentalities – of the ISF is prevalent among Lebanese, the force will be unable to establish two-way communication with the community to identify and respond to a wide range of needs.

According to Respondent 1, the ISF opts for a militarized structure because it facilitates and condones the patriarchal attitudes found amongst militarized men in Lebanon:

The emphasis on force and aggression, on destruction and violent completion, the extreme patriotism and nationalism creates this male chauvinist attitude that is very much there in Lebanese society. It was there with the militias too, and the non-governmental security actors (Personal communication, February 2016, Beirut).

Respondent 2 also described how masculinities in Lebanon are not only a question of power and superiority over women. While dominance over women is part and parcel of hegemonic masculinity, it is more of a given than an objective: the proof of ‘real’

masculinity comes in the form of dominance of men over other men: “you are really a man if you know how to dominate other men, have other men look up to you and respect you” (Personal communication, February 2016, Beirut). Thus, it is evident how the command structure and male-dominated nature of the ISF in Lebanon might perpetuate such mentalities, while blocking the way for women to assume positions of power over men.

While it remains outside the scope of this article to investigate the linkages between hegemonic masculinity in Lebanon (both inside and outside of military structures) and those promoted by militia groups during the war, this is an area that requires further research. Haugbolle posits that while culturally produced memories of the war are often represented through narratives which condemn the actions of those responsible for sectarian conflict, others celebrate them (2012). Thus, the ‘militia men’ may, in some cases, represent an ideal masculinity which continues to influence gender roles in Lebanese society, as the masculine values associated with military men continue to be informally celebrated: “While militarized masculinity associated with militias is unacceptable in a national context, it is openly celebrated in less national contexts such as families, school, neighbourhoods, clubs, and other institutions of socialization for young Lebanese men” (Haugbolle, 2012, p. 118). This paradox and the way in which it shapes gender norms was echoed during an interview with Respondent 2:

Some younger generations actually idealize the civil war generation, because they didn’t live through it, and they see it as ‘that was when men were men, political leaders at the same time become almost demi-gods’ (Personal communication, February 2016, Beirut).

I argue that a targeted dilution of 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 Lebanese society more broadly, ultimately challenging hegemonic masculinity. The following sections of this article seeks to demonstrate the pressing need for this in the Lebanese context, and the impact of unequal gender norms on security provision in Lebanon.

### **Gender Attitudes within the ISF**

In the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report 2018, which ranks countries according to their proximity to gender equality in terms of economic participation and opportunity, Lebanon ranked 140 out of 149 countries (WOF, 2018). Lebanon’s existing gender security issues are compounded by numerous geopolitical events, including the displacement of Syrians; the ‘July war’ of 2006 and other incidents of violence in the wake of the 15-year Civil War; and the fragile nature of its centralized government (Young et al., 2014). Lebanon is demographically unique, composed of a plurality of religions and sects, while an increasing Western influence on society exists in tension with traditional cultures (Aghacy, 2004), and the poverty gap between rural and urban communities is striking (UNDP, 2008).

Though its extreme gender inequality is evident, it is important to note the challenges inherent in making any generalization around the ways in which gender norms manifest

in Lebanon, given the heterogeneous nature of society and the multitude of factors that subsequently intersect with gender to produce privileges and inequalities. As Khattab and Myrntinen illustrate: “A young, unmarried rural and low-income girl in South Lebanon will have different perceptions of security threats from a middle-aged, married and middle-class man in Beirut” (2014, p. 2).

Some broad conclusions are, however, possible – Lebanon has a patriarchal society, rooted in the power and dominance of men over women, leading to discrimination against women and GBV. One study found that an ‘ideal man’ was perceived by Lebanese society as being, “a good provider for his family, one who works and strives for his home, a decision-maker, an authority figure, and a protector who is powerful and strong, and one who punishes family members when they make mistakes” (Hamieh et al., 2011, p.13), while Aghacy writes that women in Lebanon, “are still seen as bastions of traditional values. Their identities continue to center around the importance of virginity and on their achievements as wives and mothers” (2004, p. 2). The tone of interviews generally supported this view with few exceptions.

It is important to note the potential impact of the ISF in reinforcing negative gender norms at the societal level. After all, the hegemonic masculinity promoted by military institutions does not remain within the barracks or the station. It represents a set of values, beliefs, behaviours, and attitudes that affect or ‘militarize’ the society around it. As Enloe (2007) explains:

To become militarized is to adopt militaristic values (e.g., a belief in hierarchy, obedience and the use of force) and priorities as one’s own, to see military solutions as particularly effective, to see the world as a dangerous place best approached with militaristic attitudes (p.18).

Thus, civilian society becomes militarized through a vast array of imperceptible ways including politics, media, and education, adopting military ideologies of masculinity and femininity (Enloe, 1983). It is also evident in the socialization processes of boys and girls. As Cockburn (2013) explains: “Long before young male recruits put on their fatigues and report to ‘boot camp’, their masculinity has been oriented by a choice of childhood toys and games, and later by stories and images on television, in video and film, that link masculinity with violence” (p. 439).

Where masculinity is linked with violence, and where gender inequality is rife, GBV is a common outcome. While all interviews indicated that GBV is prevalent in Lebanon, statistics on the nature and prevalence of GBV in Lebanon are lacking. It is estimated that only 20% of cases of intimate partner violence (IPV), for example, are ever reported. One source indicates that at least one woman per month is killed as a result of IPV in Lebanon (CEDAW/C/LBN/CO/4-5, p. 12). A barrier to reporting such abuses to the police is the widely held belief that IPV is a ‘private’ matter (Baydoun, 2011). Interviews with both police respondents indicated, though not explicitly stated, that responding to IPV was not the responsibility of the police (Personal communication, February 2016, Beirut). This may be due to pervasive gender norms within the ISF, but the issue was only exacerbated by the fact that a domestic violence law was not passed until April 2014, which did not contain provisions sufficient to criminalize marital rape, and provided an

overly narrow definition of domestic violence (Khattab & Myrntinen, 2014). This problem is compounded by Lebanon's deeply discriminatory personal status laws, which place limitations on women in terms of marriage, divorce, custody, and inheritance, making it very hard for women to leave abusive partners (Khattab & Myrntinen, 2014).

Low reporting of GBV to the police is a common thread across Lebanon. One study revealed that women reported – or did not report – at a similar rate regardless of variables such as religiosity, type of violence, or age (Baydoun, 2011). This may be due to the fear of shame and stigmatization by family, community, and the dominance of religious court systems combined with the above-mentioned lack of confidence in and mistrust of the police. One study revealed that, “while the ISF can talk to both the perpetrator and the survivor of violence, the former is not necessarily arrested and the case not always pursued” (Khattab & Myrntinen, 2014, p.5). It also showed that, “less than half of women would visit a conventional police station in the event of a crime and less than half of men would permit female relatives to go alone” (p. 6). This is interesting when compared to the 74.6% of survey respondents in another study who stated that their first recourse in the event of a crime not including physical, political, sexual, or domestic violence would be to the state security sector. For non-gender-based incidents, only 9.5% of those surveyed said they would prefer to deal only with their family, clan, or tribe and yet for sexual violence and domestic violence cases, 50% of people surveyed across Lebanon stated that they would turn to traditional systems over state institutions (Geha, 2015). Thus, there is a clear difference in readiness to report incidents to the police where GBV is involved.

In not actively responding to these cases, the ISF may give the impression that there is impunity for GBV, which may perpetuate societal acceptance of GBV as the norm, or even encourage it. This might be especially true in cases of ‘honor crimes’, as it was indicated by Respondent 1 that male ISF personnel might to some degree sympathise with, or respect, violence against women on the basis of motivations that conform to hegemonic masculine ideals (Personal communication, February 2016, Beirut) and thus be more lenient towards perpetrators.

Societal attitudes toward non-normative gender identities can also be an important indication of the rigidity and conservative nature of gender norms, as can the consequences of perceived deviations from the norm. In 2016, the Gender and Sexuality Resource Centre (GSRC) released the first ever large-scale study of public attitudes towards gender, bodily, and sexual rights in Lebanon (Nasr & Zeidan, 2015). The study revealed that 66.3% of respondents felt that homosexuals were a threat to society: 61.7% did not believe that society should offer homosexuals protection from discrimination, while 80% of participants agreed that homosexuality was both “immoral” and “sinful” (Nasr & Zeidan, 2015, pp.18-19). The influence of religion and the outspoken condemnation of non-gender-normative identities by religious leaders and the media clearly has a significant impact on the ways in which gender identities are defined and acted out by society – also influencing the way that these issues are managed in terms of legal protections.

A number of Lebanese laws are discriminatory toward non-normative gender identities and sexualities. Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code, “criminalizes and punishes all

forms of sexual intercourse performed in a manner contrary to nature” (CEDAW/C/LBN/CO/4-5, p. 12). According to one report this has resulted in the arbitrary arrest, detention, torture, and sexual assault of persons believed to be homosexual - claims that are often made based on perception and “non-normative” mannerisms or behaviors (Reid, 2013). The use of non-consensual rectal examinations (a violation of international standards against torture) by medical personnel at the request of the ISF, was an institutionalized procedure commonly used to “confirm” homosexuality until 2012 (Nasr & Zeidan, 2015, p.7). Furthermore, women perceived to be “dishonorable” - those operating outside the bounds of heteronormative sexuality and gender - may also be marginalized and suffer abuse at the hands of ISF: “women, especially sex workers, are in many cases subjected to some form of sexual violence” (Khattab & Myrntinen, 2014, p.12).

Not only is it clear that societal attitudes toward non-normative sexualities and gender identities are adopted by the ISF, but their attitudes are often exacerbated, given that public attitudes tend to agree with punitive action for perceived homosexuality (Nasr & Zeidan, 2015); the ISF has been known to severely beat and sexually harass persons suspected of unnatural sexual behaviour (Reid, 2013). This may be linked to the militarized, hyper-masculine nature of the ISF, and the ways that non-normative sexualities and gender identities are perceived as a threat to heteronormative masculinity and femininity. Those seen to fail to live up to the accepted masculine or feminine norm thus suffer unequally at the hands of the police.

Even where there has been legal reform around discriminatory laws, policy is not necessarily translated into practice. Without addressing underlying attitudes and beliefs around gender norms and highly naturalized power imbalances between men and women in Lebanon, it is unlikely that efforts to improve police capacity in gender equality and GBV prevention and response will be effective. As Respondent 2 stated, approaches to working with the ISF to improve gender equality and GBV response capacity will have to go far beyond policy and procedure-based training in order to change practice:

You can't get into this without understanding masculinities, just because there's a law now doesn't mean we'll have an impact on them. Introducing a law really doesn't necessarily mean it'll be followed... but we need to focus on the human aspect, the socialised aspect. These men are hyper-doused in this masculine ideal (Respondent 2, personal communication, February 2016, Beirut).

A further factor in highly masculinized police forces is the question of women's participation. While all police personnel should be trained to appropriately, safely, and ethically handle cases of GBV, one way to increase the number of survivors reporting cases to police is to increase the number of women personnel within the police. In Lebanon there are very few women in the ISF, though no statistics are readily available. By triangulating data from two sources I was able to estimate that in 2012 the proportion of women could not have been more than 3%, or 900 of 32,000 in 2011-12 (Samaha, 2013; Khattab & Myrntinen, 2014) when the recruitment of women formally began. Moreover, the majority of women in the forces work in office-based or administrative roles, and where women have been deployed to field operations such as riot control, some accounts indicate that their participation while on active duty is still limited (Khattab & Myrntinen 2014; various interviews, February 2016). According to Respondent

1, during at least one protest in 2015 when female and male riot police teams were deployed, “the women ISF were asked to go to the back by the male ISF (Personal communication, February 2016, Beirut). Both police personnel I interviewed indicated that while women are capable of performing office-based roles in the ISF, they are not suited to high-risk operations, with both stating that women lack the necessary courage. One claimed that women are too emotional to carry out such tasks, while another explained that where women have taken on uniformed roles as traffic police, they have had to be accompanied by male ISF for their own protection (Various interviews, February 2016).

While women’s exclusion from roles which require “active and physical struggle” in a masculine policing environment is commonly based on their incapacity to meet necessary physical force criteria (Khattab & Myrntinen, 2014), it would appear that the ISF has made no move to suggest that the women who were recruited since 2012 have been unable in any way. On the contrary, the ISF has sent a different message. Media outlets broadcasted coverage of the first physical training sessions for women in the ISF in 2012, and during a televised interview Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Moussalem, ISF Spokesperson stated: “Initially we thought that there would be some physical or physiological issues with regard to the women, but in practice, we found that no, there’s no problem... she’s capable, she’s fit to do whatever the men do” (L’Orient-Le Jour, 22 February 2016). Furthermore, one interview indicated that women’s recruitment to the ISF had been viewed internally as a successful endeavour (Respondent 2, personal communication, February 2016, Beirut). This does not, however, explain why the majority of women in the ISF hold administrative positions and do not engage in high-risk operations.

Therefore, it may be the case that women’s representation in the forces simply continues to be deprioritized, and is not viewed – by decision-makers in security issues – as a key factor in the improvement of the capacity of the ISF to carry out its role, despite evidence to the contrary. A further factor inhibiting the increased participation of women in the forces may be the lack of acceptance by society of female police personnel. General Rahbany stated that resistance comes not from the men within the forces, but from the families of potential female recruits. She argues that cultural gender norms make women’s participation unacceptable; the security sector is associated with masculine values not suited to women’s perceived natural qualities: “This is military, it’s in a box – everywhere – severe, hard, men, blood, killing” (Personal communication, February 2016, Beirut). Thus, both gender norms within the forces, and gender norms within society may be responsible for the low numbers of female police. No doubt broader gender dynamics throughout society are critical, however, the security institutions themselves are in large part responsible for the shaping of prevalent gender norms. If greater efforts were made to normalize the recruitment of women by the ISF, then society might be more favorable to the idea of parity in the forces.

The small numbers of women in the forces may also in itself be a factor that inhibits women’s recruitment. While Respondent 1 maintained that the obligation of female police personnel to compete with primarily male personnel is, logically, due to the fact that there are more men than women in the institution, and that success can be achieved on the basis of hard work, she also indicated that gender stereotypes do influence the way in which a woman’s work is perceived:

You have to know all the laws, everything going on around you, know what you are doing, or you can't prove yourself in any post. You have to know everything about it, you have to be alert. So that you don't make any severe mistake, because it will be emphasised more because you are a woman (D. Rahbany, personal communication, February 2016, Beirut).

One of the principle barriers to the participation of women in the ISF may also be the negligible representation of women in government. As Respondent 2 explained:

Our core identities are not about 'are you a woman?' They are about whether you are a Shi'a, whether you are a Sunni, whether you are a Christian... for whom you vote, or don't vote, according to these core identities... You never see a politician here stand up and speak about gender issues and attempt to get the "women vote". That says something about how much we've empowered a collective identity of women here (Personal communication, February 2016, Beirut).

As Khatib (2008) elucidates, Lebanon's political system of sectarian representation means that the population's interests are represented not by "those sharing their interests as citizens, but by those who are supposed to be representing the interests of wider communities that those citizens belong to" (p. 448). In this sense, the individual aspect is overshadowed by the focus on sectarian agendas, resulting in a lack of attention to interests according to gender, or women's rights (despite women making up more than half of the population (Yaacoub & Badwe, 2007) and thus a greater proportion of society than any one religious sect. Thus, it appears that gender norms that privilege the masculine continue to limit the importance afforded to women's participation in the ISF, the desire of women to join the ISF, and the acceptance by society, and by other ISF officers, of women in this role.

## Conclusion

It is challenging to identify exactly where the ISF shapes the nature of gender roles in society, and where society shapes the nature of gender roles in the ISF, especially in the context of a confessional political system in a conflict-affected country. What is probable, however, is that gender norms in the ISF are indeed grounded in a hegemonic masculinity and a militarized, masculine understanding of security that renders the ISF unbalanced in its gendered composition, and significantly less able to identify and respond to gendered security needs, specifically GBV. Discrimination and violence against women, girls, and others on the basis of gender inequality will continue unreported and unpunished. Survivors of GBV will be unable to fully participate in public life and contribute to their communities, their families, and live healthy and fulfilling lives. Children will be raised in environments of normalised violence. This, in turn, reduces opportunities for national security, and sustainable peace.

To be sure, without the increased participation of women in positions of political power, and without the prioritization of gender-related security issues by the Lebanese government, the militarized, male-dominated structure will remain, and the cycle will continue. What is certain is that if the police force is to be effective in its work, it must be capable of recognizing and responding to the different but equally important security needs of men, women, boys and girls. It must promote gender equality within the forces,

and subsequently in the society it serves. The transformation of the ISF into a gender-responsive and gender-balanced institution would not only signify an opportunity to achieve security in an inclusive sense, and a demonstration of respect for women's right to participate, to be represented and to benefit from security forces; but from a much broader perspective, it would offer an opportunity to re-imagine security in a way that transforms the uneven gendered power dynamics of an entire people. As Respondent 2 remarked:

If you're really interested in seeing Lebanon develop, and preventing violence against women and discrimination against women, then this should take top priority, not just for the Lebanese people, but for every single government with a desire to aid Lebanon. This should be one of the first places where it's done, and it's not (Personal communication, February 2016, Beirut).

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#### ENDNOTES

While carrying out this study, the author was hosted as a Visiting Researcher by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) at the Lebanese American University (LAU). During this time, the author facilitated two interactive discussions entitled 'Do you trust the police?', primarily involving undergraduate students at LAU, as part of the AiW monthly 'Food 4 Thought' discussion series. For more information please see: [http://www.lau.edu.lb/news-events/news/archive/do\\_you\\_trust\\_the\\_police/](http://www.lau.edu.lb/news-events/news/archive/do_you_trust_the_police/)

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