

Training Lebanese Law Enforcement Agencies on Responding to GBV:

Context, Tools, and Challenges

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“It is time to end tolerance and complicity. We cannot make poverty history unless we make violence against women history. We cannot stop the spread of HIV unless we stop discrimination and violence against women and girls. We cannot build a world of Peace, Development and Security until we end violence against women and girls”.

Thoraya Ahmed Obaid,
Executive Director, UNFPA to End Violence Against Women

The most common forms of gender-based violence (GBV) in Lebanon include domestic violence, physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, threats of violence and harm, emotional violence, isolation, use of children, economic violence, arranged marriage, and child marriage.

Countering GBV demands contributions from the private as well as the public sectors, government and non-government initiatives, and a collective societal commitment.

At the government level, law enforcement agencies are at the forefront of the criminal justice system and are often called upon to intervene when violence, including GBV, occurs. Law enforcement officers are expected to work with victims, offenders, witnesses, and various forms of evidence. Their attitudes and responses can have an impact on subsequent developments, including the protection of victims from further violence and the prevention of future GBV.

Lebanese law enforcement agencies are far from gender balanced. Worse, the few female officers who do exist are often subject to harassment, unfair treatment, and abuse because of their gender identity.

In 2015, the Lebanese American University’s Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) launched a two-year training program for law enforcement officers in Lebanon on GBV prevention and response.

As a member of the training program curriculum committee, this article reflects on my own experience as a trainer, and highlights a number of the challenges we faced throughout this training. Specifically, this paper focuses on the structural and procedural challenges to such a training, and suggests potential remedies.

I start with an overview of GBV in Lebanon and provide a general description of local law enforcement agencies. The second half of this article gives an overview of the training modules, and highlights some of the various challenges both participants and trainers experienced over the course of the project.

The Overall Context

“Violence against women is not confined to a specific culture, region or country, or to particular groups of women within a society. The roots of violence against women lie in historically unequal power relations between men and women, and persistent discrimination against women” (UN, 2006).

In Lebanon, the gender gap between women and men in access to opportunities at the political, economic, and social levels is large. Consequently, women are vulnerable to unfair treatment, oppression, violence at home, and in the workplace. Frequent media representation of women as sexual objects exacerbates the problem.

There are five main topics that can shed light on women’s vulnerability to oppression and violence in Lebanon: poverty, economic participation and employment, education, political participation, and health.

Poverty disempowers women more than men especially in patriarchal societies. Poverty in Lebanon is concentrated in the northern part of the country (Tripoli, Akkar) and in the Bekaa Valley (Hermel, Baalbeck). In these two regions, the rates of domestic violence are high, and there have been repeated incidences of spousal murder.

Second, economic participation and employment: in Beirut and other urban areas, the rate of women’s participation in economic activities is much higher than in rural areas. However, women with graduate degrees often have more trouble finding employment, even in urban areas. And once they find a job, they still have to do unpaid labor at home and provide the care and emotions as per local traditions and customs. Employed women also earn less than employed men.

Third, education: although the literacy rate in Lebanon is high for both men and women, and higher education is accessible, the number of male faculty members is still much higher than female faculty. And although female students have been scoring higher than male students in various disciplines, opportunities for employment are more favorable for men. Women are often encouraged to avoid studying disciplines that are traditionally reserved for men, given the normative belief that women are not smart enough to enter certain sectors, or that they will be unable to keep up with their male peers.

Fourth, political participation and decision-making: the number of women in decision-making positions both in the public and private sectors is limited compared to the number of men. However, as stressed in the Convention on the Elimination of All

Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW): “the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world, and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields”.

Fifth, health: the health of women and girls is subject to more threats than men’s, especially reproductive health. In rural areas of Lebanon, girls are in many cases forced to marry at a very young age. This may cause serious physical and mental health problems. Abortion is also illegal in Lebanon, making problems more complicated to resolve.

Cases of GBV in Lebanon

Do violated and abused women in Lebanon reach out for help from law enforcement agencies? Baydoun (2011) explains that women’s decisions to seek help from the police are not related to the nationality, profession, and income of the abuser. However, reporting to law enforcement agencies, “has a significant connotation, since the police is a state institution” (p. 33). Baydoun further notes that, “when a woman files a complaint concerning family abuse with the police, she is in effect making public what is happening in the private sphere and delegating to a ‘public’ entity the responsibility of monitoring what is taking place in ‘private’” (2011, p. 33).

According to Baydoun’s research, KAFA - a Lebanese NGO - documented 62 reported cases of violence against women between 2010 and 2015, with a noticeable increase during 2013 and 2014. KAFA confirmed that half of the reported cases involved violence at the hands of a family member. This fact adds to the challenges of law enforcement intervention because the perpetrators of violence and members of the survivor’s family both often claim that the police are violating their individual rights to privacy by interfering in ‘personal’ household matters. However, physical and sexual violence against women often leads to murder; in cases where families try to hide the crime, they often fail because of increasing media and public awareness.

Violence against women in Lebanon is recorded across the country, yet the largest number of cases are recorded in Beirut. One reason for this might be that survivors of GBV are often interviewed by journalists and the media, raising awareness on the issue, especially in Beirut.

Lebanese Law Enforcement Agencies

There are five government security institutions in Lebanon: The Internal Security Forces (ISF), the General Security (GS), the State Security (SS), the Lebanese Army, and the Municipal Police. All government security personnel are trained at the Military Academy and the ISF Training Academy.

Almost all local GBV cases are reported to the ISF. Some cases involving foreigners, including refugees, are reported to the GS; the Army, State Security (SS), and Municipal Police are overwhelmingly not approached.

The Internal Security Forces (ISF)

The ISF, created in 1861, is the main police service in Lebanon. It currently consists of more than thirty thousand officers, including women. In addition to the Beirut police,

the ISF includes the Judicial Police and the Gendarmerie. ISF stations are scattered around the country; these stations are where survivors of GBV take refuge and file legal complaints.

Since its inception, the ISF has faced, and continues to face, various challenges:

- The law that governs the ISF, Law 17, needs to be updated and improved. However, internal political rivalries prevent agreement on a new law;
- The Command Council of the ISF is composed of many different unit heads including the Beirut Police Unit, the Judicial Police Unit, the Security of Embassies Unit, the Inspectorate Unit, the Gendarmerie Unit, the Social Services Unit, and the Staff Unit. Each one of these units is headed by a General who is labelled politically and religiously; the Director General of the ISF is also labelled religiously and politically;
- ISF financial and human resources are limited; this affects the overall performance of officers and the quality of the services provided. For example, the ISF uniforms, vehicles, and stations are in poor condition;
- The ISF is male-dominated, and the culture of the institution itself perpetuates chauvinistic attitudes. Although women have been enlisted and assigned various police tasks since 2010, they are still perceived by their male colleagues as soft, weak, and incompetent. Women officers are often assigned to administrative and bureaucratic tasks and are rarely active in field operations;
- The ISF is militaristic: officers wear camouflage army fatigues; don army gear, including military-grade weapons, and are trained at the Army's Military Academy. The militaristic character is overwhelming and affects the relationship between ordinary citizens and the ISF;
- Given the limited oversight, ISF personnel are often able to act with impunity, further straining the relationship between citizens and the ISF;
- The ISF currently manages prisons; distributes judicial mail; and implements construction laws - all of which are not considered part of their professional job descriptions.

The General Security (GS)

The GS is assigned to manage foreigners in Lebanon, and to monitor local political group activities and structural properties. The GS is much smaller in numbers than the ISF and has less stations, vehicles, and responsibilities. However, it shares many of the same challenges, namely:

- The Director General of the GS is labelled religiously and politically;
- The law that governs the GS - Decree 139 - was passed in 1959; it thus needs to be updated, however, internal political rivalries prevent any agreement on a new law;
- GS financial and human resources are limited and affect the overall performance of officers and the quality of the services provided;
- The scarcity of financial resources affects the training of the officers;
- Although the GS enlisted women long before the ISF, and despite the fact that some women are Generals and Colonels, the GS remains male-dominated, and misogynistic attitudes within the GS are not rare. Women are perceived by their male colleagues as soft, weak, and incompetent. Women officers are assigned to administrative and bureaucratic tasks and are rarely active in the actual field of law enforcement;
- The GS currently manages a detention center for illegal immigrants many of whom are women. And as is the case with the ISF, the GS is not professionally qualified to manage detention facilities.

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World's Initiative

Securing women's rights in Lebanon and the Arab region is one of IWSAW's most essential objectives. In December 2015, IWSAW launched a two-year project aimed at training law enforcement personnel in Lebanon on how to prevent and respond to GBV.

The project, in collaboration with the Internal Security Forces (ISF) Training Academy and the General Security (GS), was funded by the Dutch Embassy in Beirut. Other formal security agencies (the Municipal Police, the State Security, and the Army) have not been included in the training because GBV cases are more concerned with the ISF and the GS. This, however, does not mean that training on GBV prevention and response is not necessary for them and for any other government and private sector organization.

The IWSAW project included five phases: the first phase consisted of an ISF and GS needs assessment relative to GBV (December 2015 – January 2016); the second phase involved GBV training curriculum development (February 2016 – May 2016); in the third phase, pilot training was done (June 2016 – August 2016); the fourth phase was the actual GBV training for law enforcement officers; and the fifth and last phase, that focused on advocacy for, and sustainability of the training.

The training methods and tools included brief lectures, infographics, and power point presentations, short videos, distribution of print materials, discussion, and case studies. Special emphasis was placed on interaction with the trainees because the respect for women's rights cannot be enforced but has to be embraced and engrained in the mind of every law enforcement officer.

Training the ISF and the GS on GBV Prevention and Response: Developing the Training Curriculum

The Curriculum Committee was formed by IWSAW, taking into consideration the fact that it should include qualified persons who have a solid understanding of law enforcement agencies in Lebanon from a practical perspective and adequate knowledge of gender dynamics and GBV in Lebanon and the Arab region. The Curriculum Committee was also gender-balanced, and included a retired female GS General (Dalal Rahbany), a retired male ISF General (Fadl Daher), a female lawyer specialized in gender issues (Manar Zaiter), and the author of this article as a criminal justice consultant. During February and March 2016, the Curriculum Committee held ten meetings and discussed various challenges and ways to overcome them, and finally drafted the curriculum.

The final curriculum included a number of modules that covered a variety of topics and issues that fall under the rubric of a human rights framework. The next sections of this article will discuss the content developed as part of this curriculum.

Human Rights and Human Dignity: Theory and Practice

Participants are sensitized to standards of, and approaches to policing that are consistent with democratic principles. Participants are introduced to applicable international standards and their relevance to police practice and criminal investigations, including GBV cases.

Throughout this training ISF and GS officers were encouraged to:

- Maintain political independence and impartiality at all times;
- Carry out all duties impartially and without discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnicity, sex, language, religion, or politics;
- Protect and respect the human rights of all persons – including rights essential to political processes; and
- Maintain and preserve democratic political processes.

Defining GBV and the Role of Law Enforcement Agencies

Participants are introduced to various types of GBV and the role of law enforcement in investigating such cases. This includes protecting survivors and treating them with respect, compassion, and care, and executing due diligence to ensure that all survivors have access to legal redress.

Participants are sensitized to the importance of eliminating gender discrimination in law enforcement activities and to the important role of the police in combating GBV in all its forms.

Special emphasis is placed on understanding that rape, sexual assault, and other types of GBV have specific characteristics that make them complex and difficult crimes to investigate. The trainees learned and participated in practical exercises to demonstrate their comprehension of the following main points:

- GBV has a deeply personal effect on survivors. It is not just a question of physical assault: it is a violation of intimate boundaries. It can have a serious emotional impact: cultural and social norms about women and how they should act in society can lead to stigmatization by family members and the community in the aftermath of GBV. This can result in victim-blaming;
- Sense of betrayal: in many instances, offenders are predominantly men that are known to the survivor. There is therefore a sense of betrayal at the hands of those men as husbands, fathers, uncles, brothers, caregivers, friends, and acquaintances;
- Self-blame: due to the personal and intimate nature of the crime, survivors often feel ashamed, guilty, and in some cases, worthless. This can undermine self-confidence with serious psychosocial consequences;
- Health consequences: Survivors of GBV are at risk for sexually-transmitted infections (STI) and other diseases, such as HIV/AIDs;
- High potential for re-traumatization: Recounting what happened to law enforcement, health specialists, and other support staff can often re-traumatize survivors, who re-live the incident every time they discuss it again;
- Sense of security: if the location of violence is the home or in another familiar place, the survivor's sense of security is destroyed, leaving them feeling more vulnerable.

Scientific Methodology

Participants are approached to critical research methodologies, including ethical principles and challenges, and the elements of the research process for quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches. Participants use these theoretical underpinnings to begin to critically review literature on GBV and determine how research findings inform their own understanding of law enforcement work. The

importance of research and scientific knowledge for the work of law enforcement agencies was emphasized throughout, and tied to the importance of fusing and gathering statistics on the prevalence of GBV in Lebanon.

GBV in Prisons and Detention Facilities

Women face violence at the hands of the State, specifically at the hands of those in relative positions of authority for example, while in custodial settings such as jails, prisons, mental health facilities, immigration detention centers, welfare facilities, and displaced person or refugee camps. Participants focused on these high-risk populations, and learned ways to prevent and combat all forms of violence against incarcerated women and girls, specifically, and the female relatives and friends of incarcerated persons who are present in these institutions.

The training emphasized the following points:

- GBV in prisons and detention facilities is intimately linked to GBV in the broader community;
- Vulnerable inmates' safety and care should be the first priority – especially considering limited resources and overcrowding;
- In some cases, what is perceived to be consensual sex in state-run custodial facilities is actually coercive.

Special emphasis was placed on those populations at higher risk for GBV, including:

- first-time female offenders unfamiliar with unwritten “rules” (easily tricked);
- physically weak/not prepared to use violence;
- thought to have committed “sissy crimes” (non-violent);
- “good looking”, “pretty”, youthful;
- poor – economically needy (alone and does not receive any visitors);
- non-normative sexualities;
- persons with disabilities (PWD).

Lessons Learned

During this one-day workshop, participants are introduced to GBV training for law enforcement in other countries, namely, Turkey, Armenia, and Ukraine with the aim to highlight some of the contextual similarities, best practices, and lessons learned.

The training placed special emphasis on the following case studies:

- The challenges of Turkish police operating in a conservative Muslim society;
- Similar challenges for Armenian police operating in a conservative Christian society, where misogyny flourishes. Interestingly, the GBV training program in Armenia included both civilians and law enforcement personnel, which allowed for more interesting and insightful discussions;
- In Ukraine, police trainings on GBV focused on human trafficking and illegal sex work, similar to many of the problems currently facing the ISF.

Training of Trainers

The GBV training program for law enforcement in Lebanon ended with a special training of ISF and GS trainers on GBV prevention and investigation. This training was led by an experienced ISF officer.

Evaluation and Expected Outcomes

During this workshop, ISF and GS officers were asked to complete class exercises, including:

- Responding to specific descriptive questions about legal and procedural matters;
- Case study analyses and discussions;
- Essay writing on an issue raised during the lectures.

Class exercises were evaluated and discussed in class the following day. The trainer also prepared an electronic presentation to show trainee answers, and encourage further involvement.

Discussions followed every training session in order to encourage exchange and participation. The discussion helped the trainees to think more critically about the current legal and operational framework for investigating and prosecuting cases of GBV in Lebanon. Trainers often began these discussions with 'problematic' issues to trigger class engagement. At the end of the training program a final written examination is given to the trainees.

Pilot Training

Following pilot testing of the training curriculum discussed above, meetings were held to discuss the training more broadly, with the aim to highlight the best practices and lessons learned that might be applied to future trainings. A few examples are provided below:

- The location of the training – the ISF Training Academy – was convenient for officers;
- Trainee discipline was a challenge – although the ISF Academy made a serious effort to monitor the trainings, and to coordinate with the trainers and the Curriculum Committee, nevertheless trainees were not really disciplined. The training schedule was also not adequately respected (participants were often late in the mornings).
- Participants' focus throughout the trainings was varied, given that many officers were distracted by work via email, text, or calls;
- Case studies, especially when they are suggested by the trainees themselves, were a motivating element. It would also be useful to bring in guests – such as survivors of GBV in Lebanon or a video recording of a survivor's statements;
- Many trainees did not possess adequate background information about gender, human rights, and gender discrimination. This is especially true in relation to gender issues within the ISF as an organization;
- The challenges of dealing with gender within law enforcement agencies (ISF and GS) may be tackled (1) by law (anti-discrimination); (2) from a psycho-social perspective; and (3) in practice;
- One of the main challenges is how to incorporate the GBV training curriculum within the overall training curriculum of law enforcement agencies in Lebanon;
- The more interactive the training is, the more attention to, and better comprehension of GBV. Audio-visual materials are very useful in this regard, especially if they are followed by a discussion with the trainees;
- Addressing best practices for mainstreaming gender and GBV within law enforcement agencies such as the ISF.

Training Location

The Director of the ISF Training Academy General Ahmad Hajjar's plan to improve staff development includes orders to restrict the location of training to the ISF Training Academy. This allows the academy to better observe and scrutinize trainings provided by non-governmental organizations (NGO), academic institutions, and other external organizations. It also allows the Academy to better develop a comprehensive training curriculum.

The Academy is located south of Beirut and is easily accessible. It is composed of several new buildings; classes are adequately furnished, and tables and chairs can be arranged in various ways that allow for better group work and discussions. Classes are also equipped with a large screen and projector, and a computer.

Trainee Selection

The selection of ISF and GS trainees was done by the ISF Academy and the GS, however, IWSAW requested the following group and individual characteristics:

- Gender balanced group of officers from both the ISF and the GS;
- Officers assigned to positions that include GBV response;
- Officers ranked lieutenants and captains, or lower;
- Officers with English reading and comprehension skills.

IWSAW also requested the participation of qualified ISF officers in the training; two colonels were subsequently part of the training team. The participation of law enforcement officers in the training on GBV motivated other trainees to pay more attention to the topic and actively engage in discussions.

Challenges to Lebanese Law Enforcement Agencies

During the training and throughout post-training discussions with trainers, trainees, and ISF Training Academy personnel, a number of challenges were identified. Two overarching categories of challenges were depicted: structural and procedural. These challenges are listed and briefly discussed below.

Structural Challenges

Some of the main structural challenges that emerged over the course of the project included the following:

- The male-dominated government system and structural gender inequality in Lebanon. The fact that women are considered inferior to men in government institutions and in professional institutions has a significant impact on the way women are treated. Women are almost completely absent in politics and are not treated equally to men, even in the eyes of the law. For example, Lebanese women are deprived of the right to pass their Lebanese nationality to their husbands and children should they marry a non-Lebanese, and personal status laws generally favor husbands. This seems to have a significant impact on male law enforcement officers who sometimes express pity for female survivors of GBV because they view women as weak and incapable of defending themselves.

- Relative to GBV, the legislative framework is not comprehensive, and existing laws are in some cases confusing for law enforcement officers. The fact that the

“privacy of the home” is protected by law, and compounded by social norms, makes law enforcement officers hesitate before interfering in cases of domestic violence. Further, the fact that Lebanese society is so deeply influenced by religious identity and values - including the fact that all Lebanese are subject to Personal Status Codes according to their religion - may have a strong impact on law enforcement responses to GBV cases, especially if the officer’s religion is different than the perpetrator’s.

- The paramilitary structure of law enforcement agencies in Lebanon is another significant challenge to responding to GBV cases because such intervention requires social care, counseling, and psychological skills that are almost absent in military formation and training.

- Religious and sectarian power-sharing, in practice, means official appointments within the ISF and the GS that are based on sectarian affiliation, and not necessarily on technical skills and capacity. This often results in personnel that are under-equipped to deal with certain situations, such as responding to cases of GBV.

- The low academic capacity of ISF and GS officers makes trainings on certain subjects more difficult; for example, much of the critical literature on GBV is written in a foreign language, and often builds from theoretical concepts that officers are not familiar with.

Procedural Challenges

- Weakened rule of law in Lebanon and the spread of corruption is a challenge to law enforcement more generally. The democratic deficit (Members of Parliament extended their term three times) in Lebanon is discouraging for officers’ development.

- Misogynistic and homophobic discourses - the everyday language and vulgar jokes toward women and gay men, specifically - were present throughout the trainings. ISF officers tried to avoid any discussion on non-normative sexualities and gender identities, and the ISF Training Academy ultimately prevented trainers from raising the subject.

- An additional procedural challenge is the limited attention span of ISF and GS officers. These officers are not used to the classroom setting, nor interactive trainings. They often lose interest and claim that gender issues are not part of their job; as one example, a traffic police officer contested that his job does not require GBV response training.

- There were also logistical challenges: many officers could not attend the full training program as a result of their work schedules, while some were too busy on their phones during the trainings because there was no one assigned to take over their daily duties.

- ISF and GS officers’ perceptions of the trainers were also problematic, given that most of the trainers were civilians, and paramilitary personnel are usually reluctant to be taught and trained by civilians. Law enforcement officers are used to military trainers and strict disciplinary action, which was not the case in this training.

- ISF and GS officers often used the trainings as an opportunity to discuss many of the issues plaguing their institutions more generally; while this might seem to be off-topic, it is important to respect the officers' concerns, discuss them thoroughly, and then get back to GBV training, in order to not lose the participants' attention.

Conclusion

Although ISF and GS officers successfully completed the IWSAW-led training on GBV prevention and response, these two government institutions still require substantial structural reforms. Without these reforms in legislation, structural properties, function, and outlook, adequate response to GBV is difficult.

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