



النهضة العربية للديمقراطية والتنمية
Arab Renaissance for Democracy & Development



اللجنة الوطنية الأردنية
لشؤون المرأة
The Jordanian National
Commission for Women



Gender
Justice

Policy Brief

Women's Advocacy Issues- Volume 7

Building a Local Network that Empowers Women and Build's Solidarity

April 2022



With support from
Finland's development
cooperation



UK Government



ARDD

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Acknowledgment

The Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD) is conducting action research within the framework of the project "Strengthening the Capacities of Women-led CSOs in Evidence-Based Advocacy and Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda", supported by UN Women with the generous funding of the governments of Canada, Cyprus, Finland, Norway, Spain, and the United Kingdom. ARDD would like to thank the civil society partners and individuals that supported the development of this study, which was carried out by the research team of Al Nahda Thought Center.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ARDD	Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development
CBO	Community-based organization
CSO	Civil society organization
JONAF	Jordanian National NGO Forum
MoSD	Ministry of Social Development
NGO	Non-governmental organization
UN	United Nations
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
DV	Domestic Violence
GBV	Gender-based Violence
KII	Key Informant Interviews
FGD	Focus Group Discussions

Purpose of the Research Action

This brief explores the local response to domestic violence through building local research capacity, with a focus on overcoming the barriers impeding women to report cases of domestic violence. The brief offers policy recommendations guided by insights from various actors from the local community on their perceptions of domestic violence. To gain insight into the community perspectives, ARRD collaborated with 11 civil society organizations from the Jordan National NGO Forum (JONAF) Coalition and provided various training to prepare them to launch this research and build a common understanding on gender-based violence and how to address it.

Background and Methodology

Domestic violence has worsened in Jordan during the COVID-19 pandemic, with organizations specialized in providing services to survivors of gender-based violence reporting an increase in its prevalence and more limited access to services due to restrictions of movement and measures imposed by the government of Jordan to limit the pandemic. This led ARDD and partners to reflect on the need to develop local capacity to respond to domestic violence. The research adopted a bottom-up approach to understand the local communities' views on gender-based violence and identify key perceptions related to access to services. To gain insight into the community perspectives, ARRD collaborated with civil society organizations from the Jordan National NGO Forum (JONAF) Coalition. JONAF was established in 2016, an initiative of ARDD in collaboration with CSOs, CBOs, experts, and media activists from different regions of the Kingdom. JONAF works to coordinate and lead the national humanitarian response and development efforts in Jordan.

The research adopts a holistic methodology, consisting of a desk review that informed the development of the quantitative and qualitative data collection tools, several discussions and tests were held internally and with participating CSOs to finalize the tools. ARDD worked with civil society organizations (CSO's) members of the JONAF coalition who work directly with women, thus accessing insights from a local community perspective. The JONAF coalition advocates for promoting the localization of humanitarian work, thus delving into the local community perspective. Training sessions involving the 11 civil society organizations from the JONAF coalition to launch this research and build a common understanding of gender-based violence and how to address it. The civil society organizations carried out 350 surveys, 30 focus group discussions, and 45 key informant interviews. The sample covered the Northern, Southern, and Central regions of Jordan.

According to the local perspective, domestic violence is seen as a sensitive topic often shun upon from discussion as women are supposed to preserve the cohesion of their families. This secrecy often deters women from reporting their cases and rather push them to dealing with them internally within their family borders. Women are often subject to barriers hindering their capabilities of reporting their cases, these barriers include social norms, fear of retaliation, family cohesion, lack of awareness and trust in relevant stakeholders, and poor economic backgrounds.

Stigma is still impeding women access to services

Local communities suggest that fear undermines women's will to report domestic violence. Refusal to report violence against women can be attributed to social norms and culture, fear of retaliation, family cohesion and custody, and lack of awareness and trust in the Juvenile and Family Protection Department. Another reason for not reporting violence against women may be poverty for respondents.

Societal norms and culture

In Jordanian communities, culture and traditions play a crucial role, often shaping social norms. Women in Jordan live in a predominantly patriarchal society where the culture of shame is evident and where divorce is often perceived as shameful for women and their families. According to one participant, "a woman fears the environment around her as well as the culture and social norms; people are fed culture from a young age and the culture of shame acts as a taboo". Consequently, when a woman gets divorced, society usually judges negatively the woman, rather than the husband even if she survived domestic violence.

Family cohesion and custody

Family cohesion implies both a woman's immediate family such as parents, siblings, and children. A woman will not report her case out of "fear of losing her children and her family" stated one of the participants. To avoid parental pressures and the family's reaction (which may often be abandonment), women often refrain from reporting their cases to authorities. Often women are discouraged from reporting cases due to child custody concerns. If the result of reporting a case is divorce or separation a woman may lose custody of her children, and not always get support from her family which might leave her with the only option to continue in an abusive household

Fear of retaliation

Women are hesitant to come forward due to the fear of retaliation and threats, one participant stated. "So that the problems do not escalate after she reports the case." An abuse survivor generally fears that her abuser, or her own family members, will cause her harm that ranges from worse abuse, to permanent injury or murder.

Lack of awareness and trust in FPD

Victims of domestic violence are often hesitant to file complaints due to inadequate knowledge of the FPD services and procedures. One of the participants said that "some women do not know how to file a complaint and where to file it". Some people do not trust that the FPD preserves anonymity and confidentiality, or its protection mechanism, which is yet another component that prevents them from filing a complaint. FPD may be perceived negatively, as a place that destroys family cohesion and betrays anonymity, thus putting people at risk. This perception is more evident among Syrian refugees who do not believe that laws and procedures will protect them.

Poor economic situation

The economic situation is another element that might deter people from reporting cases of domestic violence. Survivors of domestic violence who have a poor economic situation are less likely to report their cases, according to the focus groups. Lack of access to a sustainable source of income is often to blame for this, along with the lack of adequate accommodation. As a result, women often put up with the violence they suffer at home to ensure that their children are provided for financially.

Cultural beliefs frame all kinds of responses to domestic violence and are shared between all stakeholders

Cases of domestic violence are preferably resolved behind closed doors (scenario analysis)

To understand participants' responses to different cases of domestic violence, the survey included a section that presented situations that women might potentially find themselves in. Participants were then asked to choose the top three responses they might give. The options provided were informed by literature and interviews with experts and CSOs. The scenarios identified that due to the sensitivity of the topic individuals would rather resolve the situation internally within their family.

Scenario 1: Your aggressor (husband) pushed you and caused your injuries because you did not have lunch ready on time.

The answers showed that survivors of domestic violence would rather deal with cases of domestic violence behind closed doors, with only family members involved, rather than report the case to authorities. Participants' choices involved requesting help from their family members (65%), from their husbands' family members (44%). In which 39 % of women preferred discussing the issue with the aggressor to agree and reach a permanent solution. Only a small number (18%) of participants said they would seek support from the Family Protection Department. These responses remained consistent across surveyed communities, yet some slight differences appeared in the central region of Jordan as individuals were more likely to consult/confide in their friends for support.

Scenario 2: Your aggressor verbally assaulted you more than once, causing you a lot of psychological pain and sadness.

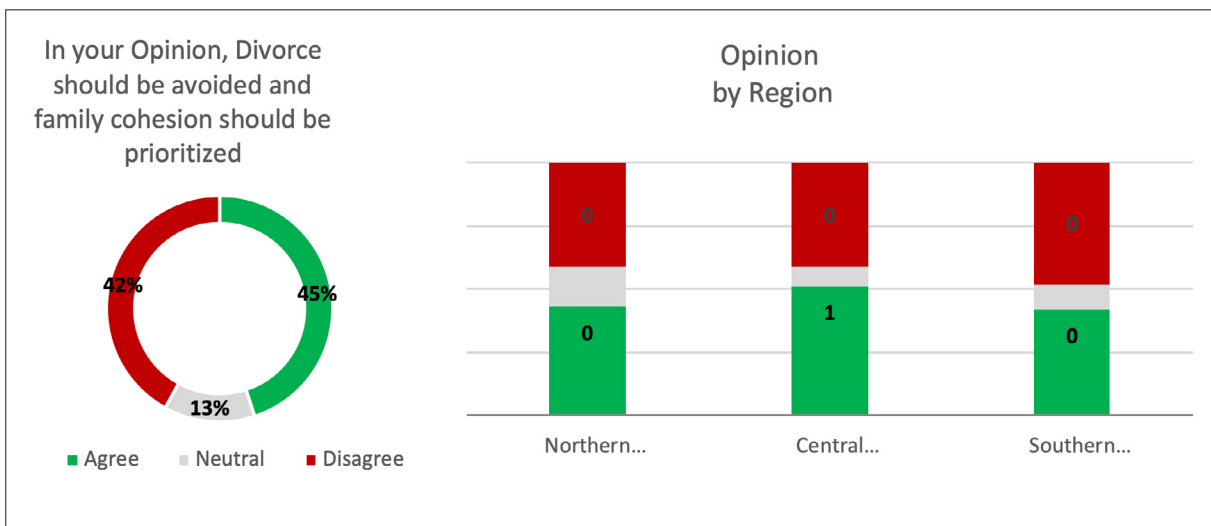
The second scenario got reactions similar to those in the first scenario, with individuals requesting help from either their family (57%) or their husband's family (45%). Individuals were also likely to discuss the issue with the aggressor to agree and reach a permanent solution to the problem (38%). Unlike in the first scenario, individuals in the second tended to perceive verbal violence as subjacent to physical violence, and so were less likely to report the issue to authorities and would rather not take any action (16%).

Scenario 3: Your husband has forced you to hand over your entire monthly salary to pay off his debts over a long period of time, and he does not accept that you keep part of it.

A trend was noticed across all three scenarios in which individuals tend to try to resolve issues internally, in the presence of their families, before any escalation and animosity. A quarter of the participants would give their salary to their husbands without taking any action (26%). On the other hand, three quarters (75.71%) chose to refuse the husband’s request, rallying the help of their families or their husbands’ families on the matter. A significant portion (18%) would file a complaint to the Family Protection Department in such scenario.

The social dilemma of divorce and family cohesion in Jordan

The generalized belief in Jordan is that divorce is not an option, even in cases of domestic violence. This is driven by the fact that “divorce should always be avoided and family cohesion should be prioritized, regardless of the impact of violence on women”, as stated by one of the respondents. Economic and social factors play a vital role in resorting to divorce in cases of domestic violence. “Women stay in abusive relationships because of fear of economic and social problems after separation or divorce.” (Shackelford, 2021) The survey uncovered that two out of every five women would avoid divorce to maintain their family’s cohesion. This was more apparent in the central regions of the country.



Q. In your opinion, divorce should always be avoided and family cohesion should be prioritized regardless of the impact of violence on women.

Denial of reality

Globally, there is a perception that women can “overreact” to domestic violence or exaggerate it to gain the sympathy of others. According to Sahu 2020, women are often accused of overreacting by the community and judicial systems. This misperception is evident in the Jordanian context but should not be generalized. Even a significant number of women (34%) agreed that women tend to overreact to domestic violence to gain sympathy. However, a larger number disagreed with the statement (43%). Denial of reality, which happens when a woman is criticized and accused of being too sensitive or overreacting, makes her experience ignored and classified as illogical or untrue. (Coates and Paludi, 2011)

Recommendations

The topic of domestic violence continues to be perceived as too sensitive in Jordanian society, and women refrain from reporting it due to factors such as societal norms, fear of retaliation, maintaining family cohesion, and economic challenges. To maintain confidentiality and not to endanger the cohesion of their families, respondents highlighted that survivors turn to their family members for assistance and support.

Build new forms of solidarity that ensure confidentiality and safety and where domestic violence can be discussed and its risks mitigated.

Establishing a network that empowers women to speak up and discuss GBV would create a safe and comfortable environment in which women can demystify domestic violence and support each other. Moreover, the network could serve as a platform for women to discuss how to mitigate risks of domestic violence, ways to access services and get support in a trusted and safe environment. It builds on women’s trust in discussing with friends to address domestic violence without aiming at providing any GBV services that should continue to be under the responsibility of professional organizations.

Build structure that supports women without stigmatization





Networks need to be established at the local level and start conversations on support, access to services, prevention, and risk mitigation based on the reality of local survivors. The networks can connect with national organizations and JONAF in an ideal structure that would help raise awareness about women’s rights and advocate for gender justice, enforcement of laws, and furthering equality, to address the root causes of domestic violence and improve access to services by protecting the rights of women, including mothers who often put up with domestic violence for fear of losing the custody of their children.



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