Baseline study: "Toward a Gender-Equitable Society" Project

DECEMBER 13, 2021

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"This publication was produced with the financial support of the UK aid, in collaboration with ABAAD-Resource Center for Gender Equality (ABAAD). Its contents are the sole responsibility of Search for Common Ground-Lebanon (Search) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the British government."

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List of abbreviations

ARIJ	Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism
AUB	American University of Beirut
CSO	Civil society organization
DV	Domestic violence
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
FGD	Focus group discussion
GBV	Gender-based violence
GBVIMS	Gender-Based Violence Information Management System
IPV	Intimate partner violence
KII	Key informant interview
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MHPSS	Mental health and psychosocial support
Search	Search for Common Ground
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
VAW(G)	Violence against women (and girls)

Executive Summary

The baseline study of the project "Toward a Gender-Equitable Society" was commissioned by Search for Common Ground (Search) and ABAAD-Resource Center for Gender Equality (ABAAD) and conducted between September and November 2021. The objective of the research was to inform the implementation of the above mentioned project, which aims to reduce sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) in Lebanon and promote the production of gender-sensitive media products. Baseline research was conducted with five target groups: TV/film professionals, women's CSOs/activists, the general public, SGBV caseworkers and psychosocial support providers, and UN staff/academic experts. Eight focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with the general public, 70 survey responses of TV/film professionals were collected, and 17 key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with the remaining three target groups.

Key findings

Through in-depth analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, a number of **key findings** emerged. First and foremost, widely shared and deeply held **social norms and beliefs** that justify SGBV and blame victims contribute to protecting perpetrators, preventing victims from seeking help, and perpetuating and normalizing violence. A **lack of understanding of the concept of sexual consent** emerged as a disturbing finding that likely also contributes to the perpetration of sexual violence. Nevertheless, in recent years, there has been **significant progress** in positively shifting social norms related to SGBV and breaking the taboo of speaking openly about SGBV, particularly among younger generations. This progress is due in large part to the dedicated efforts of women's rights organizations and activists and their willingness and ability to embrace and innovate within new forms of communication, such as social media platforms.

However, the **scope and definition** of SGBV, as perceived by women's rights organizations in Lebanon, leaves room for expansion. Within awareness-raising and prevention efforts, SGBV is almost exclusively defined and presented as forms of sexual and physical violence. **Non-physical forms of violence merit increased attention and resources**, particularly considering that psychological violence has similar health consequences as physical violence and often precedes physical violence in relationships. Also, **men and boys** are almost completely overlooked as potential victims of SGBV, despite a significant percentage of sexual abuse cases involving the victimization of underage boys. Finally, SGBV is perceived by some CSO staff as well as members of the wider public as **something that happens to 'certain' women** - those from lower socioeconomic classes who are perceived as weak or with less agency. This perception is reinforced in media, including both entertainment media as well as images used in some anti-SGBV awareness-raising campaigns.

Regarding the provision of services for SGBV survivors, challenges are less centered around the number of services available (with the exception of shelters) and more centered around **sociocultural and structural obstacles that discourage survivors from accessing services**. These obstacles include victim-blaming norms and beliefs within survivors' communities, low trust in service providers, economic and financial barriers, low trust in the justice/legal system to provide protection, and others. **Low trust toward CSO service providers** was particularly observed among refugee women.

In general, mainstream TV and film productions in Lebanon feature **highly stereotyped versions of both men and women**. In particular, female characters are often portrayed as accessories to the male character’s life and character development. Scenes and situations involving SGBV, even when accompanied by moral denunciation of the act of violence, are **sensationalized, unrealistic, and romanticized**. On the other hand, **alternative media sources**, including explicitly feminist productions, are expanding in number and reach, providing a viable alternative to mainstream content.

Recommendations

Recommendations for civil society organizations (CSOs) working on gender equality were formulated from the key findings and conclusions. General recommendations include **stronger coordination and collaboration** among women’s rights organizations in the country, as well as the development of partnerships and networks with other women’s rights organizations in the region. In addition, **awareness-raising on the concept of sexual consent** among the general public would not only fill a knowledge gap identified in this research, but would also initiate an important shift in the burden of responsibility from the victim (“did she say no?”) to the perpetrator (“did she say yes?”). In anti-violence campaigns, CSOs should also **avoid using messages or images that stereotype or stigmatize women victims of violence**, including showing women as impoverished, powerless, cowering, or with visible injuries.

Specific recommendations were also developed to encourage victims to report violence and seek help. **Awareness-raising campaigns should be tailored to vulnerable, hard-to-reach groups of women** (e.g., refugee women, women living in closed communities, rural women) to provide them with much-needed information on accessing services, as well as to build trust among these women with CSO services providers. Also, public awareness should be raised on two under-discussed topics: first, **SGBV against men and boys**, particularly boys, should be highlighted, ideally from the angle of lack of consent (as opposed to fighting back) being the defining feature of assault. Second, the public would benefit from knowledge and awareness on **non-physical forms of SGBV,** particularly psychological and economic violence.

Finally, recommendations were presented for working with media professionals. First, considering the many decision-makers involved in TV and film production, efforts to work with media professionals to produce more gender-sensitive media products should involve the **buy-in of senior media decision-makers**. Lower level production staff, even with the best capacities and intentions, may be unable to influence change on their own. Second, the **development and adoption of shared standards related to the ethical portrayal of women and girls and SGBV** would provide a framework through which civil society actors could hold media companies accountable for their content.

1. Background Information

Introduction

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is a term that encompasses acts of physical, sexual, psychological, and emotional violence committed against an individual as a result of gender norms and unequal power relationships. It is also referred to as gender-based violence (GBV) or violence against women and girls (VAWG), in recognition of the fact that it is most often perpetrated against women and girls by men and boys. SGBV is a severe and pervasive human rights violation.

SGBV occurs around the world at alarming rates, with more than 1 in 3 women experiencing physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime.[1] Declared “a global health problem of epidemic proportions” by the World Health Organization in 2013, SGBV has severe and long-lasting physical and psychological health effects on survivors. In addition, the financial costs of SGBV are immense; the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) estimated in 2014 the cost of SGBV in the European Union at 256 billion euros.[2] While less data is available on the economic cost of SGBV in the Middle East and North Africa region, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates the annual cost to women and their families alone (thereby excluding costs borne by the state or employers) at 2.17 billion Egyptian pounds.[3] Every year, SGBV in Egypt also results in children from 113,000 families missing school, and women missing 500,000 working days.[4]

Gender-based violence against men and boys, while less prevalent, is no less harmful to victims. Sexual violence against men and boys is prevalent in conflict situations, where its use has been well-documented as a weapon of war. Men and boys in conflict situations also face forced conscription. Gender-nonconforming and LGBTQ+ individuals are also targeted; they may be attacked for their sexuality or noncomformity to gender roles or experienece domestic violence (DV) / intimate partner violence (IPV) within relationships. Additionally, SGBV against men and boys is less documented than VAWG, as patriarchal definitions of gender roles make it more difficult for men and boys to report violence and have their experiences taken seriously.

When it comes to the global epidemic of SGBV, Lebanon is no exception. While official statistics on rates of VAWG are not available, a limited number of studies have attempted to shed light on the scope of the problem. A 2016 study commissioned by UN Women found that 31% of women in Lebanon reported experiencing some form of intimate partner violence (psychological, physical, sexual, economic, emotional), and 24% of men reported perpetrating it.[5] In addition, nearly 60% of women reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment in the street, and one-third of men reported perpetrating it. Furthermore, the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020, a joint plan

[1] World Health Organization, 2021.
[2] Estimating the costs of gender-based violence in the European Union, EIGE, 2014.
[3] Roughly equivalent to $127.4 million US dollars at time of writing.
[4] The Egypt Economic Cost of Gender-based Violence Survey, UNFPA, 2015.
[5] International Men and Gender Equality Survey: Lebanon, 2016.

between the Government of Lebanon and its international and domestic partners, asserts that one in two Lebanese persons reported knowing someone who had been subjected to domestic violence.[6]

SGBV in Lebanon affects women, men, girls, and boys. UNFPA reports that since 2015, an average of 90% of SGBV incidents reported to specialist service providers have involved women and girls. Cases involving male survivors, although making up a small percentage of reported cases, tend to disproportionately involve children; one-third of reported cases with male survivors involved boys under the age of 18.[7] In fact, according to 2020 data from the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS), in the area of Beirut/Mount Lebanon, 21% of child sexual abuse survivors were underage boys.[8]

Shortfalls in Lebanon's legislative framework also contribute to the perpetration of SGBV. Legislative gaps include, but are not limited to, the absence of criminalization of marital rape, the absence of criminalization of workplace sexual harassment in the penal code, the criminalization of "unnatural" sexual acts (i.e., homosexual sexual activity), the absence of laws prohibiting child marriage, and the exclusion of migrant workers from the protections of the labor code.[9] Recent improvements in this domain include the adoption of Law 293 against domestic violence in 2014, which criminalizes different forms of domestic abuse. While a modest victory, concerns have been raised regarding the effectiveness and consistency of its application and enforcement, such as the low number of protection orders issued under it and the persistence of all forms of VAWG throughout the country.[10]

Furthermore, discriminatory legislation that affirms the dominance of men over women persists in Lebanon's legal code, both a cause and effect of the harmful norms and beliefs that justify and perpetuate SGBV against women and girls. Women in Lebanon are denied equal rights under the law regarding child custody, marriage, divorce, inheritance, and the passing of nationality to children.[11]

Apart from legislative gaps, widespread patriarchal norms and beliefs discourage victims from reporting SGBV or seeking help. Attitudes that justify violence against women and girls and blame victims for 'provoking' violence can leave victims feeling responsible for the violence committed against them and contribute to feelings of shame and isolation. These sociocultural norms will be further explored throughout this baseline report.

The outbreak and persistence of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased rates of SGBV throughout the country. It has also created challenges for service providers, who struggle to continue providing essential services for victims and survivors while also ensuring the safety of

[6] Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2021, p. 22
[7] Ibid.
[8] Gender-Based Violence Information Management System, Annual Overview of Incidents of GBV in Relation to Lebanon's Situation, 2020, p.3.
[9] "Gender Justice & The Law: Assessment of laws affecting gender equality in the Arab States region: Lebanon," UNDP, UNFPA, UNESCWA, UN Women (2019).
[10] Dissecting Lebanese Law 293 on Domestic Violence: Are Women Protected? American University of Beirut, 2017.
[11] UNDP et al, op cit.

their staff and beneficiaries. Service providers are still grappling with how to shift service delivery to online spaces while protecting the privacy and confidentiality of beneficiaries, many of whom may have limited technical knowledge or access to technical devices.

The challenges brought by COVID-19 have been accompanied by an unprecedented political and economic crisis in the last three years. This has been compounded by multiple shocks that hit the country throughout 2019-2021: the October 2019 uprising, the onset of COVID-19 in February 2020, and most recently, the August 2020 Beirut Explosion and the economic and political crises that immediately followed and continue to this day. These internal and external shocks have caused increased poverty, desperation, and, in-turn, have resulted in a spike in rates of various types of SGBV across all demographics. According to Lebanese Internal Security Forces records obtained by Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ), the first three months of lockdown saw a 47% increase in the rate of domestic violence crimes reported in Lebanon. Most alarmingly, the number of reported domestic crimes as COVID-19 broke out amounted to 453, compared to 242 the year before, marking an 87% increase. Furthermore, studies have shown that there have been serious challenges for women in particular in Lebanon during COVID-19, including:

1. Women and girls' mental health and the risks of SGBV as a result of the pandemic;
2. The increased and exacerbated challenges faced by women and girls in accessing SGBV services; and
3. The accessibility of key non-SGBV services during lockdown such as food, health care, hygiene items, livelihoods, and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services.[12]

Past programming related to challenging gender stereotypes, campaigning against gender-based violence and for women's rights, alongside demands for legal reform have shown to be successful in adopting changes in legislation, raising awareness, and thus breaking taboos against discussing SGBV, especially in the areas of IPV and child marriage, and especially in the Lebanese context. It is therefore now, more than ever, as the increasing impacts of the above-mentioned internal and external shocks exacerbating SGBV continue to rise, key for the placement of resource centers and campaigns targeting support to women and girls experiencing SGBV.

Project Overview

The project "Toward a Gender-Equitable Society," implemented by ABAAD Resource Center for Gender Equality (ABAAD) in partnership with Search for Common Ground (Search), aims to reduce SGBV in Lebanon and improve SGBV prevention and response mechanisms. The project is funded by UK Aid under the Jo Cox Memorial Fund with a duration of 24 months.

The expected impact of the project is to "contribute to an enabling environment in which social norms around GBV will be shifted and access to safe and quality prevention and response services will be increased." The project aims to achieve this impact with a two-pronged complementary

[12] Various SGBV service providers have tried to mitigate restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic by shifting online. However, generalized power cuts across the country have made such services inaccessible.

approach (project outcome): 1) Increasing access to quality GBV prevention and response services, and 2) enhancing the capacity of Lebanese TV/film media to produce gender and GBV-sensitive media products.

Under the first aspect of the project outcome - increased access to GBV prevention and response services - ABAAD will ensure and improve access to specialist services in two ways: first, through its Midway Houses, emergency shelters for women survivors of SGBV and their dependents; and second, through its Women and Girl Safe Spaces (WGSS), centers that provide prevention and response services for women survivors of SGBV and those at risk. In addition, ABAAD will engage community members, both men and women, in dialogues on SGBV through its Mobile Unit, which will visit communities located farther from other direct SGBV services.

Simultaneously, under the second aspect of the project outcome - enhancing the capacity of TV/film media to produce gender and GBV-sensitive media products - Search will engage media professionals and students on topics related to gender-sensitivity in the media and the ethical representation of situations and storylines that include scenes of SGBV. Through training workshops and partnerships with media companies, Search’s activities will lead to the production of gender-sensitive short films and TV shows, as well as a new generation of students and young professionals with increased knowledge of and capacity in implementing ethical guidelines and principles related to portraying gender and SGBV in the media.

2. Methodology

Objectives

In September 2021, Search contracted Catalystas Consulting, an intersectional feminist consultancy firm represented by external consultants Kelly Litz and Sara Ajlyakin, to conduct a mixed-methods baseline study aimed at understanding and investigating the status of social norms and perceptions around SGBV and accessibility to quality prevention and services to inform the project’s planning and implementation in Lebanon.

Per the terms of reference (TOR) posted by Search, the objectives of the baseline assessment include:

1. Provide benchmark information for measuring project outcomes based on the project logframe (the project outcomes to be measured are those related to Search’s logframe indicators outcome 5 and 6);
2. Investigate the primary causes of SGBV and the blocking factors to access adequate SGBV prevention services and what are the opportunities;
3. Investigate and assess community members in targeted areas and project's participants’ perceptions around social norms and SGBV;

4. Map out available VAWG/SGBV prevention and response service providers (with a special focus on media actors e.g., TV Networks and media company production) in terms of raising awareness on VAWG/SGBV and investigate potential complementarity with the project’s objectives;
    1. Assess the level of knowledge of media professionals and film students on creating SGBV-sensitive media products for positive social change
    2. Inform Search on the selection process of media professionals and film students
5. Provide recommendations on engaging media professionals and film students, and community members, with a special focus on men and boys, in SGBV prevention related activities; and
6. Capture lessons learned and good practices feeding into recommendations and planning processes.

The key questions of the study and other methodological details can be found in the original TOR in Annex 1. See Annex 5 for the evaluation matrix, which details the data sources, data collection tools, and method of analysis for each key research question.

Data Collection

Data collection tools were developed collaboratively with Search during the inception phase. Data collection was conducted across five target groups: TV/film professionals and students, general public, women’s rights civil society organizations (CSOs) and activists, SGBV/PSS caseworkers, and INGOs. See Table 1 below for the total number of data collection activities conducted in comparison with the original targets.

Table 1: Target and actual data collection activities

Data collection activity	**Target**	**Actual**
KIIs with TV/film professionals	5	4
KIIs with women’s CSOs and activists	5	5
KIIs with SGBV/PSS caseworkers	5	5
KIIs with UN/INGOs/academic experts	3	3
FGDs with general public	8	8

Key informant interviews

17 KIIs were conducted in total across the four target groups: TV/film professionals, women’s CSOs/activists, SGBV/PSS caseworkers, and UN/INGOs/academic experts (see Table 2 below). More details on interviewees can be found in Annex 6.

Table 2: List of KIIs conducted

Interview category	**Organization**	**Title/Role**
Women’s CSOs and activists	The American University of Beirut (AUB)	Activist; Assistant Professor of Sociology and Media Studies
	Sawa for Development and Aid	Social worker, psychosocial support team
	Makhzoumi Foundation	Head of Relief and Humanitarian Unit
	National Institution of Social Care and Vocational training (NISCVT), also known as Beit Atfal Assumoud (BAS)	Mental health program coordinator
	Caritas	Shelter manager
Media professionals	Al Arabiya	Documentary filmmaker; head of documentary department at Al Arabiya
	The Talkies production company	CEO
	Daraj News	Documentary filmmaker; journalist; co-founder and managing editor of Daraj News
	Megaphone News; AUB	Co-founder and editor of Megaphone News; academic; AUB professor
Academics/ UN staff	Lebanese American University	Assistant Professor of Multimedia Journalism and Communication at the Lebanese American University
	Arab Institute for Women	Director, Arab Institute for Women, Lebanese American University
	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)	Regional Advisor on gender equality and women's empowerment, ESCWA
SGBV/PSS caseworkers	KAFA	Senior case manager
	ABAAD	Psychotherapist
	Caritas	Shelter manager
	Women Now for Development	Protection officer
	Beit Atfal Assumoud	Clinical psychologist

Five KIIs were conducted with **women’s CSOs and activists**. Two-stage cluster sampling was used to select interviewees. First, desk research was used to identify organizations and activists that work in the prevention of SGBV, who were then split into the four geographic locations (Beirut, North, South, Central). Using a random number generator, a random number was selected for each

geographic area, and the organization/activist with the corresponding number in the list was recruited for an interview. All four randomly-selected organizations/activists accepted to be interviewed. The fifth organization (Caritas) was selected using convenience sampling in recognition of the significant role the organization plays in addressing SGBV in Lebanon.

Four KIIs were conducted with **media professionals**. Personal contacts and snowball sampling methods were used to identify potential interviewees. In order to obtain a wide range of perspectives, attention was paid to recruiting media professionals from both mainstream media and alternative/emerging media, as well as to interviewing professionals with a documented background in topics related to gender equality and those without. Due to a last minute cancellation at the end of the data collection phase from a filmmaker, four KIIs were conducted with this target group instead of the planned five.

Three KIIs were conducted with **UN staff and academic experts**. Desk research and snowball sampling methods were used to identify and recruit potential interviewees. Interviewees were selected for their background and expertise in gender equality and preventing gender-based violence to provide an academic perspective on the causes and prevention efforts related to SGBV in Lebanon, the Arab region, and beyond.

Five KIIs were conducted with **SGBV/PSS caseworkers**. As mentioned previously, although two-stage cluster sampling was originally planned for this target group, there was significant difficulty in recruiting interviewees, with numerous interview requests and contact attempts unanswered. As a result, snowball and convenience sampling were utilized instead. Nevertheless, geographic diversity of interviewees was still achieved.

Focus group discussions

Eight FGDs were held with community members (see Table 3 below), who were recruited with the help of locally based CSOs. When discussing FGD recruitment with CSO staff, the consultants clarified a few points: first, to the greatest extent possible, the participants should not know each other in order to promote open discussion and avoid social repercussions for participants. Second, it was made clear that participants of a single nationality should be in one FGD at a time (i.e., all Lebanese participants *or* all Syrian participants) to avoid racial tensions and enable non-Lebanese participants to speak comfortably about certain experiences, such as those involving racism or perceptions of racism, that they may not feel comfortable sharing in the presence of Lebanese participants. Third, CSO staff were asked to approach community members from a wide variety of backgrounds in regards to age, income level, education level, and other similar characteristics.

Initially, all eight FGDs were planned to be conducted in person. However, following the violence in mid-October, the two FGDs planned for the north were held online. After seeing no escalation or continuation of violence, the remaining FGDs were also held in person.

Table 3: Information on FGDs

Location	Meeting type	Gender of Participants	Number of Participants	Nationality of Participants
Beqaa Valley	In-person	Women	11	Syrian
Beqaa Valley	In-person	Men	10	Syrian
Tyre	In-person	Women	9	Palestinian/Palestinian-Lebanese
Tyre	In-person	Men	9	Palestinian/Palestinian-Lebanese
Beirut	In-person	Women	11	Lebanese
Beirut	In-person	Men	12	Lebanese
Tripoli/Akkar	Online	Women	9	Lebanese
Tripoli/Akkar	Online	Men	8	Lebanese

Media survey

A mixed-methods survey for TV and film professionals was developed and transferred to Google Forms in both English and Arabic. Difficulties were encountered in translating SGBV related content to Arabic, despite consulting with various professional guidelines on the matter. In many cases, there is no consensus on Arabic terminology referring to gender, and translation of SGBV often results in extremely long, multi-hyphen phrases.

In total, 70 responses were received. Of those 70 responses, 7 respondents did not work in the TV or film sectors or in an adjacent field. Their responses were removed. 63 responses were included in data analysis.

Prior to public survey distribution, a test distribution was conducted for both versions with associates of the consultants. The purpose of the test distribution was to ensure the clarity of the survey and make any necessary adjustments, especially considering the challenging nature of gender equality terminology in Arabic. Based on the feedback received, a few changes were made, including: making the open-response questions optional to avoid respondents becoming frustrated and closing the survey, adding the option of ‘freelancer’ to the employment answers, splitting longer sections of questions into multiple shorter sections so the answer key would always be visible without needing to scroll up, and using consistent alignment of agree/disagree answers (i.e., strongly disagree always on the left) to reduce the possibility of respondents selecting an answer unintentionally.

More detailed information on the respondents, including demographic information, can be found in the section on findings.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data was cleaned and processed in Excel. Respondents who did not work in TV/film or an adjacent media field (n=7) were removed. Each response was then gender-disaggregated, and topical sections were highlighted for ease of analysis. In addition to gender, certain other characteristics were used to determine if patterns or correlations emerged (for example, whether participants who had previously participated in gender training demonstrated more familiarity with gender equality topics). As patterns and correlations emerged, they were then cross-referenced with interview data, particularly interviews with media professionals, to draw out themes and commonalities.

Analysis of qualitative FGD and KII data followed a grounded theory approach, allowing for in-depth exploration of emerging themes in the participants’ narrative responses. Topical codes were applied to FGD and KII notes to allow excerpts to be sorted according to FGD and interview guide domains, and open interpretive coding was utilized to identify and analyze any emerging themes observed within and between topical areas, making connections with quantitative data apparent.

Using grounded theory as our primary research paradigm implies that analysis and identification of concepts was inductive, an approach that moves from the specific to the general to explain phenomena in the qualitative theory-generating process. Analysis and explanation of phenomenon followed a “ground up” approach from data. As a result, comparative statements between groups of participants from different backgrounds and cities were only provided when analysis of findings significantly supported differences along such cleavages: when no such differences were noted, emphasizing different backgrounds may lead to erroneous and non-evidence based causal inferences.

Research Challenges and Limitations

Challenges and adjustments

A number of expected and unexpected challenges in data collection required adjustments to the original methodology. First, the outbreak of violence in Beirut on 14 October prompted a reevaluation of security protocols. determined it was safer for both facilitators and participants to conduct the remaining FGDs online. This was communicated to Search and ABAAD and received their generous understanding. Nevertheless, after another week had passed and the situation had not escalated, the research team determined that the security situation was stable enough to resume in-person meetings, and decided to conduct in-person FGDs in Tyre since the in-person meetings facilitated much better discussion.

Second, there was notable difficulty in securing interviews with PSS/SGBV caseworkers. The multiple crises occurring in Lebanon (Covid-19, economic, political) has stretched the capacity of

organizations to complete their routine work, much less to dedicate time to interviews. In most cases, interview requests went unanswered. In a few cases, such as with child protection organization Himaya, our request for an interview was kindly declined. As a result, the sampling method was revised. Originally envisioned as two-stage cluster sampling, the consultants used snowball and convenience sampling to achieve the target number of interviews. Nevertheless, the original interview criteria were met (geographic diversity and number of years of professionals experience). See Annex 6 for a demographic breakdown of interviewees.

Third, the target number of responses to the mixed-methods survey for media students and professionals was not met, despite widespread distribution of the survey. A total of 70 responses were collected, compared to the original target of 250. The consultants hypothesize a number of reasons for this, including high levels of stress and burnout throughout the country in general, a ‘brain drain’ in the TV and film sectors, and an increased focus on basic needs with less time to dedicate to other activities in response to the multiple crises in Lebanon.

The consultants made the following efforts regarding survey distribution:

- 508 TV and film professionals were emailed. A second email was sent a week after the initial email as a reminder to complete the survey. Emails were sent to groups of 20 professionals or fewer at a time to avoid spam filters. Of the 508 email recipients, 132 were received from a Beirut-based talent agent who is a personal connection of another Catalystas consultant. The remaining 376 email addresses were found in the publicly-available directory of Fondacion Cinema Liban, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and preserving the Lebanese film industry.
- Messages via social media were sent to approximately 130 production houses in Lebanon.
- A Reddit post was created in the Lebanon subreddit.
- Media professionals and professors who were interviewed were kindly requested to share the survey.
- Personal connections and networks were leveraged.
- Film department heads and professors were emailed.
- A Facebook post in the private, 15,600-member group Linked Association of Tech, Media and the Arts (LATMA), a professional network for the media and entertainment industry throughout the Middle East.

Fourth, as a result of all the above mentioned challenges, a one-week extension of the data collection phase was requested and granted by Search on 22 October. A second extension of four working days was granted on 18 November due to the loss of a loved one.

Research Limitations

A number of limitations should be considered when examining the baseline data collected. First, the FGD participants were recruited through civil society organizations throughout Lebanon. In other words, FGD participants were current or former beneficiaries of CSO support services or activities.

As a result, FGD participants may differ in certain characteristics from the general public in Lebanon, primarily with regards to familiarity with humanitarian language in relation to SGBV.

Second, there is a possibility that social desirability bias - a type of response bias in which research participants respond in a way they believe to be favorable to the researcher and others - played a role in influencing the responses of both FGD participants and interviewees. Considering the sensitive nature of the topic at hand, it may be that some respondents, particularly those in group discussions, avoided giving socially undesirable responses, such as those that condone or justify violence. In FGDs, it was observed that some participants, particularly women, carefully navigated the line between the descriptive and the prescriptive; in other words, as soon as their response seemed like it was justifying or excusing violent behavior, eliciting protests from other participants, they would retreat to the descriptive (“I’m only saying how things are, not how they should be”). This may have been exacerbated given that both the FGD moderator and note taker were women, especially in the case of male FGD participants.

In consideration of social desirability bias, the order of the media survey was changed so that the questions asking respondents’ personal opinions on gender equality came first after the demographic section. This was done because it was felt that other questions on the survey might further ‘give away’ the research team’s position on gender equality and create bias among the responses. In FGDs, the moderator repeatedly emphasized that there is no right or wrong answer to the questions, the intention being to generate a judgment and bias-free discussion.

Third, the sample size for the media survey was lower than expected. Despite numerous efforts by the researchers to reach media professionals through numerous channels, low participation in the survey may be caused by a general sense of “survey and research fatigue”, not uncommon in conflict-ridden countries and overly researched communities. Time-related restrictions also meant that the survey may have needed more time to gather momentum. Although the sample size was never intended to be statistically representative, it may be important for users to keep in mind that the findings presented here may differ from those of a statistically representative sample.

Fourth, self-reporting was used to determine media survey respondents’ knowledge of and familiarity with gender equality concepts. Self-reporting, while less rigorous than other approaches for testing knowledge, was preferable in this context, primarily because the project training material (and thus the exact content that would be taught to project participants) was not available at the time of survey design. Since the baseline research was meant to inform project implementation, the consultants believed it would be more useful to gauge general knowledge/familiarity with broader topics. In addition, the confidential and anonymous nature of the survey, as well as careful construction of response options, reduced the likelihood of participants inflating their familiarity with the topics.

3. Findings

Research findings and analysis are presented in this section. First, findings from the key informant interviews inform research questions related to causes and prevention of SGBV. Second, public perceptions and attitudes toward SGBV are presented using findings from FGDs with community members throughout the country. Finally, the knowledge and attitudes of media professionals and students is examined through their responses to a mixed methods survey.

SGBV in Lebanon: Causes and triggers

The causes of SGBV are multifaceted and complex. Key informants provided a wide range of explanations for the cause of SGBV in Lebanon, and more specifically in the communities in which they live and/or work. While primary sources (KIIs) were the main source of information in this section, secondary sources were used to add depth and background. The main causes identified by interviewees are as below:

- **Poverty**: Nearly every interviewee across all categories emphasized the economic crisis and financial stress as causes or triggers of SGBV. Poverty may affect violence in a number of different ways. In societies in which the role of the male partner is to financially support the family, as is generally the case in Lebanon, the inability to fulfill this role may lead to a crisis of masculinity and feelings of inadequacy. Men may then use violence in an attempt to reassert control and masculinity. Research by Oxfam and ABAAD with Syrian refugees in Lebanon found that men's inability to fulfil their traditional gender role damaged their feelings of self-worth and, in some cases, led to increased violence against women and children.[13] Furthermore, decades of research have revealed the complex relationship between economic insecurity, power, and intimate partner violence, regularly finding that violence is used by men as a way to increase their bargaining power and maintain control over the household.[14,15] In situations of economic insecurity in particular, male violence has been shown to be used to compensate for the male partner's lack of power in other areas.[16]

  Second, economic vulnerability plays a significant role in preventing victims from leaving violent situations. Women who are financially dependent on their partner and have limited or no skills relevant to the labor market may see no way out, and adolescents or young adults who experience violence at home may not be able to afford to leave. This is also significant for LGBTQ+ individuals, who may have been forced to move back home into families in which they experienced abuse on the basis of their sexual orientation.

[13] Shifting Sands: Changing gender roles among refugees in Lebanon, Oxfam and ABAAD, 2013.
[14] "Empowerment and intimate partner violence: Domestic abuse when household income is uncertain," Bulte & Lensink, 2020.
[15] "Economic Insecurity and Husband-to-Wife Physical Assault in Hong Kong: The Role of Husband's Power Motive," Cheun & Choi, 2013, p. 105.
[16] "Power and Violence: The Relation Between Communication Patterns, Power Discrepancies, and Domestic Violence," Babcock et. al., 1993.

Furthermore, economic hardship forces individuals and families into decisions that put themselves at greater risk for different kinds of SGBV, described by one interviewee as "forcing people to cross ethical and humane borders." Poverty leads to increased rates of child marriage,[17] and a few interviewees also spoke about women being forced into sex work out of financial desperation, an unfortunate reality known as 'survival sex' that has been documented in general as well as specifically among Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.[18]

- **Weak and discriminatory legal framework**: Nearly every interviewee also highlighted the role of the Lebanese legal framework for its failure to protect women and its outright legalization of gender-based discrimination. Personal status laws discriminate against women regarding child custody; fear of losing custody of their children was cited by most interviewees as reason women are unwilling to report violence. The discriminatory nature of the Lebanese legal framework has been widely researched and discussed, including in a recent comprehensive report by UN Women.[19]

  Interviewees also discussed the fragmented, sectarian nature of the state, in which preserving customs and traditions of some sects is prioritized regardless of the impact of those customs and traditions on women.

> "Until now, honor crimes are not by law considered 100% illegal. They issued a law that was soft because the law took into consideration the habits and traditions existing in some communities. **So, they don't want to cause any harm to the people who commit harm**."
>
> - *Documentary filmmaker, male, 62 years old*

  The *kafala* system[20] for migrant workers was also provided as a clear example of the state's failure to protect women to the benefit of the country's elite. In addition, even when violence is committed in violation of the country's legislation, there is often impunity or minimal punishment for perpetrators. One interviewee spoke about calling the police to report a domestic incident that sounded like it may have involved violence; the police declined to come to the scene, telling her that their presence might 'make the situation worse,' as if violence were something private or expected.

[17] "Early marriage and poverty: exploring links and key policy issues," Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2010.
[18] "Syrian and Palestinian Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: the Plight of Women and Children," Charles & Denman 2013.
[19] Gender Justice & The Law: Assessment of laws affecting gender equality in the Arab States region, UN Women 2018.
[20] The *kafala*, or sponsorship, system regulates the status of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon. Under this system, migrant domestic workers are excluded from the legal protections of the Labor Code. Their legal residency is tied to their employer, who is able to wield significant control over their employee through a series of restrictive laws, regulations, and customs.

- **Nature of the Lebanese state**: Sectarianism was mentioned by interviewees and media survey respondents as a cause of the state's failure to address SGBV. Most interviewees spoke dismissively or derisively about the role of the state, emphasizing that CSOs were the ones fulfilling the unmet responsibilities of the state. Despite a constitutional provision declaring equality among all Lebanese, Lebanon's sectarian political system has failed to make this a reality for women. The sectarian nature of the system has encroached on state sovereignty and created parallel and contradictory decision-making structures that wield significant power over the lives of people in Lebanon, to the detriment of women.[21]

  > "Let's agree on one thing: there is no state."
  > - *Makhzoumi Foundation representative (male, 40 years old), when asked about the role of the state in service provision to support SGBV survivors*

  In addition, the political crises and 'collapse' of the state were perceived as emboldening abusers and inciting SGBV. Numerous women interviewees spoke about feeling unsafe even in daylight in Beirut and about a general feeling of unease, reasoning that if the government couldn't even provide electricity, how could it possibly protect them or bring them justice if they were subjected to violence?

- **Sociocultural norms and beliefs**: Interviewees spoke widely about the role of sociocultural norms and beliefs in causing SGBV. They highlighted beliefs in the superiority of men over women and the 'right' of men to control, including through violence, the women in their families. When religion was mentioned, interviewees were quick to note that religion itself wasn't the problem, but that religious texts were twisted and manipulated to be used as a tool to justify the oppression of women, especially when it pertains to Intimate Partner Violence and Domestic Violence. The use of religion to justify SGBV was observed directly in FGDs with male participants, some of whom commented that their religion gave them the 'right' to discipline their female partners, although some other male FGD participants disagreed. Indirectly, religious justification was reported by case workers as being used by local authority figures (in refugee camps, for example) as well as by male partners.

  In addition, as mentioned at the end of the last section, beliefs that designate SGBV within the family as a private issue, as well as beliefs that hold victims responsible for the abuse committed against them, contribute to the perpetuation of violence.

  > "There is danger of a backlash. [Speaking openly about violence] is a double edged sword. But I don't think we're safer when we don't talk. **Either way, we're not safe**."
  > - *Professor and human/women's rights activist (female, 36 years old), on the difficulties of speaking out against abusers*

[21] "Gender politics in Lebanon and the limits of legal reformism," Salameh, 2014.

- **Patriarchy:** As stated simply by one interviewee: "The cause of violence against women is patriarchy." Despite being mentioned by only a few interviewees, decades of research have identified patriarchy, or a social order in which men hold the power, as a root cause of SGBV against women.[22] The items mentioned previously in this list are both causes and effects of patriarchy, uniting in a self-reinforcing system in which many different features collude and combine to fortify existing male-dominated power structures and keep women (and non-binary or gender non-conforming individuals) excluded and marginalized.

A number of triggers, which may not be related to the root causes, but do contribute to increased rates of SGBV, were almost mentioned. First and foremost, the negative impact of the **COVID-19 pandemic** on the health and security of those at risk for SGBV cannot be understated. CSO staff working at shelters spoke of 300% or greater increases in shelter referrals. Movement restrictions kept victims trapped with their abusers, frustration and isolation triggered violent outbursts, and ensuing economic hardship added fuel to the fire. Furthermore, health concerns and government restrictions made service delivery extremely challenging, as CSO staff scrambled to shift to online communication and service delivery, thus excluding the most marginalized women who lack access to digital devices or the knowledge of how to use them.

The **August 2020 Beirut blast** was also mentioned as a trigger by interviewees working in Beirut. One interviewee spoke about how the destruction of liberal/progressive meeting places in the blast caused significant harm to the LGBTQ community, particularly the trans community, who already had to be very careful about where they spent their time in public, and were even further isolated following the blast. Helem, an LGBTQ advocacy organization in Beirut, lost both its centers in the blast and lamented the destruction of other LGBTQ-friendly spaces. Helem also noted the potential for increased domestic violence against LGBTQ individuals who lost their residences and were forced to move in with families who may disapprove of their sexuality.[23]

Interviewees were also asked about **factors that help to reduce SGBV**. Just as all interviewees mentioned poverty and economic deprivation as factors that contribute to SGBV, most mentioned an improvement in the economic situation as a necessary factor for reducing SGBV. Other external factors included reliable and sustainable funding; the precarious funding cycles of many CSOs make it difficult to do the long-term and holistic strategic thinking and planning necessary to effectively address gender inequality and SGBV/VAWG.

Finding: There is a (racially-charged) perception that SGBV only affects 'lower class' people in Lebanon.

In both interviews and open responses in the media survey, a strong association was observed between SGBV perpetration/victimization and individuals of low income, low education, and

[22] "The European Union Sector Specific Gender Analysis: An In-Depth Sectoral Examination of Feminist and Women's Rights Issues in Lebanon", UN Women (2021)
[23] Beirut blast destroys vital lifeline for LGBT+ Lebanese, Reuters, 2020

certain races/nationalities. Some interviewees, including case workers who work daily and directly with SGBV victims, made comments suggesting these correlations. For example, one caseworker commented that there is less SGBV perpetration among Lebanese than Syrians because Syrians are less educated. Another interviewee, when speaking about increases in violence, commented that "even Lebanese" were becoming more violent. Additionally, a media survey respondent shared his belief that gender equality "isn't a major problem" in Beirut and central Lebanon; it's only in the north and south of the country where women experience oppression.

On the other hand, numerous interviewees were quick to note that violence occurs in all segments of society and all countries of the world regardless of income or social status. In fact, one interviewee laid the responsibility partially on the anti-SGBV campaigns run by CSOs, stating that the women shown in the campaigns are usually weak, poor, and unemployed, thus reproducing the stigma and stereotypes about what 'type' of women are abused.

While it is important to recognize the correlations that have been identified through decades of research on violence and education, as well as violence and poverty, it is essential not to reduce this to a stereotype for two main reasons. Firstly, it is simply not true; although economically marginalized women may be at higher risk for IPV, other variables (often those also correlated with poverty) have been identified as having stronger predictive effects on violence.[24] Also, service providers work with individual women, not generalized averages, so while it may be valuable to be aware of these correlations (particularly because poor women face additional obstacles to escaping violence), it would be a mistake to project such stereotypes onto individual women's experiences.

Second, such stereotypes are harmful to the cause of SGBV prevention and further stigmatize poor women. Considering the social stigma associated with poverty, further associating SGBV/IPV as something experienced primarily by poor women may prevent women in general from seeking help, as stigma has been recognized as reducing the likelihood of women seeking support.[25] Also, such stereotypes further stigmatize poor women, who through this analysis may be perceived as having less agency in their lives and relationships.

SGBV prevention and response

Current prevention and response efforts

The prevention and response services offered in Lebanon have been well-documented in recent mapping reports and other similar research efforts, including by ABAAD/UNFPA,[26] as well as in another mapping report specific to services for Palestinian and Syrian women in Lebanon.[27] In

[24] Intimate Partner Violence and Neighborhood Income: A Longitudinal Analysis, Bonomi et. al. 2017.
[25] The Intimate Partner Violence Stigmatization Model and Barriers to Help-Seeking, Overstreet & Quinn 2013.
[26] "Mapping Gender-Based Violence Programmes, Services, and Policies in Lebanon," ABAAD & UNFPA, 2020.
[27] "Access to SGBV Protection Services for Syrian and Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon," Menaal Munshey, United Nations University, 2018.

addition, the UNHCR-led inter-agency SGBV task force in Lebanon coordinates SGBV prevention and response activities and provides a wealth of information related to this topic.

Interviewees provided a variety of opinions and perspectives related to the existing prevention and response services and their outcomes, elaborated below.

Finding: CSO staff are not fully aware of similar or complementary services to support survivors of SGBV.

In interviews, it was observed that CSO staff were only able to speak about the services offered by their particular organizations. In many cases, they were unaware of other services offered in their communities/cities, much less throughout the rest of the country. It is likely that staff work within limited and pre-existing referral networks and are unfamiliar with available services outside of those networks. In some cases, CSO interviewees provided inconsistent or conflicting information on SGBV service provision, particularly regarding services available from other organizations.

Finding: There may be insufficient coordination among SGBV service providers in Lebanon.

Perhaps a cause and/or effect of the previous finding, stronger coordination among SGBV service providers could be very beneficial for both CSOs and beneficiaries. Currently, the UNHCR-led SGBV task force is the primary mechanism gathering state and non-state actors on SGBV prevention. In the task force's most recent update (Q3 2021), 60 organizations (international and local NGOs) were listed as contributing to progress monitoring.[28] In perhaps further evidence of a lack of coordination, of the 60 organizations listed, two of the CSOs involved in this baseline research were absent from the list (Beit Atfal Assumoud, Women Now for Development), despite their direct work with SGBV survivors.

While a few interviewees directly mentioned lack of coordination as a challenge to be addressed, the observed lack of awareness of CSO staff of other available services can create a false perception of scarcity related to service provision. This, in turn, may also prevent beneficiaries from receiving as much support as possible. For example, interviewees were divided on whether there were sufficient services for all those in need in Lebanon. Some said there were enough services but coordination was lacking; others said the number of services was insufficient. Either way, when mentioning partners or referral networks, only a few partnerships were mentioned for each organization, suggesting a pattern of SGBV service providers working in silos.

According to a recent mapping report by ABAAD and UNFPA, the sufficiency of services depends on the category of service provision.[29] Health services designed for SGBV victims are lacking, as are legal services and advice. Social services - including helplines, shelters, counseling, case management, and other specialist services - have expanded significantly in recent years, but challenges remain in ensuring these services are accessible to the most vulnerable women in

[28] 2021_Q3_SECTOR_DASHBOARD: Protection including Child Protection and GBV, Inter-agency coordination Lebanon
[29] "Mapping Gender-Based Violence Programmes, Services, and Policies in Lebanon," ABAAD & UNFPA, 2020.

Lebanon, such as those living in remote areas or within closed communities. In this regard, ABAAD's Mobile Unit may be an effective way of not only providing services to hard-to-reach populations, but also determining the specific needs and challenges of those populations for long-term planning purposes.

Among the social services mentioned, **shelters** were noted by caseworker key informants as well as in the abovementioned mapping report as a service in need of expansion. Both sources also pointed to lack of/instability in funding as an obstacle to the development of additional shelters, as they are costly and complex to operate in terms of both human and financial resources.

Finding: Some CSO staff demonstrate an incomplete understanding of SGBV and gender issues.

In interviews with some CSO staff (3 out of 9 CSO staff interviewed), an incomplete understanding of certain topics emerged. These observations came from discussions with psychologists and caseworkers; it may be possible that these staff members have been well trained on the provision of psychological support, but not necessarily on gender issues in an in-depth way.

Firstly, SGBV against men and boys is not well-understood. For example, when asked if her organization supported male SGBV survivors, one interviewee stated outright that she didn't think SGBV could happen to men - especially heterosexual men. A few other interviewees responded to the same question by either mentioning types of violence that were not necessarily gender-based or stating that these cases were rare because women rarely hit men (in other words, perceiving SGBV as something synonymous with domestic violence/intimate partner violence, as well as considering SGBV as only physical in nature and something committed by one gender against someone of a different gender). Considering the difficulty for men and boys to report violence, these attitudes and beliefs can further alienate male victims - especially those of LGBTQ orientations.

Secondly, the gendered power imbalance at the root of SGBV was not well understood by some CSO staff, who seemed to take an approach to violence prevention that addressed the *effects* of violence without challenging the causes (or mistook the effects for the causes). More specifically, instead of challenging men's control and 'rightful' status as head of the household, they challenged and criticized men who abused that control. However, it is that imbalance of power that is at the root of SGBV; as long as men have power over women, women will remain at the mercy of their benevolence (or malevolence).

For example, one CSO staff interviewee, when speaking about the role of the economic crisis in increasing rates of SGBV, mentioned that if there were economic prosperity, women wouldn't "be asked" to go to work and would therefore experience less violence, both in the workplace and at home. Another interviewee spoke about the difference between 'males' and 'men': males were those who abused their power and were disrespectful and violent; men used their power to love, protect, and respect the women in their lives. In her view, SGBV would be reduced when men became more

"merciful and spiritual." Both of these comments came from a perspective of rejecting violence while simultaneously accepting men's authority and control over women.

It should be noted that the large majority of interviewees from CSOs, the UN, and INGOs were highly knowledgeable on all topics discussed. Also, despite the findings in this section, all interviewees from those categories demonstrated passion and commitment to their work. While the introductory training activities for staff were not investigated as part of this research, they likely differ widely by organization and office. Occasional training and refresher courses may be a simple way to ensure all staff are on the same page in terms of knowledge about gender and SGBV.

Regarding the **effectiveness/outcome of services**, most interviewees spoke about the services offered by their specific organization. CSO representatives, generally being specialized in service provision, had a limited awareness of the concrete outcomes of their services. Instead, they spoke about their experiences in service delivery, often sharing memorable anecdotes related to how services had positively impacted beneficiaries. The services mentioned as effective were as follows:

- *Cash assistance*: As previously mentioned, women's economic dependence on men plays a significant role in keeping women trapped in abusive situations. Emergency cash assistance can provide a lifeline for women seeking a way to leave violent relationships. Evidence from a UNICEF cash-transfer program in Jordan,[30] as well as additional evidence from similar programs worldwide,[31] demonstrate the positive impact of cash transfers, which often have positive ripple effects for families beyond the aim of the program.

- *Financial plans*: Similarly, providing advisory and technical support to help women gain financial independence was seen as an effective strategy in helping them escape abuse. This service, while seemingly basic, may be particularly important considering the fact that individuals who have experienced trauma (such as the trauma of SGBV victimization) may have significant difficulties related to higher-level thinking and decision-making.[32]

- *Police training*: While interviewees were divided on the value of the role of the police in SGBV prevention, most agreed that CSO efforts to make police more gender-sensitive and capable of sensitively and confidentially handling SGBV cases were effective, particularly when repeated on a regular basis.

- *Shelters (particularly long-term shelters)*: Shelters are an invaluable resource for women who have nowhere else to turn, not only because they provide a safe physical space but also due to the other types of support they provide, such as psychological support, legal assistance, and vocational training. Shelters that allow longer-term accommodation are

[30] The Difference a Dollar a Day Makes: A Study of UNICEF Jordan's Hajati Programme, UNICEF, 2021
[31] Shock-Responsive Social Protection Systems Research, Oxford Policy Management, 2017
[32] Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services: Understanding the Impact of Trauma, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2014.

particularly valuable, as legal processes (e.g. divorce) and healing from trauma are intensive and lengthy processes.

- *Hotlines*: Hotlines for reporting violence, including those led by CSOs as well as the Internal Security Forces (ISF), were recognized as well-known and essential services, particularly as a first point of contact for seeking help.

- *Social media-based services*: Numerous interviewees praised the accessibility of service provision through social media. CSOs' use of social media to promote their services and spread awareness about SGBV-related topics was also something mentioned by many interviewees as a contributing factor to breaking down the taboo around openly discussing those issues. On the other hand, some interviewees mentioned cyberviolence and online blackmail as emerging problems that needed to be addressed, particularly among youth.

- *Psychosocial support*: Psychosocial support was considered essential in helping victims deal with trauma and reintegrate into society. It was emphasized that this support must be long-term, as healing is not a short-term process. This was stressed in particular for adolescents. Interviewees who work with adolescents highlighted the immense challenges in helping young people deal with trauma - particularly since it is usually inflicted on them by family members - potentially taking years to help them regain stability.

Regarding **pathways for reporting violence**, the most commonly mentioned pathways included CSOs/NGOs, the police, and hospitals/clinics. Regarding specific services, communication through hotlines, emails, and social media were most often referenced as first points of contact for those seeking help.

For adolescents, entry into support services most often occurred through the legal system; for some organizations, this was a requirement to accept minors into facilities such as shelters. Adolescents are referred to shelters through the juvenile court system.

As mentioned above, interviewees' opinions related to these pathways diverged. In particular, disagreement emerged over the role of the police. Some interviewees emphasized the patriarchal, violent, and male-dominated institutional nature of the police force. Other interviewees focused on the fact that while police conduct might not be ideal, it has improved in recent years thanks to the efforts of civil society. Interviewees who work with Syrian and Palestinian refugees highlighted refugees' distrust and avoidance of the police, often because of their undocumented legal status.

Per one survey, the Internal Security Forces (ISF) are the first reporting pathway that most people in Lebanon (74.6%) would choose if they were victims of a crime, while only 9.5% said they would prefer to turn to family, clan, or tribe.[33] However, when asked specifically about sexual or domestic violence, the percentage who would turn to their family or tribe increased to 50%, suggesting among other thing a lack of confidence in the ISF to deal with such cases. Additionally, patriarchal and victim-blaming attitudes within the ISF can contribute to the re-victimization of survivors who

[33] Citizens' Perceptions Of Security Institutions In Lebanon, Geha, 2015.

choose to report and give the impression of impunity for perpetrators of SGBV.[34] Efforts to train and sensitize police officers, in order to be effective, should be done on a regular basis, with refresher trainings conducted at regular intervals.

> "No woman in Lebanon feels safe talking to policemen. These were the men who were beating us up in the streets, and I should go to them and report that another man is beating me up?"
>
> - *Activist and AUB professor, female, 36 years old*

Most interviewees agreed that CSOs were the most likely point of entry for SGBV victims seeking support. Many comments were made on the trustworthy reputation of prominent CSOs within Lebanese society. Importantly, CSO staff working with Syrian and Palestinian refugees did not share the same enthusiasm. One interviewee working with Palestinians mentioned cases in which CSO staff had sexually harassed or assaulted women who sought their help, to the extent that it was known in the camp not to go to a certain organization after dark or alone. Another interviewee, one working with Syrian refugees, spoke about the negative reputation of CSOs among Syrians as being abusers themselves and trying to break up families; however, she stated this reputation was spread by men in order to keep their wives unaware and tarnish the reputation of CSOs.

Additionally, interviewees were asked about the **most effective interventions for preventing SGBV**:

- *National and regional networking and coordination*: Numerous interviewees stressed the importance of not only collaborating and coordinating with other women's rights organizations and allies in Lebanon, but also the potential value of establishing a strong regional network and/or entity dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment. Many view that the fragmented nature of efforts and inter-organizational rivalry emanating from Lebanon-specific challenges impede the collaboration on issues that are not only national in nature, but also regional. Establishing national and regional networks are seen as a way to establish shared platforms for collaboration and sharing strategies.

- *Working with children*: It was emphasized that reaching young children with messages on gender equality and nonviolence as well as challenging notions of traditional gender roles is essential to longer-term progress in SGBV reduction. These interventions should not be one-off, but must be reinforced throughout childhood development to affect their core beliefs. Interviewees also lamented the sexist presentation of gender roles in school textbooks – an issue that is likely worth challenging.

- *Working with men and boys*: SGBV cannot be eradicated by only or mostly working with victims and potential victims. Women and girls are not responsible for and cannot prevent their own victimization. Men and boys must be engaged as both allies and perpetrators.

[34] Exploring Gender Norms in the Lebanese Internal Security Forces, Rougvie, 2018.

Perpetrator programs are one option, with high quality guidance developed on such programs by the European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence and other actors. Another option is fatherhood support programs. Fatherhood provides a less controversial entry point for engaging men in discussions about nonviolence in the family, gender equality, and sharing unpaid care work. Involved and nonviolent fatherhood also has immense benefits for children, as those who grow up as victims or witnesses of physical violence are much more likely to perpetrate (for boys) and be victimized (for girls) in adulthood. In Turkey, Mother-Child Education Foundation (Anne Çocuk Eğitim Vakfı in Turkish) has developed expertise and guidance in this subject area, having worked with hundreds of fathers all over Turkey and dedicated significant attention and resources to rigorously monitoring the effectiveness of their programs.

- *Knowledge exchanges*: SGBV/VAWG is a global problem, and all over the world as well as throughout the MENA region, feminist organizations and advocates are working on solving the same problems, many in similar contexts. Knowledge exchanges are not only essential for innovating and deepening institutional knowledge, but they also build networks and bridges with regional and global allies and can result in highly effective partnerships. The two organizations mentioned in the previous paragraph, for example, are valuable resources for working with men and boys.

- *Awareness-raising among ethnic/racial minorities*: CSO staff working with these groups of women emphasized the importance of going where they live and work and targeting them with direct messaging regarding available services and how to access them. This may be particularly important in rural and closed communities.

- *Social media campaigns*: Many interviewees credited the presence of women’s rights CSOs on social media with opening discussions on SGBV and creating shifts in the belief systems of younger generations. Communication through social media is also relatively cost effective, with a lot of room for creativity and innovation.

- *Thinking outside the box*: A few interviewees emphasized the importance of addressing SGBV holistically in innovative and creative ways. Ideas mentioned included feminist housing initiatives, communal neighborhood kitchens to reduce the burden of domestic work, and paternity leave. Other suggested initiatives tackle the root causes of violence, such as stopping the arms trade and pursuing economic justice for the working class and working class women in particular.

Obstacles to access to services

In both FGDs and interviews, a number of obstacles to accessing services were identified. First, **women and girls often lack knowledge of their basic rights**, particularly marginalized women (refugee women, migrant workers), adolescent girls, and women living in rural areas or tribal communities - a point emphasized repeatedly in interviews with CSO staff. In addition, regarding legal rights, only 17.1% of women respondents in the media survey reported being “very familiar”

or "moderately familiar" with Lebanese legislation related to SGBV. Considering the high level of education within this group (97% of women respondents have a bachelor's degree or higher), women's (and the general public's) awareness of their legal rights related to SGBV is likely to be low, particularly in rural areas.

For example, in one interview, a caseworker spoke about a teenage girl who arrived at the shelter after she had been raped by her brother. The girl was unsure if her brother's actions were wrong, wondering if maybe he had the right to do that since he was her brother. She had never been exposed to concepts like consent or bodily autonomy.

Second, **victims may not be aware of the organizations that provide support** or what kind of support they provide. They might not know what type of services are available near them. For example, in the media survey, 17% of women, 29% of men, and 25% of nonbinary persons reported not being able to identify any support services for survivors of SGBV in their area. More details are provided on this in the following section.

Third, **attitudes that normalize and justify VAWG** prevent victims from seeking help. Women and girls in particular may consider violence a normal part of marriage or of being a woman. Similar attitudes may include believing the violence isn't 'that bad,' that it happens in all marriages, or that it is the husband or father's 'right.'

Fourth, **attitudes and beliefs that blame and shame women** discourage them from seeking out services. Shame and social stigma were mentioned by all interviewees as a significant obstacle to reporting violence. Women are told that if they report violence, they would be responsible for breaking up their family. They are often also told they are causing the violence.

Fifth, **financial obstacles** were identified as preventing survivors from accessing services. They may not be able to afford the transportation cost to travel to an NGO, or they may not own (or have safe access to) a device with which they can contact NGOs for advice or assistance. In many cases, they may be financially dependent on their abuser.

Sixth, **racial/ethnic discrimination** prevents minority women and girls in Lebanon from seeking support. It was noted in interviews that following the Beirut port explosion, non-Lebanese women and men were harassed as they attempted to access humanitarian services, with Lebanese individuals claiming they hadn't really been affected by the blast and were just trying to take resources that should be prioritized for Lebanese people. Racism was also repeatedly mentioned in FGDs with Syrians and Palestinians.

Last, but certainly not least, **ineffective and discriminatory laws** keep women trapped in abuse. Interviewees emphasized the fear of losing their children as one of the primary reasons women do not approach services or seek help. They also fear losing their families, their communities, and their homes, and for many women experiencing what they may consider 'less severe' violence, the

trade-off is not worth it, especially if they already mistrust the justice system. Other situations, such as women abused in the *kafala* system, are akin to modern-day slavery.

Gaps in service provision

Finding: Non-physical violence is underprioritized and underdiscussed.

Through interviews, it was observed that SGBV services focus primarily on physical and sexual violence. A few interviewees and media survey respondents mentioned other types of SGBV - economic, psychological, emotional. However, the primary focus of awareness-raising campaigns in Lebanon has been physical and sexual violence. In the recent mapping report by UNFPA and ABAAD, in the section on awareness-raising efforts, there is no mention of a campaign that features psychological or economic violence.[35]

Contrary to what may be assumed, numerous studies have found that psychological violence is equally or more traumatic than physical violence. In one study of abused women in the United States, 72% reported that psychological abuse affected them more severely than physical abuse.[36] Additionally, psychological violence has been shown to precede physical violence in relationships and to occur at higher rates than physical violence, and the health consequences are also at least as severe as those of physical violence, resulting in deep and long-lasting trauma. Also, considering the role of economic dependence in keeping women in cycles of abuse, economic violence is an issue to which more time and resources should be dedicated.

In addition, **shelters** (particularly those that provide longer-term accommodation and can accommodate women with older male children) were identified as a need by numerous interviewees. Existing shelters are struggling to manage increased referrals due to the economic, health, and political crises in the country.

Examining public perceptions

Various SGBV primary prevention programs seek to facilitate change by addressing underlying causes and drivers of SGBV. Traditionally, such programs include initiatives to economically empower girls and women, work on enhancement of legal protections for SGBV, and enshrining women's rights and gender equality within national legislation and policy. Increasingly, many programs are also targeting transformation of social norms and perceptions that justify and sustain acceptance of SGBV. This section intends to study contextually and socially derived collective expectations, shared beliefs, and unspoken rules that both proscribe and prescribe behaviors that may implicitly convey that SGBV is acceptable. Such perceptions and norms tend to be either descriptive: an individual's belief about what others typically do in a given situation, or injunctive/normative: beliefs about what others expect them to do in a given situation, or beliefs about how others should ideally behave in a given situation. The distinction between both is not always very clear, as reflected below. It is worth noting that perceptions are not always an adequate

[35] Mapping report, op. cit.
[36] "The role of emotional abuse in physically abusive relationships," Follingstad et. al., 1990.

reflection of the reality of SGBV on the ground, and their examination is not intended to make inferences about their truth and validity. They are valid in as much they reveal how participants produce meaning around those realities.

Public perceptions and attitudes toward SGBV

A total of 8 FGDs were conducted with community members across four principle research sites in Lebanon: Tyre, Tripoli, the Beqaa, and Beirut, to gather in-depth and qualitative information on public perceptions and attitudes towards SGBV and the role of the media. Groups were separated by gender, with a total of 79 community members participating in the discussions. Ages of participants ranged from 18 to 82 years. FGDs centered on six central topics: perceptions of SGBV as a problem, response to violence, protecting family honor, the patriarch's right to use violence, discussing SGBV in the open and the role of the media.

Perceptions on public space, safety and vulnerability

Data from FGDs demonstrates that ideas about gender and its relationship to vulnerability and danger are pervasive in talk about violence. Widely shared conceptions of gender associate femininity with vulnerability and masculinity with dangerousness. Such ideas are constructed through interaction and are based in part on shared beliefs about gendered bodies. The majority of FGD participants engaged in imagistic discourse which suggests that men have bodies that will prevail, that are strong and impenetrable, while female bodies were not presented as active agents, but as breakable, takeable bodies. When asked about the safety of their cities, one female FGD participant mentioned: "For women, it is worse, because they are physically weaker," another male participant added: "Because she is weak, she cannot fight back like men." Various male FGD participants stated that male perpetrators of sexual violence perceive veiled women as easy targets, adding: "If she didn't have a veil, the percentage of rape is less, because the predator will see her as a strong independent woman. However, if she had a veil on, he would think she is an easy target." Both male and female Syrian refugee participants expressed that "just by being Syrian, you become weak, subordinate", adding a further racial dimension to compounded perceptions of vulnerability. Upon stressing the importance of psychological support for middle aged women, one female participant said "even we get harassed," adding a generational dimension not only to perceived vulnerability, but also to notions of deserved victimhood.

The prevalence of discourses on vulnerability across both female and male participants demonstrates that there is a significant mismatch between the geography of violence and the geography of fear; in other words, perceptions of vulnerability do not necessarily adequately reflect the risk of experiencing violence for both groups, but is equally as salient in dictating restrictions on female participants' mobility in public and private space. One female participant mentioned: "There is safety - if one has a girl, she shouldn't let her go out at night," while another added, "in Tripoli, there isn't a lot of safety, if a woman wants to walk alone at night, she doesn't have the freedom and she isn't protected from those who are ill intentioned." If a community is perceived to be no longer safe, young women and girls will either voluntarily or forcibly forego social activities, or restrict their movements around a community, further exacerbating their isolation. Perceptions of vulnerability are acutely tied to day/night binaries, and easily translate into victim-blaming

attitudes, especially if women suffer from sexual violence during the night. One male participant mentioned: "The women that are going out, 90% of them are getting harassed and there is only a 10% chance she will be back safe, then why let her go out in the first place at night?"

Finding: For men, admitting to lack of safety in one's community is indirectly admitting to a failure to protect women and girls - a burden and responsibility that is understood as exclusively male.

Female FGD participants from all research sites unanimously agreed that their areas of residence and cities are not safe. Women participants mentioned various examples of types of violence that women, men and children are publicly exposed to, including harassment, verbal and physical, sexual violence, abduction, theft, and random shootings. By contrast, the majority of male participants recruited from the same neighborhoods and cities as their female counterparts, believe that their areas of residence are safe, unlike other cities in Lebanon. One male participant said: "Outside the camp, there is no safety. There is more safety in the camp than in Lebanon, here there has never been any explosions or assaults," while another added "Burj El Shemali camp is so safe, more than one can imagine. If a woman goes out at 2 AM, no one comes near her." In contrast, a female participant from the very same neighborhood said, "There is no safety anywhere." Even when male participants admit to increased incidents of violence as a result of deteriorating economic and political conditions, a disclaimer often follows: their neighborhood is better than "others."

Such narratives demonstrate that irrespective of the reality of violence against men, vulnerability is not part of shared cultural conceptions of masculinity. Such statements may indicate pressure felt by participants to meet gender expectations regarding vulnerability: to appear appropriately masculine. In other words, admitting to lack of safety in one's community as a male is indirectly admitting to a failure to protect women and girls - a burden and responsibility that is understood as exclusively male. This finding, considering the potential for provoking defensiveness when discussing the dangers to which women and girls are exposed, may have practical implications for working with men and boys on SGBV violence prevention. It may be necessary to approach the lack of safety in communities in a way that is sensitive and not interpreted by men as a personal attack and thus trigger denial.

Understanding and Identifying SGBV

There are numerous debates regarding what the term Sexual and Gender Based Violence actually means and implies, even within the humanitarian community concerned with elaborating and implementing SGBV programming[37]. It is therefore not surprising that a certain level of confusion on

[37] In her article "Gender-based Violence: A Confused and Contested Term", Sophie-Read Hamilton examines the context in which GBV first entered widespread use, following its inclusion in the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women (UN DEVAW) in 1993, pointing out that as a term GBV was originally adopted by the humanitarian community as a way to articulate the problem of violence against women and girls, as opposed to other gendered groups, such as men, boys, and members of the LGBTQ community. In the context of this research, recognizing the contested nature of SGBV as a term even amongst those who theorize it, may render the tendency of participants to associate SGBV solely with violence against women and girls in a different light: it is not necessarily a lack of understanding per-se, but an aftermath of a predominant perspective associated with the term's conceptual genealogy. https://odihpn.org/magazine/gender-based-violence-a-confused-and-contested-term/

what constitutes SGBV be reflected amongst participants from the general community in FGDs. This is further compounded by the fact that most FGD participants were recruited through non-governmental organizations in Lebanon. While not all participants were direct beneficiaries of SGBV programming, proximity to NGOs may lead to increased familiarity with SGBV jargon dominant in the field.
Initial FGD questions asked about examples of SGBV which could be experienced by women, men and children indicate a variety of types of acts/violence understood by respondents to be SGBV. Participants across all groups mentioned arbitrary deprivation of liberty, economic discrimination in salaries, spousal battery, sexual abuse, rape/marital rape, sexual violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment, domestic violence, psychological and emotional abuse, early child marriage, traficking in women and kidnappings for ransom, and forced or coerced prostitution as examples of SGBV.

However, it cannot be assumed that the ability to identify SGBV terminology yields a deep understanding of SGBV as a concept. Various FGD participants expressed that many women do not know that they are experiencing acts of violence, particularly in the context of the household. One female participant mentioned: "Some women do not know they are subjected to sexual abuse." Another female participant added: "She could be subjected to violence without knowing it. She considers [violence] something positive," while another female participant added: "Violence is even favoritism in the house," implying that intimate partner violence is sometimes perceived as an act of care and concern. However, no female participants admitted to holding such beliefs themselves. Instead, many characterized it as a problem resulting from lack of awareness amongst women in general, and adolescents in particular, on matters related to SGBV. Notably, however, at least two male FGD participants per group expressed that an act of sexual or physical aggression may not be considered violence because "many women like it." One male participant mentioned: "There are many sides [to the story], some women like to be hit, they feel pleasure when this is done to them," while another male participant from a different group added: "There are women that like to be hit, but these are not normal situations." Such statements, amongst both female and male participants, reveal a level of conflation between consensual acts of sexual diversity that consitute ethical BDSM[38] and their clear contrast in Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)[39].

Finding: FGD participants demonstrated a deep lack of understanding of the concept of sexual consent.

While there are ethical ways to combine sex and pain, this requires a rigorous understanding and application of consent. In contrast, many male participants casually associate sexual violence with conceptions of female desire to be hurt while providing no indication of debates on consent. Male participants mentioned that many women like getting beaten not in the context of a general conversation on sexual preferences, but after questions were asked by the moderator on the right of a patriarch to use violence in the household. When asked about reactions of the community to a

[38] Bondage/Domination, Discipline/submission and Sadism/Masochism
[39] For more on the conflation between consensual BDSM behaviours and IPV, please refer to Dulcinea Pitagora's article *Intimate Partner Violence in Sadomasochistic Relationships*: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283835319_Intimate_partner_violence_in_sadomasochistic_relationships

young lady's rape, one male participant revealingly answered: "It depends on the situation, if it was willingly or by force. If by force, no one will blame her." The fact that rape is not automatically understood as lack of consent by the victim is revealing of how problematic conceptons of consent underly discourses on SGBV against women. This was most apparent in narratives on marital rape. While one male participant mentioned, "Marital rape is not rape. In Islam, they tell the woman that if she doesn't have sex with her husband, there is a punishment, the angels curse her. If one is going to force his wife, this isn't rape, it is a psychological issue. Violence but not rape. Rape is when a man takes advantage of a woman and lies to her to get what he wants, and she would have no knowledge of that." It is worth mentioning that religious texts such as the Quran were used in arguments both justifying and condemning different types of violence against women. One female participant insisted: "Men use the Quran and always quote from it, but they explain it as it suits them." Another male participant added, after quoting the Quran: "Religion doesn't allow abuse. Those that hit their wives are mentally ill and aren't applying religion correctly."

Identifying psychological and emotional abuse as violence

Female FGD participants repeatedly complained that society rarely acknowledges psychological abuse as violence, let alone as gender-based violence. One female FGD participant mentioned: "In our community, they don't know there are different types of violence. They don't know that some words are violent. Some words create a long-lasting impact psychologically. Verbal abuse results in physical one as well." Another female participant added: "Verbal violence is harsher than the physical one." In general, among both male and female FGD participants, violence was perceived as cyclical and non-physical violence as less harsh in severity. However, there was a significant gender gap in attitudes on psychological violence. Analysis of female participant responses suggests that verbal and psychological abuse are often interpreted as a red flag, particularly in relation to the potential for escalation to physical forms of DV/IPV. However, male participants sometimes approached verbal and psychological violence prescriptively, reasoning that instead of beating his wife, a man should try and shout at her first. One male participant mentioned: "Violence is a danger to the community, violence begets violence. So, sometimes we can find alternatives: instead of hitting, we can use verbal abuse." Verbal and emotional abuse are seen by many male participants as less harsh measures that may be inflicted on women so as not to cause physical harm. Another male participant emphasized that when the wife is deserving of disciplinary violence due to negligence of domestic duties, it is preferably verbal not physical: "It differs from house to house: the wife can also tell the husband nice words when he comes home. Sometimes she is the reason [for the perpetration of abuse], but of course not physical abuse, maybe just verbal."

Analysis of discourses on SGBV reveal a multiplicity of continuums that participants employ to make sense of individual acts of violence they experience or perpetrate. Female respondents tend to locate different acts of violence along a continuum of severity, establishing meaningful thresholds of acceptability, tolerance, and condoning. Male participants tend to employ continuums prescriptively, moving from one type of violence to another perceived to be more severe, on a scale of effective discipline. One male participant mentioned: "In some cases, the last resort is hitting. If you talk to your wife a couple of times, the last resort would be being violent with her." Such thresholds have important consequences on attitudes about disclosure and seeking protection services, as well as on bystander intervention and network solidarity. When asked about whether or not a victim of SGBV should report to the authorities, a female participant emphasized: "It depends on the degree of violence." Another female participant added, "Society only pays attention to her and sheds light on the abuse she was subjected to *after she is killed.*" A male participant similarly commented: "If

she reaches a *dead end*, it might lead to murder," emphasizing that only then may reporting be an option.

Perceptions on causes of SGBV: Contrasting discourses on traditions, culture, and upbringing

The absolute majority of participants, both male and female, agreed that traditions, upbringing and cultural values are responsible for SGBV in their communities. One female participant mentioned: "This [violence against women] is all related to the culture of the society." Another expressed that violence against women has become part of traditions "inherited by our ancestors." One male participant added: "It depends on the upbringing and the environment. If someone is raised in an old traditional mindset, if the woman gets raped, she brings shame upon him." While many participants were quick to blame the prevalence of SGBV in Lebanon on what they saw as outdated modes of thinking, the same participants, when male and referring to their community's safety in opposition to others, emphasize that traditions also protect women from acts of violence. One male participant, expanding on why his community is safe, emphasized: "The environment plays a huge role and impact. It is a conservative community with traditions." In addition to tradition and culture as perceived causes (and possible deterrents) of SGBV, many arguments on upbringing also underlie victim-blaming discourses. When asked if a community might react differently to the rape of a woman knowing that she was wearing what is perceived as revealing attire, one male participant said: "In this situation, it is the parent's fault, her clothes, the way she talks, walks, it is an upbringing. There should be a consideration for manners, and the community and region you are living in. If you are wearing revealing clothes in a dark region, it is normal that this [rape] will happen to her." Some participants also framed traditional upbringing as an obstacle to women leaving abusive relationships. One female participant added: "They were raised on terms and understandings that are wrong, not to leave the husband's house no matter what happens."

Perceptions on causes of SGBV: Economic precarity and poverty

While society, culture and tradition are often blamed for the pervasiveness of SGBV in participant communities, economic precarity and poverty were also perceived as dominant drivers of SGBV in Lebanon. One Syrian male refugee participant mentioned, "In Syria, we never used to hear of child marriage, but after coming to Lebanon, some families are marrying [their daughters] at 13-14 years old for economic reasons." Although a complex relationship exists between poverty and violence that is not always causal, there is a common perception among participants that poverty and other types of deprivation are important drivers of SGBV, especially in the household. Analysis of male participant responses reveal that men feel under pressure to fulfill their social role as the household provider and protector, which is increasingly difficult in the country's current economic and security context. Worsening economic conditions were reported by both female and male participants as causing stress in the household, often resulting in violent behaviour by men seeking to "vent" and express frustration as a result of their sense of growing marginality. One male participant mentioned: "The economic situation plays a role, maybe the woman is nagging a lot, that she wants something that isn't available anymore. Or even if he wants to come back from work and wants to vent out." Another male participant added: "A worker goes home to find his wife complaining - he gets pissed, there is no money, there is a bad economic situation, and then these things [violence] happen." Female participants repeatedly mentioned not only that worsening economic conditions increased risk of SGBV, but widened the variety of perpetrators. One female

participant said: "During the economic crisis, many families are merging in the same household to cut on costs, and sometimes, the uncle practices violence." While economic precarity was used by male participants as justification of male bursts of anger and acts of violence, for female participants, it was understood as an obstacle to leaving toxic and abusive relationships. Mentioning lack of economic independence as one of the main reasons for staying, one female participant added: "Because she is not independent, she will eventually have to go back to her husband."

Social norms that sustain and justify SGBV

While the relationship between social norms and violence is complex, analysis of FGD data indicates that attitudes and norms are significant in shaping violent behaviors against women and girls in three key areas:

1. Men's perpetration of violence against women;
2. Women's responses to victimization;
3. Community responses to SGBV.

Analysis also indicates that social norms around the normalcy of physical and emotional violence clearly distinguish between so-called acceptable and unacceptable types of violence, and establish ways through which certain individuals, often husbands, are given the right to punish females physically or psychologically for perceived social transgressions. When asked whether or not there are certain situations where the use of violence by a patriarch is justified, many participants adamantly answered that there never is. However, a qualifying "depends," "but," or "except for" was often added. One male participant conveyed: "No man is going to be violent with his wife for no reason."

Men's perpetration of VAW: One of the main examples provided by participants, where violence against women and girls is perceived to be justified, is when women do not comply with gendered stereotypes surrounding the division of domestic labor: negligence to clean, cook, or care for the children is seen as justifiable grounds for punitive physical or psychological violence. Here, SGBV in general, and intimate partner violence in particular is understood as "discipline" and its acceptability varies depending on the nature of the transgression, whether it is perceived as for "just cause", and whether the beating stays within accepted boundaries of severity. One male participant mentioned: "[Violence is justified] when there is a woman who is sloppy in her work at home. She isn't cleaning the house, and the husband's needs aren't ready, his food or clothes aren't prepared." Revealingly, and in response to this statement, another male participant from the same group added: "There is no excuse for the man to hit his wife. In case there are shortcomings from the wife's side, they can solve this in ways other than violence. If she isn't fulfilling her duties, they can reach divorce, but no excuse to hit her. He should get in contact with her family and talk to them." Such exchanges between participants indicate that **even when violence is condemned, gendered stereotypes on female domestic duties prevail: if negligence is not enough to justify violence, it is enough to justify unilateral decisions to divorce.** In various FGDs with men, the moderator asked if the situation were to be reversed; due to the crisis exacerbated by the pandemic, the husband was laid off and the wife is working, and comes back home to find him negligent of his duties to clean, cook, and take care of the children, would violence be justifiable by the wife?

Responses across both male and female focus groups revealed that the situation was unfathomable to begin with. One male participant dismissed that possibility, adding: “It won’t happen that the woman is working, and the man is sitting at home. No man with dignity will accept this.”

Analysis of both male and female responses also suggests that women seem to face increased risk of SGBV when they are seen as attempting to exercise agency in relationship decision making in violation of traditional gender roles. One male participant mentioned when asked on situations where violence against women is justified: “violence doesnt happen except because of the woman, if she was stubborn or if she goes against her husband, then of course the man will get pissed.” Another male participant even shared a personal story about hitting his wife, making physical gestures with his arm while talking, indicating how he perpetrated the violent act: “I told my wife not to do something, and when I came back home, I saw she did it. Once I asked her why, she said that she is free to do whatever she wants. So I hit her.” One female participant shared the perception that women refusing to perform domestic duties is an indication that they are misunderstanding women’s rights. She added: “They should understand their duties, awareness should be right. For example, if her husband comes back from work, she says she doesn't want to cook because it's her right. This is wrong.” Another male participant added: “Women understand freedom incorrectly, when they were in Syria, they used to wear conservative clothes, *abayas.* When they arrived in Lebanon, they took them off. Traditions were broken. Freedom is not taking off the veil.”

Women’s responses to victimization: Many female participants justify domestic abuse as a result of guilt or self blame. These kinds of reactions frequently come about as a result of patriarchal social attitudes that hold women responsible for SGBV: in other words, victim blaming. One female participant said that while she is against violence in all its forms, “sometimes the woman forces him.” Language of “force” is often used in practices shifting blame and responsibility from the male perpetrator to the female victim. The same female participant gave an example of how women sometimes ”force” men to hit them: “Some women are always on Facebook, so her husband is going to verbally abuse her and then he will hit her at some point. It is not always the man’s fault.”

Similar discursive practices also exceptionalize male violence by understanding it as a mistake. One female participant said: “Maybe the man committed a mistake, he can reapproach [the woman] and everything will work out.”

Community responses to SGBV: While many participants, both male and female, held the belief that “clothes arent a reason to rape anyone” and that “on the street, you see a woman wearing a *niqab* and she still gets harassed, even when only her eyes are showing,” many differed when describing how society will react to the rape of a woman wearing clothes perceived to be revealing. In this case, it was not always easy to understand whether answers reflected participants’ own personal beliefs or the perception of social norms operative in their settings. One female participant said: “If a woman was raped, the first response by the community would be that it is her fault. If she was out at night, they put the blame on her, what she was wearing.” However, many participants also clearly shared personal beliefs that a woman’s attire increases the risk of sexual harassment. One male participant added: “In a conservative community, if one is wearing revealing clothes, of course she will be subjected to violence. What is banned, is wanted.” Another male participant added, “If she is wearing revealing clothes, she will be subjected to catcalling, because she is showcasing her body,”

and "if you are wearing shorts and sitting next to a taxi driver, it is only normal that he will look. Clothes do have an effect."

The internalization of victim-blaming attitudes by women and girls have serious consequences on seeking help from informal and formal support sources. Such attitudes contribute to social stigma based constructions of 'the ideal victim,' worthy of empathy and deserving of support. More subtle forms of victim blaming are sometimes practiced when female participants indicate that educated women with strong personality traits are able to avoid SGBV. One female participant added "Women should learn, educate themselves, and strengthen their personalities. When she does that, she will be able to act on her own, and defend herself, and not accept verbal or psychological abuse. The choice is hers."

Perceptions on reporting SGBV and support-seeking behavior

"What happens in the family, stays in the family": Even when participants strongly condemned the perpetration of violence and provided no exceptions justifying its use, the perception that "what happens in the family, stays in the family" was prevalent. Notions of privacy and intimacy were pervasive amongst reactions on reporting incidents of SGBV, especially domestic abuse and intimate partner violence. Reporting was seen as a victim "destroying her own home" and "humiliating herself and her family." One male participant explained: "I am against violence against women, but these are family issues that should stay exclusively within the family." The majority of male participants saw a "peaceful resolution" of conflict between husband and wife mediated through parents as the only solution for domestic violence. Another added: "Forgiveness is the way."

Cultures of silence: Negative perceptions of reporting are supported by prevalent beliefs about a culture of silence, as described by participants themselves. Many participants, especially women, recognized this as part of the problem. One female participant mentioned: "Domestic violence is more common than we imagine. You might not know that some women are suffering from violence, because they remain silent, so that she doesn't humiliate herself or so people do not know what is happening to her. It is a lot more common than what we see and is a very big problem." Another female participant elaborated: "Society teaches you not to respond, not to speak up, to stay silent."

Seeking support from informal networks: A significant number of participants suggested that SGBV victims' first point of reference and support should be the family. Data analysis indicates that participants' reason for advocating for this approach was not due to a belief in the efficiency of informal support networks composed of family and friends, but rather was a consequence of notions of privacy and sanctity of the family.

General lack of trust in state authorities/the police: The strength of opinions against reporting varied when considering to whom they may report: reporting to the police or governmental institutions was entirely rejected, sometimes to the extent of perceiving it as an act of "treason" on behalf of the victim against the family. One female participant elaborated: "The parents will threaten her to take back her report/claim she submitted to the police." Such feelings are compounded by an extreme lack of trust in Lebanese authorities and the state. One female victim elaborated: "People do not have trust anymore. If a woman gets raped or exposed to violence, they take her to *Hbeish*

police station, where she gets even more harassed,” indicating that opinions against reporting by female respondents sometimes go beyond constructions of domestic violence as “private domestic disputes” and reveal fear of further violence perpetration. Another female participant added: “In our community, the police will laugh in her face. She shouldn't go directly and report to an organization or the police. First, an understanding should be reached between her and her husband or the party that violated her.”

General lack of confidence in NGOs: Some participants preferred reporting to local or international NGOs as opposed to the police. One female participant said: “There are organizations that could help her. Maybe the government and the police might not listen, but organizations might help and stand by her until the end, even if her parents won’t.” Many participants, both male and female, also shared serious confidentiality concerns about NGOs providing protection services. One female participant added: “The organizations themselves do not provide safe spaces, no privacy or confidentiality.” Another female participant added: “I wanted to put down my name for an organization, and one of the people there told me to bring 50 USD and come alone.” Such responses show that fear of further harassment and violence often underlie reasons for not seeking support from NGOs as well as the police. In addition to concerns about privacy and confidentiality, the feeling that protection services provided by organizations are insufficient or “useless” was also pervasive. This, however, may reflect lack of awareness on availability of services rather than actual effectiveness of services provided. While many respondents mentioned the names of NGOs such as KAFA and ABAAD, discussions revealed that their knowledge of available services and referral pathways were limited.

Fear of harm against children and loss of custody: Another pervasive reason behind negative perceptions of reporting, both normative and prescriptive, was that women should “stay for the children.” One male participant mentioned: “If after multiple times, then perhaps she could go to the police. But if it is something simple that can be resolved, then she should stay for the kids.” Another female participant added: “It is a big problem. The man wants to enslave the woman and humiliate her, and she is afraid to leave her children and keeps on increasing the dose [of tolerance].” Another female participant also added: “What breaks the woman the most is her children; she cannot give them up. It is rare that a woman leaves her house and children only because she can't endure anymore.”

Public perceptions toward the role of the media

The majority of participants were open to discussing SGBV in the community. Many mentioned that times have changed, and emphasized that had they not been open about such discussions, they wouldn't have joined FGDs in the first place. It is worth noting that a significant number of participants complained of not watching TV for at least two years due to power shortages in Lebanon. Many participants reported consuming media through cell phones, particularly social media more than television. While FGD sections on the role of the media generated the least amount of discussion from participants, many saw media as an important and underused medium for raising awareness on SGBV prevention as well as legal advice for victims of SGBV and their networks of support. One female participant said: “Awareness campaigns should spread across all media outlets.” Some male participants shared the opinion that such awareness-raising campaigns may

lead to inciting women against their husbands, adding: "In the case of women's rights advertisements and shows that portray individual cases of women, it causes incitement because she would start telling her husband she wants to sue him."

Many participants, both female and male, saw the media as a dangerous means of moral corruption and decadence. One male participant added: "Turkish shows are full of cheating, even within the same family. This has a negative effect [on society]." Another male participant added: "TV programs show how girls run away from their homes, and then become successful. These stories are presented as models for young girls to emulate, which is wrong." Various participants went as far as insisting on the need for government censorship of television programs and social media. Similar concerns were shared about media as a space for "importing" ideas perceived as "foreign" or "western." One male participant elaborated: "It doesn't work to get ideas from western societies and implement them in our communities."

Media was also perceived as perpetuating gender stereotypes on the role of women and men in society. One male participant mentioned: "TV programs portray women washing their husband's feet, men hitting women, some of them even include crimes. Many want to emulate those characters." Another female participant added: "They still portray the man as the head of the family and the woman as a mother that cooks, cleans and prepares everything for the husband. Any 10 year old would think this is the norm." Another shared perception amongst female participants is that women are only considered media-worthy when they are murdered. One female participant mentioned: "The media is not fulfilling their correct role. The light is shed on the woman that is murdered and not on the woman when she is alive and asking for support. There is a blackout when it comes to these issues." It is noteworthy that while all participants agree that media should play an important role in raising awareness on SGBV and its prevention, not one participant was able to recall a media campaign they considered as effective.

SGBV and the media

Demographic information

A diverse group of media professionals completed the mixed methods survey. 63 responses were included in final data analysis. On average, respondents were 33 years old. See Table 4 below for more demographic information.

Table 4: Demographic information

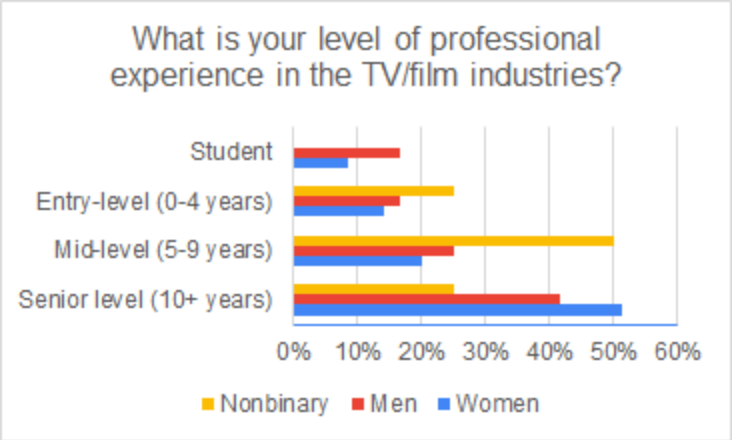
	n	**%**
Women	35	55.6
Men	24	38.1
Nonbinary	4	6.3
LGBTQ+	14	22.2

Place of birth	***Beirut***	28	44.4
	Central (Mount Lebanon, Beqaa)	17	27.0
	North (Baalbek-Hermel, Akkar, North)	4	6.3
	South (Nabatieh, South)	3	4.8
	Abroad	11	17.5

The media professionals had varying degrees of education, with the vast majority of respondents (93.7%) having completed some form of post-secondary higher education. The largest group of respondents had a bachelor's degree (49.2%), followed by master's degree (39.7%), secondary school (6.3%), and doctorate (4.8%).

Respondents had different levels and types of experience in the TV and film industries. 46.0% of respondents (n=29) identified themselves as senior level professionals with 10 or more years of experience. See Figure 5 below for a gender breakdown of respondents' professional experience.

Figure 5: Respondents' level of professional experience



Representation of women and girls in the media

There was general agreement among media professionals, both interviewees and survey respondents, about the stereotypical and generally negative portrayal of women and girls in the media. In the survey, over 90% of media professionals of all genders felt that women were presented in a stereotypical manner, while over 90% of women and nonbinary persons and 87.5% of men feeling that men were also presented in a stereotypical manner.

Media professionals perceive the portrayal of women in TV and films as oversexualized, objectified, and commodified. Female characters are often valued for their sex appeal, and their role and purpose revolves around male characters. As one respondent stated, they are the embodiment of a

"male fantasy": submissive, powerless, beautiful, and in need of saving. On the other hand, respondents identified another stereotype of female character - conniving, manipulative, and vengeful. **As one respondent put it: "Women are either mothers or sluts."**

Respondents also felt that recent progress had been made in the presentation of women, despite much room for improvement remaining. They also were careful not to overgeneralize, noting that new and emerging media as well as some mainstream TV programs and films had succeeded in presenting more well-rounded and non-stereotypical female characters.

> "Both women and men are stereotypes, especially in TV shows and programs. Rare independent films tell the story of a human being, the main character, be it man or a woman."
> - *Media survey respondent*

Both women and men were perceived as being bound to heteronormative gender roles. Even within this framework, 'good' women are generally portrayed as being without any sexual desire; they pursue love, never lust, which is an integral part of what makes them 'good.' Others noted the near-complete absence of LGBTQ characters or storylines.

> "Our media is misogynistic and queerphobic. Everything about the environment we live in tells women and gender-variant people that they don't have a place in the public discourse."
> - *Media survey respondent*

In the survey, gender gaps emerged to a greater extent regarding the presentation of situations of violence against women in Lebanese media. In response to the question "In Lebanese films and TV, do you feel that situations of violence against women are presented in a nuanced, ethical manner?", only 17.1% of women and zero percent of nonbinary persons answered either 'yes, very much so' or 'yes, somewhat,' compared to 50.0% of men.

Open response comments provided more in-depth information on media professionals' perception of the portrayal of VAW. Many respondents noted that situations of VAW are romanticized and dramatized, "with the female character in full-face makeup, no blood/physical damage at all, and little to no emotional/psychological consequences." Victims of VAW are presented as weak and without agency, or even worse, certain types of VAW (particularly psychological and emotional) are presented as displays of love and protection.

Furthermore, many respondents noted the victim-blaming nature of representations of VAW. Storylines suggest that women provoke the violence committed against them, and in many cases, plotlines include justifications for a male character's violence. On-screen violence is committed

against certain types of women, often poor or less educated, suggesting that VAW is restricted to certain socioeconomic classes. On-screen perpetrators are rarely held accountable for their actions.

> "It's so bad it's dangerous. It perpetuates the idea that women are weak/victims, that they need a man to save them, that they should submit to a man to stay safe, that they need protection. It puts the blame on women and completely erases the man's responsibility in any given situation. It tells viewers that if women get assaulted, it must be their fault, and that they should never speak out against their aggressor."
> - *Media survey respondent*
>
> "Violence is very normalized. Even in ads to stop violence, women are shown with bruises and asked to not be silent, putting responsibility on them to stop the violence, yet no images of abusers are shown or messages directed to the abusers. There is absolutely no mention of emotional abuse and a man controlling their partner or members of family is not viewed or portrayed as a wrong thing, but it's shown as signs of love and protection."
> - *Media survey respondent*

Media perceptions and attitudes toward SGBV

Finding: Media professionals widely acknowledge the severity of gender inequality and violence against women in Lebanon - an essential prerequisite for securing their cooperation and building their capacities.

> "There is no way (in my opinion) that a woman can feel safe in Lebanon. In case of sexual or physical violence, she is neither protected by society or by laws."
> - *Media survey respondent*

Media members demonstrated largely egalitarian opinions related to SGBV and gender equality, with some notable exceptions per survey responses. Respondents overwhelmingly acknowledged both gender inequality and violence against women as problems in Lebanese society, with 90.5% of respondents (94.3% of women; 84.3% of men; 100% of nonbinary) categorizing gender inequality as a 'severe problem' in Lebanon. Respondents were then asked to what extent they perceive violence against women as a problem in Lebanon; 93.7% of respondents (94.3% of women; 91.7% of men; 100% of nonbinary) selecting this response.[40] These responses may point to common ground on the issues of SGBV, without which cooperation between Search and media professionals/students would likely not be possible. This common ground may present an

[40] 'Violence against women' was used in place of 'gender-based violence' to avoid misunderstandings about the definition of GBV.

opportunity for Search to leverage media members' gender equality ideals to encourage increased gender sensitivity in media production.

To identify media professionals' perceptions and attitudes toward SGBV, respondents indicated their level of agreement or disagreement with statements from four categories: men's authority over women, acceptance of violence, victim-blaming, and breaking the culture of silence. See more details in Table 6 below.

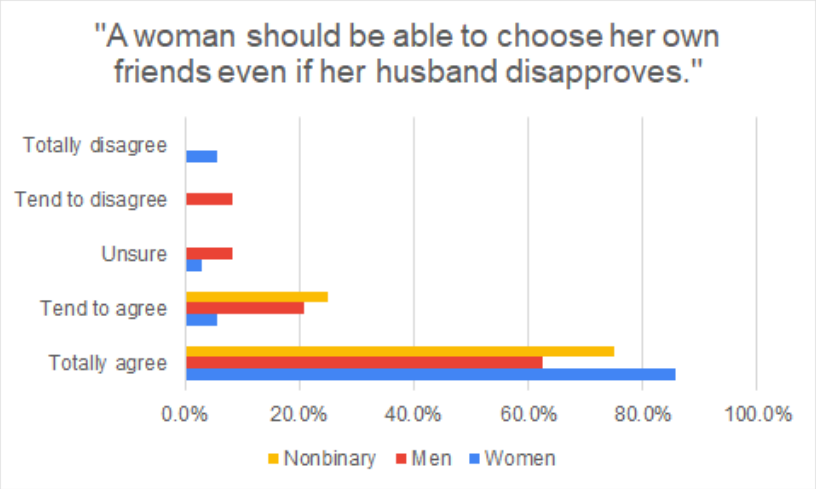
Table 6: Survey Statements

Category	**Description**	**Statements**
Men's authority over women	This category examines respondents' support related to men exercising authority over their wife/partner.	1. A good wife obeys her husband even if she disagrees.
		2. It is important for a man to show his wife/partner who is the boss.
		3. A woman should be able to choose her own friends even if her husband disapproves.
		4. It is a wife's obligation to have sex with her husband even if she doesn't feel like it.
Acceptance of violence	This category measures respondents' acceptance of the use of violence against women within relationships and wider society.	1. Sexual violence against women and girls should be accepted as a normal part of life.
		2. A man has the right to beat/punish his wife.
Victim-blaming	This category examines to what extent respondents support victim-blaming justifications for violence.	1. Women who say they were abused often make up or exaggerate claims of abuse or rape.
		2. Violence against women is often provoked by the victim.
		3. In my eyes, a woman/girl's reputation will be damaged if she reports sexual violence to the authorities.
Breaking the culture of silence	This category looks at respondents' opinions on the appropriateness of reporting and speaking publicly about incidents of violence.	1. If a man mistreats his wife, others outside of the family should intervene.
		2. Domestic violence is a private matter and should be handled within the family.
		Women/girls should not report rape to protect the family dignity.

Category 1, Men's authority over women: Media professionals overwhelmingly rejected statements 1, 2, and 4 in Table 9 above, with over 90% of respondents choosing "totally disagree" for each. Statement 3, whether a woman has the right to choose her own friends regardless of her husband's approval, was more controversial. As seen in Figure 7 below, 85.7% of women 'totally

agreed’ with the statement, compared to 62.5% of men. While men did not elaborate on this question in qualitative survey responses, previously mentioned insights from the FGDs regarding men’s (and women’s) perception of ‘acceptable’ levels of men’s control over women may suggest that men feel it is acceptable for them to have decision-making control over their female partner’s friends.

Figure 7: Percentage of respondents who agree/disagree with the statement below



Category 2, Acceptance of violence: Media professionals, both men and women, strongly rejected both statements in this category. 95.2% of respondents selected ‘totally disagree’ for the first statement, “Sexual violence against women and girls should be accepted as a normal part of life,” and 96.8% selected the same for the second statement, “A man has the right to beat/punish his wife.”

Category 3, Victim-blaming: Gender differences emerged in this category. 80% of women and 100% of nonbinary respondents selected ‘totally disagree’ for the first statement, “Women who say they were abused often make up or exaggerate claims of abuse or rape,” compared to 62.5% of men. Similarly, for the second statement, “Violence against women is often provoked by the victim,” 88.6% of women and 100% of nonbinary people selected ‘totally disagree’ compared to 70.8% of men. Throughout this baseline research, a clear pattern emerged of minimization and dismissal of men’s violence against women, as well as the tendency of all genders, particularly men, to assign blame to victims. This was observed most apparently during FGDs with the general public and is also seen here.

The third statement (“In my eyes, a woman/girl's reputation will be damaged if she reports sexual violence to the authorities”) received widespread disapproval, with 100% of nonbinary persons, 97.1% of women, and 87.5% of men selecting ‘totally disagree.’ The victim-blaming attitudes uncovered in all data collection activities, as well as the tendency of male FGD participants to blame women for violence perpetrated against them, may explain these discrepancies between genders.

Category 4, Breaking the culture of silence: Statements related to the appropriateness of intervening in situations of domestic violence received mixed responses. As seen in Table 8 below, statements 2 and 3 were strongly rejected by respondents, unlike statement 1. For statement 1, only 60% of women and 50% of men and nonbinary persons 'totally agreed' with the statement. However, considering the divergence of these results from the other statements in this category, it should be noted that this statement was the first in the series in which 'totally agree' was the gender-equitable response, compared to 'totally disagree' for the previous statements, so there is a possibility that some respondents mistakenly chose an unintended answer.

Table 8: Responses to key statements

		Totally agree	**Tend to agree**	**Unsure**	**Tend to disagree**	**Totally disagree**
If a man mistreats his wife, others outside of the family should intervene.	Women	**60.0%**	11.4%	11.4%	0	17.1%
	Men	**50.0%**	29.2%	12.5%	0	8.3%
	Nonbinary	**50.0%**	25.0%	0	0	25.0%
Domestic violence is a private matter and should be handled within the family.	Women	0	2.9%	5.7%	2.9%	**88.6%**
	Men	0	4.2%	0	16.7%	**79.2%**
	Nonbinary	0	0	0	25.0%	**75.0%**
Women/girls should not report rape to protect the family dignity.	Women	0	0	0	0	**100%**
	Men	0	0	0	4.2%	**95.8%**
	Nonbinary	0	0	0	0	**100%**

Finding: Public-facing efforts to discuss or address women's concerns, whether in media or politics, are perceived by media professionals (and other experts) as inauthentic and superficial.

Many interviewees across all categories (media, CSOs, academics, UN staff) expressed in different ways their frustration about the superficiality and symbolic efforts made by mainstream political and media actors related to gender equality and SGBV prevention. Again and again, interviewees described a concept known as 'tokenism': making superficial or symbolic efforts - 'tokens' - in place of creating actual change.

Interviewees felt that any public actions taken by the state or public declarations of commitment to gender equality were simply an attempt to appear progressive on the global stage and make it look like they are doing something to solve the problem. Respondents were largely pessimistic about the

possibility of any effective or worthwhile partnership with the state. To paraphrase one interviewee: "They would never implement anything that would make actual change because that would threaten their very structure." Another interviewee said that the Lebanese state, like other governments in the region, mostly gives "lip service" - declaring support without doing anything to show it - to women's rights issues.

Regarding tokenism in the media, one filmmaker spoke at length about the "facade" presented by the relative visibility of women in the media, arts, and public sector, especially compared to other countries in the region. This comparative visibility gives the impression of progressiveness in women's rights as well as the impression that women are able to exercise some sort of power in those sectors, when in reality, women are the commodities.

Knowledge and understanding of SGBV and gender equality

Finding: Despite high levels of post-secondary education, media professionals are largely unaware of national legislative frameworks and support services related to SGBV.

A high majority of respondents (84.1%) had never received any course or training workshop on gender equality. Perhaps as a result, only 19.0% of respondents reported feeling 'very well informed' on what to do if someone they loved experienced gender-based violence; women (25.7%) and nonbinary respondents (25.0%) were better informed than men, of whom only 8.3% felt 'very well informed' on how to respond. Similarly, despite high levels of post-secondary education, respondents were not familiar with Lebanese policies and legislation related to SGBV, with only 11.1% of respondents (17.1% of women, 4.2% of men, 0% of nonbinary persons) being 'very familiar' *or* 'moderately familiar' with the related policies and legislation. In fact, respondents reported a higher level of familiarity with international conventions and agreements on gender equality and women's empowerment than the Lebanese legislative framework on these issues.

Only a small portion of respondents reported being able to identify 'many' support services for survivors of SGBV in their city or community, while 68.3% (74.3% of women, 62.5% of men, 50.0% of nonbinary) respondents reported being able to identify 'a few.' Unfortunately, 22.2% of respondents (17.1% of women, 29.2% of men, 25% of nonbinary) reported being unable to identify any support services.

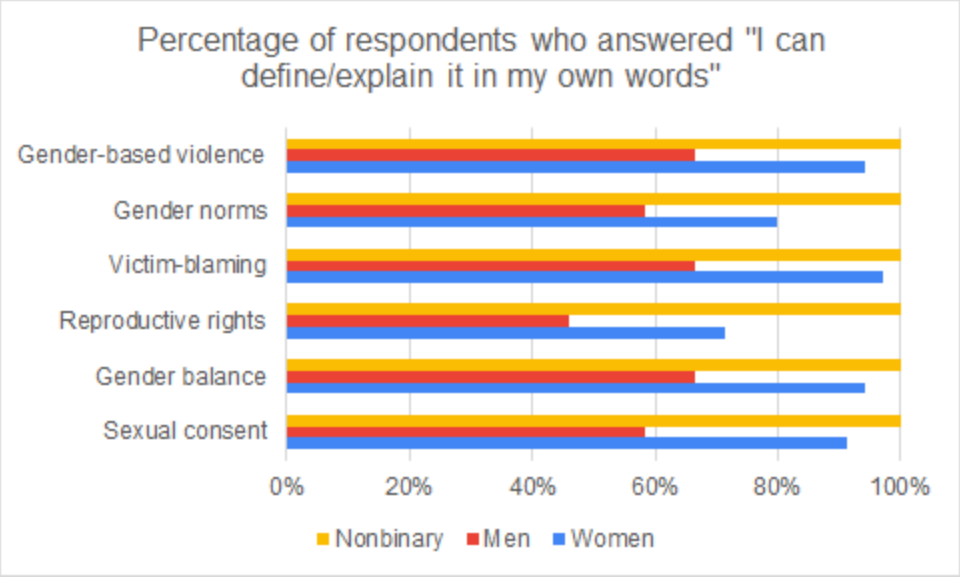
In the next section, respondents were asked to identify their familiarity with a number of terms related to gender equality and SGBV. Media professionals were already familiar with a number of terms on the topics, particularly terms that are regularly used in media discourse related to SGBV and gender equality. Respondents were less familiar with terms that were more technical and/or specialized. Interestingly, there was no significant difference in familiarity with gender equality terms between those who had previously participated in gender equality training and those who had not. See Table 9 below for the three least well-known and most well-known terms, reflected as the percentage of media professionals who responded "I can define/explain it in my own words."

Table 9: Percentage of respondents who can define or explain each term in their own words

		Total (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	Nonbinary (%)
Least well-known terms	Gender mainstreaming	34.9	40.0	25.0	50.0
	Intersectionality	39.7	48.6	16.7	100.0
	Victim/survivor-centered approach	46.0	48.6	33.3	100.0
Most well-known terms	Sexual violence	96.8	97.1	95.8	100.0
	Early/child marriage	98.4	100.0	100.0	75.0
	Domestic violence	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

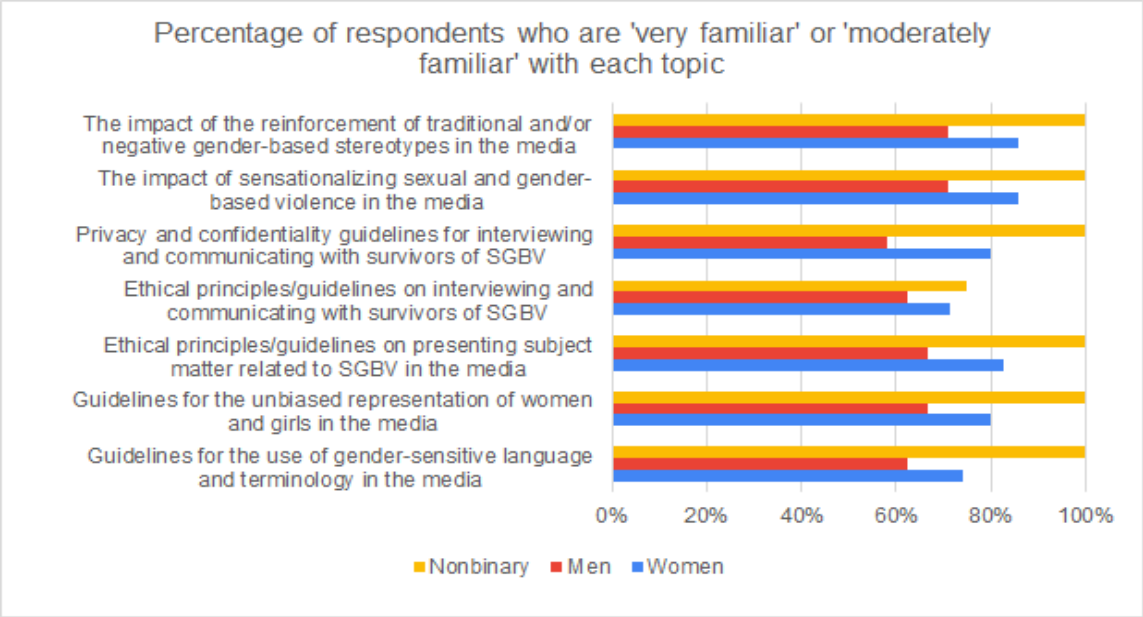
As can be seen in Table 9 above, in general, women and nonbinary respondents were more knowledgeable on gender equality terms than men. This pattern was observed for the majority of terms. Figure 10 below features the terms in which the gender difference in responses was most significant. It may be particularly notable and troubling that only 58.3% of men could define the concept ‘sexual consent,’ perhaps signifying an area in which awareness-raising sessions are needed.

Figure 10: Percentage of respondents who can define gender equality terms in their own words



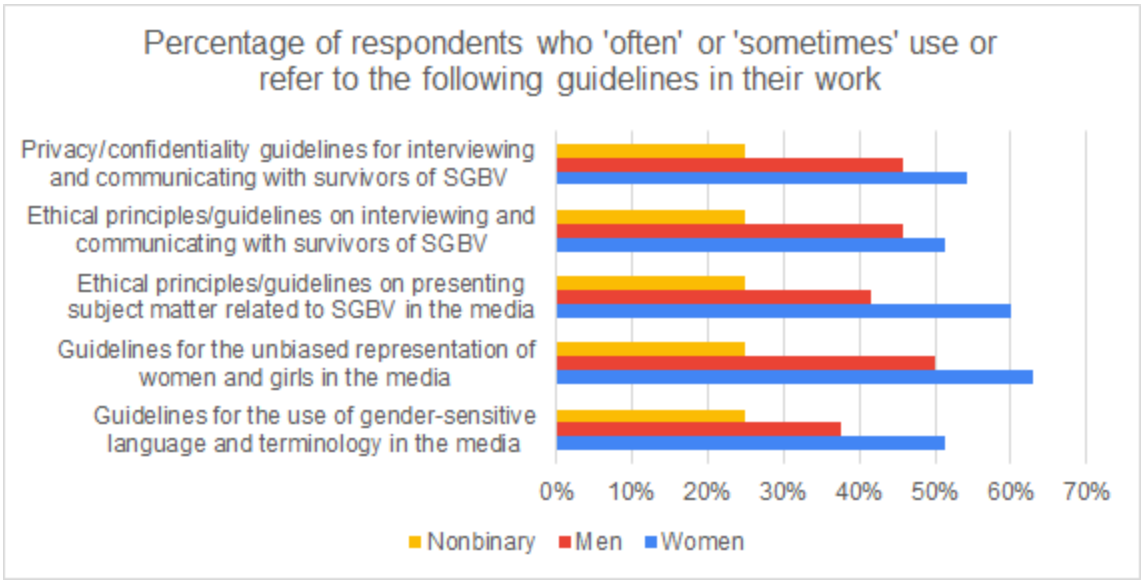
Respondents were also asked about their familiarity with standards and guidelines for producing gender-sensitive media content. As observed previously, men were notably less familiar with these standards and guidelines than women or nonbinary respondents (see Figure 11 below).

Figure 11: Percentage of respondents “very familiar” or “moderately familiar” with each topic



In the next section, respondents were asked whether they had used the same guidelines and standards in their work. Significantly fewer respondents had used the guidelines in their work compared to those who reported being familiar with the guidelines (see Figure 12 below). This may suggest that more support is needed to help media professionals practically apply ethical guidelines and standards to their work.

Figure 12: Percentage of respondents who ‘often’ or ‘sometimes’ use or refer to the following guidelines in their work



Interest in and perceived contribution to advancing gender equality/reducing SGBV

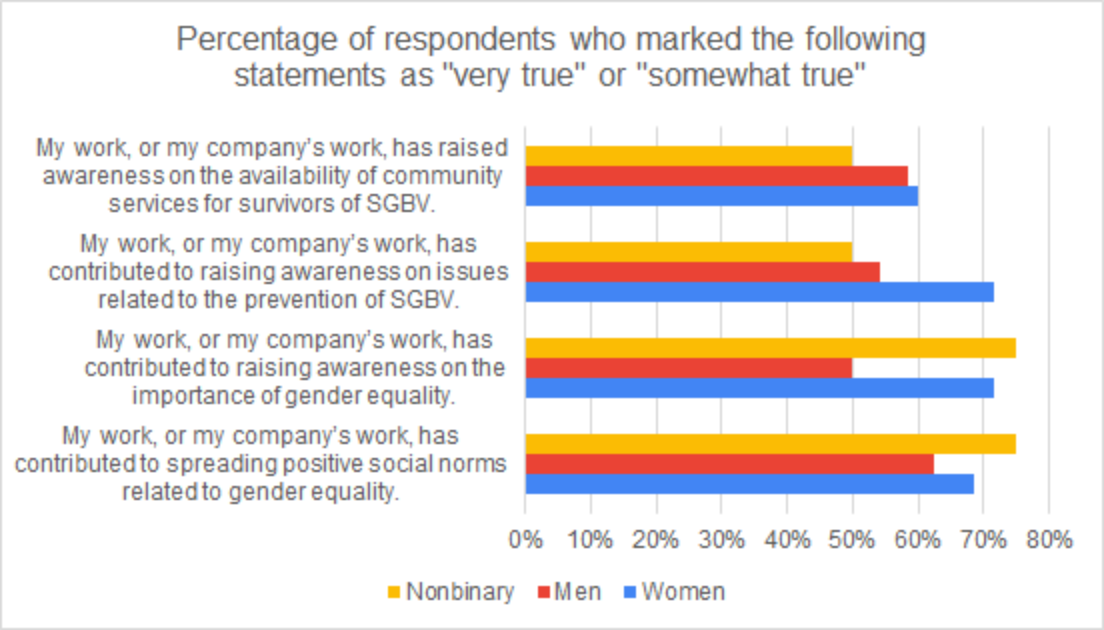
Media professionals were asked about the extent to which they already consider the implications of their work on women and girls. Women and nonbinary persons were more likely to actively consider this compared to men, as reflected in Table 13 below. However, for all genders, a gap seems to exist between noticing gender bias in media products and taking concrete action to ensure the absence of such bias in their own work.

Table 13: Percentage of respondents who responded ‘always’ or ‘often’ to the statements below.

	Women	**Men**	**Nonbinary**
I seek out information on how to represent women and girls in an unbiased and ethical manner in media products.	57.1%	41.7%	50%
My colleagues/ classmates and I have discussions about issues related to the representation of women and girls in the media.	65.7%	41.7%	100%
I consider the impact of how women and girls are portrayed in the media.	91.4%	58.3%	100%
I notice the existence of biased and gender insensitive media products.	80.0%	66.7%	100%
I make suggestions on how to better represent situations of violence against women in media products.	54.3%	45.8%	50%

Respondents were then asked to reflect on the role of their work (or their company’s work) in contributing to advancing gender equality and reducing SGBV. As shown in Figure 14 below, most media professionals were positive about the contribution of their work, with the majority of respondents reporting the statements as “very true” or “somewhat true.” Men perceived their work as being less impactful in these areas than women; this could be due to the fact that male respondents were less likely to even consider the impact of their work on women and girls, as seen in Table 13 above. It may also be due to men having a more restricted understanding of what gender-sensitive media products might look like as well as having lower levels of familiarity with both gender equality concepts and gender-sensitive media production guidelines, as shown previously in this section.

Figure 14: Percentage of respondents who marked the following statements as ‘very true’ or ‘somewhat true’



Respondents were then asked about their desire to see changes in the way women and girls and situations of SGBV are presented in Lebanese media, as well as their personal interest in developing skills and capacities to produce gender-sensitive media products. Similarly to previous findings, men were less bothered by the current representation of women and girls/SGBV and also demonstrated less interest in improving their personal capacities in this area. **Interestingly, while 91.7% of men felt that it was “important for media professionals and students to be aware of issues related to the representation of violence against women in the media,” only 70.8 percent of men reported being interested in increasing their own awareness and skills on the topic.** This suggests a disconnect between what male respondents believe is right and what they see as their role in contributing to what is right.

Table 15: Percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree with the statements below.

	Women	Men	Nonbinary
I am concerned about the way violence against women and girls is represented in Lebanese TV and films.	82.9%	75.0%	100.0%
Violence against women and girls should be presented in a more careful and ethical manner in Lebanese TV and films.	94.3%	70.8%	75.0%
I am interested in increasing my knowledge and capacity related to developing gender-sensitive media products.	94.3%	70.8%	100.0%
I would like to learn more about how to ethically present storylines that include situations of violence against women.	91.4%	79.2%	100.0%
It’s important for media professionals and students to be aware of issues related to the representation of violence against women in the media.	97.1%	91.7%	100.0%

I believe my company/university would be open to working with civil society organizations to produce gender-sensitive media products.	88.6%	70.8%	75.0%

4. “Toward a gender-equitable society” Project

The baseline study was also tasked with providing baseline data for two indicators, namely:

1. Number of film students who have enhanced capacity to produce gender and GBV-sensitive media products in Lebanon
2. Number of film students and screenwriters reporting changed perceptions on gender and GBV issues

The data collected through this baseline study offers multiple options for tracking these indicators over time. Regarding the *capacity of film students to produce gender and GBV-sensitive media products* (indicator 1), the data collected provides insight on students’ and professionals’ knowledge of gender- and GBV-sensitive media products, since capacity was not able to be measured through the survey tool. In particular, the project may measure students’ familiarity with and utilization of standards and best practices on the portrayal of gender, women and girls, and SGBV in media products. For this, the following findings may be relevant:

- 71.4% of respondents (74.3% of women; 62.5% of men; 100% of nonbinary individuals) were *very familiar* or *moderately familiar* with **guidelines for the use of gender-sensitive language and terminology in the media**. 44.4% of respondents (51.4% of women; 37.5% of men; 25.0% of nonbinary individuals) have *often* or *sometimes* used or referred to these guidelines in their work or studies.
- 76.2% of respondents (80.0% of women; 66.7% of men; 100% of nonbinary individuals) were *very familiar* or *moderately familiar* with **guidelines for the unbiased representation of women and girls in the media**. 55.6% of respondents (62.9% of women; 50.0% of men; 25.0% of nonbinary individuals) have *often* or *sometimes* used or referred to those guidelines in their work or studies.
- 77.8% of respondents (82.9% of women; 66.7% of men; 100% of nonbinary individuals) were *very familiar* or *moderately familiar* with **ethical principles and guidelines on presenting subject matter related to sexual and gender-based violence in the media**. 50.8% of respondents (60.0% of women; 41.7% of men; 25.0% of nonbinary individuals) have *often* or *sometimes* used or referred those principles and guidelines in their work or studies.

The gap between respondents’ *familiarity* with certain guidelines or principles and their *use* of those guidelines or principles may suggest a lack of understanding of how to apply those guidelines to their own work. In work with media professionals, practical activities may help bridge this gap. A second interpretation may be that media professionals have some difficulty identifying instances of

gender stereotyping or other unethical representation in media products, including their own work (for example, in the media survey, one-third of male respondents reported not noticing gender bias in media products). As gender bias is something we have been exposed to since birth, it may require specific effort to help media professionals recognize what exactly it looks like (and doesn’t look like).

Regarding the *perceptions of film students and screenwriters on gender and GBV issues* (indicator 2), media professionals and students already demonstrated widely egalitarian views on gender in their responses in the media survey. Despite the unanimity in responses, a few questions may provide insight and opportunities for measuring project participants’ perceptions. The first option is the recognition that there is room for improvement in the portrayal of such issues on TV and in films. The second option is the rejection of the belief that domestic violence or other forms of VAW are private issues that should be handled within the family.

- 84.1% of respondents (94.3% of women; 70.8% of men; 75.0% of nonbinary invidiuals) *strongly agree* or *agree* with the statement: “Violence against women and girls should be presented in a more careful and ethical manner in Lebanese TV and films.”
- 75.6% of respondents (71.4% of women; 79.2% of men; 75.0% of nonbinary individuals) totally agree or tend to agree with the statement: “If a man mistreats his wife, others outside of the family should intervene.”

It may be worth noting for Search that through this research, it was observed that asking respondents to respond to a hypothetical situation seemed to more effectively provide insights into their perceptions and beliefs than directly asking about their perceptions and beliefs. In other words, while most people may claim to support equality between men and women, more nuance may be uncovered if they are presented with specific situations that test that belief.

5. Conclusions

Through the wealth and depth of data collected through this baseline exercise, a number of important and practical conclusions have been reached.

Widely shared and deeply held social norms and beliefs that justify SGBV and blame victims contribute to protecting perpetrators, preventing victims from seeking help, and perpetuating and normalizing violence. These norms and beliefs were upheld to some extent by most interviewees/FGD participants, including CSO staff and prominent media professionals. In fact, an incomplete understanding among some CSO staff of the root causes of SGBV/VAW may lead to the unintentional replication of these norms and the misconception that reform within existing gender power structures - rather than the reform of those power structures themselves - can successfully eradicate SGBV.

Nevertheless, **it was widely believed that sociocultural norms around SGBV and the possibility of having open discussions on SGBV-related issues have improved considerably in recent years and are continuing to improve.** Nearly all interviewees and participants shared a feeling of

hope for the future in this regard; despite the challenges facing the country, they spoke positively about the trajectory of Lebanese youth and the movement of public perceptions about SGBV in a positive direction. The widespread use of social media and innovative CSO social media campaigns were hailed as some of the reasons for this.

When SGBV is discussed as a problem in Lebanon, there is a narrow perception of the term. First, **men and boys are almost completely disregarded as potential victims**, despite statistics that show adolescent boys as often being victims of sexual and physical abuse. SGBV against men, if considered at all, is perceived as only taking place in same sex relationships; SGBV against men that is perpetrated by non-partners not part of the discussion. Second, **SGBV is almost exclusively defined as physical or sexual violence, with very few interventions, if any, addressing non-physical forms of violence.** FGD participants, survey respondents, and interviewees pointed out this oversight and stressed the harmful nature of psychological, emotional, and economic violence.

There may be a lack of coordination among SGBV service providers, resulting in a failure to capitalize on the wide variety of available services for SGBV survivors, as evidenced by CSO staff's limited awareness of similar or complementary services in the areas in which they work. In addition to limiting the service options available for survivors, a lack of coordination reduces the potential for building momentum and taking collective action to demand legislative or other changes to address the wide gaps in the legislative framework related to gender equality.

FGDs and survey respondents revealed low levels of trust (especially among refugee women) in SGBV service providers, including both authorities (police) and CSOs - a sharp contrast with CSO staff's perception of their organizations as trustworthy among the general public. However, low trust may not necessarily be the result of substandard service provision; in fact, one CSO staff member spoke about men's efforts to smear the reputations of CSOs to prevent their female partners from reaching out to them for support. In addition, male FGD participants spoke about what they perceived as the negative effect of women watching empowering media content because it would provoke them to take legal action against their husbands in cases of violence. Nevertheless, regardless whether low levels of trust toward CSOs are reasonable, they are an obstacle to be overcome in encouraging SGBV victims to access support services.

The perception of SGBV as something that happens to 'certain' women is perpetuated through entertainment media and anti-violence awareness-raising campaigns. Non-Lebanese women were seen as more likely to be victims, and non-Lebanese men more likely to be perpetrators. SGBV, particularly IPV, was perceived as something that happens within poorer families and only very rarely in upper class families. In ad campaigns, women were perceived as being shown as weak, helpless victims, contributing to the stereotype that women can avoid SGBV victimization if they assert themselves (and thus are partially responsible for their victimization if they do not).

The media perpetuates gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles and portrays situations of SGBV in unethical ways to stimulate the audience and increase viewership.

While both male and female characters are presented in stereotypical ways, male characters are granted autonomy and agency, while female characters more often exist to support male characters. Nevertheless, in general, media professionals demonstrate highly egalitarian viewpoints regarding gender equality and hope to contribute to reducing the gender stereotypes used in TV/film.

Both survey respondents and FGD participants - particularly men - demonstrated a disturbing lack of understanding of the concept of sexual consent. They were unfamiliar with the term 'sexual consent' itself, as well as the concept of rape as a lack of sexual consent rather than the use of physical force. Marital rape was not considered as rape due to ignorance about the role of consent.

6. Recommendations

A limited number of key recommendations have been included in this section. The list below is not comprehensive or exhaustive, but instead focuses on recommendations that are practical and feasible based on the context in Lebanon and the limitations within which CSOs operate. As such, this list does not include some actions that are essential for the realization of women's rights in Lebanon, such as the reform of personal status laws and the abolishment of the *kafala* system, which may be out of the immediate scope of action of the users of this baseline study.

General recommendations:

Work together within the country and region to harness momentum: Collective action is one of the most important strategies for civil society to create change. CSOs in Lebanon should reject the sectarian fragmentation of civil society and instead come together toward shared goals. Furthermore, building a wider network throughout the region with CSOs working in similar country contexts can foster learning and innovation and speed up progress.

Raise public/men's awareness on the concept of consent: Understanding and respecting consent as a precursor for sexual activity - as well as understanding that sexual activity without consent, even if not done by force, constitutes rape/sexual assault - is a foundational aspect of preventing sexual violence. The lack of understanding of this concept demonstrated by some men within this study points to an urgent need to address this gap.

Avoid anti-violence campaigns that portray women as helpless victims: Sensationalized portrayals of SGBV, even if part of anti-violence campaigns, are harmful to survivors. Women should not be shown with bruises or other marks of violence, nor should they be portrayed as poor, refugee, or otherwise marginalized women, which contributes to the idea that violence happens only in lower socioeconomic classes.

Continue using social media to engage youth and all segments of Lebanese society: The prevalence of discussion on social media about SGBV is perceived to have contributed to dramatic shifts in public attitudes about violence, particularly among youth. CSOs should continue pushing the barrier of what is considered acceptable discourse on SGBV and help encourage more open and

honest conversations.

Recommendations for encouraging victims to report:

Target hard-to-reach women with tailored messaging: The most marginalized women often have the most difficulty accessing services for a variety of reasons. Syrian and Palestinian women are often isolated in camps and settlements where they are not reached through traditional awareness-raising methods. It is also essential to build trust with these groups by 1) identifying and countering the smear campaigns launched by community members who have a vested interest in women not being aware of their rights and options, and 2) building and utilizing a strong referral network that is able to support SGBV victims holistically to escape abusive situations and achieve independence.

Train staff continuously against racism, exploitation, and all forms of discrimination, including classism: It is essential to build trust among all segments of society for them to feel comfortable accessing SGBV prevention and response serivces. Staff must be regularly trained on the nuances of non-discriminatory service provision in order to ensure that all women, regardless of background, are safe and included. Ensure zero tolerance for staff violations of these policies, and make it simple for beneficiaries to report breaches in staff conduct.

Raise awareness on the victimization of men and boys: Encourage men and boys to report by countering the idea that SGBV cannot happen to men or that it is shameful or emasculating. Ensure that men and boys are not presented as powerless or helpless through these campaigns, but as brave for speaking out.

Raise awareness on non-physical forms of violence: Awareness-raising sessions with both men and women can help in the understanding that physical and sexual violence are not the only forms that create long-term trauma. It should be emphasized to men that verbal or psychological abuse is not a less severe substitution for physical violence, but rather an equally harmful form of violence that destroys love and trust.

Recommendations for working with TV/film professionals:

Secure the buy-in of higher level decision-makers within the target company: In KIIs, media professionals emphasized the difficulty of lower-level employees making substantive differences related to the content of media products. Even for employees such as script writers, the number of hands that the content passes through before it airs results in no single employee, much less lower level employees, having enough creative control to enact meaningful changes. As a result, it may be essential to secure the buy-in of upper management to advance institutional changes, such as the adoption of gender-sensitive standards for the portrayal of situations of VAWG and/or the on-screen representation of women and girls.

Advocate for the adoption of shared ethical standards on content related to women and girls and SGBV and gender-equitable employment practices and policies in TV and film companies: Securing commitments to shared standards and conducting interventions on the implementation of those standards can provide a common framework by which to judge the gender

sensitivity of Lebanese TV and films. Lessons from other countries/regions and existing resources on this topic can pave the way for advocating with leading production companies and media corporations in Lebanon. UN Women, for example, has produced a handbook on the topic; in addition, the United Kingdom holds broadcasters responsible for how they portray violence against women and other crimes, and these standards may inform those in Lebanon. CSOs may use highly publicized pledges (complete with a monitoring framework) to encourage TV and film companies to adopt the standards.

Work with professionals of all genders: It is essential to avoid the tendency to recruit and work exclusively with women. First, the majority of decision-makers in the TV and film sector are men. Second, data collected in this study (and in many other studies) show that women are already more committed to and have more knowledge of gender equality issues than men.

6. Appendices

Annex 1: TOR for the baseline assessment

Annex 2: KII Guides

Annex 3: FGD Guide

Annex 4: Mixed-methods media survey

Annex 5: Evaluation Matrix

Annex 6: KII demographic information

Annex 7: Media survey dataset

*Annexes can be shared upon request