

“Varying Perceptions, One Outcome”

Field study monitoring the attitudes

and perceptions of women and men towards

women's rights in Lebanon

Executive Summary



World Vision in Lebanon

World Vision is a Christian humanitarian organization working to create lasting change in the lives of children, families and communities living in poverty. Inspired by our Christian values, we are dedicated to working with the world's most vulnerable people. World Vision serves all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender. World Vision was found in 1954 and has been active in Lebanon since 1975. World Vision promotes the well being of Lebanon's children and their communities through emergency relief, community development and advocacy.

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ABAAD-Resource Center for Gender Equality

ABAAD is a non-profit, non-politically, non-religious civil association that envisions a world in which men and women live as equitable partners and work together to secure better lives for their future. Women are effectively empowered and participate in democratic processes that affect their lives and their communities. In this world there is no violence or discrimination, and women live in freedom, dignity and inner peace.

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*The opinions expressed in the context of the study reflect only the opinion of researcher/s,
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Even though there is worldwide recognition that women have equal rights to men in various fields of public, economic, social and political life, in addition to their personal and family rights, and even though forty-seven years have passed on this legal international recognition, differences and discrimination against women are still widespread in terms of the entitlements given to men and women. The most obvious forms of discrimination are in matters most tightly linked to personal being, i.e. matters of marriage and the ensuing roles and tasks distribution between couples.

It is apparent that the traditional forms of domination, control and coercion are ever present between them. They are still present despite all the legal procedures and efforts aiming at establishing equality between both genders. Every passing day proves that privileges, instilled by tradition, customs and cultures in men, are still engraved in their conscience and beliefs. Any man would believe that any change to the dominant relationship he has with his family, or any attempt to reconsider his discriminating behavior and attitude, infringes upon his acquired cultural rights which he believes are behind the stability of the family and the continuity of social order in eras past. There are still high percentages of men who refuse to accept equality. They support it in claims, but resist in practice and real life.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women caused many repercussions, ranging from slight shakes to violent quakes, depending on the culture and the diversity of civil patterns in societies. It took two decades for women to understand that applying the Convention does not occur automatically; they should rather be convinced that they deserve equality and raise their voices to demand equality, even if it cost them partaking in multi-faceted confrontations to persuade officials that the time has come to rid societies of the masculine edge, and replace it with coordination and sharing between both genders for a life with more fairness, justice and joy, and with less darkness, suffering and misery.

In recent decades, signs of women turning into independent beings became apparent in most societies, and new forms of struggles emerged, in which women turned from someone demanding shyly and timidly to someone demanding with a toughness based on confidence. She turned from inquiring about some rights to demonstrating and protesting in public squares, calling for participation in politics, and exercising theoretically-acquired rights regarding citizenship, elections and rule. A while ago, the process of following the detailed journey of women towards earning their rights was set up. Our study constitutes a chapter of this journey, in order to examine the extent to which men and women realize the necessity of achieving equality between them in all fields.

The present report follows and analyzes a few specific rights, mostly exercised within households, and is similar to a physical entity that depicts the conditions of society, as well as its ideas and convictions, alongside the daily patterns of its members. The nature of every family is based on tuning the life tempo of its members and organizing the relationship of a married couple, firstly among themselves and secondly among family members of both genders. We conclude that a family is a frame governed by cultural-religious, legal and socio-economic rules. As such, it reflects flaws and highlights renewing the distribution of household roles and establishing new adaptations and balances.

Methodologically, we adopted Focus Discussion Groups (FDG), and carried out sixteen interviews, as well as some individual interviews, in which 125 people participated, divided as follows:

- Gender
- Religion
- Geography
- Age group and educational level

The study was designed in a way to act as a survey of how well the participants are aware of the chosen rights and the issues it causes in the relationship between the two genders, based on various indicators chosen and considered as revealing inputs for the situation that the exercise of these rights is in.

Case at Issue	Revealing input to follow the case/Rights framework
1- Equality between spouses	- Distributing roles between the two spouses in the family
2- Violence against women and its forms	- Wife's negligence of house chores
3- Respecting the wife and her will/marital rape	- Forcing wife to have sex without her consent
4- Equality between the two genders in citizenship right	- A mother's right to pass on her nationality to her children
5- Right for old women to own property	- Seizing and managing property owned by old wives

First Case

**Gender Equality: Distribution of Roles
Between both Sexes in the Family**

The Woman's Household Job and Roles from the Viewpoint of Men and Women

"House chores and requirement are the responsibility of women," "Shari'a defined woman's role as caring for the house, cleaning it, organizing it, and raising children¹." Apparently, a large number of men still believe that they are exempt from house chores and helping women. The past, traditions, and culture, in addition to their interpretation of religion and Shari'a, ranked them first place and granted them privileges and the right to observe and evaluate. They throw all burdens on women and hold them responsible for all household chores and duties. They reserve to themselves the power, the decisions, and the right to discipline and define the type of relations and ties with their wives. These men constantly threaten their wives, disregarding that a vast number of women are financially independent, and even help the man in his expenses and financial responsibilities.

Women's Reaction to Men's Opinions

Some wives consider that men want their women to be maids not partners, since he considers the house his, the family his, and the children his. When they argue, he tells her: "Go to your parent's house," keeping in mind that she shares in paying rent or house payments, and helps sustain the family.² If the husband does not wish to have a role around the house, let him alone be responsible for family expenses and providing for the family, then I will leave my job and spend my whole time with the family. We conclude that a fair share of women notice that times have changed, and realize that they were pushed to work outside the house, agreeing to share the burdens to reaffirm her desire to create a family and cooperate with her husband to provide for it.

However, when it became apparent that it would be difficult to handle both roles in the house and outside, she tried to adapt to the new situation, expecting to win the help of her husband. Instead, he expressed reluctance and refusal to help, putting the blame on her, abusing her and pressuring her until she gave up, shut up and obeyed. Obviously, women were forced to work outside out of economic necessity, and not because relationships between the two sexes evolved, or liberation, or gender equality.

¹ Some of the opinions and sayings **from the viewpoint of men**

- Men agree that main occupation of women is taking care of her family and house.
- The Oriental man does not accept the idea of carrying out or partaking in house chores, because they contradict with the idea of masculinity and with his expecting to be treated as served man. He considers any demand for him to participate in house chores offending and belittling.
- Many interviewed men were confused between house affairs and motherhood, considering them one and the same. They considered that a woman's job outside the house did not justify what they had described as a women's negligence of her home. She should split and organize her time in a way that lets her fulfill her role.
- A woman should be understanding and obedient for the sake of her children and preserving the integrity of her family. She should respect traditions.

² Some women's opinion on the role of men:

- A women's work outside the house gives her some independence and relief from her husband's authority. It gives her certain information and knowledge, as well as analytical and assessment abilities, which is something the husband refuses. He does not accept that his wife has an active role outside the household, because he feels that others are sharing her and benefiting from her activities.
- A woman should take care of her family alone, even if she worked long hours outside the house, whereas the man assigns some relaxing time for himself when returning home.
- The idea of a couple sharing family burdens is not a shame, and does not contradict with a man's dignity or masculinity, but rather signifies not running away from assuming the responsibility of building one family.
- A man accepts sharing and dividing house chores and roles in theory, but upon application, he returns to being traditional to the bone.

Some Main Conclusions Regarding the Attitudes and Behaviors of Men and Women in this Part:

Husbands' reaction to their wives' attempts to amend family roles:

Husbands react to their wives with verbal abuse first, then physical abuse, resorting to hitting and other suppressive means to control and weaken them. They might also stop spending on the family and providing for it, leaving this burden on the working wife. They prevent the wife from dealing with her children, keep her away from them, destroy the relationship with her to the extent of estrangement or abandonment, or have parallel extra-marital relations up to the point of marrying another women or divorcing.

As for the wives, the fight back by pressuring the husband, saying they would like to quit their job and stop helping with house expenses, complain and ignore the husband's pressure and demands, or insist on talking and discussing to convince him of providing the required help under the threat of breaking up the family. She might resist his violence and leave the house, ignore him and stop talking to him, or seek the help of parents or mediators to convince him of the required help.

Conclusions regarding the first case

Based on the above, it seems a significant change has clearly affected the roles of the spouses, but it did not elaborate into a new form of role distribution between them. This change will continue and deepen as long as the wife dares and insists on asking for sharing responsibilities.

The manner in which the husband pressures and abuses the woman quickly turns her from a silent being to an active exploding being that refuses the husband's actions. Whereas a man's silence and retreat postpone the confrontation temporarily and gives the couple a breathing space to think, reconsider interests and share the wife's burdens.

When the husband shares responsibilities with his wife, he creates an atmosphere of trust, understanding and cooperation between them, protecting the family and the children. The woman also gains some of her rights, which improves her position in the family and society and leads to some stability in her life. The family is thus surrounded by positive feelings and mutual love which protect it and improve communication among family members, as well as with others.

Second Case

Violence Against Women and its Forms

It happens that two spouses communicate by force, by hitting one another with their hands, using more painful methods, throwing heavy objects at each other, or pinning the other to the ground and stopping him/her from moving in a humiliating way.

They may also exchange insults or throw curse words to hurt and humiliate each other. Other forms of abuse include humiliation, violence, threatening, blackmailing, and accusing the other of being unfaithful and deceitful.

These behaviors are considered forms of violence and aggression, violating dignity and humanity.

When being violent against women in general, and the wife in particular, men justify their actions by the idea of disciplining and righting the wrong, which was mentioned in the Quran in Verse 34 of Surat an-Nisa' as religious guidance for spouses. The idea became accepted within society and encouraged them to be merciful, talk to one another and love to each other.

Preliminary Conclusions

Some husbands interpreted things their own way, as revealed by what some interviewed had said: their husbands resort to all sorts of violence against them, from threatening to violent hitting, for silly reasons, which puts the family in a predicament.

Most of the interviewees found no acceptable justification for violence, because the relationship between a married couple should be based on mutual consent, understanding, respect, and protection of the dignity of the other. Even if the husband provides for his wife, that does not give him permission to hit her. Imagine if she equal to him in age, education, and income and belongs to a family that considers humiliating and abusing the wife is similar to targeting her family as a social entity, a matter that the family refuses and fights vehemently, protecting its daughters when faced with such abuse.

Most men justify their resorting to violence with feeble excuses, such as economic hardships, unemployment, and low income – which lowers their self-esteem, so they let off steam accidentally, but in limited fashion, on their wives.

Wives reply that any use of violence against them means the end of mutual married life, even if it continued unwillingly. A violent husband loses his wife's admiration, love, and trust.

Some participants saw that the intervention of parents or mediators dampened the husband's tendency towards violence and acted as an inhibitor for these acts. However, this did not get rid of the problem, nor provided enough protection from it.

An impressive number of people believe that marrying in haste, the widespread of security and social problems, the worsening economic situation of many households, the ongoing demand from the woman to carry traditional family burdens, in addition to professional and outside burdens, are all objective factors that lead to disputes and violence between spouses. There may be no solution except for divorce.

Establishing a law that punishes domestic violence would deter abusive husbands and stop them from resorting to traditions, customs and sometimes religion as pretexts. The majority of people are against violence, but no united public stance against it has been reached.

Third Case

**Respecting the Wife's Will and
Desire during Sex – Marital Rape**

There were many cases of marital problems because of the sex life between the couple, in terms of desire and intercourse frequency, and the accompanying issues. Women refuse to be forced to have sex against their will. The interviewees had the following to say about this case:

Forcing the wife to have sex without her consent turns her into a sex tool and object.

A wife may not be forced to have sexual intercourse, even if it was legal and acceptable, because the point of sex is making the wife feel safe.

Forced sex bypasses all foreplay that makes it a human relationship and turns it into an animal one.

Sex is a legal right for both partners, yet it is governed by temporal and circumstantial conditions.

Sex by force and coercion is disrespectful towards the partner.

Any sexual relation in which the opinion and desire of the woman are disregarded leads to a controlling and suppressing relationship, where one partner is unfair towards the other.

Even the Prophet (PBUH) commanded gentleness and warned against pouncing on women like animals.

Sex is about pleasure, not fear and intimidation.

All wives agreed that forcing a woman to have sex is flagrant rape. Some husbands however objected to using the term “rape”, because they still consider sex as an instinctive behavior bereft of all other considerations, even the emotions and feeling of the wife. The husband believes that his wife already gave him her feelings, totally, when she agreed to marry him.

Men, however, had a different perspective, considering sex a right granted by religion to the husband, and that the wife should give in to her husband’s requests.

Sex is a right granted by religion to the husband to practice whenever he wishes, but without violence or force.

The wife should give in to her husband’s requests unless there were reasons of illness.

Women have become demanding, wanting to exchange their financial contribution in providing for the family for controlling the decision of having sexual intercourse.

Resorting to court is not justifiable in a personal matter, governed by personal considerations.

It is wrong for the wife to complain to the judge or court, because they cannot help her. The couple should either reach an understanding (where she accepts her situation) or get a divorce.

Regarding attitudes and behaviors, in case the wife sued her husband at competent courts, the interviewees, both men and women, agreed that the law would side with the man, or that the woman would avoid filing a lawsuit since asking for sex and performing sexual intercourse are acquired rights of men.

The judge would side with the man because he follows the laws of his court and the religion which he applies, and therefore won’t blame the man or hold him accountable, but rather call the couple to reconcile.

The wife should avoid resorting to the court because demanding and having sex is a husband’s acquired right.

It would be better to seek the help of a doctor instead of resorting to a religious court.

A wife’s family may act as her protector against the husband’s abuse as there is no law to protect her.

Law does not provide a way out or solution for this case, but often covers it and hides its details.

Reasons that drive men to have a marital relationship based on coercion and rape

It is obvious that the attitude of both spouses is dictated by gender considerations depending on the sex. What the woman sees as rape and force, based on the freedom of women and their right to act as a being of value, dignity and will, is disregarded by the husbands because they still live in medieval times where men had the power, authority and freedom that encompass all freedoms of family members they provide for, defining their rights as they wish.

Wives mentioned that the main reasons which drive men to have a marital relationship based on coercion and rape are the men’s inexperience in having sexual intercourse the normal, correct way, and that men believe that expressing masculinity in sex requires some strength, force, pressure and violence. There are also no clear controls that define the husband’s obligations in this regard, neither by religion nor by law. Moreover, when studying, men may not receive medical and scientific information about healthy and successful sexual intercourse. Parents, especially those older in age, are not considered sources of correct information.

Fourth Case

**Rights Acquired by Marriage, especially the Right
for a Mother to Grant her Nationality to her Children**

Upon sorting and classifying the answers of interviewees, we conclude the following:

Most of the rights mentioned by participants are strictly nominal, such as custody rights, alimony, guardianship, nationality, and inheritance. They know that these rights are religious and that there are no civil, objective laws that govern or stipulate them. Also, most application mechanisms are arbitrary, left in most cases to the opinion of the judge, or the prevalent customs and traditions.

Mothers alone realize that their rights usually necessitate heavy commitments, which require mighty efforts for the children and the family. However, those efforts do not bring women benefits or earn them their rights. The efforts do not bring anything in return. They are always unidirectional: giving without getting anything in return.

Most husbands, on the other hand, hold on to the rights assigned to them by religion. They have shown no willingness to accept any changes, except among younger men whose wives help provide for the family, or whose wives insist that if there was no change, they would prefer divorce.

The majority of participants from both sexes is not aware enough of the rights granted to them by civil laws upon marriage or marital disputes. They do not have enough information regarding the following:

- i. Organizing the marriage and dividing responsibilities and needs of the partners in a way that man solely plays the role of the head of the household and is the main decision-maker, regarding owning objects, apartments, and properties, and registering them in his name, even though both he and his wife pay for them equally. This is a violation of a woman's rights in the same areas.
- ii. The situation regarding children in case of divorce, abandonment, or separation. Many fathers shy away from the responsibility of financially and morally caring for their children when they are young. At the same time, they religiously and legally demand regaining custody of their children once the guardianship period is over.
- iii. The consequences of a mixed marriage, between a man and a woman who do not belong to the same country, the same religion, or the same culture, with vast differences between them. The partners are unaware of the following consequences:
 - iv. Obtaining the nationality or main nationality.
 - v. Inheritance, its obtainment or not.
 - vi. Custody of the children or watching over them in case of abandonment or death of one of the parents, or the party to which the children are given in the event of the death of both parents.
 - vii. Boundaries and nature of exercising personal freedoms by both spouses, as well as the extent of authority and liability which originated legally by marriage and its consequences.
 - viii. Knowing the real legal, religious and sectarian reference for the spouses and the family, obeying its courts, decisions and regulations, as well as the protective guarantees available for both.

Insufficient knowledge about the possibility of a woman passing on her nationality to her children has left many women in a marriage whose consequences were not taken into consideration. A high percentage of Lebanese women married to non-Lebanese men said that they were unaware of this issue or of the difficulty of obtaining a nationality.

They said that their children's right to obtain the Lebanese nationality was a natural right, proven by birth and blood relation to the mother. If not, then why do Lebanese immigrants to USA, Canada and European states seek these nationalities by marrying women citizens of these states? If the Lebanese pay an arm and a leg for that cause, and are backed up by their relatives in Lebanon to obtain a foreign nationality, why don't they support us and stop objecting to giving our children the right to belong to this country?

The discussion revealed that most of their attitudes expressed personal indifference. They linked their participation in demanding any right with being targeted and concerned. This proves that **knowing a right and delving into its dimensions is not reason enough to fight for it for those who are not deprived of this right.**

Participants' recommendation to mobilize supporters:

We were able to find a number of recommendations to mobilize supporters for this case, among them:

- 1- Publishing articles and studies.
- 2- Encouraging citizens in general to adopt the same stance as those who seek to obtain a nationality abroad.
- 3- Involving religious leaders.
- 4- Organizing media campaigns to shed light on the consequences of depriving children of women married to non-Lebanese men on their living situations and state of belonging.
- 5- Forming lobbies which work non-stop to establish a progressing and constant public opinion.

These attitudes prove that they are based on taking advantage. Personal gains are expected in return for participation, due to the sense of frustration hovering over the civil society in Lebanon.

Fifth Case

The rights of elder women and violation of those rights

Elderly people are attacked when those close to them feel that they are starting to forget or stop following up with their surroundings. They increasingly become the victims of swindling to seize and gain their acquired rights, as well as take over their properties and belongings, especially if they were alone and had no relatives or friends. This confirms that there is no official authority to protect these people and resolve the problems which the elderly face, as there is no law to protect them, not just from health, family and economic surprises, but also from legal risks that they are victim of.

In most case, the elderly cannot face problems the right way, whether they were cases of legal fraud or urgent needs. Those around them expect them to be vulnerable victims. Their fate is either giving up, or facing a worse situation, or illness, or death. Interviewees believe that the reasons are the following:

The good will of the elderly and their expectations of good will in return, as well as loyalty, and being protected by their family as they cannot protect themselves. The problem is also the lack of morals and virtues, which can no longer nurture boundaries and mutual respect between age groups.

It has been observed that the participants of all age groups realize very well that the state in modern societies make is easier to violate what is left of elderly women's rights, given that they constitute a vulnerable age group, unable to protect their interests themselves. It is therefore more likely that other people would get hold of their guarantees and compensations because family members can have sole control over them. This did not stop a high percentage of participants from admitting that this situation ought to be changed.

Elderly people, like other people, live in a Lebanese society that recognizes the main rights of all citizens. However, enjoying these entitlements requires legislations that define implementation mechanisms and requirements.

There is no alternative for a mutual protective authority, which provides the minimum rights possible for the elderly with no discrimination, so that they may resort to it whenever they pass through tough conditions or cannot obtain these rights from other sources.

Assessing the cases in question and their indicators

Based on the chosen indicators, we were able to determine the knowledge levels of those targeted regarding the cases in question, as well as divide positions into three groups: negative, moderate or positive. Detailed tables were prepared to help uncover the awareness of rights, the level of enjoying these rights, as well as justifying the current distribution of roles, the feedback of women in this regard, methods dealing with this gender discrimination and the forms in which society faces women's demands.

The assessment included all cases in question in detail, through which it became apparent that the targeted people are divided into four categories concerning the rights and causes of women.

- 1- Traditional conservative people.
- 2- Conservative people with a modern view.
- 3- Open-minded people.
- 4- Liberal people

Challenges and Conclusions

Challenges Facing Equality on All Levels

These different groups of people led to many challenges:

Regarding Gender Equality and the Distribution of Roles:

1- A large number of men insist on holding on to their traditional role in the family and run away from any participation imposed by economic and social changes to help the wife with family duties.

2- Forcing dual jobs on the wife, outside the house to help with family income, and inside the house to take care of the children along other house chores, which increases fights, throwing blames, and an atmosphere of tension in the house.

3- The woman's/wife's insistence on demanding equal rights as the husband and the increase of domestic disputes which may lead to divorce and family disintegration.

Regarding Domestic Violence against Women:

1- The prevalence of verbal abuse between spouses when discussing house and family issues, and turning into physical abuse against the wife by some husbands who are affected by the deteriorating general conditions in society.

2- Continuous increase in a women's refusal of violence against her, even if it meant leaving the house and losing her family.

3- The spread and increase of husbands killing their wives during fights, and the vulnerability of a large group of wives in the absence of legal protection for abused women.

Regarding Sex and Forcing It:

1- Shedding light and publicly discussing the issue of forcing the wife to have sexual intercourse without her consent. This issue does not receive any condemnation or refusal. It is denounced when publicly discussed and considered offensive.

2- A considerable change, in the views of many social categories, from considering sexual intercourse between a married couple a mere legal obligation to an act that is based on consent and mutual love between the two.

3- Considering that a woman who is abused and forced to have sex with her husband is subject to humiliations, harm and violation of her dignity as a person. Women are adamant on putting an end to this reality.

Regarding Rights Related to a Woman's Right to Pass on her Nationality to her Children:

1- The awareness of Lebanese women that they may not grant their nationality to their children and depriving her from a natural birth right.

2- Aggravation of suffering resulting from the negative effects of depriving children from their mother's nationality, especially in cases where fathers is no longer present, whether through abandonment, divorce, returning to his country, or death.

3- Increasing use of children and their rights as dispute material by the two parents in court, and turning it from a personal dispute to a fight over the children. This spreads enmity and permanent discord among all and harms them.

Regarding the Rights of Elderly Women:

1- More and more sons and relatives are avoiding the responsibility of caring for an elderly woman and providing a quiet and stable life for her.

2- Relatives avoiding of responsibility towards elderly women is linked to their efforts to take over whatever rights these elderly women have left. The use inability to discern as pretexts, thus increasing the mental and material damage bought onto them.

3- Increasing vulnerability of elderly women to health and family surprises, as well as legal violation problems resulting from the lack of any form of protection.

General Challenges Require Adopting a General Strategy for Social Intervention which Targets Both Genders

The challenges revealed by the study do not touch on women's affairs and conditions only, but affect the entire social environment, with all its intellectual, material, economic, social, and cultural components, imposed on men and women alike. There is a need to adapt with new variables imposed on everyone.

Every person should begin with himself to change his conventions and stances, and develop a vision for himself and for the values which he accepts to follow. Therefore, the required intervention is not limited to women only and does not target them in particular, but should rather include both genders and require the participation of men in all programs and activities.

Intervention policies should be developed, and plans should be drawn up, so as the results would affect all those living together in a family, the neighborhood, and the region, according to the desired circle of influence to solve challenges. These policies should be translated into programs and activities.

Activating women's rights is closely associated with implementing a plan to [support family stability](#) that includes myriad projects whose effects and results go beyond providing help and services to [tackle the empowerment and rehabilitation of women](#), and improve their moral and physical capabilities so that society would recognize her independence and feel the waning of negative effects on her.

The recommended plan includes many projects, some are [service](#) projects, some are [organizational](#), and others are [research](#) projects, among them:

- 1- Establishing some organizational and administrative frameworks responsible for implementing the plan.
- 2- Providing proposals regarding legislations that solve the defect uncovered by the study in familial relations.
- 3- Carrying out some field studies to use their detailed results for developing the chosen intervention plans.
- 4- Benefiting from existing institutions, authorities and facilities, as well as from their programs, to refer detected cases to the mentioned bodies to benefit from their services.
- 5- Preparing and developing social work initiatives at the national level to push things forward, and take the initiative to guarantee realizing defined objectives.