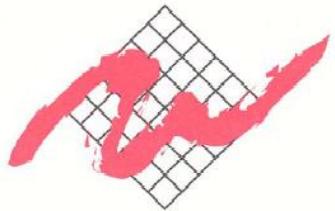


# The Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA) Project

Focus on Lebanon | Women's Freedom of Movement, &  
Freedom from Harassment & Violence Topic Brief

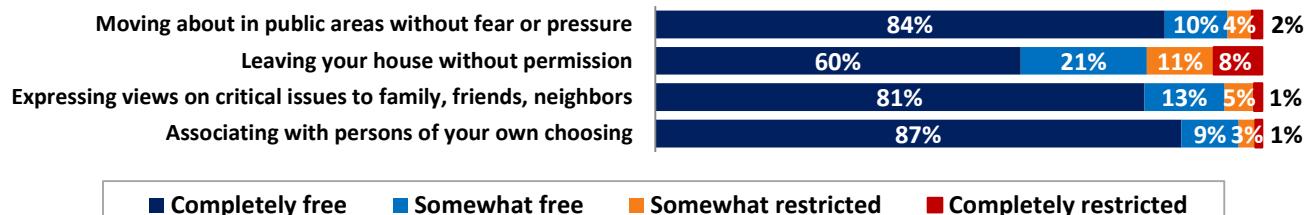
A project by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) with funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)



## WOMEN'S FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT, AND FREEDOM FROM HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE

The SWMENA survey investigated the extent to which women in Lebanon felt they enjoyed freedom of movement without pressures from family or society. The survey also examined general attitudes towards violence against women and whether domestic violence, in particular, is tolerated or rejected by society. These topics were covered in an attempt to understand power relations within the family and within society in how it views women.

**Figure 1- Many women experience limits on their freedoms of movement and association.**  
Percentage of women reporting restrictions on their actions

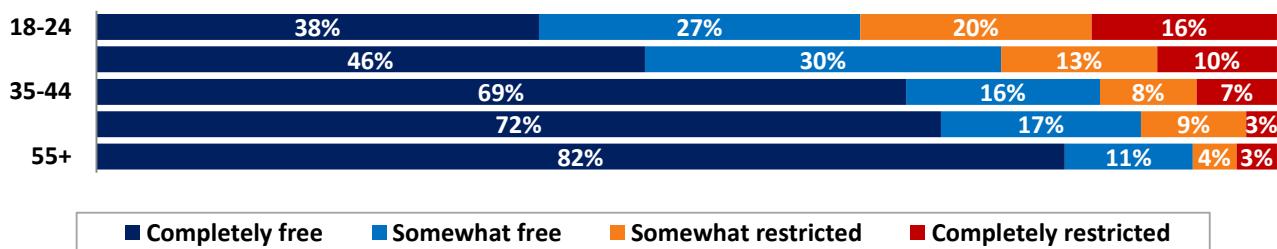


### Women in Public Spaces

Women's ability to move freely and safely in public spaces supports their ability to fully participate in the civic, political, and economic life of their communities. Therefore, women in Lebanon were asked how free or restricted they felt in associating with persons of their own choosing; expressing their views on critical issues to family members, neighbors or friends; leaving their house without permission; and moving about in public areas without fear or pressure.

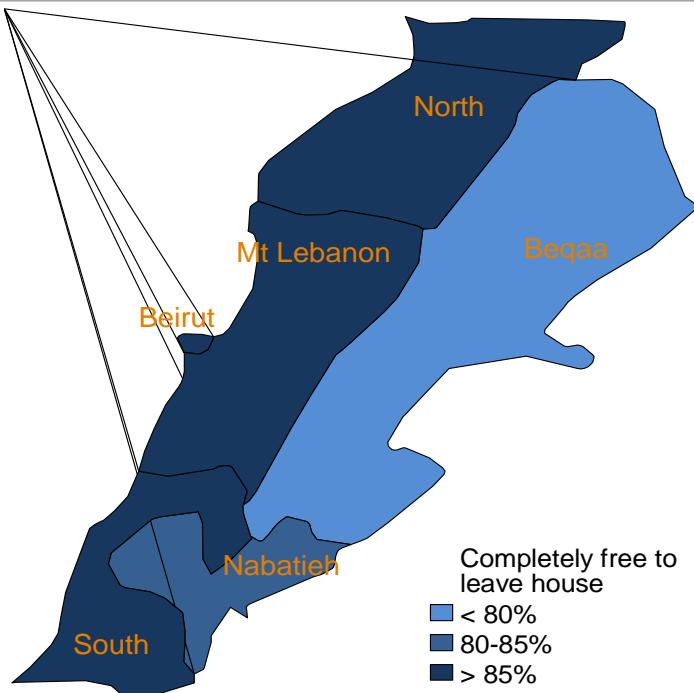
- Figure 1 shows that 87% of women feel completely free in the choice of people with whom they associate and an additional 9% feel somewhat free. Only 4% of women said they felt somewhat or completely restricted in their choice of associations.
- A large majority of women (94%) felt completely or somewhat free in moving about in public areas.
- Most women feel that they can freely express their opinions on critical issues to family members, friends, and neighbors.

**Figure 2 - Women report increasing freedom to leave the house at older ages** Percentage reporting feeling free or restricted on leaving their house without permission

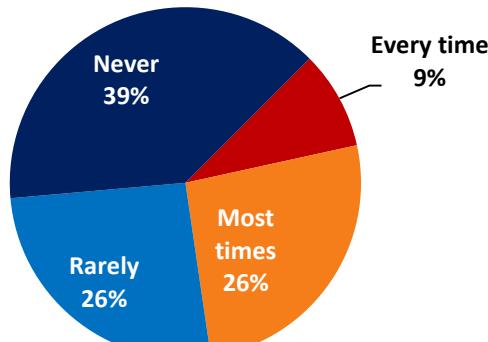


- In terms of leaving their houses without permission, less women report freedom in this aspect. Sixty percent of women feel completely free to come and go from their own home, 21% feel somewhat free, and nearly 1 in 5 (19%) feel somewhat restricted or completely restricted.
- However, the proportion of women who feel free to leave their houses without permission increases with age (Figure 2) and varies across *mouhafazat* (Figure 3).
- Figure 4 shows that when they are outside their homes, more than one-third (35%) of women report that men make unwanted rude, vulgar, or harassing noises and gestured towards them most or every time they venture into public. Another 26% have experienced these harassing behaviors by men, but only rarely. Fewer than 4 in 10 (39%) women have never been subjected to such unwanted behaviors by men.

**Figure 3 – Women living along the coast report greater freedom to leave the house without permission**  
*Percentage reporting feeling completely free by mouhafazat*



**Figure 4 - Women experience harrassing behaviors from men in public places**  
*Frequency of unwanted/sexually suggestive noises, comments, or gestures toward women*

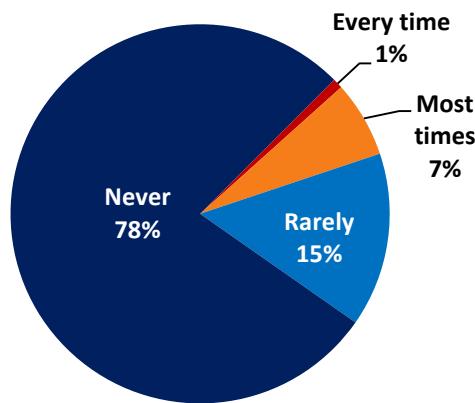


- Figure 5 shows that while unwanted physical contact is much less frequent than harassing comments and noises, more than one in five (22%) women have been touched or pinched against their will in public spaces. While few (1%) experience this every time they go out in public, 6% said it happened most times and 15% said rarely.

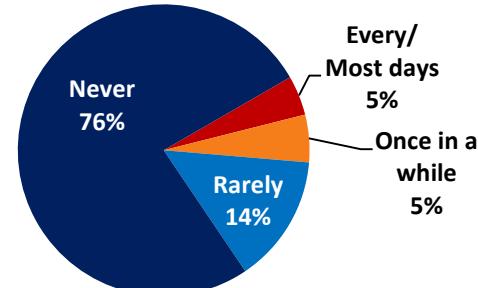
The workplace is one specific public setting included in the survey where Lebanese women might experience harassment. Survey respondents were asked, "When you are at work, how often would you say that men make unwelcome physical contact, noises, comments, or gestures toward you or other women?"

- Figure 6 shows that 5% of women experience sexual harassment at work either every day or most days. This included verbal and physical harassment. Five percent report they are subjected to these sorts of behaviors by men once in a while and 14% said rarely. Fortunately, 3 out of 4 women (76%) have never experienced harassment at work.

**Figure 5 - Physical contact is less frequent.**  
Percentage of women reporting unwanted physical contact in public spaces (n=2,000)



**Figure 6 - Sexual Harassment at Work**  
Percentage experiencing or witnessing unwelcome physical contact, gestures, or noises directed towards women at work by men (n=1389)



## Women in Private Spaces

The SWMENA survey asked about attitudes towards domestic violence in Lebanon. While other surveys (for example, some of the Demographic and Health Surveys or DHS) have attempted to measure the prevalence with which women experience domestic violence, the SWMENA project measured community opinion and norms toward domestic violence in general and in specific (hypothetical) situations.

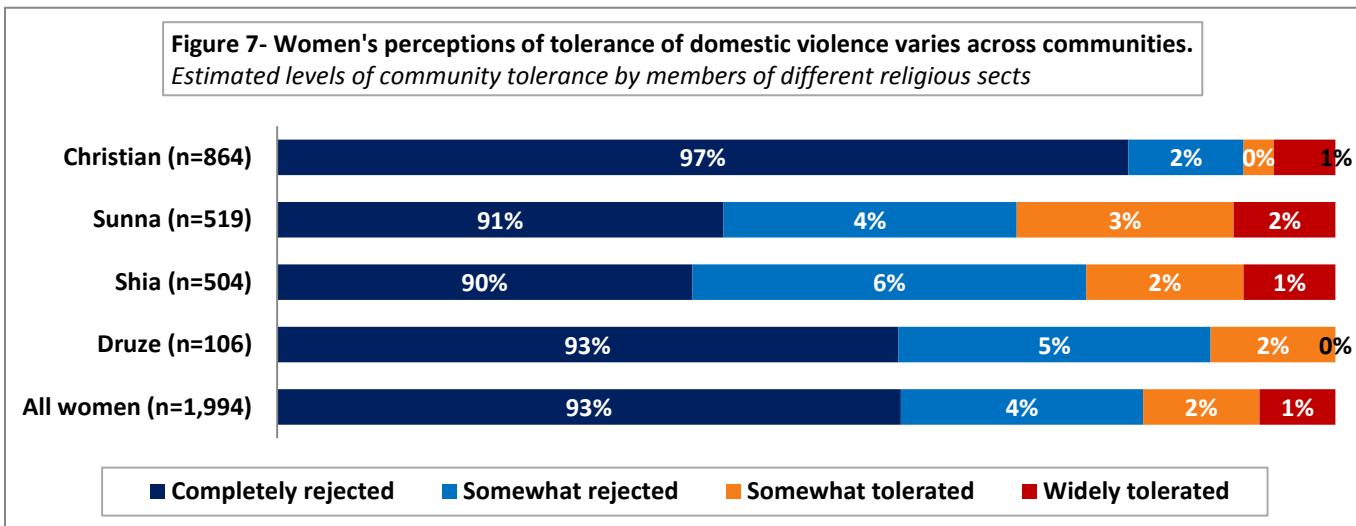


Figure 7 shows women's reported tolerance of domestic violence tabulated overall and broken down by sect.

- Overall, 93% of women feel that domestic violence is completely rejected in their communities, and 4% felt it was somewhat rejected. Three percent reported that they felt their community somewhat or widely tolerated the physical abuse of wives by their husbands.
- The rejection of domestic violence is highest in Christian communities where 97% of women said they thought it was completely rejected and less than 1% felt it is widely tolerated.
- Tolerance for husbands' physical abuse of their wives appears relatively more widespread in both Shiite and Sunni communities. Over 90% of women in these communities felt that it was completely rejected, but almost 4% of Shiite women and 5% of Sunni women reported that domestic violence is somewhat or widely tolerated.
- Ninety-three percent of Druze women said that domestic violence was completely rejected. Five percent said the physical abuse of wives by their husbands was somewhat rejected in their communities.

The survey asked respondents to provide the reasons that might explain why a husband might physically abuse his wife and open-ended responses were coded into categories. Up to three reasons could be provided by a single respondent. The top ten most frequently cited reasons for women are shown in Table 1, along with the corresponding percentage among men.

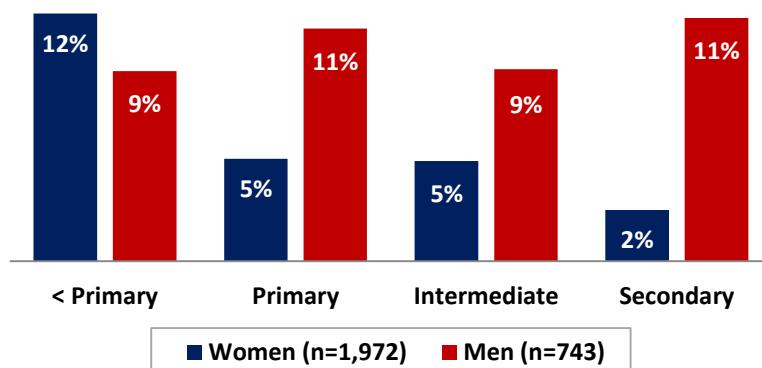
Table 1 - In your opinion, what are the causes that may lead people to resort to domestic violence? <i>% out of total; top ten ranked from highest to lowest according to citations by female respondents</i>	Women (n=2,000)	Men (n=750)
Because the husband is stressed out	38%	30%
Because the wife did something wrong/ deserves it/ needs to be punished	23%	27%
Because of poverty	19%	20%
Because of low education	13%	11%
Because of lack of communication/understanding between spouses	12%	16%
Because the husband drinks too much	8%	6%
Woman's stubbornness	6%	4%
Because of cultural reasons/ accepted in certain communities or traditions/ some people are raised this way	5%	2%
Immorality	3%	2%
Betrayal	2%	4%

- Overall, women and men provide similar reasons for domestic violence and at similar frequencies. The top three reasons for women are also the top reasons given by men and at roughly the same frequencies. Women and men both indicate that stress in the husband's life is the primary reason for domestic violence (38% of women and 30% of men) among the options given.
- The second most frequently selected reason for domestic violence is "the wife must have done something wrong." Men stated this reason slightly more than women (27% for men versus 23% for women).

Very few Lebanese women and men report that they personally find it acceptable for a husband to beat his wife (Figure 8).

- Among women, accepting domestic violence declines with educational attainment. Women with less than a primary school degree are the most likely to accept domestic violence at 12%. This percentage is half the rate

**Figure 8 - Do you personally believe it is acceptable for women to be beaten by their husbands in certain situations?**  
*% responding "Yes" by educational attainment for women and men*



among women who completed primary and intermediate schooling and cut in half again among women who have completed secondary or higher education.

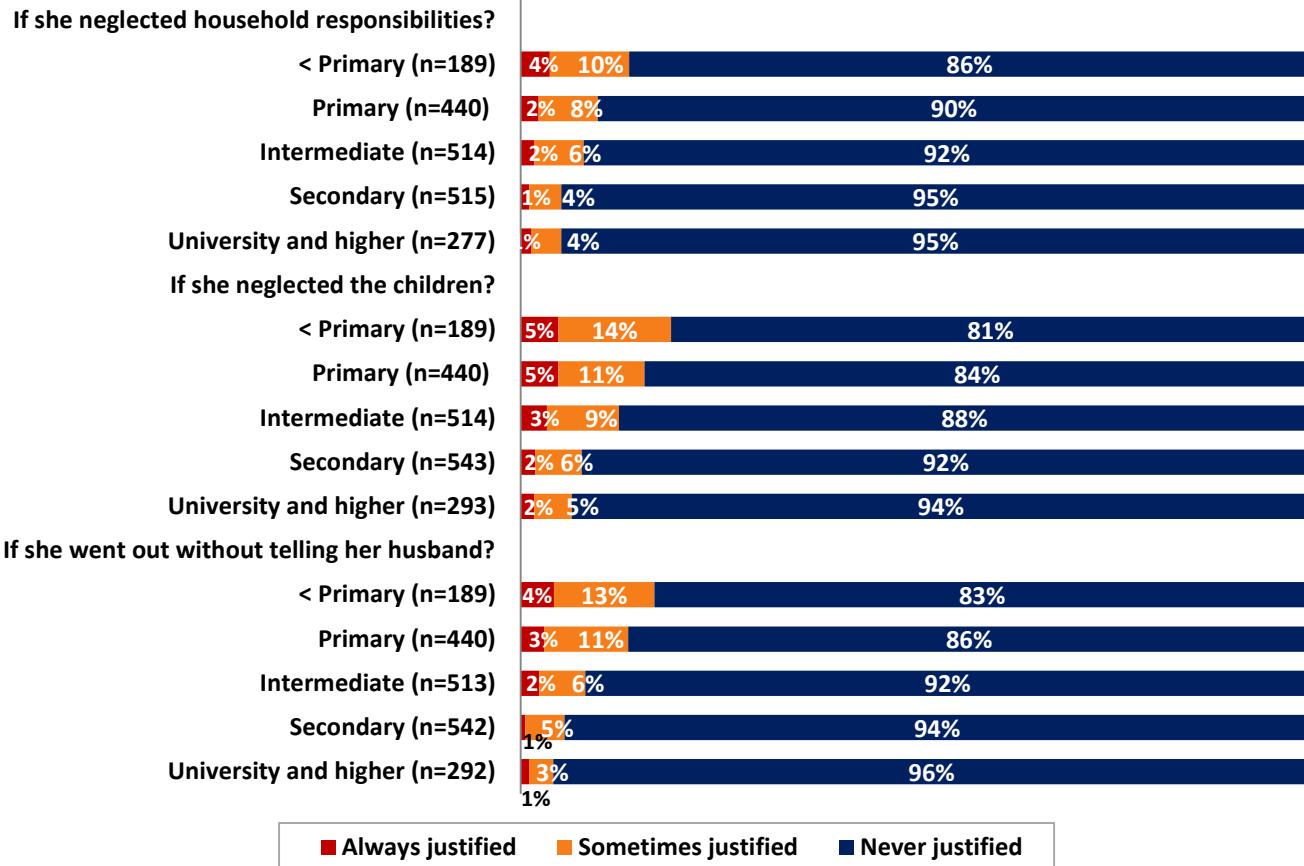
- Among men, there is no systematic change in attitudes by education. Approximately one in ten men finds it acceptable for a husband to beat his wife.

In addition to asking a general question about whether respondents found it personally acceptable for a husband to beat his wife, the survey asked if respondents found such behaviors justified when framed in terms of six specific situations:

- If she neglected household responsibilities
  - If she was disobedient or did not follow his orders
  - If she neglected the children
  - If she tried to impose her views
  - If she went out without telling her husband
  - If she refused sex
- When framed in this way, 83% of women and 79% of men said domestic violence against women is never justified in all five of these situations.
  - Figure 9 shows three of these reasons for women who responded by educational attainment. The pattern is similar for the other three reasons offered by the interviewer.
  - In each case, women with more education report less acceptance of domestic violence for the justification offered.
  - At the lowest level – less than primary schooling – 14-19% of women think a husband beating his wife always or sometimes justified the reason given.
  - The percentage always or sometimes accepting the justification offered declines to 4-8% among women with a secondary or higher degree.



**Figure 9 - "For each of these types of situations that may lead to violence in the household, please tell me if you think it is always justified, sometimes justified or never justified for women to be beaten by their husbands."**  
 Percentages by education



The final question in this section asks about crimes men commit against women who are related to them in ways other than marriage. The survey asked, “As you may know, sometimes male relatives kill or commit acts of violence against women in their family to avenge the family’s honor when these women commit adultery or engage in pre-marital sexual relations. In Lebanon, these types of acts are not prosecuted by law on the basis that they are considered “honor crimes.” Do you support changing this law to allow the prosecution of those who commit these types of crimes or do you support keeping the current law as it is now?”

- Majorities of both men (74%) and women (86%) support changing the penal code to allow the prosecution of perpetrators of “honor crimes.” However, it is worth noting that the overall percentage of men opposed to

criminalizing honor killings (26%) is nearly twice as large as the percentage of women opposed to changing the law (14%).

- Figure 10 shows that support for criminalizing honor killings varies by age for men, but remains relatively constant across age groups among women. Support for changing the law to criminalize honor killings is lowest among the youngest group, ages 18-34.
- Support for criminalizing honor killings ranges from 70% among men and 18-34 years to 75% among men 35-54 years and 86% among men 55 years and older.
- Among women, support for changing the law ranges from 83% for the youngest group, women age 18-34 years to approximately 88% for the older two groups – 89% for women age 35-54 and 88% for women age 55 and older.

**Figure 10 - "Do you support changing this law to allow the prosecution of those who commit kill or commit acts of violence against women in their family to avenge the family's honor when these women commit adultery or engage in pre-marital sexual relation"**

