

Status of Political Reforms Toward Violence's Against Women in the Middle East

Abdulrahman Al-Fawwaz¹

¹ Department of Humanities, Al-Balqa' Applied University, Amman, Jordan

Correspondence: Abdulrahman Al-Fawwaz. E-mail: dr_fawwaz77@bau.edu.jo; fawwaz77@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Women are considered as equal and essential part of the society, and have all the rights to live according to their will. However, in various countries, they are not given such chances; even their legislative positioning is also weak. The purpose of the study is to critically review the status of political reforms made towards violence against women in the Middle East. The paper tends to investigate that how women of Middle East are treated unequally and unfairly.

The findings of the paper reveals that the status of political reforms towards violence against women in the Middle East is weak as the societies are male-dominated. Females are not given equal opportunity to live and their quality of life is poor because there is no such strong implementation of legislative policies.

There is much need of policy implications so that the political reforms can be made towards providing equal and fair rights to females. Women due to poor implementation of policies face the violence; however, governmental interventions can help to overcome such inequality in the Middle East.

Keywords: political reforms, violence, women, Middle East

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

For any civil society, the fundamental aspect of living is to maintain the equality within its socio-economic and political system. Civil laws and regulations are inflicted to assure society that their personal viewpoints will be safeguarded and fair treatment will be given to all the citizens irrespective of their gender, ethnic background, and status. This trust of civilians on receiving safety makes them stronger to face personal injustice (Iyer, Mani, Mishra, & Topalova, 2012). However, despite such pledge by states, there is always a challenge for a state government to protect the rights of such people who face societal pressures (such as minorities, unrepresented citizens, and females). Individuals who belong to such groups often face a long gamut of unfairness (Htun & Weldon, 2015). The paper tends to investigate that how reforms are made over the years to overcome the injustice faced by women in the society.

1.2 Background of the Issue

In the Arab world, the common form of violence reports is the violence against women. According to the report of World Health Organisation (WHO), approx 37% women in the Middle East have experienced violence from their partners. The report further states that the political, economic, and national security situation in the Middle Eastern region fuelled this problem, where there is a direct relationship between regional crises with the domestic violence. During the Gaza conflict, 700% rise was seen in violence against women by their own partners due to the feeling of humiliation, insufficient opportunities, and hopelessness towards better living (Abraham, 2017; Skaff, 2013). Further, statistical figures indicate that approx 87% of females aged between 15-49 undergone mutilation process (Female genital mutilation) in Sudan and Egypt, whereas approx 19% have faced similar violence in Yemen and 8% faced the same issue in Iraq during the year 2015. This shows that the type of violence faced by women is not same as in many cases, not only their partners who abuse them but their families and society too (Kadi, 2017).

1.3 Problem Statement

Violence faced by women has been reported as the global problem because almost every developed,

under-developed, or developing nation faces the cases in which women are treated imprudently (Weldon and Htun, 2013). Research from different parts of the world, irrespective of East or West, astonishingly reported a higher rate of women trafficking, sexual assault, violence in a relationship, stalking, and another type of violations done at women psyches and bodies. Although from a human rights point of view, this is a clear assault and considered as a crime, at the same time, it violates the liberty of women to face and move within society. In the present scenario, Violence against Women (VAW) clearly highlights a question towards fundamental rights of women (Htun & Weldon, 2015). Interestingly, many nations and their governments have realised the need of bringing political reforms for giving basic protection to women from violence, but there is still much development needed in bringing legal reforms, establishing Non-governmental organisations to shelter such females who are victim of extreme violence and are shattered, need of public education, rape and rehabilitation centres and awareness campaigns. Precisely, there is lack of political reforms seen in protecting women rights and shielding them from any violence and assault (Ortiz-Barreda, Vives-Cases, & Gil-González, 2011; Htun & Weldon, 2015). Based on this, the problem statement of the study is *to critically review the status of political reforms toward violence's against women in the Middle East*.

1.4 Aim

The aim of the paper is to critically review the concept of violence against women and the political reforms made to overcome this societal injustice in the Middle East.

1.5 Research Questions

The questions of the study are as follows:

What is violence against women and its consequences on the society?

Why there is need of bringing political reforms towards violence against women?

What is the status of violence against women in the Middle East based upon policies and legislation?

What are the possible policy implications towards overcoming violence against women in the Middle East?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study plays a significant role in understanding the need of bringing political reforms to overcome the major issue that most of the societies face i.e. violence against women. It plays a fundamental role in knowing how the economic growth is affected due to the pressures that women face in terms of violence and how it is affecting the entire social system from being liberal. Especially, the need for strong legislation can help from the political point of view to protect women rights at every platform. Hence, the study plays a significant part to understand that how the Middle Eastern societies have moved in all these years from being extremely rigid to little flexible towards the female gender. It tends to provide an imperative understanding to academic practitioners and policymakers to know the need of investigating the status of women in Middle Eastern countries and ways through which the government can protect their rights so that they can live in complete justice and equality.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Violence

Violence is explained as the intentional or unintentional behavior by physical force, which intends to damage, hurt, or kill someone. The violence is the anger that causes harm to another person based on aggression. According to World Report violence is always the part of human experiences and today still in the 21st century it affected more than 1.5 million people despite many reforms (Anand, Grover, Kumar, Kumar, & Ingle, 2016). Majority of people who suffers from violence are facing nonfatal injuries, Chronic injuries, health consequences, low self-esteem. The violence is remained in the society since long and despite various interventions; it has been not prevented yet due to other external factors from society and traditions. The violence is the leading cause of fatality especially people who are aged 15 to 44 years. According to World Health Organization (WHO) globally there are 470,000 homicides that occur each year and more than millions of people does suffer from the violence-related injuries (Shahzad & Malik, 2014).

The exposure to domestic violence increases the women exposure towards mental illness, drugs abuse, alcohol use, HIV, and chronic heart diseases. It not only affects women psychologically, but it also affects them physically, which creates long-lasting effects. However, multiple studies shared that violence can be easily prevented by interventions (Copeland & Henry, 2017). The prevention of violence against women not only benefits a person, but it benefits a society in term of advancement and progression. The interventions regarding violence against women are the concern towards public health, which aims to:

- (i) Define problems
- (ii) Identify risk factors and causes
- (iii) Designing interventions and testing them
- (iv) Increasing effective interventions

According to the studies of Jiao, Ning, Li, Gao, Cui, Sun, Kang, Liang, Wu and Hao (2015); Hanson et al., (2015); Phillips (2016); the violence is a patterns of the behaviour that involves abuse by one person against another person within the domestic settings such cohabitation or marriage. It is also termed as the intimate partner violence in which the spouse or partner is an intimate relationship with their partner. It also includes the emotional, verbal, psychological, reproductive, religious, and sexual abuse and the women are the more serious victims of violence than men (Pearlman, Zierler, Gjelsvik, & Verhoek-Oftedahl, 2016).

2.2 Violence Against Women

According to Ellsberg et al., (2015); Alesina, Brioschi, and Ferrara (2016); Varghese and Sarkute (2017), the violence against women encompasses wide range of views, which are not limited to physical, psychological, sexual violence occurring in the family, but it also includes sexual abuse, battering of young females, martial rape, dowry-related violence, genital mutilation and other harmful acts. It also includes sexual harassment, rape, and intimation at the workplace, trafficking, discrimination, which is at a community or state level. The violence has been ignored largely due to lack of clear definition and public health issues (García-Moreno et al., 2015). It is the complex and diffusive phenomena, which is not defined due to an exact science, but it is defined as the matter of judgment. It is the notions of what is acceptance and what is unacceptable in term of constitutes harm, behavior, and social norms.

According to the typology of violence, it can be categorized as self-directed, interpersonal, or collective violence. The self-directed violence results in self-abuse or suicidal behavior (Sanjel, 2015). The interpersonal violence can be from the community or from family or partner against a female child, elder or partner. Lastly, the collective violence is due to social, economic, and political objectives. It includes genocide, violent crime, terrorism, and human right abuses. According to Universal Deceleration of Human Right Article 7, it is ensured that the women must have right to elect and participate in the formulation of governmental policies. The women can participate in any type of non-governmental organization. According to Alesina, Brioschi, and Ferrara (2016), the violence against women in politics are defined in different ways and there are various situations that deprive women of their rights.

2.3 Types of Violence

As shared by Michau, Horn, Bank, Dutt, and Zimmerman (2015), the violence against women starts before birth or at infancy period. For instance, in many countries the female face from sex-selective aborting to infanticide. In childhood stage, the abuse against girls, include malnutrition, FGM, excessive discipline, pornography, prostitution, begging, child marriage, and labor. In adolescence stage, the female suffers form force prostitution, early marriages, rape, or psychological abuse. In reproductive stage, the honor kills, bribes, intimate partner violence, sexual harassment, and intimidation are often faced (Basile et al., 2016). In elder stage, the women are often suffering from widow abuse. There are multiple types of violence against women, which are:

Gender-based Violence – As mentioned in the study of Basile et al., (2016), it is referred as the harm that is committed against the persons and it results from inequalities based on the gender roles. The gender-based violence creates a huge negative impact on the girls and women well-being (Afshar, 2016).

Domestic Violence – García-Moreno et al., (2015), highlighted that the domestic violence takes place among the intimate partners of the members family. For instance:

- (i) Violence by fathers towards their daughters
- (ii) Violence by mother-in-law towards daughter-in-law
- (iii) Violence by brothers towards sisters

The domestic violence includes the psychological, sexual or the physical abuse.

Intimate Partner Violence – Shahzad and Malik (2014) mentioned that the intimate partner violence can be or cannot be cohabitating. The relationship does not include sexual activities and it if from the former spouses' current partners, non-marital partners, etc.

Sexual Violence – Pearlman et al., (2016), elucidated that the sexual violence is the term, which includes the sex act or an attempt sex act with involving a victim that is unable to refuse or consent. The non-contact sexual abuse

includes the act of intentional exposure or voyeurism. It can be behavioral or verbal sexual harassment and the person can be involved in capturing nude photographs of another person with any consent (Alesina, Brioschi, & Ferrara, 2016).

2.4 Consequences of Violence

The violence against girls and women increases the risk of poor well-being and health. The growing numbers of researchers Ellsberg et al., (2015); Alesina, Brioschi, and Ferrara (2016); McDaniel (2017), proved that violence creates adverse effects on health and well-being. Numerous studies reported that their former partners kill women that die due to homicide. The below are the consequences of violence against the woman:

The violence creates immediate effects on women health that are fatal. The health consequences can be acute and immediate or they can be chronic and long-lasting. The researchers of Jiao et al., (2015); Hanson et al., (2015); Phillips (2016) found that violence creates greater influence on mental and physical well being. The physical consequences include (i). Immediate or acute physical injuries such as lacerations, bruises, burns, punctures, bites, broken bones or abrasion. (ii) The gastrointestinal condition includes poor health status, long-term health issues, and chronic pain syndromes. (iii) The more serious physical injuries are disabilities or injury to eyes, abdomen, ears or chest (iv) The psychical consequences further includes homicide and death due to AIDS

On another hand the reproductive or sexual consequences are:

- (i) Unwanted pregnancy, (ii) Sexually transmitted infection, (iii), Unsafe abortions, (iv) Urinary infections, (v) Vaginal inflection, (vi) Sexual dysfunctions (vii) Painful sexual intercourse

The mental consequences are:

- (i) Eating disorder, (ii) Depression, (iii) Poor self-esteem, (iv) Trauma stress disorder, (v) Eating disorder, (vi) Self-harm, (vii) Suicide attempts, (viii) Seizures

Lastly, the behavioral consequences are:

- (i) Multiple sex partners, (ii) Lower use of condom or contraception, (iii) Harmful substance or alcohol use (iv) Selection of abusive partners in later life

3. Methods

3.1 Research Methods

As the study tends to provide a critical review on the status of political reforms towards violence's against women; therefore, the suitable way of conducting the research was secondary. The study was executed based on the idea of conducting secondary research. The entire paradigm of the study focused on providing a societal viewpoint on the social study and for this, it was essential to choose the right philosophy for the research. Hence, the chosen philosophy as social constructivism. The study was based upon constructing the meaning on the issue by gathering information on such aspects that form a social construction of the entire scenario. The knowledge obtained on the phenomenon was based upon the experiences gained from the surroundings based upon several interactions that helped to construct the key arguments on the issue. The theory of social constructivism helped in answering the underlying subjectivity on the issue of violence against women based upon interacting with the existing information. Based upon this, the research design suitable on the present scenario was exploratory research design. As this was secondary study; therefore, it was meant to explore the issue in the light of the critical review. By means of exploratory research design, the limitation was only gathering the evidence from the past so that the analysis can be conducted on knowing the facts that how many political reforms are being made to overcome violence against women in the Middle East. Based upon this, the information was obtained from secondary sources, as the investigation was secondary-based. Mainly, facts and evidence obtained from existing literature, news and reports were analysed so that the research problem can be addressed concisely.

3.2 Material and Procedure

The material gathered for the investigation was from official and published reports. Different research papers have also been used to provide much in-depth information, but the facts that have been obtained from different reports provided data on violence against women in the Middle East in terms of political reforms made so far.

The procedure adopted for information gathering was based upon in-depth searching. Mainly, data was researched on a web engine and scholarly databases so that relevant information can be obtained. After going through the data, the analysis was made. The report that was studied exclusively was Factsheet of World Health Organisation (WHO) that helped in providing facts regarding the status of political reforms and the figures reported by the legislative bodies on violence against women. Besides, the research papers have been used

greatly to analyse the data on the issue and for this, the most studied papers were of Masterson, et al. (2014) on the 'Assessment of reproductive health and violence against women among displaced Syrians in Lebanon'; Ahram, 2015 on 'Sexual Violence and the Making of ISIS'; Viergever, et al. (2015) on 'Health care providers and human trafficking: what do they know, what do they need to know? Findings from the Middle East, the Caribbean, and Central America', etc. Apart from this, more papers and published articles have been reviewed to conduct the analysis.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Violence Against Women in the Middle East

The Middle Eastern region is the transcontinental region, which is in the center of Western Asia. According to the World Health Organization (2015), in Middle Eastern countries about 1 in 3rd women experience sexual violence or physical violence at least once in their lifetime. Especially, the intimate partners are highly involved in women sexual abuse and psychical violence. The report further justifies that in some countries of Middle East 70% women are experiences the sexual violence and abuse. About 37% Women in Arab do experienced violence and nearly about 4 in 10 women are suffering from homicide (Abrahams et al., 2014). The data also shows that 133 million women alive are experiencing female mutilation and in Egypt, about 92% of women aged between 15 to 49 years suffered from Female Genital Mutilation. Besides this, 700 million women alive in Middle East countries are married under the age of 18. More than 70% of women are a victim of human trafficking and the rapist is often showed leniency in the Arab region (Alesina, Brioschi, & Ferrara, 2016). This statistic shows that the violence against women is the issue, which prevents the societies from progress and it is rooted due to the low status of women in their families (Masterson, Usta, Gupta, & Ettinger, 2014).

According to the report of Guedes, Bott, Garcia-Moreno, and Colombini (2016), in Egypt during the political reforms, there was a rise in the assault of women at public places. This incident brought attention to the public health issue and the Egyptian center of the human right (ECWR) claimed that about 83% women experience the sexual harassment at the public. According to the Criminal code and constitution the articles 11, 52, 60, 67, 71, 80 and 89 ensure the protection of women from the violence that occurs due to organ trade, torture, mutilation etc (Viergever, West, Borland, & Zimmerman, 2015). The Egyptian has developed the Violence against Women Act (VAW), which aims to help a female who report the crimes of violence by providing them psychological and social support. The counties such as Jordan and Djibouti recently introduced quota for women in the local council and parliament in order to ensure equality in governmental affairs. About 25% of parliament's seats are allocated to women, which secures the equal work and remuneration (Fulu & Miedema, 2015).

In UAE the authorities are failed to respond adequately towards the domestic violence due to lack of recognition. According to the recent survey by Ahram (2015); Alesina, Brioschi and Ferrara (2016), over 1500 cases have been reported against domestic violence in past 7 years but yet no measures have been taken. This is because the country has no law, which prevents women from domestic violence. The country is high on women discrimination and about 20% Emirati women are the part of labor (Varghese & Sarkute, 2017). The country is on the second number while measuring the percentage of women workforce. However, the recent reforms such as Dubai women Establishment support the women employment and the main objective is to provide equal opportunities to women by increasing the effective participation (Anand et al., 2016).

Syria is another country that is on top of the list when it comes to women violence in the Middle East. The violence against women in Syria did not start after the armed conflict but they were deeply rooted in the society due to laws and regulation, which are against women protection. The women in Syria are bearing the violence due to which they lost security, social status, family, home and lives (Oram, Khalifeh, & Howard, 2017). The empowerment and protection of women in Syria require active measures and recognition. Likewise, other Middle East countries Bahrain also face the similar issues of violence against women and the country has recently launched the program of "takeoff" which is one of the international efforts in order to combat against the women violence. The program is the database which monitors the violence against women and it enables parties to provide support and care services in order to facilitate victim with social, psychical and psychological treatments (Varghese & Sarkute, 2017). Hence, the data shows that Middle East countries are suffering from women violence since long and the multiple initiative and intervention has been taken in order to prevent women from violence and reduce gender-based discrimination from social, political and legal context (Adineh, Almasi, Rad, Zareban, & Moghaddam, 2016).

4.2 Traditions and Legislation of Human Right Conventions in the Middle East

Syria – Before the conflicts, the discriminatory practices and laws encouraged the impunity for violence against women. Not only this, but the Syrian government prevents women, LGBT, and girls to access their right and

justice. Syria also does not recognize the spousal rape under its law and the penal code do facilities impunity due to cultural pressure and traditions (Pottie, Greenaway, Hassan, Hui, & Kirmayer, 2016). The rapists are free to escape from the punishment and even if they marry to the victims then they are not criminalized.

United Arab Emirates – United Arab Emirates has developed multiple laws and legislation in order to prevent women from discrimination. The UAE has its Shariah Law and Civil Law and these courts are strict towards criminal offenses including premarital sex, adultery and alcohol consumptions (Temmerman, 2015). The society is male-dominated society and the women need to have permission from their guardian before marrying or re-marrying. The marriage among Muslim women and non-Muslim women is punishable and the homosexuality is illegal. In 2004 UAE ratified the CEDAW and become the member of an international convention in order to prevent women from violence and discrimination. UAE also signed multiple other treaties in order to protect their women. These treaties include Minimum age convention, Hours of work convention, Right of Child and equal Remuneration convention (Abrahams et al., 2014).

Bahrain – In Bahrain the women right has been a cornerstone of political reforms which are initiated by King Hamad. After the constitution of 2002, the women were provided with the right to contribute in political affairs and stand as the candidates in the national elections. The several reforms towards women equality have been a key driver, which promotes women to gain top position in public and private sector (Alesina, Brioschi, & Ferrara, 2016). However, before 2002 the women were not provided with any type of political right and they were not even allowed to vote in the elections. This followed the performance of women and by recognizing the productivity gap the reforms were made and today Bahrain encourages women right (Ellsberg et al., 2015).

Egypt – In Egypt, the women are stated lower than the men due to masculine society. Despite equality, the women are still expected to avoid direct contact with men. Women in the adolescent age are raised by the dependant on them such as brother and father. When the women are married then she totally depends on his husband (Alesina, Brioschi, & Ferrara, 2016). The gender segregate is highly encouraged and the majority of females tend to withdraw from school when they reach the puberty stage.

In Middle Eastern countries the violence against women is the hate crime which gives unequal power and hinders right of women (McDaniel, 2017). The gender-based violence affects the women reproduction and it affects their physical and mental health. The violence also results in women death and it creates fatal and non-fatal outcomes.

5. Discussion

The analysis and the findings of the paper revealed that the Middle Eastern economy is in the great transition towards bringing equality and justice in its society. WHO (2015) also reported major conflicts seen in the economic growth among which one of the major challenges is inequality within the society. Women are facing constraints to live with liberty because the society is male-dominated. This is creating a hindrance to maintaining social equality and balance. According to the facts defined in the analysis, women in some of the Middle Eastern parts are facing violence and no one takes action against it. As a result, they are facing severe mental and physical illness. Besides, nearly every fourth women in facing the same challenges and assault from their immediate partners, family members or strangers (García-Moreno et al., 2015).

Unfortunately, the government of the UAE and various other countries of the Middle East have so far failed to address this key issue at the major level. Considering the economy of the Middle East as rich in terms of oil and gas, it is seen that the policies do not imply on providing fair and equal rights to women to overcome the social pressures they are facing (Moghissi, 2016). Ahram (2015) investigated that many cases have been reported on domestic violence and other types of violence faced by women, but no such actions are taken. Policies and reforms are not made at a major level to overcome this social issue. Even in the politics and national assemblies, inequality is seen because women are not elected to higher positions or for any higher political position. This discrimination is a witness at the community level as well where women are considered as inferior as the culture exhibit the characteristics of male domination. This can be considered as one of the major reason for poor political reforms to overcome violence against women.

It was also identified from the gathered information in prior chapters that violence not only in terms of inequality and abuse is seen, but there are various other types of violence's reported such as FGM, rape, girls being publicly abused, females abused by male members of the family and abuse at the workplace. Hence, the society is facing the challenge not because of poor reforms in legislation, but due to inequality in accepting women as equal part of the society compared to males. This is creating a major hindrance from witnessing political reforms on the issue (Jewkes, Flood, & Lang, 2015).

6. Conclusions and Implications

The paper summarises that there is the weak status of political reports towards violence against women in the Middle Eastern region and the reason for such ignorance is lack of attention given to the development of female segment within the society. Women in the Arab world are still struggling to receive education and proper facilities for living. They are being trained to listen to the male members of the family and not to question. Due to such training since childhood, they are reluctant to raise the voice for any sort of injustice they face. Even when they face the situation of violence by anyone, they do not report with the fear that their immediate family will not consider their concern. However, after a struggle for decades, they are not given an opportunity to receive vocational training and to some extent, they are given chance to seek education at higher level. Despite this, still, lack of reforms has been seen in protecting women rights. This is giving more confidence to the male segment to treat their females with injustice. The paper revealed that the major shift seen in the Arab politics gave a rise to the violence against women. In such countries of the Middle East that are facing political conflicts, the situation of women rights is even worst as compared to the countries that are developed. There is much need for implementing proper policies and introducing such laws that merely focus on protecting females from any sort of assault.

The gathered data also revealed that if the actions at political level are not taken, then increasing healthcare issues could be seen in females, ranging from mental illness to physical illness. Female members of the society needed to be given special consideration so that equality can be maintained, but lack of political reforms can result in worst or alarming effect on the social development of the economy. The United Nations and the World Health Organisation collaborated with the women wing of the Middle Eastern countries to work for women rights assurance and their quality of lives, but there need to be major reforms needed at a legislative level so that the policies can be practiced as the law of the state. This can help the countries to overcome the issue to some extent and the continuous reforms can help in overcoming the major barrier towards women empowerment to a greater extent.

There is much need of policy implications at the major level. Providing women of the state a chance to be officially the part of the politics can help in empowering women of the region. They cannot be treated parallel to males but can be given a chance to represent females so that the issues faced by this gender segment can be overcome. Giving aid to NGOs that protect women rights can help to overcome violence faced by women, especially, the chance given to such females who are a victim of violence can help in regaining their confidence to survive. Immediate actions on cases reported on violence against women can help to witness a reduction in such type of acts. This can also help male members of the society to consider women as equal part of their system. By doing so, major reforms can be seen in the policies of the state and can help to reduce the violence against women.

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