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Iraqi Al-Amal Association¹

Violence Against Women in Iraqi Kurdistan A Field Research²

The Significance of the Research

This research is unique. To our knowledge, no scientific research has been carried out on the subject of women and their rights, particularly on violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan. The research accords with the UN resolution in its eighty fifth meeting on 20 December 1993. The resolution requires *“the development of research and the collection of information from sensors on domestic violence and the spread of all forms of violence against women, and the encouragement of research on the basis for this violence, its forms, its danger and its consequences, and also the extent and the effect of the actions taken to limit and stop the violence against women, and the publication of all such studies”*³

Actions

- 1- **Location of the Study:** The Study was conducted in the Governorate of Arbil, including the center of the Governorate (the city of Arbil) and its towns, villages and residential camps.
- 2- **The Research Sample:** The sample consisted of 2350 women, of which 1234 were from the city of Arbil and 1116 from outside Arbil. Additional 18 women from the “young offenders prison” were included in the Study. The research sample was split between young girls, married women and divorcees.
- 3- **Methodology:** The following steps were taken to establish the methodology for the research:

¹ This research was organized by Iraqi Al-Amal Association and was carried out and supervised by sociologists, psychologists and academics from Saladin University in Arbil, Iraqi Kurdistan

² Translation from the Arabic text in the study. The recommendations contained in the original text were removed as they are only relevant to the local work.

³ Translation of this quotation was taken from the Arabic text in the study and may vary from the actual UN text in English.

- a- At first, five researchers conducted an “open question” interviews with a sample of 250 women from city of Arbil and its suburbs to establish the types of violence, the perpetrators and the reasons for the violence. This step was completed over five days.
 - b- As a result of the first step, four different “closed” questionnaires were established, for the married women, the divorcees, the young women and the women prisoner.
 - c- The questionnaires were, then, checked and approved by a number of specialist academics as well as by sociologists and psychologists
- 4- **Implementation and collation of information**⁴: After receipt of the necessary consents, a meeting was held with 25 researchers, all graduates of sociology and psychology, to explain the purpose of the research and methodology. The research area was divided between the researchers. Field work commenced on 10 February 2000 and was completed on 3 April 2000.
- 5- **Analysis**: The returned forms were circulated amongst a number of sociology and psychology lecturers at Saladin University in order for the information to be analysed.

The results

All Returns (Young Girls, Married Women, Divorcees)

- 1- **Age**: Age of sample ranged between 10 and 55 years. 22.43% were 25-29 years of age and 20.68% were 20-24 years.
- 2- **Employment**: 36.68% of the sample were unemployed – either housewives or seeking work – 40.34% were employed and working outside the house, mainly in government employment and particularly in teaching. 22.77% were students at various stages.
- 3- **Religion**: 96.18 were Moslems and 3.87% were Christians.
- 4- **Level of Education**: 20.85% of the sample had already attained a diploma stage and 15.79% a BSc stage. 19.83% were illiterate.
- 5- **Reasons for not attending school** (for the illiterate): 44.63% were banned from attending school by the family, 18.67% because of lack of schools in the vicinity and 13.52% because of economical conditions.

⁴ Consents were obtained from
Saladin University ref 6244/2 dated 1/11/1999
The Cabinet and the Higher Education Council ref 8235 dated 15/1/2000
Arbil Local Authority ref 145 dated 17/1/2000
Ministry of Health and Social Services ref 317 dated 14/2/2000 (The Ministry of Health), ref 105 dated 17/2/2000 (Social Services Department) and ref 641 dated 17/2/2000 (Arbil Health Department)

It is clear that there are social, economical and political conditions which prohibited part of the sample from the most important artery of knowledge.

- 6- **Reasons for not completing secondary education and beyond:** The main reasons given at the interviews were: 33.02% because of the social attitude such as “woman place is in the home”, “it only necessary to teach women reading and writing”, “university life can only bring trouble to the family”, etc. 21.60% had no secondary school in the vicinity and 14.86% were refused higher education by the family.
- 7- **Place of residence:** 59.11% were residents in the city of Arbil and 18.60% in the residential camps. The rest were living in rural areas.
- 8- **Economical status of the family:** 41.91% of the sample was from middle stratum and 13.15% were from poor families. 36.68% were from well-off families.
- 9- **Male preference against women:** only 19.36% said, “yes” to the question: “do you feel your parents prefer your brother to you?”

It is felt that “fear” to answer freely and “social conditioning” have resulted in this low reflection of the preference of men against women in the family⁵.
- 10- Although 19.36% said their parents preferred their brothers to them, 18.68% said families liked the boys more than the girls and 17.37% said they did not give them freedom to go out or select their own friends while the boys had full freedom. 16.50% also said that they were stopped from completing their studies.
- 11- **Sexual harassment:** 62.18% said that they were subjected to sexual harassment in buses and public areas.
- 12- **Psychological Harassment:** 69.62% said that they were subjected to insults and harassing comments from men in public areas.
- 13- **Insults:** 49.40% felt that the insults, usually used by men against each other, were demeaning to women, mothers or wives.
- 14- **Women’s brain is not complete:** 55.66% said that all men believe that women were ignorant and their brains were incomplete, while 27.36% said some men believed that and 8.80% said most men believed that. It is clear that some 92% of women believe some or all men look at them as less intelligent, placing them in a psychological disadvantage.
- 15- **Freedom of choice:** 33.15% thought that they had on freedom in choosing the type of education, clothing or visiting friends and family of their own choice without permission from the family or the husband.
- 16- **Suicide:** 44.26% said that they or they knew of some other females who committed or tried to commit suicide.
- 17- **Reasons for suicide:** The top reason given (29.61%) for attempting suicide was the husband’s inhumane treatment of the wife. 21.73% were due to

⁵ When women were asked specific questions about violence at home the answers gave a markedly different picture.

continued family quarrels and the family's insistence on choosing the husband.

- 18-**Physical attack:** 58.00% said that they were subjected to attacks by members of the family, including physical, psychological and sexual attacks.
- 19-**The attackers:** 23.35% were attacked by their husbands, 22.69% by their brothers and 21.60% by their fathers.
- 20-**Reasons for the attacks and insults:** 28.99% of the sample thought that the social backwardness was the reason for these attacks on women. 19.22% thought it was the backwardness of the attacker and 14.12% thought it was man's hegemony in society.
- 21-**Women have no strength and no power:** 30.51% of the sample felt that they had no strength and no power in society, that they were powerless and unprotected.
- 22-**Inferiority complex:** Nearly half of the sample (49.83%) said that they felt inferior.
- 23-**Thinking of suicide:** 21.06% thought of committing suicide or wished they were dead (preferred death to their present life).
- 24-**Self-defense:** A large proportion of the sample would only use passive defense against attacks and insults. 41.06% said they would cry or resort to silence and 26.62% said they would argue their case with the attackers. Only 13.4% said that they would take revenge, 6.06% said that they would go on hunger strike and 5.62% said that they would leave the house.

Conclusions

- 1- All women face violence of one form or another (physical, psychological, social, cultural, etc.) but divorcees face more violence and other women.
- 2- Violence comes mainly from the immediate family (husband, parents, brothers, uncles and aunts, etc.).
- 3- Boys are referred to girls in the family and there is a negative attitude to women in general and to divorcees in particular.
- 4- Women are also subjected to harassment, attack and insult outside the home, especially in public places and the markets.
- 5- There is little difference between violence against women in the town and in rural areas except in some minor issues. This suggests that all Kurdish women are subjected to violence of one kind or another.
- 6- A large proportion of women feel inferior and aggrieved.
- 7- Women have not been able, up to now, to defend themselves positively.

The Differences between the Urban and Rural Areas

- 1- Early marriage is more common in the rural areas. It also appears that rural girls are more likely to be forced to marry men much older than them.
- 2- Men in the rural areas rarely agree to help the woman in doing housework. The picture is marginally better in the town.
- 3- The percentage of women attempting suicide or wishing to die is greater in towns than in rural areas. This could be due to the increased awareness of the urban women of the grievances and the urban opportunities and their pressure on women.

There are no significant differences between the situation of the rural and urban women as far as the other matters are concerned. This is due to the fact that women in all areas are subjected to violence of all forms and feel injustice in society. It is a situation born out of the social conditions and the difficult political, economical and cultural background of Kurdistan and particularly the conditions facing the Kurdish women. They have historical roots in the life of the people of the region.

The Prisoners Sample

There were 18 prisoners in the sample. Their ages ranged between 19 and 39. All the prisoners, apart from one who was a worker, were housewives and all of them were Muslims.

One prisoner had completed secondary schooling, 3 intermediate schooling, 5 primary schooling and 8 were illiterate. The latter did not attend schools because of objections from parents, economic pressure or family problems. As for the others, they did not complete their education because of lack of schools in their areas, family problems, economic pressure or bad treatment by the teachers.

12 women of the sample lived in the city of Arbil, 3 in towns and 2 in rural areas. One of the prisoners came from a very well-off family, 3 from reasonably well-off families, 9 from middle class, 3 from poor families and 2 from very poor families.

13 women from the sample stated that their parents and their families discriminated against them in favor of their brothers. The perceived discrimination was in not giving them the choice of schooling, lack of freedom, beating them, forcing them to do housework or forcing them to marry against their wishes. All the sample said that they were not given the right to study, choose their clothing or visit their choice of friends and family. They all knew of someone who either committed suicide or burnt herself. They thought the reasons were the harsh family treatment, forced marriage, harsh treatment and violence by the husband or poor living standard.

They were subjected to all forms of violence. The forms of violence in descending order were beating, forcing them to do work and swearing.

It seems that the brothers were the most perpetrators of violence against women, followed by the fathers and husbands and then uncles, aunts and cousins.

It is clear that all the sample were made to feel inferior, that they were depressed and their rights were suppressed, and half of them either attempted suicide or wished to die.

When they were subjected to violence the majority would resort to crying or staying silent and some of them leave the house.

14 of them said they were subjected to torture and insult during the police investigation, including beating, swearing, disgracing and withdrawal of food. 4 prisoners stated that they were not subjected to any form of violence during the investigation.

7 women said that the court looked at them with contempt while 8 did not have that feeling. 3 were still awaiting trial.

They all felt that in prison they were treated fairly and that there was no discrimination in their treatment as apposed to that of the male prisoners. This could be due to their assumption that the interviewer was a prison agent, otherwise how could it be explained that the majority of them faced bad treatment by the police and the court yet felt satisfied with their treatment in the prison.

10 out of the 18 were not visited by their relatives while in prison. 7 of them felt they were innocent, 5 were there because of sexual attack on them and the others were either because of adultery, theft, murder (brother) or witchcraft.

As for the reasons and the responsibility for committing crimes, 4 blamed the poor standard of living, 4 blamed the husband, 2 blamed the family and the rest blamed the step mother, the sister, a friend or the nephew. One of the prisoners blamed herself for her crime.

The Prisoners Conclusions

- 1- The sample was mainly young girls suffering from lack of education and poor standard of living.
- 2- It was clear that the family treatment was harsh, unjust and insulting. They were belittled and lacked freedom of choice even within what is socially permissible such as the selection of clothing, studying or visiting relatives.
- 3- The majority of them complained about life, injustice and oppression.
- 4- Outside the family circle, they felt similar bad treatment from the people in general whether in the street, in the police station or in the court.
- 5- In prison, the family treatment for the majority of them was even harsher by ignoring them and refusing to visit them.
- 6- The reasons for their crimes were the oppression of the family, early marriage and forced marriage.

General Conclusions

Violence is one of the social actions subjected by “man” against another “man” for economical, social, political or ideological reasons. The degree of violence varies from one society to another and whatever the level of social and cultural development in the society some sectors will be subjected to some form of violence. Our Kurdish society is no exception, it portrays all the phenomena apparent in other societies in the world including the phenomenon of violence.

Our society is grouped within what is known as the “third world” where social habits and costumes play a major role in the behavior of the people and their relationships. At the same time the law has been written with these customs in mind. And, thus, women are subjected in our society to a variety of violence.

The conclusions of our study have confirmed that violence is used against the Kurdish woman and these findings can be summarized as follows:

- 1- Women in our society have not been given the opportunity to work outside the home in the same way as the man.
- 2- Women have not secured their rights in education in the proper way. Our study shows that more than 50% of the sample is of low education level.
- 3- Many obstacles have been placed in their way to completing their study.
- 4- Our study confirms that some 67% are economically poor because of their dependence on man.
- 5- A large proportion of the women felt that there was discrimination between them and the boys in the family. This puts women in a psychologically disadvantaged position.
- 6- Women are subjected to all sorts of pressure including the confiscation of their rights to have an opinion on whom to marry.
- 7- Most of the divorcee women confirmed that the social customs played a role in their marriage. 53.8% said that they got married without their consents.
- 8- A fair proportion said that their divorce was due to lack of compatibility/intimacy between the couples because of the lose of the women’s rights in the marriage life and the use of violence by the husband and his family. 61.44% confirmed that the behavior of the husband was behind their divorce.
- 9- A large proportion of divorcees confirmed that they faced hard life after divorce because of the negative outlook of society towards divorcee women.

The Married Women

- 1- Women were subjected to physical and psychological pressure at home. 68.58% complained of hard work at home while only 31.41 did not find housework difficult. Furthermore 57.04% said their husbands did not help them at home.
- 2- Only a small percentage (2.76%) reported that their husbands had a second wife. The majority of them (76.92%) had consented to the second wife because of infertility (25%), social customs, which would not give the woman the right to refuse (25%), fear of divorce (15%) and bribery by buying them gold and jewelry (10%).
- 3- It appeared that most women got married early. The average age of a woman at marriage was 21.42 years and the average difference between the age of the husband and the wife at marriage was 7.04 years.
- 4- 80.83% of women gave consent to the marriage against 15.44% who did not give consent but were, nevertheless, forced to marry. 4.36% did not answer the question. As for the women who did not consent 18.81% were forced to marry the men selected by the family, 46.77% because their marriage was an “exchange marriage”⁶, 22.04% as a compensation for a murdered person⁷, 10.75% because the man offered a high dowry and 1.12% because the women were given as presents.
- 5- 79.87% said that men properly satisfied the needs of the family. For the 20.12% who did not satisfy the needs of the family, 53.23% of the women said it was because the man was poor, 12.69% because the man helped his other immediate family first, 7.93% because of the man’s illness, 7.43% because the man spent on himself first and the rest said it was because of another wife, unemployment or disability.
- 6- 76.14% believed that the mental state of the man inside the house was not satisfactory.
- 7- 69.86% stated that they (the women) had the right to intervene regarding family planning, 29.49% could not intervene and 0.63% were infertile.
- 8- 81.68% said their husbands look after them and their children.
- 9- 12.96% said that their husband always threaten them with divorce.
- 10-72.31% of the women had no preference between having boys or girls, 12.56% preferred boys and 13.41% preferred girls.

⁶ Exchange marriage is where a women and a man from a family marry a women and a man in another family as part of a deal to exchange women.

⁷ A method of settling a feuds where a women is offered in marriage to settle a quarrel resulting in the murder of a person from another family.

Appendices

Field Study of Women Who Faced Violence

(23) women who faced physical violence from their husbands and who, as a result, had medical treatment, reported the incidents to the police or took their cases to court.

- 1- **Age:** Age varied between 21 and 43 years, and a large proportion were between 24 and 34 years old

Table One: Ages of Sample

Age	21-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	Total
Number	3	8	9	2	1	23
%	13.04%	34.78%	39.13%	8.70%	4.34%	100%

- 2- **Employment:** More than half (52.17%) were housewives, 34.78% were manual workers and the rest (13.04%) were office employees.

These results confirm the doctors, solicitors and judges opinions, ie. The women were of low cultural and economic background and so was the case with their husbands as the women reported themselves.

- 3- **Educational Level:** 39.13% of the sample were illiterate and 34.78% could read and write but without completing primary education.

Table Two: Education Level of Sample

	Illiterate	Read & Write	Primary Education	Secondary Education	Total
Number	9	8	2	4	23
%	39.13%	34.78%	8.70%	17.40%	100%

- 4- **Types of Violence:**

47.83% Hard and inhumane beating
 21.74% Suffered broken bones
 13.04% Subjected to insults and ejection from the house
 8.70% Were divorced without reasons
 4.35% Were accused of adultery
 4.35% Their husbands committed adultery

- 5- **Perpetrators of Violence:** 86.96% of perpetrators of violence were the husbands, 8.70% were the brothers in law and the rest (4.35%) were the mothers in law.

- 6- **Reasons for the Attack:** The reasons given by the women were as follows:

A Cruelty, hegemony and backwardness of the husbands
 B Interference by the husbands' families
 C Negative view of women

- D Lack of protection of women by the society at large
- E Poor standard of living and lack of provision by the husbands.
- F Lack of caring by the husband and staying late outside the home.

- 7- **Self Pitying:** All the women had a negative view of themselves, that they had no one to defend them and that they were rejected even by their own families.
- 8- **Feeling Prosecuted:** All the women felt that there was injustice and that they were aggrieved by society in general and by men in particular.
- 9- **Feeling Inferior:** All the women in the sample said they felt inferior and this had a major impact on their psychological life and the up-bringing of their children.⁸
- 10- **Participation by the Husband:** 86.95% said that their husbands did not and would not help or participate in the housework. Only 8.70% said their husbands sometimes helped in the housework.

Table Four: Husbands Participation in Housework

Did the Husband Help ?	Never	Always	Most Times	Some Times	Rarely	Total
Number	20	0	0	2	1	23
%	86.95%	0%	0%	8.70%	4.35%	100%

- 11- **Process of Marriage:** 73.91% said their marriage was organized without their consents.

Table Five: Process of Marriage

Did You Give Consent to your Marriage?	Yes	No	Total
Number	6	17	23
%	26.09%	73.91%	100%

- 12- **Age Difference:** 17.40% of the women were 20-25 years younger than their husbands and 34.78% were 15-19 years younger.

Table Six: Age Difference

Age Difference (Men Older Than Women)	9-5 Years	10-14 Years	15-19 Years	20-25 Years	Total
Number	6	5	8	4	23
%	26.08%	21.74%	34.78%	17.40%	100%

⁸ Table Three of the study showed 100% positive answers to the question of feeling inferior and, therefore, was omitted from the translation.

The Opinions of Doctors, Police Officers, Lawyers and Judges On Violence Against Women

To further understand the extent of violence against women, interviews were conducted with a number of people who had first hand experience of large group of women who suffered violence. They were questioned individually at their places of work to clarify their points of view on the reasons for and the type of violence against women.⁹

Person Interviewed	Number of people interviewed	Place of work & interview
Psychologists	2	Republican Hospital
Pathologists	1	Rezgary Hospital
Police Officers	4	Police Stations
Social Workers	6	The Offices of The Social Work
Judges	1	The Court
Detectives/Investigators	6	Police Stations
Doctors	3	Out Patients (Emergency) Hospital
Lawers	5	The Court
Women	10	The Union of Kurdish Women
Female Doctors	4	Obstetrics Hospital
Research Officers	3	Reform Centre
Total	45	

The Results¹⁰

- 1- **Age:** Violence affects all women of all ages, but young women of 15-25 years of age and married women of 20-35 years of age appear to be more susceptible to face violence.
- 2- **Educational Level:** 85% of women who faced violence were of low social and educational status, at least below expected average.

Table One: Level of Education

Education	Illiterate	Read & Write	Primary	Intermedi ate	Secondar y	Diploma & over	Total
Number	35	32	28	10	6	2	113
%	30.97%	28.31%	24.78%	8.85%	5.31%	1.77%	100%

⁹ All the interviews were conducted in October 2000

¹⁰ Some of the answers total more than 45 because the respondents gave more than one example

- 3- **Perpetrators of Violence:** It appears that most of the perpetrators of the violence are from amongst the family (the husband, the father, the brother, the cousins).

Table Two: Perpetrators of Violence

Relation	Husband	Father	Brother	Cousin	Uncle	Total
Number	35	37	25	20	6	123
%	28.45%	30.08%	20.32%	16.45%	4.87%	100%

- 4- **Reasons for the Violence:** The following table lists the reasons given for the violence against women.

Table Three: Reasons for the Violence

	Reasons	%
1	Low social standard & degraded women's status	88.88%
2	Ignores & the man's low educational level	84.44%
3	Lack of harmony between the couple	77.77%
4	Poverty and the lack of ability to satisfy the needs of the family	75.55%
5	Women's weakness and her negative role	71.11%
6	Forced marriage and age difference	68.88%
7	Men's hegemony and the negative view of women from childhood	66.66%
8	Inability to resolve family differences	60.00%
9	The pressure on man is finally directed at the woman	57.77%
10	Murder for adultery	55.55%
11	Problems with neighbors and the interference of the man against the women	53.33%
12	Quarrel between the man's family and the woman's family	51.11%
13	Rape	44.44%
14	Non-consent of the woman for her husband's second marriage	42.22%
15	The woman's quarrel with her husband	37.77%
16	Eviction of the mother in law from the house because of her quarrel with the wife	13.33%
17	Lack of attention by the husband	11.11%
18	No evidence of virginity at marriage	06.67%

- 5- **Type of Violence:** The sample's record show the types of violence as follows:

Beating 36.88%

Insults 32.78%

Broken bones and cuts 16.39%

Table Four: Type of Violence

Type of Violence	Beating	Insults	Cuts & Broken Bones	Murder	Forcibly investigate Virginity	Total
Number	45	40	20	12	5	122
%	36.88%	32.78%	16.39%	9.84%	4.09%	100%

6- **Extent of Violence:** It appears from the replies of the sample that violence against women in the Kurdish society is less than in other compatible societies in the region. This could be due to the fact that the Kurdish woman has more freedom particularly in the educated circles.¹¹ Nonetheless, it is still a phenomenon, which is on the increase due to the deterioration of the economical conditions and the breakdown in society.

Table Five: Extent of Violence

Is Violence a major Phenomenon	No	Yes but not major	Yes	Yes Major Phenomenon	Total
Number	30	5	2	8	45
%	66.67%	11.12%	4.43%	17.78%	100%

7- **Types of Violence Met During Their Work:** It appears that the sample comes across and deals with the following types of violence in the performance of their work.

- 1 Beating and physical attack.
- 2 Insults and eviction from the house.
- 3 Cuts and broken bones.
- 4 Murder and suicide.
- 5 Rape.
- 6 Lack of attention and break down in the sexual relationship.
- 7 Forced marriage.
- 8 Desertion and divorce.
- 9 Complaints about the husbands
- 10 Suspicion and accusation of adultery.

END

¹¹ This could also be due to the perception as to what violence means in real terms.

Violence Against Women A Field Study In Iraqi Kurdistan

Al-Amal Centre for Teaching & Training Statement of the Seminar at the end of The Field Study

Al-Amal Centre for Teaching & Training organized, in conjunction with a number of specialists in sociology and psychology, a seminar on 11 February 2001 to discuss the results of the field research on violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan carried out by Iraqi Al-Amal Association. The study, based on a pre-determined questionnaire, covered a varied sample of 2686 women.

The seminar which was under the patronage of Mr. Felek Aldeen Kakaee, the Minister for Culture, was titled "Towards Reconciliation and Against Violence in our Kurdish Society".

The contribution from the participants in the seminar included reviewing the findings of the study and proposing a number of recommendations for further development of the research. They also demanded an immediate action in order to stop "violence against women" and to improve their standard of education and safeguard their legitimate rights.

It was stressed that work should continue towards the real participation of women in society.

Al-Amal Centre for Teaching & Training
Iraqi Al-Amal Association, Kurdistan Branch
11/2/2001
