



# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & GIRLS

Reality and Indicators of Violence Against Women and Girls in  
the Kurdistan Region from the Point of View of Jurists

# ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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## Introduction

Crimes of violence against women are among the most serious challenges facing societies today, posing a grave threat to women's rights and dignity and presaging serious repercussions on the social, economic, and health fabric of societies, undermining stability and disrupting order in the community as a whole. In response to the negative effects of this phenomenon, societies have taken responsive measures, including legislation criminalizing acts of violence against women, and increasing penalties for such acts. In addition, preventive measures have been taken, including awareness-raising and education campaigns aimed at developing social and cultural awareness that recognizes the seriousness of this type of violence and promotes a positive shift towards equality and respect for women's rights. In turn, the Kurdistan Region has taken many measures to combat and reduce violence against women, including enacting many legislations to combat this phenomenon. In 2004, the Region's Parliament promulgated Law No. 43, suspending Article 144 of the amended Iraqi Penal Code No. 111 of 1969, with regard to offenses against the wife. In 2011, the Region issued its unique Law No. 8 on combating Domestic Violence in the Kurdistan Region-Iraq, whose definition of domestic violence includes physical violence and the marriage of minors. In addition, in 2015, the Region issued another law suspending article 409 of the Iraqi Penal Code, which makes the husband killing a wife in the event of adultery a "mitigating circumstance".

Despite the efforts and measures taken by the Region, occasional statistics on incidents and acts of violence against women continue to be a source of growing concern about the Region's struggle to address this phenomenon and reduce its factors and causes. In March 2023, the Kurdistan Regional Government announced statistics of the Ministry of Interior's Directorate General for Combating Violence against Women and the Family for 2022. These statistics show the registration of 15897 violence cases in the provinces and autonomous administrations during that year. Registered cases were distributed to the governorates and independent administrations as follows: 4,067 cases were registered in Erbil, 4,348 in Dohuk, and 5,411 in Sulaymaniyah, as well as 1,082 in Karmian, 624 in Rabrin, and 365 in Suran.<sup>1</sup> Although the reported figures reveal a decline in the number of registered violence cases compared to those registered in 2021, which reached nearly 22,000, the 2022 figure remains worrying. It indicates obstacles and challenges to combating violence against women in Kurdistan.

## The methodology of the report

To understand the complex and multifaceted nature of the phenomenon of violence against women in the Kurdistan region and identify the leading causes and motives for such violence, and in order to diagnose the most critical challenges facing efforts to combat it and identify obstacles to the implementation of laws and the provision of related services, this report uses a qualitative approach aimed at understanding the cultural, social and legal context that constitutes the background of such violence and contributes to its interpretation and control. In the first place, the approach involves interviewing specialists in the application and implementation of anti-violence legislation in the Kurdistan region, such as judges, prosecutors, lawyers, and members of reconciliation committees in cases of violence against women. To this end, 11 normative questions have been developed that address three main aspects: the assessment and analysis of the current situation of violence against women, the causes and motives of violence, and the challenges faced by institutions working to combat such violence and the recommended measures to overcome these challenges. Twenty-five interviews were conducted with prosecutors' judges, investigating judges, personal judges, family violence judges, legal advisers, and members of the reconciliation commission in Erbil, Suleimaniyah, Dohuk, and Halabja. The judges' feedback in the sessions that accompanied the report's preparation period was constructive.

The implementation of this report is part of a project named "Strengthening the Government's Capacity to Provide Effective Services to Address Gender-based Violence in the Kurdistan Region-Iraq", implemented by the Accepting Others Organization (AOO) and supported by UN Women. It included consultative and interactive sessions with prosecutors, judges, jurists, investigative judges, and family violence judges in the governorates of the Kurdistan Region, held in coordination with the Public Prosecutor's Office, the International Reports Response Office, and the Coexistence Directorate at the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs.

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1 <https://shorturl.at/vEHR6>

## Structure of the Report

The report consists of 12 sections, each presenting the interviewees' perspectives. Section One addresses violence against women in the Kurdistan Region. In contrast, Section Two addresses the most prominent indicators and phenomena of violence against women according to interviewees' experiences. Section Three presents the reality of violence against women in the Region's governorates, while Section Four presents the main causes and motives for violence against women. Sections Five and Six explore the challenges faced by institutions working to implement programs to address violence against women and how to put an end to or reduce the phenomena of violence against women in the Kurdistan region. Section Seven addresses legislation and laws that need to be developed in order to ensure more protection for women against violence, while Section Eight provides several measures that must be taken to ensure that women subjected to violence have more excellent protection, treatment, rehabilitation, and integration. Section Nine addresses recommended procedures and coordination mechanisms to raise awareness of and reduce the risks of violence against women, while Section Ten presents stakeholders' assessment of mechanisms for referring victims of violence to relevant authorities and how these mechanisms are developed. The type/quality of services relevant agencies provide to women subjected to violence is assessed and developed in Section Eleven. Finally, Section Twelve presents several stakeholders' recommendations.

### First: Assessment of Violence against Women in the Kurdistan Region

Generally speaking, there has been a tangible improvement in the last few years<sup>2</sup> concerning violence against women in the Kurdistan Region, as shown by the decline in some statistics and annual figures. Although cases of violence against women registered in the governorates of the Kurdistan Region are much lower than what can be seen in other areas of Iraq, they remain critical issues that need special attention.<sup>3</sup> The improvement in cases of violence against women in the Region is due to several factors. According to one view, "the decline in violence against women is attributable to the high level of awareness among young people and their increased appetite for higher education, in addition to low illiteracy rates and women's increased awareness of their rights. The role of women's organizations also contributes to raising awareness of society and urges it to make a real difference in the lives of women."<sup>4</sup>

According to a member of the Reconciliation and Social Reform Committee at the Directorate for Combating Violence against Women in Dohuk, "Generally, the situation of violence against women appears to have improved significantly compared to the rest of the years. This is thanks to media campaigns and the efforts of NGOs and the Directorate for Combating Violence against Women. Women's increased knowledge of their rights has also played an essential role in improving the overall image of the situation. The Government and State institutions' efforts to support women's protection and rights must not be overlooked. The concerted efforts of all these actors have improved the image and made reality better."<sup>5</sup>

On the possibility of reducing current figures for cases of violence against women, a legal adviser in the Region's Judicial Council stressed that the Region continued to experience cases of violence against women in rural areas where the clan was predominant, as well as in major cities, owing to difficult financial and economic conditions.<sup>6</sup> The link between violence against women and economic, social, and political conditions was emphasized by most interviewees. Consequently, the situation of violence against women in the Kurdistan Region has improved over time by increasing society's awareness and the intervention of relevant organizations and institutions, but challenges remain that make it difficult to reduce the phenomenon altogether. Consequently, the situation of violence against women in the Kurdistan Region has improved over time by increasing society's awareness and the intervention of relevant organizations and institutions. Still, challenges remain that make it difficult to reduce the phenomenon altogether. The economic, social, and political factor is at the forefront of these challenges.

On the other hand, some answers and comments indicated that violence was continuing and that statistics indicated an increase in the number of divorces - Erbil statistics for 2021 indicate that it registered 11600 marriage contracts in Personal Status Court. In return, the same court registered 10,500 divorce proceedings.<sup>7</sup> There is a problem in accessing accurate and periodic statistics; what is published in the media is not the final outcome.

2 Interview No. (4), July 2023.

3 Interview No. 1, July 2023.

4 Interview No. (17), July 2023.

5 Interview No. (15), July 2023.

6 Interview No. 5, July 2023.

7 Interview No. (20) August 2023

## Second: Indicators and Forms of Violence against Women

Indicators of violence against women symbolize signs and indications of different forms of violence against women. These indicators vary and include behaviors, acts, and manifestations of violence, whether physical, psychological, sexual, or economic violence, as well as other forms of abuse and discrimination that can have negative effects on women. In the view of some, some social phenomena, such as family disintegration and high divorce rates, are among the indicators of violence against women. Careful monitoring and understanding of these indicators contribute to developing effective strategies to reduce violence against women and work toward equality and social justice.

There are many indicators and forms of violence against women in the Kurdistan region. These indicators and forms of violence vary from one governorate to another and from one area to another. After analyzing the interviewed stakeholders' responses, it became clear that the following indicators and forms are among the most prominent indicators and forms of violence against women in the Kurdistan Region:

### 1. Physical Violence

One of the most visible indicators of violence against women in the Region is physical violence, which includes acts of assault, beatings, cruelty, and violence. Physical violence results in severe injuries and leaves women with permanent scars.<sup>8</sup> The use of physical violence against women may exacerbate the problem within the small family and extend it to the larger family of both husband and wife. Sometimes these problems may even reach the clan's range, specifically in areas where the tribal nature is predominant, as in the case of Khabat in Erbil governorate.<sup>9</sup> According to one of the judges interviewed, "90 percent of the registered violence is physical violence committed by men (spouses) against women, while 10 percent is committed by male brothers or relatives against women".<sup>10</sup>

### 2. Sexual violence

Sexual violence is another indicator of women's abuse and includes sexual assault, harassment and rape. Sexual violence causes deep physical, emotional, and psychological harm. Sexual violence is often rooted in a culture of entitlement and formation, where women are perceived as targets of male desire rather than as independent individuals who deserve respect.<sup>11</sup> According to one prosecutor, "The indicators of violence relate to the quality of interaction in communities, whether within or outside the family. Outside the family, there is violence in the workplace, where women are exploited. It is noted that the majority of indicators of violence before the courts relate to work, where women are physically exploited or forced to work in suspicious places. Within the family, there are issues of customs and traditions. If women stay at home, their problems are lower; working women are more vulnerable to violence than unemployed women."<sup>12</sup>

### 3. Verbal Violence and Threats:

Verbal violence and threats are indicators of violence against women. Although verbal violence and threats do not involve physical injury, they represent a form of psychological and emotional violence and can be more serious for the victim. Verbal violence includes the use of degrading, humiliating, and offensive words or phrases against women and may involve swearing insulting, and threats of physical violence. This type of violence can cause psychological harm, mistrust, fear, and surrender to psychological pressure. The threat is no less serious than physical violence, as it intimidates the victim and makes her feel unsafe and worried about her and her family's safety. In the Kurdistan Region, one of the most prominent indicators of violence against women, in addition to physical violence, is insult, slander, and threats, as evidenced by the frequent proceedings before the Region's courts relating to cases of verbal violence and threats.<sup>13</sup> In the view of some, social media is markedly used to commit verbal violence and threats against women. "Despite indications of an improvement in women's enjoyment of their rights and a decrease in violence against women, one of the most prominent indicators of violence against women is verbal harassment, particularly through social media, which is used negatively against women."<sup>14</sup>

8 Interview No. (2), July 2023.

9 Interview No. 5, July 2023.

10 Interview No. (11), July 2023.

11 Interview No. (2), July 2023.

12 Interview No. (13), July 2023.

13 Interview No. (12), July 2023.

14 Interview No. (17), July 2023.

#### 4. Family Problems and their Consequences

High divorce rates do not necessarily constitute a direct indicator of violence against women, and many factors tend to lead to higher divorce rates in society, such as social and economic changes, cultural transformations, the development of divorce laws and women's rights, and changes in marital and family attitudes. Violence against women may be one of several reasons for deciding to end marriage. Still, high divorce rates generally cannot be seen as a direct indicator of violence against women.

#### 5. Social Media Indicators

The majority of those surveyed and interviewed indicated that the indicators of violence resulting from the misuse of social media, the dissemination of images, defamation, and abuse against women, especially women active in the field of women's rights, had many consequences and often, caused acts of violence against girls and women.

However, most stakeholders were keen to mention divorce and various family problems as indicators of violence against women in the Kurdistan Region. According to one view, "Despite the existence of official statistics and the registering complaints about cases of violence, there are still many cases that are not registered and do not reach the relevant departments or organizations. But what is clear is the proportion of divorces that increase daily, indicating the perpetration of violence against women".<sup>15</sup> According to one expert, "The high number of cases relating to the application of the Law Combating Domestic Violence, most of which are brought by women, is a prominent indicator of violence against women; the more divorce cases and proceedings, the more negative evidence and indicator of increased violence against women."<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the increase in marital problems and the rapid occurrence of divorce a significant indicators in this regard.<sup>17</sup> This indicator, in the view of some, is not limited to divorce proceedings but includes a variety of actions related to family problems such as infidelity, abandonment of wife/husband, girls' escape from home and refuge in shelters,<sup>18</sup> and men's failure to perform their duties towards wife and family members.<sup>19</sup> However, this indicator must not be regarded as an accurate indicator of violence. In addition to not being a direct indicator, it must be noted that proceedings before the Region's courts, especially in Erbil governorate, are not related only to citizens of the Region; rather, a significant proportion of cases concern women from other areas of Iraq, such as Baghdad, Mosul and Kirkuk, who have inhabited the Kurdistan region because of circumstances which prompted them to do so or who have taken refuge in the Region to escape gender-based violence.<sup>20</sup>

#### **Third: Assessment of Violence against Women in the Governorate and the Difference between the Governorates**

The data received show a difference in violence against women between the governorates of the Region and other Iraqi governorates, owing to various factors such as customs, traditions, culture, awareness of women's issues, application of the law on Combating domestic violence in the Region unlike the rest of the governorates and women's enjoyment of greater rights and freedom to work, to travel, to choose clothes, etc.<sup>21</sup> However, the situation of violence against women in each of the Region's governorates does not appear to be the same as in other governorates, owing, among other things, to inaccurate statistics and the use of traditional means of conflict resolution, as well as cultural and social differences from one governorate to another.

There is uncertainty about the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the figures and statistics published on violence against women in the Region. According to one of the investigating judges, "Although statistics are inaccurate and sporadic, according to my experience, domestic violence cases are limited in Halabja governorate. The reason may not be the lack of violence against women but rather the social reality in certain areas. In some areas, social constraints prevent women from reporting cases of violence they face from their families. It is; therefore, necessary to treat statistics with caution and to take into account the circumstances and social and cultural factors when documenting and reporting cases."<sup>22</sup> "Similarly, one expert emphasized that lower statistics of violence against women in some areas, such as Halabja, did not mean that the level of violence in this area was lower than in others.

15 Interview No. 9, July 2023.

16 Interview No. 3, July 2023.

17 Interview No. 5, July 2023.

18 Interview No. 6, July 2023.

19 Interview No. (15), July 2023.

20 Interview No. (15), July 2023.

21 Interview No. (13), July 2023.

22 Interview No. 1, July 2023.

Rather, how laws are applied varies from city to city and is influenced by each city's environment, culture, and customs. In Sulaymaniyah, more complaints are lodged because of their larger population and people's growing awareness of the application of the law. Conversely, fewer complaints may be filed in other cities due to various factors,<sup>23</sup> including clan interference in disputes. In the Erbil governorate, many marital disputes are resolved using traditional means to resolve disputes by reaching a settlement and understanding between individuals within the clan. Therefore cases of violence associated with such disputes are not brought before the courts. They are not officially registered in the courts, which prevents providing support and protection for women at risk of violence.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, statistics on violence against women, which do not appear to be accurate, cannot be relied upon and are often published to highlight the activity of institutions working to combat violence against women. Sulaymaniyah appears to have lower rates of violence than the Dohuk and Erbil governorates. Even in the capital, Erbil, there is a low level of violence compared to rural areas such as Khabat and others.<sup>25</sup> In the governorate of Dohuk, the situation has improved owing to women's ability to file complaints, access courts, and seek assistance, and the decline in illiteracy rates, which have contributed significantly to the process of women's empowerment.

What is concluded is that the responses provide a similar assessment of the reality of violence in the Region's governorates, most of which emphasize the inaccuracy of statistics on violence against women and that differences in levels of violence from one governorate to another, and even within the governorate itself, are attributable to customs, cultures and social conditions prevailing in each area.

#### **Fourth: Causes and Motives for Violence against Women**

Violence against women is a complex social phenomenon influenced by several factors, and its manifestations vary across cultures and societies. By analyzing the responses about the most prominent causes and motives for violence against women, the causes and motives for violence against women can be categorized into major groups, including:

##### **6. Weak society culture and lack of respect for women**

The lack of understanding of each other and the weak culture of society about how women are treated, the lack of respect for their views,<sup>26</sup> and the lack of a perception of women's place within the social system<sup>27</sup> are often significant factors in the perpetration of violence against women.

###### **1. Traditional education and patriarchal culture:**

The causes and factors of violence against women include patriarchal education, which remains dominant in a society that continues to be dominated by patriarchy and its imposition within and outside the home, lack of awareness, and uneven culture between spouses resulting in limited or inconsistent understanding and harmony.<sup>28</sup> In a society such as the Kurdistan Region, many men still pride themselves on violence against women and regard it as their privilege.<sup>29</sup> Men's fear and grave concerns about changing habits, how men and women treat each other and the new patterns of behavior of wives and children constitute a cause for violence to counter such change.<sup>30</sup>

###### **2. Economic and Social Factors:**

According to one view,<sup>31</sup> economic, ideological, and social motivations are the most widespread drivers of violence against women, but the economic factor comes first. Another view<sup>32</sup> links the economic factor of high unemployment with limited basic services such as water, electricity, high living costs, and temperature rises, all of which may increase stress and prompt one to unload his anger on the closest people such as the wife and children. One judge explained that, in many cases, the causes of divorce or violence were trivial or a result of tradition or growing demand for unnecessary needs, which required an ongoing educational program for families facing family problems due to the economic situation.<sup>33</sup>

###### **3. Religion**

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- 23 Interview No. 9, July 2023.  
24 Interview No. (12), July 2023.  
25 Interview No. 5, July 2023.  
26 Interview No. 1, July 2023.  
27 Interview No. 6, July 2023.  
28 Interview No. 3, July 2023.  
29 Interview No. (15), July 2023.  
30 Interview No. (16), July 2023.  
31 Interview No. (4), July 2023.  
32 Interview No. 5, July 2023.  
33 Interview No. (23) August 2023.



Wrong understanding of religion and misinterpreting and misapplying its rules are among the factors of violence against women. For example, misinterpreting the Quranic verse: “Men are superior to women” often encourages violence.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, some men view the issue of polygamy as giving them a “legitimate right” to remarry and resort to the use of force to enjoy this right.

#### 4. Other Causes and Factors:

Improper use of various social media is one of the factors influencing violence against women. The sensitivity of the father, husband, or brother to the use of such means by women, whatever the nature of the use, is a major cause of many cases of violence against women.<sup>35</sup> Some people add social inequality (a woman’s marriage to a man who is financially, culturally, or socially below her level) to the list of factors and causes of violence.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the absence of social justice, the stark differences in wealth between classes, the widespread presence of nightclubs and cafes and the prevalence of drug abuse are seen as having a role in increasing marital and family problems, severely affecting individuals’ behavior and thus leading to criminal acts.<sup>37</sup> Other factors include the underperformance of courts and institutions related to cases of violence against women and impunity for those responsible for violence.<sup>38</sup> One of the reasons or other factors emphasized by the majority of interviewees is that “Often the delay in settling the cases or detaining the men and releasing them afterward become reasons for committing violence because, according to traditional Eastern customs, men are humiliated for being imprisoned because of complaints filed by their wives.”<sup>39</sup>

Violence against women is a complex phenomenon, and its causes and factors cannot be classified into one or a few factors. Violence is a result of the interaction of several factors that overlap with each other. It should be noted that these causes and factors may vary from one case of violence to another, with each case of violence having its causes and factors leading to it.

### **Fifth: Ways to Reduce Violence against Women in the Kurdistan Region**

The problem of violence against women is a complex and serious social phenomenon that requires effective intervention to reduce it. The Kurdistan Region, like the rest of the world, faces this problem, which affects women’s lives and restricts their opportunities and freedom. Based on the replies, ways to reduce violence against women in the Region include promoting awareness and strengthening women’s self-confidence and rights, raising awareness of women’s rights in particular and human rights in general, and utilizing the religious factor to disseminate a culture of opposition to violence against women.

#### 5. Raising Awareness and Strengthening Women’s Self-Confidence:

Raising awareness of women’s rights and their full and integrated role in society is essential in reducing cases of violence against women. When women feel important and have complete confidence in themselves, they can deal better with problems and seek support and assistance when needed. Building and strengthening such awareness and confidence requires increasing the number of specialized offices dealing with violence against women issues in all regions and cities and providing hotlines for dealing with problems. The Government must pay attention to and provide ongoing support to organizations working on domestic violence.<sup>40</sup>

#### 1. Public awareness of women’s rights:

Awareness-raising programs focusing on the rehabilitating of individuals entering into marriage, including training on how to deal with a partner and building sustainable family relationships, and the importance of obtaining advice and guidance on how to address problems, will contribute to promoting mutual understanding and respect between partners and promoting awareness of women’s rights and equality within marriage.<sup>41</sup> At another level, awareness-raising and education projects and programs should be implemented for women and men in villages and rural areas with less awareness of violence issues. Local councils can participate in this area and play an essential role in

34 Interview No. (15), July 2023.

35 Interview No. (10), July 2023.

36 Interview No. (11), July 2023.

37 Interview No. 5, July 2023.

38 Interview No. (14), July 2023.

39 Interview No. (22) August 2023

40 Interview No. 1, July 2023.

41 Interview No. 3, July 2023.

supporting efforts to combat violence and providing the required support to affected women.<sup>42</sup> It is also important to conduct awareness-raising campaigns on legislation on women's rights and violence against women and to organize ongoing seminars to raise society's awareness of the importance of implementing laws and implementing legislation and practical actions aimed at reducing violence against women.<sup>43</sup>

## 2. Proper Utilization of Religion

With the development of technology and high rates of daily internet use, the need to properly utilize religious preaching in our society, which is impacted by the development of technology, is increasing. Proper utilization of the role played by religion is essential because violence is not only an issue of the husband-wife relationship. Recently, there was an increase in cases in which mothers and fathers filed complaints against their children. In such cases, children are imprisoned for up to 10 days or more for threats, abuse, beatings, use of inappropriate words, and substance abuse. This increase necessitates using religious preachers with qualifications and experience to affect society positively and contribute to its orientation towards positive behavior and noble values. The goal is not to make the whole society pious but to promote high human values and good morals in general.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, cooperation with mosques in disseminating knowledge about the risks and negative effects of the continued spread of violence in society will have positive results.<sup>45</sup> Undoubtedly, in a society where tribalism continues to prevail, awareness-raising and education programs that support tolerance, respect, and anti-violence values will significantly impact the rejection of gender-based violence.<sup>46</sup>

## 3. Development of laws and legislation:

Although there are a considerable number of laws and legislation that have helped to guarantee women's rights and reduce violence against them, specialized opinion holders have pointed to the need to develop and amend several laws, including the Domestic Violence Law, the Juvenile Welfare Law, the Personal Status Law, certain provisions of the Penal Code, the activation of the Law/Instruction Divorced Women's Aid Fund, and the activation of the rule played by the Public Prosecution.<sup>47</sup>

## 4. Strengthening the role of educational institutions:

As individuals at all levels have the impact or be impacted by receiving education, and as the education programs and curricula lack clear lessons on laws and awareness about the causes and consequences of domestic violence, education programs, and curricula require a comprehensive national plan to enhance women's status in the curriculum and ensure their rights in accordance with international standards. This will help make individuals of both sexes aware of what family violence is and how to avoid its negative impact in a manner consistent with cultural and technological development.<sup>48</sup>

## 5. Enhancing the role of the media:

Many of the opinions in the interviews indicated the importance and impact of the media on society, in particular, social media. Accordingly, a regular plan must be made to activate media roles and launch media campaigns to address and reduce violence against women and domestic violence. The plan must be made through coordination between the Directorate General of Domestic Violence and the relevant government institutions to allocate an annual budget for this matter and carry out campaigns throughout the year on various issues.<sup>49</sup>

## Sixth: Challenges facing institutions to combat violence against women

Institutions to combat violence against women face many challenges that negatively affect the efficiency and functioning of their work. One of these challenges is society's weak awareness of the functioning of these institutions.

42 Interview No. (4), July 2023.

43 Interview No. (15), July 2023.

44 Interview No. (13), July 2023.

45 Interview No. (10), July 2023.

46 Interview No. (4), July 2023.

47 Interview No. (24) August 2023

48 Interview No. (22) August 2023

49 Interview No. (24) August 2023

Furthermore, the lack of financial and human resources needed by these institutions affects their ability to support and assist women victims of violence. These institutions also face difficulty coordinating and working with different stakeholders on violence against women, which affects the complementarity of efforts and the effective response to the problem. The main challenges facing these institutions are as follows:

### 1. Social and cultural challenges:

The community's perception of the role of the Centers for Combating Violence against Women remains one of the most prominent challenges facing them. Many believe these centers play a negative role in the family's disintegration and fragmentation and that women who resort to such centers are misfits". According to a judge in Halabja, the attempt to establish a shelter center for battered women was met with social opposition under the pretext that establishing the center was an attempt "to spread corruption and prostitution in the region.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, the attempt to revise the Law on Combating Domestic Violence faced considerable fanfare and opposition. Organizations that have initiated awareness-raising campaigns on this law in schools have faced media indifference and have even been improperly attacked and criticized through the media.<sup>51</sup> Hence, challenges to the effective implementation of the Law against Violence against Women are demonstrated by people's lack of understanding of the reality of the work of relevant organizations and institutions and the misconception that these organizations and institutions are working towards misleading women under the pretext of defending their rights.<sup>52</sup> Among other social challenges is the complainant's inability to resist pressure to concede and withdraw the complaint. After responding to pressure from the brother or a wife's relative, many complaints were waived, which may have social consequences when not responded.<sup>53</sup>

### 2. Human resources challenges

According to one view,<sup>54</sup> centers for combating violence against women and related facilities such as shelters suffer from a lack of unified programs providing the necessary protection and rehabilitation for abused women. Shelter centers lack specialists in rehabilitating battered women, which makes the need for psychiatrists and family relations experts necessary. In the opinion of some people,<sup>55</sup> the problem is not only the lack of specialized human resources, but one of the most significant challenges is the lack of belief and conviction of people working in government institutions, such as police officers and investigators, about the importance and relevance of the law against domestic violence. Consequently, if there is no obligation and conviction on the part of these workers about the importance of the Law, the implementation of the Law will not be effective.

### 3. Structural and financial challenges

Almost all judges, prosecutors, lawyers, and experts interviewed agree that institutions that combat violence against women suffer from limited government funding and support to carry out their work effectively. Lack of financial support hinders institutions' efforts to combat violence against women and limits their capacity to expand their work programs. These institutions need sustained support and adequate resources to provide services for violent women victims and help them break the cycle of violence. One of the main disadvantages of these institutions is the acute shortage of shelters and the lack of accommodation for battered women in a manner that ensures that they are separated from the rest of the women hosted in these centers for other reasons unrelated to gender-based violence. Each group of women must have a shelter center that meets its needs and provides the necessary recovery and rehabilitation support.

### 4. Organizational challenges:

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50 Interview No. 1, July 2023.  
51 Interview No. 9, July 2023.  
52 Interview No. 7, July 2023.  
53 Interview No. (13), July 2023.  
54 Interview No. 3, July 2023.  
55 Interview No. 6, July 2023.

Challenges arise from some imbalance in the organization and working methods of institutions. These include the lack of coordination and joint action among the institutions concerned the lack of specific mechanisms to follow up on the treatment of abused women,<sup>56</sup> the inability of communications and complaints to reach stakeholders in a specific manner, and the receipt of such complaints in various ways.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, there is an urgent need for a structured mechanism to deal with violence against women. The current provisions of the Law do not help in this regard. There is a weakness in the work of institutions that combat violence against women regarding the means and methods available to deal with domestic violence. There is no transitional period between receiving complaints and confronting the effects of problems related to domestic violence and the process of finding appropriate solutions.<sup>58</sup> Another view<sup>59</sup> is that if the battered women's protection programs are to be continued and sustained, it is not enough to provide rehabilitation to only one party in violence cases; the other party (responsible for violence) also needs rehabilitation and awareness. After the expiration of his sentence, the latter will return freely, and he may repeat violence if he is not adequately rehabilitated and sensitized. Therefore, rehabilitation and awareness-raising should be provided to both the battered woman and the violent perpetrator if the recurrence of future violence cases is to be avoided.

### **Seventh: Legislation needs to be developed to ensure greater protection for women against violence**

Since Law No. 8 of 2011 on Combating Domestic Violence in the Kurdistan Region-Iraq is the main law relating to domestic violence in general and violence against women in particular, it is natural that this Law is the focus of the responses of those interviewed. However, reference was made to other relevant laws.

#### **1. Law on Combating Domestic Violence in the Kurdistan Region:**

According to one of the points of view, the Law on Combating Domestic Violence in the Kurdistan Region is considered a developed law in protecting women's rights and combating violence against them. However, the lesson is not only to pass laws but also to develop effective mechanisms to implement these laws and deal with violent situations. Attention needs to be paid to how to address violence-related problems and situations. Divorce, for example, is not always one of the correct remedies for problems; In contrast, prevention and rehabilitation constitute the most suitable and appropriate solution.<sup>60</sup>

Contrary to the above view, the Law on Combating Domestic Violence in the Kurdistan Region is one of the legislations that needs to be amended and reviewed and requires review sessions among the executive organs of the Directorate for Combating Domestic Violence, the judicial investigators, the Public Prosecution, investigating judges and women's organizations. Under this view, the Law on Combating Domestic Violence must be amended to ensure women's protection from violence and their rights. On the face of it, this law appears as a woman's protector, but years after its implementation, it has been shown to increase domestic violence incidents against women. This is because this law does not balance both sides of the problem, giving everything to women and robbing men of the most important thing: their responsibility, dignity, and appreciation in the eyes of their wives and children. This makes some men face difficulties in dealing with the law's application, sometimes leading to an increase in divorce cases. The Law on Combating Domestic Violence may play a role in many divorce proceedings. Although this is not formally recognized or documented in the courts' records, reality suggests that this law influences such cases. In addition, men arrested for domestic violence cases face insult and restrictions on their dignity and manhood. A man's arrest for several days or weeks can negatively affect him. Therefore some men find divorce the only way to get rid of those painful effects, despite the complexities of family breakup and its effects on children and their future. To resolve this imbalance, legal mechanisms must be in place to ensure protection and justice for all, including women and men. The Law on Combating Domestic Violence should be amended in a way that balances everyone's rights and ensures the protection of individuals who are victims of violence regardless of their gender. Achieving social stability and reducing violence in the region requires integrated and sustained efforts aimed at several aspects and based on gender balance, equity, and equal rights and opportunities for men and women.<sup>61</sup>

#### **1. Other relevant laws:**

56 Interview No. (15), July 2023.

57 Interview No. (16), July 2023.

58 Interview No. (15), July 2023.

59 Interview No. (3), July 2023.

60 Interview No. 3, July 2023.

61 Interview No. 5, July 2023.

From some perspectives,<sup>62</sup> the Law on Combating Domestic Violence should not be viewed alone. Still, it should be examined within a comprehensive set of laws that protect women and guarantee their rights because all rights are interrelated. On this basis, there is an urgent need to review all laws relating to women and domestic violence and develop new implementation mechanisms. These include the Law on Preventing the Misuse of Communications Devices in the Kurdistan Region. There is an urgent need to amend specific articles of Iraq's Penal Code relating to sexual abuse and the protection of children. The need to amend the Law on Personal Status, which had been amended positively, particularly with regard to the issue of polygamy, particularly its provisions relating to the custody and right of access to children, showed that many of the problems relating to the application of those provisions had complicated the situation and caused additional tension between the parties.<sup>63</sup> Other legislation requiring amendment in the Region are the Minors' Welfare Law, the Juvenile Law, and the Labor Law, and there is a need to amend the Enforcement Law since, at present, decisions were not sufficiently implemented or, if implemented, women did not have full rights. The Implementation Law is a fundamental problem that impedes women's full enjoyment of their rights.<sup>64</sup>

In amending or promulgating new laws, it is essential that competent authorities participate and that women's views be taken into account meaningfully; because the issue and problem directly belong to women. Women should be actively involved in drafting laws and legislation on their issues and be instrumental in their decision-making. Participation should not be limited to religious actors and organizations, but women should be genuine partners in that process.<sup>65</sup>

### **Eighth: Measures to be taken to ensure the protection, treatment, rehabilitation, and integration of women at risk of violence**

To ensure protection, treatment, rehabilitation, and integration for women at risk of violence, several measures have been proposed that can be taken to ensure greater protection and adequate and effective support for women. Proposed measures include increasing the number of women's shelters, accelerating the establishment of such centers in areas without centers, opening special shelters for women victims, and developing their rehabilitation and recovery programs. Finally, the authority of the Directorate for Combating Violence against Women has been developed.

#### **1. Increasing the number of shelters and protection centers:**

The number of shelters should be increased and effectively monitored<sup>66</sup> to ensure the security of their residents. In this context, the process of combating violence against women consists of two basic phases. The first is the pre-violence phase, an important stage in which all preventive action must be taken as a first stage. However, when women are subjected to violence, which is the second stage, they must be treated and provided with all the necessary psychosocial and legal support in an atmosphere of safety and reassurance. This means they must be protected before returning to society as rehabilitated persons. Therefore, it is important to have safe shelters for women subjected to violence. However, despite the Centre's importance, there is no shelter for this purpose in Halabja governorate, which requires the rapid establishment of such a center.<sup>67</sup> Given the importance of shelters for women subjected to violence, it is necessary to relocate women to shelters in major cities to ensure they are adequately protected.<sup>68</sup> However, it must be borne in mind that the process of referring violent cases from outside the city to places where appropriate protection, treatment, and rehabilitation requirements are provided according to the level and type of violence they have experienced faces difficulty owing to the high number of cases.<sup>69</sup> Attention should be paid to existing shelters; for example, in Erbil, there is only one center with limited space and services, which receives all groups of women, including mentally disabled women, pregnant women, and women with their children. In this case, many women hesitate to file a complaint against their spouses and stay in this center. The center has several problems and needs to expand the space to provide additional rooms, gardens, and spaces for children's amusement. It has been noted that more than 30 women reside in one hall.<sup>70</sup>

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62 Interview No. (4), July 2023.

63 Interview No. 5, July 2023.

64 Interview No. (13), July 2023.

65 Interview No. (13), July 2023.

66 Interview No. 1, July 2023.

67 Interview No. (14), July 2023.

68 Interview No. 8, July 2023.

69 Interview No. (10), July 2023.

70 Interview No. 5, July 2023.

## 1. Opening shelters for women subjected to violence

One of the imbalances in the operation of shelters is the combination of all groups of women, regardless of whether they have committed crimes, engaged in prostitution, or experienced domestic violence. It is more appropriate to classify and differentiate these categories and host each in a specific center suited to their situation and reason for being in the center. It is, therefore, necessary to establish shelters for each case, as such classification and segregation can help reduce violence and provide appropriate rehabilitation for each group according to their situation. Women who have committed crimes may need some kind of rehabilitation, different from women who are subjected to violence and need psychological support.<sup>71</sup> Rapid rehabilitation and recovery also require opening specific centers to accommodate violence-prone cases according to their specificities, level of violence, and basic needs to be provided.<sup>72</sup>

## 2. Developing rehabilitation and recovery programs:

Additional measures are urgently needed to deal with the problem of violence against women. In addition to improving existing measures, new measures should be developed to ensure better protection and rehabilitation for women. One of the primary measures that women victims of violence need is their rehabilitation and empowerment. Empowerment is an effective tool to help psychological and physical recovery from experiences of violence. Through empowerment, women can have greater control over their lives and build a better future. Empowerment can be achieved by providing psychological and moral support, training, vocational rehabilitation, and education. Furthermore, the shelters must be equipped with qualified and trained personnel to effectively deal with the infected women and specialist who takes into account the sensitivity of some cases. The center's staff must be aware of the culture of combating violence and be experienced in providing the necessary support.<sup>73</sup> The lack of psychological support, treatment, and rehabilitation programs is a pressing issue that requires developing and expanding protection centers by including such programs and involving members of the victims' families.<sup>74</sup> It is not enough for shelters to provide protection and security to the victims, but rather to become specialized rehabilitation and recovery centers to achieve their purpose.

## 3. Developing the powers of the Directorate for Combating Violence against Women

One of the most important measures to be taken is the development of the powers of the Directorate for Combating Violence against Women to improve protection procedures and to build safe shelters that provide protection, safety, and necessary needs in accordance with the needs of groups at risk of violence, such as pregnant women, adolescent girls, mothers of young children and abused women in need of psychiatric treatment. Such measures must be comprehensive to ensure the development of an effective system. If these measures are not achieved, this may entrench a culture of violence as part of the family's and society's life philosophy.<sup>75</sup>

## 4. Activating the role of the Public Prosecutor:

One of the most prominent ideas emphasized by the majority of participants in the interviews is the activation of the role of the Public Prosecution as it plays and has a significant impact on the reduction of violence through the development of an annual plan and programs to integrate the Public Prosecution and the development of measures to be active in this area and the need to make cases of domestic violence confidential because they concern the dignity and privacy of individuals of both sexes.<sup>76</sup>

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71 Interview No. (12), July 2023.

72 Interview No. (16), July 2023.

73 Interview No. 3, July 2023.

74 Interview No. (4), July 2023.

75 Interview No. (15), July 2023.

76 Interview No. (25) August 2023

## **Ninth: Recommended coordination procedures and mechanisms to raise awareness of and reduce the risks of violence against women**

By extrapolating the responses provided, the awareness of violence against women can be raised, and the risks of violence can be reduced through the following procedures and coordination mechanisms:

1. Since violence against women is a social disease, all stakeholders must work hard and coordinate to address it and eradicate it from its roots. Work must not be restricted to women only, but awareness-raising should be general and target all members of society. It should be recognized that not all cases of violence against women are committed by men, but often the source of violence is another woman. Therefore, this awareness benefits all, helps change the culture of violence, and promotes understanding and respect among members of society.<sup>77</sup>
2. Coordination and cooperation between institutions and stakeholders are critical to reducing and limiting violence. Judicial and educational institutions can contribute to awareness-raising lectures on violence cases and how to prevent them. Awareness-raising lectures should include information on domestic violence and its negative effects on individuals, the family, and society. These lectures should also focus on raising awareness of women's and children's rights and how to obtain assistance in the event of violence.<sup>78</sup>
3. Actions require a focus on awareness-raising and attention to developing children's capacities and enhancing their self-esteem so that they feel the importance of their role in society and their ability to fulfill their aspirations and meet their needs. Children's sense of pride and trust must be strengthened and directed to respond positively to the challenges facing them. The family should play an important role in the formation of children and the development of their personalities. It should help them develop correct behaviors and guide them towards positive values and good behavior.<sup>79</sup>
4. Periodic seminars and conferences should be held to present the Anti-Domestic Violence Law and raise society's awareness of it. All segments of society should be aware of this law and its importance. Television and radio programs can play a vital role as neutral institutions in disseminating awareness, monitoring the law's implementation, and identifying challenges.<sup>80</sup>
5. Society must be directed and awareness-raising promoted on the Anti-Domestic Violence Law in all sectors. This law should be introduced to every family, and everyone must be aware of its importance and how it is implemented, and know how to deal with cases of violence and reach the relevant authorities.<sup>81</sup>
6. Coordination between police stations and courts, amendment of certain laws, and enactment of new laws to help reduce violence against women and family members. When addressing domestic violence, a woman is not what the discussion is all about. But, she is, rather, part of the family. Therefore, emphasis must be placed on the family as a whole. Amendments must be made to laws that have passed many years and no longer correspond to reality and the evolution of methods of violence.<sup>82</sup>
7. Executive bodies, such as the police, need to develop their capacities to contribute to women's awareness of their rights, and information can play a significant role in raising awareness of women's rights. Organizations and security authorities must coordinate their efforts to raise women's awareness of their rights. Most women in the Kurdistan Region and the rest of Iraq are unaware of their rights and only become aware of them when they face a problem and reach the courts, and are shocked to know these rights.<sup>83</sup>
8. Combating violence against women is an effort that a single person, party, or institution cannot undertake. Still, it is a joint action in which all legislative, executive, and judicial stakeholders must play a role. There are many practical mechanisms such as revamping the educational system in educational institutions, working with religious leaders to renew religious discourse, looking at

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77 Interview No. 1, July 2023.

78 Interview No. 3, July 2023.

79 Interview No. 5, July 2023.

80 Interview No. 8, July 2023.

81 Interview No. (11), July 2023.

82 Interview No. (12), July 2023.

83 Interview No. (13), July 2023.

women's financial situation and providing them with appropriate employment opportunities, improving the judicial system and law enforcement, and conducting and holding awareness-raising sessions in different regions at all levels.<sup>84</sup>

9. Coordination mechanisms among the institutions concerned must be tight, transparent, and sensitive to the specificities of women at risk of violence. It is essential to open advisory offices in each region to provide extension services and to be a link between society, the Directorate for Combating Violence against Women, and the political parties' Community Reconciliation Committees.<sup>85</sup>
10. Coordinating efforts between the Government and NGOs to maximize the use of available resources and train teachers and students on the risks of violence against women and how to contribute to its reduction. There is a great need to involve teachers, especially those studying Islamic education, in these campaigns, as well as to encourage the community to participate actively in awareness-raising and education campaigns and to contribute to victims' support through programs organized within the community.<sup>86</sup>
11. Develop a coordination plan with the Public Prosecutor to follow up and resolve cases of violence and increase coordination between the Public Prosecutor and the Directorate for Combating Violence because of the impact of this role and its contribution to the continuous and prompt conduct of the proceedings, since delays often lead to an opportunity to practice or expand violence.<sup>87</sup>

### **Tenth: Evaluation of mechanisms for referring women subjected to violence to relevant bodies and how these mechanisms are developed**

According to the responses received, assessments of the mechanisms for referring victims of violence to stakeholders and how they are developed can be classified into three main groups. The first group concerns the weakness of existing mechanisms and the need for improvement and development. The second group focuses on the importance of women's presence and role in institutions for combating violence against women. The third group addresses the importance of improving inter-institutional coordination and unifying procedures and standards to combat violence and protect victims. These responses raise concerns about the lack of diverse options suited to the needs of abused women and the need for the current system of protection to develop the referral and shelter system to ensure that each victim is adequately protected individually.

#### **1. Need for improvement and development:**

The reality shows that existing protection mechanisms are not good, not programmed, and not appropriate to the situation of women who are subjected to violence, to the extent that several women are forced to waive protection because their mechanisms require modernization and development.<sup>88</sup> The development of the referral system is, therefore, necessary to ensure the effectiveness of procedures in dealing with cases of violence against women. It also meets battered women's needs and ensures their protection and safety.<sup>89</sup> Another aspect of existing mechanisms requiring modernization is the preservation of confidentiality and the development of mechanisms for reporting violence, whether by the victim herself or by family members and relatives. Reports often arrive, and after the response, the complainant informs that the "problem was over" and was only a "misunderstanding", but the violence and its effects remain unaddressed. To address this issue, a plan must be developed with the participation of the relevant ministries' judges and advisers to develop reporting mechanisms. Appropriate training should be provided to stakeholders' staff to deal with situations of violence effectively and sensitively. Coordination among the institutions concerned must be improved, and procedures and standards must be unified to combat violence and protect victims.<sup>90</sup>

#### **2. The importance of women's presence and role in institutions to combat violence against women:**

Women must be present in centers to combat violence against women and in shelters. They should be present whenever an action is taken. Women should also be instrumental in protecting these centers so they can be represented in all existing organs and participate in all measures, including reporting the complaints and implementing the process of transferring the battered women. Socially, these centers should be run only by women.

84 Interview No. (14), July 2023.

85 Interview No. (16), July 2023.

86 Interview No. (17), July 2023.

87 Interview No. (23) August 2023

88 Interview No. 1, July 2023.

89 Interview No. (4), July 2023



The picture presented to society must be clear and acceptable when a woman makes a complaint or seeks protection, and it is clear to everyone that she is going to a place run by women, not men. The presence of men alone in centers and offices concerned with combating violence against women exacerbates and complicates problems, as social considerations dominate women's movement and mobility.<sup>91</sup> Sometimes, some women do not know where to go in the event of violence and often go to the wrong place. The complainant must, therefore, be aware of the steps that must be taken when she goes to a center concerned with addressing violence against women. The referral and shelter systems must also be developed to ensure that not all women subjected to violence are placed in the same center and that there are different options suited to their specific needs.<sup>92</sup> It must be stressed again that sending all women exposed to violence to shelters faces constraints affecting them. The major constraint is the non-separation of the different cases. It must be stressed again that sending all women exposed to violence to shelters faces constraints affecting them. The major constraint is the non-separation of the different cases. And this problem starts from the moment the referral is made.<sup>93</sup>

A major disadvantage of the current referral mechanisms is that some authorities making the referral do not have a significant presence in the courts and suffer from limited interaction with violent cases. This means that they do not follow up on these issues well and do not have reports documenting the situations and submitting them to the court, which poses a challenge in providing the necessary support to the women subjected to violence.<sup>94</sup>

### **3. Importance of improving coordination among relevant institutions and unifying procedures and standards:**

Assessing the mechanisms' efficiency in achieving their objectives depends on good inter-institutional coordination and unification of the procedures and standards required for combating violence and protecting the victims.<sup>95</sup> Effective referral depends on coordination between various institutions and stakeholders, which requires a solid commitment to privacy principles and protecting people's lives. The person involved in the referral must be aware of the potential risks and follow security procedures to protect the confidentiality of personal information relevant to the abused woman. The person concerned with referral must also be aware of the services available to abused women and assist them in accessing these services safely and effectively.<sup>96</sup>

### **Eleventh: Assessment of the type and quality of services provided to women at risk of violence and how they are developed**

By extrapolating the responses provided, it becomes clear that the type and quality of services provided to women at risk of violence are reflected in the following observations:

1. Developing and expanding services for women at risk of violence is essential to ensure their needs are met and provided with the necessary support. This development can be achieved by operating qualified elements to work in these centers and developing mechanisms for providing support and services effectively and in a manner suitable to social conditions in the regions concerned.<sup>97</sup> In particular, more training should be provided to investigators to develop services and increase knowledge of the law's requirements and effective methods of dealing with domestic violence cases.<sup>98</sup> Another critical issue is the ongoing training of police and officers on mechanisms to address violence against women and the development of women's capacities to deal with cases of such violence. The active role of the police in preventing violence is to ensure the protection and support of affected women.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, the Centers for Combating Violence against Women operate with limited capabilities. Therefore, the number of women investigators in those centers must be increased to ensure a comfortable and favorable environment for women at risk of violence.<sup>100</sup>

2. Services provided remain below the required level and are still underfunded. Some centers for combating violence against women suffer from a lack of fuel supply for transporting abused women from the centers to the court, which must be addressed urgently. The other aspect of women's violence is the frequent postponement of

91 Interview No. 5, July 2023.

92 Interview No. 9, July 2023.

93 Interview No. (11), July 2023.

94 Interview No. (13), July 2023.

95 Interview No. (15), July 2023.

96 Interview No. (4), July 2023.

97 Interview No. (4), July 2023.

98 Interview No. 6, July 2023.

99 Interview No. (4), July 2023.

100 Interview No. 6, July 2023.

the cases related to them before the courts, particularly personal status cases and cases heard by the investigating courts. The resolution of the lawsuits is postponed due to the frequent official and religious holidays in Iraq and the Kurdistan region.<sup>101</sup>

3. The Centers for Combating Violence against Women operate diligently and continuously, making significant efforts to provide services and protection. However, the centers can only properly resolve some of the problems owing to the large number of cases, the shortage of administrative staff and competent staff, the lack of support, and a sufficient number of centers.<sup>102</sup> Because of this overcrowding, women's shelters cannot be considered safe and sustainable. Many resident women do not live normally and feel they live in conditions similar to prison.<sup>103</sup> To end this situation, the places responsible for the protection of women must be provided with quality services, and cases must be separated from each other in shelters. Abused women must not be placed in places where they are women who have committed acts contrary to public decency and morals. When women are referred to such authorities as the court or others, women must be disaggregated by type of crime, type of violence, place of arrival of women, and nature of their society. Furthermore, the programs and services provided by these authorities must be at the required level to enable women's rehabilitation, enable them to cope with violence, and start a new life.<sup>104</sup>

4. Many women residing in shelters are trapped between the centers' walls and cannot go out even for hiking purposes due to threats and persistent follow-up. Indeed, some women have been in these centers for 6 or 7 years. It is, therefore, essential to provide training programs such as sewing workshops to help such people develop their skills, obtain a livelihood, and enable them to integrate into the outside community after departure.<sup>105</sup> In addition to these courses, creating a well-being and comfortable environment within shelters, such as sports stadiums, gardens, and other facilities, is necessary.

5. In general, services for combating violence against women must be developed and improved to reach the required level of ambition. Protection, rehabilitation, and treatment procedures must be updated, and psychological support must be provided sustainably and comprehensively to include abused women's families. Attention should be paid to providing adequate services to adolescent girls and pregnant women who have experienced violence before the eyes of their children and families.<sup>106</sup>

## **Twelfth: Recommendations**

1. One way to reduce violence against women is to raise women's awareness of their rights and build and enhance their self-confidence. This requires an increase in the number of specialized offices dealing with violence against women in all regions and cities, especially in district and sub-district centers, because the lack of such offices and their limited access in different regions are among the reasons that impede women's promotion of self-confidence and communication with authorities that can help them protect or reduce their vulnerability to violence.

2. It is necessary to use the influential role of clergy in building a socially stable society free of all forms of violence by encouraging clerics to advocate, in their Friday speeches, for the values of tolerance, respect, and anti-violence, particularly gender-based violence, which has devastating effects on society in general, and on the family in particular. This effort can be supported by preparing the preachers and Imams and making the necessary changes to the Faculty of Islamic Law curriculum in a way that serves the purpose.

3. It is essential to combat stereotypes prevailing in the Region's directorates for combating violence against women and their associated shelters. To that end, a clear and transparent picture of the centers' work and the nature of the services provided should be provided, and the presentation and dissemination of personal success stories illustrating the reality of the centers' work should be encouraged. It is also essential to conduct a wide-ranging field study to survey married men's views on the services of these centers and what they are expected to react to if a wife or relative resorts to one of these centers. This study should draw realistic conclusions about the centers' responsiveness and make practical recommendations.

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101 Interview No. 5, July 2023.

102 Interview No. 9, July 2023.

103 Interview No. 7, July 2023.

104 Interview No. (12), July 2023.

105 Interview No. (13), July 2023.

106 Interview No. (15), July 2023.

4. To make the system for the protection of abused women effective and inclusive, it is necessary to develop standardized rehabilitation and protection programs targeting abused women. Such programs should include psychological, social, and legal support. This requires recruiting and training psychosocial rehabilitation specialists, including psychiatrists and family relations experts.

5. After more than a year since its implementation, it became necessary to conduct a comprehensive review of the Kurdistan Region's Law on Combating Domestic Violence and to involve all stakeholders. It is also essential that the comprehensive review of this law considers a certain gender balance and takes into account current social and economic conditions. One of the objectives of this comprehensive review must be to move towards a comprehensive code of provisions related to domestic violence. The development of such a code requires codifying the provisions of other legislation relating to domestic violence.

6. As a result of the high number of court cases, including many cases related to the application and implementation of the Law on Combating Domestic Violence and to avoid the harmful effects of postponing the resolution of lawsuits, it became necessary to increase the number of judges in domestic violence courts and the number of the investigators in domestic violence cases. It is also necessary to increase the number of staff and police elements in the Directorates for Combating Violence against Women or to recruit new women police officers who are trained to deal with cases of domestic violence and women at risk of violence.

7. A prerequisite for the success of any program is its ability to update and sustain. Government support and funding for directorates to combat violence against women and shelters should, therefore, not shrink day by day. On the contrary, such support and funding must expand, and existing shelters should be expanded and new shelters established, particularly in areas that still lack such centers. Existing shelters must be redesigned to provide an atmosphere of recreation for residents, including professional courses for residents and the establishment of new accommodation facilities such as parks and others.

8. The current reality of abused women's shelters shows that they are inadequate and do not play their role in rehabilitation and treatment. This is because it is a place that hosts all types of women, regardless of the nature of the reason for their presence in the center. This imposes a burden on the Centre's service delivery and causes fragmentation of its programs. Therefore, the need to accelerate the process of rehabilitation and recovery calls for opening special centers to accommodate violence-prone cases according to their specificities, the level of violence, and the basic needs required to be provided.

9. In protecting abused women, referral is the most important step that can either make the process work or cause it to fail. The development of the referral system is therefore necessary and vital to ensure the effectiveness of procedures in dealing with violence against women and to ensure that it meets abused women's needs and ensures their protection and safety. It is important to develop a unified referral system in which all the Region's directorates for combating violence against women ensure that confidentiality is maintained and orientate women according to the aim pursued. The individuals concerned with referrals must be trained on how to deal with cases sensitively and respectfully, and they must be able to provide support and assistance to abused women in order to overcome the challenges they face.

10. It is essential for the referral system to be implemented by female elements or employees, which would create a kind of safety and reassurance for women. The women's cadre should be present when taking all actions, including reporting the complaint and transferring the abused women. Socially, these centers should be run only by women's elements and cadres in terms of measures and actions directly related to working on abused women.

11. There is a need for the Government to pay attention to organizations working in the field of domestic violence, to provide them with ongoing support, implement partnership programs with them, develop plans according to the social environment of each region, and set up special projects to address domestic violence with the support of non-governmental organizations in various government departments, especially the relevant departments.

12. Increasing the number of women specialists in centers for combating violence against women and letting

them assume primary responsibilities. Many of the perceptions and opinions expressed by participants in the interviews confirmed that the presence of capable women who have the necessary experience and competence in such centers would enhance women's confidence in them and increase the interest of these centers in the women subjected to violence.

13. For the specialized centers for combating violence against women or the accommodation shelters to have confidence in women and their families and to provide a beautiful and clear picture of their work, well-trained consultant researchers are required to provide them with 24 hours of psychosocial support, monitor women's actions and determine the quality of support needed.

14. According to the majority of interviewees, there was agreement of opinions about the impact of social media as one of the causes of the prevalence of violence against women. It, therefore, requires that the role of social media platforms be particularly strengthened to help raise society's awareness of the dangers of violence against women and gender-based violence. The interview participants also stressed the need to establish a solidarity lobby between influential platforms and centers for violence against women, depending on the presence of active platforms in each region, to carry out awareness-raising campaigns on the responses to violence against women, girls, and boys.

15. Also among the recommendations made by the participants in this report was the focus on several ongoing awareness-raising programs in several directions by the various media and according to the dialects of each region in carrying out media awareness campaigns on the risks of widespread and persistent violence against women, such as campaigns on legal awareness and campaigns on the active role of centers for combating violence against women, media campaigns and year-round talk shows designed and implemented with the support of the Government and media institutions, particularly with regard to responses to violence against women and in coordination with directorates for combating violence against women.

16. Interviews revealed a major problem regarding community awareness about violent practices in society. This requires the development of boys' and girls' capacities at different levels of education to address domestic violence, such as taking action to prevent domestic violence and spreading legal awareness to address violence against women and boys through educational curricula that keep pace with societal developments.

17. According to information and interviews, there is a critical need to review some of the measures that have hampered the proper implementation of the law, namely community reconciliation committees, as they require the implementation of advocacy campaigns to activate their role, increase the number of their specialists and engage them in specialized training courses so that they can help solve problems and reduce violence resulting from recourse to law enforcement institutions.

18. As law enforcement is accompanied by a range of measures, this requires communication with some institutions, such as advisory offices for supporting families and women, especially those that serve as a showcase in some regions and do not exist in others. This requires a large-scale advocacy campaign to develop this mechanism to provide wider pre-marriage or family services in case of problems to reduce clan interventions and be a strong catalyst for achieving greater redress for victims.

19. With so many links and procedures that sometimes cause an increase and multiplication of the psychological effects of violence, the resolution of cases is delayed. There is, therefore, a need to expand the judicial investigator's power to reduce red tape and solve problems of domestic violence before it reaches the courts.

20. Interviews, as well as discussions, have shown that there is a need to make family violence investigation procedures confidential because they concern people's lives and privacy and are often the cause of the increase or expansion of violence due to widespread information on family problems, mainly because of the significant impact of community traditions and customs.

21. Since, according to many opinions, indicators of increased and widespread violence are the result of misuse of telecommunications devices, this requires the establishment of a committee specialized in telecommunications devices when verifying their contents to preserve people's privacy when complaints about misuse of telecommunications devices and social media tools are lodged.

22. A continuous campaign of coordination and cooperation between scientific research institutions and study centers is required to carry out ongoing studies on the prevalence of violence and its coping mechanisms and to keep abreast of recent developments in the fields of psychology, social developments, and the impact of technology.
23. Allocating an annual budget to the Divorced Women's Support Fund and establishing robust mechanisms so that divorced women are supported to earn a living for their dependents and families and give women simple loans to continue their lives without taking a risk or being afraid to fail to secure a living.
24. Activate the role of the private sector and private banks in developing an annual program to support women with low-interest grants and loans so that women, especially widows, and widows of war, are given the opportunity to obtain support as part of redress and support for active economic activities.
25. The establishment of a special police force named "judicial police" to be trained and qualified for performing their duties, as this will help to reduce routine and support regular investigations and summons processes.
26. Entrusting an official authority with responsibility for the upbringing and rehabilitation of children abandoned by their parents after divorce - an authority that enjoys credibility, trust, and support and operates in accordance with international standards.

**A list of individuals interviewed with reference only made to their responsibilities to preserve their work's privacy. It includes 14 men and 11 women:**

1. Investigating Judge of the Halabja Court of Inquiry;
2. Judge... Public Prosecution - Dohuk
3. Legal Adviser - Dohuk
4. Human Rights Adviser - Personal Status Court in Sheikhan District
5. Legal Adviser, Judicial Council, Erbil
6. Deputy Prosecutor, Sulaymaniyah
7. Human Rights Adviser - Sulaymaniyah Court;
8. Human Rights Adviser, Directorate of Violence against Women, Sulaymaniy
9. Jurist - Sulaymaniyah
10. Sulaymaniyah Personal Status Judge
11. Personal Status Judge - Sulaymaniyah;
12. Deputy Prosecutor, Erbil
13. Deputy Prosecutor, Erbil
14. Legal Adviser, Halabja Governorate Office
15. Member, Reconciliation and Social Reform Committee, Dohuk
16. Rights Adviser, Dohuk
17. Member, Reconciliation and Social Reform Committee, Dohuk
18. Rights Adviser, Sulaymaniyah Court.
19. Judge - Domestic Violence - Erbil
20. Prosecutor's Judge – Erbil
21. Rights Adviser - Halabja
22. Rights Adviser - Halabja
23. Investigating Judge - Dohuk
24. Personal Status Judge/Violence against Women - Dohuk
25. Investigating Judge - Dohuk



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