

Hidden Voices

Arab Women's Stories
of Economic Survival



Fem
Power

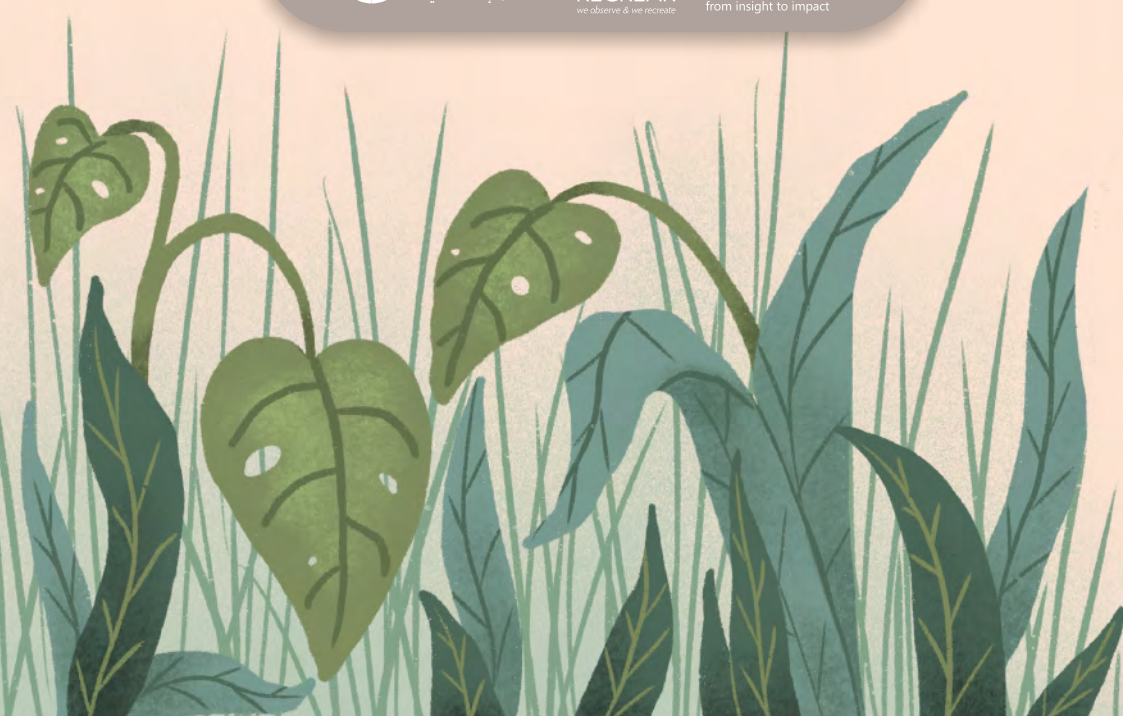
النسوية من أجل حقوق
النساء الاقتصادية



RECREAR
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INTEGRATED
from insight to impact





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TRUST THE PROCESS

Picture a woman confined to her home due to occupation; a mother carving out time from her caregiving duties to pursue education; a daughter enduring violence at home, and yet deciding to share her story; a woman dictating research notes from her hospital bed with a baby in her arms.

This booklet is intended as a tool to amplify the diverse voices of young women across Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Tunisia facing Economic Gender Based Violence [EGBV]. Here, we transmit the findings of a 9-month-long ^[1]Community-Based Participatory Research [CBPR][1] involving 18 local co-researchers [CRs] and engaging 85+ women in workshops and semi-structured interviews. As part of this research, we discovered what EGBV meant for the women involved. We accompanied co-researchers and research participants by creating a space for them to share their experiences. Hearing the stories you will read here was heartbreaking, moving, and confronting to us – we hope they will act as a wake-up call to consider the vast implications of EGBV and advocate for urgent systemic action.

This project took place in extremely difficult conditions for all women involved in the research [including CRs, the women engaged in the research process, and the leading research team]. Some participated in this research while their country is under occupation or amid a war. Others struggled with their day-to-day life, lacking access to the Internet or appropriate equipment. For other women, participation in this project was a question of juggling their different realities and identities as mothers, wives and daughters, carving out time for work, their interests, and their career advancements. Sharing these stories required extra precautions to ensure the safety of many participants. Significantly, most women engaging in this process as CRs had experienced GBV and economic GBV.

“Amira pointed out that in our group of CRs, we all have personal experiences related to EGBV along with all the women interviewed [as part of the research].”

[Wejdene, Local Lead Researcher, Tunisia]

The leading research team for this project was composed of 4 Local Researchers [LRs] from Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia [based in Lebanon, Jordan and Tunisia] and 3 Coordinators from Egypt, Italy and Morocco [based in Scotland, Spain and Jordan]. Each time we met, whether to prepare a learning session or to look at the data emerging from the process, we started with a check-in. These often turned into an hour-long sharing of our pain for witnessing the War on Gaza; sometimes, we'd feel demoralized, and then we reminded ourselves of the importance of continuing to carry out this project in the region. Throughout moments of collective grief and delays caused by personal or systemic challenges, this project served as a constant reminder to trust the process. We embraced the value of slowing down, letting go, and changing our approach to be in tune with the needs, processes, and energy of the people involved.

Unwillingly, we decided to withdraw the research from Gaza, keeping the project in other regions in Palestine. Due to the bombing in Lebanon, one of our LRs could not participate in the in-person Participatory Action Research^[2] training we hosted in Jordan. At times, it was hard to reconcile project timelines with the realities of the ecosystems we inhabit. We are grateful to the advisory board of the FemPower consortium for their flexibility and commitment – they accompanied us in making hard decisions and were with us all along the way as supportive partners.

Every woman involved, whether a CR, a Lead Researcher, or FemPower's consortium partners, went out of their way to support other participants with their aspirations, needs, and objectives. We all created safe environments to share stories and handled them with extra care. Our CRs stressed how meaningful it was for them and the women they engaged to have a platform for their stories, challenges, talents, and creativity.

We all poured empathy and solidarity into this project. One of the most striking aspects was the level of support participants provided to each other. Co-researchers collaborated to complete their research activities and develop their final crea-

tions. They self-organized to exchange notes and share ideas. Where there were low literacy or digital skills levels, they created a WhatsApp group to help one another. If there was a case of abuse or someone feeling unsafe but wanting to share their story, we combined our heads, hearts, and knowledge to find the best way to support them.

We hope the sentiment and the force women generate when they come together in solidarity erupts from this booklet. While these stories speak of harsh realities and the many layers of oppression women face, we want you to feel our power and transmit how we resist and create alternative worlds. We invite you to join us in creating these alternative realities, which are necessary not only for us as women but also for our partners, families, societies, and the systems around us.

The Lead Research Team,
Yasmine, Wejdene, Nouha, Mira, Joulia, Fiammetta

[1] Community-based research is also known as Participatory Action Research (PAR), and in this document, PAR and CBPR will be referred to interchangeably.

[2]Community-based research, also known as Participatory Action Research (PAR), will be referred to as PAR and CBPR interchangeably in this document.

What Is Inside This Booklet

This booklet is divided into three parts:

1

In Part One, we present:

- **The How** : our **methodology**;
- **The Who** : all the **people** involved in this project: the leading research team (including the Local Researchers and the Research Coordinators), the Co-Researchers, and the communities and women they engaged;
- **The What** : the **themes** and **questions** we learned about.

2

In Part Two, we share the **stories** that emerged from the learning journey, as written by some of the CRs. We organize the stories under four spheres that shape most women's ecosystems: the family, the community, the workplace, and society.

3

In Part Three, we share our **recommendations**, as advised by our CRs, and a brief **conclusion**.

Methodology

Background and Rationale
for a CBPR Approach

This research was commissioned by "FemPower: MENA Feminist Power in Action for Women's Economic Rights", a 5-year program launched in 2021 by a consortium consisting of four partner organizations:

- Arab Women Organization [AWO, Jordan],
- Collective for Research and Training on Development [CRTDA, Lebanon],
- The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation [Kvinna till Kvinna],
- Palestinian Working Women Society for Development [PWWSD, Palestine].

FemPower aims to amplify the diverse voices of young women at both national and regional levels, empowering them to lead the fight for gender-responsive accountability on Economic Gender Based Violence [EGBV]. The focus is holding duty bearers accountable for improving conditions for young working women, especially in the informal sector, across Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Tunisia.

As part of the program, the FemPower consortium hired Recrear and Integrated International in September 2023 to conduct a regional Community-Based Participatory Research [CBPR] on EGBV in the four countries. The CBPR process had the following intentions:

- Engage a group of diverse young women as Co-Researchers to highlight the actual needs, struggles, and successes of women living and working in the informal sector.
- Ensure meaningful representation and engagement of the affected communities^[3] while building the capacities of women as researchers of their own realities.
- Surface the experiences of EGBV among young women with diverse identities [i.e. women refugees, women living in rural areas, women with disabilities, and women from other marginalized groups], especially those working in the informal economy.
- Support the FemPower program in creating evidence-based for their future advocacy activities to influence gender-sensitive economic justice.



Part 1: The How, The Who, The What.

- Guarantee that these women themselves can lead the advocacy efforts sought by the FemPawer program based on their existing needs and challenges.
- Invite researchers and participants to network and reflect on the conditions and necessary actions for supporting women and combating EGBV.
- Deepen understanding of how EGBV is perpetrated in women's lives and how it is reinforced by communities, institutions, and the private sector—entities that are both part of the problem and the solution.

Framing the Research: Selection and Onboarding of Co-Researchers

The Recrear/Integrated International team collaborated closely with FemPawer POs to identify the communities of interest based on specific criteria^[4]. To ensure the research process and products supported the efforts of the FemPawer Consortium and in-country partners, we formed a Working group (WG) of six members from the FemPawer Steering Committee and their local Partner Organisations (POs). We held regular check-in meetings to validate and ensure relevance to the context and the programme.

Our team of Local Researchers (LRs) led community members' selection, onboarding, and training to carry out various PAR^[5] activities as CRs. We first put out a call of applications to invite a group of co-researchers to a 9-month-long project. Through an application process, we selected 18 CRs: 5 from Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine and 3 from Tunisia. Once selected, we interviewed the CRs to create a space to share their experiences of EGBV and invite open communication and a tailored accompaniment throughout the research process. The group then took part in a learning journey, including 5 physical and virtual half-day workshops led by LRs. This series aimed to:

- Reflect on and share stories and experiences of EGBV
- Engage with desk research on EGBV that Recrear and Integrated conducted before initiating the PAR process;
- Acquire training on CBPR/PAR and Recrear's storytelling methodology.

[3] In the next section, we list the communities engaged in this study.

[4] You can find the detailed selection criteria in Appendix 1.

[5] Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a methodology and research paradigm that aims to decolonize knowledge by making the everyday knowledge of the research participants central and equal to 'expert' knowledge. PAR is structured in cycles of action and reflection and thereby puts theory and practice into a constant conversation, allowing us to be attentive to what is emerging within a process and to generate new knowledge.

Conducting the Research

The 18 CRs carried out 5 semi-structured interviews each, combined with other research activities they selected among those explored in the learning journey [such as painting, podcast/audio-story interviews, and videos]. They conducted a total of 85 interviews in their selected communities, across the four countries. The semi-structured interviews allowed for intimate conversations and reflexive dialogues where themes surfaced organically. CRs explored, reflected, and learned together among women in their communities. These interviews helped cultivate learning on EGBV experiences from women not part of the co-research team. VThey also strengthened the storytelling process and allowed more women to share their experiences in a safe environment.

We used **participatory storytelling** as a creative and accessible data-gathering method. Storytelling allows us to share nuanced and relatable accounts of events and experiences, offering rich insights into women's real-life challenges related to EGBV. It also empowered women from the selected communities to amplify their voices and create solidarity networks.

The 18 Co-Researchers were the main creators and validators of the knowledge produced. With the support of the LRs and the Recrear Coordinators, CRs summarized the data collected, took part in participatory analysis and coding sessions, and wrote short stories based on their interviews with women affected by EGBV.

Finally, each LR analyzed and presented their country's findings in a regional sense-making session coordinated by Recrear. The analysis and findings were validated with the CRs during an in-country workshop. There, we also collected feedback on their learning experiences. The findings were shared and validated with the FemPawer WG.

The process focused on creating a dynamic and brave space for CRs and women participants alike to reflect on their experiences of EGBV and the roles of communities^[6], institutions, and the private sector in reproducing inequalities or offering solutions. At the same time, it provided an opportunity for CRs to learn storytelling, PAR and interviewing skills that they can continue using to amplify the stories of women in their communities.

[6] Below, in the section "The Co-Research team", we specify the communities engaged in each country.

By the end of the project, we asked each CR to share their definition of EGBV based on what they had learned from the interviews they conducted with women in their communities. Building on their definition, each country team of CRs discussed and arrived at a collective definition of EGBV. We present the four definitions below.

Jordan CRs' definition: EGBV is any behavior undermining a woman's financial rights and independence. This includes preventing her from working or studying, forcing her into specific jobs, controlling her property and finances, and depriving her of financial resources. Such violence can be perpetrated by family members, employers, or the broader community and is often reinforced by societal norms and roles.

Lebanon CRs' definition: EGBV is a daily reality for many women and young women, manifesting through depriving their rights to self-fulfillment, including education, social status, and access to resources. This form of violence leads to family instability, such as family disintegration and discrimination between sons and daughters. Women are forced into continuous confrontations within their families, workplaces, and society to combat control, oppression, and exploitation. EGBV often involves forcing women to work long hours without extra pay and is intertwined with other forms of GBV, including psychological, verbal, and physical violence. This pervasive abuse results in significant short- and long-term psychological and physical harm to women.

Palestine CRs' definition: E-GBV is a multifaceted form of abuse shaped by various circumstances and dimensions. It is deeply rooted in patriarchal systems and cultural practices that vary across contexts. E-GBV often remains hidden due to a lack of awareness and fear of confronting the abuser. This harmful behavior typically occurs within households, leading to the silencing and threatening of women. It is an unjust practice that lacks accountability and legal repercussions.

Tunisia CRs' definition: EGBV is a hidden form of abuse where individuals in positions of power, such as men or employers, deprive women of their rightful earnings and economic rights. This exploitation of women's vulnerable situations and need for work leads to a dangerous environment of control and subordination, severely impacting women's economic and personal well-being.

What are formal and informal sectors and jobs?

During the project, we also discussed with LRs, CRs, and the women from the communities how they classified and understood the formal and informal sectors. First, we learned that for the women involved, the distinction between formal and informal sectors isn't always clear or useful in describing their EGBV experiences. Some challenges associated with the informal sector are also common in the formal sectors, where women are still likely to be hired without contracts and under unfair and unsafe working conditions. Therefore, the line between formal and informal work is often blurred, and women employed in the formal sector may experience conditions typical of informal jobs.

In the cell below, we share how CRs categorized formal and informal jobs.

Formal	Informal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teachers and staff workers [In education institutions and universities] ● Corporate employees and fixed-term contract employees [telecommunications companies, law offices, clinics, etc.] ● Public servants and government employees [in public service, ministries, courts, and administrations] ● Factory workers [with formal contracts] ● Registered freelancers ● NGO employees [in registered NGOs and companies] ● Public service units [police and law enforcement, public transportation, government healthcare] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Agricultural workers ● Domestic workers ● Sex workers ● Hairdressers /Beauty salon employees with no or weak contracts ● Taxi drivers ● Workers in non-registered NGOs and companies ● Contractors ● Unregistered teachers ● Tailors ● Employees in private small businesses with no contract or weak contracts ● Street vendors ● Workers in the private education sector without contracts [universities and schools, starting from kindergarten] ● Factory workers with no contracts [sewing, food, pharmaceutical, or other factories] ● Women working in their small home projects [cooking, sewing, etc.]

The Co-Research team

The Co-Research team leading this research project was formed by:

1. 18 CO-RESEARCHERS :

Each CR engaged 5 women in their research. The 5 women were selected from a diverse range of communities as listed below:

Communities engaged in Jordan:

The women interviewed were aged 20-50 working in agriculture, production factories, secretarial roles, education, beauty salons, cleaning companies, shops, laboratories, and home projects. Women participants identified with a range of intersectional identities, including refugees/migrants^[7], women with disabilities, and various marital statuses (single, married, divorced, and widowed), with educational levels ranging from basic education to master's degrees. The areas covered include the Ajloun, Zarqa, Karak, Irbid Governorates, and Irbid Camp.

Communities engaged in Lebanon:

The women interviewed were aged 24-50 working in private schools, educational/vocational institutes, the esthetic field, restaurants, small-sized enterprises, and social associations. Women participants identified with a range of intersectional identities, including Syrian refugees, women with disabilities, and various marital statuses (single, married, divorced, and widowed), with educational levels ranging from basic education to vocational training and higher education. Some women are currently unemployed, while others are active in civil society or own small handicraft projects. Areas covered include Tripoli, Baalbek, Baalbek-Hermel district, and Beddawi camp.

Communities engaged in Palestine:

The women interviewed were aged 25-55 and worked in informal sectors. The women participants identified with various intersectional identities, including women with disabilities and women living under occupation. Their marital statuses include single, married, divorced, and widowed. Areas covered include Jenin camp, Hebron Governorate, and surrounding cities, villages, and settlements.

Communities engaged in Tunisia:

The women interviewed were aged 28-57 working in various sectors, including agriculture, domestic work, artisan crafts, and shop work. Women participants identified with a range of intersectional identities, including undocumented migrants, women with disabilities, black women, and other marginalized groups. Their marital statuses include single, married, divorced, and widowed. Areas covered include Medenin, Sidi Bouzid and Tunis.

2. 4 LOCAL RESEARCHERS :

Four LRs led the in-country research and coordinated the teams of CRs. They were guided and supported by Recrear and Integrated International's lead research team. They received training in facilitation, storytelling, and participatory research methods, enabling them to lead and support the CRs. Each of them adapted the process and Recrear's methodology to their contexts and groups and played a significant role in the direction of this research process. They supported their CRs throughout the learning journey and accompanied them in analyzing their findings and writing their stories.

3. 3 RESEARCH COORDINATORS :

3 Coordinators from Recrear and Integrated International collaborated to mix the recipe with the different ingredients for this project. They designed the learning process and storytelling methodology, trained the LRs, coordinated the participatory analysis and editing of the stories (Recrear); and organized all the components and people involved (Integrated International).

[7] In this publication, we use the terms "migrant" and "refugee" interchangeably. While we acknowledge the significant legal and situational differences between migrants and refugees, our Co-Researchers did not investigate or record the specific legal statuses of the women they interviewed. Therefore, this booklet reflects the diverse experiences of both migrant and refugee women involved in the study, focusing on their shared challenges rather than their legal classifications.

Palestine Co-Researchers:



Doaa Abu Qutneh



Wejdan Dhedi



Eman Zayyad



Eman Al-Masri



Hesen Al Foqaha

Tunisia Co-Researchers:



Chahrazed Ouni



Amira Ben Amor



Rania Belhaj Romdhan

Jordan Co-Researchers :



Rawan Khatatbeh



Manal Abu Zaytoun



Saba Al-Takhaina



Rania Al-Hamawi



Anaghim Ma'an
Abdullah al-Soub

Lebanon Co-Researchers:



Celine Ghadban



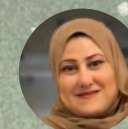
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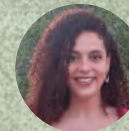
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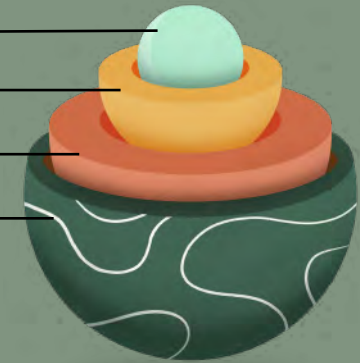
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Research Assistant

You can find the Bios of CRs, LRs and Coordinators, [here](#)

THE STORIES

This section presents the stories as written by CRs. They are organized under four spheres, forming the ecosystems most women find themselves participating:

- The sphere of the FAMILY
- The sphere of the COMMUNITY
- The sphere of the WORKPLACE
- The sphere of the SOCIETY



We introduce each sphere with a one-pager describing the research findings highlighted in the stories in that section. Most stories touch on multiple spheres, and we invite you to see how these intersect, influence and reinforce one another in relation to EGBV.

CRs wrote the stories in their local dialects and shared them with LRs and Research Coordinators, who worked closely with the CRs to translate and edit each story. LRs then shared the stories back with CRs in their original language for final approval. This process wanted to preserve each story's literal meaning and emotional narrative.

As part of the editing process, we fictionalized some names and details to safeguard the identity of the women involved in this project.

Part 2: The Stories.

THE SPHERE OF THE FAMILY



“Through my interviews with women, I noticed that every girl or woman is exposed to economic violence, and that her mother was exposed to it before her, and that the history of the past has a great impact on their future lives.”

[Rania, Co-Researcher, Jordan]

“Families are preventing girls from learning and working and force them to marry at a young age due to their difficult economic situation”

[Rima, Interviewee, Lebanon]

EGBV often begins within the very walls women expect to be sheltered and nurtured in. In the four countries and the communities this CBPR covered, women face economic abuse at the hands of their families long before they encounter workplace and societal discrimination.

In many cases, we found women are not allowed to work because working environments are perceived as unsafe or destined for men only. We also found that many young girls are exploited by their families, including by their fathers and then by their husbands; for example, many women are allowed to work only for their earnings to be taken away from them. In many stories shared throughout this process, women's income benefits the family or supports male members [such as brothers]. Imagine Noor, who tells the first story in this section. She is a dedicated teacher who has worked tirelessly to earn her master's degree, only to have her father take away her salary.

In the second story, another woman voices her frustration when she realizes her family did not include her in the inheritance plans. Women are widely excluded from inheritance [across the four countries in this study, by law, women inherit half of what men are entitled to], or their siblings can threaten them if they try to claim their rights. This exclusion is not just about money; it is a stark denial of women's economic independence.

These forms of EGBV are imposed by family members but reinforced by societal norms and patriarchal traditions. For example, most men perceive women as unable to manage income and, therefore, leave women with no means to invest in their education and self-advancement.

The lack of financial freedom makes it so they become economically dependent on their abusers. The cycle of abuse continues across generations of women. Ironically, trauma is the one inheritance that women are fully entitled to receive.

Once married, the cycle of economic abuse continues, with women bearing the dual burdens of unpaid care work and economic exploitation by their husbands. The lack of tools, practices and awareness to stand for their economic rights exacerbates the situation of those women who find themselves in situations of ongoing violence and oppression within their household. Many women remain silent not to lose their families, especially their children, or because they need income to afford raising their kids. Because of this fear, they might accept abusive relationships and working conditions. The situation is even worse for women with disabilities, where family dynamics of overprotection or neglect can exacerbate women's difficulties and trap them in their homes.

Women who get divorced or become widows face further economic abuse, including the deprivation of child support or inheritance by their extended families. We invite you to see how a widow's life turns upside down when her maternal rights and financial control over her own children are stripped away from her. Read Raneem's story, a widow thrust into a world of material, financial and psychological turbulence after her husband's death.

Altogether, we find women are not free to make financial decisions, even when these are related to their own lives and the use of income they earned themselves.



THE SPHERE OF THE FAMILY

STORY 1: My income belongs to my father

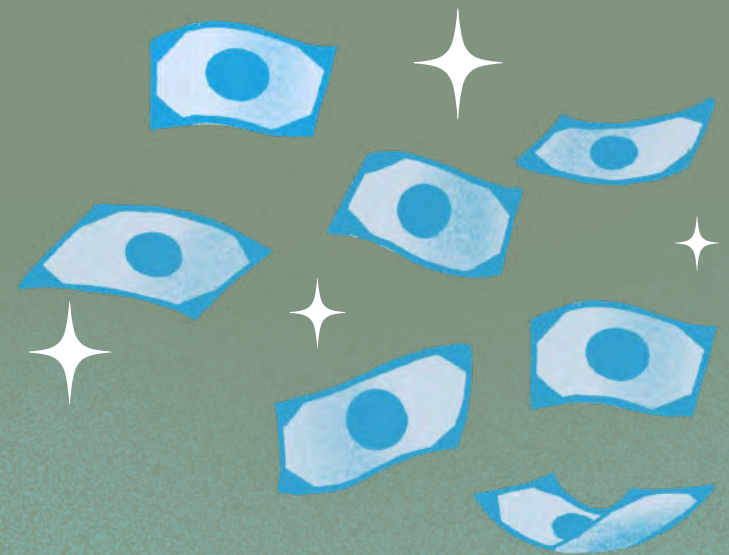
Written by Wojdan Mohammad [Palestine]

I'm Noor Hamdan, 35 years old. Like many others, I dream of having an independent source of income to meet my needs and save money. After completing my master's degree, I began my professional career as a teacher. Given my family's precarious financial situation, I wanted to contribute a portion of my salary to assist them.

However, this decision brought about unforeseen challenges. My father started taking my salary every month against my wishes and opposed my desire to marry, fearing that my salary would be diverted to another household. Despite months passing by, my father remained unwilling to compromise, refusing even to consider allowing me to retain a portion of my earnings.

Eventually, I decided to pursue marriage and build a life for myself despite my father's objections. After much persuasion from other family members, my father finally consented to the marriage under the condition that I continue to provide him with my salary.

Following numerous interventions to persuade him of the unfairness of his demand, he reluctantly agreed to accept half of my salary. To move forward with my life, I accepted his terms. This compromise allowed me to marry, but my father still claims half of my earnings.





THE SPHERE OF THE FAMILY

STORY 2: Power in the Darkness - Voice-Story -

Written by Rama Cheikh Ali [Lebanon]



For the voice story [click here.](#)

This voice story is based on women's experiences with EGBV in the Baalbek District, Lebanon. It is inspired by an interview conducted with a woman who shared about the EGBV she faced in her own family.

Character 1: [Interviewer]: Can you share your experience with us?

Character 2: [The Woman]: One day, I heard my family was looking for a public notary to register the family inheritance in the name of my younger brothers. No one mentioned me or my sisters. This incident made me feel excluded, like I didn't even exist in this family.

Character 1: Offf—why?

Character 2: Because "a girl will belong to her husband's house," so they can't give the family inheritance to a brother-in-law.

Character 1: Oh, what is this way of thinking?

Character 2: Well, they call the father in the family "Abu Ali" [the father of Ali = by the name of the boy/son] and not "Abu Fatima" [by the name of the girl/daughter] even if a woman is the eldest among the siblings.

Character 1: So what did you do? And how did you manage to cope with the situation?

Character 2: I felt humiliated, psychologically and physically exhausted, and frustrated. But as time passed, I couldn't let this define my value and future. And then, of course, I faced a second challenge...

Character 1: What was this challenge? And when did you encounter it?

Character 2: My big brother, of course, he'd get more money and would have more freedom than I. I didn't even have a phone and couldn't secure any of my basic needs. So, I started working from home, thinking it would be a good way to earn money and build my personality without

going out. Yet, it was a big struggle to get my family to accept my business idea in the first place.

Character 1: How did these challenges affect you? How did you feel?

Character 2: How should I feel? I felt upset and sad, like I was worthless in this society.

Character 1: Did you feel it was unfair?

Character 2: I felt like it was a huge injustice. I was working from home, building myself up, and taking responsibility off their shoulders. Despite my efforts, my family forced me to give a portion of my earnings to my younger brother.

Character 1: Did you try to object to this?

Character 2: Of course not. This was the only solution to keep my job.

Character 1: What have you achieved now? Do you still work?

Character 2: So far, I have acquired a mobile phone with my work. I am pursuing a certificate in nursery education to become a kindergarten teacher and achieve my dream.

Character 1: Can I tell you something? You are very strong. What would you say to young women who suffer from the same challenges?

Character 2: Believe in yourself and your abilities, and it is very important that we support each other because no one understands women except other women!



THE SPHERE OF THE FAMILY

STORY 3: Under guardianship A Widow's Fight for Her Children's Future

Written by Manal Abu Zaytoun [Jordan]

My name is Raneem. I am 34 years old and a widow with three children. I studied for a bachelor's degree in a medical speciality and am currently working in the same field. This has helped me greatly, especially after the death of my husband.

Life was once filled with promise. I had a loving husband, and together we moved abroad, dreaming of a brighter future for our family. Until the COVID-19 pandemic struck, my husband lost his job, and after months of financial strain, we sold our furniture, couldn't afford the rent, and had to move in with my sister temporarily. The stress took a devastating toll on my husband, leading to a fatal stroke. The most incredible suffering was after the grief for his death. I found myself responsible for three children with no financial support.

Soon after my husband died, I was surprised to learn about a law called the "Guardianship Law." This law states that a male figure from the husband's family becomes the guardian of the children after their father's death. This guardian is responsible for the children's financial well-being, but what about their psychological, social, and educational needs? This law focuses solely on the financial aspects of caring for orphans, overlooking other crucial aspects of their well-being.

During this challenging time, I expected to find support from my husband's family. However, my husband's father, who was now our guardian, insisted I move to his country, Palestine, to receive any financial support. I complied with his wishes, hoping to find stability for my children. However upon my arrival, he insisted that I could only obtain financial support through the court, which would determine the amount. Feeling trapped, I overcame my fear of the legal process and filed a case.

After a lengthy legal battle for a year, the court's decision provided only minimal alimony, inadequate for even one child's needs. Later, I discovered that the guardian had sold the house my husband and I had worked abroad tirelessly to build — our dream home in Jordan, funded partly by selling my own gold. Now, under the guardianship law, I was left with nothing, as the guardian had full control over the property and finances meant for my children.

I felt like I was in a battle, facing waves I could not ride. During this period, I changed a lot. I became anxious and entered a cycle of frustration and depression. All of this also had an impact on my children. I began to see them as a burden. Even though the feeling of motherhood was present, it was mixed with concern. The most difficult time for me was when my daughter fell ill, and I couldn't afford her treatment.

Meanwhile, the guardian does not care about the children and their needs. Legally, nothing obliges him to see them or care for them while controlling their money. As we cannot access my children's funds without his permission, I must constantly engage with him to protect their finances.

I was lucky to have my degree and family that supported me during those difficult times. The hardships I endured have made me a strong woman and pushed me to find a job and become the family provider. I still have to deal with the guardian regularly to defend my children's rights, protect their money and make sure they get to live a good and normal life like other children.

THE SPHERE OF THE WORKPLACE



"We don't have much choice but to work to provide for our kids and families. I have worked in this field for 33 years, and 10 dinars is better than starving. If we complain, we risk getting fired."

[Noura, Interviewee, Tunisia]

"When I get sick, I cannot take sick leave, and if that is done, it will be deducted from my monthly salary"

[Nouha, interviewee, Lebanon]

The three stories below highlight some of the challenges women in this project described when and if they manage to find employment.

As the three stories we present in this section illustrate, women deal with long working hours and unfair remuneration in the workplace. In the communities CRs covered, most of the employment women find is informal, primarily in domestic and agricultural sectors. Small businesses, such as hairdressing and food provision, are another major source of employment. Yet, since men own most of the businesses, women work under male control in these jobs. Women slave away to make ends meet; their exploitation is normalized, along with harassment and discrimination.,

In the first story, we can see how marital status significantly impacts women's exposure to EGBV. Divorced, single and widowed women often face increased abuse and economic exploitation. Their experiences of EGBV are intensified by the stigma surrounding them. A vulnerable social status exposes women to

violence and exploitation from employers who see them as easy targets and dependent on them for income.

Women with disabilities also encounter higher degrees of discrimination and exploitation. In the second story in this section, we learn how societal and institutional neglect leaves them highly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

In the first two stories, we find that some NGOs and governmental institutions provide women with training and awareness sessions to learn about their rights. Yet, these efforts remain theoretical and often fail women in providing viable alternatives. Some women in this study flagged that these organizations and institutions can become part of the problem by offering the same working conditions found elsewhere, such as low remuneration and lack of contracts. Women with disabilities can be exploited and used for tokenistic participation by organizations that claim to support them without offering real job opportunities or fair treatment.

The story of Farah, Salam, and Noor, the last in this section, highlights the many forms of harassment women can face in the workplace. Women in this project referred to sexual, verbal and psychological forms of harassment, which are often intertwined. They have reported receiving direct threats [e.g. losing their job if they demand better work conditions or if they don't accept sexual harassment] and being unable to seek legal support.

The Private Sector is mainly compliant with inflicting EGBV on women. Women participating in this study reported that, occasionally, business owners and employers are understanding and can support women by providing full-time jobs and contracts to protect them from economic violence at home. However, many are exploiting them and fear no repercussions due to the situation of irregularity of the women, their lack of awareness about their rights, and their situation of financial dependence. Even some bigger, more established companies operate outside national labor legal frameworks and are not held accountable. This impunity discourages women from reporting EGBV and drastically limits their chances of seeking a way out.

The consequences for women's health are high and impact both their physical and psychological well-being. The ongoing violence and the inability to change their situation leads women to disillusionment – this spills over to severe health conditions and social isolation.



THE SPHERE OF THE WORKPLACE

STORY 1:
From poor salary
to poor salary

Written by Ramona Habib [Lebanon]

Eight years ago, I had a beautiful family life with my husband and three children. Until one day, my husband got very sick and passed away, leaving all of us behind. We felt all the suffering in this world. His death turned me upside down. I felt sad and full of worries: "What will happen to my children and me? Who will bear the burden of this family? There were people of good hearts who helped me with house rent and education expenses, but I had no idea for how long that would help sustain us.

I decided to look for work and found a sales representative job. I used to pack customers' orders and sort them by region. My work was very tiring. I used to work for nine hours without a fair salary - only \$10 a day. Whenever I asked for an increase, they would tell me: "This is what is available". I had no contract to guarantee my rights.

While participating in awareness sessions on economic violence in a community center, I learned that I was exposed to economic violence at work. I then started doing "work-for-cash projects" with this center, restoring sidewalks and making medical face masks. But this project lasted only forty days, and I was still paid only \$10 per day. In the mean-

time, I started volunteering at another center, receiving only a symbolic transportation allowance.

Our society is harmful and hinders women from working. Certain jobs are imposed on us while we are prevented from participating in others. Obtaining rights, such as a work contract, seems impossible. At the moment, we don't have anything that protects us in workplaces where we are exposed to harassment [such as verbal sexual harassment].

I want to tell all women to take care of themselves, fight, demand their rights, and do not let these injustices affect them.



THE SPHERE OF THE WORKPLACE

STORY 2:
When they see you,
they'll pay

Written by Eman Zaiad [Palestine]

I am a 33-year-old woman with a complete visual impairment. I had studied teaching methods for the Arabic language but faced numerous rejections when applying for jobs. Every time, they would say things like "You can't see" or "Your disability conflicts with the job requirements." These words wounded me deeply and made me feel humiliated. After years of trying and feeling discouraged, I decided to pursue something I loved: media.

To develop my skills, I searched for training opportunities in radio stations. Surprisingly, most responses to my application were dismissive, with remarks like "How can you be a broadcaster if you can't see?" But one radio station agreed to take me, and I began training, proving my capabilities. During this time, I also became acquainted with a nonprofit organization that partially funded my salary through their temporary employment program.

Initially, things seemed fine. However, I realized I didn't fully understand my rights at work. I was a broadcaster but didn't pay attention to details like work hours, tasks, salary, contracts, or leave policies. I worked three full days a week for a monthly salary of 600 shekels. Beyond hosting the show, I recorded news reports, prepared programs, and did other tasks. I didn't even have any days off: if I missed a day, it was deducted from my salary. After about three years, I requested a salary increase or to focus solely on hosting the radio show. My request was rejected.

At the same time, I was asked to assist the marketing department in obtaining sponsorships and endorsements under the guise of "When they see you, they'll pay." At some point, I refused to assist because I saw this as exploiting my disability for marketing purposes rather than focusing on my competence or the quality of the programme I was hosting.

Eventually, I resigned but was still owed two months' salary. They initially refused to pay because I had no contract to prove I worked there. After much effort, I asked for help at the labor office in Hebron and eventually managed to get my money.

Then, I became involved with an organization focused on supporting women with disabilities in Hebron - I volunteered extensively for them over ten years. Despite my dedication and contributions, I was never considered an employee. When they needed me, they paid me a symbolic amount. With time, I realized this was also an exploitation of my disability and needs.

I questioned how they could advocate for economic empowerment for women while I, with all my experience, wasn't considered worthy of employment, even part-time. I faced mental and economic violence for many years, feeling my energy going wasted. Today, I'm unemployed. I now understand the importance of looking out for myself and my interests, but I wonder how long this violence will continue to confine me.



THE SPHERE OF THE WORKPLACE

STORY 3:
Flickering Lights
The Struggle of Farah,
Salam, and Noor

Written by Rania Al-Hamawi [Jordan]

Fate brought three young women together in a small commercial store: Farah [Joy], Salam [Peace], and Noor [Light]. After a brief Eid holiday, Farah and Salam returned to work, only to notice Noor's troubling absence. Concerned after three silent days, they visited her home.

Noor's mother, her face drawn with worry, answered the door. Upon asking where Noor was, she revealed, "For three days, Noor has shut herself away, not eating or seeing anyone. She's ashamed to go out because she's lost her eyebrows, hair, and lashes."

Farah and Salam were stunned. Noor had always been the liveliest among them.

When Noor appeared, she seemed a shadow of her former self. Sitting quietly behind her mother, she shared: "After high school, I had to start working to support my dreams. My first job was at a spice shop, the owner harassed me, claiming love, then turned hostile when I didn't want to play a part in his idea of what a Romeo and Juliet love story should look like. His hatred crept in, and then the exploitation and the humiliations began. I almost lost my eyesight there because of the spices that got in my eyes, making them red, and the owner still would act like he didn't see it. I left that job for a job at a larger company, I thought it would be better. But you know, long working hours stretching until midnight, barely making ends meet. And now, again, I'm facing unfair conditions at the store where we work. Honestly, I'm tired of how shop owners treat us, day in and day out. I'm tired of being exploited. I want to rest, I want to get out of this infinite darkness, and now, after everything that happened to me and all the accumulated trauma, I don't

want to deal with anyone anymore. This continuous stress that I am living under led to a hair disease, making me lose my hair," Noor disclosed, revealing her thinning hair.

"I understand, Noor." Replied Salam: "Better days must be coming, and I pray your strength grows, Noor. But know this: you're not alone in this struggle. I've faced my share of battles too. I manage depression with medication, which sometimes makes me feel paranoid like someone's always following me. It got worse after I was falsely accused of theft at work. For three years, I've worked like a slave—no breaks, long night shifts, humiliated in front of customers - all for just 200 Jordanian dinars a month. Our workplace doesn't match my skills or respect my education. I walk to work daily to save money, facing countless humiliations for any delay. Once, merely taking a leave day was enough to get me fired. That's why I started therapy, but the medication has severe side effects. Now, here I am, stuck in the same store with you and Farah, wondering when, if ever, our situations will change."

Farah chimed in, her voice low, "I used to earn only 100 dinars despite 13 years of experience. I've become a shell of myself, distrustful and disconnected."

As they held hands, Salam voiced the lingering question: "Will we ever find happiness, or will our lives forever be marked by pain and exhaustion?"

THE SPHERE OF THE COMMUNITY



"I have found that myself, my mother, my friends, and every woman in our community and society are subjected to violence in one way or another and the main reason is the fear of society's judgment."

[Sabaa, Co-Researcher, Jordan]

"Society still considers a woman's place to be at home, getting married and raising children, and does not acknowledge EGBV; they normalize it."

[S.H., interviewee, Jenin, Palestine]

"I found that women do not find support when they are subjected to economic violence, neither from their immediate environment nor from the society they live in."

[Manal, Co-Researcher, Jordan]

The stories in this section illustrate how EGBV is perpetuated and normalized at the community level.

Communities often fail to recognize EGBV as a significant issue. Prevailing social norms continue to confine women to traditional roles [such as home-making and child or elderly care] while overlooking their need for economic independence and undervaluing their economic contributions and rights.

These community norms not only limit the recognition of EGBV but also reinforce economic exploitation through the employment conditions they allow. Women often find themselves in jobs/businesses with poor compensation and unstable conditions and contracts, a situation supported by the widespread view of women as secondary earners. For women who become the primary providers of their families, these norms are particularly hindering. This bias systematically favors men, prioritizing their access to economic and income opportunities and embedding the economic exploitation of women within community practices.

In the first story, *The Kitchen of Hope*, we see how economic hardship forces Fawzia to become the sole provider for her family after the death of her husband. The kitchen she creates becomes a vital lifeline for many women facing domestic violence. Fawzia uses all her power to bring the community to accept and value her project, demonstrating how community support can empower women economically and socially. Women who do find community support are more empowered to challenge injustices and seek economic prosperity. However, this vital support is rare. Most women facing EGBV live in fear of their abusers, social stigma or repercussions from their own families and communities - they live in silence and despair. When women find support from their circles and environment, they actively promote economic prosperity for their communities.

Fawzia's story also takes us to her community context in Palestine, where direct violence by the Israeli occupation, such as harassment, suppression, and destruction of property, creates a sense of insecurity. The ongoing violence influences social dynamics, where men subjected to abuse by the occupying forces often become violent at home, exposing women and children to further abuse. Despite the positive impact of the kitchen and the community support around it, persistent external threats and societal pressures pose significant challenges, highlighting the fragile nature of community-based initiatives in such contexts.

In the second story, we meet Tyba, who illustrates the compounded discrimination experienced by women with intersecting identities. Black women, migrants, and those belonging to marginalized communities are victims of severe exploitation and abuse, often invisible to mainstream support systems. They face legal and

societal barriers that prevent them from reporting abuse or seeking fair employment. Despite Tyba's resilience, the lack of institutional support and the community's complicity reflect broader societal failures to protect vulnerable women.

The women in the study indicate social norms as one of the leading causes of EGBV. In the second and third stories, Tyba and Bara'a tell how the search for economic status can make men resentful when their wives are successful. These stories underscore the harsh realities faced by women who, despite their efforts to achieve self-sufficiency and live dignified lives, are hindered by their families as well as the communities that should support them. Cultural expectations often dictate that women endure in silence, which can escalate to severe outcomes, such as femicide, like in Bara'a's story.

The three stories below highlight the challenges women in this project encounter within their communities, where societal norms and structures intersect with economic hardship and instigate a cycle of abuse.



THE SPHERE OF THE COMMUNITY

STORY 1: The kitchen of hope

Written by Eman Zaiad [Palestine]

Those who live in the area named H2 in Hebron City^[8] are familiar with the challenges of economic hardship firsthand. My name is Fawzia, known as Um Abdel Salam, a widow with 8 children. For 25 years, I've lived in an area surrounded by four Israeli military checkpoints, making movement extremely difficult due to constant attacks by settlers. Women are afraid to leave their homes because they risk returning to find them burned by settlers. They are also afraid their family members would get arrested.

For a woman without a provider, the situation is undoubtedly more challenging - I am one of them. I had to continue supporting my family during my husband's illness. After he died, I relied solely on myself. Despite the hardship, I decided to support other women in my area who needed a source of income and lacked support, aiming to protect them from any potential harm within their families, especially violence.

This inspired me to establish a kitchen that accommodates 30 women. Working in the kitchen helped me raise my children and educate my son at university. On the other hand, it provided a source of livelihood for women, especially those experiencing domestic violence. I observed that women victims of violence remain silent when they lack the financial means to support themselves or their children. So, the kitchen wasn't just a source of income; it was a place for women to educate themselves about their rights, a haven for women facing violence.

The kitchen brought a lot of positivity and significant progress to our lives, serving as a lifeline for supporting our families. Life wasn't perfect, but at least the kitchen covered our expenses. That was until the settlers came and burned it down entirely, which happened twice thereafter. We rebuilt it from scratch both times until the pandemic struck, making the situation more complicated. Currently, conditions have worsened with the war and the immense economic pressure on people. At the same time, the continuous targeting of the kitchen meant we had to close our doors, depriving women of their livelihoods and leaving many vulnerable.

I remember facing many challenges and criticism from the local community when I first opened the kitchen. However, their experience with me over the years and the trust we built turned their criticism into support. Today, I can say that more than 180 women visited the kitchen. The kitchen has enhanced the skills of women in the area, changed people's perspectives, and encouraged women to leave their homes. Today, I wonder how I can keep supporting the women who were once working in the kitchen, especially with our area currently completely closed down, which is the greatest form of violence.

[8] This area is under the control of the Israeli occupation forces, including several houses confiscated by the Israeli authorities and given to Israeli illegal settlers.



THE SPHERE OF THE COMMUNITY

**STORY 2:
Unseen**

**The Struggle of a Black
Woman in Tunisia**

Written by Rania Belhaj Romdhan [Tunisia]

"I am not celebrating my 40th birthday this year; it reminds me of my suffering."

Tyba is a black Tunisian woman who grew up in Kabaria, a popular area of the country. She grew up with low self-esteem and low self-love, given the fact that in her country, girls like her are considered unworthy and even bullied and mocked daily only because of their skin color. Despite these challenges, she had simple dreams: completing her studies, securing a public sector job, and finding love. So, she studied hard and obtained her nursing degree.

One day, her handsome prince charming, "Hassan," appeared, and she married him within a few months. Like most marriages, the first period was beautiful: she felt loved and cared for by Hassan. However, he gradually did not allow her to go out without his permission, preventing her from working because, as he said, "I am protecting you."

Years passed, and Tyba gave birth to her first and then second daughters. The situation in the country changed, and Hassan lost his job. As economic hardships hit their family, his 'protection and fear for her' suddenly disappeared, and Tyba was forced back into work. She did jobs she could do within her home to avoid Hassan's wrath; she could not return to nursing as she wanted. Instead, she took on jobs that are common practices for black women: sewing and hairstyling. She found the roles unfulfilling and exhausting.

While she didn't earn much, she used to put the money in a box on the living room table so that he could take it directly. He used her money to buy new clothes, perfumes, cigarettes, and alcohol for his weekly gatherings. He used her for years. Whenever he found the box empty, he hit her. One night, he tried to kill her because the money in the box was less than what he needed. Her pleas and screams moved neither anyone in the neighborhood nor his family members living next door. Women like her, black, vulnerable, and not rich or powerful, do not actually matter. Because of fear, she jumped from the third floor and escaped barefoot.

She found no escape but the police station to resort to. In Tunisia, there is a special unit in charge of violence against women, supposedly working 24/7 in every police station. Unluckily for Tyba, the policeman who interrogated her that night was not part of the specialized units of violence against women and turned out to be her husband's friend. He did not consider her complaint, and she found no support or backing from her family. So, she returned to her home. She is still exposed to financial exploitation and physical and psychological harm. She is resilient for the sake of her daughters.



THE SPHERE OF THE COMMUNITY

STORY 3: When EGBV kills: the tragic fate of Bara'a

Written by Anaghim Ma'an Abdullah al-Soub [Jordan]

Bara'a is a young girl who lives in Karak Governorate, south of Jordan. She dreamt of a caring partner and believed she had found him when she married the man she loved. Bara'a entered married life determined to complete her training as a makeup artist and support her husband with their lives and family expenses. She eventually achieved these goals, and within two years, she became a successful beautician.

As Bara'a started earning money, she sought to share these successes with her husband by bringing him gifts. However, over time, her husband began to feel jealous and greedy. Punishment awaited her every day at home. Bara'a did not complain; deep down, she hoped he would return to the man she once loved.

Each time he apologized, she forgave him and kept working diligently to improve their financial situation. However, his greed deepened, turning his love into hatred. He began to abuse her physically and verbally, and eventually, he prohibited her from accessing any of her earnings, seizing control of all she worked for.

Bara'a started feeling like a money-making machine, existing solely to satisfy her husband's desires. She considered leaving to protect herself and her children. Yet, the fear of social stigma towards divorced women held her back. Despite knowing the law might support her to take custody of her children, she feared societal backlash more than her husband's wrath.

One day, she couldn't bear it anymore and decided to return to her parents' home. Her departure cut off her husband's financial benefit, so he tried desperately to convince her to return home. By then, Bara'a

realized that his love was merely a facade masking his abuse. She refused to return, leading him to lose control.

Blinded by anger and feeling powerless, he spent days watching her every step. Then he exchanged one of her wedding anniversary gifts for a gun. One day he followed her to her workplace, and took out his hatred: he killed her. This act was the last in a series of killings of her and her dreams. Bara'a left her three children behind.

Was it her love or fear of societal judgment that led to her death? May God have mercy on her soul.



THE SPHERE OF THE SOCIETY



"We live in a society that oppresses us a lot and dictates what we do and where we go."

[Rima, interviewee, Lebanon]

"NGOs such as Aswat Nissa became a great part of our journey; I had no clue about laws and regulations before meeting them. They empowered me to lead women in my region, to go for strikes, and to lead demonstrations to fight for our rights. The state never achieved this, as if they don't know we exist. State control is a joke; they have offices, salaries, and cars, but we don't know them personally; we never saw them."

[Amira, Co-Researcher, Tunisia]

"I suffer from racism because I am black, discrimination because I am a woman, and economic violence because I am a refugee. If I am not exploited for one of these reasons, I am exploited because of all of them."

[Emily, Interviewee, Tunisia]

Pressure from society limits women's chances to develop awareness, assert their rights, and protect themselves. In the stories below, we learn how women are forced into marriage, into renouncing their rights, or into jobs as a means of survival, either for themselves or for their children. These situations often lead women to accept unsafe and unfair working conditions. Rarely is women's work recognized as a means of empowerment or a way to exercise equal economic rights in society.

In this section, the stories also highlight the critical role of institutional complicity in perpetuating EGBV. As we learn from Razan's, Nour's and Amira's stories [the first three in this section], institutions lack effective laws, policies, and mechanisms to protect women against EGBV. In all four countries in this research, legislative frameworks fail to represent or address women's challenges adequately. Where laws are present, such as in Tunisia, they are not socially accepted or implemented. As Amira's story showcases, this leaves women with no means to change their realities.

Institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, often lack the necessary resources and focus to support women adequately against EGBV. While their primary focus is on other forms of gender-based violence, such as domestic violence and sexual harassment, they overlook the unique challenges of EGBV, which require specific attention and resources.

In Nour and Amira's stories, we learn that women living in remote, rural areas or conflict zones face unique challenges. In fragile economies, women are more likely to accept jobs in highly exploitative sectors, like agriculture, because there are no viable alternatives. Remote and rural areas and refugee camps often lack institutional coverage and are frequently overlooked by governmental and non-governmental organizations. This further isolates women and makes it even more difficult for them to access support services and address EGBV.

In the case of vulnerable communities, state institutions can also play a role in enforcing violence. When migrant and refugee workers are not recognized as worthy of legal rights, they become more vulnerable: if they face EGBV, they can't complain to the government and police.

The complicity and inadequacy of institutions make women distrustful, isolating them even more and reinforcing a culture of silence. Women fear reporting because they can face societal repercussions. After all, laws are not enforced because of corruption among police forces and the legal systems, which are also male-dominated and often fail to provide adequate response.

Reporting violence is fraught with challenges, particularly in rural and decentralized areas, where women fear and face repercussions. Ultimately, women fighting back have no legal, institutional or societal backup, such as in the case of Amira in the third story.

As Razan shares at the end of her story, women look for means to understand better and improve their situations and that of other women. Education is seen as a crucial means for preventing EGBV as it helps women foster economic independence, confidence and self-assurance. On one hand, access to education builds women's confidence and assertiveness in demanding their economic rights. On the other hand, significant barriers diminish education's effectiveness. Poor alignment of education curriculum with the job market, coupled with patriarchal norms restricting women's access to resources and mobility, means that even educated women from the communities involved in this study report that they are facing EGBV.

Despite the difficult realities these stories demonstrate, in the final video story, 'I Am Ready', we see that women are still standing up, ready to fight for their rights and support one another.



THE SPHERE OF THE SOCIETY

STORY 1: Married Twice, Same Denial of Rights!

Written by Hesen Foqaha [Palestine]

My name is Razan. I am 48 years old and have six children: two from my first husband and four from my second husband. When my first husband passed away, I was forced to marry his brother, or else his family would have taken my children away from me. I had to accept the marriage to keep my children close.

In my city, Jenin, women are forced to live under societal traditions that oppress them and work against their interests and the interests of their children. My second husband works in construction; his financial gains are insufficient to cover our family's expenses, but he does not allow me to work. I gave birth to four more children with him, increasing the financial burden on us, which complicated our marital relationship and eventually led to divorce.

I dared to divorce him and demand financial reparation for his mistreatment and neglect of myself and the children. However, the court was not fair in its ruling either. Due to my second husband's poverty, the court granted me only a minimal allowance of approximately 120 Jordanian dinars^[9], forcing me to take up a sewing job to make ends meet. I bought a sewing machine and worked from home to support my children and cover their needs as much as possible.

It wasn't easy for me to work as a woman in Jenin. I was financially exploited by traders who bought garments from me at an exploitative

price simply because I am a poor, uneducated, divorced, widowed woman in need of money. Despite all these challenges and injustices, I achieved my dream of becoming financially independent, being able to take care of my children, and supporting them in their education, away from the abuse of my husband and his family. I am still unable to fully achieve my human rights and material needs due to the exploitative circumstances of my work, but I hope to achieve that someday.

Looking back at my life, I think the main obstacle to achieving my rights was not completing my education. I urge every girl to complete her education regardless of the oppressive customs and traditions against women in our society. Education gives women the power to know their rights and become who they want to be.

[9] In Palestine, people can choose whether to be paid in the local currency or Jordanian dinars. In this case, Razan's husband earns in Jordanian dinars.



THE SPHERE OF THE SOCIETY

STORY 2: Nour's Light: A Beacon in the Shadows of War

Written by Anaghim Ma'an Abdullah al-Soub [Jordan]

When wars destroy all dreams and ambitions, darkness and injustice prevail...

Nour, a teacher, was separated from her husband by the war. She stayed in her country, Syria, and her husband took refuge in Jordan in the hope that the war would end soon. Her hopes crashed when their house was destroyed. Nour had to join her husband in a foreign country she knew nothing about.

She sought to alleviate her family's financial struggles by offering tutoring classes from home, but it was not enough. Determined to provide more income support, she started looking for work in her field. Unfortunately, her degrees, along with her dreams and home in Syria, had all been destroyed. Out of necessity, she reluctantly accepted work in a private school for meager wages.

Despite being underpaid, Nour remained dedicated to her work, earning respect from students and colleagues alike. However, she soon realized that her salary was significantly lower than her peers, falling below even the minimum wage in Jordan.

Driven to improve her situation, Nour confronted her employer and requested the pay she deserved for her hard work. When she asserted her rights, her employer immediately mentioned that she had refugee status and lacked any certificate proving her educational background, claiming that the school violated the law by hiring her.

Nour felt silenced and overlooked, with a deep sense of injustice and disappointment. She had no legal support and no rights to claim; her voice went unheard. Even human rights organizations, which many see as sources of hope, provided no help or support. Despite this, Nour kept teaching, her spirit tired but resilient.



THE SPHERE OF THE SOCIETY

STORY 3: **Harvesting Hope** Amira's fight for dignity in the fields of Tunisia

Written by Amira Ben Amor [Tunisia]

In Mazouna, a small village in Sidi Bouzid, our options for making a living are few, mostly limited to agriculture. We spend our days collecting fruits and vegetables from sunrise to sunset, often underappreciated and undervalued.

My name is Amira. I'm 33 years old and a mother of four. Like many women here, I work in the fields. We earn just 10 dinars daily, while men earn at least 25. Our work conditions are harsh: we work in extreme heat or cold, with no contracts, exhausting hours, and no healthcare or retirement benefits. The treatment we receive from employers and middlemen is degrading. They yell, treat us like modern slaves, and use trucks to transport us, cramming over 35 of us together and pouring water on the floor so we can't sit down to squeeze in more people. These trucks, which we call "death trucks," are so unsafe we joke grimly about buying our coffins because we're not sure we'll survive the journey.

I am eight months pregnant; I suffer from back pain and exposure to harmful chemicals because we're not provided with proper safety equipment. Yet, I must continue to work: my family depends on it.

You might wonder, why don't we stop accepting these conditions? I've never been one to stay silent. My sense of injustice drove me to speak out despite not knowing the laws. I've complained about the low wages and dangerous transport and tried to mobilize other women to demand

better pay and safer conditions. My efforts led to being labeled a troublemaker; I was fired, and no farmer would hire me. Desperate, I begged for any work I could get.

Finally, I was re-hired, but I also began to engage with associations like Aswat Nissa. The support from these groups has been empowering. We continue to organize strikes and speak to officials, hoping for change. I've even learned to ride a motorcycle to avoid dangerous trucks.

Living in rural Tunisia, where such protests are rare and often frowned upon, continues to be challenging. But I remain determined, fighting for our right to work and live with dignity. The dream of a better life persists.



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STORY 4: **I am ready** **- Video-story -**

Written by Celine Ghadban [Lebanon]



For the video story [click here.](#)

[In Arabic with English subtitles]

A woman wearing a black robe, symbolizing her emotions as she exists in society, says:

"Since my childhood, I was raised in a society where I only hear: [the hands of men appear to her right and left showing signs and telling her]:

- Inheritance is not your right
- The land is your brother' right
- Your brother is more eligible than you
- In the end, you belong to your husband
- You are obliged to work, and your husband should manage your salary
- Your work shift is 12 hours per day
- We don't have maternity leave
- We can hire a man instead of you
- Don't negotiate the salary because you are a woman
- You don't like the salary? You can leave

As expressions of dissatisfaction, sadness and anger appear on the girl's face, she finally closes her ears and shouts, "Khalaaaasss!" [enough]

From the back, the hand of another woman appears on her shoulder as she says:

"We are here by your side, and we will support you. You are not alone. These rights are yours, and together, we can claim them. Together, we can achieve the impossible."

The girl strokes the hand on her shoulder, removes the black robe, and says, "I am ready."

Part 3:

Recommendations and Conclusion

Recommendations

The co-research team drafted a series of recommendations, which indicate the possible actions and measures they identified as appropriate to support women facing EGBV. NGOs, governmental organizations, and any other actor committed to addressing EGBV in the region might want to consider the following recommendations:

- 1. Support the creation of safe spaces for women**, facilitating connection and providing physical meeting places for women-to-women learning. It's vital to foster spaces where women can share their stories and increase their capacity to recognize economic violence. Awareness building becomes actionable when women can train one another and build networks of mutual support [this can be done at the community, national, and regional levels].
- 2. Provide financial support and grants for women** to start small businesses and community projects. Help secure funding for vocational training programs and entrepreneurial projects led by women. Offer project management training and other capacity building for income-generating activities to increase women's technical skills and capacities in leading projects.
- 3. Engage young women and men by including educational material on EGBV in educational programmes.** Make sure that gender-based violence, gender equality, and healthy gender relationship skills are embedded in national education curriculums.
- 4. Raise public awareness of economic violence and women's rights** through local and national campaigns [e.g. using TV, radio, social media, and community events] targeting women and men, families, communities, employers, and public ministries.
- 5. Foster collaboration among labor unions, syndicates, women's associations, and human rights organizations; support them to strengthen their relationship with governmental institutions** [such as the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, The Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Economy & Trades]. Different actors need to work as partners towards identifying and reducing violence against women, including EGBV. Run training sessions on EGBV and how organizations and institutions can recognize and tackle violence and

exploitation within their own premises, organizational culture, and practices.

6. Advocate for legal and policy reforms at the national level.

These could include:

- Embedding official definitions of EGBV;
- Drafting new legislation to criminalize EGBV;
- Amending hereditary laws to better protect women's rights to inheritance;
- Formulating legislation ensuring equal pay for men and women;
- Pushing for the provision of health cards and social security to all female workers, including in informal sectors;
- Creating safety protocols for women in the workplace, especially in unsafe sectors [such as the agricultural sectors or industries handling chemical products];
- Improving maternity policies;
- Strengthening access to legal rights for divorced, widows, refugees, migrants and women with disabilities or from other marginalized groups.

7. Improve the effectiveness of reporting channels and support services.

Strengthen access to shelters, helplines, counseling, legal aid, and healthcare for survivors of EGBV. Mapping existing reporting mechanisms and support providers is a good first step; for instance, by organizing inquiries [led by women] to understand where and why services are not easily accessible, culturally sensitive, or tailored. Where these are not available, support creating and sustaining accessible reporting mechanisms and platforms. Ensure these services provide special aid and assistance for migrant/refugee women, addressing language barriers and legal rights awareness. Include psychological support as part of these services.

8. Enhance monitoring of EGBV by building capacities and assigning specific roles within social services agencies, civil society actors, and police forces. To better assist victims of EGBV, particularly among vulnerable groups, hire legal and social facilitators experts in EGBV in government departments [for example, to assist those responsible for financial transactions related to inheritance].

9. Create opportunities to share knowledge about proven strategies and successful models for addressing economic violence across countries and regions.

Conclusion

"I found that women are not necessarily silent, but they need a safe space to speak."

[Manal, Co-Researcher, Jordan]

The stories in this booklet echo a painful truth: EGBV often begins at home, is widespread in the workplace, and is reinforced by societal norms, making communities and institutions complicit. All these spheres, where women should find nurturing and support, can become cages that trap women, stripping away their financial autonomy and rights.

In the communities that took part in this research project, EGBV is one of the least recognized forms of violence by women and society. It is more spoken about if it happens in the workplace, but it is considered taboo to talk about it when it occurs within the family. This culture of silence around abuse is widespread among the four countries in this study and further reinforces the idea that women cannot challenge their abusers.

This confines women in a trap where causes and impacts reinforce one another into a continuous cycle. Economic insecurity is a direct cause of EGBV as it leads women to accept unfavorable, oppressive and exploitative working conditions. At the same time, under these conditions, women often remain impoverished and become even more of a target. In this unbearable cycle, women feel deprived of their lives, suffer from severe physical and mental health conditions, and perceive themselves as burdens on society.

The personal battles of women in these stories highlight the relentless struggle for economic independence in the face of familial control and societal norms. Women's resilience and courage inspire us to listen, understand, and fight alongside them for a world where every woman can claim her rightful place and financial freedom.

This participatory research journey has highlighted the pressing issues of EGBV and has also contributed to empowering participants to lead the knowledge-making and advocacy for their economic rights. Women know what to do but need support to access space, platforms, and technical and financial aid. At the same time, unless communities and society at large are involved in the conversation around EGBV, influencing social discourse, women are left alone fighting for change.

The stories and insights presented in this booklet form a powerful foundation for guiding efforts to achieve gender-sensitive economic justice in the MENA region. We must amplify these voices and turn their resilience into a collective movement. Let this booklet serve as a call to action: to support and advocate for women's freedom and the realization of their full potential, enhancing their lives and transforming our societies for the better.

APPENDIX 1

List of selection criteria for Co-Researchers:

- Young women either working or having access to women working in the informal sector
- Can speak to experiences of E/GBV
- Intersectional identities welcomed [refugees, rural residents, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups]
- Involved with a research project/FemPawer before
- Can read and write [in close contact and able to interview women with no or little literacy skill]
- Can participate and commit to the entire length of the project activities
- Willing to travel to meet with the local researchers for 5 sessions
- Age - young women [between 18-50]
- Live in the targeted countries [Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Tunisia]



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