

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN YEMEN: OFFICIAL STATISTICS AND AN EXPLORATORY SURVEY

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ABSTRACT

This article presents official statistics on violence against women in Yemen, as a threshold indicator of victimization incidence. Next, we present the findings from an exploratory survey into the prevalence of violent victimisation among a stratified sample of 120 women in Sana'a. We distinguish several kinds of violence. It appears that over half of the interviewed women have been threatened at some point in their lives, 55% have been abused physically, 34% have been victimized financially, and 17% are victims of sexual violence. Only 28% had not suffered at least one kind of violence. Older, married or divorced, and less educated women are at higher risk of victimisation. For those women who had been victimized, the husband was most often the perpetrator, although strangers also contributed sizeably to overall victimization. Most women report psychological damage as a consequence of the abuse and hardly ever seek help from the police. Additional qualitative findings show that many women regard the violence they have suffered as ordinary, and many regard society as being in principle against them and favouring men. We end with policy recommendations as well as recommendations for future research.

INTRODUCTION

The Problem of Domestic Violence

Violence against women is a topic that is increasingly receiving attention from the media, policy makers, scientists and public health workers alike. All over the world, women are believed to be victims of several kinds of violence, related to their role, socio-economic position and cultural constraints. Such violence can take the form of public violence such as robbery, assault, and rape by strangers, but it is believed to be particularly prevalent in the private domain, where it is often labelled domestic violence.

Violence against women occurs in many societies. Although the past years have seen an increasing body of research on the subject, relatively little remains known about the particular situation of women in less developed countries. In general, women are found to be more afraid of criminal victimisation than men, and are most afraid of being victimised outside the home. Many women take far reaching precautions, for instance, not going out alone at night, or even in the day time, or always ensuring that they are accompanied by a male family member.

However, it is generally acknowledged that a large number of crimes against women occur within the home. The International Crime Victimization Survey estimates that women's chances of being robbed or assaulted in their own homes are twice as high as those of men (Alvazzi del Frate, 1998; p. 70). Estimates of this figure for the United States are within the same range (Tjaden and Thoennes, 1998). Various United States' surveys estimate that women, when they are a victim of a violent crime, are victimised five to six times more often by persons with whom they have intimate relations (Craven, 1997; Bachman and Saltzman, 1995). In 93% of violent assaults in the United States at age 18 and over, the perpetrator is male; 76% percent of women who were physically assaulted or raped when over the age of 18 suffered at the hands of their husband or partner (Tjaden and Thoennes, 1998). This pattern can be found in studies from various countries and cultures; for instance, a study in Egypt (Abd el-Wahhab, 1994) that used newspaper items and court files as data sources showed how the majority of female victims of violence were married women. Ammar (2000) reports on a study in Egypt showing that 35% of married women are beaten by their husbands at least once during their marriage. Some authors assume that women in less developed countries are at greater risk of victimisation than women in developed countries (Alvazzi del Frate and Patrignani, 1999), although this assumption can be disputed at the theoretical as well as the empirical level, given levels of immigration and increased cultural exchange.

In spite of under-reporting, the results of studies from a variety of countries – developed as well as developing – show that the majority of murdered women are murdered by their (former) partners (Heise *et al.*, 1994b). For rape, a similar pattern emerges. Victimization studies of sexual assault face problems assessing both its true prevalence and its incidence; one substantial obstacle is that questions into sexual matters are sensitive and may be surrounded by strong taboos. All in all, it can be said that much of the violence experienced by females the world over is suffered at the hands of intimates, within the confines and context of the family home.

Assaults from intimates are less likely to be reported to the police than assaults from strangers (Alvazzi del Frate, 1998). Tadros (1998) found that women in an informal settlement in Cairo, Egypt did not report domestic violence to the police as they considered it inappropriate to report the 'father of one's children'. Hammoud (2001) presents a survey where 93% of abused women did not report to the police. Next, even if a violent crime by a close relation is reported, the police have been known to view the matter as a private affair rather than one within their area of competence. Lastly, a number of these reports do not result in prosecution, as victims of domestic violence are psychologically and economically involved with the offender and therefore more likely not to press charges (Gowdy *et al.*, 1998). Prosecutors, on the other hand, have historically been disinclined to pursue convictions in domestic violence cases because of problems in finding evidence, or concerns with family privacy. The small study by Abd el-Wahhab (1994) in Egypt, which involved mainly such extremely serious

crimes as murder and attempted murder, showed that in only two of the total of 10 cases were court orders made, and three comprised fines and orders to make up with the victim ('s family). In many countries, women are in fact punished for escaping from their batterers, as court decisions often allocate the children to the battering husband, he generally being the one who has a house and an income.

When domestic violence takes place, women are much more likely to be injured by it than men; they face twice the risk, depending on the type of crime. Studies have shown that abused women report significantly worse physical and mental health than non-abused women (see for instance Heise *et al.*, 1994; Kornblit, 1994). A sizeable proportion of women visiting United States' emergency rooms do so for the treatment of injuries inflicted in the course of domestic abuse (Council for Scientific Affairs, 1992). The World Bank reported that the burden on the health care system imposed by the injuries sustained by women as a result of domestic violence is of the same magnitude as recognised health hazards that have long been on the international agenda (Heise *et al.*, 1994a).

In addition, the long-term consequences of violence within the family or family circle are often grave. It is believed that in most cases of domestic violence, the violence constitutes a structural pattern of abuse, in which it assumes various manifestations of physical, mental and sexual violence (Alvazzi del Frate, 1998). It is a generally acknowledged fact that family violence may under certain conditions be self-perpetuating, with battered children becoming child batterers themselves. Much of the victimisation that women experience begins during their childhood. One in four victims of violent crime in 1992 in the United States was below 18 years of age (Moone, 1994). The majority of rapes occurs against children and adolescents, with 22% of women under 12 years old when they experienced their first rape. Women as well as children are often unable to protect themselves against this kind of violence. Even if the children in such abusive homes are not victimised themselves, witnessing abusive behaviour is known to be correlated with various seriously adverse effects (see for instance Kornblit, 1994).

Little is known about the causes of domestic violence or violence against women as a whole. Studies into its contributory factors indicate that there are probably several processes that play a role. Levinson (1989) identifies four factors that correlate with the extent of violence against women in a society. These are: economic inequality; the accepted use of violence for conflict resolution; male dominance; and divorce restrictions for women. Heise *et al.* (1994b) identify a number of further factors, which they group into cultural factors (such as a belief in the inherent superiority of males, notions of the family as private), economic (such as limited access to employment and education for women, discriminatory laws regarding property), legal (being in place in plural systems of law), and political (under-representation of women in power).

While stressing the heterogeneity of Arab society, Afkhami *et al.* (1998) see male dominance as the general underlying cause for violence against women, they give examples of how women are in a vicious circle, having been systemati-

cally deprived of knowledge of their rights and of the law. They state that Muslim fundamentalist doctrine singles out women's rights as the supreme test of cultural authenticity. In many Muslim societies family laws have not adjusted to modern conditions, and thus continue to form the base for the unequal power relationship between women and men. In Abd el-Wahhab's admittedly small study it appeared that quarrels over confiscation of the woman's property were often a precursor to violence, as were quarrels over income, the woman living with her in-laws, problems with her 'moral' behaviour and problems over marriage, such as the woman marrying against her family's wishes when the husband wished to marry another, or the woman's wish to divorce (Abd el-Wahhab, 1994). Regarding domestic violence in Arab societies, Hammoud (2001) notes that it is an extension of 'societal violence'; she argues that Arab society is tolerant of family violence and that many women view their husband's abuse as something normal.

In assessing the extent of violence against women, all types of measurement methods are likely to underestimate the levels of violence. Whether they are based on official statistics, where a dark figure is to be expected, or whether they use survey methodology, women are generally reluctant to admit to abuse or violence, or for various reasons do not define it as such. In general, studies into domestic violence are notoriously problematic, in developed as well as developing countries. They suffer from distorting memory effects and social desirability effects in the retrospective assessment of cause and consequences, all exacerbated by difficulties in definition (Bijleveld, 1998). The dark figure surrounding domestic victimisation thus remains, as does the relative lack of facts regarding the phenomenology of the violent incidents, the influence of culture and society, the long-term causes of violent behaviour, its intensity both in terms of immediate consequences and frequency, and its long term consequences. This lack of data is especially serious for developing countries, where studies into domestic violence have, with a few notable exceptions, been rare.

Yemeni Culture

Yemen is a Muslim country situated on the southern tip of the Arabian peninsula. Until 1990, it composed two countries: North Yemen and South Yemen. North Yemen was highly traditional, governed until 1962 by an Imam (a religious and political leader) who was not inclined to maintain any relations with outsiders. The South on the other hand was Marxist and maintained close links with the Eastern bloc countries. The South was much more liberal with regard to women's status, and had a higher literacy rate. After the collapse of Communist rule in the Soviet Union and the subsequent disintegration of the Eastern bloc alliance, South Yemen lost almost all of its support from that area. Simultaneously, the North, which had supported Saddam Hussein in the second Gulf war (in which operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm took place), saw most of its migrant workers in the Gulf states repatriated as a retribution. This caused social disrupt-

tion and a substantial reduction in the foreign earned income stream that had kept much of the economy going. Both countries impoverished, they merged in 1990 to become Yemen. Although one civil war (in fact an uprising in the south against the dominance of the north) took place, Yemen is now a relatively stable democracy.

The upheavals of the past ten years have taken their toll: the cost of living has more than doubled and many families live in extreme poverty. Health services are scarce and insufficient, maternal and infant death is among the highest in the world. Female literacy is 24%, male literacy 67%; the enrolment of females (up to tertiary education) is 29%, the same figure for males is 72%. As in many other developing nations, a large part of the population is under 15: in Yemen 49%. In general, facilities in the big towns are much better than in the rural areas. Schooling facilities, for instance, have dwindled in past years, especially in the more remote regions, and illiteracy remains high. The human development index, constructed as a combination of several 'dimensions' of human development, that is life expectancy, health issues, education and standards of living, ranks among the lowest 30 of the world (UNDP, 2001).

The Yemeni administrative structure stretches over 20 governorates. A governorate is an administrative political unit, that in Yemen has very limited autonomy from the central government, especially in the areas of education, health services, sports and social welfare. The police forces are always under the control of the centralized administration. In practice, Yemeni authority is more limited in the rural areas where strong tribal structures remain. There are two major religious groups in Yemen. The Zaydis, who are Shia, are, though the minority religious group (20%), the most powerful, mainly because of their tribal and military dominance in Yemeni society. Most of them live in the northern part of Yemen. The Shafii (who are Sunni) are the majority (80%); they live in southern and eastern part of Yemen. They have less power than the Zaydis and are engaged in agricultural and commercial work rather than militarisation of their tribes.

Yemeni culture is traditional and places great emphasis on family and tribal structures. The proper behaviour of women is central to the honour of the family. Especially in the towns, as a rule women veil almost completely ('*munaqqabat*'); that is, they wear a black cloak that covers the entire body, and a headdress that entails complete veiling except for the eyes. The societies of men and women are – but for the family – separate. Women also function under strict behavioural codes, and societal norms require many of them not to venture out in public without a male family member. Thus, Yemen can be said to rank high on each of the four factors identified by Levinson (1994).

In the following, we present the findings of the first study of its kind on violence against women in Yemen. We assess victimisation prevalence for various types of violence. We explore the relationship between the victim and her victimiser, and we expect that women are – as in other countries – mainly victimised by their (close) relations. Given the fairly strict separation of Yemeni

women from men, one could expect that they seek less recourse to official institutions than do women in other countries. Many studies show that a variety of factors contribute to domestic violence, and these we expect to play a large role for Yemen as well. Lastly, we investigate the consequences of the violence for women. Where our data permit, we link incidence to pertinent background characteristics. Our data sheds light on a country which employs strict rules and regulations for women and which constitute, as the literature appears to indicate, a clear pattern of risk factors for domestic violence.

METHOD

Official Statistics

To begin, we collected all police records in Yemen for various types of victimisation of women. For this we combined the records from the Central Police Department within the Yemeni Ministry of the Interior with the records from the central Departments on Crime in every governorate. In Yemen, every police station sends all its crime notifications daily, within 24 hours, by telex to the governorate's Criminal Police, who in turn send them on to the Ministry of the Interior. The central Departments on Crime in each governorate also collect separate notifications from their own governorates, as some people do not report to their local police station but prefer to do so directly to their central Department on Crime, or, on occasion, directly to the Ministry of the Interior. As the official records are based only on the information obtained from the local police stations that are passed on by the central Departments of Crime by the Ministry of the Interior, they therefore do not include the victimisation cases registered directly with the governorate. As such, they can only under-represent victimisation rates.

Survey

Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted by the first author to improve the questionnaire for the exploratory study and to collect relevant background information for the analysis and interpretation of the findings. This pilot study consisted of three lengthy in-depth confidential interviews with volunteers who had been recruited through friends and acquaintances.

Sample

For the exploratory survey of victimisation rates, a stratified sample was drawn of 120 women living in Sana'a, the capital of Yemen. Three strata had been selected which represent respectively a higher socio-economic level, an average socio-economic level, and a lower socio-economic level. Within each stratum two areas in Sana'a were selected, ensuring a spread across the town. The first stratum was composed of Hadda and al-Hay al-Siyasi; the second of al-Safia and Shari'a Ta'iz; and the third stratum of Nuqum and Bab al-Yemen. Within each of the chosen six areas, houses were ordered along the streets and each seventh house in a row selected. Within the houses, adult women were asked to volunteer for the study. In some cases, two women in one household were interviewed. There were no refusals, although not all doors were answered. As not all questionnaires were filled in accurately, the final sample comprised 111 women.

Procedure

Female interviewers approached the subjects in their homes. The interviewers had been so trained while they were students in the Department of Psychology at the University of Sana'a. A total of six female interviewers conducted the 120 interviews. Sometimes they were accompanied during their rounds by other females, as this was considered safer. Interviews were conducted in an informal atmosphere. All respondents were assured that the interviews were anonymous and that their answers would be treated confidentially. Interviews were administered by the interviewers. No male supervisor was present. Contrary to expectations, most interviews were very open, the women were in general quite eager to talk about their experiences. One tentative explanation for this is that the interviewers were strangers, which made it easier and less threatening to talk.

Questionnaire design

A modular questionnaire was used, containing open-ended as well as closed-end questions. Closed-end questions were used for demographic characteristics, such as age, marital status, number of children, education, profession, living arrangements, socio-economic status, and the number of dependants living in the respondent's home.

Mixtures of open-ended and closed-end questions were structured around victimisation with respect to insults, beatings, threats of beating, death threats, attempted murder, torture, imprisonment at home, sexual harassment, attempted rape, rape, damage to property, hostage taking, and expulsion from the home. For each topic, the questionnaire asked first about frequency, and then the woman's relation to the perpetrator, the causes or events leading up to the violence, and its

consequences. The questionnaire concluded with a number of global questions asking about the woman's coping style and support network. Room had been left towards the end for mentioning other types of violence not included, as well as for remarks of a general nature.

RESULTS

Official Statistics

Table 1 presents the female criminal victimisation figures obtained from combining data from the 18 central Provincial Departments on Crime and from the Ministry of Interior. As noted above, police and official data are known always to contain a dark figure; given the extent of reporting and insufficient administration in Yemen this is expected to be even more the case here. Nevertheless, these data give an indication of the irreducible level of violence against women.

Table 1 shows a number of matters. First, numbers are very small. Our view is that this points mainly at a very high dark figure and reflects the incompleteness of the police notifications. Given that Yemen has some 17 million inhabitants, these numbers are unrealistically low, even taking into account both the expected dark figure that is known to be high in domestic violence and victimisation and aspects of rural life in Yemen. In all probability they reflect cultural obstacles and women's reluctance to report crimes committed against them: in many cases it may be impossible for women to report crimes to the police.

Secondly, numbers are too small to allow comparisons to be made over years within victimisation categories within or between governorates. This is also the reason why we did not correct the annual figures for population size in each of the governorates. The figures can never be taken as more than indicative. Nevertheless, we believe that comparisons can be made, although with caution.

Looking at the marginal total figures, we see that the highest total figure is the victimisation category 'violence' (36 for 1996 and 142 for 1997). Second highest is 'murder' (66 for 1996 and 108 for 1997). Next come 'suicide' (40 for 1996 and 68 for 1997), 'rape' (56 for 1996 and 40 for 1997), and 'manslaughter' (10 for 1996 and 68 for 1997). These are all extremely serious crimes. The fact that 'murder' is second may point to a high differential effect in the sense that many other offences or crimes against women are as a rule dealt with through extra-judicial channels or traditional dispute resolution.

But for rape, the incidence of all categories is on the rise. Looking at the totals in each line, we see that this rise is consistently accounted for by the governorates which contain larger towns, such as Amana (which is the capital Sana'a itself), Sana'a governorate, Aden, Ta'iz, Hodeidah and Dhamar.

Across all governorates, women's violence victimisation increased 49% from 1996 to 1997. Measurements from other years are necessary to establish whether this is a structural change or not.

TABLE 1
1996 and 1997 female victimization statistics

	murder	man- slaughter	elope- ment	rape	violence	suicide	violent kid- napping	dis- appearance	shooting victim	explosive victims	death from unknown causes	robbery	stealing	subtotal
Amara	8	2	10	6	4	2	2	2	8	-	-	-	-	44
1997	8	10	14	6	14	6	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	64
Sana'a	4	2	-	-	2	-	2	-	4	2	2	-	-	16
1997	8	2	-	-	14	6	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	32
Aden	2	-	2	24	4	4	2	4	4	-	-	-	4	50
1997	2	10	6	14	28	20	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	80
Ta'iz	12	-	-	-	2	4	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	20
1996	10	6	2	2	2	4	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	26
1997	2	-	-	4	-	4	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	8
Hodeidah	4	2	-	-	2	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14
1997	6	-	2	4	2	6	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	22
Abyan	6	-	6	-	4	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20
1997	-	6	-	-	4	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20
Lahaj	6	-	2	-	2	10	-	-	4	-	4	-	-	28
1996	2	6	-	-	16	8	2	-	-	-	4	-	-	34
1997	14	6	6	-	6	10	2	2	16	2	2	-	-	66
'Ibb	20	20	-	4	22	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	68
1997	-	-	-	-	6	-	-	-	8	-	-	-	-	14
Dhamar	8	-	-	-	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	18
1997	-	-	6	10	-	-	-	4	-	-	2	-	-	22
Hadhramaut	4	-	6	10	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	16
1996	2	-	-	2	2	-	-	-	2	-	2	-	-	10
1997	6	2	-	2	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	18
Sa'ada	4	-	-	-	2	2	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	14
1996	6	2	-	-	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14
1997	4	-	-	2	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	18
al-Baydha	6	2	-	6	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	8
1997	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	8
al-Mahara ¹	2	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	-	10
1996	2	-	-	2	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8
1997	2	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	4
Shabwah	2	-	2	-	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10
1996	2	2	2	-	2	2	-	2	2	-	-	-	-	4
1997	16	-	-	-	4	2	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	22
Hajja	2	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	6
1996	2	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
1997	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Ma'rib	66	10	30	56	36	40	12	14	64	4	12	-	4	348
1996	108	68	24	40	142	68	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	460
1997														

¹ Al Mahara is a new governorate formed in 1997. As such no statistics for 1996 are available.

Quantitative Survey Findings

Married women constituted 44% of the sample, single women 39%, 3% were widowed and 15% divorced or separated. Of ever-married respondents, 88% had been married once, 12% had been married twice. The distribution of the female respondents over age groups, educational levels, and income groups is given in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Distribution of respondents over age, educational, and income

Age		Education		Income/month	
15-20	23.1	illiterate	13.8	<5000 YR	5.6
21-25	32.7	read and write	3.7	5000-7000 YR	12.1
26-30	23.1	elementary	10.1	7000-10000 YR	28.0
31-35	10.6	primary school	11.0	10000-20000 YR	21.5
36-40	6.7	secondary school	25.7	20000-30000 YR	13.1
41-45	1.9	university	30.3	>30000 YR	19.6
46-50	1.0	higher than university	5.5		
51-55	1.0				

On average, seven to eight persons were supported from the reported income. Less than half were housewives (35%), a quarter were teachers (26%), and 13% said that they were students; 14% were employed in skilled and 4% in unskilled labour; the employment status of the remainder was unclear. The highest proportion of women (46%) lived in their family's home, 29% rented a house, and 14% were home owners. Of those women who had children, 80% had fewer than six.

Table 3 lists the types of violence suffered by the women in the sample.

The verbal violence of insult is suffered by approximately three quarters of women. After insult, the most prevalent type of violence is beating: 46.3% of women have suffered this at some point in their lives. Threats of beating are third, followed by torture, property damage and expulsion. Imprisonment at home and death threats are other important categories: one in five of the women had received death threats at some point in her life. The frequency values show that most of the violence occurs on a regular basis, 3 being the average scale value denoting 'regularly'. When analysing the data a striking pattern emerged. It turned out that the most frequently mentioned perpetrator of almost all types of violence was the husband. The brother or father was often second. A second striking finding is that the most often named consequence is psychological, for all types of violence except property damage. Looking at the causes or events leading up to the violence it turned out that they were not unique to types of violence: in many cases, one problem led to an array of abuse and violence, with

TABLE 3
Types of violence, prevalence and frequency

violence type	prevalence	frequency ¹	most frequently mentioned perpetrator	most frequently mentioned consequences
insult	74.5	2.82	husband	psychological
beating	46.3	3.10	husband	psychological
threat beating	44.9	2.78	husband	psychological
threat kill	19.0	3.35	husband	–
attempt kill	3.8	4.75	others	–
torture	36.3	2.11	husband	psychological
imprisonment home	28.6	3.17	husband	psychological
sexual harassment	13.3	2.43	–	–
rape attempt	10.6	3.82	n.a.	–
rape ²	1.0	–	–	–
property	34.0	2.78	others	material
hostage taking	2.9	3.00	–	–
expulsion	34.9	2.58	husband	psychological

the same perpetrator for the same reason exhibiting various types of abuse. The problems that were most often mentioned as causes of the violence related to the woman's moral behaviour (in most cases quarrels about her going out), quarrels about money, and incompatibility with the family in law.

For the purpose of a deeper analysis of these data, we excluded verbal abuse, as it may be presumed to be the least damaging and is very frequent. Next, we grouped the types of violence experienced into threats, sexual violence, physical violence, restrictive violence (not being allowed to go out, being taken hostage), and material damage. This analysis showed that 50.9% of women had suffered threats, 17.3% had been victims of sexual violence, 54.5% had suffered physical abuse, 28.2% had had their freedom restricted, and 34% had had property damaged or stolen. Only 28.2% of women had not suffered any violence. Almost half (44.5%) had suffered three or more kinds of violence.

If we relate these figures to the women's background characteristics, several patterns emerge. First, we see that those who are younger and more highly educated have in general a smaller chance of victimisation. Given the fact that most of the perpetrators are husbands, this seems likely to be a spurious effect: younger women (who simply because of opportunity also have a greater chance to have been in higher education) are less likely to be married, and thus will have been less exposed to a husband. However, even when controlling for age, education remains negatively correlated with victimisation. This finding is sus-

tained by the fact that single women in particular (and not just younger women) have smaller chances of victimisation – even though there is again a relationship with education (as educated women are more likely to be single). Concerning particular types of victimisation, we find the following statistically significant associations: divorced and unemployed women have a higher risk of being threatened; single women have a lower risk of physical abuse, and conversely divorced as well as married women run higher risks of physical abuse; single women have a lower risk of having their freedom restricted, and divorced women as well as those who listed their profession as ‘housewife’ run a higher risk of having their freedom restricted (in the latter case, cause and effect might be bi-directional, as women who have their movements restricted have few other options than being a housewife). In particular, divorced women stand out as running higher risks for almost all types of violence; it is reasonable to assume that many of these women may actually have divorced to escape the battering.

Looking at consequences – again excluding insults – 47.3% of all respondents are suffering or have suffered psychological consequences because of the violence they experienced, with 17.3% suffering or having suffered physical consequences. A total of 61.8% of respondents reported that they had suffered abuse at the hands of their husband, the son was implicated in 5.6% of cases, father and brother were both implicated by 28.2%, the mother by 11.8%, the paternal uncle by 7.3%, the maternal uncle by 5.5%, others were named by 31.8%, and strangers were mentioned by 16.4%; the proportion of women who reported that they had been violently abused by any non-stranger as perpetrator amounted to 69.1%.³ This means that the subjects in this sample are 4.5 times more likely to be the victim of non-stranger than of stranger violence, with the husband by far the most often cited. Looking at victims only, it turns out that 93.7% of victims rate a non-stranger as the perpetrator, with 32.8% rating a stranger.

Looking at women’s coping strategies when they face violence, it is remarkable that only 3.4% reported they went to the police. Most go to parents, relatives or friends. A large number (27.6%) did nothing, but considered the violence to be their own problem.

Qualitative Survey Findings

In the qualitative remarks made at the end of the questionnaire, many women volunteered additional information. Indeed, one of the most striking findings here was that many of them said that the questionnaire failed to investigate violence committed against them by society. This concept of ‘societal violence’ is discussed by Hammoud (2001). She identifies the general negative attitude towards women in Arab societies as an integral factor in domestic violence. One woman bluntly stated:

'Women have no rights. They have to suffer, society does with us as they please. We are second class citizens. Nobody listens, nobody cares, people think this is normal but it is not normal.'

Indeed, as one example of societal violence, several of our respondents ranked early marriage and polygamy (as an illustration, a Yemeni saying purports that girls are ready to be married by 8 years of age). One woman said:

'This society always favours men. Nobody thinks of us. We suffer many injustices, even ones that no one thinks about such as polygamy and early marriage.'

Respondents indicated that this practice led to deteriorating family relations and to a family climate conducive to violence. Other kinds of societal violence mentioned were violent divorce, the manner in which women's inheritances are more or less customarily confiscated, as well as the absolute dominance of men over women. One older divorced woman said:

'After 20 years of marriage and 6 children he divorced me. He sent me to my family house. It was a big shock for me and for my whole family. People tried to mediate between us but no success. I am living now with my family in a very small house. Everybody blames me and is looking at me with mean eyes. Nobody welcomes me here. The members of the family often tell me that this divorce is my fault. Many times I have thought of killing myself, but I am afraid of Allah, and I think of my children. I always pray that I will get justice.'

We encountered the bitterest complaints. The respondents stated that they had no confidence whatsoever that anyone ever took their position to heart. They felt that society as a whole had an extremely negative attitude towards women, in principle favouring men's interests over theirs. We give a number of quotes from interviewed women:

'I don't believe what I hear from the media about equality between man and woman in our society. Our society is men's society. Men decide what is right and what is wrong, not only in the family but in the whole society. They interpret the holy Qur'an in harmony with their interest. We know that our religion (Islam) guarantees many rights for women, but men accept only what is good for them and don't accept what is not good for them. For example, in some part of Yemen the community doesn't accept women's inheritance: this is against Islamic law! This is because they don't accept woman as a person.'

Victims of violence also reported that even their own families seemed not to care that they had suffered. Women said that their families as well as society as a whole told them they simply had to behave in a manner that pleased their husbands, or otherwise their husbands were permitted to beat them.

'When people have to choose between word of a man and the word of a woman, they will believe the word of the man. Even the people who are my close relatives, they believe my husband instead of me. So I have no one, I simply have to solve this problem myself.'

Another woman said:

'In the age of 14, my family arranged for me a marriage with a man, who was 20 years older than me. Now I am 21 years old and have 3 children. My husband has always treated me very badly. He tells me that my family didn't raise me well, and it is his responsibility to do that. He has been beating me and torturing me. I complained to my father several times, but he also blamed me; he told me I have to be patient and protect the back of my husband. I never understand how my family gave a right to my husband to abuse me so cruelly. For a long time I only cry from my heart and pray that I get help. I do not think that there is hope to get justice from any person, if even my father doesn't recognize my suffering. So I gave up. It is the first time for me to speak with an outsider about my problem.'

Other women reported how the family simply refused to let her accuse her husband of abusing her. Quite a number of victims therefore rated the violence they had suffered as 'normal', and as a consequence also did not want to take action or even to discuss it with outsiders.

Women who had suffered physical violence sometimes suffered severe physical consequences. One woman had been blinded as a consequence of the beatings she had undergone, one was handicapped for life. Some women had had cigarettes extinguished on their bodies, and some had been stoned. Several women had been locked in their houses, in one case confined to a cellar for days on end. A number of married women reported that they had been raped by their husbands.

DISCUSSION

The data from the police files and Interior Ministry records we collected pointed mainly to a gross under-reporting of the extent of violence against women. In particular in the rural areas of Yemen, where traditional law applies and conflict resolution is mostly achieved in the traditional manner, it is highly probable that crimes will not be reported to government offices. In addition, given the fact that police stations in Yemen are – while there are indications of improvement – still

nearly exclusively male-staffed, it would be culturally unacceptable for a woman to enter a police station, unless accompanied by a male family member. If that male family member is the one who is the perpetrator of the crime, it is not difficult to understand why reporting by women is highly unlikely. Reports from other countries have shown that the appointment of female police staff is an effective policy measure to increase reporting and registration of crime against women.

Our survey findings are generally consistent with figures reported from other countries. Prevalence figures are high, especially for beating, beating threats, and torture. The figure for beating is lower than that reported by Abd el-Wahhab (1994); differences may however be attributable to sample composition. The fact that women reported the psychological consequences most often, and that they most often mentioned their husband as the perpetrator is also consistent with findings from other countries: Ammar (2000) reported similar results. Tadros (1998) reported that for Egypt quarrels about sexual services were the most frequent cause of domestic violence; in her study quarrels about financial matters came second. It may be that cultural reasons made Yemeni women mention sexual issues less often, as we found that respondents were reticent about discussing sexual incidents. On the other hand, financial reasons may actually be much more prominent in Yemen, with living standards lower than in Egypt. Some types of violence are unique to Yemen, such as hostage taking which is endemic in Yemen, or maybe unique for Muslim countries, such as the appropriation of women's (already half share) inheritance. The same applies to the societal violence mentioned by women in the qualitative part of the study, such as forced marriage, early marriage, and polygamy.

Even though overall levels and other patterns may be consistent, the consequences of violent crime may be graver for women in Yemen than for women in other countries. While an injury is an injury, and in many parts of the world women have little recourse to help, women in Yemen face, we believe, a worse situation. First, anecdotal evidence suggests that whereas women could in the past return to their family if a marriage turned abusive, many families these days simply cannot afford to feed an additional person, or cannot afford to pay back the dowry. At the same time, women can expect little protection from the police, even assuming that cultural constraints do not prevent them from seeking help from government institutions. The literature suggests that women may lose, and are therefore afraid to lose, their children if they leave their husband (Hammoud, 2001). Again, the situation of battered women in Yemen is comparable to that in other Muslim societies, such as reported on by Ammar (2000) and Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2000). With women often being illiterate, with no one to turn to and without independent income, they are truly prisoners of their situation.

At the same time, as many women indicated, much of the violence they suffer is perceived as 'normal' by society. For instance, it is considered the husband and male family members' prerogative to decide whether and when a woman may leave the house; many Yemeni will consider it an absolutely normal situation that

a woman is told to stay at home. This of course excludes such extreme situations as are described above, where one woman was locked in a cellar. It is striking that while a number of the women said that the violence they were suffering was normal, a structural part of the society in which they lived, this did not mean that they considered it acceptable. As in other Muslim countries, so in Yemen, it might be concluded that women should not be viewed as victims who are resigned to their fate, even though they sometimes have no means to put an end to their situation.

Acknowledging that it must be perceived against the constraints imposed by resources and infrastructure, our study can be said to have a number of weak points. Our sample was small and probably not representative for Sana'a, let alone for the whole of Yemen. The usual methodological complications of assessing victimisation retrospectively must be assumed to have been present. In addition, even though no men were present during the interviews, the fact that other female family members may have been present and that many married women live in with their family in law may have caused under-reporting. We believe there is a need for concerted action. More representative and more detailed data should be made available on the nature and extent of domestic violence in Yemen. Such studies should focus on repeat victimisation, on incidence, and should include results from the less easily accessible rural areas. It would be beneficial to link such further studies with the International Crime Victimisation Survey, in order to permit national comparisons.

NOTES

- 1 Frequency had been measured on a five point scale where '1 represented 'always', and '5' represented 'once'.
- 2 Only one woman reported being the victim of this act of violence, so we do not report its frequency.
- 3 The percentages need not add to 100 because (a) the woman may have been victimized more than once, or (b) the violence may have had more than one perpetrator.

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