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After COVID-19: Mitigating Domestic Gender-based Violence in Egypt in Times of Emergency

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A Policy Paper in Contribution to the Research Project:



Social Protection in Egypt: Mitigating the Socio-Economic Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Vulnerable Employment

The Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Research and Innovation
Initiative at the American University in Cairo

Principle Investigator:

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Abstract

In times of crises and emergencies, violence against women tends to increase. The outbreak of COVID-19 has resulted in severe precautionary measures such as social isolation, physical distancing, staying at home, curfews and lockdowns, which brought “normal” life to a halt and created a temporary convergence between the public and the private. The pandemic has forced the global community to turn its gaze back to the private, and compelled them to pay attention to the old/new problem of gender-based violence, particularly, domestic violence that spiked during the pandemic. Against such a backdrop, and using a critical feminist lens that analyzes the historical socio-political roots of the problem, this paper revisits the national structures, mechanisms, strategies and policies that address gender-based violence in Egypt. Data for this paper was collected through various methods to measure and analyze domestic violence in Egypt. These included qualitative research tools such as expert interviews in addition to secondary data such as literature review on the policy problem, and a desk review of the official data, relevant laws, policies, and law enforcement practices related to domestic violence.

This policy paper argues that while COVID-19 exacerbated a set of deeply-seated problems that have limited the efficacy of national policy interventions, it provided a rare opportunity for a comprehensive reassessment of the national structures of gender-based violence reporting, socio-legal interventions, and risk-mitigation. The paper further argues that while the current policies, institutions, laws and efforts have taken into consideration some of the particular challenges presented by COVID-19 in addressing domestic violence in Egypt, there remains room for more interventions that are sensitive to the root causes of the problem through a set of policy measures.

The paper focuses on emergency services during COVID-19 through a close-up analysis of the efficacy of state-run shelters for survivors of domestic violence. Shelters continue to be globally recognized as one of the main tools for mitigating domestic violence. With that in mind, the paper analyzes the main challenges facing service providers of Shelters in Egypt and the gap that exists between international and national standards. While critical of the UN calls for combatting domestic violence worldwide without providing member states with the necessary resources or technical aid to do so, this paper demonstrates how a combined lack of resources, along with a set of complex legal loopholes and socio-cultural set of gendered beliefs about women’s role in the family unit render shelters practically useless as tools to tackle domestic violence in Egypt. COVID-19 did however, highlight the importance of the private sphere to the economic and social realms and its life sustaining role worldwide, thus making interventions to combat domestic violence both a policy and public health necessity. The paper concludes with a number of short, medium and long-term recommendations to combat domestic and gender-based violence on a national scale in Egypt post COVID-19.

I. Introduction and Key Questions

The COVID-19 pandemic increased the reported violence against women worldwide. Shelter in place orders have meant that families spent more time together, which resulted in a spike in different forms of domestic violence against women and children. The situation has prompted the Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres to call it a [“horrifying global surge”](#). Since the start of the pandemic, the UN is reporting that many countries, for example, Lebanon and Malaysia, have seen the number of calls to helplines double, compared to the same month last year. In other places, like China, [they have tripled](#). While statistics are lacking in many countries, anecdotes from government domestic violence services and hotlines worldwide seem to confirm a drastic rise in the number and frequency of cases. Thus, different forms of domestic violence against women and children are one of the most widely spread global consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the 4th of April 2020, The United Nations Secretary General recognized this crisis and appealed to end all forms of violence, not only in the battlefield, but also what takes place “at home” around the world. In a [statement](#), he declared emergency services as essential services for gender-based violence survivors/victims. Furthermore, the UN Secretary General expressed concerns over women’s accessibility to emergency services globally, due to the diversion of attention, efforts and resources to address COVID-19 ramifications. He also pinpointed the challenges for survivors/victims to access emergency services in such contexts. “In some countries, the number of women calling support services has doubled. Meanwhile, healthcare providers and police are overwhelmed and understaffed”, declared Guterres, while adding that “local support groups are paralyzed or short of funds. Some domestic violence shelters are closed; others are full.”([United Nations Secretary General Statement, April 4, 2020](#)). The United Nations Secretary General did not stop at raising alarms, he also urged countries to ensure addressing these challenges in their national response plans to include “increasing investment in online services and civil society organizations and making sure that judicial systems continue to prosecute abusers. Setting up emergency warning systems in pharmacies and groceries. Declaring shelters as essential services. And creating safe ways for women to seek support, without alerting their abusers” ([United Nations Secretary General Statement, April 4, 2020](#)).

In addition to the toll violence takes on women and children, both physically and emotionally, domestic violence has had several drastic economic and political consequences. At a time when the global economy is going through a major recession, domestic violence also adds a devastating financial cost. Women and children in need of medical and psychological services pose an additional burden on an already very stretched healthcare systems. Mitigating the effects of national lockdowns and shelter in place orders on increasing the levels of domestic violence has thus become a priority for governments around the world. Some states have strengthened, doubled, or increased the efficiency of systems that are already in place, such as national domestic violence helplines, or shelters, while others have created new methods of dealing with this old/new problem that are more efficient and context-appropriate. In places as diverse as Argentina, Canada, France, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States, government authorities, women’s rights activists and civil society partners have warned against increasing reports of domestic violence during the crisis, and plans for more shelters for domestic violence victims are already underway. In Australia, the government established a special COVID- 19 family and

domestic violence task force, while in India, the National Commission for Women, the main state's national machinery for improving women's rights and status, [launched a new WhatsApp number that enables women to reach an emergency help line through messages](#).

While a global conversation about the toll of COVID-19 has been taking place for several months now, and specifically since mid-March 2020, the response to the increasing levels of domestic gender-based violence in Egypt, has been slow and uneven. Like many other countries in the global south, Egypt lacks a proper reporting system of domestic violence, a fact that makes data scarce and governmental and non-governmental interventions uneven. In addition, Egypt's national response to domestic violence has been historically very limited, lacking a clear national strategy for dealing with domestic violence (Nazra for Feminist Studies 2016). Such limitation is evident in the lack of a national laws that deal with crimes of domestic violence, the lack of rapid responses and interventions that are survivor-centered, and the limited number of shelters that exist. In fact, the National Strategy for Combating Violence against Women (NSVAW), adopted by the National Council for Women in Egypt (NCW) in May 2015, [addressed directly the subject of shelters, making the provision of adequate shelters as one of its objective](#). In other words, given the crisis created by COVID-19, there exists an opportunity to reassess Egypt's National Strategy for Combating Violence against Women (NSVAW) and the gaps and challenges inherent within this program.

This policy paper situates domestic violence within the current socio-political crisis resulting from COVID-19. In summary it seeks to answer three interrelated questions:

- a) What policies, institutions, laws, and efforts currently exist to address domestic violence in Egypt? How adequate is the current preparedness for an outbreak of domestic violence in Egypt, especially as a second wave of the pandemic is peaking with the publication of this paper?
- b) How can we understand the question of domestic violence in the age of COVID-19 as a question of violence in the private sphere from a critical feminist perspective?
- c) What are the immediate to short-term, medium term, and long-term measures that need to be put in place in the light of the crisis of domestic violence highlighted by the COVID-19 outbreak in Egypt?

This paper tackles these questions through a multi-layered gendered analysis of Egypt's response to the question of domestic violence both before and after the outbreak of COVID-19. As elaborated above, while Egypt is far from being the only country facing those challenges, domestic violence against women and children in the private sphere has been a long-standing challenge in the country. The pandemic thus highlights the urgency of addressing this challenge head-on within a broader triage of justice, healthcare, and safety. Over the past few months, and as a result of the current global emergency, the different bodies of the United Nations, and especially UN Women, have developed a rapid series of responses to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on violence against women. The five pillars of urgent global response are outlined on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) main website page as follows:

1. Gender-based violence, including domestic violence is mitigated and reduced;
2. Social protection and economic stimulus packages serve women and girls,
3. People support and practice equal sharing of care work;
4. Women and Girls lead and participate in COVID-19 response planning and decision-making;
5. Data and Coordination mechanisms include gender perspective ([United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 5, Update on COVID-19 response, 2020](#)).

A quick survey of the recommendations put forward by the different UN bodies demonstrates a lack of evaluation of both the extent of the emergency, and the differing state capacities to deal with the numerous challenges related to the pandemic. Many challenges thus arise, including but not limited to under-reporting of domestic violence, the difficulty of making services, including shelters, safe during the pandemic, as well as the lack of resources to carry out those services in ways that ensure the safety of both service providers and recipients. While both the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and UN Women pay particular attention to the elimination of violence against women, as evident under Target 5.2 of the SDGs, one that specifically pledges to [“eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation”](#), one wonders how doable any of those recommendations or pledges are. Moreover, those statements, proclamations, and pledges risk raising empty promises, unless they are supported with the necessary aid and resources needed to face the daunting challenges of providing services for domestic violence survivors in the midst of a pandemic. In addition to the lack of material provisions, the international community often focuses on quantitative statistical analysis with a focus on what Fuentes and Cookson terms “gender data revolution” (Fuentes and Cookson 2020, 881). Such an obsession with quantitative indicators means that the vast majority of the world’s countries that neither have the means nor sometimes the political will to collect such data, have no real sex-disaggregated statistics (Gender Statistics UNESCO 2013). This situation, the lack of sex-disaggregated statistics, is commonly referred to as the gender data gap by international bodies who deem this to be the main problem facing global attempts to combat different forms of violence against women (Fuentes and Cookson 2020).

In contrast to this focus on either broad statements or platitudes or detailed data on gender violence aggregated by country, this paper adopts a purely qualitative analysis of ongoing national efforts to mitigate domestic gender-based violence in Egypt. The paper argues that while COVID-19 provided a rare opportunity for a comprehensive reassessment of national structures of gender-based violence reporting, socio-legal interventions, and risk-mitigation, such a reassessment was conditional upon an understanding that any administrative, legal, or policy intervention to combat domestic violence should be based on the fluid boundaries between the public and private domains. This is especially the case for women, whose experiences in the public space again becomes reflective of the same rules that govern their behavior within the family unit. While countries like Egypt lack the necessary infra-structure to carry out national statistical cross-section analysis of domestic violence for a variety of reasons that will be discussed in detail in the next sections, this paper analyzes the current policies in place, and offers urgent, medium-term, and long-term recommendations. The underlying argument of this policy paper is that in countries like Egypt, where efforts to eradicate a socially and culturally complex phenomenon such as domestic violence have been largely lacking historically, the current crisis could open the way for novel approaches and innovative tools to tackle domestic violence, especially at a time when the very definition of the private sphere of the home is undergoing rapid transformation.

The rest of this paper proceeds as follows: Section II outlines the paper’s methodology and main tools for data gathering. Section III provides a mapping of the reality of domestic violence in Egypt, with evidence-based indicators that demonstrates the increasing levels of domestic violence under confinement, and how it

evolved during the months of the pandemic. Section IV provides a detailed account of Egypt's National Strategy for Combating Violence against Women (NSVAW), as well as the National Strategy for The Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030, and how they tackled domestic violence. The section highlights how domestic violence was analyzed in the four main pillars of the NSVAW; including the economic, social, political, and leadership dimensions. It also outlines some of the challenges that face research on gender-based violence during the pandemic. Section V outlines a multi-layered gendered framework for understanding domestic violence in Egypt between theory and practice. It provides a theoretical "problematization" of the distinction between the public and the private spheres in Egypt, and analyzes the effects of the pandemic on domestic based violence, with a special focus on how it has challenged the public/private divide in ways that necessitates rethinking, or rather reimagining what laws, protective measures, and risk mitigation systems could look like given the new reality post COVID-19. Section VI focuses on shelters as one of the main globally recognized tools for mitigating domestic violence. This section highlights the challenges facing the provision of shelter services in Egypt, and the extent to which the pandemic exposed many of those challenges, especially as these institutions are a major risk for the spread of the pandemic. Section VII provides a comprehensive overview on the concept of emergency services related to gender-based violence at time of global emergencies, citing some of the global lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis, and how those lessons could be applied in the local Egyptian context. Section VIII concludes with a critical assessment of Egypt's domestic violence problem that revisits some of the central theoretical and empirically driven arguments of this paper, focusing in particular on the changing definitions of the public and private spheres as domains of the states' legal and policy interventions during times of crisis. The paper ends with a set of the immediate, short, medium, and long terms recommendations that can mitigate the effect of COVID-19 on women's safety in the home.

II: Methods

This study relies heavily on expert interviews, official data on gender-based violence in the private sphere published by the Egyptian government, literature review of previous studies on domestic violence in Egypt, and a desk review of all the relevant laws, regulations, policies, and law enforcement practices related to domestic violence. It is based on six expert interviews with consultants at international organizations operating in Egypt including CARE international and UN women, officials at the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MOSS) and the National Council for Women (NCW), and legal consultants including the official spokesperson for Egypt's Administrative Courts and a State council. In addition, reports conducted by leading non-governmental organizations, including Nazra for Feminist Studies, and El Nadim Center for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, and the Center for Egyptian Women Legal Aid (CEWLA) were used in the research.

As a result of the time sensitive nature of the research that has a limited timeframe, in addition to conditions imposed by the outbreak of COVID-19 in Egypt, most interviews were conducted online, and there was a significant delay in response time as most of the interviewees were either working from home or dealing with national and international emergency situations created by COVID-19. We conducted three structured long open-ended expert interviews. In order to overcome the difficulties of conducting direct fieldwork in Egypt with both service providers and survivors of domestic violence, and the lack of available data on gender-based violence in general, we attempted to triangulate the data collected as much as possible by assessing the relevance of the statistics, and the details of the interventions undertaken by different national agencies to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on women and children at home. That said, we also tried, whenever possible, to provide data and statistics on domestic violence which were made available through expert interviews. In a situation of imperfect access to information and given the unfolding situation of COVID-19, verification through triangulation on the one hand, and unofficial but important estimates revealed to us through expert interviews, enabled us to analytically assess the current domestic violence problem in Egypt.

While the lack of data and empirical knowledge on domestic violence in Egypt, whether before or post COVID-19, has been noted, nevertheless, three expert interviews highlighted the institutional challenges to establish systems of management and production of data related to GBV in general. For instance, questions related to the lack of state streamlined reporting and monitoring systems are of much added significance now. We ask if there is annual periodical data on the number of cases segregated by type of violence, age, geography and marital status. And are the state's preventative and responsive interventions being monitored and evaluated regularly for their efficiency and their accessibility by survivors and victims of gender-based violence? These questions provided an entry point to recognize the structural challenges in the response system to GBV in general and domestic violence in particular in Egypt.

III. Mapping Domestic Violence in Egypt: Before and After COVID-19

a) Domestic Violence Before the COVID-19 Pandemic

In the pre-COVID-19 world, domestic violence was one of the prevalent forms of violence, which affected women and girls. Domestic violence entails multiple forms of violence; however, the most common form is the one exercised by intimate partner through physical, psychological and/or sexual violence. [Globally](#), one in five women and girls, including 19 per cent of women and girls aged 15 to 49, have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner within the last 12 months. Yet, 49 countries, including Egypt, have no laws that protect women specifically from such violence (Kaplan, Khawaja and Linos 2011). Due to the complex nature of the problem, different actors have been concerned with addressing domestic violence and intimate partner violence. Yet, state interventions through legislations and national mechanisms are a driving force for change through preventive and responsive interventions.

There is a dearth of large N studies based on nationally representative samples of cases of domestic violence. There has also been a number of important studies that attempted to measure the phenomenon since the mid-nineties. The rest of this section reviews national statistics on domestic violence over the years. It demonstrates the prevalence of domestic violence in Egypt and how it is both accepted and condoned through cultural norms and practices around women's place in the private sphere. The following quick data review also shows a steady increase in the size of sample and the number of women who have been exposed to domestic violence. This could signal either an increase in the overall number of battered women and children, or an improvement in surveying techniques and larger samples, or both.

In 1995, a sample survey, which included 7,000 married women ranging from fifteen to forty-nine years of age, was conducted by the Egyptian Demographic and Health Survey [EDHS](#). The survey found that "around one in three married women had been beaten at least once since they were married, most often by their husbands. Among women who have ever been beaten, 45 percent have been beaten at least once, and 17 percent were beaten at least three times". Social and cultural acceptance of gender-based violence has also been recorded, where surveyed women expressed that "whether they themselves have been beaten or not, most ever-married women agree that husbands are sometimes justified in beating their wives." Additionally, women survivors of violence were found less likely to seek help as the report had stated that "among women who have been beaten, less than half have ever sought help" ([EDHS 1995](#)).

A 1997 unpublished study by the National Center for Social and Criminological Studies in Cairo showed that 27.5% of Egyptian women faced some type of violence in their lifetime, including beating, sexual assault, and homicide. Over the years, more insights on the various forms of violence women are subjected to in the private space were made available through the identification of their perpetrators. In [2005](#), the EDHS reflected how intimate partners continue to be the most frequently identified perpetrators, in which "more than seven in ten women identified their current or a previous husband as the perpetrator in at least one episode of physical violence" (EDHS 2005, 41). Violent treatment by male family members such as fathers or brothers was also highlighted "with fathers named twice as often as brothers by the women reporting the violence (53 percent and

23 percent, respectively)” (EDHS 2005). A later study conducted on domestic violence among women and their husbands in 2008, reported that 62.2% of women reported some form of domestic violence, with almost one fifth of these women reporting sexual abuse (Fahmy & Abd El-Rahman, 2008).

One recent article examined the prevalence of sexual coercion within marriage in Egypt, concluding that the husband’s level of control is directly associated with forced intercourse during a woman’s lifetime (Kaplan, Khawaja and Linos 2011). This study is significant as it was based on a nationally representative large sample, and explored two interrelated hypotheses: that a husband’s increased control over household decision making would be positively correlated with a woman’s experience of sexual violence, and that also a husband’s lack of control within his broader social environment would be associated with higher levels of sexual violence within the household. (Kaplan, Khawaja and Linos 2011, 1473). More importantly, the study demonstrated a statistically significant relation between variables related to patriarchy like husband’s control over household resource allocation and key decisions, and sexual violence committed against the wife. This study, and several others suggest that inequities within the household, and the husband’s level of control are important predictors of violence, including sexual violence (Kaplan, Khawaja and Linos 2011).

Parallel to the dearth of studies that provide national statistics on domestic violence, there is also a very limited number of studies on reporting spousal abuse to the police or official authorities in Egypt. In addition, under-reporting is also prevalent as law enforcement authorities, ranging from the police to the courts, tend to dismiss domestic violence as a private matter that happens between husband and wife, and that concerns the family. Consequently, for law enforcement agents preserving the “integrity of the family” is more important than the well-being of the woman (Ammar 2006). According to the most recent available data, women’s experiences regarding domestic violence remained unchanged. The [EDHS 2014](#) found that “three in 10 ever-married women age 15-49 years in Egypt have ever experienced some form of spousal violence, with 25 percent saying they were subjected to physical violence, 19 percent emotional violence, and 4 percent sexual violence” (EDHS 2014). The report does not provide any more details on how they define each category of violence, or what type of domestic violence crimes comes under each of those designations. Though intimate partners remain the most identified perpetrators, it was reported that “other than the spouse were mothers/stepmothers (31 percent) and fathers/stepfathers (26 percent)” (EDHS 2014).

Domination and control over women and girls have always been among the main reasons for the exercise of violence. For instance, [EDHS 2005](#) found that among the reasons women were beaten “is going out without telling the husband (40 percent) and neglecting the children (40 percent), followed closely by arguing with the husband (37 percent) and refusing to have sex (34 percent). According to EDHS (2014), “three in 10 ever-married women age 15-49 years in Egypt have ever experienced some form of spousal violence, with 25 percent saying they were subjected to physical violence, 19 percent emotional violence, and 4 percent sexual violence. The report finds that “Cultural norms continue to reinforce social acceptance of domestic violence with no signs of notable improvement in men’s and women’s perception to such form as “more than 70 per cent of men and women said they believe that wives should tolerate violence to keep the family together” ([IMAGES 2017](#)).

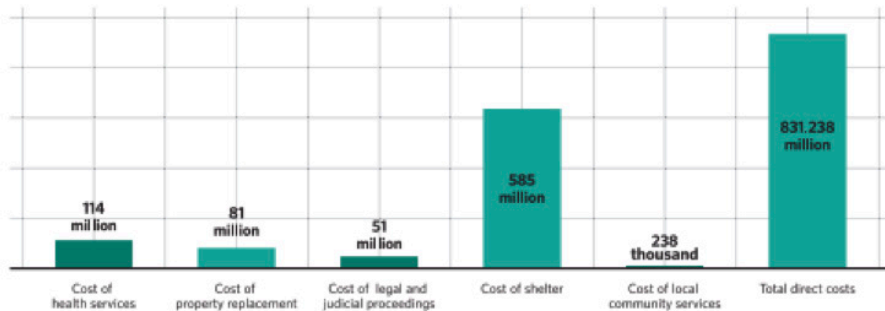
In 2015, [The Egypt Economic Cost of Gender Based Violence Survey](#) (ECGBVS) revealed valuable insights not only on the frequency of domestic violence, but through highlighting its direct and indirect costs on survivors

of violence as well as the costs incurred by violence on state resources. For instance, the direct costs of violence perpetrated by intimate partners have accounted for a total of 831.238 million Egyptian pounds. This included the allocated budgets for costs of health services, property replacement, shelters, legal/judicial proceedings, local community services as demonstrated in the figure below (ECGBVS 2015).

Table 10.3: Estimates of direct costs and number of women by type of service, due to husband/fiancé violence (last 12 months), Egypt 2015

| Type of direct cost | Cost estimate LE | Estimate of the women used the service |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|--|
| Cost of health services | 114 million | 605 thousand |
| Cost of property replacement | 81 million | 152 thousand |
| Cost of legal/judicial proceedings | 7 million/44 million | 52 thousand/33 thousand |
| Cost of shelter | 585 million | 1.06 million |
| Cost of local community services | 238 thousand | 7 thousand |

Figure 10.1 Allocation of the total direct costs by services used by women facing violence perpetrated by husband/fiancé during the last 12 months, Egypt 2015



Source: The Egypt Economic Cost of Gender Based Violence Survey, 137.

b) Domestic Violence After the COVID-19 Pandemic:

With COVID-19 pandemic, serious health issues are not the only predicaments faced by different members of society. The pandemic forces precautionary measures and protective policies such as social isolation and curfew measures to ensure physical distancing and people staying at home. These measures lead to increased vulnerability to different forms of Gender Based Violence especially domestic violence. Moreover, loss of income and employment for both men and women likely increases levels of domestic violence.

On another level, the pandemic led to many difficulties in accessing support services for survivors/victims of gender-based violence such as health care, mental health support, legal aid and socio-economic support. Looking at the difficulties of accessing medical support, we find that on the one hand, survivors/victims would refrain from going to hospitals in order to avoid getting infected. Yet, on the other hand, hospitals would also prioritize seemingly more “serious” cases infected with the virus rather than receiving cases of domestic violence. Furthermore, in EDHS reports for 1995, 2005 and 2014, they find that survivors/victims of domestic violence take refuge in their families and their social networks as they are their first line of support. Survivors/victims would move to stay with their extended families in cases where they are subjected to severe violence in their nuclear home. Under COVID-19, family members refrained from large social gatherings to protect each other and specially to

protect the elders. Hence, survivors/victims' vulnerability became complicated as they found themselves isolated from support and confined with their perpetrators.

Additionally, the new reality imposed by COVID-19 resulted in the convergence of the public and private sphere, which contributes to further challenges to balance between work and domestic chores and lead to increased responsibilities of childcare in absence of childcare facilities and schools and the absence of familial assistance and social networks for support. Together all these factors make women and girls more vulnerable to violence.

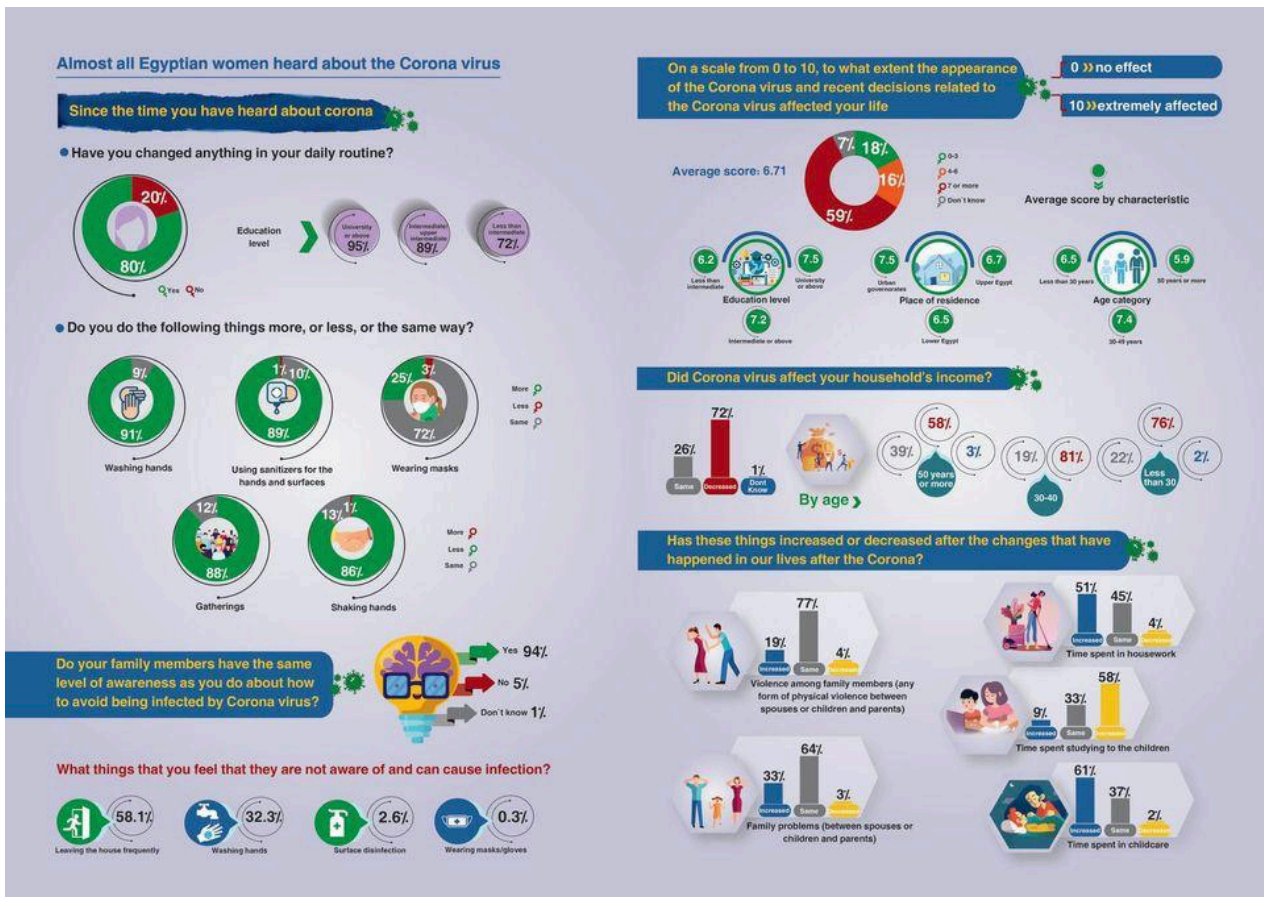
One of the main challenges faced in this research was having qualitative insights of the reality of domestic violence on the ground that would provide data on the increase of domestic violence during COVID-19 pandemic. Experts reflected during our interviews on the surge of domestic violence, its frequency within households as well as the nature of harm the so-called "new-normal" or "new-private sphere" created. For instance, Professor of Law and State Counsel at the Administrative Courts, Mohamed Samir, revealed that he "received random messages from his female students without revealing their identities to him and they were complaining of the repeated violence they face by members of their families whether physical or sexual violence" (Interview with Mohamed Samir, July 11, 2020).

Since the outbreak of the pandemic in mid-March 2020 in Egypt, the official sources on domestic violence were mainly [The Women Policy Trackers on Responsive Policies & Programs during The New COVID-19](#), a periodical report issued by the National Council for Women since March 2020. The National Council for Women issued this report as a policy tracker that monitors all its policies and programs. Those policies are, in turn, being mainstreamed in an effort to respond to women's unique needs amid the COVID-19 pandemic over the immediate, medium, and long-terms. The tracker recognized how the COVID-19 outbreak affected women differently than men. This was also recognized by the national report on Beijing +20 that was prepared by the National Council for Women (NCW) and that [covers topics such as violence against Women, leadership and political representation](#).

The above-mentioned report was followed by several other editions that detailed all the gender responsive interventions that were introduced to address the broader ramifications of COVID-19 in Egypt. The report identified the most vulnerable sections in society that are more prone to increased levels of violence as a result of shelter in place instructions. Among those identified as some of the most vulnerable segments of societies are orphans, residents of elderly homes, and shelters for street children. Remarkably, the report did not identify survivors of domestic violence who reside in state-run shelters as a vulnerable segment during the pandemic. However, significant preventive measures have been introduced promoting what the report calls "intensified preventive measures for any potential increased of domestic violence as a result of the existing health precautionary measures such as: 1) promoting NCW's Complaints Office's receiving-hotline 2) upgrade its capacities through COVID19 related guidelines 3) Adopt precautionary measures & sterilize the women shelters and apply all health measures to them (in preparation of dealing with expected VAW incidents)."

In [the third edition](#) of the same report, quantitative data was made available to provide initial insights on the magnitude and direct influence of COVID-19. This edition also initiated precautionary measures in relation to potential increased violence against women, The National Council for Women, in partnership with both Baseera

Center, and UN Women in Egypt, launched a large N phone survey. The survey included 1518 women with a minimum age of 18 years old during the period from the 4th to the 14th of April, 2020. The report found 7% of the wives to have reported that they had been subjected to violence by the husband (verbal abuse or insult) and that this did not happen prior to the pandemic. The survey showed that 33% is the rate of increased problems within the family; and 19% increase in violence among family members. Besides the women policy trackers, The National Council for Women (NCW) released [info-graphs](#) that were posted on their official Facebook page for other results that stemmed from the survey.



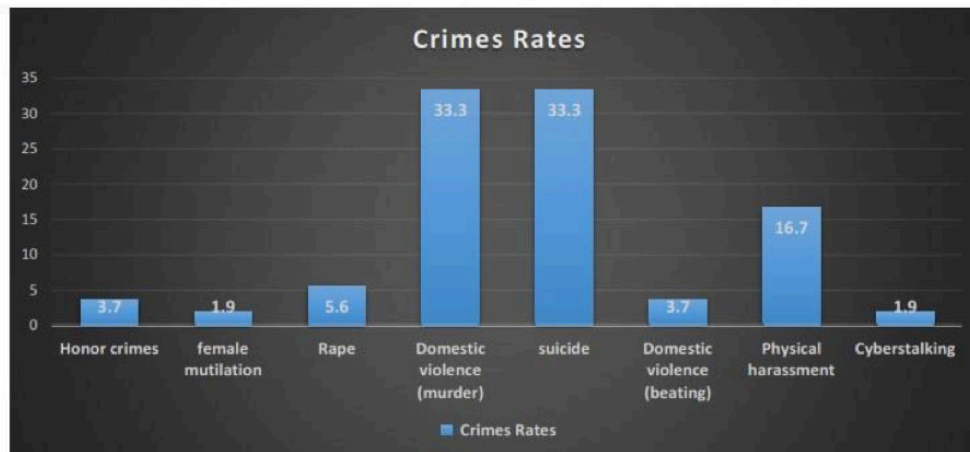
Source: The National Council for Women Facebook page. Link: <https://www.facebook.com/ncwegyptpage/photos/a.484665108276466/29819974567621/?type=3&theater84>

In the updated [fourth edition](#), NCW published an account of the total number of inquiries/complaints that were received by its complaints' office. The policy tracker mentions that they received 34,000 inquiries/complaints since the start of the outbreak (14th of March until the 4th of June 2020), which is the only documented number of cases of GBV since the outbreak. Given this piece of information, the challenge continues in how to read these figures in the absence of comparable data. The numbers provided here are standalone figures and do not tell whether there is an increase or a decrease in the number of complaints received in comparison to the same time in previous years. This leads to questions such as were survivors/victims of domestic violence able to report or file complaints? What kind of difficulties/barriers do women face in order to report and file complaints in light of the context of COVID-19, when they are stuck with their perpetrators at home? The answers to these questions could be gleaned more from the expert interviews that the authors of this report conducted.

While examining the reality on the ground and attempting to obtain representative data to the problem, the same questions were raised to understand whether the number of women accessing responsive services such as shelters have increased or decreased. An interview was conducted with an officer at The Ministry of Social Solidarity (MOSS), who manages directly the shelters and issues their regulatory laws, to investigate the status of women's shelters in Egypt during the pandemic. The officer confirmed that although domestic violence has increased in general in Egypt, this was not translated to an increase in the number of survivors/victims reaching out to the hosting centers or to the police stations (Interview with officer at MOSS, August 18, 2020). The officer mentioned that violence existed among families and no change in the nature of violence has been noted, yet it is the frequency of violence that increased whether physical, psychological, and sexual. When asked directly whether the Ministry of Social Solidarity received reports from the Ministry of Interior on a noticeable increase in the number of complaints related to domestic violence filed in police stations, the officer could not confirm that, but states that based on reports from social workers and the media, there seems to be a noticeable increase in instances of domestic violence (Interview with officer at MOSS, August 18, 2020). According to the officer, most prevalent cases of violence were from intimate partners, who lost their jobs or started to stay for longer times inside the homes resulting in increased tensions and being constantly subject to violence. The eight shelters that are state-run are remote, unpublicized and have limited capacity. Access is highly restricted by a litany of bureaucratic procedures. The complexity of establishing entitlements to shelter is daunting. Two other shelters run by non-governmental organizations also operate under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MOSS).

There have been other non-governmental initiatives to document and produce data on gender-based violence crimes in Egypt specially during COVID-19 Pandemic. In August 2020, Edraak Foundation for Development and Equality launched its [report](#) titled "Gender-Based Violence Crimes Against Women and Girls Observatory". The report is an attempt to monitor and document Gender-Based Violence Crimes from the period of January 2020 to June 2020 and it relies on officially reported crimes that the research team was able to access, monitoring Egyptian newspapers, and following on the statements of the media office released by Public Prosecution. The crimes are disaggregated by type of crimes, age, geographical location. The crimes that were documented for the first quarter account to (54) crimes of violence directed against women and girls. The below figure from the report showcases the types of crimes, where domestic violence constitutes 37% of the total crimes. The report divided the age group into two. It identified an increase in the rate of violence in the age group from 13 to 18 years, which is the age of adolescent, succeeded by the age group from 30 to 45 years. Additionally, it shows that the higher concentration of cases of gender-based violence is in urban areas with 65% versus 33% in rural areas.

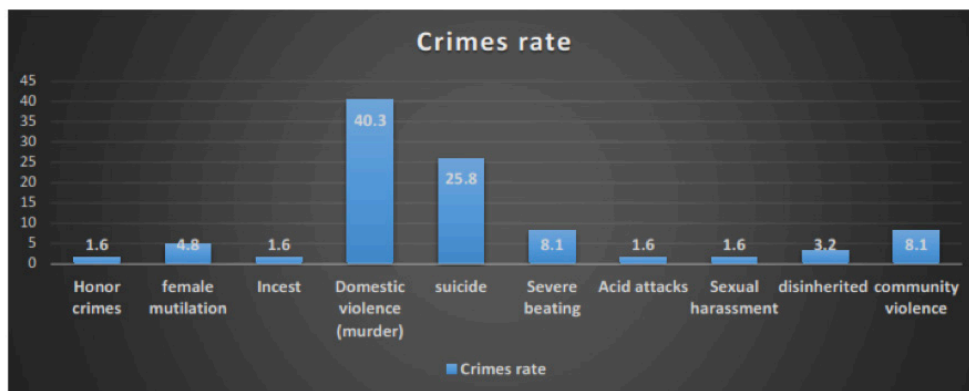
- **Violent crime rates against women and girls, which were monitored for the first quarter of 2020:**



Source: Gender-Based Violence Crimes Against Women and Girls Observatory, 9.

In the second quarter of 2020, the research team was able to monitor 62 crimes of violence directed against women and girls. Domestic violence crimes constitute 40.3% of the total monitored and documented crimes. Unlike the first quarter, the rate of violence increases in the age group from 19 to 29 years, succeeded by the age group from 13 to 18 years. Regarding the geographical distribution of GBV cases, they are almost equal in urban and rural areas with a rate of 49% in urban and with a rate of 48% in rural areas. The report shows the highest rates of violent crimes for the second quarter are in Cairo, Souhag, then Qena and Qalyubia.

- **The monitored violent crime rates against women and girls for the second quarter of 2020:**



Source: Gender-Based Violence Crimes Against Women and Girls Observatory, 14.

In addition to the official statistics, many stories of women suffering from intimate partner's domestic abuse appeared in the media since the outbreak of the pandemic. On June 26th, 2020, [the story of Shorouk Al-Husseiny](#), a 25 years old woman, who had been thrown from the balcony by her husband, appeared in many daily newspapers. On that day, her husband wanted Shorouk to bring him 27,000 EGP from her family by any means possible. When she refused, he started to hit her with an electric wire and it was not his first time to beat her. Shorouk was able to get him to stop when she sought the help of her neighbors. However, as soon as the neighbors left, he resumed and started to beat her again. When she ran to the balcony to seek help from the street and other neighbors, he immediately threw her from the fifth floor. Miraculously, she survived.

Another story of domestic violence is the story of the [Syrian refugee Hanaa](#), a wife and a mother of three. Hanaa's husband worked as a mechanical technician, but he lost his main source of income due to the current crisis, which made him turn into a violent person with his family members. Since he started spending more time at home, the frequency of violence against his wife and children increased. Hanaa narrated that she wished to find a job to support her family, yet she feared leaving her children alone with her husband. She continued to live in fear for her safety and the safety of her children.

While no national statistics that prove the rise of incidents of domestic violence in Egypt since the outbreak of the pandemic exist, the above anecdotes, coupled with the initial statistics from the Gender-Based Violence Crimes Against Women and Girls Observatory, point to a significant increase. This observation is further supported by another quote from an interview conducted with one of the shelters' officers at MOSS:

"To be honest with you, we don't have any official numbers that could indicate whether or not domestic violence increased as a result of COVID-19 in Egypt or not. I also can't use the shrinking number of women who have come to the shelters since the outbreak of the pandemic as an indicator that domestic violence has decreased. In fact, it is probably increasing based on the women who are seeking an online therapy service that we started with a private sector partner, Chaise lounge. More and more women are reaching to us and asking to be linked to online therapists. While this by itself is not enough to be considered as an indicator of an increase in levels of domestic violence, it does point to an increasing need of women for marital counseling and individual therapy"
(Interview with officer at MOSS, August 18, 2020).

In response to all these alarming indicators of the increased violence within the private sphere, the National Council for Women (NCW) developed a number of actions to address these issues. For instance, it promoted the essential service packages for any potential violence against women case since the start of the COVID19 outbreak. It attempted to address technological issues to ensure more efficient & effective services for women who are inquiring/complaining. It also made it possible for the first time for non-Egyptian women residing in Egypt to access the shelters (Interview with officers at MOSS, August 18, 2020). While it is still early to fully evaluate how effective those measures have been, the officer at MOSS seems to think that this technological innovation will go a long way towards resolving some of the problems of accessibility that have often plagued these services.

Recently, The National Council for Women in Collaboration with The Ministry of Information has [launched a new platform](#) for receiving complaints from survivors/victims of violence called "Shakwetek", which means "Your Complaint". The new platform aims to create more spaces for women to come forward with their testimonies and complaints on the different forms of violence they are subjected to. This platform is different from the Complaint Bureau in that it receives complaints via WhatsApp. It is a useful addition as many women might not be able to talk in the presence of the perpetrator and it can be easier for them to send a message. Interestingly, the statement has mentioned that among the functions of the new platform that the Ministry of Information will refer all received complaints to the National Council for Women to take them forward for legal investigations.

It is worth highlighting that in [April 2018, a set of new regulating laws](#) were added by the National Council for Women (NCW), with an additional 23 new articles. Article 7 introduced an important achievement as point 12 stated that the NCW will receive and study complaints about the violation of women's rights and freedoms. It

also stated that the NCW will be responsible for referring them to the appropriate authorities in order to ensure their safety and provide the necessary legal assistance to survivors/victims of gender-based violence. This is a key step in cases of violence against women and specifically sexual violence cases to encourage women to come forward with their testimonies, while they feel safe and protected by the State. The article provides the council with the necessary authority, which holds them responsible to bring justice to all survivors/victims of gender-based violence, who decided to resort to the council. However, the question remains if this step will be effectuated in all complaints received. Until now, this article has been deployed in two cases, the case of serial rapist [Ahmed Bassam Zaki](#) and [The Fairmont Rape Crime case](#). The latter case is currently under investigation by the office of the Public prosecutor.

It should be noticed here that there is no current data on the number of cases that had been processed so far after the important amendment introduced in Article 7. While the complaints bureau received 35, 000 cases so far, it is not clear how many of them were actually referred to the legal authorities as per this legal amendment.

IV. Egypt's National Strategy for Combating Violence against Women (NSVAW) and National Strategy for The Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030 (NSEWW): Gaps, Contradictions, and Challenges

For the last two decades, feminist groups and women's rights advocates negotiated, often with little success, with various national machineries, to establish a national strategy to combat all forms of violence against women. On May 7th 2015, the National Council for Women (NCW) finally launched [The National Strategy For Combating Violence Against Women](#) (NSVAW) 2015-2020. The strategy consists of four pillars of interventions. Those four pillars are: Prevention, Protection, Intervention, and Legal Procedures to fight domestic and community violence. The establishment of this strategy represents a feminist triumph as it places the question of violence against women on the state's agenda, and holds it accountable for ensuring women's safety and security in the public and private spheres. In addition, the NSVAW translated long-standing feminist demands and how to address them into policies with long-term action plans and practices to advance women's rights. In this section, we apply a multi-layered gendered lens to Egypt's National Strategy for Combating Violence Against Women (NSVAW), with the aim of problematizing some of the state's approaches, practices, and commitments towards women's empowerment, and the logics at work behind them.

In the wake of the 25th January Revolution, the public sphere witnessed wide participation by women in protests and different political processes. This was met with systematic sexual violence against women by groups of men. This has registered a turning point in the nature of sexual violence and assault, its severity and brutality in the public space. The incidents of mob-sexual assaults became more visible in November 2012 and January 2013. On the 3rd July 2013, Nazra for Feminist Studies, which worked on documenting these cases and provided required services, released a [joint statement](#) regarding incidents of mob sexual assaults on the background of protests against the ousted President Mohamed Morsy as they "recorded incidents of sexual assaults have reached 101 cases of varying intensity." The statement also confirmed the precedence of these patterns where "in November

2012, gang rapes were committed amidst disregard from official and unofficial bodies. The severity of attacks increased during the demonstrations that marked the second anniversary of the revolution on January 25th 2013, during which 19 cases of gang rapes and sexual assault were documented in Tahrir Square and its vicinity. The assaults in November 2012 and January 2013 targeted women demonstrators, passersby, and female volunteers in field groups intervening in situations of sexual assault and rape” (Nazra for Feminist Studies Statement, July 2013). Another incident of massive sexual attacks with equal cruelty was during the presidential ceremony of the newly-appointed President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi, which was caught by mobile cameras and went viral. The rapid increase of public forms of gender-based violence was an important turning point, as the necessity to redress the problem of gender-based violence in general became more urgent, creating the political will to launch a National Strategy to combat violence against women in both the public and private spheres.

Since 2015, a number of other strategies has been adopted for women’s empowerment in Egypt besides the National Strategy to combat Violence against Women in 2015 such as the National Strategy for Reproductive Health in the same year, and the National Strategy to Combat Female Genital Mutilation in 2016. The year 2017 was announced as the Year of Women that created another momentum to demonstrate the State’s political will towards advancing women’s rights especially before the elections in 2018. This was by launching [the National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030](#) (NSEEW 2030), where the question of combating violence against women was incorporated differently under the fourth pillar for protection.

Reading both the NSVAW and NSEEW 2030 together reflects a clear inability to envision an approach on how to address this problem. At the same time, it highlights many gaps and contradictions. This reading foregrounds some weaknesses and pinpoints critical issues on the necessity of establish a holistic approach comprised of policies and laws, changing cultures and making essential services available to combating violence against women based on survivor-centered approach. National strategies need to be translated into policies and concrete action plans. The development of policies and action plans should be evidence-oriented and research-based to achieve realistic focused targets that can be tracked, monitored and reported. The integration of gender and feminist readings to strategies, policy making and formulations is a key to understanding the existing challenges socially, economically, politically and legally that hinder adopting a holistic approach. Additionally, the assessment of the current institutional model to advancing women’s rights is timelier than ever. This to identify the challenges related to the authority and mandate required for the responsible national machinery of advancing women’s status and how NCW’s mandate needs further revisiting for more authority with a gender responsive budget to allocate the necessary and required financial resources. Finally, emphasizing and supporting a multi-sectoral and multilateral approach is a necessity to reach a holistic approach and that includes issues of coordination with respective ministries in order to reach this unified approach.

While the NSVAW 2015-2020 does a good job of identifying some of the main challenges, they still lack a comprehensive understanding of some of the root causes of domestic violence as a public policy problem, and how it is different than sexual harassment and assaults in the public sphere. Part of the problem stems from the fact that most legal interventions in the field originated from the state’s response to the rise of public forms of gender-based violence. In addition, most of the suggested politics mentioned in the National Strategy does not unpack the multi-layered nature of this problem especially when it comes to the cultural and social stigma of

involving the police within what is socially seen as a strictly private family matter.

In addition, various informal domestic disputes adjudication channels exist that actually deter most women from seeking legal remedies in the case of domestic violence, in ways that are quite different from instances of street or work sexual harassment. This social resistance to state intervention, coupled with the problems inherent within the legal system itself, as elaborated below, makes it difficult for many of the designed responsive services to function properly. The NSEEW 2030 does not present a comprehensive definition to the problem, yet it recognizes the gravity of domestic violence. It is stated that “contrary to expected, the Survey of the Economic Cost of Gender-Based Violence found that most violence does not occur in the public sphere; in fact, the highest rates of violence encountered by women occur in homes, the place where they are supposed to feel secure” (NSEEW, 51). This recognition of the social and cultural complexities of state interventions in the private sphere for the family, as this paper argued, must inform any policy plan to combat domestic violence in Egypt.

A large part of the problem lies in the legal system and legal practices that deal with gender-based violence in Egypt. The legal system and the legislations are of paramount importance to create a safe enabling environment for survivors/victims to report cases of violence without going through traumatizing processes, which burdens them more. Both strategies push for a comprehensive legislation that covers all forms of violence against women and girls. Although it is of high importance to have this law, we need to be reminded that this law will not be in separation from other laws and the whole legal system. Counselor Mohamed Samir Prosecution’s Spokesperson/ Professor of political systems and constitutional law and lecturer on gender issues in Egypt confirms the importance of this proposed law, yet he takes a step back and provides insights on the current challenging legislations, which represents stumbling blocks to any laws on violence against women. In addition, he elaborates on how to address the problem through a holistic approach. In an interview with State Counsel/Professor Samir, he stated that:

“The main obstacle is legislation. [We] have a clear law that provides legal legitimacy for domestic violence. The Egyptian Penal Code exempts from punishment if it is perpetrated in good faith according to Islamic Sharia, the text of Article 60, a legal text. This text is used to beat the wife and the children ... You cannot imprison a father or a mother in an incident like this unless [they] cause permanent disability or if the child dies or is tortured”

(Interview with State Counsel Mohamed Samir, July 11 2020)

This is not the only law that needs revisiting. In December 2014, Nazra for Feminist Studies and Center of Egyptian Women’s Legal Assistance launched a [Campaign on the Legal Issues associated with Violence against Women in both Public and Private Spheres](#) listing all laws that reinforce gender-based violence. Among the laws allowing perpetrators not to receive the deserved punishment for the committed crimes of gender-based violence is article 17. The joint statement of the campaign reveals that that this article is “problematic in rape crimes, since it gives judges the discretion to apply maximum clemency in reducing the prescribed penalty by two degrees ... [and it] is frequently used in cases of rape and indecent assault against women, resulting in many unfairly reduced sentences.” (Nazra for feminist Studies Report, December 2014). Nevertheless, Personal Status Law cannot be disregarded from the process of revisiting the laws that reinforces family rights to exercise violence.

State Counsel /Professor Samir also highlights other aspects that should be considered when introducing new laws to ensure its efficiency and effectiveness. He presents an example to this through the newly introduced

law of Data Protection (No. 151 for 2020). Again, women's rights groups and the feminist movement in Egypt had called for so long for a law that protects the privacy of the information and personal details of whistleblowers and witnesses in sexual violence crimes. The law was finally introduced in the aftermath of the recent case of serial rapist, [Ahmed Bassam Zaki](#). On that point, Counsel/Professor Samir elaborates as follows:

"We want to reach a stage, where we introduce a law, the good indication is that the government has adopted a new law ... [regarding] the protection of whistleblowers and witnesses - a step that we do not stop at and it is necessary to consider other components to be included. When I draft a law like this, the first thing I must specify the penalties for violating it, [and to avoid] leaking [the data]"

(Interview with State Counsel Mohamed Samir, July 11 2020)

Professor/State Counsel Samir further added that the laws related to gender-based violence crimes need to be complemented with specialized units of violence against women managed by trained prosecutors. To this purpose, he provided a vision of these prosecution units and the type of training that would be needed for prosecutors. In his view, the units should be available for 24 hours with a hotline number. It should coordinate with forensic units and provide instant psychological support based on the approval of the survivor/victim. Moreover, there should be specialized VAW units inside the courts and to refer these cases to them. Nevertheless, he concludes that the question of women's exclusion from the judiciary system in Egypt cannot be discarded and should be included as part of these reforms. From his experience in the administrative prosecution sector, he notes that:

"[Since] 2017, we found that it is better that cases of this kind [gender issues] are investigated by women who volunteer to investigate this type of case ... so their ability to understand the dimensions and understand the survivor/ reporter is much greater than the man."

(Interview with State Counsel Mohamed Samir, July 11 2020)

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the Ministry of Justice had taken a number of interventions including one that was carried out in May 2020, as they decided to suspend the work of courts but took an exceptional decision to proceed with the family court cases in order to finalize issues such as alimony payment, child custody, and other important matters that will support women custodians during the pandemic. The decision has been coupled with another one to sanitize the concerned courts and apply all precautionary measures to them. (Interview with State Council Mohamed Samir, July 11 2020). It is in fact an important step to ensure that women are not subject to economic violence due to family conflicts in the midst of pandemic. Transformation to electronic courts is highly needed for gender-based violence crimes. State Counselor/Professor Samir commented on this as follows:

"At the level of all judicial bodies, a comprehensive automation of all these litigation processes started. It takes time and it is not easy at all, but it started with the economic courts. We will meet a bit of legislative problems related to investigations and court sessions that are held remotely. I think that it can be deployed very well, especially with regard to concealing the survivors' data. They do not need to be present in court and everyone knows their identity even if the court session is secret. [Also] If it works online, it will be much faster."

(Interview with State Counsel Mohamed Samir, July 11 2020)

This contribution from Professor Samir ties together the different aspects that need to be considered

in the legal system when introducing new legislation and amendments in relation to gender-based violence. His comments also stress the need for a holistic and comprehensive approach towards combating all forms of gender-based violence, stressing that while issuing a comprehensive bill of law that deals with all forms of violence against women, it is not expected to achieve much if social attitudes towards involving the state in the private domain of the family do not shift. On the other hand, the [National Strategy for Violence Against Women](#) (NSVAW) seems to apply a strictly legal approach that does not suggest policies, recommendations and solutions to systematically tackle the public's aversion/ reluctance to resorting to the law in cases of domestic violence. An example of similar problem, also related to violence against women and girls in the domestic sphere is the case of FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) in Egypt. While the state introduced several laws and regulations criminalizing the practice, those legal tools are seldom invoked by the concerned parties. Both domestic violence and FGM constitute private forms of violence that thus require an approach that tackles the culture of silence and societal "normalization" with those crimes.

While the National Strategy calls for necessary legal amendments, as expressed in this statement from the document "although the National Council for Women has already submitted a draft law in 2012 and other draft bills have also been submitted by the civil society, there is still a dire need to speed up the enactment of these laws and all other laws pertaining to women's rights such as the Labor law, the Social Security Law and the Personal Status Law "(NSVAW, 20), there is not much that tackles socio-cultural barriers to reporting domestic violence and seeking help. In the NSEEW 2030, the official state documents continue to stress the importance of the rapid issuing of this comprehensive legislation to combat violence against women, without providing insights on the kind of challenges and the reasons behind such delays, or more importantly, on plans to encourage the public to report crimes and for victims to seek the necessary legal, medical, and psychological help.

The year 2020 marks the final year for the implementation of the national strategy. On the one hand, the focus of this study does not allow us to investigate to what extent this strategy was able to achieve its goals and objectives thoroughly, which is a challenging task due to lack of information from the implementers. Yet, it is of paramount importance that the National Council of Women present a detailed report on this for transparency, accountability and responsibility. Unlike NSVAW, [The Egyptian Women's Observatory](#) has been launched to track The NSEEW 2030 indicators. On the other hand, the end of the strategy poses many questions for future strategies, policies and practices on the State's commitment to the problem of violence against women. Many of these questions focus on the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the strategy to understand what happened? What are the targeted gender equality results achieved in relation to the indicators that were set? Why did we reach these results? What kind of changes in terms of gendered power relationships that those interventions were able to register? What went wrong and what went right? What are the lessons learned for the future? And how do these lessons learned, along with strategy targeted results, link and impact any future national strategies on violence against women? Finally, what are the state's outreach plans to create lasting partnerships with civil society organizations that had been working on the issue of gender-based violence for decades and that have valuable experience that might help in designing effective national strategies?

In summary, providing such links and making data on gender-based violence available is of paramount importance in times of COVID-19. Global strategies on SDGs have been revisited to assess all kinds of impacts

as a result of pandemic. To this extent, the question is not only what has been achieved so far, but also, more importantly, how will NSEEW 2030 be modified to adequately address the impacts of COVID-19 and especially the area of domestic violence? What approach will the Egyptian state and its national machinery adopt to achieve this? We revisit some of these critical questions in the both conclusion and the recommendation sections, provided at the end of this policy paper.

V. Between the Public and Private Spheres: A Feminist Analysis of Domestic Violence in Egypt

Domestic violence is defined as actions that constitute “assaultive and coercive behaviors that adults use against their intimate partners.” (Holden 2003, 155). According to studies conducted on the topic, men and women commit physical and psychological domestic violence equally often (Langhinrichsen-Rohling 2010; Swan et al. 2008); yet, men’s physical violence is more injurious, and men more often stalk, sexually assault, and use coercive tactics of control more often than women (Langhinrichsen-Rohling 2010; Swan et al. 2008). In the Middle East and North Africa, systematic studies of psychical, sexual, and psychological violence within marriage remain scarce in general (Kaplan, Khawaja and Linos 2011).

Such a regional dearth of information on domestic violence is in itself telling of the strength of the societal attitudes towards domestic violence against women, often seen in cultural terms, as a rightful punishment towards wives that are not obedient to their husbands (Elnashar, El-Dien, Eldesoky, Aly, & El-Sayd Mohamed Hassan, 2007). Furthermore, such a system of patriarchy and male domination is “sanctioned” and reinforced by a patriarchal ideology anchored in the larger legal, cultural, political, and sometimes religious systems (Kaplan, Khawaja and Linos 2011).

The COVID-19 pandemic has further “gendered” the roles within the household. Women bore the brunt of handling additional housework with school closures, because more women than men tend to care for and teach their children, even while working from home. That, in addition to the unequal burden undertaken by women in household chores in general, created a situation that made women bear the largest brunt of the pandemic when it comes to the household. This in turn, resulted in a number of unfolding consequences, including the surge in domestic violence against women and children. While the lack of official statistics nationally on domestic violence makes it difficult to estimate an increase, an officer in the ministry of social solidarity (MOSS) that we interviewed noted an increase in levels of domestic violence based on women’s use of the National Council of Women’s helpline, and the online psychological support system, that is provided as part of the shelters services (Interview with Shelters Officer at MOSS, August 18, 2020).

One theoretical approach to analyzing domestic violence in the private sphere of the “home” is to begin by questioning what constitutes the private and public spheres in the first place, and question women’s place in them. For a long time, feminist scholarship questioned the demarcation of the public sphere as not only the sphere where political action happens (Armstrong and Squires 2002; Coole 2000), but also as Habermas famously defined it as the intermediary structure between the political system, and the private sectors of the lifeworld, that

functions to familiarize the state with the needs of its citizens” (Habermas 1996, 367). Habermas’s definition of the public space, as opposed to the private space of the “home”, was contested by a number of feminist scholars, who expressed doubt over the public/private distinction as an adequate instrument for keeping up “with the current means by which sexual inequalities are perpetuated” (Armstrong and Squires 2002). Other feminist scholars suggest that the distinction between the public and private is empirically irrelevant and politically ineffective, thus calling for the conceptualizing of “new maps” to understand how gender discrimination and violence works across multiple spheres (Coole 2000, 348).

In addition, the usefulness of the public/private frame when it comes to defining economic activity has been criticized by economist feminists of color as reflecting a Eurocentric bias. In communities around the world, equating the private with home and the public with professional and political life is problematic as women’s labor is often unpaid domestic labor. The resurgence in studies that focus on women’s unpaid domestic labor and the scholarship produced by a number of feminist economists in this field throughout the 1990’s further complicated the classical demarcation between the public and the private spheres (Agrwal 1997). In addition, there is a large and growing feminist literature on the diverse ways in which the private encroaches on the public (Ong 1986; Hoodfar 1997; Kumar and Markova 2008).

The critiques of feminists from the global south of the classical private/public distinction are especially relevant to the study of domestic violence in Egypt. While seemingly on the surface the distinction between the public and the private domains seems to be more strictly observed as a result of strict gender segregation in some contexts like Upper Egypt, for example, the lines between the public and private spheres are in reality much more blurred. The collapse of this classical divide in many third world contexts had led to the rise of what Kumar and Markova had termed, “the domestication of the public sphere” (Kumar and Markova 2008). The term “the domestication of the public sphere” is used by feminist scholars to describe the relationship between the public and private spaces in many third world countries that are historically characterized by weak state structures due to the effects of colonialism and global neoliberal market influences (Kumar and Markova 2008). According to such understanding of the public/private distinction, there are no real boundaries between the public and private domains, especially for women, whose experiences in the public space become reflective of the same rules that govern their behavior within the family unit or private sphere vice versa. In the words of Suad Joseph, speaking of Lebanon but also elsewhere in the region, public life remain a function of “political familism,” or the deployment of family institutions, ideologies, practices, and relationships by citizens to activate their demands in relation to the state and by state actors to mobilize practical and moral grounds for governance” (Joseph 2011, 150). Joseph’s analysis highlights the double role of states and non-state actors in the spread and persistence of different forms of sexual violence in the region.

The above feminist theorization and critique of the classical public/private distinction is key to understanding the roots of the problem of domestic violence in Egypt. As the private values and norms of the patriarchal family overrides the classical liberal values of equality, enshrined in laws, state policies, that characterize the modern notion of the public space, women who are at risk in the private sphere of the family are often left to their own devices as the state and its agents often hesitate to interfere in the private sphere of the family that is seen as the main unit of society whose preservation becomes a priority (Ammar 2006). Moreover, state agents and

institutions often reinforce those patterns of violence against women through legal loopholes of discriminatory laws, or through issuing gender-neutral laws that fail to address the real roots of gender discrimination and exclusion in society (Mernissi 1975; Ammar 2006).

At the heart of this spillover of private norms into the public at the margins of state and society is a dominant cultural understanding that is central to dominant readings of Islamic theology and jurisprudence that women's sexuality is active and potentially disruptive. In the words of the late Fatima Mernissi, one of Morocco's and the Middle East's leading feminist thinkers and activists: "women's sexuality is regarded a powerful force that can lead to fitna or chaos if not constrained and controlled by the social and legal institutions designed to restrict women's freedoms such as the family and sometimes the state if necessary" (Mernissi 1975: 31).

In summary, a quick survey of the literature and previous studies conducted on domestic violence in Egypt demonstrates the fallacy of the classical separation of state and society that often forms the basis of most analysis and policy interventions that seeks to combat sexual violence in public. The weakness of the state agents vis a vis non-state actors, makes it both a perpetrator and an enabler of private forms of gender-based violence. The consequences of such a feminist reading of the public/private distinction on the efforts of combatting domestic violence in Egypt are numerous. First, the cultural norms of the patriarchal family structure override most public state-sanctioned efforts to combat violence against women.

Second, and as consequence of this first point, laws by itself, as important as they are, are barely sufficient alone to address violence against women in the private sphere without a strong national implementation plan that takes into consideration all the cultural barriers that stand against women and children seeking help from the state in cases of domestic violence. As the rest of this paper will show, the laws governing domestic violence in Egypt are not only limited, but they also face serious challenges in their scope and application to real life situations of violence at home. The dominant official understanding of domestic violence, as expressed in the laws and policies of the state that are enacted by the state agents, remains problematic and incapable of making a real meaningful intervention in the private sphere that enables women to leave domestic situations in which they feel threatened. While this problematic understanding of domestic violence and what constitutes the private sphere of the family is by no means limited to Egypt, all the national policies reviewed in the next sections of this paper, barely address this problematic understanding of the problem of domestic violence itself, and the policies, practices, and administrative rules that directly stem from it.

Third, the "domestication of the public sphere" impacts the ways in which state interventions in the private sphere play out. Again, and as this paper will demonstrate, many of the approaches undertaken by the state to mitigate domestic violence might end up exacerbating the exact private values and norms of the patriarchal family instead of replacing them with a legal and policy framework that stresses equality. Fourth, and most relevant for the purpose of this paper, COVID-19 has introduced further disruptions to the public and private distinctions all over the globe, challenging existing systems of reporting domestic violence, legal interventions, and existing tools for combating domestic and intimate-partner violence in general. The challenges introduced by the current pandemic, especially the ways in which it is further collapsing the distinctions between the public and the private, especially for women who are now taking on more burdens than ever in the new private-turned-public sphere

where domestic violence takes place in the home, whose very definition is changing.

VI. Why Shelters matter: A critical assessment of Egypt's Shelters for Survivors of Domestic Violence

According to a Human Rights Watch Report from 2004, not only do most victims of domestic violence do not know of the existence of women shelters and safe houses but the police also know little about them (Human Rights Report 2004, 34). Egypt's "Shelters' problem" predated COVID-19 and had been highlighted by most of the research done on domestic violence in Egypt. Some of the major problems include: the limited number of shelters, the shelter's accessibility to women in the first place, and the role of the shelters as understood and practiced by the ministry of social solidarity, ministry of interior, and the National Council for Women, and women's security and privacy once they enter the shelters. This section will analyze each of these challenges pertaining to the provision of shelter services in each, and how those challenges are directly linked to the larger political, cultural, and legal contexts elaborated above.

First, Egypt had always only had a limited number of shelters. According to a recent study by Nazra for Feminist Studies, a leading women's rights organization in 2017, there are currently [9 shelters only in Egypt](#). While some shelters, especially those in Cairo and Alexandria are better equipped and cleaner, with areas for kids available, most of the other shelters in other governorates are in much poorer conditions. The real problem, however, lies in the fact that shelters continue to remain empty, since there is no well-functioning and active referral network connecting shelters with civil society organizations working with women and children [who are subjected to domestic violence](#). Shelters that do exist are also reportedly understaffed, under-resourced, and barely functioning. There are no official statistics pertaining to the number of beneficiaries who resided in shelters before the outbreak of the pandemic. With the spread of COVID-19 and the spike in domestic violence, the need to provide shelters for survivors of domestic violence is more urgent than ever. But this need has also become more of a challenge due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and the need to achieve state of the art levels of safety for both social workers who run the shelters, and the recipients of the services. Rather counter-intuitively, the main problem is not the limited number of shelters per se, but rather the under-use or insufficient use of them. Before the outbreak of COVID -19, shelters in Egypt were mostly empty and under-used. According to a report by Human Rights Watch in 2004, the reasons behind this insufficient use are a list of strict and rigid rules for admission. In order to be eligible to stay in a shelter, women must meet a set of strict criteria set by the ministry of social solidarity and the ministry of interior (Ammar 2006). This list includes the fact that she must be divorced or widowed, be younger than fifty years of age, and be currently experiencing family difficulties that makes it difficult for her to seek shelter elsewhere (Human Rights Watch 2004, 45). These rather strict orders make it difficult for many women who are otherwise eligible and could use the services to do so.

In addition to the already existing accessibility problems described above, shelter staff have the power by law to refuse to admit women brought in even by the Police (Ammar 2006). The reasons behind these strict rules, and the broad mandate given to shelter staff and officers, ties deeply to deep-seated cultural understandings of the public/private divide in Egypt, and the concept of the "domestication of the public sphere" referred to earlier in the theoretical framework section of this research. In other words, many shelter officers do not differentiate

between their professional role as service providers, whether as social workers, therapists, and administrative staff, and their private beliefs about marital relations, and thus their view of their role as reconciling husband and wives, and not providing a safe refuge to women. In other words, the administration and running of shelters demonstrates the extent to which there are no real boundaries between the public and private domains, especially for women, whose experiences in the public space again becomes reflective of the same rules that govern their behavior within the family unit. During an interview with a senior officer who specializes in the management and development of shelters, at the ministry of social solidarity (MOSS), she gave the following statement:

“When we receive a woman in the shelter, I have to explain to her all the options that are available to her. This includes the process of reconciliation, something that many of the women who seek refuge in the shelters end up opting for. My role is to make her choices clear to her but not to push her toward taking any of the options. Many women end up reconciling for financial reasons and there is nothing we could about it” (Interview with officer at MOSS, August 18, 2020).

Several past studies have even reported that shelter staff have often volunteered to bring husbands to the shelters “mediate between the couple to avoid being sued for kidnapping charges. Of course, such practices run contrary to any shelter safety plans and protection of the victim from her abuser” (Human Rights Watch Report, 2004). This conflation of the role of shelters betray a deeper misunderstanding of the nature of domestic violence in Egypt, and how it happens in the grey area between the public and the private spheres; the spaces where state agents, include shelter staff, law enforcement officials, and therapists, operate and intervene in the private space, while also enforcing some of its very patriarchal norms.

In addition, and as mentioned in the previous section, many of the recent legal and policy interventions introduced in Egypt aimed to combat public forms of sexual violence/ harassment, and not domestic violence. The outbreak of COVID-19 has forced the global community to turn its gaze back to the private, as life as usual was brought to a halt. However, in Egypt, conflating public forms of gender-based violence with private forms of it such as domestic violence, betrays a much deeply-seated problem: the lack of political will and policy tools to tackle domestic violence, since it involves a substantive investment in intervening in the private sphere of the home. On the positive side, COVID-19 might have shifted the balance to the private sphere, and thus made this intervention a policy and public health necessity.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the challenges facing shelters have multiplied. First, the already small number of women who knew about the services and used them, shrank even further. Many of the shelter service-providers felt increasingly vulnerable and unable to carry out their work because of the lack of safety protocols in the shelters, and their fear of either catching the virus or carrying it unknowingly and infecting vulnerable and elderly members of their families. According to the same senior officer, when asked about the effect that COVID-19 had had on women’s accessibility to the shelter:

“We are facing a two-pronged problem. On the one hand, the panic over the spread of the pandemic and the lack of a plan to ensure the safety of both service providers and beneficiaries by the ministry of social solidarity (MOSS), meant that less women sought our services. On the other hand, it also meant that less women will continue to seek our services until we find a way to implement a safety protocol and plan that enables us to carry on with our work. In fact, many of our staff members are unable to carry out their work at the shelters as they fear endangering their own families. Many of them are even receiving counseling and medical services now to help them deal with the situation. So now, instead of providing services to victims of domestic violence, we are offering such services to our own staff.”
(Interview with officer at MOSS, August 18, 2020).

The above quote demonstrates clearly that shelter services were not considered a priority service at the times of the pandemic; and thus the staff at the shelters were not considered essential workers or first responders, such as the case with medical staff and others. This fact demonstrates that the state's emergency plan to deal with COVID-19 did not envision that domestic violence will turn out to be one of the most urgent consequences of the confinement and lockdown associated with the outbreak of COVID-19. Until now, domestic violence is not considered an emergency such as the case in other countries where more developed and functioning reporting systems are put in place. So far, the only concrete response to the problem has been to offer counseling and therapy services to victims of domestic violence online. While this is a welcome intervention, it barely addresses the roots of the problem or attempts to measure its scope during the pandemic.

One other central gap in the system is the question of the safety and security of beneficiaries. As it is clear from the above quotes, shelters are currently not implementing safety measures that make them safer for both staff and women recipients. There are currently no updates on improved protocols or safety measures, but there is a discussion inside the Ministry of Social Solidarity on how to proceed further in order to better reach and provide services to women who are victims of domestic violence at the time of COVID-19. One positive way in which MOSS seems to be tackling this is to carefully study different experiences from around the globe, in terms of providing shelter services at the time of COVID-19. According to the shelters' officer at MOSS, some countries have decided to move all their services online and close shelters, while others include shelters' staff as essential workers who provide front-line services that need to be prioritized in terms of safety and mitigating the chances of infection from the virus (Interview with officer at MOSS, August 18, 2020).

While the National Council for Women (NCW) conducts its own outreach campaign to make women aware of the national resources that are available to women victims of domestic violence, those outreach efforts are obviously not enough. The Complaints Bureau in The National Council for Women, for example, are not conducting an effective national campaign to advertise their hotline and WhatsApp numbers. In addition, the hotline works only from 9:00 AM- 9:00 PM ,whereas domestic violence can happen at any time throughout the 24 hours. Hence, shifts need to be introduced to the complaint bureau system to ensure that this mechanism is available 24 hours throughout the week, and that survivors are able to resort to it at any point. The other hotline is for the Ministry of Interior for the violence against women units in police stations. Few of these units are available and are not disseminated across governorates, making those services currently unavailable to survivors to access who might need them. State Counsel/Professor Samir explained the complications of this issue as follows:

"If you are a woman outside Cairo, you don't find a forensic doctor who is present. This means that in order to prove any domestic violence before the police, a woman will have to wait for the next day or the day after. If a women had already suffered from sexual violence, she will then be required not to change her clothes. The end result will be exposing the victim to more pressure and trauma by forcing her to wait to be seen".

(Interview with State Counsel Mohamed Samir, July 11 2020)

In practice, this means there are not enough forensic units and doctors in the governorates and it is available only in centralized cities. Additionally, the example reveals how emergency services are interrelated and dependent on each other for accessibility. Former Gender Regional Advocacy Adviser for MENA Region in CARE International, Amira Abdel Fattah, recognizes the importance of the UN General Secretary's statement in relations to emergency services as essential services, which she considers a turning point. Commenting on the current

emergency services and reporting mechanism in Egypt, she said:

“I see that COVID-19 is a soft opportunity for us to make an assessment of the structure of the GBV reporting mechanism and risk mitigation, so we can work on this in the future. [Current interventions] are for treating symptoms, but we don’t know to what extent we have [an efficient] protection system that is sufficient for women who are exposed to violence. We are currently witnessing a decline in the support provided to women exposed to violence, [the] priority [should be] for the survivor, even at the expense of the family unit, which seems to be the focus of all state interventions until now. If I have been subjected to violence, insulted, and beaten, where [can] I go and [how] to go out [when] we have a curfew? family, may not receive you because they are old [fear of getting infected]. How do they go to the shelters? Are the phones safe? How could I report if I am stuck with my perpetrator? Or how can I go down the street? ... In my opinion, before COVID-19, there were some efforts, but they were weak. Consequently, let us recognize that services for gender-based violence before the crisis were not meeting the level of needs on the ground ... After COVID-19, the world has relapsed [regarding essential services], in my opinion, because now the most important need is hygiene kits since we are in a lifesaving context.” (Interview with Amira Abd El Fattah, July 9, 2020)

On a positive side, some efforts to improve shelters and make them safe are currently slowly being introduced including the sterilization of shelters, establishing isolation rooms and providing PCR tests (Interview with officers at MOSS, August 30, 2020). In addition, the launching of the “Mental Health Prioritization” initiative led by The National Council for Women, in cooperation with the UN Women, which was disseminated through the social networking sites of the Council and the partners (Interview with Amira Abd El Fattah, July 9, 2020). Also, the National Council for women has been promoting the essential service packages for any potential victim of violence against women since the start of the COVID19 outbreak, however, those services have not been properly advertised so very few potential beneficiaries know about them (Interview with Amira Abd El Fattah, July 9, 2020). Again, accessibility to these provided services needs to be evaluated, in order to understand what kind of barriers exist when it comes to accessing them during the current outbreak of COVID-19. Understanding these barriers will inform how to redress them in any crisis context.

In summary, shelter services for victims of domestic violence in Egypt continue to be small in number as only 11 shelters exist in Egypt at this moment. In addition, the shelters that do exist are under-utilized, and unable to attract women who in turn rarely register as domestic violence victims. This in turn results not only in an under-use and waste of the services associated with shelters, but also in an undercounting of the phenomenon of violence in the private sphere in Egypt, a fact that in turn disincentives any future national plans to provide shelters for domestic violence. This vicious circle could end only with the recognition of domestic violence as a national human rights, public health, and public policy issue. Moreover, the challenges raised above by Abdel Fattah enforce the importance of declaring shelters as essential services and have staff working at them be declared as essential workers, meaning that they can be available 24 hours. This step is crucial as it will enable staff to support the survivors if they are trapped with their perpetrators or cannot commute during curfews.

VII. Conclusion: Emergency Services in Times of Crises: Global Lessons and Local Practices

The COVID-19 Pandemic has been foregrounding many unpredicted vulnerabilities other than health risks and economic risks. Whereas countries were more preoccupied with forcing precautionary measures, the surge in domestic violence cases globally highlighted how this form of violence is of equal risks and it causes death and severe health issues.

The pandemic continues to provide an opportunity for Egypt to strengthen its emergency service capabilities and use new innovative measures to combat domestic violence. One of those measures should be declaring shelters as essential services as a major first step aimed at changing perceptions on gender-based violence services and their significance. As this paper has shown, emergency services, reporting mechanisms, and referral pathways are underdeveloped in Egypt, a fact that further decreases their preparedness to deal with the current crisis. Furthermore, and given the current system of emergency services (or lack of) in the case of Egypt, a different approach to the issue of domestic violence that takes into account the local context including the systems already in place and places the survivor of domestic violence at the center of the service is much needed. As the previous section showed, shelters in Egypt lack proper outreach services that could sensitize their services to the targeted community of beneficiaries. Another issue related to current systems is accessibility to hotlines and services due to the lack of proper outreach tools that both reach women all over Egypt, and encourage them to seek help. As the interviews conducted with experts reveal, the main structural problem is not the lack of services, although there is large room for improvement, but the fact that potential beneficiaries don't hear about them enough, and are not encouraged to seek them and use them as a result of the prevailing cultural norms that prohibits most victims from reporting those crimes to the authorities and seek much needed help.

The current pandemic did shed light on many gaps in the national system and resources available to combat domestic violence in Egypt as elaborated in detail throughout this paper. In addition, the current crisis has made those resources even less useful for women who suffer from domestic violence. When an incident of violence does happen now, the options for women are severely restricted by the shutdown of essential care, legal, and health services. Furthermore, women's rights organizations, which could help support the influx of women in danger, have been [amongst the victims of the crackdown on civil society under the current political context](#).

On the more positive side, the different national bodies that together design and implement Egypt's national strategy against domestic violence are attempting to implement several steps towards mitigating the expected rise of domestic violence during the outbreak of COVID-19 and beyond. Those measures include sanitizing the shelters, providing online counseling services to women through partnership with the private sector, the recent launching of new helpline, and the use of social media applications and phone applications like WhatsApp to encourage women to reach out for help at any time. While many of those initiatives are important, they remain quite limited when measured against how other governments around the globe are dealing with this national emergency. In many parts of the world, shelter homes and one-stop centers have been created to deal with the special circumstances of the pandemic, with less rigid rules for admission. The Middle East and North Africa, including Egypt, had generally been slow in responding to this domestic violence crisis, with only local aid groups

offering support over the phone and online, and sharing helpline numbers on social media to encourage victims to seek help.

In other parts of the global south, government interventions to combat domestic violence have been more responsive to local needs, with women's rights civil organizations and groups playing a major role in helping governments with advocacy and outreach. In [India for example](#), many of those shelters and stops have been declared essential services, and allowed to function day and night with necessary safety measures. Moreover, different Indian states have created several targeted public service messages from the national government on the issue of domestic violence aimed towards the society as a whole, encouraging communities to work together to combat domestic violence. Encouraging the role of extended family members, bystanders, and neighbors is essential, who should also be targeted through media campaigns to encourage them to help women or report incidents to the authorities. Such campaigns can go a long way towards breaking the silence and overcoming some of the culturally ingrained beliefs about domestic violence being a private matter and not a public one. Several innovative ideas for national reach out have been implemented all over the globe. Some have even shared information about shelters, hotlines, and shelters available for potential victims of domestic violence on food packets and grocery items. There is also a growing recognition of the gendered effects of COVID-19 and its corresponding public health response measures, such as lockdowns and social distancing in a way that led the national government of India to declare sexual and reproductive health services and commodities as [essential services during the pandemic](#). In other countries, special funds were created for the purpose of helping NGOs and shelter homes to provide support to women and children. Many of the above solutions could be adopted as part of the National Strategy to combat Violence Against women, with the establishment of a network of shelters run by NGOs, that regularly monitored by both the Ministry of Solidarity and the National Council for Women.

But above all, redefining domestic violence as a public policy issue is crucial to the success of any efforts, whether by the national government or the private sphere. The outbreak of COVID-19 unsettled the traditional boundaries between the public and the private sphere, thus presenting a rare opportunity and a critical juncture that could be utilized to redefine gender-based violence in the private sphere in Egypt and seek new innovative solutions for it. The final section of this paper, below presents a number of policy recommendations, based on this research, to combat and mitigate domestic violence in Egypt, post-COVID-19 in the immediate, short to medium, and long terms.

Finally, COVID has highlighted the importance of the "home" as a new area of intervention since lockdowns forced people to live, work, and seek refuge in the private sphere. As a result, homes should emerge as safe zones where violence should be eliminated in all forms. Lockdown could imply strengthening existing deep-seated beliefs about women's place in society, or it could also imply locking the patriarchal notions and ideas to imagine a violence free gender equal world.

VIII. List of Recommendations:

Recommendations for Immediate Action:

1. Launch media Campaigns on domestic violence in Egypt and use culturally sensitive messages/material to promote the idea of shelters among the populace.
2. Integrate domestic violence prevention messaging into COVID-19 prevention materials for healthcare providers, journalists, media and outreach workers and service providers.
3. Make all state-run services related to domestic violence including hotline, WhatsApp groups, and other services accessible to women all over Egypt.
4. Set an effective system for documenting domestic violence in Egypt through tracking both the quantity and nature of calls for help. This will help document the extent of the problem and identify in which sectors of society do high levels of domestic violence exist.
5. Declare emergency services for gender-based violence as essential services during pandemic outbreaks.
6. Ensure that service providers and shelter workers are trained and equipped to deal with the safety and health precautions as necessitated by the pandemic.
7. Ensure the safety of service providers and shelter workers through application of all safety and health measures including the sterilization of all service provider headquarters and ensure access to hygiene kits for all.
8. Ensure hospitals have access to emergency kits for needed for cases of sexual violence and assaults.
9. Create effective multi-sectoral referral pathways to victims of domestic violence.
10. Develop long-term partnerships with civil society organizations in order to make sure that the national responses are translated into immediate interventions on the ground.
11. Launch a comprehensive report on the results of the National Strategy for Combating Violence against Women (NSVAW) NSVAW in order to share the findings from implementation and the future plans that are developed as a result of these findings. The report should also include the challenges that faced those implementations and what is being done to overcome those challenges.
12. Activate Article 7, point 12, of Law 30/2018 that was passed by the national machinery (NCW) on legal and administrative referral for the received complaints by the complaint bureau in case of domestic violence.
13. Set an annual gender responsive budget for the national state machinery (NCW) as part of the state annual budget.

Recommendations for the Short to Medium terms:

1. Establish VAW units in hospitals/ police stations/ prosecutions/forensic across all governorates or Establish one stop centers that provide medical and psychological care and legal aid in one place across governorates.
2. Install training programs on gender equality, and especially on domestic violence as a public policy problem (and not a private one) and make sure that all state officials working in the established units across the governorates undergo the same training.
3. Equip service providers with needed technological infrastructure and provide training for service-providers on how to deliver these specialized services online.

4. Increase the number of state-run and state-regulated civil-society shelters for domestic violence and establish a network of shelters and one-stop centers for domestic violence all over the country that are allowed to function 24/7 with the necessary safety measures for Covid-19.

5. Amend Article 60 of the penal code that exempts husbands from punishment in cases of domestic violence if it is perpetrated in “good faith according to Islamic Sharia.” This article stands in the way of establishing legal accountability in crimes of domestic violence and thus needs to be amended as soon as possible.

6. Eliminate the use of Article (17) of the Egyptian Penal code, an article that gives judges the discretion to apply maximum clemency in reducing the prescribed penalty by two degrees, and that is often used in “honor crimes” or the murder of women by male family members.

7. Halt gender discrimination against the appointment of women in the Egyptian State Council as well as other judicial branches in Egypt.

8. Adjust the legal status of the National Council for Women (NCW) to abide by The Paris Principles, relating to the status of national institutions to guarantee its budget and mandate are independent.

Recommendations for the Long-term:

1. Establish a clear monitoring and reporting system on national strategies and make findings accessible.

2. Produce regular periodical data and statistics on violence against women that are accessible to all stake-holders.

3. Incorporate a gender-based violence analysis into national responses to COVID-19, including in public policy, economic, and health solutions

4. Establish a standing consulting committee on domestic violence consisting of representatives from civil society and relevant ministries such as MOSS, Ministry of justice, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of International Cooperation.

5. Activate the provisions of the 2014 Constitution that establish the equality of men and women before the law, therefore changing the legal provisions involving discrimination against women.

6. Pass a comprehensive national law against all forms of violence against women that tackles all forms of violence against women in both the public and private spheres.

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