

Gender-Based Violence: Women's Safety in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq



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ABSTRACT: Violence and discrimination against women often originate from entrenched traditions and tribal mentalities, relegating women to subordinate roles within families and society. In many social spheres, boys and men are granted dominance over women. This paper aims to fulfill another aspect of CEDAW's requirements. CEDAW demands that States parties undertake necessary legal and policy measures to ensure women's equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. To achieve this goal, CEDAW draws attention to specific fields for State Parties to address. This paper involves conducting surveys to assess the policy measures taken by the Kurdistan Region as key steps toward eliminating violence against women in line with CEDAW requirements. Accordingly, this paper discusses and analyzes questionnaire findings, identifying inadequately addressed issues. It also highlights CEDAW Committee Recommendations, providing further support to the study's findings. By conducting these studies, I aim to contribute to existing knowledge on preventing violence against women in the Kurdistan Region. This research offers guidance to legal professionals and politicians interested in achieving gender equality and preventing violence.

KEYWORDS: Marriage, Domestic Violence, Honor Killing, Gender Equality, CEDAW.

1- INTRODUCTION

Violence against women persists, despite the regional government's some efforts to fight it. Most women are unaware of the legislation and law enforcement mechanisms that combat violence against women.¹ In Iraqi Kurdistan region, violence against women, especially spousal and domestic violence, is widespread. The study showed that the prevalence of physical, psychological and spousal sexual violence was 38.9%, 52.6% and 21.1% respectively.²

There are, however, many obstacles to the enforcement of the legislation, such as the discriminatory mentality of officials, mainly men. This leads to failure to investigate criminal cases and provides the needed protection. Particularly, when the perpetrators belong to the ruling parties. In fact, the women are considered as the culprit in many cases of rape. That is why no or few perpetrators are found guilty. Consequently, not many perpetrators are punished. Likewise, the fear of being regarded as culprit, many rape victims does not file complaints against their rapists.

Typically, women are afraid to report the complaint because they are usually threatened. Furthermore, as many of the informants have mentioned, punishing the perpetrator by imprisonment can have severe detrimental consequences for women as men are usually the bread-winners. Most women also bear the consequences of abuse. It is therefore important that the Government provides the means for women seeking to secure their rights.

According to director of the Gender Studies and Information Organisation, Kurdish society does not accept a woman who makes a complaint against men and once they do they are no longer taken back into their family or community.³ Also, she adds that such rejection often leads to depression, potentially, and suicide.

Moreover, the violence against women has been exacerbated because of the means of communication. Currently, unregistered SIM cards have been made available freely in the market. This has encouraged many abusers to use threat or defame the females, usually

¹ Intisar A. Mali and others, 'Women's Knowledge of the Domestic Violence Legislation in Erbil, Iraq and their Response to Spousal Violence' 2017 32 *Journal of Family Violence* cited in Nazar P Shabila and Tariq Al- Hadithi 'Women's Health and Status in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq: A Review, crescent' (2018) 5 *Journal of Medical and Biological Sciences* 70, 72.

² Hazha H Al-Atrushi and others, 'Intimate partner violence against women in the Erbil city of the Kurdistan region, Iraq', (2013) 13 *BMC Women's Health* cited in Nazar P Shabila and Tariq Al- Hadithi 'Women's Health and Status in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq: A Review, crescent', (2018) 5 *Journal of Medical and Biological Sciences* 70 at p.72.

³ D Parvaz, *Combating Domestic Violence in Iraq's Kurdish Region*

<<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/10/combating-domestic-violence-iraq-kurdish-region-161007093040513.html>> accessed 24 March 2020.

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for extorting those who females who reject them. The condition is further worsened because telecommunication companies offer calls free of charge which encourage many men to harass women and inflict enormous psychological pain on them.

In 2012, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) established the Independent Human Rights Commission, an independent body charged with researching and implementing strategies to combat violence against women in the region.⁴ The IKR has set up new bodies to deal specifically with women's issues. One such is the General Directorate of Combating Violence against Women. Established in 2010, it consists of six sub- Directorates tasked with monitoring cases of violence against women. Moreover, in all three Kurdish Governorates, domestic violence courts are created. Another body is the High Council of Women's Affairs. It is formed to advise the government on gender policies and the way to develop effective strategies. Moreover, the council is responsible for protecting women's rights in the Kurdistan Region, and for monitoring the impact of policies adopted by the KRG on women's lives and their empowerment in political, social and economic spheres.⁵

Recently, the government has set up a hotline, 119, which women can call for help. In September 2019, the line soon became an important tool in the Kurdistan Region's efforts to prevent and reduce violence against women.

The Kurdistan Regional Government has adopted a strategy to combat violence against women, started in 2017 and supposed to last until 2027. It involves repealing all legal provisions that discriminated against women, raising public awareness of the causes and effects of violence against women, supporting victims of violence, including rural women, and providing them with improved services.⁶

In general, the continuation of violence can be attributed to all the following: The lack of measure of protection for victims, the weakness of law enforcement institutions, the dominance of tribal, traditions and customs over the legal system, the deficiency of laws criminalizing domestic violence, and the absence or lack of data, inaccuracy of statistics, classification and analysis based on discrimination and violence against women. And all these reasons can be explained in terms of government lacking in seriousness in implementing General Recommendation No. 19 of the CEDAW Committee.⁷

This lack of seriousness has been observed by the Committee of CEDAW and therefore it recommends that the Kurdistan Region; To ensure the effective implementation of Act No. 8 (2011) by, inter alia, issuing the regulations necessary for its operationalization; To develop guidelines specifying which type of domestic violence cases could be referred to conciliation committees and take measures to guarantee the rights of victims whose cases are referred to such committees.⁸

2- BEATING WIFE

Beating wife, also known as domestic violence, is a grave violation of human rights that occurs within households worldwide, affecting people of all backgrounds and ages. It inflicts physical, emotional, and psychological harm, trapping victims in a cycle of fear and powerlessness. Addressing this issue requires legal action, support services for victims, education, and challenging societal norms that perpetuate violence. Together, we must work towards creating a society free from domestic violence, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

The figure (1) shows a study which is done on family violence and beating wife by their husbands in case they violated husbands' rules or regulations. Obviously, families should be built on love and trust and its integrity should be protected against inhuman conception and prejudices. There are issues in families and no family can leave without problems. Hence, it is very crucial to possess problem solving skills by one of them or both. For instance, almost all of the participants disagree with the idea of wife beating which is more than 81% of surveyors. However, the fact is that most of Kurdish families have domestic problems and they lack the knowledge and awareness to resolve them. For instance, illiteracy plays a great role in shaping the behaviour. Only 1% agrees with beating wife. This might be due to unawareness of human rights, of the proper way of relationships between spouses or disregard to women's rights. 12% of participants believe that it is all right to beat the wife sometimes or at least to intimidate them.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Kurdistan Regional Government, *High Council of Women Affairs* <<https://gov.krd/english/government/entities/hcwa/>> accessed 20 March 2020.

⁶ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Summary Record of the 1721st Meeting : Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties under Article 18 of the Convention Seventy-Fourth Session (30 October 2019) CEDAW/C/SR.1721, 21.

⁷ Iraqi Women Network, 'List of Issues on the Iraq's Report on the Implementation of CEDAW in Iraq' (Iraqi Women Network 2019) 9.

⁸ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Concluding Observations on the Combined Fourth to Sixth Periodic Reports of Iraq (1 June 2016) CEDAW/C/IRQ/CO/4-6, 9.

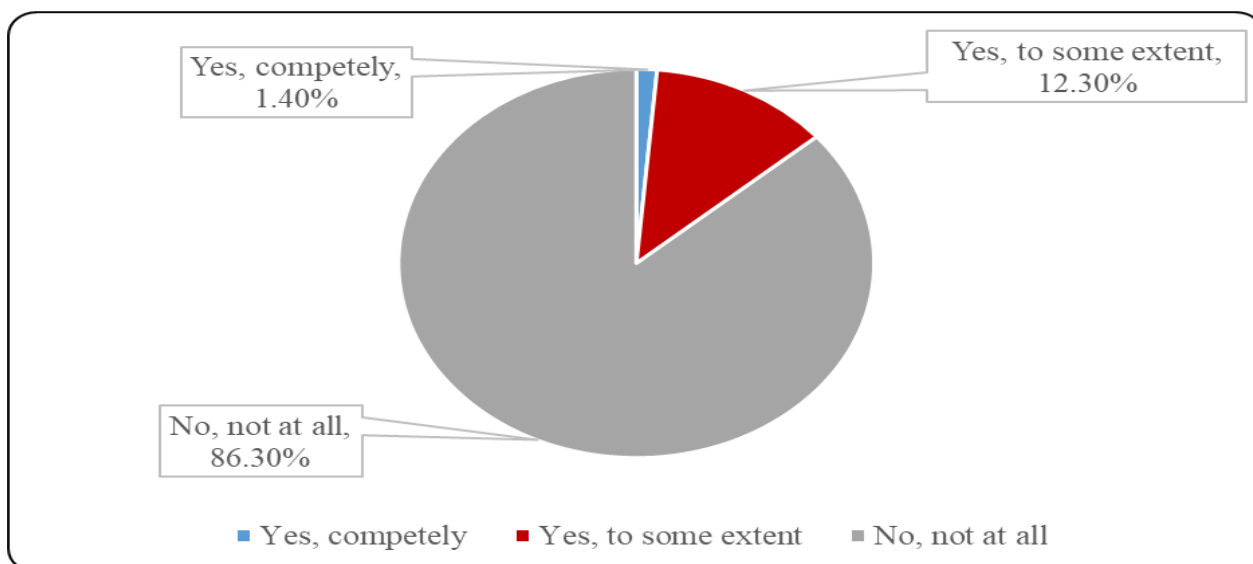


Figure 1: Does the husband have right to beat his wife if she disobeys his orders?

To conclude, the vast majority of people reject the idea of beating wife regardless of circumstances or reasons. As for those who accept beating wife systematically or sometimes, there should be studies to understand them and try to change their thinking. In this context, the organization of workshops and social awareness campaigns are predicted to have positive impact not only on beating wife but also honour killing.

3- EXCHANGE OF BRIDES IN MARITAL ARRANGEMENTS

The exchange of brides, also known as bride exchange or bride barter, refers to a practice in some cultures where families negotiate and exchange brides as part of marital arrangements. This practice has historical roots in various societies and has been documented in different forms across different periods and regions. It's important to note that practices around arranged marriages, including the exchange of brides, vary widely and are deeply embedded in cultural, social, and historical contexts. While it may have been more prevalent in certain societies in the past, many cultures have evolved, and contemporary arranged marriages typically involve more consensual decisions between the individuals involved.

This traditional type of marriage arrangement was very common in the past, but even nowadays it occurs from time to time and there are still the same negative effects on families and society.⁹ So our survey tried to find out whether the practice is still ongoing or has ceased. The results, as shown in the figure (2), indicate that 12% of participants believe the practice is still ongoing in Kurdistan Region. 46% think it might be happening sometimes. 15% think it does not happen. 25% said they have no idea about that. As such, it could be said that the majority think it happens. We cannot be sure about it but considering the beliefs of our respondents, which the study assumes to be based on their experience, the study accepts that it might be happening. The importance of this matter stems from the fact that bridal exchanges involve forcing marriage on one side or both. It has been known for decades that bridal exchange is unsafe arrangement. When trouble between one couple of spouses happen it reflects immediately on the counterpart couple as well. The fact that there is a minority expressing the occurrence of *Zhin-ba-Zhin* might indicate that the majority is not aware of the phenomena. However, the seriousness of this problem requires investigation by the relevant authorities, and in case it was determined that it is ongoing in some parts of the country, the government should intervene to enforce the law so that the phenomenon is eradicated. Moreover, the situation might also require some institutional arrangements for monitoring.

⁹ United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations on the Combined Second to Fourth Periodic Reports of Iraq (3 Mar 2015) CRC/C/IRQ/CO/2-4, 11

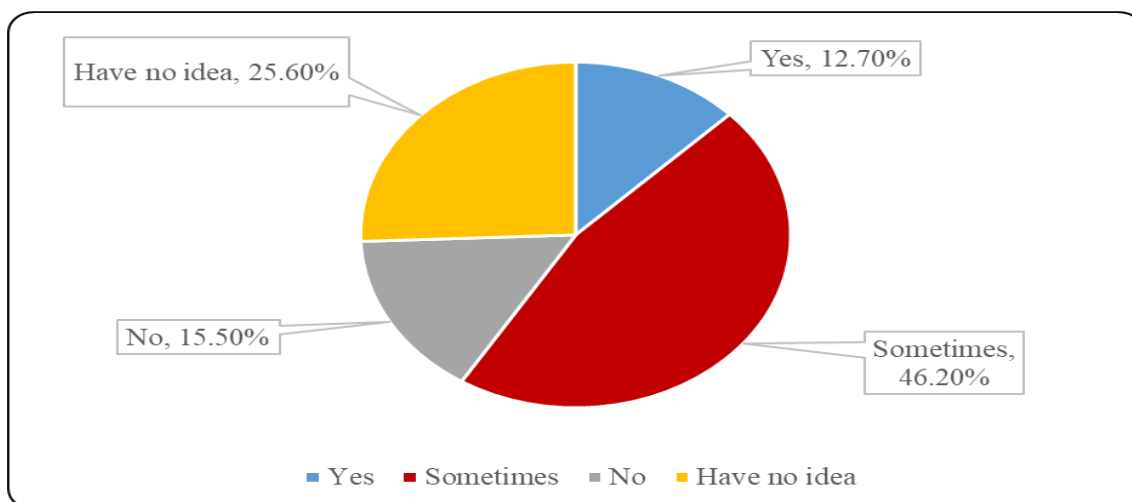


Figure 2: Does zhin-ba-zhin (exchange of girls and women in marriage process between two families) still exist in Kurdistan Region?

The UNCHR mentioned that there was zhin bi zhin in rural areas, citing several sources and it regards the “a woman for a woman” marriages as form of forced marriage. The usual logic that motivates families to carry out such arrangement is that the two families involved will avoid spending money which they might not be able to afford any way. It can also be motivated by mutual wishes of families, clans or tribes involved to strengthen the bond among them.

One of the victims of marriage exchange in narrating her experience says that “My brother wanted to get married thus they married me off in exchange for his bride although I was very young so I could not get pregnant for three years. That affected a lot of problems for me and my family.” She continues to describe that when her sister-in-law had a problem with her brother and left her home, she also had to leave her home, and so far she has been the victim of the family problem of her brother.¹⁰ Another victim of the marriage exchange she was married off in exchange for a wife for her brother. She was forced to divorce after a week because there were problems with her brother and her sister-in-law. As a result, she was sent home without even telling her husband about it.¹¹ According to the Kurdistan Region Domestic Violence Law, marriage exchange is illegal and it is a type of violence against women that has its sentence in law. However, this phenomenon still persists in society, according to humanitarian organizations.¹²

4- FORCED AND EARLY MARRIAGE

Child marriage, defined as the union involving a child under 18, disproportionately impacts girls and is deemed a form of child abuse by UNICEF. Various factors such as poverty, limited educational opportunities, conflict, and traditional beliefs contribute to the persistence of child marriages worldwide. While some parents perceive early marriage as a means to safeguard their daughters and bolster financial stability, it exposes girls to safety risks and violence, resulting in adverse psychological effects. In many countries, the wedding night is legally considered statutory rape if the individuals involved are not yet 18.

Iraqi legislation on child marriage falls short of international standards, as evidenced by Article 41 of the Iraqi Constitution, which grants legislative discretion in personal status matters. A 2014 draft law, known as the Ja’afari Personal Status Law, proposed permitting marriages as young as 9, but the Iraqi Parliament rejected this amendment, upholding the existing law (Article 8 of the Iraqi Personal Status Code). This law allows child marriage if authorized by a judge for girls above 15 years old, a provision relatively more equitable than the proposed draft. However, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), Law No. 15 of 2008 superficially amends Article 8 to permit a judge to authorize the marriage of a 16-year-old, still falling below international standards. Ironically, the KRI Domestic Violence Law No. 8 (2011) categorizes child marriage as an act of domestic violence, imposing penalties.

Nevertheless, the KRG's endorsement of marriages for 16-year-olds, under specific conditions, contradicts this law. This inconsistency raises concerns regarding the KRI's commitment to addressing child marriage, prompting speculation that the enactment of Law No. 8 (2011) was aimed at showcasing progressiveness to Western audiences.

"Forced marriage" refers to a situation where one or both parties involved in a marriage are married without their free and full consent. This practice is often associated with cultural, familial, or societal pressures, where individuals are coerced or forced into marriage against their will. Forced marriage is a violation of human rights and can lead to numerous negative consequences for those involved, including physical and emotional harm, restricted freedom, and limited opportunities for personal development. It

¹⁰ Khalat Salh , *Exchange marriage in Iraqi-Kurdistan* (2017)

<<https://wadi-online.org/2017/11/22/exchange-marriage-in-kurdistan/>> accessed 29 March 2020.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

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is essential to address and combat forced marriage through legal protections, awareness-raising efforts, and support services for those at risk or affected by this practice.

As is illustrated in Figure (3) there are a number of different views. 33.2% of the participants say they are sure that forced marriage exists still in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. However, 53.80 % of the participants believe that the forced marriage in the region exists sometimes. But, 8.70 % of the participants do not have any idea of having the forced marriage in the region.

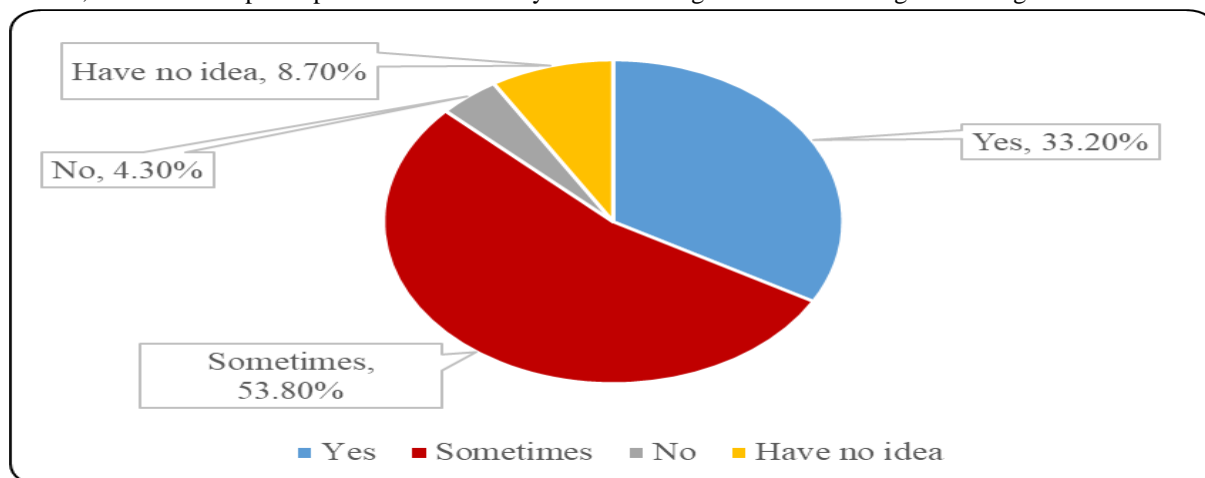


Figure 3: Do you think forced marriage still exists in Kurdistan Region?

On the other hand, 4.3% of the participants say no and believe that the forced marriage does not exist in the region now. Iraqi Kurdistan Region enacted a law criminalizing child and forced marriage in 2011, however, this law is not actually enforced.¹³ According to an international organisation in Erbil early marriages are common to the KRI. It has been suggested that early marriage is mainly related to religious and social customs and that such marriages take place in several parts of Iraq.¹⁴ The Directorate for Combating Violence against Women noted that the majority of women in the KRI are forcibly married. The director of the Women Empowerment Organization (WEO) in Erbil, also clarified that tribal conflicts often include handing over one to three girls to marry someone of the opposing tribe. Forced marriage is more common where tribal customs still prevail, such as rural areas.¹⁵

In regard to child marriage, data from Iraq's Central Statistics Bureau, of 2011, showed that 5% of Iraqi girls were married before the age of 15, while 22% of Iraqi girls married before the age of 18. For Iraqi Kurdistan, these proportions are about the same.¹⁶ Child marriage contracts are usually signed informally outside the courts and without formal registration in the Kurdistan Region and Iraq, thereby allowing for unreliable data and underreporting on the real rates of child marriage.¹⁷ Children, under threat, generally accept marriage. They can face abuse, or actual violence. Often when she is still a child a promise of marriage is made on behalf of a girl. According to the report by the E-kurd Daily (2011) child marriage were most frequently reported in the areas of Ranya, Chwarqurna, Hajiawa, Betwate and Pishder.¹⁸ However, there appear to be no mechanisms for monitoring early and forced marriages, and therefore those who responsible for marriages that violate the law are not brought to justice.¹⁹

The persistence of forced marriage in the Region of Kurdistan indicates that the government has not been able to uproot the practice yet. This means that it has so far failed to implement the CEDAW's demands.

In this regard, CEDAW's Joint General Recommendation and General Comment No.31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and No.18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on Harmful Practices (2014), urge the State Party to take concrete steps to put an end to early and forced marriage practices and to: Ensure that the minimum age of marriage set at the age of 18 for both girls and boys is applied, that a child under the age of 16 cannot under any circumstances be married; Establish awareness campaigns and awareness programs on the harmful effects of early and forced marriage on girls' physical and

¹³ Tahirih Justice Centre, *Forced Marriage Overseas: Iraq* <<https://preventforcedmarriage.org/forced-marriage-overseas-iraq/>> accessed 29 March 2020.

¹⁴ Landinfo, 'Security and Human Rights Issues in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), and South/Central Iraq (S/C Iraq) Report from the Danish Immigration Service's (DIS) (Danish Refugee Council's (DRC) and Landinfo's Joint Fact Finding Mission to Erbil and Sulaymaniyah and Amman Jordan 2009) 60.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ UNFPA, *Child Marriage In Kurdistan Region- Iraq* (UNFPA 2016) 2.

¹⁷ Ibid 3.

¹⁸ Falah Muradkan-Shaker, *Iraqi Kurdistan seen from a women's perspective*, *E Kurd Daily* (21 Jan 2011) <<https://ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2011/1/state4550.htm>> accessed 29 March 2020.

¹⁹ Home Office UK Border Agency, *Country of Origin Information Report Kurdistan Regional Government Area of Iraq* (21 May 2009) 91.

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mental health and well-being, targeting families, local authorities, religious leaders, judges and prosecutors; Establish protection schemes for forced marriage victims who make a complaint.²⁰

Furthermore, the Committee recommends that the State party adopt a comprehensive strategy to eliminate all harmful practices and stereotypes, in particular child marriage, in conformity with articles 2 and 5 of the Convention, which includes awareness-raising efforts targeting the general public, the media and religious and community leaders, in collaboration with civil society and women's organizations.²¹

5- THE PRACTICE OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a deeply entrenched form of gender-based violence, rooted in tradition and cultural heritage. Defined by the World Health Organization as any non-medical alteration of female genitalia, FGM constitutes a severe violation of human rights, particularly for women and children. It deprives women of their integrity and autonomy, dehumanizing them in the process. Despite efforts by international organizations, FGM persists, with Kurdistan experiencing disproportionately higher rates compared to the rest of Iraq. It is imperative that FGM be eradicated entirely to ensure the safety, dignity, and rights of women.

General Recommendation No 14 of the CEDAW Committee proposes that State Parties take suitable and effective steps to eradicate the exercise of FGM, and No 24 of the general recommendation stipulates that these signatory countries should guarantee that regulations prohibiting FGM are enacted and enforced effectively. Article 29(4) of the Iraqi Constitution prohibits all types of violence and abuse within the family and holds the family's commitment to guarantee this in the highest esteem. There is no legislation in Iraq specifically banning FGM. In Kurdistan Region, however, a law of Combating Domestic Violence (No 8 of 2011) is enacted which criminalizes the exercise of FGM and penalizes individuals who "instigate, help or perform" the process. Penalties for FGM offenders range from 6 months to 3 years imprisonment. However, its application still faces obstacles, which meant that the law has not accomplished its planned objectives.

As is mentioned in Figure (4), 18.80% of the participants say yes and think that FGM still exists in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. However, 32.90% of the participants think that FGM sometimes exists in the region. But, 35.70% of the participants do not have any idea of FGM. On the other hand, 12.60% of the participants deny that FGM exist in the region.

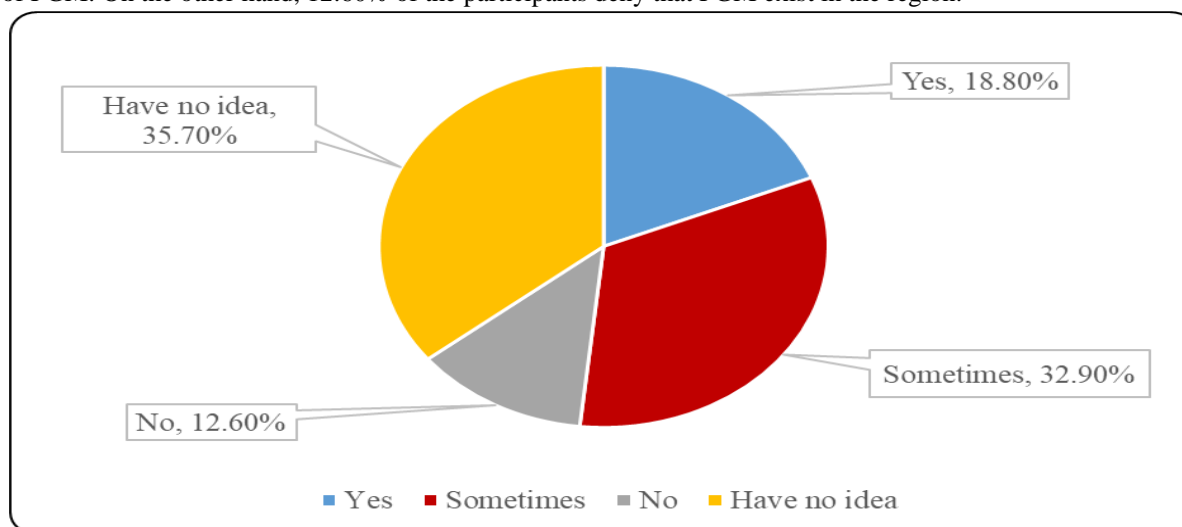


Figure 4: Do you think FGM (female genital mutilation) still exists in Kurdistan Region?

According to the High Council for Women's Affairs survey that published its finding in 2016, just half the women and girls in Kurdistan were aware of related health problems caused by FGM and just half the women surveyed were aware of the law forbidding FGM.²² In a survey of over 700 villages and districts, conducted by the Wadi German Organization in 2007 and 2009, including Sulaymaniyah, Erbil, and Garmin, around 72 per cent of women were subject to genital mutilation. Older women with no medical expertise perform this procedure. According to an article by Network of Iraqi Reporters for Investigative Journalism, FGM is particularly prevalent in the areas of Rania and Garmiyan in Iraqi Kurdistan, as tribal practices in these areas are particularly strong and is practiced by particular tribes. The aim of FGM practice is to ensure in the eyes of the Kurdish community the marriageability

²⁰ United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations on the Combined Second to Fourth Periodic Reports of Iraq (3 Mar 2015) CRC/C/IRQ/CO/2-4, 11.

²¹ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Concluding Observations on the Combined Fourth to Sixth Periodic Reports of Iraq (1 June 2016) CEDAW/C/IRQ/CO/4-6,7.

²² Valeria Vilaro and Sara Bittar, 'Gender Profile- Iraq : A Situation Analysis on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Iraq' (UN Women, Oxfam and Japan 2018) 41.

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and honor of the female. The origin of this practice in region's customs is unknown. Some said it was an ancient tradition, while others attributed it to social pressures and associated it with ideals of modesty and girls' marriageability and respectability in the family. Others thought that there was something to be regulated about female sexuality. Many believed the practice was religious (Sunna) origin. Because women have lower social and financial status and less education, their ability to make informed choices is undermined.²³ A subordinate status of women in society prevents women from influencing and eradicating the practice in Kurdistan. The procedure causes the women who are subjected to it both immediate and long-term physical health problems. They also suffer psychological trauma, for years afterwards.

Moreover, Human Rights Watch mentioned that a woman from Rania said that because there is a law now, people don't talk about it currently, but if people in my village or another village wanted to have that done to their daughters, they can still do it secretly.²⁴ According to a survey conducted in the Region of Kurdistan, FGM prevalence among daughters is correlated with the mother's level of education. On average, as a mother's level of education rises the likelihood of her daughter undergoing FGM decreases.²⁵ FGM was more prevalent in rural areas than in urban areas. When mothers were asked about their plans to cut or not to cut their daughters, only 4.3% stated that they intend to have FGM performed for their daughter. The two most common reasons cited by mothers for forcing their daughters to undergo FGM were that FGM was a religious requirement (63.4%) and that FGM was part of their tradition (61.8%). Just over 24.0% said that FGM was done as a result of family pressure. Among mothers whose daughters had not undergone FGM, about 40.0% said that they did not force their daughters to be cut because FGM was not part of their tradition and 23.5% said that their religion forbade it.²⁶ Moreover, the survey about FGM prevalence in the Kurdistan Region showed that just over 50% of respondents were aware that there was a law prohibiting FGM. The rate was much lower in Dohuk (19.7%) compared to each of the other three governorates (66.0%). The majority of mothers (67.5%) believed that greater awareness of and enforcement of the law would help reduce the practice of FGM. Mothers felt that the best way to strengthen the law was through information campaigns from the government using media (61.0%), better enforcement of the law (58.7%), increased vocal support from religious leaders (56.5%), education in schools (50.4), and information campaigns by civil society organizations (47.3%).²⁷ Despite the enactment of the law, however, the government of Kurdistan has not yet adopted any procedures for its activation and the rates of this phenomenon are still high.²⁸ Strict laws need to be enforced to prevent people from subjecting their daughters to practice. Because this crime afflict very young girls, often under the age of 7, who are not expected to report the crime.²⁹ Because of that the Committee of CEDAW recommends that the Kurdistan Region take measures to strengthen its awareness-raising and educational efforts, targeted at both women and men, with the support of civil society, to eliminate the practice of female genital mutilation and its underlying cultural justifications, and enforce the legal provisions prohibiting it.

6- MURDER UNDER THE PRETEXT OF PROTECTING HONOUR

Murder under the pretext of protecting honor refers to the killing of an individual, typically a woman, by family members or community members based on the belief that the victim has brought shame or dishonor to the family or community. This type of murder is often motivated by cultural or traditional notions of honor and is considered a form of gender-based violence.

A joint report by Minority Rights Group International and the Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights, November 2015, estimated that over 12,000 Kurdish women were killed in the name of honor between 1991 and 2007.³⁰

The Directorate for Combating Violence against Women issued data on violence against women in terms of statistics. The recorded number of KRI women's killings was 55 cases in 2015 and 43 cases in 2016.³¹ Moreover, Kurdistan Region's General Directorate to Combat Violence Against Women released statistics about domestic violence against women in 2018 according to this statistic 14 women were killed in Erbil; 14 women in Duhok; 13 women in Sulaymaniyah; 3 women in Garman; 1 woman in Raparrin; 1 in Soran.³²

²³ Human Rights Watch, *They Took Me and Told Me Nothing: Female Genital Mutilation in Iraqi Kurdistan* (United State of America 2010) 8.

²⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Iraqi Kurdistan: Law Banning FGM not Being Enforced* (2012) <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/08/29/iraqi-kurdistan-law-banning-fgm-not-being-enforced>> accessed 31 March 2020.

²⁵ Heartland Alliance International and others, 'Report Summary FGM Prevalence Study Survey in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq' (High Council of Women Affairs 2015-2016)15.

²⁶ Ibid 17.

²⁷ Ibid 21.

²⁸ Ibid 50.

²⁹ LSE the Middle East Centre, *State building and Gender in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq* (London School of Economics 2104) 5.

³⁰ Miriam Puttick, 'The Lost Women of Iraq: Family-based violence during armed conflict' (Minority Rights Group International and Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights November 2015) 27.

³¹ Landinfo, 'Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) Women and Men in Honour-Related Conflicts' (The Danish Immigration Service 2018) 10.

³² UNFPA and General Directorate of Combating Violence against Women and Family, 'Annual Report 2018: Activity and Statistics of General Directorate of Combating Violence against Women (Rozhhalat Publisher 2019) 7.

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The reason might be that many more cases are not reported and no one is persecuted for those hidden crimes.³³ There might also be many more cases of honour killing however they are presented as self-immolation. The suspicion is that husbands, brother in-laws, parents or brothers and other male relatives set the women on fire and report it as self-immolation. However, suspecting reported self-immolation as cases of honour killing does not deny that real self-immolations happen. But even in these cases we should consider the responsibility of the women's social network for their fate. Certain women are subjected to constant physical, sexual and mental torture and they feel trapped without any hope of escape or salvation. Consequently, they set themselves alight as a way to escape and also to signal that their lives have been no less than the hell which they are usually threatened by through religiously informed "advice".

Many women are killed for the mere asking for divorce which is considered as an unacceptable challenge. Unfortunately, in Iraqi Kurdistan men are free to have many privileges in comparison with women and men think it as natural to deny women, their wives or sister, the enjoyment of what they allow themselves to enjoy. For example, many women and girls were killed, just because they were using mobile phones.

Table 1: The statistics about violence against women in Kurdistan according to the General Directorate of Combating Violence against Women and Family, in Kurdistan ³⁴

Year	Murder	Suicide
2018	46	68
2017	50	75
2016	43	74
2015	55	64
2014	35	48

Table (1) shows the number of annual of murder and suicide from 2014 to 2018. It is clear that there is a slight rise in the number of murder and suicide starting from 2015. There is a slight drop in figures in 2018. However, to whether the trend is changing or not we need more accurate data of the following years. In any case, the data reflect the reality of threat against women.

7- BURNING AND SELF –BURNING

Self-immolation to death is one of the methods of suicide followed by women in Kurdistan. However, it is suspected that there might be many cases of murder made to look like self-immolation. There are various viewpoints about the reasons for women to use this method and about the reasons that families resort to this method for killing their female members.³⁵ In any case, the data about these violent events are unsettling. As the statistics of the General Directorate of Combating Violence against Women and Family, in Kurdistan shows that 107 women allegedly set fire on themselves in 2018, and 139 women were reported to have caught fire in their homes.

Table 2: The Statistic of the Total Number of the GBV incidents in Kurdistan Region.³⁶

Year	Burning	Self- Burning
2018	139	107
2017	202	122
2016	220	96
2015	198	125
2014	197	97

Table (2) shows the data of burning and self-burning from 2014-2018. Burning has seen slight increase from 2014 to 2016 and then somewhat a sharp decrease in 2018. Self-burning reflect also similar pattern except that in 2018 has gone below or to the same level as 2014. Overall, it could be said that self-burning is the most horrifying death one can inflict on herself. It is a message to the society that what they have been experiencing has even more horrifying than being scorched.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ General Directorate of Combating Violence against Women and Family, *Statistic* <<https://www.bgtakrg.org/en/index.php/statics>> accessed 22 March 2020.

³⁵ High Council of Women Affairs, 'National Strategy: Combating Violence against Women in Kurdistan Region for Ten Years 2017-2027' (Shahab publisher in Erbil Kurdistan Regional Government 2017) 31.

³⁶ General Directorate of Combating Violence against Women and Family (n .34).

8- CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, violence against women remains a significant issue in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, despite efforts made by the regional government to combat it. The prevalence of physical, psychological, and spousal violence is alarmingly high, indicating the urgent need for effective measures to protect women's rights and promote gender equality. One of the major challenges in addressing violence against women is the deep-rooted traditions and cultural norms that perpetuate discriminatory attitudes and behaviors. Women are often marginalized and expected to serve men and the family, which normalizes and endorses violence against them. Additionally, the discriminatory mentality of officials, lack of law enforcement, and fear of reporting further hinder the prosecution of perpetrators and access to justice for victims. While the Kurdistan Regional Government has taken some steps to address the issue, such as establishing the Independent Human Rights Commission and implementing strategies to combat violence against women, more concerted efforts are required. This includes the repeal of discriminatory laws, raising public awareness, providing support services for victims, and improving data collection and analysis to accurately assess the scope of the problem. It is crucial for the government to demonstrate a genuine commitment to implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and translating its principles into tangible legal frameworks and practices. This entails ensuring the effective implementation of existing legislation, developing guidelines for handling domestic violence cases, and creating institutional arrangements for monitoring and enforcement. Furthermore, addressing violence against women requires a multifaceted approach involving education, social awareness campaigns, and workshops to challenge societal norms and promote respectful relationships between spouses. The provision of support services, including hotlines for women in need, is crucial for providing immediate assistance and protection. Ultimately, eradicating violence against women requires a comprehensive and sustained effort from the government, civil society organizations, community leaders, and individuals. By prioritizing the protection of women's rights, promoting gender equality, and fostering a culture of respect and non-violence, the Kurdistan Region can work towards creating a society where women are empowered, safe, and free from all forms of violence and discrimination.

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