

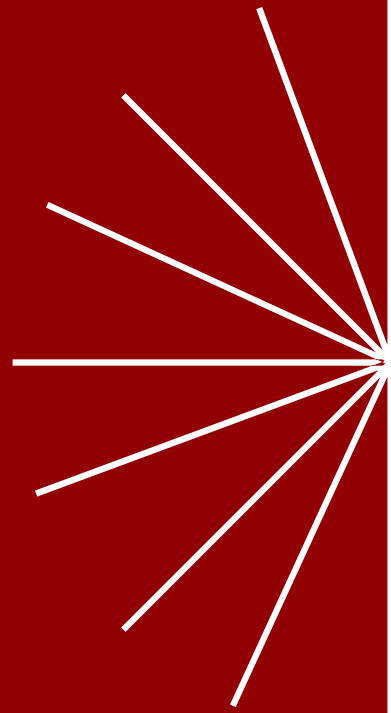


ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE SWANA REGION:

A CALL FOR TARGETED INVESTMENTS IN PREVENTION



TABLE OF CONTENTS



01

Introduction

02

Investment in Prevention

03

Challenges in SWANA

04

16 Case Studies

21

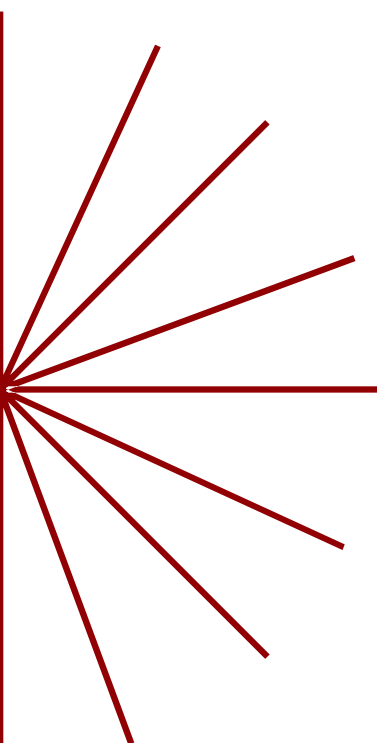
16 Policy Recommendations

CONTENT WARNING

The following brief contains discussions of sensitive and distressing topics, including rape and sexual assault. Reader discretion is advised. If you find this content triggering or distressing, we recommend approaching the material with caution or seeking support.

It addresses the urgent need to address Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in the South West Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region and calls for targeted investments in prevention strategies.

Please prioritize your mental health and wellbeing while engaging with this material.





INTRODUCTION

In the SWANA (South West Asian and North Africa) region, Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) prevails amidst geopolitical complexities, instability, and entrenched patriarchal norms. The latter are deeply embedded in societal structures and contribute to unequal power dynamics, necessitating interventions that consider the intersectionality of factors contributing to VAWG. The region's complexities do not absolve the responsibility to protect women and girls; rather, they underscore the urgency for targeted and strategic actions.

Aligned with the 16 Days of Activism theme, "Invest to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls", this brief emphasizes the imperative for strategic investments in preventative measures. This policy brief underscores the critical need to prevent violence against women and girls by investing and recognizing the unique challenges posed by persistent patriarchal norms and laws that endorse such violence. In the subsequent sections of this policy brief, we will explore the specific challenges faced by the SWANA region, delve into the 16 case studies shedding light on the harsh realities faced by women and girls in the SWANA region, advocating for a targeted approach to address root causes. We then propose 16 targeted recommendations for policymakers.

INVESTMENT IN PREVENTION:

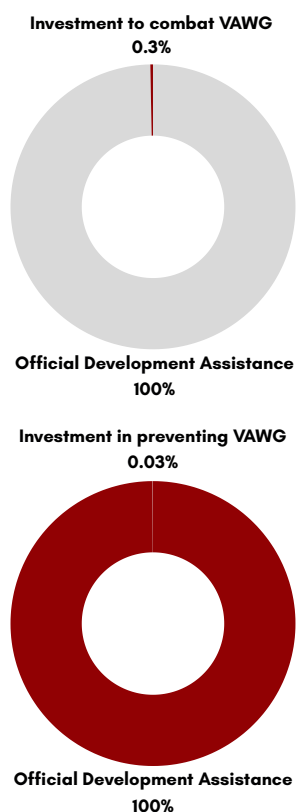
Investment in prevention is not merely a strategic choice but an ethical imperative. The repercussions of violence reverberate across societies, impeding progress in healthcare, education, social protection, justice, and productivity. This policy brief advocates for a paradigm shift in policy approaches, emphasizing the need for robust responses that include strategic investments in preventing VAWG.

In the pursuit of ending VAWG by 2030, urgent attention must be given to feminist funding. The Gender Snapshot 2023 reveals a substantial funding gap of \$360 billion annually to achieve gender equality by the target date and empower women across the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This financial deficit poses a significant obstacle to realizing comprehensive and sustainable efforts to address VAWG in regions like SWANA, where the challenges are compounded by geopolitical complexities and patriarchal norms.

It is imperative to prioritize funding for feminist and women's rights organizations as a key strategy. This includes directing support to feminist groups leading social justice movements, particularly those operating in Global Majority countries and regions like SWANA, which are often characterized by turmoil and political instability. Furthermore, to ensure the effectiveness of funding initiatives, it is crucial to make financial support flexible, sustainable, and devoid of bureaucratic impediments.

GENERAL DEVELOPMENT FUNDING



A glaring disparity is evident in the funding commitments made by Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members during 2020-21. They allocated only 0.3% of their total Official Development Assistance (ODA), amounting to \$458 million annually, to combat violence against women and girls. Approximately USD 2.042 billion has been invested in the prevention of VAWG in the last five years. This amount accounts for less than 0.03% of the annual Official Development Assistance. This falls short of the necessary commitment, highlighting the urgent need for increased financial support to address the pervasive issue of VAWG.

CHALLENGES IN SWANA:

© 2021 AP PHOTOS/ADEL HANA



The SWANA region faces significant disparities in funding opportunities for feminist and women's rights organizations. Limited data is available on the funding landscape specifically for feminists in this region. However, organizations like Karama, an advocacy group promoting women's rights in the Arab region, report a lack of sufficient funding and resources to support feminist initiatives. The complex socio-political dynamics, conservative norms, and challenges associated with addressing gender inequality in the region further compound the funding gap.

According to a study conducted by AWID, the SWANA region experiences a significant funding gap for feminist organizations overall. With one of the highest numbers of unregistered groups coming from SWANA (43%), the main reasons feminist organizations give for not opting to register their organizations in AWID/FRIDA's report included: the process being too expensive (35%); not being registered is a political choice/decision (33%); and legal, fiscal, and administrative burdens that hinder the registration process (30%).

Adding to this, religious fundamentalism is reported across all regions, with feminist organizations from SWANA being the most affected by threats and violent attacks perpetrated by members of extremist or fundamentalist religious groups.

To bridge the funding gap and address the complex challenges faced by women and girls in the SWANA region, there is a need for wise resource allocation, leaving no one behind. Empowering those on the frontlines, especially feminist and women's rights organizations, is paramount for fostering meaningful change. By investing in these organizations, which understand the nuanced dynamics of the local context, we can facilitate transformative and sustainable interventions that contribute to preventing and ending gender-based violence while advancing gender equality.

16 CASE STUDIES

Our commitment to spotlighting VAWG is embodied in the presentation of 16 case studies, each narrating the personal struggles of women and girls who have faced VAWG in the SWANA region. These narratives provide a human face to the statistics, elucidating the need for concrete actions that address the root causes of violence.

As we delve into these case studies during 16 Days of Activism, we invite policymakers, stakeholders, and advocates to reflect on the shared responsibility to foster environments free from violence. This policy brief serves as a call to action, urging all to join hands in crafting policies that not only respond to the immediate consequences of VAWG but actively prevent its occurrence.

Together, let us invest in prevention, acknowledging that a safer, more equal future for women and girls in the SWANA region is within our collective reach.

01

IRAN - RESISTING
MANDATORY HIJAB

02

IRAQ - WOMEN
REBUILDING LIVES
AFTER ISIS
OCCUPATION

03

YEMEN - CHILD
BRIDES AMIDST
CONFLICT

04

SYRIA - WAVE OF
VAWG FOLLOWING
EARTHQUAKE

05

PALESTINE -
C-SECTION
WITHOUT
ANESTHESIA

06

LIBYA - NEGLECTED
NEEDS OF WOMEN
AFTER STORM

07

SUDAN - SURGE IN
VAWG AMID
CONFLICT

08

UAE - MISTREATMENT
OF FEMALE MIGRANT
WORKERS

09

LEBANON -
DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE CRISIS

10

AFGHANISTAN -
GIRLS FIGHTING FOR
THE RIGHT TO LEARN

11

SAUDI ARABIA -
INTERCONNECTED
STRUGGLES OF
WHRDS IN PHYSICAL
AND VIRTUAL SPACES

12

ISRAEL - REPRODUCTIVE
OPPRESSION AGAINST
ETHIOPIAN-ISRAELI
WOMEN

13

MOROCCO -
POST-EARTHQUAKE
VAWG RISKS

14

JORDAN -
UNMASKING THE
INJUSTICE OF
"HONOR KILLINGS"

15

TURKEY - WOMEN
AND GIRLS POST
EARTHQUAKE'S
AFTERSHOCKS

16

EGYPT - FEMALE
GENITAL MUTILATION
AS A GRAVE
VIOLATION OF HUMAN
RIGHTS



IRAN - RESISTING MANDATORY HIJAB

In Iran, the draconian enforcement of mandatory hijab laws has become a breeding ground for violent incidents perpetrated by the self-proclaimed "Hijab Guards," often aligned with the government. This narrative focuses on Armita Geravand, born on April 2, 2006, in Kermanshah, western Iran, and residing in Tehran. She became the target of an unprovoked attack by a Hijab patrol in a Tehran metro station on October 1, 2023, resulting in severe head trauma, a coma, and later declared dead on October 28, 2023.

Armita, not only a talented athlete and martial artist but a young woman embodying resilience, found herself victimized for refusing to conform to a rigid dress code. Her ordeal resonates tragically with the case of Jina Mahsa Amini, whose death in custody in 2022 ignited nationwide protests. A year later, the harassment of women and girls by the State has escalated, with authorities intensifying punitive measures against those asserting fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and bodily autonomy.

Armita's case has become a focal point for public outcry, fostering global solidarity and calls for justice. Social media campaigns and protests demand not only a re-evaluation of the powers wielded by morality patrols but also a comprehensive investigation into these unwarranted attacks. Human rights organizations, grounded in intersectional feminism, actively advocate for accountability for those responsible.

This crime serves as a catalyst for vital discussions on personal freedoms, the insidious role of morality patrols, and the imperative for legal safeguards against VAWG. The ongoing legal proceedings are poised to shape discourse on individual rights, magnifying the intersectionality of cultural enforcement in contemporary societies. The narratives of women like Armita and Jina Mahsa Amini underscore the urgent need for an intersectional feminist approach to dismantle the oppressive structures that disproportionately affect women in Iran.

Sources: [OHCHR](#), [Al Jazeera](#)



IRAQ - WOMEN REBUILDING LIVES AFTER ISIS OCCUPATION

In the aftermath of ISIS rule in Iraq, the challenges faced by women, exemplified by Amani Salih's experience, are profound and demand an intersectional feminist lens. Amani, a 30-year-old from Mosul, endured unimaginable difficulties, facing violence and oppression under ISIS. The capture of the city not only erased women's rights efforts but also enforced strict codes, limiting freedoms and silencing their voices, forcing them into lives of submission.

Amani's personal account is a stark illustration of the pervasive fear and hopelessness women encountered during the ISIS occupation. Her struggle underscores not just the psychological toll but the urgent need for support systems that acknowledge the complex intersections of gender, trauma, and oppression.

With the liberation of Mosul from ISIS, an opportunity for rebuilding emerged, but it requires an intersectional feminist approach to address the unique challenges faced by women. Efforts to restore women's rights must go beyond a superficial level, delving into the intersections of gender with other factors such as class, ethnicity, and religious identity. Reintegration into society must recognize and uplift the diverse experiences of women, acknowledging the specific adversities faced by marginalized groups.

Amani's journey, representative of countless others, emphasizes the importance of intersectional feminism in promoting resilience in the face of oppression. As communities collaboratively work post-ISIS, the hope for a brighter future lies in recognizing and dismantling the interconnected systems of oppression that disproportionately affect women with varying identities. The scars of the past may be indelible, but through an intersectional feminist lens, there is a collective commitment to rebuild a society that is truly inclusive and empowers women of all backgrounds.

Source: [UNDP](#)



YEMEN - CHILD BRIDES IN MIDST OF CONFLICT

In the protracted conflict now entering its ninth year, women in Yemen are disproportionately affected by pervasive violence, discrimination, and the disintegration of social structures. Amidst the challenges of displacement, economic collapse, and social breakdown, families are resorting to child marriage as a distressing coping mechanism. Yet, this supposed refuge often turns into an additional source of violence, exacerbating the plight of women in a society grappling with the collapse of social structures, economic crises, and mass displacements, leading to the intensification of domestic abuse.

This narrative zooms in on the story of Ibtisam, a young girl in Yemen, compelled into an abusive marriage at the tender age of 14 due to displacement. For her, marriage became a harrowing intersection of war-induced trauma and the violence inflicted by her older husband. Despite her deep unhappiness, she felt compelled to accept the situation due to the limited choices available in the midst of conflict.

Further complicating her already dire circumstances, Ibtisam became pregnant within a month of getting married. Enduring constant mistreatment, including physical violence and suffering, she sought help from her family without success.

Crucially, Ibtisam's journey reflects the intersectional nature of her oppression—her vulnerability compounded by being a young girl, a victim of war, and a survivor of domestic violence. Her story serves as a stark reminder that addressing the issue of child marriage in Yemen requires an intersectional feminist analysis, considering the interconnected systems of oppression that perpetuate VAWG. Ibtisam's transformation from victim to trainer, empowering other women through her newfound skills, embodies the potential for intersectional feminist approaches to not only provide support but also catalyze empowerment and independence for women trapped in cycles of violence.

Source: [Relief Web](#)



SYRIA - WAVE OF VAWG FOLLOWING EARTHQUAKE

In the thirteenth year of the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Syria, the challenges are deeply affecting women's and girls' lives, presenting an intricate intersection of struggles. With 15.3 million people in need of assistance, of which 4.2 million are women of reproductive age, the situation is dire. This circumstance was further intensified by the 7.8 magnitude earthquake in February 2023 that shook northern and western Syria, deepening the complexities of an already profound crisis.

This narrative zooms in on a 13-year-old girl who became a survivor of sexual assault in the bathrooms of a shelter in northwestern Syria. This shelter, initially meant to provide refuge for those displaced by the earthquake, became a scene of violence. The perpetrator, also displaced by the earthquake, persistently attempted to invade the girl's privacy, succeeding in inflicting harm on the third and fourth attempts.

Upon bravely disclosing the incident to her family, the girl received the support she needed. Her family decided to relocate to another camp managed by a woman a few kilometers away. The initial days at the new camp were marked by the girl's visible fear, particularly when using the bathroom.

This 13-year-old girl's story serves as a poignant example of the multifaceted challenges faced by Syrian women and girls post-earthquake. While this particular girl dared to speak up and found support within her family, countless others remain in urgent need of similar assistance and backing.

An intersectional feminist perspective is essential in understanding how the convergence of being a girl, a survivor of assault, and someone displaced by an earthquake shapes unique experiences. The broader context underscores the need for comprehensive support systems that address the interconnected oppressions faced by women and girls in post-disaster scenarios, ensuring that no one is left without the assistance required for healing and empowerment.



PALESTINE - C-SECTION WITHOUT ANESTHESIA

Amidst Israel's persistent acts of violence amounting to genocide in Gaza, women encounter profound challenges in accessing healthcare and support services. The Israeli airstrikes have not only resulted in widespread destruction but have also left approximately half of Gaza's 36 hospitals non-operational, as reported by the Palestinian Ministry of Health. This dire situation disrupts health services, with mass displacements further exacerbating the crisis. The difficulty in accessing food and water compounds the issues, particularly impacting the nutrition of pregnant women.

In delving into the lived experience of Lam Hussein, who underwent the ordeal of giving birth at Al-Shifa Hospital through an emergency Cesarean section without anesthesia, her story unveils the harsh realities faced by Palestinian women during this brutal war. Lam's decision was prompted by an ultrasound indicating the fetus' weak pulse, an urgent response hours after she had already lost another child in an Israeli bombing.

Lam's resilience is evident as she courageously states, "Thank God, the baby is fine," despite enduring excruciating pain and bearing wounds on every part of her body. Her experience mirrors that of countless pregnant Palestinian women navigating childbirth amid the ongoing attacks, emphasizing the urgent need for funding to support humanitarian efforts. These efforts are essential for providing crucial healthcare and assistance to women grappling with extraordinary challenges during the Gaza crisis.

An intersectional feminist lens underscores the interconnected oppressions faced by Palestinian women in this crisis, considering not only their gender but also the specific challenges arising from pregnancy, childbirth, and the broader impact of displacement. This perspective emphasizes the urgency of addressing the multifaceted needs of women like Lam Hussein and countless others who, in the midst of conflict, continue to bring life into a world marked by destruction.

Source: [El Pais](#)



LIBYA - NEGLECTED NEEDS OF WOMEN AFTER STORM

In the aftermath of the devastating flooding caused by Storm Daniel in Libya, women who have survived this disaster find themselves grappling with neglect in accessing proper care, encountering specific challenges related to hygiene, sanitation, and reproductive health. The breakdown of medical infrastructure adds to the complexities, exacerbating the difficulties faced by women in obtaining crucial healthcare services.

As a response to the disaster, many women survivors have been compelled to establish makeshift shelters in front of their damaged residences. The overcrowded conditions intensify concerns about health and wellbeing, particularly for pregnant women and those with young children.

This narrative zooms in on the experience of 60-year-old Khadijah, who has sought refuge in a government school after her house was destroyed. In articulating her feelings of humiliation and suffering, she poignantly remarks, "The living are the ones who suffer; the dead are relieved." She further highlights the stark contrast between closing her eyes on her own bed and suddenly finding herself lying on the cold floor of a public school.

Having witnessed numerous wars and disasters over decades in Libya, Khadijah, at 60 years old, stands as a resilient force in the face of recurring challenges. Despite the familiarity of such trying situations, her enduring hope for assistance speaks volumes. Khadijah's story underscores the imperative to recognize and address the distinct challenges faced by women in the aftermath of natural disasters and advocate for a gender-sensitive response. An intersectional feminist perspective illuminates the interconnected layers of oppression faced by women, emphasizing the urgency of holistic and inclusive solutions that acknowledge their unique needs and experiences.

Source: [Al Jazeera](#)



SUDAN - SURGE IN VAWG AMID CONFLICT

In the midst of Sudan's ongoing conflict since April 2023, a profound humanitarian crisis has emerged, disproportionately affecting women who bear the brunt of severe human rights violations. This includes a distressing surge in VAWG, healthcare disparities, and the deliberate targeting of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs).

Amira, a young woman from Nyala in South Darfur, bravely shared her experience of sexual violence and highlighted the broader reality faced by women and girls in Sudan, where documented cases of rape are alarmingly prevalent. Amira revealed the challenging dynamics of sharing information about pharmacies and clinics that offer help for rape victims, relying on fragmented channels like WhatsApp groups and personal contacts.

In response to the dire situation, Sudanese women, like Amira, have forged a network aimed at protecting each other and disseminating crucial information about safe shelters. Despite Nyala being considered relatively safer, Amira paints a haunting picture of el-Geneina, describing it as a "horror story" marked by looting, kidnapping, continuous fighting, clashes, and a surge in rape cases.

Amira's account serves as a poignant reminder of the widespread incidents of sexual harassment and rape faced by women in Sudan, emphasizing the urgent need to support their collective efforts in self-protection. The establishment of networks and information-sharing platforms among Sudanese women underscores the necessity for a feminist intersectional lens in addressing the multifaceted challenges they endure during the conflict. This lens emphasizes not only the gender-based nature of the violence but also the intersecting factors of location, socio-economic disparities, and the specific threats faced by WHRDs. Urgent action is required to ensure the safety and well-being of women in times of conflict, recognizing and dismantling the interconnected systems of oppression that perpetuate their vulnerability.

Source: [Al Jazeera](#)



UAE - MISTREATMENT OF FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS

In the UAE, the mistreatment of female migrant workers exposes the hidden struggles faced by women in the Arab Gulf region, particularly those engaged in domestic roles, often overlooked in comparison to more visible professions like construction work. These women labor within private homes, concealing the extent of their challenges, which include abusive labor conditions, restricted mobility, the impact of the Kafala system, and economic exploitation.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) sheds light on this issue in their report, "I already Bought You," revealing a system where employment agencies charge fees, fostering a dynamic where some employers claim ownership over the employee. The report underscores the urgent need to address systemic issues, specifically calling for the abolition of the "kafala" system, restricting migrant workers from changing jobs or leaving the country without being accused of absconding.

Mary, a 34-year-old domestic worker from Kenya, serves as a case study, recruited by a UAE agency as a mediator to work for a local family. Mary unveils inhumane working conditions, detailing her exhaustion from over 18 hours of daily labor without a day off, earning a meager monthly salary of USD\$327. Frustrated with exploitative conditions and mistreatment, Mary attempts to leave but finds herself trapped in the UAE. Recruiters, instead of providing aid, accuse her of "creating drama," leaving her without assistance and living in fear, having never been given a contract before starting her job.

A Guardian report exposes UAE recruitment agencies openly advertising women for "sale" online, reducing them to commodities devoid of agency. Mary's story resonates with numerous female migrant workers seeking a better life for themselves and their families. This highlights the urgent need for specialized programs ensuring migrant women receive support, with their rights safeguarded. An intersectional feminist lens is crucial, recognizing the distinct challenges faced by migrant women, considering the intersections of gender, race, migration, and socio-economic status contributing to their vulnerable position in the UAE. Immediate action is imperative to dismantle exploitative systems perpetuating the mistreatment of female migrant domestic workers.

Sources: [HRW](#), [The Guardian](#)



LEBANON - DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CRISIS

VAWG is a pervasive and escalating concern in Lebanon, particularly exacerbated by the ongoing economic crisis, where women find themselves at the forefront of vulnerability. In Lebanon, VAWG manifests in various insidious forms, including verbal and physical violence, sexual abuse, and the alarming increase in femicide, often rationalized as so-called "honor" killings. Disturbingly, the Resource Center for Gender Equality reported a surge in femicide cases, with 14 women killed by their partners in the first seven months of 2022, compared to 18 throughout the entirety of 2021.

The tragic narrative of Zeina Kanjo, a young woman from Akkar in the northern region near the Syrian border, exemplifies the harrowing experiences of VAWG in Lebanon. Zeina, driven by ambition, envisioned a different life and sought to establish a beauty salon, building her brand on Instagram. After meeting her future husband in 2020 during her participation in "Miss Elegant Lebanon," her aspirations took a dark turn. Discovering his involvement in fraudulent activities, Zeina aimed to seek justice. In response, her husband spiralled out of control, ending her life through suffocation and leaving her family in profound shock. Following her tragic death, he fled to Turkey.

Zeina's story is emblematic of countless women in Lebanon trapped in cycles of domestic violence and femicide. The roots of gender inequality run deep in Lebanese society, intertwined with patriarchal values and the emergence of a culture perpetuating militarized masculinity, contributing significantly to the alarming surge in domestic violence.

The economic crisis, with 80% of the population grappling with poverty, exacerbates vulnerability among society's least powerful. Elevated stress levels, the absence of basic necessities, the fear of homelessness, and a lack of law enforcement and political will collectively instill hesitation and fear in women, discouraging them from reporting instances of domestic violence. In this intersectional feminist analysis, it is crucial to recognize the interconnectedness of economic hardships, VAWG, and deeply ingrained societal structures that disproportionately affect women in Lebanon.

Source: [The Guardian](#)



AFGHANISTAN - GIRLS FIGHTING FOR THE RIGHT TO LEARN

In the heart of Afghanistan, where dreams once thrived, a poignant story unfolds—Habiba, a 17-year-old with an unwavering determination to pursue education, battles against the oppressive shadows cast by the Taliban. Habiba's journey was abruptly halted when the Taliban, in an unprecedented move, barred hundreds of thousands of teenage girls, including her, from attending secondary school. Despite daily promises of school reopening, the girls, including Habiba, live in perpetual grief, their hope diminishing with each passing day.

"When I see the boys going to school and doing whatever they want, it really hurts me. I feel very bad. When I see my brother leaving for school, I feel broken," says Tamana, one of Habiba's friends.

The Taliban's increasing restrictions on women have crushed any hope of schools reopening for girls like Habiba. Despite initial promises, freedom gradually transformed into confinement. The crushing blow came when universities were closed to female students, and women were banned from various public spaces and working in NGOs.

The plight of these girls reflects the broader educational crisis in Afghanistan, as highlighted by a report from Human Rights Watch. Sixteen years after the ousting of the Taliban, two-thirds of Afghan girls do not attend school. The Taliban's rule and escalating conflict have forced families to fight desperately for their daughters' education, with many facing insurmountable obstacles.

As schools remain closed, and the Taliban tightens its grip, brave voices like Habiba's continue to echo, yearning for a chance to reclaim their dreams in a land where education was once a beacon of hope. The international community must stand in solidarity, amplifying these voices, and demanding that the Afghan government and global leaders uphold the human right of education for all, especially for the resilient girls fighting for their right to learn.

Sources: [HRW](#), [BBC](#)



SAUDI ARABIA - INTERCONNECTED STRUGGLES OF WHRDS IN PHYSICAL AND VIRTUAL SPACES

In the oppressive landscape of Saudi Arabia, Loujain al-Hathloul's story intertwines with the broader struggle faced by women challenging the status quo. Kidnapped from the UAE in March 2018 and deported to Saudi Arabia, Loujain faced arrest and a travel ban, becoming a symbol of resistance against the kingdom's repressive policies.

Despite women being granted the right to drive in June 2018, Loujain remained under arrest. Reports from ALQST and Amnesty International revealed that she, along with other women's rights activists, endured torture for their activism. Techniques included beatings, electric shocks, and waterboarding. Despite her release in February 2021, Loujain faces severe restrictions, including a five-year travel ban. Her ordeal continued in 2021 when she exposed hacking attempts on her iPhone, leading to the discovery of spyware by the Israeli NSO group. In December 2021, Loujain announced legal action against three former American intelligence officers, accusing them of hacking her devices and contributing to her kidnapping.

The recent UN condemnation of Salma al-Shehab and Nourah bint Saeed al-Qahtani's arbitrary detention adds another layer to the systematic oppression against women's voices. Salma and Nourah's narratives, intertwined with Loujain's, spotlight the dual assault faced by WHRDs. Salma, a mother and Ph.D. student, and Nourah, an academic and writer, received harsh sentences under Saudi Arabia's Anti-Terrorism Law for expressing views on women's rights. The broader crackdown, with over 100 women arrested during Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's rule, showcases the kingdom's resistance to feminist voices.

The recent surge in online expression crackdowns in Saudi Arabia deepens the struggle for women's rights. Amnesty International's documentation reveals harsh sentences, notably the longest ever imposed on a Saudi woman, for peaceful online activities. This repression extends beyond physical arrests, instilling fear around online expression. The state's control over digital spaces intensifies challenges for WHRDs. Urgent action for justice must address systemic issues sustaining crackdowns in both physical and virtual realms. Amplifying these voices is crucial in global solidarity against the complex oppression faced by those challenging the narrative in Saudi Arabia, through an intersectional feminist lens.



ISRAEL - REPRODUCTIVE OPPRESSION AGAINST ETHIOPIAN-ISRAELI WOMEN

Ethiopian women who migrated to Israel spoke out about being coerced into receiving injections of Depo-Provera, a long-acting birth control drug, as a condition for immigration. This contraceptive, known for its links to fertility problems and osteoporosis, adds another layer to the struggle faced by these women. This revelation came to light in late 2012 when it was reported that Israeli representatives in Ethiopia and Israel had been administering these injections without properly informing the women of their purpose or alternative methods of fertility control, sometimes even coercing them into taking the medication.

These women were told that maintaining small families was essential, as large families posed challenges in finding employment and securing housing. This revelation comes in the decade that saw a 50% decline in the birth rates among Ethiopian Jews who immigrated to Israel. The history of Depo-Provera is intertwined with a problematic and often racist and colonial legacy. The drug, designed for ethnic minorities, perpetuates a pattern of "Sterilization Racism" that views the reproduction rates of minorities as problematic and in need of control. Fertility control becomes a central component of international aid, influenced by a colonial legacy where the fertility of women in developing countries is perceived as something that needs to be 'controlled' by the Global North.

Despite growing evidence of the severe side effects of Depo-Provera, the Israeli Health Ministry continued to prescribe it routinely to Ethiopian women until 2013. The problem persisted, revealing a disturbing attitude of criminal negligence and outright abuse towards Ethiopian Jews. Interviews with community organizers in the Ethiopian community of Jaffa indicate that the practice still continues, despite promises from the Health Ministry to end it.

This case epitomizes how racism and misogyny become entangled, showcasing the intersectionality of oppression faced by these women. In the struggle for reproductive autonomy, the feminist movement's achievements are often not applied to the most vulnerable—minorities and immigrants. These women are left to grapple with their trauma alone, highlighting the urgent need for an intersectional feminist approach to address the compounded challenges faced by Ethiopian women in Israel. It's a stark reminder that feminism isn't truly feminism unless it is intersectional, encompassing the diverse and intersecting layers of oppression experienced by women.



MOROCCO - POST-EARTHQUAKE VAWG RISKS

Following the devastating earthquake in central Morocco on September 8, 2023, young girls, already vulnerable due to displacement, face a disturbing online gender-based violence (OGBV) campaign. Exploiting their dire circumstances, the campaign encourages men to marry them under the guise of protection, with images circulating on social media.

This exploitative trend rests on harmful assumptions about these girls' perceived lower demands post-disaster, making them more accessible. An intersectional feminist analysis reveals the complexity of intertwining gender with socioeconomic status, age, cultural norms, and technology.

The earthquake disrupts lives and exposes economic disparities, reinforcing exploitation. The focus on very young girls highlights the intersection of age and gender, exploiting their vulnerability in the aftermath. Cultural norms, exemplified by the absence of dowry as a selling point, perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes.

Online spaces can become tools for propagating harmful ideologies, revealing the intersection of technology with VAWG. Displacement exacerbates vulnerability, as girls face physical threats and exploitation due to diminished social and economic status.

In response, citizens and activists launch awareness campaigns, reflecting an intersectional approach. Collaborative efforts from communities, authorities, and organizations are crucial to dismantling structures perpetuating VAWG and ensuring the safety and empowerment of affected girls.

Source: [Morocco World News](#), [Al Jazeera](#)



JORDAN - UNMASKING THE INJUSTICE OF “HONOR KILLINGS”

VAWG is a pervasive issue in the Arab World, with UN Women reporting that 37% of women in the region have experienced some form of violence during their lifetime. Jordan, unfortunately, is no exception to this troubling trend. "Honor killings" are sometimes reframed as "femicide" or "gender-based violence" within a feminist discourse. This shift in terminology is aimed at emphasizing the gendered nature of these crimes and moving away from the notion of "honor," which can be misleading and often perpetuates harmful cultural relativism.

The burden of such violence is often experienced by wives and daughters, and the perpetrators are frequently husbands, ex-husbands, brothers, or fathers. The patriarchal system grants men significant power and authority, affording them protection from prosecution while often placing blame on women and girls rather than the perpetrator.

An example of this is the tragic case of Ahlam, a 40-year-old Jordanian woman. On July 18, 2020, in Safut, Balqa Governorate, northwest of Amman, Ahlam was brutally killed by her 60-year-old father's brutality. In a shocking act, he smashed her with a stone, leading to visible injuries and her desperate attempt for help. Tragically, her calls for help went unanswered, as both her mother and neighbors remained silent, allowing her father to continue the assault until she died. Disturbingly, this was not the first instance of violence against Ahlam by her family, as she had previously attempted to escape this abusive environment.

Unfortunately, Ahlam's experience is not isolated, as many women suffer in silence. The reluctance to report male abusers is rooted in multiple factors, including traditional gender norms that confine women to their homes and stigmatize them if they seek divorce. Additionally, victim-blaming attitudes and a lack of legislative measures perpetuate VAWG in Jordan.

Sources: [Euromed Monitor](#), [The Arab Weekly](#).



TURKEY - WOMEN AND GIRLS POST EARTHQUAKE'S AFTERSHOCKS

Climate disasters exacerbate gender inequalities, disproportionately affecting women and girls due to entrenched gender and cultural norms. The aftermath of such disasters leaves them more vulnerable to unemployment, poverty, and domestic violence.

Illustrating this is the case of Alev Altun, a 25-year-old mother of two from Hatay, Turkey, who became homeless after the recent earthquake on February 6th, 2023. Seeking refuge at her ex-husband's house, she faced further exploitation when he poured scalding water on her while she slept, leveraging her vulnerability and claiming she should be grateful for her safety.

Natural disasters, like the earthquake in Turkey, are linked to heightened physical, psychological, and sexual violence against women and girls. Their increased risk of violence stems from disrupted access to essential services, food, relief, and supplies. Shockingly, 356,000 pregnant women across affected areas lacked access to healthcare and sanitary facilities, and female survivors faced stigma when requesting basic necessities like sanitary pads.

Despite these stark realities, during times of disasters, the rights and freedom of women and minorities often take a backseat, deemed less urgent and important. An intersectional feminist perspective is essential to dismantle these biases, ensuring that the unique challenges faced by women and marginalized communities in the aftermath of climate disasters are acknowledged, centered and addressed urgently.

Sources: [The Conversation](#), [The Guardian](#)



EGYPT - FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION AS A GRAVE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a violation of human rights and a brutal act of VAWG. Despite legislative efforts and positive shifts in attitudes towards circumcision, the issue remains pervasive in Egypt. According to the 2021 Egyptian Family Health Survey (EFHS), a staggering 86% of married Egyptian women aged 15 to 49 have undergone FGM, with 74% of these procedures being conducted by medical professionals.

This deeply traumatic experience leaves an unforgettable mark on any woman subjected to it. In an interview with a 34-year-old Egyptian woman, identified only as N.S., conducted by AP News, she vividly recalls the fear, pain, and presence of a stranger holding scissors during her FGM procedure.

Both she and her sister endured the practice that day, resulting in feelings of incompleteness and unhappiness, with constant resentment towards her family. Afterward, she opted for reconstructive surgery, relieving the physical pain but leaving her with ongoing emotional challenges. Despite the surgical intervention, she confides, 'The operation on its own is not enough. ... I don't feel like I am completely over the trauma, and I still struggle with the idea of physical touch.'

FGM is linked to gender inequality and discrimination, representing a cultural and historical manifestation of the subjugation of women and the stigmatization of their sexual and reproductive health and rights. To combat FGM effectively, a multisectoral approach is imperative, including a comprehensive strategy rooted in the principles of human rights and gender-transformative education.

Source: [UNFPA](#)



16 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Acknowledging the unique challenges posed by deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and laws, these policy recommendations are crafted with an intersectional lens. We call for investments that address the root causes of violence. These feminist and intersectional policy recommendations aim to create a holistic framework for preventing VAWG in the SWANA region.

By recognizing the interconnected nature of social identities and addressing the root causes of violence, we can pave the way for a more just, equitable, and violence-free future for all women and girls in the region.



Flexible, Long-Term and Sustainable Funding: Advocate for funding models that are flexible, long-term, sustainable, and free from bureaucratic constraints, allowing young feminist organizations and women's rights organizations to allocate resources efficiently.

Inclusive Research Initiatives: Support and fund research studies focusing on the intersectionality of VAWG, ensuring inclusivity and representation of diverse experiences within the SWANA region.

Targeted Funding Opportunities: Establish targeted funding opportunities specifically designed for young feminist organizations, acknowledging their unique contributions and the challenges they face in preventing VAWG including online gender-based violence (OGBV).

Diversified Language Accessibility: Promote language diversity in funding applications and requirements ensuring accessibility for organizations with linguistic diversity in their leadership and membership.

Comprehensive Capacity-Building: Prioritize comprehensive capacity-building programs for young feminist organizations and women's rights organizations, encompassing financial management, advocacy skills, and strategic planning to enhance their impact.

Non-Financial Support Structures: Encourage the creation of non-financial support structures, including mentorship programs, peer networks, and collaborative platforms, to bolster the resilience and effectiveness of feminist organizations.

Intersectional Data Collection: Advocate for intersectional data collection methodologies and feminist research methods to ensure a nuanced understanding of the diverse experiences of women and girls experiencing VAWG within the SWANA region.

Inclusive Training for Philanthropic Institutions: Develop inclusive training programs for philanthropic institutions, fostering an understanding of the unique needs and contributions of feminist organizations in the fight against VAWG in the SWANA region.

Transparent Accountability Mechanisms: Establish transparent accountability mechanisms within funding institutions, ensuring that decisions are informed, fair, and aligned with the principles of inclusivity and gender justice.

Culturally Sensitive Psychosocial Support: Fund and promote culturally sensitive psychosocial support services for survivors of VAWG within the SWANA region, considering the diverse cultural contexts and sensitivities.

Networking Opportunities: Create opportunities for networking and collaboration among feminist organizations, facilitating the exchange of ideas, resources, and strategies in the fight against VAWG.

Anti-Patriarchal Educational Initiatives: Support educational initiatives that challenge patriarchal norms and promote gender equality, addressing the root causes of VAWG from a young age including for boys and men.

Empowerment Through Technology: Invest in technological innovations that empower young feminists, providing platforms for advocacy, awareness, and communication that are accessible and user-friendly.

Representation in Decision-Making: Advocate for increased representation of feminists in decision-making processes, ensuring their voices shape funding priorities.

Addressing Legal Barriers: Work towards dismantling legal barriers that hinder the work of feminist organizations, ensuring a legal environment that supports rather than obstructs their efforts.

Regional Advocacy Collaborations: Foster global collaborations in advocacy efforts, encouraging alliances between feminist and women's rights organizations to amplify their impact and create a united front against VAWG.

