

# A Choice Between Violence and the Family

## Battered Women in Lebanon

On-going wars in the Arab world have made violence the rule and a part of daily life for many. Nevertheless, other forms of violence are also common to Arab societies and receive their share of legal provision. Systematic information about them is scarce, particularly when related to gender. Tradition, in most of these Arab countries, has clearly confined women's issues to the family. In fact, when faced with two threats: being battered or breaking up the family and losing the children by leaving, women in the Arab world tend to favor battery. It seems like the only plausible choice for these women in the absence of support from society and the government. When AL-RAIDA decided to tackle the problem of domestic violence in general and battery in particular, the persistent question was: "What constitutes battery? Is it limited to brutality, or do other mild violations, such as a slap on the face, fall within the criteria?" The second interrogation that was raised focused on women's coping methods, followed by the legal and social facilities battered women can resort to, to protect themselves and their rights. Consequently, private and confidential testimonies of victimized women to friends, doctors or lawyers represent the bulk of evidence for battery. Documentation and official record keeping on the subject are not available, judging from our experience in preparing this special File.

The general inclination is to convince the woman to bear the situation rather than humiliate her family with a public scandal and protect the children from a broken home. There is little to indicate that Arab governments, legislators, and academe are concerned with domestic violence against women. Activists in different Arab countries try to assist battered women with legal advice and psychological support. Some of the prominent ones are listed below.

The Tunisian Association of Democratic Women has a crisis center for women victims of violence. It offers legal and psychological advice and support to women. The Association has gained power and coverage through its activities, and brought the problem to the attention of the Tunisian Women and Family Ministry. In November of 1993, The Association organized a three-day conference to identify the problems of violence against women, and to discuss strategies to assist women who suffer from it. (For more information contact: Association Tunisienne des Femmes Democratres, c/o Nawla Darwish, Arab Women Center, 44 Rue de Pologne, Bab Saadoun, Tunis, Tunisia).

In Lebanon, a group of women activists created an Association to assist battered women by publicizing their problem and calling for the ratification of the UN Declaration for the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women (for more information, contact: Nazik Saba Yared, c/o Humanities Div., Beirut University College, P. O. Box 13-5053, Beirut, Lebanon).

As it stands, such organizations compose the only support system for women who suffer from domestic violence. Even so, their effectiveness is limited to helping women cope with family pressures. Practically speaking, Arab women must chose between family and battery.

— R.A.H