

# Are Battered Women Hospitalized?

Eva Bu Melhem

By surveying hospitals in the Beirut area, we hoped to collect systematic data on the number of battered women who come to the emergency rooms. Our interest was to gather information on the socio-economic class they belong to, their physical condition, and the person who brings them in for help.

The hospitals contacted are located in various parts of the city, Beirut, and cater to people from different religious groups and socio-economic brackets. The sample includes nine hospitals: Al-Rassoul al-Aazam, and al-Sahel in the Southern suburbs, a densely populated Moslem Shiite area; Barbir Hospital and Makassed Hospital in a Moslem Sunni part of town; Jitawi, St-Georges and Hotel Dieu de France located in the eastern side of Beirut in quarters that are populated by Christians; the American University Hospital and the Middle East Hospital in the more cosmopolitan parts of the city.

The researcher approached the Emergency Room (ER) as the department most likely to admit cases of violence. The hospitals resisted giving out data about the issue despite reassurances that our interest was purely academic. Furthermore, when it was furnished, the data was based on the observation of the re-

spondent rather than in reference to hospital files. It is interesting to note that psychological disturbances were reported as being more frequent than physical injuries among women seeking medical care in emergency rooms. Nevertheless, the causes of illness did not seem to concern those reporting it.

Women who are treated for injuries of domestic violence, in the Rasoul-al-Aazam Hospital, include wives, mothers, daughters. A sixteen year old girl who attempted suicide after her father attempted to rape her, was reported as one of the cases of violence treated in the ER. The hospital called her father to double check the story. Naturally, he denied it. It was also reported that the ER of the Rassoul-al-Aazam Hospital treats three to four cases of depression among educated women, every week, and a few suicide attempts.

*In the few cases of domestic violence in the ER of al-Sahel Hospital, battery cases are the most frequent. The battered women, who are brought in by neighbors, suffer from bruises and severe emotional trauma. They belong to all social and economic classes, and their ages range from sixteen to forty. Cases of attempted suicide, often, involve younger female patients. These are admitted into observation*

for twenty four hours and then referred to a psychiatrist.

At the Barbir Hospital, there were no records of violence against women and a limited number of hysterical cases were reported.

At the Makassed Hospital, three cases of physical violence against women during the year were reported. The victims were brought in by parents or husbands who seemed apologetic and afraid. The patients were in the thirty year age bracket. A particular case that was treated in the hospital five months ago, was a five year old girl who was raped by her grandfather. She was brought in by her parents who were in a state of shock and her father swore that he was going to kill his own father.

The Jitawi Hospital reported very few cases of battery. The most common illness that women who come to the ER suffer from is nervous hysteria. *There is an average of ten cases a month.*

The St-Georges Hospital was unwilling to give out any information. After repeated negotiations, a nurse said: "We do not ask patients about their personal lives."

At Hotel Dieu de France, the information collected from different staff members in the ER revealed that no cases of violence were treated during April 1994. There were 10 hysteria cases

and one case of attempted suicide. The patients were brought to the ER by their parents. Their physical condition was loss of consciousness and their psychological states included neuropathic and hysterical crises.

The American University Hospital, provided little information as well. An ER staff reported a few cases of violence against women and none of rape and sexual abuse. Suicidal attempts are seasonal increasing just before the winter, the staff member noted. The female victims are young between eighteen and twenty five, and the injuries resulted from drinking parathione, demole or other poisonous products.

At the Middle East Hospital, the information was as scarce as the other hospitals. Very few cases of women suffering from injuries incurred from domestic violence were reported. Suicidal and nervous illness were more frequent and an average of 10 cases of attempted suicide are treated a month.

The resistance of hospitals to report information for determining the situation of psychical, and psychological violence against women illustrates the general reluctance of society to address the issue. Hospitals are afraid of being associated with a controversy like violence against women, which can be strongly mobilized if supported with precise numbers from their files.

— Eva Bu Melhem,  
Journalist in a Lebanese  
radio station