

Domestic Violence Against Women in Jordan

Arwa Aamiry

A Jordanian weekly recently reported that a man surrendered to the police and confessed to slaughtering his daughter 'like a sheep'. He killed her because she was pregnant, even though the lover was willing to marry her. As soon as the father found out about the pregnancy, he went home, asked the visitors present to leave, took a sharp knife from the kitchen and dragged his daughter to the roof where he slaughtered her.

What is of relevance here is not the fact that honor crimes are still common in Arab society at the end of the twentieth century, but that the verdict of the courts does not seem to sanction such practices. Her lover was not considered guilty since she had accepted his advances. The father was found guilty of killing his daughter, but since she had violated traditions, values and customs, and got her father 'beyond himself', his punishment consisted of six days in prison starting with the day of her death and the confiscation of the murder weapon.

Thus, not only was a woman slaughtered like a sheep, not only did tradition condemn her behav-

ior, but also by the legal system, lawyers and judges. For most people, particularly for women and children, 'the family is the most violent group to which they are likely to belong. Despite fears from the contrary, it is not a stranger but so-called loved ones who are most likely to assault, rape or murder' (Dobash and Dobash, 1979, p.7).

The aim of this article is to present research findings on family violence in Jordan conducted in 1988, by the Center for Women's Studies at the University of Jordan. The aim of the research was to compile data that would stand as evidence for the existence of domestic violence and support strate-

gies for raising public awareness on the issue.

Members of the center searched for evidence of the existence of violence in the Jordanian family. However, as is the case in many countries, facts were not available. There were only indications of one or another form of violence in the family. Women are generally unwilling to speak up. They are often ashamed and blame themselves thinking they had provoked the men. Women also want to project a good impression about their marriages and therefore prefer to keep silent.

However, in spite of the silence that surrounds family violence, the members of The Center for Women's Studies did find indicators upon talking to psychiatrists, lawyers, hospitals and the police who confirmed the existence of domestic violence, but none had any data on its extent or severity.

A questionnaire was distributed to 56 students at the University of Jordan. Violence was defined as: 'any behavior that aims at subjugating and controlling another person through intimidation, threat, psychologi-

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85 murders were reported in 1989 in Jordan. The killer was identified in 75 cases, including 72 men and 3 women. The victim was a woman in 31 of the 72 cases.

cal, verbal or physical means.' **The Power and Control Wheel** (the figure on the next page) specifying type of abuse was included to help respondents recognize the type of violence occurring in their home, if applicable. An enclosed matrix also served to help them identify the violator and the victim.

Eighty six percent of the students answered in the affirmative to the question: 'Is there abuse of any kind in your family?' Intimidation was the form of violence that prevailed among 75 percent of the students. The second most common form of violence was emotional abuse, which 40 percent of the students claimed was practiced in their families. Physical abuse was reported by 33 percent. It is important to note that the same student/person is often subjected to more than one form of violence. Abuse of the mother was ascertained by 50 percent of the students and it reached the point of physical violence in 21 percent of the families.

These data are similar to the ones published in a report of a group of experts meeting to discuss the issue of violence against women. The meeting was set by the United Nations and resulted in recognizing that violence against women in the family and society is pervasive and cuts across income levels, class and cultural lines.

When the matrix was filled, the hierarchy of abuse became clear: the father abuses everybody,

the mother abuses the children, the male children abuse the female children. In 1989, my students and I looked into homicide cases in the family. The Jordanian society is known to be safe, and non-violent. It did not surprise the police that only 85 murders were reported in 1989. The killers were identified in 75 cases, and included 72 men and 3 women. The victim was a woman in 31 out of the 72 cases. In all of these crimes the killer was a close member of the family, namely the father, the son or the husband.

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sion to be drawn from this research on homicide is 'that an extraordinary proportion of killings take place in the home and that women are much more likely than men to be slain in their roles as wives or inmates than men as husbands' (Dobash and Dobash, 1979, p. 17).

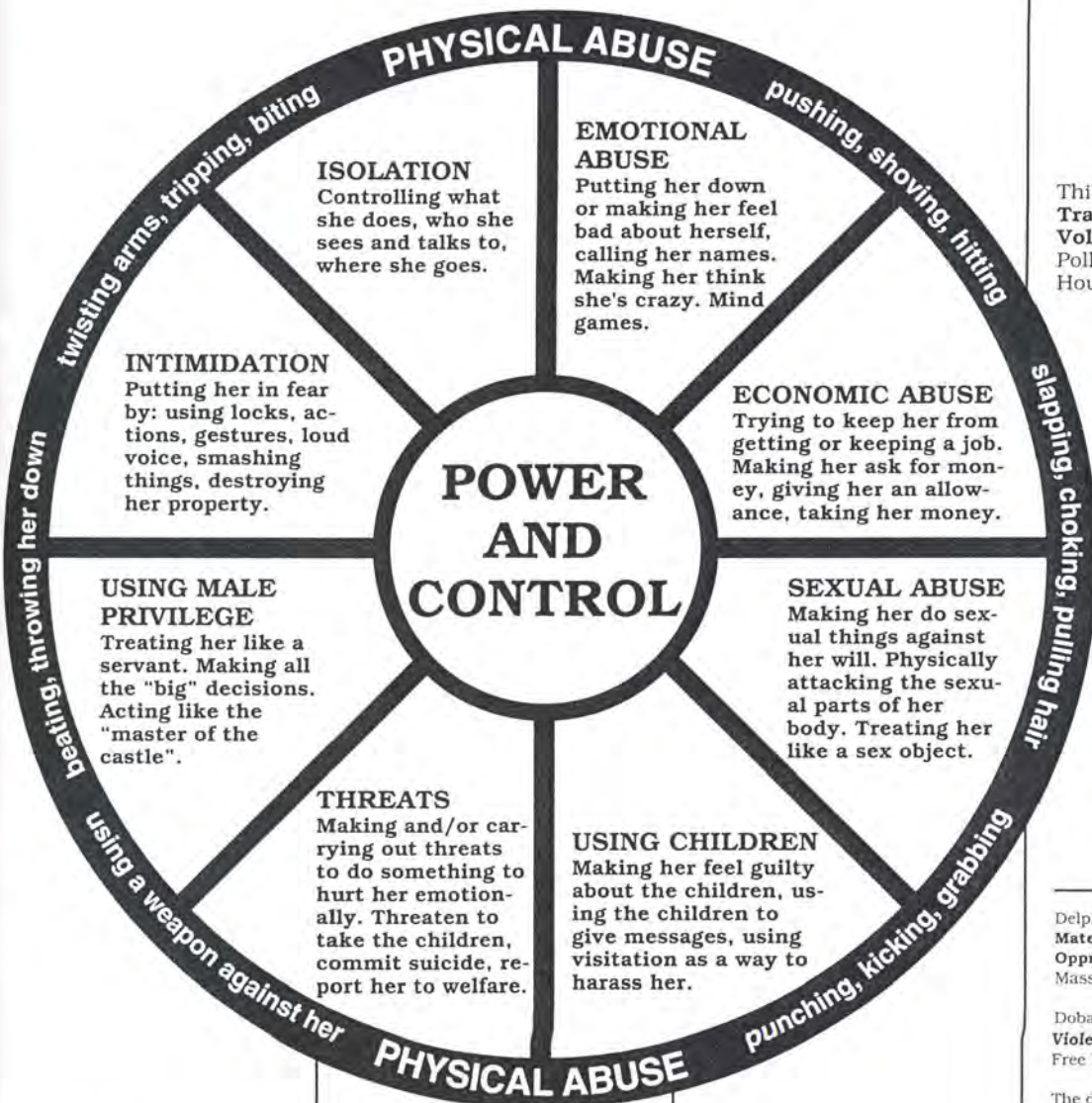
It is important to reiterate that the findings of this study should be treated with caution because the sample is relatively small and the data are based on the children's accounts of violence in the family, and not that of the mother. More comprehen-

sive research is needed to determine, more accurately, the prevalence of domestic violence.

It is also incorrect to say that only social misfits abuse members of their families. 'Seeking the causes and sources of violence and crime through emphasis on pathological individuals or deviant relationships has been an important activity of those who would ignore that violence is endemic.' (Dobash and Dobash, 1979, p. 17). The fact that 86 percent of the families on a group of students at the University of Jordan witness abuse in their families indicates that violence is a norm not an exception. Subjugation of women to accept, internalize and, in due time reinforcing the corresponding social norms takes place early in their lives.

Acts of violence can be understood only in the context of the hierarchy of family authority. That the socio-cultural patriarchal system uses violence to maintain its order became a public issue recently. American Judge William Sweeney posed the question: 'Why do we have so many victims of battery?' Answering the question, he stated: 'This society, historically, presumes men's superiority. If you grant this presumption, then superiority has to be validated if challenged. How do you validate it? Ultimately with physical force' (Sweeney, 1981).

Power differentials between men and women, which are internalized



This figure is taken from **A Training Manual for Volunteers** (p.32) by M. Pollock, 1984. Woman House, St. Cloud, MN.

Delphy, C. 1984. *Close to Home: A Materialistic Analysis of Women's Oppression*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Dobash R.E. and R.P. Dobash, 1978. *Violence Against Wives*. New York: Free Press.

The data reported in this paper are similar to the ones in a report that was presented to an expert group on violence against women in a meeting set by the United Nations office at Vienna. **Center for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, Division for the Advancement of Women**. Vienna, November 11-15, 1991.

Ilawi, M.J. 'A Father Confesses to Murdering his Daughter in Defense of his Honour.' *Shihan*, Weekly Political and Social News. p.39. No. 499, May 14-20, 1994.

Sweeney, W. **The Need for Policy Development in Domestic Assault Cases**. March 11, 1981. Conference on Duluth Criminal Justice Intervention in Domestic Assault Cases. Cited by Ellen Pence. 'The Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project.' *Hamilton Law Review*. 1983. 6, p. 247-275.

maintained and perpetuated by the women's silence. Something must be done to stop the abuse of women in the home.

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through socialization of both sexes, is the primary variable that preserve inequality. It is reinforced by the patriarchal rule, which is essentially a social structure of subordinating women to men (Delphy, 1984).

The function of the patriarchal system has been and continues to exert a strong influence on the persistence of battering women in the family. It is

Man stabs divorced sister in fit of anger

By Rana Husseini

Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN -- A 25-year-old Wihdat woman was stabbed by her brother Friday and was listed in critical condition, according to the Civil Defence Department (CDD) and family sources.

The woman, identified as Taghrid A., had had an argument with her husband, who immediately divorced her the same day (Friday).

The woman, a mother of two, sought refuge at her brother's house, according to family sources.

A Family member told the Jordan Times, an argument erupted between the brother, identified as M.A., and his

sister regarding Taghrid's fight with her husband.

According to the family member, the brother asked his sister to return to her husband's house. The woman refused, the source said, and when the argument reached a deadlock M.A. drew a knife and stabbed his sister in the stomach several times.

The woman was rushed to Al Bashir Hospital for treatment. Hospital sources told the Jordan Times that the woman's condition is critical.

According to relatives, the woman's brother is being held by police pending further investigations.

Police refused to give details of the incident.

Victim of incestuous rape killed by second brother

By Rana Husseini

Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN -- A 16-year old girl Monday was stabbed to death in Jabal Hashemi Shamali by her 31-year-old brother for adultery with another brother in Al-Zagult suburb, according to police and family sources.

The woman, identified as Kifaya D. received several stabs to the neck and chest, inflicted by her brother Khalid, who surrendered to police shortly after the killing. A close relative of the victim told the Jordan Times Tuesday.

According to the relative, Kifaya was raped by her younger brother Mohammad, (22) six months ago, and he threatened to kill her if she told her family.

Two months later, Kifaya discovered that she was pregnant, the relative said, adding that she was then obliged to explain her condition to her family and reveal that she had been raped by her brother.

When her brother Mohammad heard that his sister revealed the rape to the family, he tried to kill her by cutting her wrist, said the relative.

Another family member Khalid, in his testimony to police, he said family and relatives urged him to kill his sister to "cleansing the family honour because she had been raped by her brother."

The relative said Khalid told police he went to the family house at about 1:00 a.m. Tuesday, took hold of a kitchen knife, found his sister and asked her to pray to God before stabbing her to death.

The next door neighbour went out to check what was happening, he said he saw Khalid waving a knife in the air and shouting. "There I have cleansed my family's honour."

The neighbour said that Khalid's relatives, who gathered to witness the event, started ululating and praising Khalid.

According to the neighbour, a family member told Khalid, "you have done a good job, well done."

Another witness told the Jordan Times that Kifaya's body was mutilated, and some parts of her stomach were removed and scattered about her.

Police confirmed the killing and said both brothers were in custody pending further investigation into the case. By they declined to release any further information.

Kifaya is the 12th woman to be reported killed in a "crime of honour" in Jordan this year.

Kifaya was one of ten siblings in a family where the father had abandoned the mother, said a relative.

Woman found dead in Zarqa

Jordan Times

A 35-year-old woman was found dead Monday with eight bullet wounds to her body, according to Civil Defence reports.

The woman identified as S.I.A., was a resident of the Masoum suburb of Zarqa.

A civil defense official told the Jordan Times that the woman was killed in a crime of honour by her uncle, identified as I.A.

Police declined comment on the crime.

Clippings from Jordan

June 1, 1994

15-year-old girl killed in 'crime of honour'

By Rana Hussein
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN -- A 15-year-old shepherd girl Friday was shot and killed by her brother in Jiza, a small town near Queen Alia International Airport, according to family sources.

Khawla M., was shot several times by her 25-year-old brother Ibrahim M., who surrendered to police immediately after the killing, the mother of the girl told the Jordan Times.

According to the mother, Ibrahim received an anonymous letter saying that his sister was having an affair with someone. She said, her son, "without investigat-

ing the letter or finding out its source" showed it to his father.

The mother said her husband gave Ibrahim his licensed gun and asked him to go kill his sister to "cleanse the family honour." The mother said she was baking bread outdoors Friday evening when she heard several gun shots. The woman said she rushed into the tent where she lived with her 18 children and husband and found her daughter lying in a pool of blood.

The woman expressed anger over her daughter's death because, she said, Khawla was a well-behaved girl.

"I don't have any idea who would send such a letter to my son, because my daughter never saw anyone, and she did not have any enemies," the mother told the Jordan Times.

"But I also believe in fate, and my daughter's fate was to die, and we can't question God's wishes," she added.

According to the woman, the family buried the girl on Saturday, while her son was still in police custody for further investigation in the case.

Police would only confirm the incident, and declined to give details.

May 8, 1994

Mother of 14 children killed by brother - CDD

By Rana Hussein
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN -- A 37-year-old Jerash woman Saturday was shot and killed by her inebriated brother in Burma, a small town of Jerash, according to Civil Defence Department (CDD) reports.

The woman identified as Layla M. A., was shot seven times by her brother Nawaf M.A., who surrendered to police shortly after the killing, a CDD official said.

The official said the victim, the mother of 14 children was accused two years ago of adultery, and her husband divorced her.

The woman was acquitted of the adultery charges a year-later and was reunited with her husband, the CDD official said.

Later, said the official, the husband again divorced the woman, and she was obliged to live with her brother.

According to the brother's testimony, said the CDD official, the suspect (42) said that someone told him that his sister was seeing a man in Jerash town.

The brother said he went out and got drunk, returned home and shot his sister.

According to CDD the report the woman died instantly of bullet wounds to the chest.

Her body was taken to Jerash Military Hospital and was later transferred to Al Bashir Hospital for an autopsy.

Jerash police declined to comment on the crime.

April 3, 1994

Brother kills sister, drops nephew in the street

By Rana Hussein
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN -- Zarqa police have revealed a murder case which involves the divorced mother of a reportedly missing child.

Zarqa police have detained a suspect in connection with a crime that was committed two weeks ago and involved a wandering child whose whereabouts had been advertised in the local papers by the police on Dec. 15. The two-year-old was found in the Zarqa streets on his own.

Police sources said that after placing the advertisement with the boy's picture

in local newspapers, a Zarqa citizen was able to identify the boy and told the police that he knew the child lived with his father abroad.

Acting on the information from the witness, police started investigating the case and learned that the brother of the mother had committed the crime.

A police source the Jordan Times the brother confessed to having killed his sister because she was frequently leaving the house without his knowledge and he suspected she was having somebody. That made him kill her.

The brother, who has not been identified, told the po-

lice on Dec. 10, he killed her. He went with his sister (the victim) by the Zarqa stream and after an argument about her suspected behaviour he picked a sharp object and hit the victim with it several times on her head. This caused her death. The suspect then buried his sister at the scene of the crime and took the two-year-old child to the city market in Zarqa and left him there. He was later picked up by the police.

According to a police official in Zarqa, the child is being held at a child care centre in Zarqa until the investigations are over.