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Progress in gender equality in Egypt

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Abstract

Egypt, like many countries in the world, has been witnessing over recent decades slow improvements in gender equality, in line with the evolving international political debate. In this study we are going to analyse changes in gender relations in Egypt using socio economic and demographic indicators. We will thus highlight the ways in which Egyptian society is evolving slowly towards more egalitarian behaviour and attitudes. We are going to focus on the issue of “wife abuse”, using the few quantitative studies existing on that topic for Egypt. At the same time we will analyse the role played by women associations in promoting gender equality and thereby reducing gender based violence. This socio-political process is reflected by the media (particularly independent media organs) in Egypt, as in other countries of the Middle East (Palestine, Jordan). Therefore we will analyse the social and media discourse regarding these issues.

Introduction

Both the Arab Human Development Report (AHDR, 2006) and the Human Development Report of 2005 highlighted that in Egypt, as in other Arab countries, there is a wide gender gap in many aspects of life including human rights such as wife abuse, female circumcision, political and legal rights. Egypt, like many countries in the world, has been witnessing over recent decades slow improvements in gender equality. Those improvements are in line with the evolving international political debate on gender issues. For instance, one of the recommendations of the Cairo ICPD Plan of Action (1994) strongly condemned violence against women and children. During the intervening years, many countries around the world have started to collect data about violence against women (Gautier, 2004; Heise et al., 1999; Jaspard et al., 2003; Jaspard et Condon, 2007). In 1995, the Egyptian DHS questionnaire included for the first time questions about domestic violence (DHS, 1995); the same questionnaire was enlarged in DHS 2005. There are other examples of these studies in the region: for instance, researcher Haj-Yahia conducted studies in the Palestinian territories and among the Arab population in Israel to document attitudes about wife abuse.

Egyptian NGOs and governmental organisations have been struggling for many years to improve gender equality in various aspects of life. They promote the role of women in society and lately they obtained some important improvements through the Personal Status Law (2000). The image of women in the media is also changing thanks to the central role played by NGOs. Those changes are in line with CEDAW recommendations to Egyptian government. In 2006 the “Arab Network for Monitoring the Image of Women in the Media”, composed of independent NGOs and media experts was created. Its objective is to give an alternative image of women based on basic human rights such as the right to a life without violence. The Salma NGOs network -financed by European Commission and the Heinrich Böll association– is fighting violence against women in the Arab countries. As a result, discussion on the first draft of a new violence prevention law is soon to begin in the Egyptian parliament. A similar law has been already ratified in Jordan thanks to Salma involvement (Official Journal of Jordan, 48926/2008).

In this study our approach is both quantitative and qualitative. We are going to analyse changes in gender relations in Egypt using socio economic and demographic indicators. We will thus highlight the ways in which Egyptian society is evolving slowly towards more egalitarian behaviour and attitudes. We are going to focus on the issue of “wife abuse”, using the few quantitative studies existing on that topic for Egypt. At the same time we will analyse the role played by women’s associations in promoting gender equality and thereby reducing gender based violence. This socio-political process is reflected by the media (particularly independent media

organs) in Egypt, as in other countries of the Middle East (Palestine, Jordan). Therefore we will analyse the social and media discourse regarding these issues.

1.1 The role of mass media, women NGOs and other institutions in the gender equality debate

Women's rights activists in Egypt, as in neighbouring Arab countries, are trying to fight laws deemed discriminatory against women, such as the personal status code which reflects a hierarchical view of gender in which women are marginalized. They contribute to this political game in several ways: through proposing amendments to the personal status or the Penal Code and through international conventions such as CEDAW (Convention for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women)¹. Moreover, women's NGOs act through bills and specific measures to protect women from violence, such as the foundation of shelters for "battered women" and so on. Mainly, the link between these associations is their demand for equality between men and women within the family sphere.

It is important to note that Egypt, like Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Syria have indicated their "reservations about anything that is inconsistent with the Islamic Sharia". Noteworthy, the main reserves of Egypt and Jordan concern equality between men and women (Egypt Article 2, Jordan and Egypt refused to Article 16 concerning the equal status of spouses). Women's associations in turn expressed their refusal of a partial equality: Representatives of women's NGOs in Arab countries met in Rabat from 8 to 11 June 2006 to launch a regional campaign called "Equality without reservation", to cancel all reservations of Arab countries regarding this Convention.

Recently, we have witnessed rising public debate concerning women's status and violence against women in Egypt, which is an inseparable part of the subject of gender equality. This debate, particularly in the independent media and in the Internet, reflects the breaking of some taboos concerning VAW. This new trend may be attributed to women's NGO efforts in the Arab world, including to the new regional networks who contributed to this cause. For example, "the Network for monitoring women's image in the Arab media", created in Cairo on November 2006, aims to promote a "alternative" image for women based on democratic values, rights including the human rights to physical integrity and a life without violence and social development².

One of the main achievements due to Egyptian NGOs struggle is reflected in the last reform to the personal status code, as described below.

1.2 Towards gender equality within the family: the debate on the divorce law (2000)

Family and criminal laws, can be viewed in some way as an indicator for social change. However their mere existence does not necessarily affect hegemonic perceptions and patriarchal norms. As Gautier says: « It is not enough to change the law to transform gender relations: often this legal change is the result of social transformations and of the intervention of the feminist movement. The laws allowing divorce may ultimately have important consequences because they give the possibility to women to escape from oppressive relationships»³.

It is important to note that prior to the recent reform of the personal status code, Egyptian law on divorce has gone through many changes in the different stages of history and politics of Egypt.

¹ The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Adopted by General Assembly of United Nations the 18th of December 1979. Resolution 34/180.

² ARAB NETWORK FOR MONITORING THE IMAGE OF THE WOMAN IN THE MEDIA. Report. Cairo, November 2006.

³ GAUTIER, Arlette. Les violences au sein de la famille, <http://www.genreenaction.net>, 2004, p.6.

The first reforms, which were obtained in the beginning of the 20th century following the pioneer feminist struggle⁴, allowed women to obtain divorce in case of the husband's illness, abandonment by the husband, his disability to provide the women's requirements or abuse and violence referred as "Darar" (meaning "injury" or "damage").

The last reform of Personal Status code in Egypt under President Hosni Mubarak in 2000 gave women the right to divorce, known as the "khol", without the spouse consent⁵. The reform also addressed other aspects of laws that discriminate against women, such as women's freedom to travel without the permission of her husband (the Article 26 of the new code). The most controversial part in this reform concerns the "khol" which allows the wife to seek divorce on grounds of incompatibility, without having to prove damages suffered by the wife without the consent of the husband, while giving up its financial rights (dowry and wedding gifts). This reform has led to the creation of a family court, pursuant to Act No. 10 of 2004, which includes a reconciliation of free service (Article 7 of the Act), which means that the trial can take place in case of failure of reconciliation. The amendment was finally obtained, despite opposition from conservative parties and individuals, as a result of the Egyptian government's pressure, together with the national and independent NGO efforts, and legitimised through reinterpretation of Islamic jurisprudence (Sharia), which gave it the needed credibility.

However, it is clear as some point out⁶, that the law benefits women with average economic living standards at the expense of poor women who have no means to give up their financial rights, in addition to other difficulties related to divorce including family pressure and fear of social sanctions. In addition, we must admit that the difficulties in providing evidence of domestic violence, the duty of conciliation meetings in accordance with the law of 2000 (up to three months after the divorce) and the reluctance of some judges to grant divorce, combined with family pressures and economic constraints on women, are obstacles to obtaining a divorce in cases of VAW.

It is important to note that this amendment created a strong debate in Egyptian society, which was also reflected in media and the press. Opposition to this law by conservatives and some religious actors was covered by and large in the media claiming their fear from family destruction and the loss of Egyptian identity⁷. Most of these articles tried to marginalise feminist Egyptian discourse mainly by use of caricatures.

These media and press coverage proved once again that the media role in this debate for gender equality is highly relevant, which is why media "monitoring" is extremely important for Egyptian women's NGOs.

1.3 Media as an indicator for changing attitudes?

In general, studies on the issue in the Egyptian written press reveal that little space is devoted to violence against women. In her study on the Egyptian press coverage of the population conference in Cairo (ICPD) in 1994 and the World Conference on Women's rights on 1995, Najwa Kamel⁸ found that the Egyptian press has considered the issues of female sexuality (which were

⁴ BARON, Beth. *The Women's awakening in Egypt – culture, society and the press*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994. 259 p.

⁵ BERNARD-MAUGIRON, Nathalie. Normes et pratiques en matière de statut personnel : la "loi sur le khol" en Égypte, *Maghreb-Machrek*, 2005. n°181, pp : 88-98.

⁶ Al Ahram Weekly. « *By the skin of her teeth* ». 17-23 février 2000. Numéro 469. Maryse Tadros.

⁷ TADROS, Maryse. *The khol' in the Egyptian press*. AL SAWI, Ahmad. "the khol' an analytic study". Cairo : Cewla (Egyptian Center for Women's Legal Aid). 2003. Pp : 83-100. In arabic.

⁸ In: KAMEL, Azza. Women's image in the egyptian press. Le Caire : Appropriate Communication Techniques (ACT). 2004. 150p. In Arabic.

discussed in these conferences) far from the Egyptian context and requiring no public debate. In addition to that, the Socialist newspaper journalists "Al Sha'ab", Islamic guidance, have criticized the participants of these conferences, under the pretext that they would cause the destruction of the family institution, through the encouragement of adultery and apostasy.

One might recall the international coverage of the genital mutilation in Egypt during the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994. At the same time, a program broadcast on CNN has led to an intense debate on this violent practice in Egypt and the world. The American chain has been put on trial by Egyptian officials on the grounds of "spreading a negative image of Egypt". Later on the charges were withdrawn and the Egyptian Ministry of Health issued a decree ordering its prohibition in hospitals and public clinics⁹.

While women's NGO have been working continuously since the 90s against genital mutilation, the social and political debate slowly attained the public opinion. For example, we notice that the debate was covered mostly in the Egyptian press for foreign readers, such as the French weekly "Al Ahram Hebdo", and the English "Al Ahram weekly". Few years after the 1995 Population conference and the first DHS survey on VAW, Egyptian media offered more space to women's NGOs activities, but public opinion remains silent when it comes to spousal violence or family violence against women. This is particularly true regarding the national media, in government possession.

As an illustration, the Egyptian NGO ADEW study on 136 articles on 2003¹⁰, revealed that the most favoured subjects by the journalists were women's right to work and their procreation rights, which also corresponded with the subjects preferred in the political discourse on "Family Planning" adopted by the National Council of Women (chaired by First Lady Suzanne Mubarak)¹¹. Meanwhile subjects related to VAW have not yet gained much attention from the governmental bodies, which explains the low interest of pro-governmental journalist's interest on the "taboo" topics of sexuality and crime (only five articles published on these two questions and they were written by women journalists).

2. Improvements in gender equality indicators

Turning now to the demographic view point on women's status, an important transformation has taken place: the total fertility rate (TFR) has slowed down in Egypt since the 1960's, passing from 6.5 in 1960 to 3.0 in 2008. This shift in TFR is largely due to a growing contraceptive use; contraceptive prevalence rate increased from 20% at the beginning of the 70's to 60% in 2008. Increasing age at first marriage is also a determinant of fertility transition: mean age at first marriage increased both for men and women. In the 1960's Egyptian men married at the age of 26, in 2005 at the age of 28.5. The corresponding average ages for Egyptian women were 19.5 and 23 years. Family planning programmes, increased female education and economic crisis also contributed to the fertility transition (Ambrosetti, 2006).

The educational gap between men and women in Egypt is decreasing: illiteracy rates for the young aged between 15 and 24 have slowed down since the 1980's both for men and women. Female participation rates for primary education were about 93% in 2000 (vs. 61% in 1980 and 100% for male in 2000). Female participation in secondary education was 82% in 2000 (vs. 88% for

⁹ ZUHUR, Sherifa. 2001. The mixed impact of feminist struggles in Egypt during the 1990s. *MERIA – Middle East Review of International Affairs*. March 2001. Volume 5, no^o1, pp: 1-8.

¹⁰ ADEW (Association for the Development & Enhancement of Women). Monitoring women's image in the Egyptian media – analytic study. Le Caire: British Cultural Institute, september 2002- February 2003. In arabic.

¹¹ This study demonstrates that coverage of these topics is provided by the national daily "Al Ahram" that has published 20% of the articles studied, like the study found that 2888 articles published by this newspaper in 2004 representing 40% of the articles examined in this study.

male the same year). Labour force participation is still low for Egyptian women: according to the last Egyptian Labour Market Panel Survey (ELMPS 2006), female economic activity rate was about 27% in 2006. It has increased since the previous survey of 1998 (ELMS 1998), when it was about 22%, but it is still low. The corresponding male activity rate was about 79% in 2006. According to ELMPS female unemployment rate was about 11.5% in 2006, which is the double of male unemployment rate (5.6%). The employment rate was about 22% for women and 74% for men in 2006. Thus gender inequalities in the labour market are still quite substantial. According to economists structural adjustment programs are largely responsible for this situation (Ambrosetti, forthcoming 2009).

According to most recent data available, the maternal mortality rate declined from 174 to 84 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births between 1992 and 2000 (Khalil, Roudi-Fahimi, 2004). This progress is mainly due to the National Safe Motherhood Programme. Infant mortality rate is still high in Egypt; furthermore Egyptian female children have higher infant mortality rate than their male counterparts. Yount (2001) attributed this gap to gender discriminating behaviour of parents especially in health care.

Female circumcision has been widespread in Egypt since the Pharaonic period. According to DHS data, the prevalence of female circumcision among ever married women aged between 15 and 49 was 97% in 1995 and 2000, and a rate of 91% was observed in 2008. Controlling for various background characteristics, such as age, education, income and residence, only a few differences can be observed in the female circumcision prevalence rate. Female circumcision is lower in urban setting, for younger women, for more educated women and for richer women, but it still remains at 80% for such social categories. A recent study (Andro, Lesclingand, 2007) showed that female circumcision has been declining in most African countries over recent years but not in Egypt. Nevertheless, prevalence of women approving of female circumcision has declined over time: it was 82 % in 1995, 68 % in 2005 and 63 in 2008 (DHS survey data).

Women are not aware of the health risk resulting from circumcision (only 32% knew the existence of health risks in DHS 2005 and 48% in DHS 2008) nor are aware of possible delivery risk related to that practice. However in 2008 98% of women reported to have heard before about the risks through television advertisements. Fewer women (about 15%) had obtained information about circumcision from other sources (i.e. other media and health workers). Female circumcision is forbidden by both Islam and Christianity, the two main religions in Egypt. Religious authorities frequently give official reminders of their position in condemning this practise. But surprisingly in DHS 2008, 49% of women reported that it is required by religious precepts.

3. Measurement of violence: acts and contexts

Violence against women takes many forms. There is now a wide consensus that it includes not only physical and sexual violence but also psychological. Another aspect of variation in the types of violence is the context in which it takes place. Most surveys have focussed on the married or cohabiting couple relationship, alternatively on the household. Violence in this context is often referred to as domestic violence, although the use of this term is questioned by some who claim that it confuses violence against a partner and that towards children (as well as other violent family relationships). Others have widened the scope to looking at other contexts too (the workplace, public space).

As Sunita Kishor stated at a recent UN expert group meeting, “the DHS is an ideal vehicle for studying not only the linkages between domestic violence and health and demographic outcomes, but also the context in which violence takes place” (2005, p.3). The individual women’s questionnaire collects data for women aged 15-49 on a variety of characteristics, including parity, contraceptive use, empowerment status, husband’s educational level and occupation. This data on

the marital union, in addition to data on household characteristics, form the context within which reported experience of violence can be analyzed.

The 1995 survey in Egypt is, along with the Columbian survey, one of the precursors of the study of violence within the DHS. The 1995 data is interesting as questions were asked within a general module on women's status. However, the single question threshold approach used to focus questioning about experience of violence, with only those women having responded positively to a question on whether they had been beaten by anybody since they were married, means that no further exploration is possible on experiences that they might not identify as being "beaten". Another limit of the DHS is underlined by Ellsberg et al. (2001) on Nicaragua survey. They noticed "that higher prevalence estimates were obtained with the use of multiple, behaviourally specific questions than with broader, aggregate questions. Moderate violence was more likely than severe violence to be misclassified using the general questions. This finding provides support for the view, advanced by many researchers, that general, global questions are less effective in eliciting disclosure of violence"¹².

Nonetheless, the data is rich in two ways. Firstly, the different forms of violence reported can be studied in relation to one another, comparing experiences by age and other characteristics. Secondly, the experience of violence can be analysed in relation to various autonomy status indicators and also to responses on attitudes to different instances of male dominance in the couple.

The 2005 survey uses the DHS module developed through consultation with violence against women experts and following WHO guidelines on interviewing on this sensitive topic. This module is based on the conflict tactics scale and includes questions investigating violence caused by perpetrators other than the husband, as well as one on violence experience during pregnancy. This is in line with most recent surveys exploring the occurrence of individual acts, not referring to 'violence' or being 'beaten' and then building indicators post hoc.

Despite the differences in methodology, comparison is both valid and worthwhile. First, we can build indicators of different types of violence during the last 12 months as well as, by age, violence within the marital union. Second, we can compare risk factors from one date to the other. Third, a comparison of attitudes to marital violence and male dominance within the couple can be conducted. In addition, we can examine norms relating to female genital mutilation. Fourth, we can compare reporting rates; although this can only lead to tentative conclusions as the single question method may have produced underreporting and by the later date, following campaigns on the topic of violence against women, reporting rates may increase sharply. Clearly a detailed analysis of the social, legal and political context relating to the status of women and gender relations is necessary to interpret any changes suggested by the statistical data analysis.

3.1 Indicators of different forms of violence

The first kind of descriptive analysis that can be done is to compare violence experienced during the marital union (table 1). There appears to be the sign of a slow decrease in reporting violence during marital union in 2005 compared to 1995.

Further descriptive comparative analysis aim to compare violence experienced by age and duration of union (table 2-3). Reporting experience of violence during their marital union is highest among women aged 30-39 years than for other age groups both in 1995 and 2005. The impact of marital duration is less clear since there are lower rates for the 20-24 years duration in 1995 and 25-

¹² ELLSBERG Mary, HEISE Lory, PENA Rodolfo et al.. Researching Domestic Violence Against Women: Methodological and Ethical Considerations. Studies in Family Planning, Vol. 32, no. 1, March 2001, p.12.

29 in 2005, rising again for the longer unions. However this may be an artefact related to other characteristics of these women on their unions. The most clear trend seems to be the lower rates in the early years of marriage, with a significant drop for unions of under ten years. A strong decrease in reported experience of violence is observed for women aged less than 24 between 1995 and 2005. This decrease is interesting given that the latter survey included a more efficient method of uncovering experience of violence (different acts rather than a single filter question on being beaten or not). Clearly analysis by different social characteristics of women may be revealing, as could a breakdown of the global physical violence indicator.

The reasons for this decrease in reported violence amongst younger women may be ascribed to better terms of negotiation at time of marriage and more freedom in choice of partner. In the first DHS on 1995, there was a sample measurement of women’s freedom on marriage decisions as well as participation in decision making: in both samples it appeared that most women didn’t have much choice in the spouse selection, neither over decision making in the family sphere. For example, more than three out of four women interviewed in DHS 1995 did not select their own spouse, and among those who did they did so with parental approval. Unfortunately similar questions were not posed in the following DHS (2005 and 2008). Nevertheless, reporting less violence among younger women may point out some changes in the gender power relations between spouses. This can be interpreted as an outcome of Egyptian NGOs efforts and to the late legal reform on the divorce law “khol” (2000), which is an attempt to reinforce women within the family. The law is particularly important for VAW, as women who experience violence can use it as a strategy to protect themselves, after giving up their financial rights. Despite the critics to this law by many Egyptian conservatives and some religious factions, the wide social and political debate which was covered in the media may have contributed to promote public opinion regarding these issues.

However it should be said that women of poor and rural origins are less likely to benefit from this law, since they lack economic independence and their family support and therefore cannot afford to lose their financial rights (which is the condition for obtaining divorce). Therefore, women with better living standards (economically and education level) have both legal recourse and economic “insurance” in case of violence, in contrast with women from poorer origins and with fewer educational resources.

Another relevant result in the 1995 and 2005 DHS is the significant difference between VAW experience of married and divorced women (table 4): divorced women are more likely than married one to be victim of violence. The rate of reported violence for divorced women has increased between 1995 and 2005 passing from 47 to 68%. With reference to the last legal reform on divorce, we can argue that the facilitated divorce for women is being used, increasingly, as a remedy against violence, thus granting women more effective strategies to protect against violence.

Table 1- Frequency of reported violence experienced during the marital union 1995-2005

Year	%	N
1995	35.31	5772
2005a	33.75	5613
2005b	33.22	5613

2005a includes only physical violence

2005b includes physical and sexual violence

Source: authors calculation on DHS 1995 and 2005

Table 2- Frequency of reported violence experienced during the marital union by women's age group 1995-2005

Year	<20	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	N
1995	28.70	34.76	35.50	38.34	37.14	34.48	32.35	5772
2005a	19.73	28.71	33.87	36.18	35.59	35.46	32.68	5613
2005b	19.73	29.45	34.34	36.64	36.15	36.05	33.19	5613

2005a includes only physical violence

2005b includes physical and sexual violence

Source: authors calculation on DHS 1995 and 2005

Table 3- Prevalence of reported violence experienced during the marital union by duration of marriage 1995-2005

Year	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30+	N
1995	24.00	39.85	40.11	37.44	32.94	39.26	36.54	5772
2005a	21.94	33.73	38.93	37.33	37.36	31.66	40.15	5613
2005b	22.25	34.37	39.39	37.74	38.01	32.75	40.15	5613

2005a includes only physical violence

2005b includes physical and sexual violence

Source: authors calculation on DHS 1995 and 2005

Table 4- Prevalence of reported violence experienced during the marital union by marital status 1995-2005

Year	Married	Widowed	Divorced	N
1995	35.59	25.13	47.31	5772
2005a	32.37	28.87	67.95	5613
2005b	32.86	30.13	69.09	5613

2005a includes only physical violence

2005b includes physical and sexual violence

Source: authors calculation on DHS 1995 and 2005

Prevalence indicators of violence

After studying descriptive statistics of violence during the marital union both for 1995 and 2005 we turn to the analysis of violence experienced during the past 12 months, looking at different forms of violence beyond the general indicators "physical, sexual, psychological" (table 5-7).

As a general remark, we found a lower reported violence rate in 2005 compared to 1995. Furthermore in 2005 the frequency of reported violence is lower than 1995 for all age group. An examination of rates during the year previous to the survey is very useful, as it shows that whilst all women, whatever their age, report experience of violence during their marriage, this experience is often not so recent for older women whereas younger women are currently exposed to a higher risk of violence.

The striking result is the far higher rates of violence reported by younger women in 1995, a trend not observed at the 2005 survey despite the fact that there has been little change in the age of women at marriage during the period and in the mean age difference between partners. Nevertheless those results could indicate improved terms and conditions of entry into marriage since the turn of

the century thanks to legislation changes and women's rights activists mobilisation. Reported violence is more common for women married for 5-14 years. Similarly, at the 1995 survey, more recently married women (a characteristic certainly coinciding with age) reported experiences of violence over the previous year than did women married for over 15 years. Frequency of violence in the last year is also more common for married women than for widowed and divorced women.

Table 5- Frequency of reported violence experienced in the last 12 months 1995-2005

Year	%	N
1995	18.18	5772
2005a	5.94	5613
2005b	6.53	5613

2005a includes only physical violence

2005b includes physical and sexual violence

Source: authors calculation on DHS 1995 and 2005

Table 6- Frequency of reported violence experienced in the last 12 months by women age group 1995-2005

Year	<20	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	N
1995	24.76	24.01	21.30	18.09	18.19	13.59	9.52	5772
2005a	5.31	6.89	6.13	7.43	6.37	4.87	3.74	5613
2005b	5.91	6.89	6.83	8.25	6.74	5.56	4.62	5613

2005a includes only physical violence

2005b includes physical and sexual violence

Source: authors calculation on DHS 1995 and 2005

Table 7- Frequency of reported violence experienced in the last 12 months by marital duration 1995-2005

Year	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30+	N
1995	19.06	24.13	21.48	17.36	12.57	14.09	8.19	5772
2005a	4.43	8.04	7.16	5.62	5.98	3.36	5.70	5613
2005b	4.70	8.41	8.11	6.18	6.81	4.44	5.70	5613

2005a includes only physical violence

2005b includes physical and sexual violence

Source: authors calculation on DHS 1995 and 2005

Table 8- Frequency of reported violence experienced in the last 12 months by marital status 1995-2005

Year	Married	Widowed	Divorced	N
1995	19.17	2.65	13.19	5772
2005a	6.19	0.00	2.15	5613
2005b	6.81	0.00	2.15	5613

2005a includes only physical violence

2005b includes physical and sexual violence

Source: authors calculation on DHS 1995 and 2005

Table 9- Frequency of reported violence experienced during the marital union and in the last 12 months by form of violence- 2005

Form of violence	Last 12 months		Marital union
	Often	Sometimes	Ever
Spouse ever pushed, shook or threw something	4.12	9.96	25.71
Spouse ever slapped or twisted her arm	4.23	10.62	28.12
Spouse ever punched with fist or something harmful	2.48	4.47	12.86
Spouse ever kicked or dragged	1.44	1.75	5.91
Any less severe violence	5.92	12.27	33.19
Spouse ever tried to strangle or burn	0.20	0.27	1.05
Spouse ever threatened with knife/gun or other weapon	0.20	0.12	0.92
Spouse ever attacked with knife/gun or other weapon	0.07	0.04	0.46
Any very severe violence	0.33	0.38	1.65
Spouse ever physically forced sex when not wanted	1.82	2.05	6.64
Any physical violence (very severe or less severe) or any sexual violence	6.50	15.20	33.75

Source: authors calculation on DHS 2005

Less severe types of violence are those experienced more frequently during marriage during the year prior to the survey. The analysis of violence prevalence over the previous year shows high rates of pushing, shaking, slapping but that these forms of violence take place at various times during the union for one in four women. Being punched, hit with an object, kicked or dragged, or forced to have sex is put up with by numerous women beyond the first year of marriage. Only by cross-tabulating these forms over previous 12 months and age / duration of union can we determine whether some forms are more common in the early years of marriage (or by younger women) or whether, for example, some forms may, more than others, lead to a demand for divorce. This more related analysis will be conducted for the published paper (forthcoming 2010).

3.2 Comparison of risk factors

The characteristics of women- education level, geographical location, work status – are used to differentiate women. Thus a ‘risk factor’ is a high level of violence reported by particular subgroup of women (e.g. low educated, rural...). However, Sunita Kishor (2005) warns us against taking prevalence differentials at face value. These differentials doubtless include differentials in reporting, some women more likely to under-report thus complicating the observation of actual differences. More educated women may have more power in the household than lesser, and may be better informed on how to protect themselves against violence. However, the shame attached to talking about violence to which one should not be exposed may prevent them from reporting.

Table 10- Frequency of reported violence experienced during the marital union by residence 1995-2005

Year	Urban	Rural	N
1995	30.03	39.18	5772
2005a	31.05	34.78	5613
2005b	31.55	35.32	5613

2005a includes only physical violence

2005b includes physical and sexual violence

Source: authors calculation on DHS 1995 and 2005

Table 11- Frequency of reported violence experienced during the marital union by employment status 1995-2005

Year	Working	Not working	N
1995	26.61	37.11	5772
2005a	32.29	33.44	5613
2005b	32.98	33.93	5613

2005a includes only physical violence

2005b includes physical and sexual violence

Source: authors calculation on DHS 1995 and 2005

Rural women appear to be more exposed to violence than those living in urban areas (table 10). However, the difference seems less marked by 2005. Working women are a little less exposed to violence in 2005 and 1995 than not working women (table 11). The striking result here is that working women report more violence in 2005 than in 1995. This could be attributed to a greater readiness to report violence by women more sensitized to the issue of women’s autonomy and less tolerant of dominant behaviour by men. Of course, there is a possibility of higher rates of tension and violence in couples in which the woman, through stable, skilled employment, is contributing to the household budget more than her husband. This interpretation was also made in Haj Yahia’s survey in Palestinian society¹³, which showed that in some cases women who were in a better financial and educational position were victims of violence. Violence against women in these cases can be interpreted as a reaction to the power reversal within the family and to patriarchal resistance against change, and female independence, perceived as loss of control and loss of “male” identity.

¹³ HAJ YAHIA, Muhammad. The incidence of wife abuse and battering and some demographic correlates as revealed by two national surveys in Palestinian society, *Journal of Family Violence*, 2000, Vol 15, n°4, pp: 347-374.

Table 12- Frequency of reported violence experienced during the marital union by women education 1995-2005

Year	No education	Primary	Secondary	Higher	N
1995	42.09	42.48	20.66	9.15	5772
2005a	39.98	42.72	28.92	13.86	5613
2005b	40.36	43.70	29.37	14.46	5613

2005a includes only physical violence

2005b includes physical and sexual violence

Source: authors calculation on DHS 1995 and 2005

Women that completed secondary or higher education appear to be less exposed to violence than less educated women. However, we observe in particular that women with secondary-level or higher education more frequently report violence in 2005 than do these groups in 1995. We may interpret this result in a similar way as for the increased reporting by working women.

Table 13- Attitudes towards wife beating 1995, 2005, 2008

Wife beating justified:	1995	2005	2008
If she goes out without telling him (%)	n.a.	40.41	31.5
If she neglects the children (%)	52.39	39.82	29.4
If she argues with him (%)	70.34	37.49	14.8
If she refuses to have sex with him (%)	52.39	33.61	21.7
If she burns the food (%)	29.49	19.03	7.9
If she wastes money (%)	45.54	n.a.	n.a.
If she talks to men (%)	65.59	n.a.	n.a.
At least one reason (%)	86.41	50.0	39.3
All reasons (%)	19.6	16.5	5.9

Source: authors calculation on DHS 1995, 2005 and 2008

Attitudes towards wife beating seem to be evolving over time: women are less likely to justify violence in 2005 and 2008 compared to 1995 (table 13 and 14). This analysis reveals a clear and significant decrease in tolerance of male dominance in marital unions, reflecting changes in awareness of legal rights, in gender relations and in a desire for more egalitarian relationships within the household. However Seif el Dawla et al. (1998), noticed that for the DHS 1995 there was probably a problem of understanding by some women on the right of the husband to beat his wife, mentioned in the question. The question had been understood as to inquiry on why the women are beaten and not on the legitimacy of these reasons. Nevertheless in the following DHS, the interviewers were better trained, in addition they could take advantage from the experience of other surveys and from a changed context with a growing awareness among young generations on issues such VAW. As a result, attitudes towards wife beating changed over that period meaning that women are less likely to justify violence. The decline in proportions of women justifying violence between the 2005 and 2008 surveys confirms the real change in attitudes.

Table 14- Attitudes towards wife beating by background characteristics

Year		1995		2005		2008	
		Wife beating justified:					
Background characteristics		At least one reason (%)	All reasons (%)	At least one reason (%)	All reasons (%)	At least one reason (%)	All reasons (%)
<i>Partner's education level</i>	No education	93.32	30.08	64.44	26.62	57.74	13.29
	Primary	93.40	23.91	60.40	20.38	48.96	6.85
	Secondary	84.79	10.37	46.79	11.45	34.99	3.69
	Higher	59.17	2.00	22.06	5.13	16.09	1.05
<i>Woman education level</i>	No education	93.89	28.79	67.32	27.49	59.29	12.72
	Primary	92.64	20.18	60.52	18.01	48.78	6.77
	Secondary	77.67	5.01	39.36	8.58	29.57	2.19
	Higher	50.44	1.42	15.88	1.25	11.26	0.14
<i>Marital duration</i>	0-4	84.57	12.77	42.04	12.49	34.92	4.85
	5-9	87.43	17.30	49.63	13.51	37.26	4.52
	10-14	86.34	21.21	46.89	13.25	39.03	5.07
	15-19	85.94	19.35	47.53	14.39	37.46	5.63
	20-24	90.15	24.43	54.07	18.78	39.23	6.25
	25-29	89.95	24.27	57.75	22.75	49.06	9.04
	30+	91.37	27.43	70.85	29.06	56.98	13.02
<i>Type of place of residence</i>	Urban	79.74	9.58	36.22	7.53	27.72	2.16
	Rural	92.74	26.97	59.30	21.60	47.48	8.51
<i>Age group</i>	15-19	92.35	18.71	54.35	11.26	50.38	8.16
	20-24	89.05	16.35	52.52	17.04	40.16	6.03
	25-29	87.38	20.17	46.54	12.69	35.27	4.26
	30-34	85.35	19.20	45.36	12.35	38.13	5.34
	35-39	87.58	19.63	51.36	17.89	38.10	5.13
	40-44	86.62	22.53	50.95	17.54	40.98	6.97
	45-49	85.78	20.38	51.29	19.50	42.51	7.93
<i>Respondent currently working</i>	No	89.91	21.22	51.49	16.22	41.59	6.26
	Yes	74.32	11.87	42.61	14.21	27.73	3.94

Source: authors calculation on DHS 1995 and 2005

The analysis of wife beating justifications by women background characteristics reveals that more educated couples less likely to justify violence. Moreover, women married for less than 15 years are less likely to justify violence. There is no significant effect of age or duration of marriage on justifying for at least one reason; however, those women justifying all reasons for violence against a spouse, explored in the survey, tend to be the older women and those married the longest.

As far as geographical location we can notice that women living in urban areas are less likely to justify violence.

3.3 Multivariate analysis of experience of violence

The analysis of attitudes of male dominance and partner violence is particularly rich. Multivariate analysis would reveal whether the same women responded positively to the items in this section. In order to identify the factors that significantly increase or decrease the risk of experiencing violence, multivariate logistic analyses were conducted for DHS 1995 and 2005.

We considered individual factors, partner and household characteristics: the dependent variable is ever-experience of spousal violence (any kind of physical violence). The analysis is restricted to ever married women aged 15-49. Results are presented in table 15.

In both regression education level (both women's and husbands), the wealth index, marital duration, marital status are factors influencing the probability that a woman will experience violence: more educated women and husbands, richer women, women married since less than 5 years or more than 15, women married or widowed are less likely to experience violence during their lifetime.

In a similar way to the DHS survey, other studies in Egypt and the region (Yount on the al. Minia's survey (2005), Haj Yahia) reinforce these results. Al Minia's study showed that the wealth of a household is negatively correlated to the manifestation of violence. In other words, VAW occurs more frequently in families with poor economic status. The economic and social dependence of the wife, not related to the wealth of the household, has been a significant factor encouraging the violence. Having fewer resources (educational and economic) than their husband exposed women to a higher risk of suffering a violent experience. Similarly, isolation of the wife compared to her family of origin increases the likelihood they will suffer from violence. As we said before, women with better social opportunities (socio economic status, more education), are better equipped to deal with violent experiences within their couple. In addition they are better informed regarding recent legal reform and they have more access to social violence prevention mechanisms (The divorce law, 2000).

Table 15- Logistic regression results: woman ever experienced violence 1995-2005

		1995	2005
	DESCRIPTION	Odd Ratios	Odd Ratios
Covariates			
Constant		***	***
Education	No formal education (ref)	ref	ref
	Primary	1.125	1.301**
	Secondary and more	0.493***	0.658***
Husband education	No formal education (ref)	ref	Ref
	Primary	1.017	0.778**
	Secondary and more	0.703***	0.759**
Current age of respondents	15-19	ref	Ref
	20-24	1.064	1.463*
	25-29	0.810	1.415
	30-34	0.876	1.198
	35-39	0.895	0.973
	40-44	0.752	0.953
	45-49	0.523**	0.826
Wealth Index	Poorest	ref	Ref
	Middle	1.024	1.052
	Richest (ref)	0.614***	0.787**
Marital duration	0-4	Ref	Ref
	5-9	2.158***	1.696***
	10-14	2.135***	2.407***
	15-20	1.832***	2.315***
	20-24	1.387	2.365***
	25-29	2.259***	1.720**
	30+	2.431**	2.362**
Residence	Urban	1.102	1.127*
	Rural (ref)	ref	Ref
Respondent current working	V714	0.876	1.015
	No	Ref	Ref
Marital Status	Married	ref	Ref
	Widowed	0.533***	0.723*
	Divorced	1.491*	4.190***
	N	7106	5585
	Chi-square	437.5100	310.2257
	Degrees of freedom	22	22
	-2 Log-Likelihood	7477.470	7136.969

Significant at *p<=0.05; **p<=0.01; ***p<=0.001

Discussion: Towards VAW prevention policies in Egypt?

Since State institutions activity is an important factor to prevent violence against women, NGOs in the middle-East exert pressure on their States to pass laws in order to promote women's rights within the family and the couple. For example, Egyptian NGOs together with the National Women Council have tried to pass laws increasing the punishment of perpetrators of harassment and rape, and some attempts to criminalize marital rape have been made. But, it is important to note that the state's institutions provide very few solutions for women who experience violence. In addition, some official actors who adopt blaming attitudes do not direct the women towards effective solutions. For instance, Police officers and Egyptian judges have expressed traditional views justifying the violence, by tending to define domestic violence cases as "private." Indeed, attorney Abd El Wahhab for the help centre for victims of violence "Al Nadim" has shown that women are often discouraged by the police to complain. It is important to note that poor women of rural origin encountered much more of these attitudes. Regarding facilities for victims of violence, Nawal Ammar¹⁴ notes that household services available to protect women paradoxically reinforce their victimization. Indeed, the four shelters (in Cairo, Alexandria and Beni Sweif Dakahilya), funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs, have extremely rigid entry rules: they only accept divorced or widowed women, aged 50 years and refuse to accept some women. In addition, shelter policy leans towards reconciliation and mediation between the spouses, thus creating an obstacle to the prevention of domestic violence.

On the other hand, the NGOs, limited in their action by the State laws, offer a legal and social support to victims of violence, but do not have the mandate nor the means to provide solutions for emergency violence victims. The draft law of Al Nadim's association (for victims of sexual abuse) may provide a partial solution to this problem of prevention. This association presented in January 2008 a law for the protection of women against violence, as part of a regional initiative including Egypt, Jordan (by the lawyer Asma Khader), Lebanon and the Palestinian occupied territories. The project is directed by the Salma network and supported by the European Union and the German NGO Heinrich Böll. This project for a new law, being reviewed by the Egyptian government and already approved in Jordan, is intended to provide free and easy solutions for women suffering from violence. Its objective is to strengthen the State's role in protecting women through the cooperation of the Department of national cohesion (in Egypt) with NGO's, in order to provide free consulting services to violence victims, to train staff in contact with these victims (police officers, social workers) and to strengthen the institutions involved in financial and material (homes). As it was for prior laws on women's rights, it is expected that this proposed law would face harsh opposition from conservative factions who tend to consider VAW as an imported subject of a western agenda, and as an attempt to worsen Egyptian image. However, the debate itself would partially achieve some women rights interests, by allowing a public discussion on a subject that has been silenced for a long time.

Conclusion

It has been argued often that women's "empowerment" in the economic and educational spheres may help to achieve progress in gender equality and therefore reduce VAW. However, the

¹⁴ AMMAR, Nawal. Beyond the shadows: domestic violence in « democratizing » Egypt. In *Trauma, violence and abuse: a review journal*. 2006. Vol 7, n°4, pp: 244-259.

DHS results imply that, to some extent, better economic and educational opportunities do not protect women from violent experiences within the family sphere. As we have shown, in DHS 2005, working women reported more violence than in 1995 and the same result was also shown to women with more education years. Moreover, we argue that change in gender relations requires a questioning of hegemonic patriarchal norms and family values, related to women's freedom to choose their spouses, their status in their family and within the couple, their participation in decision taking etc.

Clearly, the "empowerment" argument which is commonly used by governmental rhetoric's, excludes some of women's most urgent problems from the debate on women's rights. Indeed this reasoning was reflected in the governmental policies focused on women's economic participation and their education¹⁵ without taking into account the fundamental aspects related to gender and power relations within the family. However, the last personal status reform demonstrate some willingness by NGOs and the state to change the power relations within the family, by granting women the right to divorce, whether after a violent experience, or for any other reason.

In the following struggles for prevention of VAW (legally and socially speaking), new research could shed light on the Egyptian states willingness regarding concrete policies against VAW in the context of an increasing international awareness to the subject. In addition, it would be interesting to explore the way DHS survey's results can be used for advocacy purposes in order to promote new initiatives against VAW in Egypt.

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¹⁵ ZUHUR, Sherifa. Women and Empowerment in the Arab World. *Arab Studies Quarterly*. Fall 2003. Vol 25, N°4, Pp: 17-38.

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