CAWTAR
Center of Arab Women for
Training and Research

Preventing Gender Based Violence in University:

From Knowledge to Action towards Change

Summary

TUNISIA

PREVENTING GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN PUBLIC SPACES:

FROM KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION TOWARDS CHANGE

SUMMARY

CAWTAR Team

- Soukeina Bouraoui
- Faiza Benhadid
- Souleima Majeldi Mansouri
- Hedia Belhadj Youssef

Scientific Committee

- Sihem Najar
- Lilia Othmani Challougui
- Pierre-Noël Denieuil

Country Team

- Khaoula Matri
- Maher Trimech
- Pierre-Noël Denieuil

Editing and proofreading

- Faiza Benhadid
- Meriem Boudjadja

Foreword and Acknowledgements

The Action-Research underlying the present report was conducted as part of the project entitled: «Prevention of Gender-based Violence in the Public Space: From Knowledge to Action for Change», implemented within the framework of partnership between the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR) and the Open Society Foundation (OSF).

Through this research, the three components of the university community, namely teachers, students and administrative staff, shared their experiences and offered significant, and sometimes poignant, testimonies on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in public spaces, and more particularly in the university.

The situation analysis and the results obtained (presented hereafter) made it possible not only to diagnose the situation but also to produce evidence for advocacy and policy dialogue, with the aim of guaranteeing the protection of GBV victims, and promoting safe, GBV-free universities in Tunisia and Morocco. The project outputs include:

- Country Reports for Morocco and Tunisia (in French) published in electronic format on CAWTAR Clearinghouse on Gender;
  http://www.cawtarclearinghouse.org/Site%20Pages/English/Home.aspx;
- A Regional Report that shed light on the situation in the region in terms of Gender equality and GBV from a "Human Rights and Development" perspective. It also summarizes the situation analysis and the field research results in both countries;
- A summary of each report, in hard copy and electronic formats, and in three languages (Arabic, French, and English), covering the main facts, conclusions and recommendations.

The CAWTAR's Executive Director and team would like to take this opportunity to thank all the participants in the Action Research: teachers, students, managers and administrative staff for their generosity in sharing despite the sensitivity of the subject; the scientific committee for its unfailing support; the research team in Tunisia for creating a dynamic within their university; and finally the associations for their effective participation and support. Without minimizing the effective contribution of all, a special recognition is for those who have allowed this work to be done in the best conditions in Sousse, namely :

- Ms Samia Charfi, Director of Higher Education, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Tunisia,
- Professor Ali Mtiraoui, President of the University of Sousse,
- Professor Montassar Ouaardi, Dean of the Faculty of Juridical and Political Sciences, Sousse,
- Professor Kamel Jerfel, Dean of the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, University of Sousse,
- Professor Lotfi Tarchouna, former dean of Dean of the Faculty of Juridical and Political Science, Sousse,
- Professor Naila Chaabane, Dean of the Faculty of Juridical and Political Sciences, University of Carthage,
- Professor Wahid Ferchchi, Faculty of Juridical and Political Sciences of Tunis
- The students of the two universities of Sousse and Carthage for their commitment and recommendations,
- Ms Fathia Hizem, President of the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women in Sousse,
- Ms Alia Daaloul, President of the National Union of Tunisian Women in Sousse.

Soukaina Bouraoui

Executive Director,

Center of Arab Women for Training
and Research/CAWTAR

Background and framework of the action-research

The first study conducted in Tunisia in 2010 on the issue of violence against women (VAW) revealed an alarming fact: 47% of the interviewed women are victims of violence; an everyday violence often overshadowed by the façade image of Tunisian women who have acquired many rights. Studies carried out since 2014 show that 83 to 88% of the women interviewed consider that violence has increased during the Revolution, with 53% of women having been victims of violence in public spaces, 8 out of 10 having suffered sexual violence, and 70% having been subject to domestic violence. These figures indicate an increase by nearly 10% compared to the study conducted in 2010. The present document is the fruit of a partnership between CAWTAR and OSF. It includes three sections:

Section ONE presents the overall context of Tunisia, which allows us to better identify the specificities and dynamics related to the issue of gender equality as well as the role of the university. This section addresses the socio-economic situation (rising unemployment and regional social imbalance), the political situation (the new Constitution adopted in 2014), Tunisia's place globally in terms of gender equality (the best performance at the Arab level between 2014 and 2017), women's position in the job market and employment (a growing presence in various sectors, more involvement in political life), as well as the constitutional, legislative and legal framework (significant legal advances, including the organic law dated August 11, 2017 on the elimination of violence against women; Articles in the 2014 Constitution relevant to gender equality), which circumscribes the GBV issue in Tunisia today. This first section concludes with two findings on GBV in the Tunisian context: At the core of this action-research lies the issue of the disclosed or undisclosed existence of GBV, the discriminatory practices involved, and the way GBV is perceived in universities.

- The coexistence of a strong political will with a significant legal arsenal in favor of equal opportunities, on the one hand, and the impact of the everyday manifestations of the social norm, and forms of symbolic "smothering" of violence both in the moralizing discourse of men and in the "resignation" of women, on the other hand;

- Major political changes taking place since 2011, and various struggles conducive slowly but surely to this equality: adoption of a parity system for the preparation of electoral lists, lifting of the ban on Muslim women marrying non-Muslims, and enactment of the law on the elimination of violence against women.

Section TWO gets into the heart of the subject. It reviews existing knowledge on GBV in Tunisia. It also proposes a methodology for producing knowledge about GBV in public spaces and, in particular, for illustrating the study conducted in universities. This section presents the field of reflection and action on GBV: relevant actors, institutional and legislative mechanisms, socio-cultural stakes, and the strategies already in place. It reviews the international awareness-raising actions, programs and conferences on the elimination of all forms of VAW, as well as the

9

guides and publications available to date on GBV. It also reviews the major reference studies conducted on GBV in Tunisia: French surveys, the first medico-psychological surveys, the first Tunisian state-of-the-art reports (National Office for Family and Population - ONFP, 2010) on health issues, and CREDIF reports on VAW in the post-Revolution period, and in public means of transport. The work of advocacy associations, NGO networks, and academic institutions is also highlighted. Part of this section is devoted to the analysis of the literature on violence in universities: student "inferiorization" in Afghanistan, social discrimination in Ethiopia, "law of silence" in Quebec, political will in Geneva, and feminist activism in Tunisia.

This section shows that until 2010, the majority of studies focused on the private sector, with little attention given to the issue of citizenship in the public space. Since 2011, women's mobility has become smoother within a collective space that has grown increasingly open. Violence, though not necessarily on the rise, has become more visible within a media context and a public opinion that have grown more sensitive to the GBV issue. The 2011 Revolution itself broke out as a reaction to various forms of inequality (in employment, wages, working conditions...), perceived collectively as "abnormal" and, therefore, as a form of violence. The economic "exploitation" of women at work, being paid less than men, amounts to a form of discrimination and is also perceived as violence.

On the other hand, works conducted with activists in NGOs and political parties revealed the willingness of the Tunisian Revolution, with influence from women's associations, to further involve women in the social movement, in representative assemblies, and in the electoral/political process. Women represent only 23% of the members of the Tunisian Parliament, still a low presence in the high-level political sphere. The system of parity and alternation in electoral lists was then adopted on April 11, 2011. The enhancement of women's status in the public space also finds its concrete illustration in women's increasing engagement in cyber-activism as well as in the media sphere. In August 2011, Tunisia lifted all reservations to the CEDAW, (and notified the UN of its decision in April 2014), especially as regards the nationality code, the status of foreigners, and the protection of migrant women seeking political asylum[1].

This section shows that for many women, violence is represented as a "culture" (a recurrent experience) that accompanies them wherever they go, and in all their life cycles. A common point of all the aforementioned works (which also applies to the present empirical study) is to see violence from the victim's perspective, and to seek to break the associated "taboos". In this sense, the present work aims to give a voice to women victims, either by quantitatively measuring the frequency of situations and forms of violence, or through the qualitative assessment of violence in the context of everyday life.

Section 3 is devoted to the field surveys conducted in four university institutions in the city of Sousse during the period April-September 2018. It addresses the social representations of the university space, as well as the perceptions and lived experiences relating to violence: political violence, sexual harassment, victims' feelings, stigmatizing attitudes and behaviors, women as objects of morality, the avatars of sexism and the representations of violence in relation to gender challenges and social relations among teachers, students, and administrative staff. Based on the data collected and in light of the questions raised by the present study, this section involves three stages: First, representations of universities, public

---

1. In 1985, Tunisia had made reservations to certain articles of the CEDAW Convention, namely Article 9 concerning the right of women to transmit their nationality to their children; Article 15 concerning the right of women to choose their residence and domicile; Article 16 concerning the granting of the family name to children and the acquisition of property by inheritance; and Article 29 concerning the arbitration of disputes arising from the Convention.

spaces, and GBV; second, everyday experiences and stories on GBV; and finally, social actors' attitudes and reactions to GBV in universities. The report of the field study concludes with proposals and recommendations by relevant actors to combat GBV. The section devoted to the empirical analysis of GBV in universities has yielded the following key findings:

1.   City of Sousse

Sousse has a large population from different regions for work and study and, like all cities with these characteristics; it is also affected by violence against women.

2.   A public space perceived as hostile

The social representation shared by all the categories of social actors interviewed as part of this study confirms that the public space is hostile toward women. The street, in particular, is perceived as a dangerous, risky, mixed, and stained place for women. In public means of transport and in transit places, young female students are exposed to various acts of brutality and aggression.

Responses confirmed that women's presence in the public space must always be justified and related to a specific purpose such as visiting the family or accompanying the children. Female teachers prefer to go to select places for entertainment. Female students usually go to youth's leisure and sociability facilities, such as cafés, with those of them who live far from their parental home enjoying more freedom to make outings in the absence of family or community control.

3.   The university, representations and social relations

The experience of the University: The social representation of the university space is far from being homogeneous. Access to the university is for students a dream come true. Pursuing higher education is, for them, a projection into the future, a hope, a bridge toward a better social status. University years are, for female students in particular, a moment of adventure and freedom. Their experience in students' dormitories helps them break away from the family bond and become independent. But at the same time, the university is a place of frustration; a place where tolerance, openness and exchange are called into question; a place where they get to experience economic difficulties and antagonistic social relations.

The teachers' perception of the university space is associated with the notions of professional status, academic role, scientific career, and even social prestige. The status of "university teacher" gives a certain "notorious" authority within and outside the university. This status, however, is strongly marked by internal constraints related to hierarchy, rivalry, sectarianism, and clientelism. This is the other side of the coin.

The administrative body perceives the university as a professional framework. It presents itself as a service provider, with male/female employees being out of touch with scientific and academic events. For them, university life comes down to specific moments associated with certain school rituals. Often stigmatized, the administration is considered as the weak link in the university system, and is often accused of malfunctioning, bureaucracy, and archaism.

11

Representations of teacher-student relationship: Representations of the faculty members are rather tinged with a generational conflict: the student is viewed as a child in the process of learning, whose mind should be shaped. A dichotomy is very often established between "serious" and "non-serious" students. On their part, male/female students usually categorize teachers into "good" and "bad". The "ideal" teacher is the one who "mothers" his students, who sacrifices himself for his job, and whose commitment goes beyond his academic duties. The ideal teacher should have a certain charisma (by imposing order and behaving with fairness and appropriateness), and is highly esteemed for his human values.

Social relations: The university is a place for interaction. It is, however, tinged with tacit conflicts, rivalries, and mutual reproach, all having an impact on Gender relations. The professional and social relationship among male/female teachers is similar to that of chiefs of tribes or sects, being based on the subordination of those with a lower rank. Women are subjected to authority in two ways: First because they conform to the same hierarchical relationship; and second, because they suffer the domination of their male colleagues. The distribution of benefits and professional tasks is usually governed by the degree of loyalty to the "clan" and the preservation of its interests against other "clans".

12

Within the administrative body, women at the bottom of the hierarchy are poorly treated, with a stereotypical reproduction of certain (male and female) jobs in universities, such as guard, technician, and chief of staff for men, and cleaning lady, secretary, and executive assistant for women. Those who hold administrative positions in universities define moral harassment as: injustice, sabotage, bullying, and pressure, and consider that women are more likely to be poorly treated, especially those at the lower end of the scale. Moreover, instructions given by male hierarchical superiors are usually responded to more positively than those given by female superiors.

If the administrative body denies, or is not aware of, the existence of GBV in intragroup professional relations, testimonies reveal that the behavior of other actors is more aggressive toward female employees. Female staff members are more subject to verbal aggression, denigration and humiliation on the part of male/female teachers and students.

4. Universities, an allegedly protected space tinged with discrimination and sexism

Hostile or benevolent sexism: Focus is laid here on "hostile" or "benevolent" sexism toward women from all categories (administrative staff, faculty members, and students). The study shows that sexism is built at different level : harassment that is rooted in the pedagogical relationship with "subordinate" students, the power of assessment, abuse of power, and exploitation of authority relations with female students/colleagues. "Hostile" sexism feeds on stereotypes, qualifies women as "provocative", "nagging" and "less efficient", and confines them to certain professional roles.

Abuse of power with colleagues would reproduce a hierarchy in terms of status: verbal aggression during debates, monopolization of speech, degrading of women's image, moralization of women's behavior, etc... The monopolization of decision-making and leadership positions by men (in scientific committees, unions, commissions, laboratories and research units) places women, scientifically and academically, in a marginal, subordinate status.

University practices tend to promote men's professional advancement. These practices involve misogynistic, discriminatory behaviors toward female colleagues through sexist prejudices, such as "women are not fit for field work", or are more fit for domestic, family and maternity roles. The majority of hierarchical superiors support and encourage male candidates and prefer them as allies, on the pretext that they are more available and more efficient than women. This kind of behavior would lead women into self-exclusion, or into forsaking their ambitions especially in terms of professional advancement. A good "female figure" at work would thus "require" more sacrifices (be more competitive, obedient ...) and self-control (proving her skills, exemplary behavior).

Sexual harassment techniques: A harasser seeks to "save face" and to "make a good impression" by attracting the sympathy and admiration of his victim. He plays on a "self-image" to better subdue and ensnare his "prey". Harassment often takes place against girls within a context marked by the impunity of the harasser, the complicity of the surrounding environment, and the silence of the victim. The social environment legitimizes this violence by reversing roles: making the victim feel guilty and protecting the aggressor's image; more clearly, accusing the "seductive" student of "trapping" her teacher. In this sense, the harasser combines two types of sexism: "hostile" and "benevolent". Both types constitute an interactive "vicious circle": The man adopts a hostile attitude which he will offset by benevolence under the pretext of a woman's need for "recognition" and protection by men.

5.   Experiences and feelings of actors

Feelings of victims of violence/harassment: Young female students strongly denounce the aggressors' deviant behaviors, especially through denigration, contempt and anger. At the same time, some of them try to resist in the face of fear, and to develop strategies of avoidance and forms of female solidarity. They reject the moralistic judgment of their behavior or outward appearance. The feelings they expressed during the interviews were various: frustration for not having a place in the public space; the trauma of being in a state of shock and persecution, shame or self-loathing due to inability to resist or to react given the imposed silence, and powerlessness in the face of man's "authority" and the imbalanced power relationships.

Types of response to GBV and sexual harassment: First of all, there is the "majority that feels outraged". This category includes those who reject GBV and advocate changing social realities within and outside universities. Those who belong to this category believe in Gender equality and advocate for more Gender equity in the future. Then there are the "normalizers" who tend to trivialize the matter. Under this logic, situations of violence usually depend on the surrounding circumstances on the one hand, and on "respect" for the moral codes assigned to men and women, on the other hand. As such, women who do not respect the "female identity" (behavior, reactions, dress, speech, etc.) could be subjected to violence. The moralistic rhetoric supports this vision. Finally, there are those who are "passive" or "negationist", believing that men and women are not equal but rather complementary, and that "biological" gender differences compel women not to "provoke" men. A woman is thus required to control her acts and gestures, to walk quickly and control her "body techniques", and to eliminate through her dress any attractions of her body. In this sense, avoiding violence would be the responsibility of the woman in the first place.

13

The impact of social codes: Some of the teachers / administrative staff interviewed indicate that the social codes that govern women's presence in public spaces "penalize" women who get into this space without a specific purpose or at a late hour propitious for aggression. It seems, therefore, that a woman is compelled to comply with these codes; otherwise, she would be accused of having self provoked the situation of violence in which she found herself. In this sense, our respondents consider that the more a woman complies with dress codes and confines her presence in the public space to "familiar" hours and places, the lower the risks that she will be victim to GBV. Non-compliance with these codes would expose them to many risks. Accordingly, what is being questioned here is neither social codes nor men's behavior, but rather the "responsibility of the woman".

6.   The silence and the norm

The silence: Two key findings emerge from this study: First, the public space is highly "masculinized", with women either rejected or considered as a sexual object. Second, women remain silent about violence, do not file complaints, but rather internalize, trivialize, or even excuse this violence. The National Strategy document had, since 2014, highlighted the social pressure and the trivialization of violence, with 55% of women believing that violence is commonplace and does not deserve talking about it.

"Women's silence" in front of men seems to be of crucial importance. A woman would be committing a "sin" if she failed to avoid violence or broke the silence thereon. Most of the men interviewed do not accept that a woman does not consent to silence. Initially a victim, she becomes "guilty" for having spoken out about the inequality she has suffered. A woman must not, therefore, react and must avoid provoking any aggressive attitude (otherwise she would lose her "honor" to the man). As such, she is even denied her right to speak.

The norm: At the end of this study, special focus is laid on the causes of the "silence" surrounding the issue of GBV and sexual harassment in universities. This silence implies a refusal on the part of actors to get involved, and more specifically, a defense of an underlying norm that shapes attitudes and behaviors.

7.   Recommendations

The findings of the situation analysis and the Action Research (interviews and focus groups) highlighted priority issues which were organized into three broad categories of recommendations related to education and training, services delivery and finally legal and procedural issues. These recommendations could be reviewed in detail in the country report.

Beyond the above referred to findings, the discussions during the various consultations also pointed out the importance of the work, women and society should do on themselves to move forward. This is reflected in the three priority recommendations that were highlighted in terms of the necessary shift in the «social norm» that governs any change in attitudes and behaviors regarding GBV, summarized as follows:

14

1. Encouraging women to recognize that violence is the manifestation of a domination that must be denounced;
2. Making sure public authorities condemn these acts of violence, and that GBV becomes an institutional rather than a family issue;
3. Promoting the mixed nature of the public space, and sensitizing men to the rules of respect for otherness and rejection of domination, away from any so-called code of honor, knowing that recognition of otherness is a major issue in education for global citizenship.

As specified in the parts relating to methodology and implementation process, a series of meetings with stakeholders has been organized with the aim of consultation and validation of the results in order to ensure their ownership but also commitment. The students of the University of Sousse and the University of Tunis, who were more particularly targeted, also made a point of expressing their expectations and needs in terms of recommendations, the most important of which are set out here:

1. Set up mechanisms to encourage students to integrate civil society in order to familiarize them with public speaking and self-expression, such as for instance free training in personal development.
2. Organize training on gender issues and gender-based violence as an essential step to «*stop denying it, practising it, normalising it or hiding it*».
3. Create mediation centres and listening units within the universities that include trained social counsellors, including in the gender approach.
4. Develop and adopt a charter/code of ethics to fight against GBV and denounce it.

15