

Preventing Gender Based Violence in University: From Knowledge to Action towards Change

Summary

MOROCCO

**PREVENTING
GENDER BASED VIOLENCE
IN UNIVERSITY:**

**FROM KNOWLEDGE TO
ACTION TOWARDS CHANGE**

SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE ACTION-RESEARCH IN MOROCCO

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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 Executive Director and all the CAWTAR team would like to take this opportunity to convey sincere thanks and gratitude to all who were involved in the Action-Research, including teachers, students, and administrative staff, for their generous sharing despite the sensitivity of the topic. Special thanks are also due to the Scientific Committee for its unflinching support, the research team in Morocco for its willingness to move forward and for the efforts made despite difficulties on the ground, as well as to associations concerned with women and development issues, and associations acting against GBV, for their active and effective engagement and their continued support throughout the entire process.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE ACTION-RESEARCH IN MOROCCO

Background and framework of the action-research

The present study has been prepared as part of the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research/CAWTAR and the Open Society Foundations/OSFs Partnership, and in the framework of a sub-regional project. It falls in line with CAWTAR's mission, which is to “contribute to the empowerment of women in the Arab World so that they can fully exercise their human rights, economically, socially and politically, through gender- and human rights-based approaches”. To this end, CAWTAR generates knowledge with the aim of producing a core, evidence-based database to advocate against all forms of discrimination and violence against women, and to promote gender equality.

To convert the vision and goals of CAWTAR, OSFs and other partners in Tunisia and Morocco into concrete results, an action-research entitled: “*Prevention of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Public Spaces, especially in Universities: Building Evidence for Effective Solutions*”, has been conducted in universities in Morocco and Tunisia. This research aims to contribute to a forward-thinking process for the conduct of a broader and more in-depth survey whose results would later serve for purposes of advocacy.

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.

According to data collected in 2013, 35% of women around the world have already been victims of physical or sexual violence. Moreover, data from the National Survey on the Prevalence of Violence Against Women/ENPVEF reveal the magnitude of violence against women in public spaces, with an overall GBV prevalence rate of 62.8%, and with a rate of 32.9% in public places. The same source indicates that educational and training institutions are not exempt from this scourge, with a GBV prevalence rate of 24.2%.

The documentary analysis also shows that in higher education and scientific research institutions, as revealed through testimonies collected by associations⁽¹⁾, there exist, as elsewhere, inappropriate, discriminatory, and even violent behaviors that adversely affect the integrity of individuals and the course of their studies or career. There, as elsewhere, gender stereotypes and the associated inequalities, discriminatory acts, and violent practices are perpetuated. It also turns out that in universities, colleges, and training/research institutions, be they public or private, there are power relations that are likely to be conducive to acts of violence. However, for many reasons, GBV in universities, while being actually present, remains a hidden issue, as demonstrated through our field survey.

1. Association Européenne contre les Violences Faites aux Femmes au travail/AVFT, Collectif de Lutte contre le Harcèlement Sexuel dans l'Enseignement Supérieur/CLASCHES and anti-hazing associations

Action-research objectives:

General objective:

- To produce evidence-based data and information on GBV in public spaces in general, and in universities in particular.

Specific objectives:

- To fill gaps in knowledge/information on GBV in public spaces/universities, and on the restrictions imposed on women/girls in accessing these spaces, which affects the enjoyment of their rights, including the rights to education, health, work, and economic and political participation.
- To contribute to changing policies and attitudes with regard to GBV in public spaces/universities, by conducting advocacy actions and raising awareness among the relevant actors, including rights-holders and duty-bearers.

Action-research hypotheses:

Though our documentary analysis has revealed that GBV is actually present in higher education and training institutions, and because the university is, by definition, a venue for knowledge transmission whose users are generally of a high level of education, we presumed the universities to be a much more secure place for women than the public space, hence our focus in universities on the more psychological dimensions of GBV and the more discreet and less aggressive forms it undertakes in that space.

The data available on universities have guided us in the formulation of our hypotheses which rest on the assumption that the university, much like the public space, is not in the end a violence-free place. GBV is actually present in universities in various forms, including especially sexual harassment. In fact, the data collected show that the most common form of GBV in universities is sexual harassment. This form of violence is practiced by teachers towards their female students, in the absence of moral and legal institutional safeguards that could prevent this practice or allow female victims of sexual harassment to see an end to it or to obtain reparation. Such violence is thus permitted to continue in all impunity, with adverse effects on the female students' performance and on the proper functioning of universities.

To test our hypotheses, it was necessary to highlight, through the field survey, the target population's lived experiences and perception with regard to GBV in the public space as useful input that helps us better understand GBV and the forms it takes in universities. This being said, our action-research was conducted using an approach that involves two complementary levels:

1. Research and documentary analysis;
2. Lessons learned and field survey.

Research and documentary analysis:

Research and documentary analysis have gone through various stages: A review and analysis of the relevant literature, leading to the preparation of the general bibliography (national and international) on the basis of which the selective annotated bibliography and the bibliography of press articles have been produced. The lessons drawn from this process helped to define the research techniques and to develop the research tools employed for the field survey: the Interview Guide for the teachers and administrative staff, and the Focus Group Guide for the students. The exercise have also made it possible to determine the content of the action-research report which includes an Introduction, Parts One & Two, and Part Three which is devoted to the field survey (analysis, findings, recommendations and conclusion). These parts can be summarized as follows:

The introduction provides an overview about the national context of Morocco on the basis of socio-demographic and economic data/indicators. It identifies the framework of the study and the issue it addresses (GBV). It highlights the magnitude and spread of GBV across all social, economic and cultural categories, in urban or rural areas, and whatever the educational or religious context, and underlines the importance of taking these realities into consideration in order to place violence within the context of gender-based social relations.

Part One: Theoretical/conceptual framework of GBV and methodological framework of the action-research

This part reviews the theoretical and conceptual framework of GBV, by defining GBV as stipulated by the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), and as defined in Morocco by the National Survey on the Prevalence of Violence Against Women/ ENPVEF and in Law 103-13 on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. This part introduces GBV as both a general and a specific issue. It addresses GBV in the public space as a prelude to tackling the issue of GBV in universities, the focus of our action-research.

Part Two: Gender Equality, Human Rights and Gender-Based Violence

This part provides data and indicators on gender gaps and, accordingly, on all forms of discrimination that prevent women's access to their rights and freedoms. It also demonstrates the correlation between these discriminations and the different forms of GBV. The documentary research has also shown that significant progress has been made in Morocco in terms of promoting women's access to their fundamental rights (Family Code, Nationality Code, access to decision-making positions, education, health, ... etc.). Still, it must be noted that women's situation continues to be marked by persistent gender inequalities/gaps and gender stereotypes, as shown through indicators.

Morocco, in fact, ranks 137th out of 149 countries (Global Gender Gap Report 2018). The female illiteracy rate stands at 42.1%, against 22.2% for men; and access to ownership is 18.7%, compared to 80.9% for men. Women have a low presence in decision-making positions (21.5%) and in representative institutions (parliament and local authorities). Women's labor force participation rate stands at 23.6%, against 70.8% for men. The overall GBV prevalence rate amounts to 62.8%.

The documentary research also reveals that the inherited traditions (58.7%) and religious influence (9.3%) are the main causes behind the persistence of stereotypes as obstacles to women's/girls' enjoyment of their rights. It also shows that the persistence of gender gaps perpetuates the existing gender stereotypes that are deeply ingrained in the Moroccan culture.

To reduce gender inequalities and the resulting gender discrimination, and to honor its commitments under international instruments, Morocco ratified the CEDAW Convention (1993) and its Optional Protocol (2015). This being said, the country is keen on adopting the needed legislative, regulatory and public policy measures. These commitments are reflected in the 2011 Constitution, the preamble of which provides that the Kingdom of Morocco commits itself to "ban and combat all discrimination whenever it encounters it, for reason of sex".

The Constitution enshrines the principle of gender equality (Article 19). To this end, it provides for affirmative action measures (parity), along with mechanisms to ensure effective gender equality such as the Authority for Parity and Fight against all Forms of Discrimination/APALD. Besides, the Constitution prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex or personal circumstance (Article 22). This provision was reinforced by Law 103-13 on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Thus, in order to strengthen the legal and institutional framework toward further promoting women's rights, gender equality, and fight against all forms of gender-based discrimination and violence, Morocco has adopted national and sectoral strategies, policies, plans and programs of action, involving civil society and women's rights organizations.

Furthermore, institutional mechanisms have been created to provide the needed support, to supply evidence on GBV, and to monitor, coordinate and evaluate the relevant strategies, programs and action plans. Programs and care services for GBV survivors have also been established at governmental and civil society levels. These advances have been reinforced by Law 103-13 on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Still, our documentary analysis shows that although Morocco has undertaken the promotion and protection of women's rights and combat the rights of women and to combat all forms of discrimination against them, the fact remains that the approved or proposed bills have not been sufficiently aligned with Morocco's international commitments. Indeed, the process of implementing the constitutional provisions on women's rights is slow (for instance, the APALD is still not operational). Moreover, though Morocco acceded to the Optional Protocol to Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women/CEDAW (2015), it has not yet deposited the instruments of accession to give concrete expression to the entry into force of this Protocol.

In addition, some provisions of the Family Code have not so far been reformed despite the incessant claims and pressures from civil society organizations. As a result, there is still a huge gulf between the levels of equality guaranteed by international and constitutional commitments, on the one hand, and the provisions of the Family Code, especially in relation to underage marriage, filiation, inheritance..., on the other hand. These provisions have direct and indirect effects on women's rights and their participation in decision-making.

Field-testing of the action-research - Qualitative survey/ research:

Part Three: Gender-based violence in universities: Methodology and Outcomes, Recommendations

To explore the reality of GBV in universities, this part is devoted to the collection and analysis of the field data, based on the Interview and Focus Group Guides. It reviews certain aspects related to research limitations, methodology and process, results, and synthesis of the main recommendations. Though limited at national and international levels, the survey, supported by the analysis of the quantitative/qualitative data/information collected through the documentary research, has allowed drawing lessons and building the research's hypotheses, especially with regard to GBV in universities.

For reasons of availability and due to the limited time allotted to the field survey, two Focus Groups with students from Mohammed V University in Rabat were canceled. Few administrative staff were available for individual interviews. Yet, despite these limitations, it was possible to collect a number of perceptions regarding experiences of GBV in universities from the target population.

We were keen on diversifying the target population of our survey, in order to ensure the representation of different perspectives regarding the GBV issue. The interviews and Focus Groups were conducted with contacts provided and facilitated by Non-Governmental Organization/NGO partners in this project, and with others from our networks of contacts in universities. Cities, universities, interviewees, and focus group participants were chosen based on this approach.

Implementation / methodology of the field survey:

This survey was conducted with teachers, students, and administrative staff in universities in five cities in Morocco, namely Rabat, Casablanca, Fez, Marrakech and Meknes. It covered 4 universities, 6 faculties, and 2 higher institutes in these cities. It was conducted from October 8 to November 8, 2018.

The methodology used for conducting field investigations combines two research techniques: semi-structured interviews and Focus Groups. These techniques are designed to identify the respondents' representation of GBV, particularly in universities, to highlight the relevant problems and needs, and to explore with them the needed interventions and institutional actions against GBV.

Research techniques were based on two investigation tools: an Interview Guide targeting teachers, administrative staff, and students, which seeks to explore women's lived experiences of GBV in the public space, with focus on GBV in universities; and a Focus Group Guide, targeting university students. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the three concerned parties: teachers, students, and administrative staff. In total, there were 18 interviewees: 16 women and 2 men.

Regarding the interviewees' socio-demographic profile, and without this being a deliberate choice, all our interviewees from among the population of 11 university teachers were women (09), with the age range between 30 and 49 years. In terms of level of education, the vast majority of them are doctoral candidates, and only one female interviewee has a Master's degree. As for the marital status of the entire population studied, 6 are married (women), 3 are single (including 2 men), and 2 are divorced (women). There were 4 interviewees from the administrative staff: 2 women and 2 men, aged 35 to 63 years old, and all married. It was not possible to identify their level of instruction, except for the Vice-Dean in charge of scientific research, who holds a Ph.D. which she received in Morocco.

Four Focus groups were organized in two faculties (Ben M'sik Casablanca, Legal and Economic Sciences - Ben Abdellah University in Fez), in the National School of Agriculture, Meknes, and in the Batha Multifunctional Center of Fez for the Empowerment of Female Victims of Violence.

The Focus Groups, which involved a total of 29 students of both sexes, aimed at prompting new ideas and explanations that would not have emerged had the Focus Groups been limited to female students only. The approach opted for the creation of small groups of 8 to 9 persons, in order to achieve better group dynamics and minimize the risk of subgroups being formed within each Focus Group.

The socio-demographic profile of students in these Focus Groups was as follows: there were 15 girls and 14 boys, with an age range between 21 and 30 years. Their fields of study are varied, including criminal justice, law, design & merchandising, arts, chemistry, and agronomy. Their levels of study range from the first-year level to the MA level.

The main findings and conclusions drawn from the field survey have confirmed the lessons learned from the documentary analysis conducted as part of this action-research in Morocco, as well as the validity of our starting hypotheses.

With regard to GBV in public spaces:

The lessons learned from the analysis of GBV in public spaces have enabled us to understand, through the interviewees' responses, the degree of knowledge on the GBV issue and the perception of its magnitude in Morocco, and—more particularly—to provide insights about the prevalence of GBV in universities. Interviews with our target population have revealed the following:

Women are primarily exposed to psychological, physical and sexual violence in public places, a fact that restricts their access to this space, both spatially and temporally. Accordingly, the use of this space requires them to take precautions and adopt attitudes so that their presence in it will be tolerated and accepted.

For women, the public space is a risky place, full of dangers that threaten their physical and psychological well-being, and even their lives. This is a major impediment to their empowerment and to their access to fundamental rights (health, education, work, individual freedoms...). This reflects the unequal and discriminatory nature of the public space which tightens social control over the body and movement of women. Women in public places are exclusively responsible for their safety, given the indifference of people in the street who refrain from intervening when they witness acts of verbal or physical violence against them.

GBV survivors usually resort to silence. They do not react against the harms they suffer, for fear that they will find nobody to listen to them; that they will be made to feel guilty by their environment; or that what happened to them will have adverse consequences on their lives, their families, and their future.

The findings drawn from the interviews have led us to the conclusion that addressing the issue of GBV in the public space requires, in the first place, acting on gender-based social relations and on their representations. We have, therefore, proposed the following:

A number of measures that would allow to act on both individual and collective mindsets and attitudes, and at the same time to review urban and territorial policies based on a gender-oriented approach; thereby enabling women to use the public space safely and to fully enjoy their rights on equal terms with men: *Measures for protection, prevention, penalization and reparation, designed to put an end to GBV in public spaces.*

With regard to GBV in universities:

Based on the analysis of the lessons learned from our field survey with the target populations in universities, it is noted that the university is not immune to GBV. It does not differ from its social environment in terms of gender equality. It is a space which, in turn, contributes to the construction of social norms that shape gender relations, and to the perpetuation of gender inequalities.

The survey has made it possible to bring into light several facets of this unequal social construction and its impact on the academic future of female students and on the professional career of female teachers and female administrative personnel. The existence of explicit or indirect barriers (glass ceiling) standing in the way of female teachers' access to management and power positions is also among the most common forms of GBV with which female teachers are confronted. The same holds true for verbal and physical violence to which female students are exposed on the part of male students, especially during the examination period.

The findings of the survey indicate that the most common form of GBV is sexual harassment of female students by their male teachers in the university. This situation is further exacerbated, according to respondent female students, by the lack of an internal mechanism for preventing and punishing sexual harassment in universities. As a result, harassers maintain their abuses, often taking advantage of the power they have—as teachers—over their female students to sexually harass them, in all impunity.

The survey also revealed that female students are also a preferred target for some student political groups. These are groups that have given themselves the right to maintain order in the university. Their interventions can take the form of verbal intimidation, and may even reach as far as holding “trials” by “student courts” that pronounce sanctions considered by our respondents (both male and female) as arbitrary and unfair. According to respondent female students, the attitude or behavior of victims of GBV in universities oscillates between dodging, submissiveness and refusal to speak out about the abuses they have suffered. Fear of scandal, revenge, or stigmatization compels them to resort to silence.

Recommendations:

The analysis of the results deduced from this situation requires that specific measures be taken, targeting not only the university but the higher education system as a whole, in order to curb gender-based discrimination and to ensure prevention of GBV and protection of women and girls victims of GBV in Moroccan universities. The lessons drawn from the interviews and Focus Groups have allowed us to identify paths of action on two levels:

1. Strategic interventions that would make sure gender equality becomes a guiding principle in the management of universities, as well as in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of programs; thereby providing, within universities, a work/study space respectful of women's rights and free from all forms of gender-based discrimination or violence;
2. Specific interventions that primarily target women and that involve initiatives to strengthen women's power in universities, to promote their protection, and to prevent/repair the harm caused by GBV and also includes the establishment of mechanisms to be in charge of designing, implementing and evaluating these interventions in the short term, in order to curb sexual harassment. Universities should also have:
 - A regulatory scheme in their disciplinary system, with stringent provisions that, on the one hand, deter or severely punish sexual harassment, and on the other hand, establish rules that impose a civic behavior respectful of women in universities;
 - Special units for counseling and for social, psychological and even legal assistance, in order to encourage and support victims to present their grievances and complaints and to speak out against the perpetrators of GBV in universities. Partnerships can be established with Counseling Units within women's rights organizations;
 - Information/sensitization programs/actions on the legislative and institutional policies and mechanisms governing the GBV issue, in particular Law 103-13 on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, targeting all teachers, students and administrative staff. Their aim is to raise collective awareness about the gravity of GBV and its adverse impact on women/girls and on the credibility of the university. These programs/actions include roundtables with experts and professionals, dissemination of research and surveys on GBV, distribution of posters and fact-sheets on GBV, and promotion of academic research on GBV (MA, PhD...) etc.