# Breaking the Silence: An intersectional approach to sexual violence and harm narratives of women living in Lebanon

by

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## THESIS EXAMINATION INFORMATION

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The above committee determined that the thesis is acceptable in form and content and that a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by the thesis was demonstrated by the candidate during an oral examination. A signed copy of the Certificate of Approval is available from the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

## ABSTRACT

Lebanon has experienced war and conflict for the last four decades, yet there is an absence of literature on Lebanese women's lived experience of the Lebanese Civil War (LCW) (April 1975 – October 1989), and the ongoing conflict that has occurred thereafter. There are limited accounts of Lebanese women's experience of sexual violence during times of conflict, and the existing literature does not address their resilience and survivorship. The militarization of public spaces increases the vulnerability of women living in Lebanon and advances masculinization within patriarchal power structures (Accad, 1990; Farr et al., 2009, Holt, 2014; Holt, 2013; Joseph, 2012). This dissertation utilizes a qualitative methodological approach to uncover in-depth narratives detailing the experiences of violence among Lebanese women within a politically conflicted nation. The research examines the gendered social relations, exploring topics such as sexuality and the female body. Furthermore, this dissertation will explore coping strategies and the use of shelter services. It seeks to understand the perspectives of Lebanese women residing in a conflict-ridden country, as they confront and challenge prevailing cultural ideologies regarding sexual violence, victimization, patriarchy, shame, and honour in Lebanon. Examining the real lived experiences of women residing in Lebanon can be significant in advancing the field of social justice and advocating for human rights in war-torn countries.

**Keywords:** Lebanon, militarism, patriarchy, sexual violence, women

## AUTHOR’S DECLARATION

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Natalie Azzi-Mofrad

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## STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTIONS

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication. I have used standard referencing practices to acknowledge ideas, research techniques, or other materials that belong to others. Furthermore, I hereby certify that I am the sole source of the creative works and/or inventive knowledge described in this thesis.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the strong, courageous, and resilient Lebanese women and women living in Lebanon.

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS**

| | |
|---|---|
| CEDAW | Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women |
| ISFD | Internal Security Forces Directorate |
| LAF | Lebanese Armed Forces |
| LCW | Lebanese Civil War |

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Context

The violent sexual victimization of women is a ubiquitous characteristic of war. Lebanon is a Middle Eastern country that has a history marked by war, conflict, and sexual violence. These challenges have severely impacted vulnerable and marginalized groups including Lebanese women and women residing in Lebanon such as Syrians, Palestinians, and migrant workers from various developing countries. Yet, there remains a noticeable gap in the literature on Lebanese women and their lived experience of sexual violence in the Lebanese Civil War (LCW) (1975 – 1989), and the ongoing conflict(s) that have occurred thereafter, during the Israeli occupation in Southern Lebanon (1978-2000) and the Israel-Hezbollah war (July – August 2006) in Beirut, to name a few. There has been a surge of physical and sexual violence in post-war Lebanon, but there are few accounts of Lebanese women's postwar experience of sexual violence, resilience, and survivorship in the extant scholarship. Only a handful of scholars such as Charles & Denman (2013), Holt (2014), Holt (2013a; 2013b), and Usta, Farver & Zein (2008), Usta, Masterson & Farver (2016) have actively engaged in research aimed at capturing accounts of sexual violence experienced by Syrian and Palestinian women refugees in Lebanon.

In 2013, KAFA, a Lebanese NGO, reported that their hotline received 2,600 phone calls that year related to abuse and sexual violence cases (ABAAD, 2017). Further, in 2017, a national study conducted by the NGO ABAAD found that one in four women in Lebanon have been raped and less than a quarter of those who faced

sexual assault reported it (ABAAD, 2017). Consequently, women are still unsafe and underserved in Lebanon. In a conflict-ridden country like Lebanon, oftentimes, the home or neighborhood is a combat zone when local and international authorities treat violence against women as a non-priority and perpetuate masculinization and militarization ideologies. As such, gender-based violence prosecution and prevention are no longer deemed to be urgent matters by the Lebanese government (Lattouf, 2004). Also, the highest priority of the military is national security, and therefore, violence against women is ignored. Enloe argues (2002), "For many women, the home and neighborhood can be as insecure as a battlefield" (p.26). A report by Legal Action Worldwide (2021) confirms this in the Lebanese situation. In Lebanon, the most traumatic experiences that women reported during and after the war were dealing with the violence perpetrated by their husbands and male relatives. Women and girls endured a surge in domestic violence, encompassing physical beatings, verbal harassment, and sexual abuse inflicted by husbands and male relatives. This rise in violence particularly affected families compelled to live in substandard conditions due to displacement.

To improve the safety of Lebanese women, it is critical that Lebanese women's stories revealing sexual violence and harm, as well as gendered relations with authority figures during the 15 years of the civil war are understood. There is some existing research on Syrian and Palestinian women's experiences of sexual violence (Holt, 2014; Holt, 2013a; 2013b, Shalhoub- Kevorkian, 2009), but research is absent specifically from the perspective of Lebanese women and their experiences of sexual

violence. The primary objective of this dissertation is to address the research gap about Lebanese women's experience of sexual violence during and after the civil war, by giving voice to the unheard and silenced Lebanese women who have survived sexual violence and harm in the context of war. The next section discusses the statement of the research problem.

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

In examining sexual violence in war zones, it is crucial to emphasize that the physical, emotional, and other consequences of sexual violence do not vanish abruptly after the end of war conflicts. The lived experience of sexual violence by women in Lebanon has been a part of their lives in a war-torn country, causing them to experience repeated trauma. The trauma from sexual violence is compounded by the conflict and the war they have survived. The trauma that wartime sexual violence leads to devastates social life and impairs the bonds that create and rebuild the sense of community, before conflict (Erikson, 1994). Sexual violence in Lebanon must be researched to understand how women have survived and rebuilt their lives and communities after the compounded violence of sexual assault and war. It is also important to understand how sexual violence is experienced in Lebanon because a woman's sexuality does not affect her only, but also affects her family's reputation, and thus, it is compounded by a collective sense of cultural shame and honour. In the Lebanese culture, generally, a woman is responsible to avoid bringing shame upon herself and her family; thus she is culturally expected to uphold her family's honour by preserving virginity until marriage. Any act that suggests sexual promiscuity is deemed a dishonour to herself and her family. A woman living in

Lebanon must ensure that she is always in check when it comes to her sexuality (Ouis, 2009). Therefore, within a culture that places a significant emphasis on shame and honour, it becomes imperative to frame our comprehension of how sexual violence is approached in a theoretical context. This dissertation relies on two theoretical perspectives to shed light on the subject of sexual violence during the Lebanese civil war. Specifically, it draws from feminist theories, employing both standpoint theory and an intersectional feminist approach as guiding frameworks.

In this dissertation, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 women who are survivors of sexual assault living in Lebanon. The current research aims to understand how sexual violence has been perpetuated by men and perceived by participants. A secondary aim of this research is to add to the knowledge base of social responses to endemic sexual violence in a war-torn country. These stories remedy the gap in research about sexual violence and harm against Lebanese women and explain why shame, honour, and silence continue to be pervasive in their lives and culture.

In this study, sexual violence is operationalized as gender-based violence. When sexual violence is referred to in this dissertation, it can involve forced sexual intercourse including rape and marital rape, and includes vaginal, anal, and oral penetration, as well as penetration by foreign objects such as a weapon. Harm or violence is also used in this dissertation alongside sexual violence; harm and violence include physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and physical, as well as psychological coercion.

Using qualitative methods, the research questions of this study are:

1) How do the Lebanese women being interviewed understand and describe incidences of violence that have been perpetuated against them and other women?;

2) What have been (a) women's individual responses to sexual violence and harm in Lebanon and (b) what are the social responses to sexual violence and harm in Lebanon?

**1.3 Overview of Theoretical Framework**

Feminist standpoint theory (Harding, 2004; Harstock, 1998; Smith, 1999) and the intersectionality perspective (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw, 1989; Potter, 2015) will be used to frame understanding of the observations and findings of the study. Specifically, the study will be building on standpoint theory and situating the knowledge of Lebanese women within their lived experience as central to the study. According to standpoint theory, intersectional identities affect a woman's lived experience; this theory is, therefore, useful for highlighting the differences and similarities of lived experiences among women. Drawing on intersectionality as a tool of analysis that recognizes that the multiple axes of identity are fluid, intersect, and dependent on time and place, I will examine how women make sense of their lived experiences of sexual violence within war zones.

The integration of feminist standpoint theory and intersectionality is not normally used in the analysis of non-western countries; thus, in this study, a foundation will be laid

for applying feminist standpoint theory and intersectionality to a case study in Lebanon. The influence of dominant power structures on the lived experiences of women in Lebanon has not been examined within an intersectional analysis. This dissertation significantly contributes to the scholarship by including several dominant power structures, some unique to Lebanon and others more general such as confessionalism, political familism, and militarism into an intersectional analysis examination of survivors of sexual violence in Lebanon. The following is a brief overview of these power structures and how they affect Lebanese women:

a) Confessionalism interweaves social, religious, and political facets in Lebanese women's lives, affecting their rights within religious tribunals, citizenship laws, and state norms (Kisthardt, 2013). It also affects women's rights and social justice initiatives, particularly with regard to violence against women.

b) Political familism highlights the way patriarchy is established within the socio-cultural lives of Lebanese women and underscores the themes of honour and shame that control their lives.

c) It is pivotal that militarism as a power structure be included because it has been pervasive in controlling the lives of women as soldiers and militias patrol streets and neighbourhoods in the name of security. Militarism in Lebanon advances masculinization within patriarchal hegemonic power structures (Accad, 1990; Farr et al., 2009).

This section has outlined the theoretical frameworks of feminist standpoint theory and intersectionality. As outlined above, the integration of these theoretical frameworks allows for a specific focus on the voices of Lebanese women in this study. It also facilitates an examination of the distinctive power structures unique to Lebanon and how they influence the lives of Lebanese women. The narratives of women living in Lebanon will contribute valuable insights to the body to scholarship focused on the Middle East and other developing regions. The following section explores the significance of this study.

### 1.4 Significance of the Study

This research is significant for three reasons: First, this research draws attention to the obfuscation of the harm and trauma that women in Lebanon have endured during their experience with sexual violence during the civil war. Second, it further helps us understand the nuances and depths of negative experiences that women face in patriarchal countries characterised by confessionalism, political familism and militarism, such as Lebanon. Lastly, the examination of the narratives themselves can serve as a resource for practitioners, educators, law enforcement professionals, and families to gain a better understanding of the experiences faced by this marginalized group. This understanding and may encourage the development of programs, shelters, and policies aimed at helping women in dealing with their traumatic experiences by ensuring they have equitable access to justice and support.

Cultural norms of shame and dishonor have been identified as reasons for not

reporting sexual violence, as women would be further blamed for not preventing the attacks (Holt, 2014; Holt, 2013a; 2013b; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009). One of the contributions of this study is to highlight the role of shame and honour. Moreover, the social conventions of shame and honour mask the undercurrents of the frequency with which sexual violence occurs in a war-torn country. The silencing of women after sexual violence is frequently either out of fear of being killed by family members or dishonoring the family name (Gill et al., 2014). Yet, globally, Lebanese women are thought to have rights and freedoms that are far more liberal than several of the neighboring Arab countries. Nevertheless, the narratives of Lebanese women in studies completed by Holt (2014) and Holt (2013a; 2013b) demonstrate that Lebanese women do not live as freely as perceived by other countries. More narratives that capture the lived experiences of Lebanese women need to be recorded during times of war and instances of sexual violence. Such documentation will enhance our understanding of the difficulties and challenges they face due to their victimization, including the obstacles they experience when seeking assistance or support while also enduring societal criticism.

**1.5 Chapters Outline**

This chapter has outlined the context and statement of the problem, the research objectives for this dissertation, an overview of the theoretical frameworks, and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 presents a literature review on the global perspective of sexual violence and war. It also includes a synopsis of the historical and political context in Lebanon as well as the social and familial status of Lebanese women in

Lebanon. The current context of sexual violence in Lebanon will also be addressed. Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical frameworks used in the study, standpoint theory, and intersectionality. Chapter 4 presents the research methodology, data collection details, participants of the study, ethical considerations, and the interview schedule. Chapter 5 includes the results of the study: demographics and background, forms of violence experienced by Lebanese women, resistance, faith, and resilience as well as structural and institutional sources that perpetuate violence against women. Chapter 6 is a discussion of the main findings alongside the limitations of the study and future research.

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the scholarship on sexual violence in war zones, with a particular focus on the sparse literature written about Lebanon and the experiences of sexual violence. The aim is to comprehensively assess the scope and depth of research in this field It introduces the following themes: sexual violence (global and local perspectives), the historical and political context in Lebanon, and the status of women in Lebanon. Considering the nature of my study, I find it helpful to discuss the historical, political, and social contexts in Lebanon. Such an exploration provides a better understanding of the complex intricacies that have occurred contributing to the ongoing conflict and a constant state of change.

## 2.2 Sexual Violence and War Zones: A Global Perspective of Motives Behind Harm

Sexual violence during wars has been studied in Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Latin America, China, Korea, Bosnia, Israel and the Occupied Territories as well as World War II (Browmiller, 1976; Holt, 2014; Holt, 2013a; 2013b; Močnik, 2018; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009; Terazawa, 2006; Wood, 2005). In the documented wars mentioned above, one can find occurrences of sexual violence (Brownmiller, 1976). The literature on sexual violence during war is vast and focuses predominantly on women who have been victims of weaponizing rape as tools of war. In this section, I will summarise the factors behind sexual violence and wars identified in the literature. My purpose here is to recap the reasons why rape during wars occurs from the literature, to gain insight into the firsthand experiences of sexual violence in

conflict-ridden nations. Wartime sexual violence is predominantly perpetrated by men (Bourke, 2008; Engle, 2005). War rape commodifies women and their bodies and celebrates militant masculinity (Baaz & Stern 2009; Turpin, 2003). Enloe (2000) reminds us that militarization is always fraught with hetero-normative ideas of masculinity and femininity. During the 1948 Nakba in Palestine, rape was a male bonding mechanism during wartime and it was used to "punish" women for challenging rules deemed honorable, designed to uphold honour and respect (Enloe, 1988; Holt, 2014). Pappe (2006) records that on August 12, 1949, a platoon of soldiers in the Negev captured a twelve-year-old girl and she became a sex slave for the platoon. She was gang raped and, in the end, she was murdered. The Israeli Defence Force Archives holds information about how soldiers in the Haganah (a Zionist paramilitary group formed in 1920) during April – May 1948 were told to uproot and expel villagers by destroying their villages and rape was a part of this mission (Holt, 2014). When rapes occurred, it is said that usually more than one soldier was involved (Holt, 2014). During the Nakba, rape was used as a territorial cleansing tool (Holt, 2014).

Wartime sexual violence has brought about not only physical pain but emotional and psychological pain alongside national, international, and intergenerational impacts on societies in conflict. Henry (2011) alludes to the generational damage that sexual violence in war can cause. She states, "The intergenerational cycle of unresolved trauma, violence, and vengeance obstructs the fulfillment of post-conflict peace and justice, contributing to the perpetuation of conflict and suffering" (Henry, 2011, p. 4).

Women are increasingly vulnerable to abuse due to the cultural bond and traditional gender roles that are inherent within countries ridden with conflict (Raj & Silverman, 2002). Shame, silence, and taboo that stem from wartime sexual violence damage women's livelihood, identity, and psychological well-being, such that inevitably affects the psychology and well-being of their family, their children, their society, and their nation. In non-war societies, male sexual prowess and dominance are integral to gendered relations and women are assumed to be passive, causing them to be more at risk of infidelity and rape (Raj & Silverman, 2002). As a result, gender-based violence is not always recognized as a criminal offense because it is woven into being a culturally accepted act of living. In nations plagued by war and conflict, patriarchal practices such as sexual violence are amplified. This amplification, destroys the social fabric of a nation and hinder the process of post-conflict community healing because the trauma is widespread, and complex, and is not being brought to justice.

In some countries, war rape occurs alongside genocide. Henry (2011) contends that during the First and Second World Wars, there were numerous rapes of women in concentration camps and there were military brothels in occupied areas. Rape was central to the Nazi conquest during the Second World War because it was used as a tool to humiliate and destroy "'inferior peoples'" in order to create a master race (Browmiller, 1976, p. 49). Rwanika (2010) studied the effects of rape and warfare on the female bodies of survivors within the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Rwanika (2010) found that rape in the DRC has nothing to do with culture and all to do with power and control. In the DRC, rape is not about sexual impulse

and a lack of self-control, it is about intimidation and a systemic and organized mechanism of control, degradation, and dehumanization (Alexandra, 2010; Godin, 2017; Rwanika, 2010). Sexual violence has been used to control, humiliate and displace women in the conflicts of the First and Second World Wars as well as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Henry, 2011).

Nikolic-Ristanovic (2000) introduces the rationale for the occurrence of wartime rape that is connected to ethnic wars. She states that rape is understood as a kind of crime against an ethnic community and a crime against a woman, who is considered the property of a male (Nikolic-Ristanovic, 2000). She argues that rape is not a crime against the female body and a woman as an individual (Nikolic-Ristanovic, 2000). Rape is weaponized as a retaliation tool against the “other” ethnic group or religious group being attacked. Nikolic-Ristanovic (2000) identifies wartime rape as a disembodied event, however, the harm done to a woman’s body is central to wartime rape. It is an assault on women in general and on women’s bodies because in this context the act of rape can be considered torture due to the physical and psychological traumatic repercussions. This trauma is meant to debilitate the individual and indirectly, her family, community, and nation.

### *2.2.1 Legal Parameters of Sexual Violence and War Zones*

Crimes against women are still not seen as important or severe enough to prosecute. Solutions to gender-based violence are not engrained in cultures in peace, and more so in cultures of warfare and militarization. (Henry, 2011). In this section, I present documented evidence that rape, sexual slavery, sexual mutilation, and sterilization were

not referenced as instances of rape or sexual violence until recently. The Geneva Convention did not help promulgate the rights of women in conflict, especially women who have experienced wartime rape. Sharratt (2011) stated, "The Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 intended to protect civilians, mentions rape and enforced prostitution explicitly in Article 27 but again characterizes them as honor crimes. Women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honor, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault" (p. 16). The problem is that this law still refers to rape using the discourse of honor, and honor brings about the oppression that is experienced by many women living in conflict (Alexandra, 2010; De Brouwer, 2005; Sharratt, 2011; Sellers, 2002).

During the 1990s, it became known that thousands of Rwandan women were being raped, gang raped, and held in sexual slavery collectively or through forced marriage, and acts of sexual violence were normalized (Henry, 2011; Human Rights Watch, 1996). The survivors of these atrocities in Rwanda, were witnesses in court cases and perpetrators began to be prosecuted. Recently, sexual violence during war was tried as a crime of genocide, a crime against humanity, and a war crime (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009). Consequently, the definition of sexual violence during war or conflict has broadened since the 1949 Geneva Convention to include sexual genocide, sexual slavery, and forced sex through the formation of brothels during war, forced marriage, rape, and gang rape (Henry, 2011, Sharratt, 2011).

In 1993 when the Ad Hoc International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY)was created, the word "rape" became an explicit crime within a

global and enduring law (Sharratt, 2011). While the ICTY included rape in the statute, it nevertheless, continued to ignore other gender crimes concerning sexual violence, such as sexual slavery (Sharratt, 2011). For rape to be considered a crime, rather than a grave breach according to the Geneva Convention, it needs to be systemic, widespread, and within or outside of armed conflict (Sharrat, 2011). Consequently, rape was excluded from the application of universal jurisdiction (Sharrat, 2011). There is a strong gender bias within the laws that presumably prosecute war crimes and sexual violence in and outside of armed conflict. Even when war rape cases went to trial, the severity of these occurrences and their frequency was minimized. During the Nuremberg trial, evidence of rape was submitted but not prosecuted (Henry, 2001). When the ICTY trials prosecuted sexual violence rape was the only act recognized (Sharrat, 2011). Furthermore, rape was treated on an equal footing as looting and pillaging (Henry, 2011). Rapes were seen as heinous but not severe enough for prosecution (Henry, 2011). Despite evidence of rape, sexual slavery, mutilation, and sterilization, the Nuremberg Tribunal did not reference these instances of rape or sexual violence (Henry, 2011).

Henry (2011) explained how the Nuremberg trials proceeded: "When rape was mentioned at trials, it was often used to highlight the heroism of one side, pitted against the barbarity of the enemy" (p. 41). In other words, rape was used to show off the bravery and gallantry of the victors. Similarly, in the aftermath of the Second Sino-Japanese War, during the Nanking trials, specifically in the Tokyo trial, defendants were convicted of rape crimes during the Nanking invasion, but the sexual enslavement

of comfort women was ignored (Henry, 2011).

The Nuremberg and Nanking trials influenced the discourse of warfare sexual violence in a way that discredited the experiences of women. There was a hierarchy set up by both tribunals about different types of rape (Henry, 2011). Rape was expected and sometimes excused under certain circumstances of war as "justifiable rape" (Henry, 2011, p. 50). However, large scale forms of rape as part of an aggressive war were considered to be "'unjustifiable rape'" (Henry, 2011, p. 50). Moreover, sexual violence and rape were viewed as "private experiences", particularly post-World War II. It was therefore, not considered appropriate for a public forum and subsequently, an international war crimes trial (Bassiouni, 1999; Henry, 2011). Henry explained why rape needed to be kept private when he stated, "The taboo and silence surrounding sexual violence were a product of a code of morality and chastity" (Henry, 2011, p. 51). Additionally, the problem is that the legal necessity to prove consent in historical and contemporary contexts represents an obstacle within the judicial system for women who seek justice on a domestic and international scale (Henry, 2011). It is important to note that the state of wartime rape during the Nuremberg and Nanking trials is intertwined with the status of women during that period, which is why historic tribunals failed to adequately prosecute rape crimes (Henry, 2011). The exclusion of women's accounts of war from policy, judicial processes, and decision-making promulgates the continued silence about rape. In the last two decades, the neglect of cases of wartime rape, and subsequent, silence surrounding these cases, have begun to be uncovered, but there is more to be known

and more to understand when it comes to sexual violence of all forms in war and within conflict zones.

Historically, warfare has been presented through the narrative of masculine victories at the expense of women and women's human rights (Brownmiller, 1976; Henry, 2011). Rape represents a defeat of the enemy in war, and this is why it is important to highlight women's resilience and strengths during war, as a counter-narrative to the one dominated by hegemonic masculinity. As the evidence from the trials in Nuremberg, Nanking, and Rwanda above showed, war rape has often been presented as a normalized act of war. This further supports what Henry (2011) and Brownmiller (1976) have also documented. The next section will present the historical and political context in Lebanon to better understand the power structures that influence Lebanese women's lived experience with sexual violence. The historical and political context in Lebanon has affected everyone living in Lebanon, but the religious conflicts and military influence are central to the historical and political context in Lebanon. The patriarchal ideals integrated with these other factors, further exacerbate the neglect, violence and harm women experience.

### 2.3 Historical and Political Context in Lebanon

Religion plays an important role in the political and social makeup of Lebanon. Lebanon is comprised of 18 sects; six Muslim sects predominantly represented by Sunni, Shi'ite, Druze, Alawite, and Isma'ili, and 12 Christian sects predominantly represented by Maronite Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian

Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Syrian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Chaldean, Assyrian, Copt and Protestant (Saloukh et al., 2015). These sects are geographically defined; many regions in Lebanon and their respective neighborhoods are organized specifically around each of these sects.

The political system in Lebanon is based on confessionalism, which was a political state that was suggested by the French; when Lebanon became independent in 1943 (Saloukh et al., 2015). Confessionalism is a government that fuses politics and religion, whereby the distribution of power is divided among the varying religious communities' representatives of the country and run by clientelism (Saloukh et al., 2015). Clientelism involves the elite land and business owners of Lebanon who represent each confessional group in the government as mentioned above.

The political makeup of the Lebanese government consists of the president, a Maronite Christian; the speaker of Parliament, a Shi'ite Muslim; and the Prime Minister, a Sunni Muslim (Saloukh et al., 2015). While Lebanon's political, religious, and social diversity is unique, it has been the reason for its weakened state since the latter part of the twentieth century because the difference in religions has been an important factor of each conflict in Lebanon (Holt, 2014). The complexity of this confessional state has created a political system that is based on the influence of the businesses that run each influential sect (predominantly Maronite Christians, Sunni Muslims, Shi'ite Muslims, and the Druze) (Saloukh et al., 2015). The governing issues in Lebanon have reached a state where the parliament has failed to elect a president 12 times since October 2022. As a result of the diversity of the government and its representation, clashes have occurred and

continue due to the major ideological differences that stem from each sect as well as corruption. It is important to understand the historical and political context in Lebanon, as it has affected the government's lack of consensus and lack of response to issues regarding women's rights, including the government's lack of attention and response to sexual violence in the country. In this next section, the Lebanese civil wars will be further explored to understand their history, and to aid in understanding their influence on current political and social climate in Lebanon.

### *2.3.1 The Lebanese Civil Wars*

The Lebanese Civil War (LCW) (1975 – 1990), the Israeli occupation of the South of Lebanon (1978-2000), and in the summer of 2006 the artillery engagement between Hezboallah and Israel leading to Israeli retaliatory airstrikes on Beirut and the south and on the ground guerilla warfare with the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) have been the source of Lebanon's recent political and civil conflict (Holt, 2014).The continuous internal and external conflicts have jeopardized the nation's security, eroded social norms, and plunged Lebanon into an unending cycle of persistent destruction and reconstruction. The LCW erupted on April 13, 1975, with reports that it began with the conflict between the Phalangist militia (better known as the right-wing Maronite Christian political party, the *Kataeb*) and Palestinian commandos (Holt, 2014). Subsequently, the Lebanese government became paralyzed due to four different issues central to the Lebanese conflict: 1) the struggle over Lebanon's identity; 2) the reform of the Lebanese political system; 3) the Middle East conflict (Israeli-Palestinian

conflict) surrounding Lebanon and its repercussions on Lebanon's security; and 4) the threatened sovereignty of Lebanon (Shehadeh, 1999).

Syria initially joined the war on the side of the Phalangists, and later played a major role in the LCW by pursuing Syrian interests in annexing Lebanese land and expanding Hafez al-Assad's Baath party's influence in regional and international affairs (Shehadeh, 1999). Ultimately, Syria and Israel used Lebanon as a launching pad against the other (Shehadeh, 1999). Syria stepped in to help the Lebanese Army during the LCW in 1975, however, clashes occurred in 1978 when the alliance between Syrian and Lebanese forces weakened. Syria eventually was accused of becoming more of a foreign occupier than a savior (Shehadeh, 1999).

Israelis also played an influential role during the LCW. The Lebanese-Israeli border was very peaceful until 1969. In 1970 the PLO headquarters were moved to Lebanon, after their failed rebellion against King Hussein of Jordan. This solidified the presence of Palestinian guerrillas in the south of Lebanon. Lebanon and its south region was used as an operation base for raids on Israel and Israel retaliated back, both in the south and in Beirut. The impact of this move on Lebanon was one of destabilization and increasing sectarian strife, which would eventually deteriorate into a full-blown civil war (Haugbolle, 2010). On December 4, 1990, Lebanon was declared a unified city and freed of armed militias for the first time since 1975 (Thomas, 2013). In 1990, under Saudi Arabia's mediation, the *Ta'ef* Accord emerged between Lebanese Christian and Muslim communities and formally ended the LCW (Thomas, 2013). The terms of this accord subsequently deepened Lebanon's sectarian

divisions (Thomas, 2013). Specifically, the 1990 constitutional amendments usurped many of the traditional functions of the Maronite president by strengthening the Sunni-held position of the Prime Minister (Thomas, 2013). The *Ta'ef* Accord also decreed that parliamentary seats be distributed equally between Christians and Muslims (Thomas, 2013). At the locus of these conflicts were the women who were victimized bystanders and who suffered under the patriarchal guise of the LCW and at the hands of the Lebanese Syrian, and Israeli military and sectarian militias. Sexual violence against women in Lebanon will be discussed next to bring further understanding of how violence and harm are perpetuated.

### 2.4 Sexual Violence against Women in Lebanon

The topic of sexual violence is still considered taboo in Lebanon. Due to the shame associated with sexual violence, it remains unspeakable and silence prevails. Lebanon is one of many shame oriented cultures in which a number of acts, such as having male friends, going out at night as well as smoking and drinking, are considered taboo for women, and guilt is a tactic used to maintain women's obedience (Alexandra, 2010; Hynes, 2004; Skjelsbaek, 2001). The shame culture stems from patriarchal ideologies and as Holt (2013a;2013b; 2014) states, the problem of sexual violence in conflict zones, such as Lebanon, is due to patriarchy. Patriarchy in Lebanon is experienced as the father or eldest male of the family holding the power and decision-making within the family, affecting women's lives and often causing women to be oppressed (Accad, 2021; Holt, 2014;2013a;2013b; Joseph, 2011; Shehadeh, 2011). More generally, patriarchy is present in government,

society, and all institutions, whereby men hold power and women are mostly excluded from participating actively in society or decision-making (Shehadeh, 2011). As Browmiller (1976) argues, a situation in which men hold power and women are excluded is considered the “male solidification of power” (p.18). Instances of sexual violence and harm are seldom reported in Lebanon to preserve the woman’s honour, confirm her obedience, and avoid tarnishing her and her family’s reputation (Holt, 2013a; 2013b; 2014).

In 1982, a Palestinian participant in Holt’s (2014) study talked about her experience in Lebanon as a refugee, specifically when the Israeli soldiers used physical and psychological intimidation against her. Detainees like herself experienced sexual threats and were deemed “bad women” and “bad mothers” as well as accused of being prostitutes as an excuse to threaten them with sexual violence, while playing on the shame culture and the concept of *honourable behaviour* (Holt, 2014).

One participant in Holt’s (2014) study indicated that sexual violence took place during the LCW by the Phalangists and Lebanese Forces at Tel al-Zaater refugee camp in the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacres (Holt, 2014). This account was mentioned in an interview conducted by Holt (2014), who was studying violence within Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. On September 16, 1982, the Sabra and Shatila Massacre occurred in Beirut where Christian Lebanese militia, supported by Israeli soldiers, killed 400,000 civilians, mostly women and children (Holt, 2014; Nuwayhed al-Hout, 2004). It was also said that many girls and women were raped before being killed (Holt, 2014; Nuwayhed al-Hout, 2004). Sexual violence is

common in the context of genocide, as we have seen in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia (Meger, 2016). Nevertheless, the Sabra and Shatila Massacre was one of the first recorded instances of genocidal rape in Lebanon.

After the Israeli army withdrew from Lebanon (in 1990), there was another type of conflict, one often referred to as the Amal War (Holt, 2014; Sayigh, 1994). This was an extension of the LCW where, the Maronite-led Lebanese Front and the Shia Amal Movement were at war with the PLO. Hence, the South Lebanon conflict can partly be seen as an extension of the civil war that ended in 1990 (Human Rights Watch, 1996). During this time of conflict, fighters from all three groups committed rapes (Holt, 2014; Sayigh, 1994). Shame, trauma, and honour are psychological and cultural barriers to reporting or talking about sexual violence during wars (Pappe, 2006). As stated above, honour is very much tied to the moral behaviour of women and girls (Holt, 2014). Sexual violence during war becomes a gendered threat and a weapon against personal, familial, and societal honour. An example of sexual violence used as a threat was the way Israeli soldiers used this threat against Arab civilians in Palestine and Lebanon during the Sabra and Shatila Massacre (Holt, 2014; Whitehead, 2007). Fear of sexual violence was a prime motive for both Palestinians and Lebanese fleeing their countries during war (Holt, 2014).

When uncovering how ethnic conflict turned into genocide in Lebanon during the LCW, Kreidie and Monroe (2002) found that

> “Every killer claimed he killed because he had no choice that he had to do it to protect himself or his group. The violation of psychological boundaries—the

> perception of threats to group identities—played a critical role in the move toward ethnic violence" (p. 32).

The ethnic conflict recorded here offers a perspective on how varying ethnic groups in Lebanon fought against each other during the LCW and later conflicts, including committing acts of genocidal rape. During the LCW, there was a re-classification of the "other" based on one's religion and ethnicity, which facilitated violence against women and violence more generally.

As seen in previous wars and countries in conflict, sexual violence is used to defeat the physical, psychological, and emotional well-being of civilians. Holt (2014) stated, "One of the most pervasive manifestations of violence against women is the use of rape, as "'an efficient weapon for demoralization and humiliation'" (p. 55). Rape is used as a tool, predominantly by men to subjugate women and exert their power over them (Holt, 2014). Consequently, rape needs to be understood as "'a form of mass terrorism'" (Holt, 2014 p. 55; Griffin, 1971). Furthermore, Zajovic (1994) explains that rape is about male defeat on the ground and not about subjecting women to pain and suffering. Rape is not only a means of exerting power over women but in instances of war and conflict it also is exerting power over enemy men using the bodies of their women as the weapon (Accad, 2021; Holt, 2014; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009). Sexual violence and rape during wartime are not just committed by the enemy, but women are more likely to experience the same by their men due to heightened tensions and aggression that come with war and living in conflict (Accad, 2021; Holt, 2014; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009). Accordingly, we need to recognize that the real problem

of sexual violence in war is about power and control (Accad, 2021; Holt, 2014; Holt, 2013a;2013b; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009). While there are women who are beginning to speak about their experiences with violence, the concept of speaking up is new. Islamic conservative groups that are growing in Lebanon are discouraging the talk about violence against women, using religion to convince women not to speak (Holt, 2014). Ironically, religion has also become a comfort for these same women and is used as a resistance to violence (Accad, 2021; Holt, 2014). The experience of sexual violence in Lebanon is complex as it is woven with historical wars central to religious conflict and cultural ideologies stemming from patriarchy, power, and control, all of which will be further discussed in this next section.

## 2.5 Women Living in Lebanon: Patriarchy, Family Honour, Gender Bias, and Social Status

To better understand how Lebanese women live in Lebanon and how they are treated, it is helpful to give an overview of some important components and power structures that influence Lebanese society. Political familism, the status of women, and gender bias as well as family honour and sexuality will be presented.

### *2.5.1 Political familism*

Before delving into the discussion of the status of women in Lebanon, it is important to understand the social makeup in the country and the basis of its cultural, ideological, and institutional structure, as well as its belief system. Lebanon is a collectivist society, based on political familism. It is a political system that privileges

family, and consequently, patriarchal families are considered the norm in Lebanon (Joseph, 2011). While political familism is not at the forefront of the politics of confessionalism, it is an ever present characteristic of the political and social values in Lebanon.

The dominant ideology within political familism is that citizens and the state recognize the family as central to politics and social life (Joseph, 2011). Political familism is found in all facets of Lebanese society including within religious institutions and educational institutions, to name a few. The ideology of political familism also trickles down to Lebanese society and seeps into everyday lives. Through the influence of political familism, it is understood that decisions are made by the male heads of households and women follow these decisions. Men and women inherit their socio-economic status, political affiliations, gender specific roles, and social identity from their families (Abul-Husn, 1993). Consequently, women have limited roles within Lebanese society because it is founded in political familism. This is the reason why a woman's primary role in Lebanon is to take care of the family before she marries; and once she marries, she must have children and care for her family (Ammar, 1996, see also Ammar, 2007). Political familism is based on a shared value system and individual decision making is non-existent without the consent and approval of the parents, especially the men in the family. If a decision is made independently of the family, women become outcasts. Family relations become strained when a female member of the family does not consult the family unit regarding any decision to be made in her life (Joseph, 2011). Family relations and

family- like relations (i.e. kinship relationships) are the foundations of social life in Lebanon and also underpin the courts and legal system (Joseph, 2011). Through political familism, gender bias and the status of women is revealed, and will be discussed in this next section.

*2.5.2 Status of Women and Gender Bias in Lebanon*

Legally, women living in Lebanon are presumed to have childlike incompetency (Lattouf, 2004; Wehbi, 2002). Economically, women are seen as temporary workers who cannot be trusted with challenging work and professions, and who should, therefore, possess very few rights and benefits (Lattouf, 2004). The social system is usually hostile and violent towards women because they are viewed as passive, sexually submissive, and exist to meet men's needs (Lattouf, 2004). Patriarchy and gender bias are ingrained within Lebanese society and are consistent across the realms of social class, religious affiliations, ethnic background, and educational attainment (Lattouf, 2004; Wehbi, 2002). While Lebanese women are expected to pursue higher education, female obligations such as marriage, child rearing, and household duties always supersede educational and professional endeavors. The more educated a Lebanese woman is, the more opportunities she will have for suitors to ask for her hand in marriage (Lattouf, 2004; Wehbi, 2002). As a result, women are not fully involved and present within the economic and political system. Women who are powerful and educated are seen as a threat to the sex-based roles within Lebanese society; thus, a woman's education does not change gender

disparity (Lattouf, 2004).

Education is easily accessible to women in Lebanon, but education has not allowed Lebanese women to obtain decision-making positions in numbers (Khallaf, 1995). The education that a Lebanese woman obtains is simply a value added to the family unit (Wehbi, 2002). The duty of a Lebanese woman is to be a wife and a mother, and this conditioning crosses all religions, socio-economic backgrounds, and nationalities in Lebanon (Khallaf, 1995; Lattouf, 2004; Wehbi, 2002). Lebanese women are taught to be passive, dependent, and subservient. Any woman who defies this identity is labelled negatively and viewed with harsh judgement (i.e., stubborn, daring, threatening, aggressive, gay, non-marriage material, traitor, etc.) (Lattouf, 2004). A woman's ambition to have a career is equated to rejecting marriage and the family, the two most valued areas in a woman's life according to Lebanese socialization (Lattouf, 2004; Stephan et al., 2015). Education and socialization maintain the ideals of patriarchy (Lattouf, 2004; Stephan et al., 2015).

Religious law and how it fits into the Lebanese legal system via religious courts is an important factor in living life in Lebanon. In Lebanon, patriarchy exaggerates the biological differences between the sexes and institutionalizes these differences through a binary system (Lattouf, 2004; Stephan et al., 2015). All humans are either male or female; there are no classifications or room for "in-betweens" (Lattouf, 2004, p. 10). Patriarchy is also embedded in the legal codes and courts. Specifically, religious law is not concerned with democratic justice or equality (Lattouf, 2004; Stephan et al., 2015). Justice and rights are interpreted based on religious documents by male religious

scholars (Lattouf, 2004; Stephan et al., 2015). Religious law views women as dependent beings, whose sole role is to bear children (Ammar, 1996, see also Ammar, 2007; Lattouf, 2004; Stephan et al., 2015). Religious law aims to uphold and preserve the patriarchal family (Lattouf, 2004; Stephan et al., 2015).

Further, married women in Lebanon who are in abusive situations do not leave and do not call the police out of shame and feelings of helplessness (Lattouf, 2004; Stephan et al., 2015). It is not customary to call the police on one's husband because familial matters are private, and it would be an embarrassment to invite a stranger to resolve a conflict in the home (Baydoun, 2011). Rather, women rely on their family and friends in times of need, but oftentimes women who experience abuse keep their experiences to themselves out of fear of repercussions from their husbands or their families (Lattouf, 2004; Stephan et al., 2015). Consequences of divulging abuse can result in further abuse in the home, the shaming of the woman by her husband, her family, and her in-laws, and in some instances, honour killing (Lattouf, 2004; Mansour, 2020; Wehbi, 2002; Welchman & Hossain, 2013). Also, when women do confide in their friends and families, they are told to live with it and accept their circumstances (Lattouf, 2004). Women are also blamed for their husband's behaviour, causing alienation and isolation in cases of family violence. This causes women to feel hopeless and they begin to internalize their inferiorities and oftentimes, are thus complicit to the enforcement of patriarchy (Lattouf, 2004; Stephan et al., 2015). It is important to mention that the status of women and gender bias discussed here is a typical cultural profile, and there are always exceptions to these rules such as Amal

Clooney, the late Linda Matar, and Myrna Boustani, first woman ever elected to parliament (El Chamaa, 2022). Next, the concept of family honour and the policing of a woman's sexuality as central to Lebanese culture, will be explored.

### *2.5.3 Family Honour and Sexuality in Lebanon*

The violence experienced in Lebanon is contingent on the history of the civil war and conflict. Furthermore, patriarchal values require that women uphold the honour of society and that men protect this very honour (Holt, 2014; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2005; Warnock, 1990). The Arab-Islamic society values the notion of "family honour", whereby one's dignity, status, identity, and public esteem are linked to how one's family is regarded by the larger community (Holt, 2014). In the majority of Arab countries, honour is defined by a woman's familial and sexual role, dictated by the traditional and patriarchal familial ideology (Holt, 2014). 'Honour' limits women's involvement and participation in politics, education, and employment (Holt, 2014). Oftentimes, women in Lebanon and most of the Arab world are discouraged from committing to duties and activities in the public sphere to preserve their honour embedded in gendered roles.

The concept of "rape culture" is still present in Lebanese society and it is related to the sexualization of women, sexual assault on women and men, domestic violence, and the normalization of objectification of the other gender (ABAAD, 2013). Rape culture is defined as sexual violence against women that is inadvertently or consciously encouraged and normalized (Shebaya, 2016). Women in Lebanon are

often blamed for anything that happens to them, including when sexual violence instances against them have taken place (Lattouf, 2004; Welchman & Hossain, 2013). Most recently, awareness and anger towards the Lebanese "rape culture" rose after the Lebanese MP Ellie Marouni stated, "In some cases, we need to ask if women play an active role in pushing men to rape them" (ABAAD, 2013). Women are usually blamed for the occurrence of sexual violence and harm; as such, the responsibility to remedy the situation is placed on the very female who seeks help or intervention.

Honour is a very important part of a woman's identity in the Middle East and it is associated with a woman's integrity, altruism, and good moral character (Gill et al., 2014; Roberts, 2014). Wikan (2008) maintains that individuals in communities that value honour are equally concerned with avoiding shame. Shame is said to be a transgression against the expectations that maintain honour (Gill et al., 2014). Women are held responsible for upholding honour and when there is perceived transgression, women are accused of dishonouring the family. The code of honour in Lebanon implies that honour may be restored if the female who caused the shame pays a price (Lattouf, 2004; Welchman & Hossain, 2013). To redeem family honour, she must be killed as it is said that the blood "washes away" family dishonour (Lattouf, 2004, p. 27). In some communities the adult males of the family meet and hold a council to discuss and decide the outcome of the dishonour (Lattouf, 2004; Welchman & Hossain, 2013). The reason women are expected to pay for the family honour is that it is culturally assumed, through patriarchal ideals, that women are weaker and less useful in the family because they drain the family financially, while men contribute to the family economic resources, and are

considered to be productive members (Lattouf, 2004; Welchman & Hossain, 2013).

The murder of women based on honour is grounded on a system intertwined with socio- cultural gender norms designed to enforce patriarchal values (Ertürk, 2012). Women who dishonour their families are killed by their male kin (i.e., father, brother, uncle, cousin) to avoid any revenge killing by the presumed offended party (Lattouf, 2004; Welchman & Hossain, 2013). Guilt or innocence does not need to be established and mere suspicion is sufficient for an honour killing to occur (Lattouf, 2004; Welchman & Hossain, 2013). Within the idea of honour, men's violence is seen as a *natural* male trait (Lattouf, 2004). Masculinity in Lebanon is understood to encompass aggression, as such, violence is necessary to make one a real man (Lattouf, 2004). Furthermore, violence is seen as a natural way to show superiority (Ellis, 2017; Lattouf, 2004).

For young women in Lebanon, naivete, sexual passivity, and virginity are the ideal (Lattouf, 2004; Reddy 2014). If women exhibit the opposite, they are blamed for tempting men and for the results of this temptation (Lattouf, 2004). Lebanese men connect violence with their manhood; as such, they protect their honour by controlling women's bodies and sexuality (Lattouf, 2 004; Welchman & Hossain, 2013). Women are seen as possessions of the patriarchal family; it is thus assumed that women's bodies belong to their male relatives, and once married to their husbands (Lattouf, 2004; Welchman & Hossain, 2013). A woman's virginity represents the family's honour and thereafter, the honour of her husband, and it must be checked (Lattouf, 2004; Reddy 2014). Women's bodies are seen as chattel, and thus, the male decides the

fate of her body (Lattouf, 2004; Welchman & Hossain, 2013). Consequently, community aid for women who experience sexual violence and harm can be challenging.

### 2.6 Community Aid and Sexual Violence in Lebanon

Bartels et al. (2010) maintain that in the chaotic environments of war-torn countries, such as Lebanon, it is challenging to monitor and evaluate gender-based violence programs. Since the prevalence of shame and taboo about sexual violence is still dominant in Lebanon, there is an absence of studies and information about community aid for women who have experienced gender-based violence, such as sexual violence. Culturally, violence against women is seen as a family issue that should not be handled by anyone outside of the family, including the police or the criminal justice system (Raj & Silverman, 2002). A woman receiving help for violence triggers the unspoken rules about shame and honour, as asking for help and/or reporting violence, including sexual violence, shames her father and/or husband and brings dishonor to the family; therefore, women usually ignore the abuse (Raj & Silverman, 2002). Women who experience violence may either approach their closest female friends or nuns, but they are often encouraged to remain silent about the matter and fix their relationship with the abuser (Raj & Silverman, 2002).

At the moment, the known NGOs that are fighting gender-based violence (GBV) are ABAAD and KAFA. ABAAD was founded in 2011 to lobby for change in the area of violence against women. They run a shelter with a plethora of resources for Lebanese,

Palestinian, and Syrian women who experience violence. One impactful program recently launched was Jina-Al-Dar [translated as We have come home], where a bus travels the streets of the most marginalized regions in Lebanon providing access to women who need assistance with health, education, and/or legal advice (ABAAD, 2020). KAFA, [translated as, Enough] with the implicit notion of enough Violence and Exploitation. KAFA is another activist organization known for its work with women who experience domestic violence, sexual violence, and prostitution. They offer a 24-hour helpline and advocacy services for women in Lebanon (KAFA, 2019). Other than these two organizations, little is known about social support NGOs for women living in Lebanon.

Human rights issues involving women in Lebanon are usually placed on hold. The justification used is that there are more pressing issues in Lebanon that need attention (Lattouf, 2004). Sadly, human rights activists who lobby for change in favor of women are accused of being unpatriotic and of using threatening tactics toward a nation that is fragile and rebuilding (Lattouf, 2004). Women's legal status is connected to the confessional system and laws tied to religious courts (Lattouf, 2004). As such, the government does not want to create more religious tension, which may reopen the religious aspects of the conflict (Lattouf, 2004). The exploitation of women is either dismissed as untrue or deemed less important than the demands of nation building (Lattouf, 2004). Women are assured that once the threats of society subside, the government will respond to their matters (Lattouf, 2004). Nevertheless, women are left in a perpetual state of uncertainty because the conflict in Lebanon continues to intensify. In this next section, the gap in the literature will be presented.

## 2.7 Gap in Literature

The literature that comes close to the subject of sexual violence during war in the Middle East is from Accad (2021;1990), Cooke(1996), Holt (2013a;2013b;2014), and Shalhoub-Kervorkian (2009). Nevertheless, the literature either addresses the experiences of Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories, Syrian refugees living in Lebanon or Lebanese women who are in professional positions such as educators, lawyers, and social workers, etc.

The review of the literature identifies multiple gaps in the existing qualitative research on sexual violence during wars in the Middle East. Lebanese women's experience of sexual violence during war has not been studied and has scarcely been documented. Specifically, qualitative interviews of women's experience of sexual violence in war and conflict have been conducted with Palestinian and Syrian refugees living in Lebanon (Holt, 2014; Holt, 2013a; 2013b; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009); however, there is a gap in this research on Lebanese women living in Lebanon and their experiences of sexual violence during war and conflict. There is an additional gap in qualitative research on Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese women's collective experience of sexual violence in war and conflict in Lebanon. There is a further gap in research about how sexual violence occurred during wars in Lebanon and how it has affected women. Finally, there is also no literature on how Lebanese women receive help, if any, from the Lebanese criminal justice system as well as from NGO programs, services, and shelters. As a result of these significant gaps in the literature, sexual violence against women in Lebanon is not always recognized as a criminal

offense because it is woven into a culturally accepted act of living.

My contribution to the gap in the literature not only involves sharing insights from the lived experiences of Lebanese women who endured sexual violence during the war and conflict, but also entails assessing their responses. This viewpoint considers the significance of intersecting factors such as gender, political familism, confessionalism, and militarism in shaping their experience of sexual violence, given their complex, interrelated identities (Bilge & Collins, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989). Further, understanding the intersectional lived experience of Lebanese women who endured sexual violence in a war situation can reveal the extent to which social services and justice policies in Lebanon protect and empower women, while also identifying opportunities for future research.

**2.8 Conclusion**

Sexual violence in war zones is commonplace, but it has not yet been studied thoroughly in Lebanon. Literature about sexual violence during war initiates a dialogue on this topic in a country where it is considered taboo. When studying sexual violence within a conflict-ridden country like Lebanon, it is important to consider key social and cultural influences on the lived experience of women, such as being groomed to be a "respectable" woman from a young age, as well as taking responsibility in avoiding shame and maintain honour. Patriarchy and family shape the participants' perceptions and life experiences in conflict zones. The historical and political climate of political familism, confessionalism, and militarism is also significant, as the nuances of these

power structures inevitably influence Lebanese women's experiences generally and those who endured sexual violence more particularly. The literature review in this chapter is the backdrop of the study and will inform the interviews with participants. The following chapter discusses this dissertation's theoretical framework, namely, standpoint theory (Hancock, 2007; Harding, 2004; Harstock,1998; Smith, 1999) and intersectional feminism (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Cho, 2013; Cho, et al., 2013; Collins, 2000; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw, 1989, hooks, 2006, hooks, 2004).

# CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## 3.1 Introduction

In this section, the theoretical frameworks of standpoint theory and intersectionality will be presented, as they are this dissertation's guiding posts. Both standpoint theory and intersectionality will be discussed in relation to sexual violence and harm, and their importance when discussing the experiences of women living in Lebanon. Standpoint theory and intersectionality will also be reviewed relative to the power structures present in Lebanon discussed earlier: confessionalism, political familism, and militarism. This section will also explain how these two theories, which were born in the West, can be extended to cultures in the Middle East, by way of applying them to the lived experiences of Lebanese women.

## 3.2 Standpoint Theory

Standpoint theory was developed in the 1970s and 1980s. It was coined by American feminist theorist, Sandra Harding (2004) to classify epistemologies that emphasize women's knowledge. Smith (1999), a scholar rooted in feminist standpoint theory, critiqued the notion of objectivity and objective methodologies. Objectivity excludes human interference and knowledge arising from data external to the researcher (Harstock, 1998). Based on this critique, Smith (1999) highlighted the lived experience of women, which introduced the non-universal and non-neutral positioning to sociology. Understanding the lived experience of a woman from a subjective stance recognizes that not all women share similar experiences; and thus, women's experiences cannot be recognized as universal. The lived experience of one group of women may be affected by

some varying identities and/or social structures that another group of women would not have experienced. Further, Smith (1999) introduced the concept of bifurcated consciousness, which highlights the stories of lived experiences which are missing from "objective" methodology in the traditional social sciences. She argues that objective knowledge is, in fact, biased by a set of patriarchal, historical, and social ideologies that represent those in power and in turn, causes women to negotiate between dominant knowledge and their lived experiences (Smith, 1999).

Smith (1999) explains that social relationships are often based on unequal power dynamics, found in dyads such as instructor-student or parent-child. Nevertheless, traditional lines of inquiry fail to examine these power relations and how they impact what people are doing and experiencing in a given local site. According to standpoint theory, the central focus is on the relations and their context, and how they generate multiple distinct experiences (Smith, 1999). The examination of those distinct experiences uncovers the realistic influence of power relations, social structures, and their influence on people's lives. Standpoint theory begins with the exploration of women's lived experience that is not defined by power relations (Smith, 1999). Standpoint theorists reconstruct sociological inquiry to focus on people's daily experiences and advocate for research to "speak from particular, historically specific, social locations" (Harding, 2004, p. 4). Standpoint theory is about formulating knowledge from the standpoints of women outside the mediated conversations of the ruling discourse. Standpoint theory, in particular, is situated in the particularities of everyday life experiences of the women (Harding, 2004).

Standpoint theory provides a compelling vantage point in articulating women's lived experiences in a social world dominated and defined by masculine norms. Thus, the standpoint approach reflects a feminist challenge to the patriarchal production of knowledge. Standpoint theorists identify how women's work, interests, and concerns are neglected by the traditional ways of studying social structures and explore how this can be remedied (Harstock, 1998, p.89).

Based on this theoretical insight I chose to design my data collection instrument to involve in-depth interviews with participants. This decision aligns with Smith's (1999) perspective which notes that, "opening inquiry by beginning in the actualities of people's lives as they experience them does not mean making them the objects of research" (p. 8). Smith (1999) asserts that sociological projects should aim to delve into the explanation of people's behaviour and how the influence of power structures in people's lives are embedded in the way life is experienced. The connectivity and unity within women's lived experiences that Smith (1999) illuminates becomes significant for the objective of my research, which is to treat participants as co-producers of the work. As Smith (1999) argues, ways of communicating within universities, the media, books, and/or other forms of publication exclude women, even though women are everywhere. In the current literature, Lebanese women's narratives of sexual violence have not received much attention in written publications. According to standpoint theory, authority is rooted in a person's knowledge (Smith, 1999). Thus, my research also aims to capture Lebanese women's experiences and to present Lebanese women's stories and standpoints based on their own experiences and their own narrated truth.

Moreover, Smith (1999) points out that organized women's movements have often been represented principally by white, middle to upper class women. I, therefore, aim to build upon Smith's (1999) observations by identifying the voices of women from the Middle East and their experiences within a country like Lebanon, which is militarized and where women live a very different type of feminism than the western feminisms. I also find it useful to incorporate the insights of intersectional feminism or intersectionality into my approach, as it recognizes the layered identities of women and how their interactions with social systems shape both their privilege and oppression within their lived experiences.(Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Cho, 2013; Cho, et al., 2013; Collins, 2000; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw, 1989, hooks, 2006, hooks, 2004).

**3.3 Intersectional Feminism**

Contemporary feminist criminologists have already begun to attend to issues of class, race, gender, age, sexuality, nationality, religion, and physical ability through intersectional feminism (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Cho, 2013; Cho, et al., 2013). In the late 1970s, feminists from developing countries found that their experiences were underrepresented in mainstream feminism and critiqued the majority-group counterparts who spoke on behalf of all women (Burgess-Proctor, 2006). Third-wave feminism, which emerged during the 1980s and 1990s, focused on multiplicities of identities and affirmed and supported multiple genders, races, and sexualities (Burgess-Proctor, 2006, p. 31). Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) introduced intersectionality to describe Black women's experiences with violence. Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (2000) added the

systemic aspects of intersectionality by highlighting the structural matrix of domination. Within the concept of the matrix of domination, Collins (2000) describes multiple forces of privilege and oppression as dependent and situated in our social structures' historical and cultural foundations.

Intersectionality addresses the issue of essentializing the voices of white, heterosexual, and economically privileged women as speaking for all women (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Sokoloff et al., 2004). Some feminism attempts to create a universal stance by claiming that all women have a shared experience (Burgess-Proctor, 2006). As a result, the universal approach found in liberal feminism, radical feminism, and postmodern feminism, for instance, is reductionist because it assumes that all women are oppressed by men in the same way (Burgess-Proctor, 2006). Intersectionality dismantles what liberal, radical, and postmodern feminists assume is a unified voice (Crenshaw, 2001). Daly and Chesney-Lind (1988) argue, "One of the many challenges for feminism in general and feminist criminology, in particular, is the paradox of acknowledging diversity among women while claiming women's unity in experiences of oppression and sexism" (p. 502). Nevertheless, the approach of feminist criminology leaves out the "multiple burdened" (Cho, 2013, p. 391) experiences of women of colour, women of different religions and those from different classes. It is these identities that intersectionality theory highlights because it considers the multi-faceted aspects of one's identity and explores how the dominant structures of society work with these identities (Burgess-Proctor, 2006). Intersectionality is a perspective that moves away from a "false

universalism" toward examining other locations of inequality (Burgess-Proctor, 2006, p. 34).

Further, intersectionality solves the conundrum of universality and difference so commonly found in the debates within feminist thought through its relationality (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Collins & Bilge (2016) write, "Relational thinking rejects either/or binary thinking, for example, opposing theory to practice, scholarship to activism, or blacks to whites" (p.27). Relationality within intersectionality affords the analysis of multiple identities and how they function within the interpersonal domain of power (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Relationality facilitates an understanding of how race, class, and gender collectively shape global social inequality (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Intersectionality proponents promote a contextualization of the subject matter and the research being undertaken. Intersectionality fuses relationality, power relations, and social inequality in a social context (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

Crenshaw and Collins also critiqued the single identity politics prevalent in feminism and challenged the structures of oppression and privilege (as cited in Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). Consequently, intersectionality arose from the feminist research completed thus far, and intersectionality authors have linked crime and inequality with a more informed framework grounded in Black feminism, critical legal studies, and critical race theories (Cho et al., 2013; Potter, 2015). Intersectionality proponents may challenge the status quo with their multiple societal anchors and as such they have introduced a perspective that focuses on the marginal voices that have not had a chance to break through the dominant culture. Intersectionality modifies and contests current social

dynamics and re-conceptualizes how we need to think about multiple social forces such as gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, geographical location, and the various aspects of our identity.

Hill Collins (2000) refers to the *matrix domination* within intersectionality, whereby people are socially situated based on their differences from each other (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Collins, 2000). For example, a Black woman will experience the workplace differently than a Black man. Burgess-Proctor (2006) interprets gender as socially constructed through the interlocking systems of gender, race, class, and other points of inequality. Therefore, the multi-facets of one's identity intersect with one another, influencing how they experience privilege. This experience is contingent on their socio-economic, political and other positioning. Intersectionality also draws attention to how the intersecting systems of power are manifest in various structural levels (i.e., race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, etc.) and are components of social interaction, as well as social structure (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Hancock, 2007). As indicated by Burgess-Proctor (2006), "The intersectional approach recognizes that race, class, gender, sexuality, and other locations of inequality are dynamic, historically grounded, socially constructed power relationships that simultaneously operate at both the micro-structural and macro-structural levels" (p. 37). Subsequently, intersectionality permits the researcher to understand different forms of subordination and privilege. People do experience these simultaneously since no group can be entirely privileged or oppressed (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; MacDowell, 2013). Therefore, one's social location

and the influence of micro as well as macro structural levels shape an experience, including experiences of sexual violence.

Cho et al. (2013) wrote, “The analysis of the overlapping structures of subordination revealed how certain groups of women were made particularly vulnerable to abuse and were also vulnerable to inadequate interventions that failed to consider the structural dimensions of the context” (p. 797). Theories that examine the single-axis framework fail to inform how resistance strategies work against non-inclusive policies that aims to dismantle racialized gendered systems functioning under the assumption of neutrality (Cho et al., 2013). Through the lens of intersectionality, the challenges, and impediments women experience in receiving help for sexual violence cases are brought to light by understanding the influences of resistance strategies, non-inclusive policies, and power structures that perpetuate racialized gendered systems. As Zaidi et al. (2014) argue, “Failure to recognize and examine these intersectionalities renders the ignored position and identities and their intersections invisible and leads to the essentialization of a singular position or identity” (p.34). Moreover, feminist theories prior to intersectionality do not challenge the generalizations within feminism and the universality of women’s experiences. Intersectionality challenges and reveals generalizations made by these feminist theories about women’s lived experiences in the positivist approach. Intersectionality is a corrective for the overemphasis on generalizability, as it enables valid knowledge claims can be made without using a positivist approach (Hancock, 2007).

Some authors critique intersectionality and do not recognize it as a valid social scientific perspective. They see it as serving to further marginalize the people whose voices have not been heard or included in social science research. Crenshaw confirms, "Intersectionality's articulations within law challenged the putatively universal subject of antidiscrimination law and, later, the antiviolence movement and in anti-domestic-violence interventions" (Cho et al., 2013, p. 791). This rigorous manner of connecting the dots of varying identities presents intersectionality as a counter-narrative for the reproduction of hegemonic policies. Intersectionality further demonstrates the various prongs of patriarchal privilege at work in our society (Anderson & Scott, 2012). Scholars use intersectionality to avoid reproducing the results of structural forces of patriarchy. Intersectionality is not simply a political viewpoint; it incorporates systematic empirical methods that allow for an exploration of what it is like to live as a victim (Burgess-Proctor, 2006), as will be explored later in this study. Burgess-Proctor (2006) argues that intersectionality is an optimal perspective that mediates intersecting systems of inequality such as class, race, and gender and can be used with qualitative or mixed-methods designs. Intersectionality allows for a combined strategy between its interest in sensitive discussions of personal experiences and its interest in power and privilege. Thus, it goes beyond just being a political viewpoint and is a good partner with qualitative research (Burgess-Proctor, 2006). Cho et al. (2013) indicate, "Therefore, in-depth follow-up questions that antecede more general, broad-based interview questions may grant researchers greater insight into participants' self-reported experiences with intersecting race, class, and gender systems" (p. 800). Intersectional analyses demonstrate how the

structure of inequality is at once racialized, gendered, and classed for women of colour (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

Intersectionality has also been critiqued by multiple authors for having a vague methodology. This is evidenced by Jibrin & Salem (2015), who argue that intersectionality does not have a clear methodological preference. As a result of this unclear methodology, Jibrin & Salem (2015) point to two problems; one is that it is insufficient to study the intersections of social categories without understanding how they were constituted. The second problem they identify with intersectionality is its methodological ambiguity, causing feminists with contradictory ontologies to work under one framework, intersectionality. In response to this critique however, MacDowell (2013) maintains, the intercategorical methods within intersectionality are geared toward discerning the categories of intersection, and they identify changes in relationships between social groups. She further states that the intercategorical methods within intersectionality enlighten the researcher on intersecting categories of the structures of domination, as well as how they are founded and reproduced (MacDowell, 2013). Intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological tool is important because it includes the viewpoint of the multiple identities within marginalized groups; it further affords an analysis of interactions of the multiple categories and views these as overlapping and influencing each other through one's experience (Olofsson et al., 2014).

Intersectionality can assume many different forms. Intersectionality as an analytical tool is a form of thinking and doing research (Cho et al., 2013). According to Collins & Bilge (2016), intersectionality is used as an analytical tool to resolve problems

of discrimination, for instance. Collins & Bilge (2016) confirm that intersectionality has been used as an analytical tool with people in the Global South. Using intersectionality as an analytical tool enables a better understanding of power structures and their influences on global inequality (Henne and Troshynski, 2013; Patil, 2013). Intersectionality has become useful as a human rights framework. Collins & Bilge argue, “The engagement of intersectionality and human rights has potential implications for sharpening conceptions of social issues as potential human rights violations” (p. 97). Intersectional analyses, specifically in the field of violence against women, help illuminate global trends within the realms of social justice, understanding intersecting power relations and human rights (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Limiting intersectionality to its analysis of class, gender, race, sexuality, physical ability, and age reduces the point of analysis to nuanced variables such as political-religious-social regimes. Such a limited analysis ignores the non-western systems of oppression, and levels of examination that influence a person's identity, such as social power structures seen in developing countries like Lebanon. Therefore, categories of analysis within intersectionality need to reflect the several overlapping systems of oppression, resistance, and analysis in non-western countries. Intersectionality theorists encourage researchers to engage in an in-depth investigation of cultural analysis and encourage the researcher to be mindful of the layers of one’s identity and how they are influenced by the dominant structures already in place. Intersectionality brings us more to the complexity between the unitary experiences of women and their differences by acknowledging the varying layers of their identity and the differing inequities they face from these very identities. As such, intersectionality is a more inclusive and

comprehensive theory that allows for the analysis of multiple identities and their function within the structures of our society. Burgess-Proctor (2006) argues that intersectionality proves the equal-treatment model to be wrong because, under the ideology of gender neutrality, women's status is measured against the dominant male norm instead of one based on experiences of the marginal. Some would argue that Burgess-Proctor's (2006) different approach to intersectionality is dangerous because it takes away from women's equality (Burgess-Proctor, 2006). However, the difference highlighted by intersectionality stands for a broader perspective of women's different needs and experiences based on the complexity of identities of privilege and subordination that intersectionality exposes.

### 3.4 Standpoint Theory and Intersectional Feminism in Lebanon

Standpoint theorists argue that the ruling discourse in social scientific knowledge must be countered. The theory pairs well with the goal of this study, which is to provide a Middle Eastern perspective on women's lived experiences in Lebanon that goes beyond western frameworks. Standpoint theory locates people's lives in relation to social structures and powers (Smith, 1999). Hence, this study aims to demonstrate how social structures in Lebanon such as political familism, confessionalism, and militarism are embedded in the lived experience of Lebanese women and how these structures affect their experience of sexual violence and living in conflict. Lebanese women's lived experience of sexual violence and living in conflict has been a "concealed standpoint" (Smith, 1999, p. 43) and limits our understanding of women's lived experience in the waring parts of the Middle East. Standpoint theorists recognize the gaps in knowledge of

firsthand-experiences of women who live in the majority world, especially those who have endured sexual violence in a war-torn country such as Lebanon. Harding (2004) argues that standpoint theory focuses on the historical and social locatedness of knowledge projects, which can transform the experience of oppression into one of liberation. Using the concept of knowledge production in standpoint theory, researchers can contribute to social justice projects. Standpoint theory is used to empower oppressed groups by valuing their experiences as knowledge that offers insight and presents an "oppositional knowledge" to the dominant discourse in white feminism (Collins, 2000, p.10).

Intersectional feminism was a response to white feminism, affirming that social and political identities (i.e., race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, etc.) intersect with one's experience of oppression and discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989). Specifically, Crenshaw (1989) argued that intersectionality is a useful tool for understanding the interaction of racism and sexism in the experiences and lives of women of colour who are survivors of domestic violence. Crenshaw's (1989) work educated scholars in understanding that domestic violence services are usually directed to white women and not women of colour. Particular social locations of women based on race, ethnicity, class, immigrant status, and familial relationships shape women's experiences of sexual violence and demarcate the available options for dealing with their situations (Josephson, 2005). Consequently, policy and programs need to be responsive to the needs of underserved women and elucidate how race, class, and gender work within one's identity, and thus are enriched by the lived experience valued by the theoretical framework of intersectionality.

The intersectionality perspective allows scholars to examine the structural causes of violence against women. Intersectional scholars caution researchers about the inaccurate representations of marginalized women who are experiencing violence (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Crenshaw, 1991; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). Intersectionality enables the researcher to explore the role of culture in understanding violence against women and the responses to this challenge (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). More specifically, within my study, intersectionality is used to illuminate our understanding of the underlying dynamics of violence against women in Lebanon including the confessional system, political familism, and militarism, as well as the lack of responses to prevent women from harm. The multiple facets of privilege and oppression are situated in the historical and cultural foundations (Collins,2000). In Lebanon, the historical foundation is closely aligned to the ever-present wars that solidified the conflicts within the confessionalist system as a major cause of these wars along with the cultural foundations of political familism and militarism.

In Lebanon, particularly in recent years, socio-economic status, religious background, and the neighbourhood where one lives are a reflection of the cultural foundations of its confessional system, political familism, and militarism. Those factors influence how participants experience life in conflict. Through the use of an intersectional lens, the specific experiences of Lebanese women based on the identities mentioned above can inform policies that address their needs, their culture, and their challenges. While the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is present in Lebanon, policy definitions and responses are based on Western thought and

ideologies. Intersectionality offers a counter-narrative to the Western view of these topics. Hancock (2007) maintains, “Intersectionality is sympathetic and applicable to both the structural level of analysis and individual-level phenomena via its domains of power thesis, which recognizes the various terrains on which politics plays out-structural and interpersonal” (p. 74). Intersectional feminism engages in the breakdown of these structured levels that influence women’s way of life (i.e., family, confessionalism, military) to understand how each participant in the study experiences gendered relations within these realms.

The use of intersectionality within my study provides us with an understanding of Lebanese women’s experiences of sexual violence and harm in a politicized war zone. For instance, the answer of a Lebanese Christian woman and her experience of sexual violence and harm may differ from one who comes from a Druze, Sunni, or Shi’ite background. Class, religion, and region where the participant lives are added to the layer of the analysis and initiate a richer description and understanding of participants’ experience of sexual violence and harm. Intersectional feminism within this study also informs us about Lebanon's broader social and political climate regarding confessionalism, political familism, and militarism. Analyses within intersectionality enable a multi-level and comprehensive approach that engages with the individual and structural factors of policy making across the varying categories of difference within one’s identity (Hancock, 2007). Furthermore, intersectional subordination within intersectionality has the ability to advance insights from marginalized communities (MacDowell, 2013). Within the framework of intersectional subordination, burdens and

pre-existing vulnerabilities inherent in one's identity and shaped by social structures, offer knowledge from underrepresented groups. As Jibrin & Salem (2015) state, intersectionality is an intervention to liberal feminism that "sidelined 'race' as an unimportant aspect of feminist research" (p. 8). Race, among other aspects of identities that can lead to experiencing oppression, has not been examined in liberal feminist theories. Intersectional theorists like hooks (2004), Collins (2000), and Crenshaw (1989), encouraged researchers like myself to center on the aspects of participant identity and understand how multiple identities interact with the social categories and social structures in place (Cho et al., 2013). The logic of sameness and difference explored by intersectional theorists shed light on a more testable approach than any previous feminist theories, especially for women in the Middle East (Cho et al., 2013).

In seeking social justice for Lebanese women who have experienced sexual violence and harm, intersectional feminism as an analytic framework can provide an understanding of women's perceptions of the political and the personal (Crenshaw, 1989). The narratives of Lebanese women in this study have the potential to initiate change in consciousness and social relations that intersectionality promotes as a component of political change (Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 2006; hooks, 2004). More specifically, sexual politics needs to be built from the ground up, informed by women's experiences (Harstock, 1998). Thus, for practical change to begin in Lebanon including its laws and policies on sexual violence and harm, the narratives of Lebanese women in this study can raise the awareness and encourage women to reclaim justice for their rights and their bodies.

According to Crenshaw (1989), women's oppression can be a source of knowledge. Intersectional feminism empowers vulnerable groups by valuing their experience and presents "oppositional knowledge" (Collins, 2000, 10). Hence, the narratives of Lebanese women's experience of sexual violence and harm are a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse. Intersectionality is a subjective experience, whereby structural issues, social positioning, and everyday practices intersect in time and space. It is a perspective that examines a more complex, nuanced, and dynamic understanding of the social world. It is a conceptual instrument that asks us to bear witness to the experiences of others, with the objective of finding common ground—a standpoint—from which to act.

Crenshaw (1991) argues that intersectionality is needed to address the problem of violence against women of colour, which is also relevant for Middle Eastern women. Intersectionality has not been used to examine women who have experienced violence in the Middle East. Remedies cannot be found by considering women as homogenous group or gender (Collins & Bilge, 2016). It is important to move away from looking at the topic of violence against women through a single lens and applying intersectional analysis to uncover the deeper complexities of this problem. Intersectionality values truth-telling and narrative traditions unique to theoretical foundations in feminism (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Intersectionality is a theory that closes a conceptual gap because it focuses on the multiple social categories and offers a tool of analysis to understand the workings of these multiplicative identities (Olofsson et al., 2014). The multi-layered axes of difference in intersectionality add detail and value to the research on discrimination and

social justice initiatives (Olofsson et al., 2014). Ultimately, the work of intersectionality theorists has proven to be meaningful in examining gender through the lens of difference while acknowledging the role of power and its influence on gender relations (Olofsson et al., 2014). Burgess-Proctor (2006) argues that intersectionality successfully attends to the issues of dominance and power through differences of experience while claiming universal relevance.

Women of colour and marginalized ethnicities have been overlooked. Intersectionality welcomes more diverse voices to join feminist theory because understanding the lived experiences of unprivileged women is needed to deepen the analysis of inequality and oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). The western feminists conceptualizations of sexual violence, shame, and honour have not been sufficiently explained issues pertinent to minority and world majority women. Intersectionality expands the analysis of the lived experience of women living in Lebanon.

The single-axis framework by previous feminist theorists has their inquiries into the experiences of the privileged members within feminism and thereby erased the voices of marginalized groups. Intersectionality corrects the underrepresentation of marginalized voices. Crenshaw (1991) contends, “The focus on otherwise-privileged group members creates a distorted analysis of racism and sexism because the operative conceptions of race and sex become grounded in experiences that represent only a subset of a much more complex phenomenon” (p. 140). It is the case for Lebanese women represented by a subset of women who do not share the experience of living through conflict or

experiences of Lebanese women especially within the context of political familism, confessionalism, and militarism. The concepts used in intersectionality encourage the complexity of the testimonies to emerge where knowledge building is based on the lived realities of these women and their political struggles.

### 3.5 Conclusion

Many streams of feminism, such as standpoint theory (Smith, 1999) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) call scholars to study the lived experience of marginalized groups. Building on the insights and stance of feminist standpoint theory, I will employ intersectionality to analyze the dimensions of difference in participants' positions within systems of power. This study uses the framework of intersectional feminism to interpret the empirical data. Within the existing literature, an intersectional analysis of the lived experience of Lebanese women living within a conflict zone has not been conducted, nor have the theoretical frameworks of standpoint theory and intersectionality been used to inform analysis. Consequently, the contribution of this study will lie in using standpoint theory and intersectional feminism to unravel the complexities of the lived experience of women living in Lebanon who have endured sexual violence; a war and conflict ridden country that is patriarchal and militarized, with influences of a multitude of religions and political familism at its core.

The intersecting, as well as fluid political and social identities highlighted by standpoint theory and intersectionality, allow for understanding the Lebanese women's experience of sexual violence and harm during the civil war with a cross-cultural

perspective. Intersectional feminism in the context of my study allows for a counter-narrative to how Lebanese women's experiences have been recorded in historical, political, and social contexts. Further, standpoint theory enables the development of a sociology informed by women's standpoints, which begins with the particularities of women's everyday experiences (Smith, 1999). The actualities of women's lived experiences are paramount to discovering how women experience life as survivors of sexual violence and conflict that is outside of the confines of structured institutions (i.e., religion, family, etc.) and patriarchal ideals. Standpoint theory and intersectionality provide a theoretical gateway for women's lives to be researched, to create a counter narrative to patriarchy, and give an explanation of how women's lives have been defined.

# CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

## 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the method used to conduct this research, as well as outline the data analysis. More specifically, the data collection rationale, sampling method, sample size, and analysis utilized will be discussed. Additionally, the location of data collection, recruitment strategy, honorarium, risks, and reflexivity will follow. Lastly, the instrument of data collection, the interview guide, and the core themes in the interview schedule will be defined.

## 4.2 Location of Data Collection

Originally, the research was to be conducted in person, with women who live in and/or use the services of a violence against women shelter in Lebanon. However, due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, the research study became one that was conducted online, via Zoom and WhatsApp applications. The name of the shelter will not be identified to respect the anonymity and security of participants as well as the security of the founders and workers of the shelter.

The shelter is a not-for-profit and charitable organization that provides women with access to basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing to begin their journey of building their lives and strengthening their status within Lebanese society. The shelter operates on and with a commitment to anti-discrimination, maintaining a non-sectarian stance, and extending a warm welcome to all, irrespective of race, class, or religion. The shelter's mission is to work with women who experience various kinds of violence in

Lebanon and raise community awareness and education in hopes of breaking the cycle of abuse and violence. Volunteers and professionals offer their services. They support and encourage women as they endure to overcome their traumatic experiences.

The shelter was founded in 1994. The shelter's founders initiated their efforts by opening their homes after encountering a woman who had suffered mental and sexual abuse by her own father and brother. The woman had asked for shelter after running away from home and this is where the support began. The woman’s decision to seek shelter after escaping her home, marks a pivotal moment for their journey of support. The founders witnessed the abuse of women both in their academic research and while growing up during the LCW, during which time they too faced issues of abuse by men within their own families and communities. Thus, due to a lack of significant support from either the government or civil society’s social systems, the founders decided to establish the shelter, which offers a sanctuary to alleviate the suffering related to violence and abuse experienced by both men and women. As scholars, they realized that writing and researching might improve conditions, but in combining them with activism, they would have access to the lived experiences of the survivors and, more importantly, provide real support and practical remedies for people experiencing violence.

I have known the founders of the shelter and some workers at the shelter since 2012. I have presented in person workshops and have been a support person for women who shared with me their experiences. My involvement in the shelter has given me the opportunity to understand the functioning of the shelter and some programs offered to survivors. My connection to the shelter for so many years has also allowed me to build

and foster trust with the founders and workers of the shelter. Gaining trust is the key to a successful research led by in-depth interviews (Clark, 2017; Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). This trust enabled participants who did not know me, to see me as researcher who is a trusted ally in the goals of the shelter and empowering women who have come for aid.

### 4.3 Sample and Procedure of Data Collection

#### *4.3.1 Participants*

The participants of this study are women who have stayed at the shelter for a minimum of three days. Ten female participants between the ages of 21 and 47 were a part of this study. The sampling strategy began with a convenience sample, with the recruitment of participants from the shelter, and a snowball sample was also used as some participants referred me to other women they knew. I aimed for a larger sample size, but due to COVID-19, intake into the shelter had substantially decreased because Lebanon was on lockdown during the period of data collection, and movement in the country was very limited. Further, the electricity in Lebanon had proven to be a challenge at the time, making it difficult to get a hold of potential participants as well as to schedule interviews. Data was collected using semi-structured individual in-depth interviews (via Zoom and WhatsApp) based on a cross-sectional design to fill the gap of unrecorded stories and events lived by Lebanese women who have endured sexual violence.

For this study, in-depth interviews work optimally when attempting to fill the gaps in women's lived experiences. As previously mentioned, Lebanese women's stories

have not been recorded and in-depth interviews allow for the thick description[1] and promote details into the unknown perspectives of Lebanese women. Rubin & Rubin (2005) indicate that in-depth interviews can remedy the issue of the absence of records of the forgotten groups during times of war, and this would include women's perspectives and experiences. As a result, studies that focus on in-depth interviews remedy the omissions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Online interviews were conducted in Arabic for a time frame of 6 months. Data collection for this study is guided by the aforementioned overarching research objectives reviewed in Chapter 1 and proceeding interview questions (appendix 1). The basis of the study was explained to participants alongside ethical considerations so that participants can understand the parameters of the study, and how voluntary participation works.

*4.3.2 In-Depth Interviews and the Interview Schedule*

In-depth interviews were exploratory and qualitative in nature. Using qualitative methods enables the discovery of a topic and allows for the integration of women's lived experiences, voices and perspectives to be expressed and further understood. Interviews lasted about 1.5 – 2 hours. In-depth interviews contained some quantitative questions to further understand the social, religious, and ethnic identity of the participants. Open-

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[1] Clifford Geertz (1994) uses the term thick description to describe how participant's accounts can provide cultural context as well as meaning to human behaviour, contrary to a thin description, which strictly presents factual accounts.

ended qualitative questions followed to understand the participants'experiences of sexual violence and their coping methods. Participants were asked about their religious beliefs and their experience concerning gendered relations within their upbringing and family structure. Participants were also asked about gender bias and double standards within patriarchy, their experience living in conflict, experiences with the military and police as well as with the shelters and support for sexual violence in Lebanon.

The interview schedule begins with questions about demographic characteristics and their individual as well as familial background. The next set of questions set out to address women's experiences and social relations within the family, the criminal justice system, the military, and social services. This set of questions provides the opportunity for the much-needed voice of women and their experiences with violence including that of patriarchy in their own words. The set of questions that follow address the participants' experiences living in war/conflict zones and any unwanted attention or contact from military/police, as well as Lebanese civilians living in Lebanon. These questions delve deeper into the instances of sexual violence in conflict, and narratives that are absent in sexual violence and war literature. Next, a set of questions focuses on reporting and receiving help for cases of sexual violence. These questions allow for a further investigation of how shelters in Lebanon function and whether they aid women with their experiences and challenges. Perceptions of the justice system and perceptions of sexual violence in conflict are the basis of the next set of questions. Such questions provide insight into how Lebanese women experienced war and instances of rape. The aftereffects (i.e., physical, mental, emotional, etc.) of the incidents are also discussed. These

questions are exploratory in nature since there is a lack of previous research on the topic. After the completion of the interview, a debriefing followed.

Probing questions were used throughout the interview, which revealed answers that contextualized the cultural and social context to their stories, leading to subjective discoveries of  meanings and explanations from participants about their lives. These discoveries allowed for a thicker description of the participants' lived experiences with sexual assault in Lebanon. There were many opportunities for probing during the interview process. For example, I probed participants further about their experiences of patriarchy and how they were treated differently than males in their households and within society. I probed on matters of their experiences with unwanted male contact and their experiences after the sexual violation as well as their coping strategies. I also probed the participants about their experiences or lack thereof with the criminal justice system and how their sexual violence cases were handled whether they were reported or not reported.

#### *4.3.3 Ethical Considerations*

Before the interview started, a consent form was presented to participants and permission to record interviews was obtained from the participants. The participants also received an information letter, outlining the details of the study and my contact information during recruitment. The consent form indicated that participants have a) The right to withdraw from the study at any time; b) the right to stop the interview at any time without penalty; and c) could refuse to answer or skip any question that they did not feel

comfortable answering. Participants were reminded of these at varying points during the interview or if discomfort was felt/witnessed. Participants were also reminded that they could take breaks at any time during the interview. The consent form explained to participants that all data would be confidential and anonymous. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through a) providing a pseudonym for each participant instead of using their real name; b) identifying information was not recorded; and c) transcribed interviews were stored on a secure hard drive and a backup storage server, which is password protected. I am the sole person who has full access to the data. The right to withdraw from the study at any time was included in the consent form and was reminded during the interview.

One-on-one interviews occurred online, and participants were on-site. A psychologist was on-site to see participants after the interview for a debriefing or if they needed to talk about feeling upset, uneasy, or disturbed during or after the interview. At the end of the interview, visiting the on-site psychologist at the shelter was offered to each participant. Shelter users know the staff well, including the psychologist, and they felt comfortable receiving a debriefing from them. Due to the sensitive topics that arose during the interviews, the interviewing process was emotionally difficult for me at times. Consequently, I had a debriefing with a psychologist in Toronto weekly during and after the interviewing process. I kept a daily journal where I recorded my thoughts and emotions during the entire interviewing process and afterward. I scheduled one interview on a given day and not more so that the interviewing process did not become emotionally cumbersome and overwhelming. I had also taken one day off in between my interviewing

days to plan positive activities such as spending time with my family and friends to help me calibrate my mental health and to alleviate the upsetting incidents I heard in the interviews.

Studies have shown that survivors of sexual violence who spoke about their experience of rape feel that it is cathartic (Campbell et al. 2009; Henry, 2011; Mocnik, 2018). The in-depth interviews provided value to participants because it was confirmed to me by some participants that the interview was cathartic as many have not had the opportunity to express and share their experiences with anyone. Participants felt a sense of benefit because, through the in-depth interviews, the information can serve social justice initiatives and can increase knowledge about survivors' experiences with sexual violence and receiving help. The information collected can enhance the safety of women and have the potential to improve the way cases of sexual violence are handled in Lebanon. The information in the interviews can be used as a foundation to create policy within policing and the courts, to protect women from sexual violence and in improving procedures about such cases. Next, the recruitment strategy and honorarium will be discussed.

### 4.4 Recruitment Strategy and Honorarium

Participants were recruited from the shelter via purposive and snowball sampling. Participants who had been interviewed as well as other women at the shelter were asked if they knew participants who may be interested in participating in the study. Some participants did come from referrals. The gatekeepers at the shelter were also a part of the

recruiting process and some participants were referred by them. All participants received $25US transferred to them via Western Union at the end of the interview to show appreciation for their time and participation. Participants received the honorarium regardless of full or partial completion of the interview. Participants were not coerced into answering any questions that made them feel uncomfortable, and they were encouraged to feel in control of when they can end the interview and when to continue if a break occurs.

### 4.5 Data Analysis

The study is based on grounded theory, involving an inductive approach during the data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The feminist intersectional approach that guided this study is coupled with a reliance on the principles of grounded methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), where the aim is not to verify theories but to generate theoretical concepts and build theories from empirical data. Grounded methodology was deemed to be appropriate for this study because no research on sexual violence has been conducted with women in Lebanon, thereby permitting the collection of salient concepts useful for building further quantitative or qualitative explorations. As feminist researchers, activists, and practitioners have long argued, the credibility of rape survivors has always been in question; therefore, methodologies that work to validate participants' experiences and conceptions are best suited for this type of research (Bergen, 1996; Davis & Srinivasan, 1995; Dutton, 1996; Wehbi, 2002).

An inductive approach is used to enable nuanced perspectives of the women's lived experiences on general themes, allowing their voices to inform the interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2003). Research findings were based on emerging themes and patterns that arose from the data (Creswell, 2003). Emergent themes were drawn from analyzing interview narratives repeatedly. The data was used to provide context to the subsequent questions and themes regarding the theoretical framework and literature about sexual violence and war. The interviews shed light on themes of patriarchy, non-militarized sexual violence, familial trauma, identity/agency, shame, honour, experience with shelters as well as self-efficacy and resilience. The participants interviewed are not representative of a population, and results are not generalizable (Creswell, 2014). However, they offer an exploratory window into a larger phenomenon of sexual abuse in Lebanon (Luker, 2008). The value of qualitative research is the description and themes that stem from the context specific site of the interviews (Creswell, 2014).

Once data collection was complete, the interviews were translated from Arabic to English by the researcher, transcribed, and analyzed based on research objectives. Accuracy of translation was completed via member checking (Creswell, 2014), whereby interviewees were sent a copy of the transcription via a secured document. Further, professional translators were consulted to ensure accuracy of translated transcriptions. A thematic analysis was done based on the model recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1994) to explore the perceptions and experiences of sexual violence in Lebanese women's lives. Qualitative responses were analyzed several times to define the coding process. Codes were based on overarching research objectives defined in Chapter 1.

Codes were defined based on keywords and/or phrases in the narratives. Categories and subcategories were defined by using a thematic and emergent coding strategy. Coding was done on the computer with different colour markers to provide codes for the subthemes. I also kept a journal to record insights and impressions during the interviews and after the interviews. These were also coded using the same method discussed above.

The first round of coding, open coding, was completed to find initial codes, categories, and themes (Kozinets, 2010). After the first sets of codes were defined, a thematic grouping was completed based on emergent patterns and themes presented in Chapter 2, the Literature Review. The second round of coding was done via axial coding where codes are integrated within a theoretical model (Creswell, 2014; Kozinets, 2010). Finally, the third set of coding was completed via selective coding, whereby the interconnection of categories and themes begin to weave a story about the data collected (Creswell, 2014). Major themes included: Forms of Violence Experienced by Lebanese Women, Resistance, Faith, and Resilience, as well as Structural and Institutional Sources that Perpetuate Violence Against Women. Themes and data were organized to take into consideration standpoint theory and intersectionality as well as sexual violence and war literature.

**4.6 Reflexivity**

Confirmation bias is the researcher’s tendency to interpret new evidence as confirmation of their own existing beliefs, ideologies, or theories (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). Malterud (2001) maintains that the position and background of the researcher will

affect the choice of investigation, the angle of the research, the methods chosen, and the framing of the communication about the topic and the communications of the study's conclusions. Being an insider, a Lebanese woman who was raised within a Lebanese culture despite being born and raised in Canada, confirmation bias can be a challenge, but as will be seen later, my insider and outsider positioning was a benefit to the interview process.

Reflexivity is important in this matter and considering my role as the insider/outsider. My identity as an insider (Lebanese woman) has allowed me to build trust with participants. Participants knew that I am Lebanese, and this made participants comfortable and to freely discuss their experiences about the country and the culture, without having to ask if I understand what they mean and without having to leave out any experiences that they may assume I do not recognize. Survivors who had been interviewed about their experience in Campbell et al.'s (2009) study expressed that they wanted to interview with someone who understood them whether it was shared personal experience or not. Furthermore, possessing an insider role allows for a rapport (Couture et al., 2012) to be built, allowing for more detailed responses in in-depth interviews. Consequently, to create more of a conversation in the interview, I would concur that I had witnessed the experiences they identified. My role as an insider also comes into play because all of the participants knew of my connection with the shelter, and they trusted the gatekeepers and anyone they work with. As a result, participants were also comforted by the trustworthiness I had built with gatekeepers, and by extension, participants trusted me and my study as much as they did the gatekeepers.

However, being from Canada places me in an outsider position as I have never lived in Lebanon and have not had socio-cultural experiences similar to participants living within a conflict-ridden country. Consequently, this may have caused some participants to feel distant from me, but this was not shown or expressed by participants. Nevertheless, my outsider position can be considered to be helpful because Lebanese culture is very much about who people know and being disconnected from people in Lebanon may have made me more trustworthy as a researcher because I have no access to community members. Feminist objectivity is about situated knowledge, not about splitting the subject and the object (Bolak, 1997). Hence, my insider-outsider status becomes relevant to the research and this self-reflexive account bridges my role as a researcher to the researched.

Aside from my insider/outsider position, it is important to note how one conducts the interviews also builds trust, especially with survivors of sexual violence. My approach to the interviews was non-invasive, where I used my active listening skills and let the participants be in control of the interview and how much information was given to me. Campbell et al.'s (2009) study revealed that survivors appreciated that they were given control over how much of their stories to tell. Campbell et al. (2009) found that participants valued how interviewers listened to the stories of survivors using engagement and empathy, which was central to my role as the interviewer in this study. I also gave the opportunity to participants to speak at their own pace, without judgement. I practiced patience during the interview so that participants can speak as freely as they liked about their experiences. To further foster trust, bearing witness (Campbell et al., 2009) to

participant’s stories and experiences was sufficient, and allowed for deep and meaningful discussions. The ethical considerations discussed with participants, ensuring participants were comfortable during the interview and actively listening paved the way for trustworthiness. The seeming disconnect we would have experienced because the interview was via Zoom or WhatsApp was not felt. Many participants had expressed that they felt comfortable speaking with me, and they felt like they knew me and considered me like a sister. As a result, I do not believe that interviewing via video affected the quality or thick description of the responses in the interviews.

### 4.7 Conclusion

Finally, this dissertation attempts to inform upon and answer the following research questions via the main finding and analysis of the data: 1) How do the Lebanese women being interviewed understand and describe incidences of violence that have been perpetuated against them and other women?; 2) What have been (a) women’s individual responses to sexual violence and harm in Lebanon and (b) what are the social responses to sexual violence and harm in Lebanon? The results section in Chapter 5 will provide a detailed account of the responses of participants based on the overarching themes that stem from the research questions. Personal experiences and subjective perspectives will be captured as best as possible to reflect the lived experience of participants.

# CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

## 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I review the results of the study that answer the following research questions: 1) How do the Lebanese women being interviewed understand and describe incidences of violence that have been perpetuated against them and other women?; 2) What have been (a) women's individual responses to sexual violence and harm in Lebanon and (b) what are the social responses to sexual violence and harm in Lebanon? The results are presented in sections including demographics and background, forms of violence experienced by Lebanese women, their acts of resistance, faith, and resilience, along with structural and institutional origins of sexual violence against women. The results in this study reflect the lived experiences of women living in Lebanon who were interviewed. While it is difficult to generalize from an exploratory study, this study is informed by voices of women who endured sexual violence in Lebanon during war and conflict. The following section presents the demographics of the participants interviewed.

## 5.2 Demographics and Background

A total of 10 female participants living in Lebanon were interviewed. The average age of participants in this study was 31 years old. Seven participants were native to Lebanon and three participants had moved to Lebanon and had been living in the country for at least two years. Four participants identified as Sunni, three identified as Shi'ite, two Christian Orthodox, and one Druze. Four participants had either completed or attended higher education and six participants had partially completed their high school diploma.

Table 5.2: Sample Profile by Participant Demographics

| Participant Pseudonym | Age | Ethnicity | Length lived in Lebanon | Religion | Education |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mariam | 29 | Lebanese | Native-born | Sunni | Grade 9 |
| Marta | 21 | Lebanese | Native-born | Shi'ite | Bachelor's - Banking and Finance |
| Emilie | 21 | Syrian | 2 years | Sunni | Grade 9 |
| Saida | 44 | Lebanese | Native-born | Sunni | Grade 5 |
| Rasha | 28 | Lebanese | Native-born | Druze | Bachelor's – International Business Management |
| Leila | 23 | Palestinian | 9 years | Sunni | Grade 12 |
| Najwa | 47 | Lebanese | Native-born | Christian Orthodox | Associate degree |
| Chantal | 26 | Lebanese | Native-born | Shi'ite | Grade 10 |
| Salma | 35 | Syrian | 7 years | Christian Orthodox | Grade 11 |
| Farida | 31 | Lebanese | Native-born | Shi'ite | Three years in University-French Literature (2 yrs.) and Graphic Design (1 yr.) |

The following section identifies the themes and sub-themes in the study and will present the responses of participants regarding their experiences living in conflict as women and survivors of sexual violence and harm.

### 5.3 Forms of Violence Experienced by Lebanese Women

In the first part of my results section, I will answer the first research question of my study, 1) How do the Lebanese women being interviewed understand and describe

incidences of violence that have been perpetuated against them and other women? I will present the different forms of violence experienced by women living in Lebanon; emotional and psychological violence in the family, emotional and psychological violence in the culture, familial sexual violence, communitarian violence through threats of honour killing, rape in the context of intimate relationships and the use of rape as punishment in marriage. Finally, women's perceptions of why men commit sexual violence, identifies how women perceive men's acts of sexual violence towards women. Thereafter, I will identify how Lebanese women understand the violence that has been perpetuated against them and other women within their social environment.

Talking about violence and admitting that a person has experienced sexual violence in their lifetime is taboo in Lebanon. However, participants in this study were forthcoming about their lived experiences and they wanted to share their stories. Violence is prevalent in Lebanon and the study's findings alerted to the fact that many women experience some form of violence, including forms of sexual violence in their lives; unmarried, married, or divorced. Participants shared that violence and sexual violence are normalized in a patriarchal society like Lebanon and results hinted at the fact that many men living in Lebanon have expressed violence against women and sexually violated women whether in their families, in their marriages, or within general society.

### *5.3.1 Emotional and Psychological Violence in the Family*

While sexual violence narratives are important in this dissertation, the interviewees highlighted various forms of violence that women in Lebanon experience. In

this section of the results, participants explain that women living in Lebanon are groomed to only listen to the family patriarchs, causing these women to have a diminished identity. Consequently, each participant had shared an experience of staying home and not leaving the home for any occasion, being barred from any decision making, and dressing modestly to remain decent in the confines of patriarchal rules.

Nine out of ten women interviewed indicated that they were only allowed to leave the house if it was for school and three participants said they could leave the house for work. Participants indicated that when a woman exceeds her time out of the home, various forms of violence emerge. One form is emotional or psychological violence.

When I asked Marta, a 21-year-old Lebanese woman who is Shi'ite and was raped by an acquaintance from university, if she could make decisions on her own, she said,

> "*No, I cannot. In our village, especially in our family, the girl is not allowed to make a decision about any subject matter. I am one of the people that got accepted into university and my father decided that I stop going to school and stop my plans for future education because I wanted to attend university. He decided that I stop school and he began looking for a husband for me and he said that my husband will decide if I will pursue my education or not* (Participant 2).

Participants said that there are priorities that women are supposed to have. These priorities dictated by Lebanese culture are, to care for their household duties and pursue higher education to increase their eligibility for marriage. Further, the participants who worked expressed that they were either humiliated when they came home, accused of being with a man, or they were scolded for not placing their household chores as a top priority. Saida said,

"*We were not allowed to work but we could go to school because my father liked that. But when I got divorced, the doctor told him that I need to be working. And sometimes my father would let me work, but every time he takes me and brings me back from work, he puts me down and he would humiliate me. My father is also the type that does not trust anyone, and he used to accuse me of seeing a man when I was going to work*" (Participant 4).

The control over women's identities and their inability to claim an identity of their own is a form of emotional and psychological abuse/violence. Participants shared that girls in the Lebanese culture are groomed by their families to be a "good and proper girl". Most participants shared that a "good and proper girl" obeys her parents, takes care of household duties, and who does not bring shame to the family, but protects family honour. Married participants talked about their grooming continued after marriage by their husbands and their in-laws, stripping them of their freedom and confining them to household duties and motherhood. Through the lived experience shared in the interviews, I came to understand that women in Lebanon are born into their father's homes and are said to belong to their fathers until they marry. If their fathers passed away, it is either the grandfather, uncle, or oldest brother who claims the role of decision maker on behalf of her life. Grooming and forming a woman's identity in Lebanon is a form of emotional and psychological violence because Lebanese women's identities are shaped only by the restrictive experiences their fathers or men in the family allow them to live. As all participants mentioned in their stories, as a daughter, she does not make decisions for herself and as a wife, she is unable to make decisions without the consent of her husband.

Nine out of ten participants indicated that it was their father who made the decisions in the home and when married, all decisions had to be discussed with their

husbands first. Women go straight from their father's home to their husband's home, once again experiencing a limited identity of wife, mother, and caretaker of the family. As a married woman, she is still unable to make decisions for herself or the household, the decisions are left to her husband. In fact, any decision cannot go without the consent of her husband. When asking Mariam if she was able to make decisions in her marriage she answered,

> *"Not at all. I was not allowed to say anything. Even if I am wearing clothes and he tells me they are not nice, or if his mom said my clothes are not nice, I have to change my clothes right away without arguing"* (Participant 1).

These forms of identity control and blocking any decision-making abilities can be viewed as emotional and psychological violence.

*5.3.2 Emotional and Psychological Violence in the Culture*

According to all participants, women and men follow different rules defined by their gender within Lebanese culture. All participants confirmed that men do not have the same restrictive rules to follow as women do. As evidenced in the forthcoming results, the rules that women have to abide by reflect instances of emotional and psychological violence deeply ingrained in the culture by stringent rules. Further, instances of emotional and psychological violence are accentuated by participants' lived experiences, which differentiate them from men's lived experiences in Lebanon. Marta shares,

> *"For a woman, you can say that she is not allowed to do anything but for the man, he is allowed to do everything. A woman, what is her role? And I am referring to the community I was a part of, she needs to wash dishes, cook, vacuum, wait for her husband, raise kids and that's it. But for the man, no, he has*

> *his own life, he has his friends, his work, his family. The man is allowed to tell a woman to stop speaking to her family, her mother, and her father because you need to be with my family. The man has all of the right to do anything but when it comes the time that something does not work for you as a woman but if it works for your husband, it will need to work whether you say yes or no"* (Participant 2).

In Marta's response, it is evident that the  restriction of a woman's identity in the Lebanese culture can be understood as emotional and/or psychological abuse because it restricts her freedom, imposes limitations or prohibitions on social activities limited or prohibited and denies  independence to women living in Lebanon. Rasha says,

> *"A woman is not to wear revealing clothes, she is not to go out too much and stay out late, she should not have too many relations with men, she should not smoke or smoke the argileh[2]. If a woman were to have sex before marriage, she is shameful and sinful but for a man it is normal. Shame is always placed on her and people speak about her, yes this is the mentality that women are always in the wrong, but men can do what they want"* (Participant 5).

In Rasha's experience, we see emotional and psychological violence in the culture because a woman living in Lebanon is available for anyone's scrutiny. A woman is never free in Lebanese society, she is constantly watched and judged based on her actions or inactions.

Farida, a 31-year-old Lebanese Shi'ite woman with two children, who survived intimate partner violence and marital rape confirms gender differences when she said,

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[2] "Argileh" is the Arabic word for shisha, hookah or water pipe, used for smoking tobacco via heating or vaporizing.

> "*These are all rules for women. My male siblings could stay out until 5 am, and that was considered normal, and they can go anywhere they want and do anything they want, but me no. A man can go into 100 relationships and that would be normal. If a woman gets into a relationship and speaks to someone without being engaged, she is a slut. She is deemed a woman that is no good. For a man whatever he wears is ok but for me, in Baalbak I am not allowed to wear a swimsuit. For a man, there is no issue. There are many rules. For example, it is shameful for me to smoke but for my brother it is ok. My brother can have friends, even female friends, but I am not allowed to have male friends.*" (Participant 10).

Understanding the lived experiences of women living in Lebanon opens a window into how women are forced to live within the confines of cultural and patriarchal rules over the course of their lives from a young age and how violence can be experienced emotionally and psychologically.

*5.3.3 Familial Sexual Violence*

While stories of incest are taboo, three out of ten women experienced incest in different forms. Mariam, a 29-year-old Lebanese woman with two children, who has been completely ostracized from her family, indicated that her sister-in-law's brother had sexually harassed her multiple times, her brother had also tried to molest her, and her cousin had raped her; thus, she got married to get away from sexual violence (Participant 1). Rasha, a 28-year-old Druze woman who shares that she has overcome the trauma she experienced from her grandfather's rapes as a child, and Saida, a 44-year-old Sunni Lebanese woman who was raped by her grandfather during childhood, shared that their grandfathers had raped them during most of their childhood. While the three women stated they had experienced incest, they did not provide any details of their stories of incest. Compared to later stories of women's experiences with sexual violence, incest was

the least discussed in detail. Participants mentioned it happened to them and no other specifics were provided. This confirms that incest could potentially be the most taboo of the violence women experience in Lebanon.

Although incest is taboo, the interviewees confirmed that it is prevalent in some families. Two of the three participants stated that to be approached sexually by a male member of the family is normalized. Mariam shares,

> *"I was not allowed to have any guy friends because the concern is that one of those guys may hit on you or may do something to you. But if your brother did something to you or came close to you that is normal, that's my brother and he is allowed"* (Participant 1). Rasha also thought the incest she experienced was normal when she said, "*I was not awake and did not understand what my grandfather was doing, I felt like what was happening was normal that my grandfather would rape me*" (Participant 5).

When participants talked about their experiences with incest, they shared that shame was central to the experience, and their honour was questioned. Participants expressed that the blame was never placed on the males of the family and their actions. The focus was on the women's mental stability and sanity and whether they were telling the truth or making up stories. Not only were these women raped by male family members, but they were beaten by other male family members for telling their stories. They were accused of being mentally unwell and needing to visit a hospital for people with mental health illnesses. Rasha says,

> *"My family did not want to believe me so that they are not embarrassed by people in the society, who will speak. After my mom took me to the American University,*

> *they found that I was a good person, and nothing is wrong with my mind and my health and I came out as not being a virgin"* (Participant 5).

The women's narratives alluded to the fact that familial sexual violence continues to be underreported not only because it is taboo, but because there is shame around the subject and dishonour committed by the males of these families. As mentioned in Chapter 2: Literature Review, if a woman's sexuality is threatened, she is no longer honourable. Maintaining honour is the most important responsibility a Lebanese woman undertakes. However, when a male family member dishonours his family with his actions, there is no mention of dishonour and the man does not suffer repercussions for dishonouring the family.

Further, Mariam indicated that marriage gave her security from experiencing sexual advances from family members, but later Mariam spoke of her experience with marital rape that she endured for years. Sadly, Mariam's experience is evidence that a woman is the property of her family until the transfer of property becomes her husband's as was discussed in Chapter 2: Literature Review. Until then, girls' and women's' bodies are accessible to their families and it is noticeable from narratives here that the perpetrators of incest are exempt from the norms surrounding honour in Lebanese culture.

*5.3.4 Communitarian Violence through Threats of Honour Killing*

The upkeep of honour is the responsibility of women, the concept of honour acts like the big brother, watching over the women of society. Cultural and religious standards are imposed on women and restrict them to behave in certain ways. Communitarian

pressure and those standards have to do with honour. These standards are defined by what the community decrees as honour. When asking participants about their experience with honour in the culture, most stated that maintaining honour meant that a woman needed to be a virgin and should not socialize with males or have any male friends. Participants also expressed that maintaining honour also meant a woman is not to drink, do drugs, smoke, or go out late because it is thought in the Lebanese culture that these can all lead to the loss of a woman's virginity and discovery of her sexuality. By forcing women to live up to the standard of honour, the community is involved in policing honour, and the community is involved in killing women or plotting to kill women who have broken the vow of honour.

Honour killings are murders committed by males onto their female family members, but it does not exempt the other women in the family to be complicit in the decision making and the act (Mansour, 2020). Honour killings are committed to defend the honour of a woman who has allegedly done something outside conventional and cultural norms (Mansour, 2020). Honour killings also act as cleansing the dishonour fallen on the family due to this shameful act (Mansour, 2020). The murder is symbolic of "cleansing" the impurity that the woman's alleged act has brought to the family and which has emasculated the men of the family (Mansour, 2020). The perpetrators of honour killings are usually committed by the fathers, uncles, brothers, and/or husbands of the family (Mansour, 2020). Article 562 of the Lebanese Penal Code protects murderers of honour killings from a punishment that is proportional and similar to the severity of

the crime (Mansour, 2020). Article 562 was repealed in 2011 and then revived in 2016 allowing for mitigating excuses for murders committed in the name of honour (Mansour, 2020). Forcing women to preserve their sexual personae rather than encouraging them to express their sexuality reinforces sexual hierarchy and female possession (Stark, 2007), leading to the acceptance of honour killing in the culture.

Honour killing appeared as a theme in several of the interviews as we discussed honour in the culture. Honour killings occur in Lebanon, but they are invisible and there are no laws against them. Since some familial matters are dealt with by religious courts, honour killings punishment either result in a lighter sentence for the perpetrator or are absolved (Wehbi, 2002). When I asked Mariam if there had been times that her honour was threatened, she discussed a time when her brother-in-law would come into the room when she was studying and harass her by sitting very close to her and insinuating sexual innuendo (Participant 1). She said that she could not say anything to her brother or her sister-in-law because they would “kill” her (Participant 1). I asked Mariam to clarify when she says, “They will kill me,” if this is a serious threat and she confirmed that it was. When a woman is threatened to be killed or states that she was threatened with death, it is a serious matter and not taken nonchalantly as we do in the West if we say, “he/she/they would kill me.”

Emilie, Leila, Chantal, and Farida all expressed a fear of death or shared that they were threatened with death after experiencing rape. Emilie, a 21-year-old Syrian woman who fled her husband mentioned that if her brother knew that she was raped while on a

cleaning job, he would kill her (Participant 3). After Leila's rape, she stated that she did not report it to the police because her parents would "kill her" (Participant 6). She said that people would talk about her and say she is not a good woman and that nobody would spare her. Chantal, a 26-year-old Lebanese Shi'ite woman who had the experience of her husband taking her virginity before an actual marriage, told her mother-in-law and her mother-in-law said,

> *"She said no one is allowed to know about this, if you tell anyone, I will shoot you. I said to my mother-in-law please do not tell your son that I told you because he threatened to kill me if anyone found out. My mother-in-law said do not tell your parents, I said I will not say anything"* (Participant 8).

When Farida ran away from home after suffering physical violence and marital rape for years, her father announced in the village that anyone that sees her can kill her (Participant 10). Also, when she ran away to the police station to report the abuse of her husband, Farida was threatened to be killed by a mob of her husband's family outside of the police station (Participant 10). All of these incidents are tied to the acceptance of honour killing if a community perceives that a woman's honour is being threatened or has been compromised through the loss of a woman's virginity, by allowing rape to happen to her, or by leaving a marriage.

*5.3.5 Rape in the Context of Intimate Relationships*

In 2017, article 522 of the Lebanese Penal Code, which exempted rapists from punishment if they married the survivor, was abolished (BBC News, 2017). Nevertheless, rape is still occurring under the disguise of marriage and some of the interviewees,

claimed that rectifying the rape act by marriage seems to be supported by religious beliefs.

Leila, a Shi'ite Syrian woman who was in a relationship with a Sunni Lebanese man was raped after he put a date rape drug in her coffee (Participant 6). When I asked Leila why he did this, she said, *"He said, I love you and I want you to be my wife. He said I did this so that my parents and your parents accept us"* (Participant 6). Leila had expressed that the difference in their nationalities and religion was causing strain in the relationship and among their families. Leila explains that her boyfriend used rape as a symbol of marriage to "prove" their union as a married couple and felt the strain would disappear if they got "married".

Chantal was also "married" in the same way as Leila. Chantal shares,

> "*I went to his (husband) home and he said to me let's get married. I said no, let's leave it until tomorrow. He said no, we have to get married now. I said before we do this, I am a little shy so please turn off the light. We sat together, he did not kiss me or hug me. There was no romance, he said let's get married"* (Participant 8).

In this case, marriage meant to have sex but according to Chantal, he raped her because he forced her into sex, disguised as a symbol of marriage. Even though the law that allowed rapists to marry their victims was abolished, in intimate partnerships there seems to be an understanding that when sex is introduced, it automatically means marriage. It was suggested that a sacred union of marriage is used by men for women to accept a sexual relationship. Participants further explained that disguising sex as marriage is the only way that a woman's honour would not be threatened. However, both participants

noted that they were reluctant to have sex. Therefore, it seems as though men are using "marriage" to justify the act of rape.

*5.3.6 Use of Rape as Punishment in Marriage*

The results also allude to the justification of rape in marriage. Marital rape is not considered a crime in the Lebanese Penal Code. Participants expressed that in the eyes of the law in Lebanon, a husband who has raped his wife has done nothing wrong because his wife's body is considered to belong to him. Marital rape not being a punishable offence in Lebanon confirms that a woman is to abide by her husband's wants and needs without question. After speaking to married participants about their experience with sexual violence, more than half shared that they had experienced marital rape regularly. Mariam expressed that she had experienced marital rape constantly within her marriage (Participant 1). Farida also expressed rape in marriage as being normalized.

The results also identified that rape in marriage was used as a tool for punishment. Farida says,

> *"For example, when I and my husband would argue, he would tie my hands and penetrate me from the back, not from the front. I would tell him to stop hurting me and he would say just take it as rape because this is not for your fun, I am doing this to hurt you"* (Participant 10).

In most instances, marital rape was used by husbands as a punishment towards their wives. Chantal, who was also punished by rape states,

> *"One time he brought a cucumber. I am sorry I am talking to you about this. He brought the cucumber and put it inside of me. He said kiss my shoes. If you don't,*

> *I will break this inside of you. He had done this three times with the cucumber and threatened to break it inside of me"* (Participant 8).

If a participant did not do as they were told, if they wore inappropriate clothes, if they spoke back to their husbands, or if they insulted their husbands or their families, all of these were some reasons shared to justify the punishment of marital rape. The results speak to how rape is normalized in the culture, especially in marriage.

*5.3.7 Women's Perceptions of Why Men Commit Sexual Violence*

When asking participants why they think men commit sexual violence, I was told that the Lebanese culture supports and accepts men's domination over women, fueling the prominence of sexual violence in the culture. When asking Marta why she thinks men commit sexual violence, she states,

> *"To be honest, for most men in the community, it is not about being repressed because this is done a lot. A man is valued based on how many women he sleeps with. A man who has slept with one girl is nothing, but a man that has slept with twenty women, oh that is a real man"* (Participant 2).

In Lebanese culture, it appears that men need to prove their masculinity and sexual violence is one way to do so. Marta shared that she was raped by a friend from university and that he had done this to her twice. She shared that he seemed to be such a professional in the practice of sexual violence because he only ripped the bottom of her pants very neatly as if he had done this many times (Participant 2). Marta's experience of sexual violence as she indicates, is the perpetrator's way of exerting his dominance over

her, showing her that he is more powerful and can do as he wishes without any repercussions.

When speaking to participants about their experience of sexual violence by an acquaintance, men asserting their authority over women is central to the act and ensuring a man's dominant status is maintained across various domains of society. Emilie was raped while at work, by the owner when she was cleaning a home (Participant 3). Salma also experienced rape at work and it was someone she said that she had confided in. The experience of sexual violence at work is alarming because as Emilie explained, men think of women as easily accessible to them.

**5.4 Resistance, Faith, and Resilience**

The results of the study strongly suggest that individual responses to sexual violence were choosing the path of resistance to the negative cultural ideologies that have controlled and disempowered Lebanese women. Specifically, this section answers the part of the second research question that asks what women's individual responses to sexual violence in Lebanon have been. There is evidence to show that the research participants have fought back and resisted in the face of adversity, as the Lebanese culture supports women's subordination through law and religion. Most research participants also demonstrated an interesting relationship with their faith, another response to their lived experience with violence. In this section, the participant's resistance to the culture of silence, and the resistance to shame and honour will also be discussed. Participants changing their religions as a form of resistance as well as their

resistance to the Lebanese culture more generally will also be explored. Moreover, what will be shown in the results is the resistance to the culture that these women have shown in the face of conflict, and their lived experience with violence is also a form of resistance to patriarchy and the dominance that men have over women in Lebanese culture.

### *5.4.1 Resistance to the Culture of Silence*

It was noted in participants' responses that older generations of Lebanese women have suffered in a culture of silence and shame, where shame was so heavy, that it silenced them until the day they died. Silence has alienated women and has disallowed them to improve their status as citizens in Lebanon. Consequently, sexual violence reporting is low in Lebanon due to the culture of silence. There is no support from the family, the police, the courts, or the culture. Rasha states,

> *"It is enough to say that in my case, I had to be silent. I could have gone to court, I could have complained about my grandfather, I could have had him imprisoned. I could have taken my right from him. But because of society and because society does not accept easily that I was raped, this is the reason why I was silent"* (Participant 5).

This experience confirms the influence of the culture of silence on participants and the continued role silence plays in Lebanese culture.

When participants were asked about the importance of honour in the culture, results alluded to silence preserving family honour and the honour of the woman who experienced sexual violence. Further, the stories of participants confirm that shame around sex and sexual violence also keeps the culture of silence alive. When Chantal

experienced abuse and sexual violence in her marriage she said, *"Even my parents would ask me how are you with him? I could not tell them. I did not want to tell them to ruin their lives and he had threatened me not to saying anything otherwise he would kill me"* (Participant 8). Silence means that the shameful story will not travel to the neighbours, acquaintances, and society, thereby protecting the woman who experienced sexual violence from scrutiny, judgement, and sometimes death.

Najwa, a 47-year-old Lebanese Christian woman who has dedicated her life to managing a woman's shelter states that she did not tell anyone about the rape that occurred by her neighbour (Participant 7). Najwa shares that it did not cross her mind to complain to the police and her family does not know of the incident. From the stories told by Rasha, Chantal, and Najwa, there is a code of silence embedded in the Lebanese culture and it is sealed with shame and preserved by maintaining honour.

Nevertheless, participants' responses have suggested that silence in the culture is beginning to shift with the young generation of women in Lebanon. The interviewee's narratives suggested that the younger generation's response to their lived experience of violence and sexual violence is to tell their story in hopes of improving another woman's life. The participants of the younger generation explained that they have grown up in a culture of shame, but they are willing to be emancipated from this culture in the name of the freedom they gain, yet, at the expense of losing their entire family. The women interviewed have shared that they are on a mission to improve their lives and their families' lives, even though some of their families have disowned them. Participants expressed that the resistance to the culture of silence is improving their lives. By no

longer being silenced and speaking about their experiences of violence and sexual violence - one of the most shameful experiences one can have according to the Lebanese culture – participants shared that they have gained freedom and independence.

As demonstrated in the results of the study, younger generations are not accepting to be silent. Emilie shares that she now has dared to speak and live an authentic life. Emilie's outlook and way of life are evidence that she is overcoming the culture of silence in Lebanon that has controlled women for decades. When Farida was asked how her experience has changed her, she said,

> "*I pass along the message to not stay silent and to not just let these incidents pass. If we continue to let these incidents pass in silence, we are encouraging the perpetrator and supporting the perpetrator because we are staying silent"* (Participant 10).

Farida shared that she now knows her value and worth and that she is more important than someone hurting her and staying quiet to protect them (Participant 10). Participants are sacrificing their honour, as defined by the culture, and even safety at times, in the name of emancipating women living in Lebanon from a culture that has held women captive for centuries.

*5.4.2 Resistance to Shame in the Culture*

The women in this study commented on how shame in Lebanese culture is central to their existence as she is responsible for avoiding shame and in many cases, her gender alone causes her to be shameful. As discussed in Chapter 2: Literature Review, shame is connected to a woman's honour, and shame is avoided by protecting her virginity, and

sexuality and abstaining from any behaviour deemed dishonourable to her and her family. Participants expressed that when growing up in the Lebanese culture, girls are taught about shame at an early age when they are seen as a representation of shame because of their sex. Marta explains,

> *"In the culture, it is the understanding that a girl is seen as shame because she is a woman, and she can capture a man by her look, her body and because she is simply of the opposite sex"* (Participant 2).

But the majority of women I interviewed, who are a part of the younger generation, expressed a belief about shame that contradicted what my literature review revealed about shame in Lebanon. Saida shared that shame played a role in her life when her father would accuse her of shameful acts (Participant 4). However, she said that when she ran away from home, she took better care of herself (Participant 4). Shame was no longer something that controlled her and consumed her thoughts (Participant 4). Therefore, the younger generations of women are not letting shame silence them and subdue them, but they are taking a positive perspective and one that is of independence and self-care.

The definition of shame in the culture is changing according to the women I interviewed. Mariam states,

> *"Shame for me is when you do something that injures society. Shame is about doing something that injures me as well. So, for example, connecting with someone results in bad behaviour or going out drinking and drinking too much, or doing something that is not good* (Participant 1).

According to Mariam, shame extends to one's responsibility to act right with themselves and as a result, acting in a way that does not injure herself will automatically extend to

being an exemplary citizen. Thus, shame in the culture for Mariam goes beyond conserving her virginity and abstaining from sexual behaviour.

Farida has a similar outlook to Mariam about shame. Farida says,

> *"For me, I say that anything you are ashamed of, do not do it. I do not think anything is considered shameful, everything is with respect and dignity. Anything that conflicts with respect and dignity is shameful. If a woman is speaking to a man and she knows what is right and wrong and she knows how to support herself, it is not shameful"* (Participant 10).

Shame in Farida's perspective is also personal to one's actions and it is connected to respecting oneself and others as well as upholding her dignity.

For Marta, shame is relative to a person's beliefs about their actions and behaviours. Shame is not set by the culture or society. Marta says,

> *"In my personal opinion, I do not see anything that is called shame. At the end of the day, if there is something that works for you or does not work for you, whether it works for me and does not work for you, you may see it as something that is not good, yet I see it as something good, so we cannot define that this particular thing is considered shame. It is not like that"* (Participant 2).

According to Mariam, Farida, and Marta, shame is more about hurting oneself and not about what social norms dictate. For all three participants, shameful actions or inactions should not be set by a culture or society but by one's moral standard.

Leila, a 23-year-old Palestinian Sunni who has lived in Lebanon for nine years and who experienced sexual violence by her intimate partner, indicated that shame *"is in someone who is living in them that have no manners and no respect. Shame is not me*

*without the hijab or showing my body, when he from inside is dirty"* (Participant 6). For some participants, shame is no longer seen as something that a woman needs to carry. Participants expressed that shame is on the person who committed the rape, or who has bad intentions. Leila wants the focus to be on the perpetrator who did wrong and the shame to be placed on him, not on the woman, who is blamed for being sexually violated and who is deemed responsible for protecting her body and her surroundings. The resistance to shame in the culture is another individual response to the women's experiences of sexual violence. Younger generations are pushing back on cultural ideologies and slowly transforming the way shame is understood.

### *5.4.3 Resistance to Honour*

In Chapter 2: Literature Review, honour was a theme addressed within the Lebanese culture. Maintaining one's honour has been discussed with participants and their responses regarding honour have been recorded in earlier results. It was stated it is the woman's responsibility to maintain the honour of the family and participants shared that honour is tied to her virginity and sexuality. Participants spoke of the woman who carries the burden of maintaining not only her own honour but the honour of the family by avoiding any action or inaction that could be deemed shameful.

However, similar to the concept of shame in the culture, younger generations are pushing back on cultural ideologies of honour and are slowly transforming the way honour is translated in the culture. The women's responses to their experiences of sexual violence illustrate the redefinition of honour in the culture and the resistance to what

honour means in the culture. Leila maintains, *"The person who has honour, their heart is clean. It is not related to their body. It is not related to the culture or how people speak of another. It is about the person from the inside"* (Participant 6). Leila is suggesting that we see honour as a trait stemming from one's personality and intentions, instead of the body. Farida shares,

> *"For me, honour is when you take care of yourself and you raise your children equally. Even we know of boys who have been raped. So, honour is to raise your children similarly with limits but with an awakened perspective to know what to be careful of and what to watch for. It is in your manners that you have honour, it is not tied to sex and sexuality. Sometimes just the way you speak is associated with your honour, it should not be tied to the body but to have respect for yourself and others"* (Participant 10).

Farida echoes Leila in her response about honour, disconnecting honour from sexuality and connecting honour to behaviour and one's character. Therefore, the participants are changing the view of honour in the Lebanese culture to one that relates to a person's intentions and moral values, detaching the concept of honour from sexuality and the body altogether.

When asking if the participants associated their bodies with honour, once again there is a new outlook on honour and its disassociation from the body. Esther states that honour is not associated with the body. She shares that she is not hiding the fact that she did a hymen restructuring operation after her rape because she has told her current partner (Participant 2). She says, *"I do not connect my experiences with my honour. It depends on how I am. I see how I am and not my body"* (Participant 2). When I asked Farida if she associates honour with her body she said,

> *"No, but society may think there is an association. For me, there is a connection between my body and my limits that I have defined myself. And I have many friends who have sexual relations before marriage, but I do not think of them without honour. She is free, it is her body"* (Participant 10).

Five participants stated that they did not believe there is a connection between the body and honour. These participants expressed that honour has nothing to do with sexuality and more to do with one's personality traits and all to do with someone's behaviour such as honesty, or one's respect for their body by avoiding the use of harmful substances such as illicit drugs; therefore, honour is connected to one's behaviour apart from sex. The women interviewed in this study encouraged a change in viewing and defining shame and honour in the Lebanese culture.

### *5.4.4 Faith and Religious Conversion as a Form of Resistance*

The lived experience of surviving violence and sexual violence for many participants has been challenging, but many have turned to faith as solace and healing for their pain. Faith was featured as a saving grace in the interviews, whereby faith allowed for the women's survival, and healing. As discussed in Chapter 2: Literature Review, religion in Lebanon can be oppressive towards women. In all 18 sects present in Lebanon, women are subdued by religious codes, affirming that they are meant to be led and guided by males in their families. While this is true, what is also true is that religion, specifically Christianity, has been the "reason for healing", expressed by Rasha (Participant 5) and other participants.

Eight out of ten participants indicated that they had converted from Islam or Druze to Christianity and they suggested that Christianity had saved them from judgement and shame that was housed in Islamic and Druzian ideologies. Mariam expressed,

> *"But now, in my life as a Christian, I am able to find belonging in the community, there is so much value and respect as a woman. There is a love for the woman and respect, there is justice. I began to understand that I do not need to be confined to these rules I was obeying and that what I have gone through is not shameful or haram. And that Jesus accepts me as I am. So, for sure religion is a part of my culture"* (Participant 1).

In Mariam's experience, faith has become an act of resistance through her conversion from Islam to Christianity. Further, Rasha indicated that as a Druze she felt oppressed, but as a Christian she states,

> *"First of all, I found myself clean and someone who is loved and not that this thing happened because I am not a good person. No one is not good. In Christianity I see myself as someone who is accepted and loved, and that life has not ended because of this experience. I have strength and I can get myself back up again. In the culture of my religion maybe I would have either gone mad or I would have committed suicide. I think to myself that if I was born in another generation it would be better (Druzian belief). But in Christianity, it is different"* (Participant 5).

Both Mariam and Rasha found acceptance in Christianity, and they did not feel shame in the Christian religion because they had experienced sexual violence. Acceptance and love in Christianity were subthemes that came from these results. Other religions were negatively discussed by participants, causing them to feel guilty that they experienced

sexual violence and were unworthy of being loved and accepted by society and anyone for that matter.

Christianity has been a guiding light for participants. Saida, who also converted from Islam to Christianity, indicated that when she is harassed on the street, she responds to them and begins speaking to them about Christianity, gives them bracelets that she makes, and tells her survival story. Based on participants' responses, conversion to Christianity has been another form of resistance. Converting to a religion that is more accepting to participants is a change of lifestyle that demonstrates the detrimental effects of a religion that according to participants, was fueling the culture of shame and judgement, especially in their experience of violence and sexual violence.

#### *5.4.5 Resistance to the Lebanese Culture*

One of the most powerful responses that participants have demonstrated in the face of their experience with violence and sexual violence is their resistance to the Lebanese culture. All participants of the study have shown resilience in their response to living in conflict and experiencing violence and sexual violence. Despite the constant conflict, women in Lebanon have survived. Instead of taking orders from their families, they made their own decisions and felt that they did have control over their bodies and their lives. Rasha explains that in her past life as a victim, she could not decide for herself, but in her current life, she said that she decides everything for herself (Participant 5). Saida shared that when she moved to the shelter, she was able to stop taking anxiety medication and she said that she felt more in control of herself (Participant 4).

While women are particularly vulnerable living in conflict zones, the women I have interviewed have taken their emancipation into their own hands. The responses of participants unveiled true resilience as they defy the cultural, social, and political structures to live a better life. All participants decided to no longer let their traumatic history live on to make someone in their family happy. Leaving and beginning a new life, which includes a healing journey, also means leaving a life of service to others and focusing on oneself, something that is considered revolutionary in a culture embedded with political familism and patriarchy that dictate the role of women. Marta shares.

> *"I am not allowed to create something for myself in my life. To be honest, I saw myself as someone who was very limited in my life choices. But now, I see that I was not limited, it was the confines of the culture and my family. I have always been a person who wants to study and work and stand on my own feet"* (Participant 2).

After leaving her family, Marta feels that she can believe in herself again and she can follow her dreams, without the limitations imposed on her for being a woman.

Mariam shares a similar outlook, and she says,

> *"I have the right to make decisions, I can make decisions about my religion. I began seeing myself in my religion, I go to the streets and talk about Jesus and tell stories about Jesus. I want people to know the pleasure of finding God. Before I was controlled by my body and sexual violence but now, I am the opposite, I am being pushed forward"* (Participant 1).

Mariam no longer has to follow the decisions made by her family and her ex-husband and his family. By separating herself from her ex-husband, she feels in control of her life. Similarly, to Mariam, Farida said that she now felt responsible for her household after

leaving her husband. She also learned how to make her own decisions and she witnessed how she can stand on her own. The lived experience of Marta, Mariam, and Farida indicate how their emancipation from their families have allowed for a life of independence, practicing decision-making, and taking responsibility; all of which women in Lebanon cannot enjoy due to patriarchal ideals and the confines of political familism, that are embedded in the culture and social institutions, also discussed in Chapter 2. Therefore, finding confidence in themselves to live a life dictated by their own decisions is resilience in the form of resistance to the patriarchal norms deeply latent in Lebanese culture.

The women I spoke with are stepping out of their predetermined roles and finding their identities as independent women. Mariam expressed that she found her identity by beginning to do things for herself and she was determined to live a good life for herself (Participant 1). When she found the "new" Mariam as she called it, she came to understand that she could make her own decisions. Independent women in Lebanon are frowned upon and even ostracized. Mariam shared, *"I could not go back, and I would rather go somewhere where I can have control"* (Participant 1). Marta found her identity and independence as she shares,

> *"I learned that I have my life and I have a future and that I was able to turn my personality around despite destruction and I was hurt very much. But I developed my personality and I stood on my feet and I am continuing my education"* (Participant 2).

Emilie has found herself as she expresses that getting herself out of her marriage and away from her controlling family has enabled her to focus on herself, *"I was unable to look after myself so at least I can teach my daughter to look after herself"* (Participant 3). The emancipation of the participants also shows how much patriarchy and men's dominance in the Lebanese culture shape women's identity into one that accepts submission. The participants needed to remove themselves from their families and they needed to experience ostracization to find their authentic selves. Results indicate that participants found their personalities, followed a more authentic lifestyle, and focused on themselves. According to participants, finding one's independence separate from their family and the normative culture is a form of resistance.

### 5.5 Structural and Institutional Sources that Perpetuate Violence Against Women

The women's responses pertaining to the second aspect of the second research question, what have been the social responses to sexual violence in Lebanon, suggests that the social reactions to violence against women in Lebanon is supported by structures and institutions. A lack of regard for women's abuse is inherent in the police, military, and criminal justice system in Lebanon. From the response of the women I interviewed, I understood that the police, military and criminal justice system are turning a blind eye to the violence that women experience. The police push back sexual violence cases to be resolved either within families or the religious courts. By examining the themes related to "underreporting", "inconsistent interactions with the police", "militia influence", and "insufficient protection from the criminal justice system and the courts in Lebanon", my

analysis provides insight into the pervasive influence of patriarchal culture within law enforcement, the military, the judiciary, and the overall criminal justice system.

### *5.5.1 Lack of Reporting*

ABAAD, an NGO in Lebanon, conducted a nationwide study in 2021 revealing that ninety six percent of domestic violence incidents in Lebanon went unreported (ABAAD, 2022). Forty two percent of the ninety six percent were reports of physical violence, rape, and sexual harassment (ABAAD, 2022). There is a lack of reporting of gender based violence including sexual violence in Lebanon. This is mainly due to the culture of shame, the culture of silence, and the culture that approaches violence against women as an issue within the family and hence it needs to be addressed and resolved within the confines of home (Baydoun, 2011), without any interference from outsiders such as the police or any other component of the justice system. Moreover, the Lebanese Penal Code does not protect women against sexual violence and harm, for the various reasons already discussed earlier. Further evidence from the women interviewed shows that when reporting violence and/or sexual violence, women are not supported by the police or the justice system.

Najwa did not report her rape by a neighbour because she did not even think of reporting it and she said it did not cross her mind as she had never experienced such an incident before (Participant 7). In Najwa's case, not thinking about reporting sexual violence identifies how little the police are implicated in such cases and that women are left to respond to their own trauma. The women's narratives illustrate that it is

commonplace for the police not to involve themselves or do anything with these complaints, let alone record a report in their system. As participants have shared, the police do not seem to be able to step in, either due to the culture of reporting, or lack thereof, and/or based on the assumption that families need to resolve their own problems, or for the religious leaders to determine the outcome.

Mariam indicated that she did not report the sexual and physical abuse from her husband because she said, *"… they will say this is your husband, he is allowed"* (Participant 1). As discussed, men in the family make the decisions and they are given full authority to do as they please in the home without question because it is their right as the man of the household in Lebanese culture. Religion was also used as a fear tactic for women to do as their husbands say and accept even marital rape. Mariam shares,

> *"Sometimes I will say that he is sleeping with me in a disgusting way, and I was told if you do not sleep with your husband, God does not love you. So, I would be afraid that God would not love me I also do not dare to speak because he will lie about everything. He will say I did not do anything, and I will look like the liar. Even if he does tell the truth and say that he did rape me, they will say that I allowed him to do so. I did not have anyone in the community to trust"* (Participant 1).

In this case, the lack of reporting has to do with being obedient to one's husband, supported by religious beliefs, and a lack of merit placed on a woman's experience of sexual violence because her husband's word is considered the truth and not hers.

Emilie's encounter with the police was not supportive. When I asked her if she reported her sexual abuse at work to the police she said,

> *"I told the police and they told me if you knew that going to the kitchen would cause you trouble you should not have gone. And if I continued with the case, they would send me back to Syria and if I go back to Syria, I will be dead"* (Participant 3).

The lack of reporting of sexual violence cases comes also from being fearful of victim blaming. As discussed in Chapter 2: Literature Review, when women in Lebanon experience sexual violence, they are often questioned about their actions, and what they could have done to prevent it, or invite it. They are blamed by being scrutinized for their dress, alleged sexual behaviour, and/or accused of drinking and/or drugging. Also, sometimes, like in Emilie's case, her ethnicity plays a role in how her case is handled. In Lebanon, Syrian and Palestinian refugees are discriminated against, and often, their ethnicity is used as a justification for the racism and lack of justice they receive.

*5.5.2 Inconsistent Encounters with the Police*

In Lebanon, it is uncommon for people to call the police for help with cases of violence against women. Participants did not have very many encounters with the police and the participants who had, one had a negative encounter and the other, had a fairly positive one. Leila, who had a negative experience, went to the police with her fiancé, after he stole her phone and after he pressed charges against her for harassment. Leila did not initiate contact with the police after her fiancé raped her. Her encounter with the police was regarding her stolen phone. Her fiancé still had her phone and when she asked her fiancé to hand over her phone, the police officer slapped her (Participant 6). When I asked Leila if the police had hurt her in any other way, she shared, another officer had hit

on her, telling her that she is “soft” (Participant 6). This encounter suggests that the police do not treat women like adults, they infantilize them. Before Leila left the police station, she thought a complaint was filed against her fiancé for harassing her and stealing her phone. However, when she checked back days later, she said that her case disappeared, and nothing happened with her complaint. She said, “*Had I not asked the police about my case, I would not have known that a case was not recorded*” (Participant, 6). It can be inferred from this case (and the other interviews about reporting mentioned above) that incidents related to gender-based violence are not taken seriously and are not being recorded. This attitude towards gender-based violence further confirms that the cultural assumptions approach these incidents as an issue to be dealt with within the confines of the family and the home. Leila indicated that the police officers who dealt with her case are her fiancé’s neighbours. I probed further asking if they were Lebanese and she had said yes, and she said, *“They tell me you are the Syrians, you are the Syrians”* (Participant 6). I then asked if she received any form of help when she filed the complaint with the police, and she said, “*No, there is no help because I am from Syria”* (Participant, 6). The police mistreated Leila and her family because they were Syrian and hence fall outside the power structures of Lebanese culture. While Leila was the only Syrian participant who had an encounter with the police, it is important to note that the police treat people differently based on their power status and Syrian refugees are mistreated in Lebanon because they fall outside all spheres of power. I am aware of how Syrians are

treated in Lebanon[3] but based on the responses of the women in this study, it is unknown whether women of other ethnicities are discriminated against by police as well. In this study, I only had one participant who was not Lebanese and who had this negative encounter with the police. Nevertheless, Leila's experiences draw attention to concerning indicators of how certain groups, like Syrian refugees in Lebanon, face further marginalization and mistreatment based on their country of origin.

Farida's experience with the police has been conflicting as she experienced some officers who are corrupt and some that are helpful. When her husband found out she was at the police station she says,

> "*He told the police that I would pay $1000 for each soldier who slaps her. I saw the one who had two stripes on his shoulder, he was very well mannered. But the young ones had no problem hitting me and taking $1000. So, they kept me in an office at the police station, I could not move, they left me without food until midnight this is to ensure that my intake was not a lie"* (Participant 10).

This statement sheds light on the corruption of some police officers in Lebanon, exposing their susceptibility to bribery and its effects on the consistency in the services they provide to the community. However, Farida had an officer keep her in his office to protect her. She says,

> *"The police did not dare to let me out because his (Farida's husband) family and a big group of his friends were behind this. They all had arms outside and the police could not do anything, imagine. They were all militia, and the police*

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[3] Anani, 2013; Charles & Denman, 2013; Nabulsi et al., 2021; Roupetz et al., 2020; Yasmine & Moughalian, 2016.

> *cannot touch militia. The police said that I cannot let you out now because my husband's brother said I know that you are supporting her and I am telling you that once she comes out, I will kill her."* (Participant 10).

In Farida's experience, there are helpful police officers and corrupt bribable police officers. She said that in her experience the higher ranked police officers helped her, whereas the more junior ones whose salaries are low are more open to being bribed. These inconsistent encounters with the police illustrated in the women's narrative shed light on the lack of trust women have in utilizing police services. Inconsistent encounters in the results also identify that it may not be worth calling the police if some will assist and some can make matters worse. Further, when law enforcement agencies fail to actively respond to gender-based violence cases, as revealed by the women interviewed in this study, it further perpetuates the societal tolerance of these acts within the Lebanese culture.

*5.5.3 Militia Influence*

When asking participants about reporting and the involvement of police in their cases, the influence of the militia came up as a theme in some interviews. The interviews revealed that aside from the police's failure to enforce the law, perpetrators of violence against women sought certain groups of militias in Lebanon when they needed assistance to absolve them from any legal action. The women participants in this study indicated that these militia organizations were developed during the LCW and they continue to be powerful in Lebanon, influencing many societal aspects, including shutting down cases of gender-based violence for perpetrators.

Three participants indicated that people seek help or complain to the militia to resolve a situation and entrusting the help of militia is more common than utilizing police services in Lebanon. In this study, the stories told by participants identified the perpetrators using the militia to threaten survivors not to speak of their experience with sexual violence. Emilie indicated that the perpetrator sent a member of the militia after her to threaten her not to talk about the rape to anyone and not to complain to authorities (Participant 3). Marta had an encounter with a stranger on the street who ran after her and hit her, giving her a message on behalf of the perpetrator that she is not to mention the rape to anyone and not to report it to the authorities (Participant, 2). Lack of trust in police and militia's strong influence further evidences the systemic disregard towards sexual violence and other gender-based violence cases.

Leila, who is Syrian, expressed that when her fiancé, a Lebanese man, complained to the militia about her, she was the vulnerable one in the situation. She states, *"I am Syrian in their eyes and it means that he is stronger than me" (Participant 6).* I probed and asked why the police did not help her and she said,

> *"Because I am Syrian, this is the first reason. And because the judgement of the Shi'ite is stronger than the Sunni. Also, the country is not my country. Very easily, I and my family could be shot, and this would be considered to be normal"* (Participant 6).

Therefore, it is not only a gender-based violence issue, but one that intersects with ethnicity and religion. Leila was a Sunni, as mentioned earlier, and her fiancé and the militia were Shi'ite. There is a historic religious conflict between those two sects of Islam

(that emerged in the late 7th century over the succession line after the death of the Prophet Muhammad). This historic conflict was revived in Lebanon after the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and has plagued the country for decades and in the case of Leila, it has reached interpersonal relationships in Lebanon. One more participant in the study revealed her experience with militia in Lebanon. Salma shared that her husband threatened to have the militia kill her if she does not give him custody of their daughter (Participant 9). She shared that her husband knows people who you can bribe for $100 to have them kill someone. She said, *"You can ask them to kidnap my girl and this is a normal ask."* (Participant 9). I asked if these groups of militias are known in Lebanon for doing such acts, and she confirmed that they are. I then probed to know if people reach out to the police for help instead of the militia, and she said, *"There is no police. By the time you open a case with the police, this entire case would be finished"* (Participant 9). Salma's experience raises concerns about how encounters with the militia further exacerbated women's chances to be fairly treated in cases of gender-based violence. The women's narratives suggest that once the militia is involved, survivors are threatened and the incidents of violence are eradicated, leaving them without any support from law enforcement or the legal system.

*5.5.4 Lack of Protection from the Criminal Justice System and the Courts in Lebanon*

The social response to sexual violence from the police has not been positive for the most part and the courts in Lebanon are also not aiding women who have experienced sexual violence. Two participants reported their rape to police and eight participants did not. Mariam for instance did not report the numerous rapes she experienced in her

marriage because she said in Lebanon, we do not have rights for women and the laws do not recognize women (Participant 1). Mariam said that if she reached out to army members or police for help, they would tell her it is not their problem and not their business. Chantal reported her rape to the police, but they did not do anything as she was waiting for the court's response. When Chantal reached out to the police, they did not assure her that she will receive justice, but she said that the NGO, KAFA, stood by her instantly (Participant 8). The police could not assure her justice because it depended on the final decision of the religious courts as the police do not involve themselves in sexual violence cases. When a sexual violence case reaches the courts, discussions about the survivor's consent are the focal point. Similar to when a woman complains to the police and is judged for her actions (Stephan et al., 2015).

More than half of the participants interviewed mentioned that they do not believe that the criminal justice system or the courts can help with their cases of sexual violence. Marta expressed that the criminal justice system does not have a role to play in her case because many cases have not gone to the courts and many women did not get their justice. Marta says,

> *"Many stories place the blame on the woman, and they focused on what she was wearing or how she annoyed/frustrated him. Or for example let's say she was in a pub and they say see where she was, if she was not at the pub, he would not have done this. Or if you are walking on the street at night by yourself. So, the blame is always on the woman"* (Participant 2).

Culturally and within the justice system, it is the norm to question a woman's culpability in a sexual violence case and not the perpetrator. Women are scrutinized if just one

misstep is taken, and they are blamed for tempting the perpetrator with her clothing, behaviour, and actions.

Rasha shares that the criminal justice system plays a negative role in cases of sexual violence. She says,

> *"Of course, there are many cases of sexual violence that have occurred, and they did help the woman but not in the right way. For example, you have cases of rape in marriages and the religions and courts do not consider this rape, but it actually is rape. If someone raped me and then married me, is that the solution to marry the rapist? Of course not. Or to pay me money"* (Participant 5).

Rasha's experience illustrates that the existing laws are not deployed to protect women against rape or sexual violence. When Mariam was speaking about the troubles in her marriage and I asked her if she has ever pressed charges, she said she could not because she was married. Whether married or not, sexual violence is not punishable in Lebanon as there are many loopholes around getting away with the act. When I asked participants how they felt about the police and the courts protecting them, Mariam said,

> *"If I went to say that my husband is doing this to me, they will tell me this is your husband. He has the right to do what he wants. It is only if I am killed, for example, he shot me and I died, this is when they get involved"* (Participant 1).

Women in Lebanon are not protected against gender-based violence, survivors are asked to handle their own criminal cases. Farida said,

> *"In Lebanon, until now, if a man raped a woman and accepted to marry her, he will get out of jail. There are many cases of rape where the girl's parents go and complain and at the end, they pay money, and the case is closed. And the blame is placed on the woman and they think it was the woman who made actions and ways that got him to want to do this"* (Participant 10).

Farida also said that she did not feel protected by the police or the courts because any one can be paid off with money and then a case is closed (Participant 10). Mariam and Farida's reasoning sum up the problem with the lack of support from the courts and the criminal justice system. If married and raped, marital rape is not against the law. If unmarried and raped, simply getting married will remove the culpability of the perpetrator or paying off the police or militia will wipe out the case entirely.

## 5.6 Conclusion

In summary, the results demonstrate that Lebanese society is rooted in patriarchal norms where men dominate women, leading to a lack of support for and dismissal of gender-based violence cases and a complete disregard for women's lives. The themes emerging from the interviews conducted with women survivors of sexual violence:1) Forms of Sexual Violence in Lebanon, 2) Resistance, Faith and Resilience, and 3)Structural and Institutional Sources of Sexual Violence against Women, reveal the lived experience of women in Lebanon and their response to gender-based violence. The cumulative narratives of the women interviewed in this study illustrate that gender-based violence, including rape and sexual violence, is a lived experience to many women in Lebanon. This lived experience of violence for Lebanese women, according to the narratives resulting from the interviews, is the consequence of

inequity between visible genders, leading to norms that tolerate abuse of women at the macro cultural level and the micro level of the family. Most notably, shame and honour in the culture are reasons for the continued acceptance of violence against women; when women are perceived to behave badly or against normative gender roles, violence against them is justified. Furthermore, external forces such as the police, and the sectarian militias, subdue women by either judging their behaviour or sending them back to their families and homes to deal with the violence and their complaints. The courts influenced by religious sectarianism also use patriarchal interpretations of religious texts to subjugate women and do not protect women against the various forms of violence discussed above.

Nevertheless, the interviews with the women in this study alluded to a number of women who have decided to resist this abusive culture by redefining their understanding of shame and honour. Participants in this study have shown their rejection of the patriarchal culture in Lebanon by speaking up and breaking the code of silence and sharing their stories to assist other women in their healing and breaking free from the judgements of their families, friends and strangers. The participants shared, that attitudes and beliefs about gender norms and power imbalances among men and women need to be addressed and rectified, otherwise, gender equality and gender-based violence responses will continue to be dismissed in the country. Chapter 6 provides a summary discussion that connects the theoretical frameworks, the narratives obtained from the interviews to answer the overarching research questions of the study: 1) How do the Lebanese women being interviewed understand and describe incidences of violence that have been

perpetuated against them and other women?; 2) What have been (a) women's individual responses to sexual violence and harm in Lebanon and (b) what are the social responses to sexual violence and harm in Lebanon?

# CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

## 6.1 Introduction

This dissertation was about narratives of women living in Lebanon who had experienced sexual violence and harm within the context of a protracted civil war. The original interest in this research was motivated by personal experiences with family members who had endured military sexual abuse and who had chosen not to speak about their lived experience, forever changing the course of their lives and their daily life experiences due to its traumatic impact. At the time I found out about their stories, I was unable to find research that included real life experiences of Lebanese women during the civil war. There was little research pertaining to women's personal accounts and insights into the challenges they faced while living in conflict, including sexual violence.

The path my dissertation has taken me on, in an attempt to capture the experiences of women in Lebanon, has been both a humbling and enlightening journey. It has deepened my understanding of how women navigate their lives in a country scarred by war. In interviewing the women participants, it became clear that their experiences of sexual violence took place within a broader context of a society where violence against women was normalized. Power and control are salient in the instances of violence against women in Lebanon. Nonetheless, power and control are also contested and challenged. The collective narratives from the interviews with the women in this study identified that gender-based violence was still very prevalent in Lebanon and the response to it by several agencies, and cultural units or structures was dismissal or diminishment. But participants have survived gender-based violence and resisted it in unique and

empowered ways. This section highlights the main findings that stem from the two research questions used in the study. The first significant finding pertains to how sexual violence continues to be masked by marriage (rape-marriage) despite the abolishing of Article 522 of the penal, rape-marriage law, which exempted a rapist from punishment if he married his victim. Additionally, the law in Lebanon does not criminalise marital rape and the women in the study affirmed that it is used as a tool of punishment and control by husbands. Both forms of rape, the legal and the sanctioned, continue to be justified by ideologies within the patriarchal frameworks and the power structures unique to Lebanon including political familism and confessionalism.

The second finding is that instead of helping women with their cases, the police and the militia use abusive tactics to dismiss the complaints the violence against them. This in turn magnifies the dismissal of violence against women in Lebanon.

The third significant finding that brings about a sense of hope and optimism, is that despite women's distressing experiences of violence and sexual violence, participants have worked through their challenges. They have done so by resisting oppressing aspects of the Lebanese culture such as living in silence, and by redefining shame and honour as separate from their identity and responsibility.

While race and class were acknowledged, the subsequent analysis focuses on Lebanese power structures beyond these factors—specifically, political familism, confessionalism, and militarism—that have left a significant imprint on the lives of

women in Lebanon. These power structures contribute to the overall understanding of how Lebanese women navigate oppression.

Using standpoint theory and intersectionality as a framework, the following discussion explores the various forms of power and control experienced by women. In this study, race was not an influencing factor in the lived experience of participants as race is not a relevant factor in Lebanese society. However, the participant's nationality did have an impact on their encounters. The two Syrian participants recounted experiences of discrimination linked to historical tensions between Lebanon and Syria during the Lebanese Civil War.

Similarly, class did not occupy a central role in the participants' narratives, although it structurally influences women's lives. Education, on the other hand, was employed as an indicator of the participants' socio-economic status. In Lebanon, access to higher education is typically limited to those in the upper to middle classes due to the absence of government-funded educational resources. To afford higher education in Lebanon, one needs to belong to the upper to middle classes because there is only one publicly funded university in Lebanon. Much of higher education is represented by private institutions that follow American universities or French universities. While race and class were taken into consideration, what follows is a reflection on Lebanese power structures other than race, class, and gender that influence the lives of Lebanese women. Power structures such as political familism, confessionalism, and militarism, have impacted women living in Lebanon. These power structures further inform how Lebanese women experience oppression.

A principal claim within standpoint theory is that knowledge is socially situated (Smith, 1999). The lived experience of women living in Lebanon is unique because it is influenced by political familism, confessionalism, and militarism. The participant's stories and experiences would not be fully understood without an explanation of how these social structures clout women's experiences with violence and sexual violence in a country that has been in conflict for decades. Confessionalism, political familism, and militarism are mostly non-western power structures present in Lebanon that have not been identified in an intersectional analysis to highlight how they affect women's lived experiences. These three social structures share one commonality regarding women's rights; all of them are supported by patriarchal ideologies and fail to support or recognize women's rights.

Political familism, confessionalism, and militarism are power structures that intersect in women's lives. The ideologies within political familism dictate that all conflict in the family be solved by the family, which includes all cases related to women and girls in the family. Confessionalism as a system, confines citizens to their respective sects, further oppressing women to follow the rigid rules of their religion. And finally, the influence of the military in Lebanon, a country that has been in conflict for decades, forces women to comply with the patriarchal rules of the home, ruled by political familism and their religious community. The military is also ruled by confessionalism, as the military is not trained to help women and it is not their responsibility to help women. The military takes orders from the political parties and clientelism that have power over the government.

Furthermore, the police force in Lebanon, influenced by militaristic values, is also not trained in cases of violence against women, and women are told by the police to resolve their cases at home and/or via religious courts. Standpoint theory asserts that research should begin with the lives of marginalized groups, particularly when looking at power relations (Smith, 1999). As we will see in the themes ahead, these three power structures have a detrimental effect on the participant's lived experience, and it creates a unique experience of harm and survivorship that is different from experiences in the West. As a result, the themes of*,* Justified Rape and the Influence of Confessionalism, The Power of Militarism: Militia's Influence and Police Negligence, and Resistance to Political Familism and the Lebanese Culture: A Path to Freedom and Resilience, alongside Limitations and Future Research, will be discussed in the following section.

*6.1.1 Justified Rape and the Influence of Confessionalism*

When interviewing women about their perceptions and their lived experience of sexual violence, it was surprising to see that rape had been used and understood as a symbol of marriage and a tool for punishment. When asking women about why they believe men commit sexual violence, their answers not only mentioned to assert their power over women, but to prove that they are powerful in society and to obtain their dominant status. As Meger (2016) argues, "… sexual violence as an expression of sexual dominance employed as a means of reconstructing marginalized men's "rightful" position in the gender hierarchy" (p. 47). Consequently, to regain one's sense of control and masculinity, sexual violence appears to be an act that men perpetrate to defend their social status (Ellis et al., 2017). The men who committed violence and sexual violence

against participants had likely experienced violence and poverty in their childhood (Ellis et al., 2017). The crises that men are experiencing allude to fragility and insecurity (Beneke, 1997; Caputi, 2003; Ellis et al., 2017; Hoch, 1979). When living in conflict for so long, there is a sense of loss of control over one's life, goals, and prospects. The shame that likely came from being abused and not feeling like real men permitted them to reclaim their power through violence (Ellis et al., 2017). Exerting one's power over another allows for a sense of control in a world where loss is imminent and constant. Further, Lebanese culture does not support men in confronting their sources of frustration and anxiety (Farran, 2021), so the feeling of powerlessness is masked through acts of sexual violence. Asserting one's power over another and gaining self-confidence from such an act fuels sexual violence in a conflicted country such as Lebanon. The overarching themes of power and control presented in Chapter 2: Literature Review arose within the two themes; rape as a symbol of marriage and rape as a punishment in marriage.

After interviewing the women in this study who live in Lebanon, it was clear that they find sexual violence is normalized, and some expect to be sexually violated at least once in their life. When analyzing sexual violence in a conflict country versus a non-conflict country, there is a stark difference. Violence in a conflict country is desensitized and becomes the expected norm. When sexual violence is experienced in conflict, it seems that the perpetrators feel comfortable with the violence and more entitled to carrying it out. Comfort comes from lawlessness in a conflict-ridden country, where there is no legitimate authority to charge or imprison the perpetrator. Furthermore, in a country

ruled by confessionalism, where there is sense of unity in politics and religious strife in the country, incidences of violence take on a relativistic tone in the various religious courts, making the outcomes inconsistent and uncertain. This relativistic justice puts women in a precarious position during conflict.

Religion plays a major role in life and politics in Lebanon, because the political system is organized on the basis of confessionalism. Confessionalism as discussed in Chapter 2: Literature Review, is the political makeup within the Lebanese government, which represents the majority religions in Lebanon; Christian, Sunni, and Shi'ite. The government is chaotic in Lebanon due to the tensions between Christians and the Shi'ites as well as Sunnis and Shi'ites. The basis of these conflicts is historic going back many centuries and others are an outcome of the origin of Lebanon as a nation state in the early 20th century. The details of these reasons have been discussed in Chapter 2: Literature Review. Currently, the Lebanese government is in a state of flux due to corruption and having had 14 failed attempts to elect a president. This chaos, as well the discord among the various religious groups have caused tension among citizens and have impeded progress in all social institutions, including those impacting women's rights.

As a result, many of the responsibilities of the government on issues related to the status of the family (including violence against women) have been transferred either to the family, or the relevant religious court, or to religious leaders. But even when government rules apply, much of it is contradictory and can be circumvented through loopholes. While article 522 of the Lebanese Penal Code was abolished,

which used to allow a rapist to marry the victim, articles 505 and 518 are still present in the Lebanese Penal Code, supporting a rape clause that if a girl between the age of 15-18 is raped, a marriage can occur if there is consent and/or a promise of marriage (Najjar, 2017). Interestingly, the participants who talked about the theme, rape as a symbol of marriage, were over 18, yet the rapes are still happening, and perpetrators are not being charged with anything. In speaking with participants, their collective narratives highlighted that confessionalism and its influence on the religious courts plays a major role in supporting rape being interpreted as a symbol of marriage within social relations.

Rape as a punishment in marriage was also an unexpected theme that punctuates the prominence of marital rape in Lebanese culture. Marital rape is not a crime according to the Lebanese Penal Code. The law criminalizes spouses if they use threats or violence to claim their marital right to intercourse but does not criminalize non-consensual violation of physical advances (Saloukh et al., 2015). Participants spoke of the lack of priority given to cases of sexual violence within Lebanese politics because they are assumed to be private and need to be resolved at home. Maintaining the sanctity of one's sexuality is the duty of a Lebanese woman as she upholds the shame and honour of her family through her sexuality, a key unspoken understanding in political familism. Marriage in political familism is also viewed as a sanctity, but what the women have described about marriage is that it is a prison and a license for their husbands to rape, beat and mistreat them. The interviewed women indicated that marital rape was the norm in a marriage and the duty of a wife was to appease her husband's sexual needs. Stephan et al.

(2015) found that “in some cases, Lebanese women reported feeling desensitized to violence and marital rape. They begin accepting these abuses as part of normal marriage” (p. 140). Similar to the theme of rape as a symbol of marriage, religion was used to defend marital rape. Participants who experienced marital rape stated that their husbands would use God’s will and religion to affirm that anything they wanted from their wives was approved by God and religious texts.

Article 9 of the Lebanese Constitution, which falls under the section entitled Conscience and Belief, upholds the role of religion as a central element of Lebanon’s national identity (Stephan et al., 2015). As mentioned, religion is one of the most influential aspects of Lebanon’s identity as it is deeply seeped in the political system of confessionalism and in Lebanese culture.

Article 9 of the Lebanese Constitution, gives religious leaders the power to claim religion as the guiding post in their decision-making, rendering their decisions infallible. Stephan et al. (2015) maintain, “Religious leaders claim that rules ascribed in the scriptures are divine. Therefore, any attempt to circumscribe the written word is an abomination” (p. 1). When it comes to gender-based violence and eliminating violence against women on the ground, the subjective religious translation of texts leaves no room for solutions for women. It is worth mentioning that the foundation of the Lebanese Constitution is rooted in a document from 1926, which underwent revision in 2004. This underscores that many of the issues concerning women are shaped by a document that is nearly a century old, albeit with a revision as recent as 20 years ago.

The intersection of gender, political familism, and religion is relevant to the oppression that women face. Accordingly, these power systems create distinctive social locations, and the identities of Lebanese women are positioned differently within social disparities discussed in intersectionality, in comparison to the experiences of white women or women of colour in the Canadian or American context (Collins & Bilge, 2016). In many Western nations, religion does not play a central role in regulating the civilian or legal lives of women. But in Lebanon, confessionalism runs through all systems of power, and cases of sexual violence are not supported by a confessional state. Confessional states discourage the public discussion or recognition of sexual violence and uphold patriarchal traditional values that stigmatize the public discussion or recognition of sexual violence, making it difficult for survivors to come forward or for authorities to address such cases effectively. Gender, political familism, and religion enhance our understanding of how women experience sexual violence in Lebanon and inadequate response towards sexual violence cases. As discussed earlier, the criminal justice system does not ensure the punishment of sexual violence. Therefore, men commit sexual violence in various social spaces because they can and because it affirms their masculinity and dominance. The feelings that participants expressed about the criminal justice system in Lebanon are also confirmed by Stephan et al. (2015) and Ammar (2000), indicating that religious courts in Lebanon are managed primarily by men and in some religious courts women are not permitted to serve. Moreover, many of those religious courts depend on judge's decisions and not a jury. The rulings of such a religious court are influenced by ideologies of patriarchal traditions, inevitably causing

the decisions to be affected by personal biases, ideologies, and experiences of Lebanese men. Stephan et al. (2015) affirm that these courts result in decisions, “that[reflect] patriarchal practices and norms (i.e., the expression of male dominance in society and politics) continue to be deeply embedded privately in the family and publicly in the confessional legal system” (p. 21). Cases of sexual violence are forced to be resolved in the families that experience them, instead of the courts.

*6.1.2 The Power of Militarism: Militia’s Influence and Police Negligence*

In answering the second research question, regarding the social response to sexual violence, the influence of militia in sexual violence cases was surprising. The stories in the women’s narratives showed that militias are implicated in the power, control, and violence experienced by women living in Lebanon

There are several militaristic entities in Lebanon and they have been pervasive since the start of the civil war. The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) is the official state sanctioned military in Lebanon. There is also The Internal Security Forces Directorate (ISFD), which is the national police and security force of Lebanon. According to Makdisi & Sadaka (2003) there were 24 major and minor militias in Lebanon during the LCW period; many of them remain active today. The militia played a significant role in Lebanon in filling the void for civil societies. They had large budgets based on arms sales, internal and external support. During conflict periods, they were called upon to manage and control their political territories. When there is no conflict, they patrolled and controlled the streets via checkpoints and provided services including food and medicine.

The women reported that some of the militia members were hired to ensure sexual violence cases are put aside and to target survivors. Cleveland and Kolkata in Collins & Bilge (2016) confirm this very experience that “militarized and increasingly privatized police are exerted most heavily on the most structurally disenfranchised populations whose social location within interlocking systems of oppression makes them vulnerable to violence” (p. 149).

Since military training is grounded in traditional notions of security (Rougvie, 2018), military institutions, such as the militia, perpetuate ideologies and procedures that support patriarchy, essentializing men’s and women’s gender roles. The patriarchal and hierarchical ideologies within the influencing armies in Lebanon reinforced power imbalances among men and women (Enloe, 1988; Rougvie, 2018). Furthermore, the role of law enforcement is to maintain security, combat crime, and protect people and property (Rougvie, 2018), but their responsibilities do not include the enforcement of gender-based violence and the role of police is expunged once the militia are involved in sexual violence cases.

When a government is confessionalist, and thereby sectarian, made up of various religious leaders, it becomes difficult for government leaders to assert their power because a consensus needs to be reached among the confessions/sects and their leaders (Stephan et al., 2015). These frictions impede the advancement of women’s movements because sectarian and political loyalties are above the advancement of women’s rights (Stephan et al., 2015). The result of sectarianism and the inability to move forward with human rights issues for women is exemplified in the inaction of police when it comes to

cases of gender-based violence. The three participants that utilized police services indicated that the police do not act on domestic and sexual abuse cases, especially when it stems from family violence. The police do not protect women from family violence because participants indicated that they were told that these cases should remain in the family and that the police cannot intervene in the private sphere.

The ISFD are militarized and function very much by military practices and ideologies. The ISFD operates akin to the uniformed paramilitary services of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Hezbollah's militia (Saloukh et al., 2015). Rougvie's (2018) study confirms that ISFD officers follow the same curriculum and training as the Lebanese Armed Forces, in their military academy. Gender norms within the ISFD reflect the ones established by the Lebanese culture, privileging normative masculine values like strength, power, aggression, and independence while devaluing normative feminine qualities such as being physically weak, emotional, and compassionate (Rougvie, 2018). The problem is also that the police are acting with military values, instead of policing initiatives, causing further challenges to the treatment of civilians. Police mentality and procedures are harsh, as seen in the results since their approach is influenced by militaristic values. Moreover, the police reinforce the patriarchal ideologies of Lebanese culture and they affirm political familism, whereby a woman is encouraged to return to her husband and not cause a scene for the family. If a woman is single, she is to return to her father's home and handle the situation with her family. One of the underlying reasons that police send women back to their families is to maintain the honour of the family as it is a woman's responsibility through her body and her actions or inactions. Lebanese

women are also supposed to keep from any acts or inactions considered shameful in Lebanese culture. Problem solving focuses on preserving and improving the family unit within a collectivist society and thus, the police follow form.

### *6.1.3 Resistance to Political Familism and the Lebanese Culture: A Path to Freedom and Resilience*

While power and control were evident in the lived experience of each participant, resistance was a powerful response to the oppression and violence the women had survived. This finding answers the second research question. Participants are resisting oppressive aspects in the Lebanese culture such as the code of silence and they are redefining honour and shame in the culture. Shame and honour are two key elements women must maintain in their lives, in accordance with their gender role as prescribed by the Lebanese culture. All of the women interviewed spoke about their experience with violence and sexual violence, and by doing so, they broke the code of silence that has burdened Lebanese women for centuries. Additionally, most women talked about wanting to redefine honour as something that no longer falls solely on the shoulders of women but as an aspect of personality that includes all humans that dishonour themselves or others. Also, most women talked about redefining shame as something that is disconnected from a woman's dignity and self-respect, and that it is something that should extend to all humans, as a personal responsibility to act rightfully towards themselves and their society. Further, within the theme of resistance, I found that participants had been converting to Christianity, away from, as they said, the oppressive religions of Islam and Druze. As we have seen in Chapter 5: Results, religion plays a

significant role in politics and a person's life in Lebanon. Thus, the act of converting was a form of resistance to Lebanese culture and its norms surrounding respect and obedience towards a person's religion that they were born into. Participants shared that they are looking to break free from the confines of the culture, religion and family pressure. Therefore, a form of resistance that the participants expressed was to convert to a religion that was more welcoming and less judgemental, in this case, Christianity, and defying the religion they were born into to mean that they separated themselves from its oppressive ideologies.

Resistance was not a surprising finding, but the ways by which the participants resisted were remarkable. They defied gender roles and cultural ideologies. The gendered role of Lebanese women is reinforced in their socialization and is embedded in the cultural ideologies, and it is difficult to escape these roles. By leaving their homes and seeking out a shelter and NGOs to support them, participants resist the rules and expectations surrounding gendered roles. Moreover, the women who sought help had to leave their families behind, which is also a form of resistance to a culture that places family at the nucleus of all institutions. The family is such a highly regarded institution that it was ingrained in the political system, as political familism. As explained in Chapter 2: Literature Review, political familism privileges the family, and therefore, all important decisions and resolutions begin and end with the family, and not the social institutions in Lebanon such as the police, courts, and military. For women to leave their families places their lives at a great risk because a woman who is disconnected from her family in Lebanon is one who exposes herself to scrutiny in the

least severe cases and to death at the most severe case. In Western countries, the government makes decisions and resolutions for its citizens, but in Lebanon, it is the responsibility of the family and not the government. In Lebanon, the family is central to politics and these decisions and resolutions are to be made by the male heads of households and women are to follow. There is no consideration for the opinion or rights of women, which is evidence of patriarchy and a lack of regard for women to be treated as first class citizens. A woman without her family in Lebanon means that she is not protected and supported, and thus, it offers her up to experience more danger.

Political familism becomes an essential power structure to consider in the intersectional analysis of women living in Lebanon because political familism defines the nucleus of a woman's role in society. Political familism magnifies the struggles of a woman's life in Lebanon, including carrying the burden of family honour and attending to her main responsibilities, household chores, and child-rearing. Political familism stipulates the rules women have to abide by, which inevitably affects how women experience life and how they are treated in a patriarchal society.

In Lebanon, it is very difficult for women to remove themselves from their families, whether they are married or not. Women are more supported by their families when they are married and have children (Ammar, 1996). The freedom that the participants took cost them their families, stability, and protection. A Lebanese woman who is not connected to her family unit is very vulnerable to experiencing sexual violence, harassment, and being used by men and by anyone for that matter. Mariam shared her experience when going for a work interview, she explained, "When you go

and do a work interview. One of the questions is if you are married or not. I answered that I am divorced. And the owner was harassing me in a horrible way. He is an older man, 85 years" (Participant 1). Lebanese culture is collectivist, whereby groups are more valuable than the individual (Stephan et al., 2015). Any act that benefits the individual over the collective is frowned upon and viewed as a selfish act. Stephan et al. (2015) also confirm, "The collective nature of Lebanese culture puts self-interests, such as mental well-being and life satisfaction, second to cultural stigmas and social pressures to uphold traditional family values and social status" (p. 137). Finding one's independence in such a culture and within conflict is resilience. Participants demonstrated strength and resilience by going against cultural pressures and defying traditional as well as patriarchal ideologies in the name of their independence and emancipation from their oppressive families.

Barrios Suarez (2013) illustrates that "Resilience is often conceptualized as the absence of PTSD, depression or other signs of emotional distress" (p. 201). While resilience is seen as an outcome of negative circumstances (Barrios Suarez, 2013), in this study, resilience goes beyond the outcome of negative circumstances and illustrates how participants have broken the confines of gender barriers to create better lives for themselves. Nevertheless, there are insufficient narratives of women and girl survivors of war and their resilient responses to living in conflict and post-war (Barrios Suarez, 2013). Therefore, it is important to discuss how resilience is experienced by survivors of war-torn countries. While the definition of resilience given by Barrios Suarez (2013) considers the absence of psychological effects of trauma, this study identifies a definition

of resilience that highlights the presence of positive psychological effects of trauma. In the study, resilience appears in participants' lives by being hopeful, practicing gratitude, and perseverance.

The participants interviewed have all experienced repeated trauma, whether it be living in a conflict-ridden country or a conflict-ridden home. When repeated trauma is experienced, one goes numb. This is especially the case when trauma is compounded with participant's experiences of war and child abuse, and/or child sexual abuse and as adults, sexual violence. Participants had expressed that at first, they were numb, angry, alone, and suicidal. The numbness aids one from taking in more acts of violence or living in war (Gallegos et al., 2018). Numbing protects an individual from experiencing extreme emotions that could affect one's memory, health, and safety (Gallegos et al., 2018). Numbness is a response to repeated trauma that allows a person to conserve energy and protect themselves from further pain and suffering (Gallegos et al., 2018).

The trauma that participants have experienced in a conflict country and their lived experience may make one expect that the women accept their fate and lack the ability and at times desire to bring themselves out of the oppressive situation. However, participants are surviving and are living their lives, by their own rules and not someone else's, as they expressed. It is important to note that the dichotomy of victim/survivor in the literature regarding violence against women is problematic. It needs to be acknowledged that women are neither victims/nor survivors and are oftentimes living in a state of dynamic tension between being the victim and survivor. Yet, the women I spoke with have found resilience and their stories are a testament to freedom and hope for women who are

experiencing a similar situation. After participants embarked on a healing path, the numbness turned into courage, confidence, taking responsibility, and independence. In a country where women experience forced dependence, women interviewed took responsibility for their lives, their healing, and improving their lifestyles. The path to healing is a courageous one and sometimes requires going against the culture, societal norms, and religious prescriptions.

Moreover, the resistance that these women demonstrated by redefining shame and honour are one way of rejecting the patriarchy influencing Lebanese culture. The redefinition of shame and honour by participants is a counter-narrative to dominant narratives regarding gendered roles, sexuality, and living authentically. Furthermore, participants mentioned their aspirations, which is something that Lebanese women do not usually discuss because their families and chores need to be the priority, and not their future goals. If women mention their aspirations, they will be judged for being neglectful of their role as daughters, wives, and mothers. The level of awareness that participants identified is important in building resilience. All of the women interviewed became aware of the value of their feelings and the importance of their existence. Women questioned their positions in society, and they questioned their status. This level of awareness is a sign of forming one’s identity, rather than conforming to society, the family, and patriarchal rules. Self-awareness is not simple when experiencing repeated trauma and living in constant conflict. Self-awareness is moving beyond numbness, which is evidence of resilience.

The participants are examples of women who have prioritized their self-identity and self-esteem. In Lebanon, “The vows of marriage are considered to be far more important than a woman’s personal health and happiness, or even the health and happiness of her children” (Stephan et al., 2015, p. 138). The women interviewed have placed their safety and personal happiness over their duty to their families and marriages. It is these women, I presume, who will begin to initiate change in Lebanese society, one that values the human rights and freedoms of women. The women who have chosen to lead their lives despite familial pressures have the ability to help other women in need and are capable of working in areas to improve the status of Lebanese women, from the ground up.

### 6.2 Limitations

For this study, I intended to conduct in-person interviews in Lebanon because the participants I interviewed are a difficult population to reach. However, before the recruitment of participants began, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, and I was forced to pivot the study to be conducted online. Therefore, recruitment was completed online, and interviews were conducted on video (using WhatsApp or Zoom) or over the phone. As a result of COVID-19, some challenges arose. For instance, the intake at the shelter where I began my recruitment was lower due to the lack of mobility (i.e. lockdowns in Lebanon, people were restricted to the use of services in their neighbourhood and they could not cross to other neighbourhoods or regions) because of the virus. Had there not been a pandemic, I may have had more participants to speak to at the shelter. Further, while I did achieve a snowball sample, recruiting more participants in this manner was challenging

as I believe that creating trust and confidence in participants is facilitated by in person communication rather than by video or phone communication. Hence, had I been able to meet potential participants in person, my study may have conjured more interviews.

Another limitation in recruitment and interviews online was the connectivity issue in Lebanon. Lebanon still experiences power outages on a daily basis and oftentimes, I had to reschedule interviews due to the outages. Additionally, I was told by participants that Lebanon had been experiencing connectivity issues, whereby people could not connect to the internet as frequently because the government had not paid vendors on time, causing outages for all Lebanese people. Due to the challenges stemming from COVID-19 and the lack of access to more participants, the sample size was smaller than planned initially.

Most participants were recruited from the shelter where I have connections. The participants knew that I was connected to the founders of the shelter. Therefore, participants may have communicated socially desirable answers to me, or they may not have reported or spoken in detail about the negative actions or negative coping methods they had chosen when they first experienced conflict within their families or their lives more generally. No participant had indicated the use of alcohol or drugs as negative coping methods, all were positive. A lack of using negative coping methods could have been an influence of their religiosity or the heavy influence of religion on their upbringing. While these reasons have not been confirmed, it is important to mention them. In addition, the lack of reporting negative coping methods could also very well be tied to shame and maintaining honour. The participants may have also been embarrassed

to share these details with me as well because of my connection to the shelter founders. In this regard, my insider role may have been a limitation in the study. While my insider role allowed for participants to feel comfortable in sharing their lived experience with me because I am Lebanese, I conducted interviews in Arabic and there was trust in me as an interviewer being affiliated with shelter founders. However, part of my insider role may have affected the way participants answered the questions about their coping methods and may have stopped them from telling more detailed stories of the harm they did to themselves or they may have experienced.

Furthermore, the women I interviewed are women who wanted to speak up, and they are a group of women who have gained strength from the founders and women at the shelter. The group of women interviewed have resisted the culture and their experience of violence and sexual violence. Nevertheless, their experiences are not necessarily representative of Lebanese women or women living in Lebanon. The study only focused on women living in Lebanon, who are at the shelter and their lived experience with regard to sexual violence and harm during a civil war. The results of this study are not generalizable to other populations of women in Lebanon, nor are they generalizable to men. A gender-specific interview schedule would have been needed for men as the study did allude to men experiencing life in conflict differently than women. To include men in the study would have been outside the scope of this dissertation and is identified as a significant topic within the section on future research.

## 6.3 Future Research

In considering the limitations of the study, future research needs to consider Lebanese men's experiences concerning sexual violence, either as perpetrators or survivors living in a conflict-ridden country like Lebanon. Through this research, I have learned that the crux of war and conflict is men fighting against men. Weapons are used against men, as sexual violence is used as a weapon against women. Future research involving a study with men is invaluable to the literature on war and sexual violence, specifically in Lebanon. While conducting my study, I did not come across any men that used shelters, and most of the NGOs and shelters that I knew of or that became known to me after this study, did not seem to have men utilizing their services. It would be vital to interview men who experienced sexual violence and/or harm and to ask them about their coping methods, and how they seek and receive help when they are victimized. Comparing how men and women experience sexual violence and harm, their lived experiences, coping methods, and how they receive help, will shed significant insight into how religious courts, the police, military, and NGOs, as well as shelters, are involved or maybe not involved in men's lives.

Further, in answering the question about the social response to sexual violence, participants alluded to a disconnect between the police, religious courts and not having their cases filed anywhere or deleted from the system the police use to report cases. As discussed, sometimes the police leave cases of violence against women to be handled by the religious courts and for the religious leaders/courts to determine the outcome. Learning about women's experiences of violence and sexual violence in religious courts

and how cases of violence against women are handled in religious courts, is also an opportunity for future research. Also, participants shared that churches and NGOs (i.e., ABAAD and KAFA) have played a major role in helping women who experience violence and sexual violence in Lebanon. In future research, it would be interesting to understand how churches and other religious institutions play a role in social justice for women. It is also worth understanding how NGOs in Lebanon work with patriarchal systems such as the police and religious courts, and more generally how they push through cases into the system so that women receive some justice.

### 6.4 Conclusion

The perspective informed by women's voices about sexual violence in Lebanon has been central to this dissertation. Learning more about their lived experiences and social locations have shown that social structures unique to a country such as Lebanon need to be studied. Confessionalism, militarism, and political familism have impacted women living in Lebanon and their experiences with sexual violence and harm. These power structures have barred women from seeking and receiving help to remedy their endurance of violence and sexual violence. These social structures have also restricted women's ability to cultivate various social networks, confining them to familial and religious institutions plagued by patriarchal norms and behaviours. Some women in the West assume that the lived experiences of women in the Middle East, including in Lebanon, is one of accepted oppression. While this may be the case for some women, the participants in this study have found their strength and authentic selves by emancipating themselves from their families and the oppressive aspects of the Lebanese culture. In the

majority of instances, participants have transcended the trauma of sexual violence by resisting these power structures and refusing to have them exert influence over their lives, and they have chosen to break free from the constraints of political familism, confessionalism, and militarism by seeking help from shelters, NGOs, and churches. While most participants resisted the confines of the oppressive culture, it came at a price, as some lost all contact with their families and many never received justice for the harm they experienced.

This study filled a gap by introducing narratives of women living in Lebanon who have experienced sexual violence and harm within a conflict-ridden country. The narratives will enlighten the readers about the challenges women face when seeking and receiving help for sexual violence incidences and violence cases. More broadly, the study informs readers about why violence against women persists in Lebanon how the social structures of confessionalism, political familism, and militarism uphold the oppressive norms latent in Lebanese culture. The persistent patriarchy in Lebanon in its various forms of misogyny, the code of silence, shame and the maintenance of honour work to maintain violence against women protected. Accordingly, to move forward and away from patriarchal ideologies and gender-based violence, the police and the courts need to include women as officers and judges as well as women from the various religious sects in the country. Also, there needs to be a specialized division of the police that is trained in handling gender-based violence and another that monitors the influence of militia in preventing women survivors of violence from seeking help. There should also be a criminal justice mechanism that keeps updated data on instances of sexual violence

reported and make them readily available for use by religious courts. All in all, the criminal justice system needs to be stripped of the misogynist cultural values that influence its functioning and focus on systematizing data collection, following the laws and policies that support women in cases of sexual violence and harm. Further, NGOs like Kafa and ABAAD need to be involved in training the police and working with the courts in assisting women with their cases. While these suggestions seem to be far reaching in a society that is controlled by oppressive social structures, the women interviewed are taking responsibility for their lives and are working in shelters and with NGOs to improve the lives of women and the existing systems.

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**Appendices**

**Appendix A**

A1. Interview Schedule

Please consider this interview as a chance for you to share your story with me and help me better understand the issues at play while living in Lebanon.

**A) Individual/Familial Background**

First, we will start with some questions about you:

1) How old are you?

2) What is your educational background?

3) What religious group do you identify with? How much does religion play a role in your life? Probe for self-perceived level of religiosity.

4) Do you work? What is your occupation?

5) Where were you born? Are you a citizen of Lebanon? If not, what is your status? How many years have you been living in Lebanon?

6) What Middle Eastern country did your family come from (Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Palestine)?

7) In which neighbourhood do you live? (North Lebanon, South Lebanon, etc.)

8) Do you like living in Lebanon? Is Lebanon home for you?

9) Are you married? How would you describe your marriage? (i.e happy, rocky, etc.).

Probe, do you feel supported in your marriage? How do you deal with trials and tribulations in your marriage? Are you comfortable sharing sensitive information in your marriage?

10) Do you have children? How many?

11) Thinking about your family, who is the head of the household? Who makes the rules and decisions in the household?

12) Who are you closest to in your family? Why do you say that?

**B) Social and Familial Gendered Relations**

1) Would you consider your religious beliefs as part of your culture?

2) How would you describe your family life? Do you think that a man should be head of the household?

3) Tell me about your upbringing. Did you have rules in your household? Do you have a

curfew? Are you allowed to date? Are you allowed to attend school and have a job?

4) Are there rules that you have to follow being a female? How are they different than rules for males?

5) How do you understand the rules we just discussed to be played out in your life?

6) How just do you find these rules?

7) Were you a victim to double-standards or gender bias in the family?

8) What are your thoughts on shame in the culture?

9) Has shame played a role in your life? How so? If not, why?

10) What are your thoughts on honour in the culture?

11) Have there been instances where your honour has been threatened?

12) Tell me about your social life. Do you have little or many friends? Do you consider yourself to be social or more wanting to be alone?

13) Does technology play a role in your day to day? Have you ever used technology to discuss your personal life?

14) Do you travel? If so, how often? Where have you been?

The next set of questions is sensitive in nature and I would like to remind you that you do not have to answer any question if you do not feel comfortable. We can just move to the next question. Also, if you need to take a break at any time, please feel free to let me know and we can do so.

**C) Conflict Zones/Non-Militarized and Militarized Sexual Violence**

1) What is your experience/views on living in conflict?

2) How does living in conflict affect you? Has it changed the way you make decisions in your life? How so? How not so?

3) How many times have you moved due to conflict?

4) Have you lost people due to conflict/war?

5) How has living in conflict affected your experience as a woman?

6) Have you ever experienced any type of unwanted attention/contact from any person in your life? Unwanted contact means forced sexual intercourse and includes vaginal, anal and oral penetration as well as penetration by foreign objects such as a weapon. It also

includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse and physical as well as psychological coercion.

7) What was the most serious nature of this contact? Was it physical? Psychological?

8) Why do you think this person did this? (referring to contact from above question). What

do you think they are trying to achieve?

9) Have you told anyone about this occurrence? If so, who and why them? If no, why not?

10) Have you ever experienced any type of unwanted attention/contact from a person in uniform (i.e police, military, etc.)

11) What was the most serious nature of this contact? Was it physical? Etc.

12) Why do you think the military, police, etc. do this? (referring to contact from above question). What do you think they are trying to achieve?

13) Have you told anyone about this occurrence (i.e family, friends, etc)? If so, who and why them? If no, why not?

14) Did you suffer any consequences in your life after this incident?

15) Do you feel like you have strong bonds? With whom? (Who is your go to person, does anybody know?)

16) Who do you have in your life that you can confide in, whom you tell your most personal information?

17) Have you ever shared your experiences of what we talked about using technology? We are going to switch gears a little and talk more about your personal experiences.

**D) Sexuality, the Body and Sexual Violence**

1) How do you perceive your body?

2) Do you feel like you have control over your body?

3) Do you feel like your body belongs to you or someone else?

4) Prior to the event, how did you perceive your body?

5) Did your image or relationship with your body change after the event? If so, how? If not, why do you think that is?

6) Have your relationships (i.e. familial, social, romantic, etc.) changed after the event? If yes, how so? If no, why not?

7) Do you carry shame about your body? Why? Why not?

8) Do you associate your body with honour? Why? Why not?

9) Does sexuality play a role in your life as a woman? If so how? If no, why not?

10) Do you have anything else you would like to add/comment on?

**E) Thoughts on Sexual Violence/Experience of Shelter**

1) How long have you lived at the shelter?

2) How did you find out about this shelter?

3) Have you visited another shelter in Beirut?

4) Did technology help you in any way to find information about shelters or how to receive help?

5) Have you ever reported (i.e police) an incident of rape/gang rape? If so, was the police helpful? Did you feel secure? Did you trust them?

6) Have you ever told anyone (family member, friend) about this incident?

7) Are you aware of any groups that support women that have experienced a similar situation to you? Are these shelters helpful, empathetic, supportive?

8) How has this experienced in your life changed you and your relationships (i.e familial, social, romantic, etc.)?

9) Have you experienced any physical and/or mental health issues as a result of the incident?

10) What are your coping strategies?

11) Have you ever gone to counselling? (i.e alone for self-care, marriage counselling, etc.)

12) How do the intersections of being a woman, Muslim/Christian, your experience of sexual violence play a role in your daily life?

13) If there was one thing you could change with respect to what we have talked about, what would it be? Probe: Why do you say that?

**F) Thoughts on sexual violence and the criminal justice system**

1) In your opinion, what is the role of the criminal justice system when it comes to cases of rape?

2) How do you feel about the police and courts protecting you from these incidents?

3) Why do you think rape/gang rape is committed by the military?

4) Why do you think rape/gang rape is committed overall?

5) How has your experience changed you? Do you feel like it has given you power or have you felt alienated, powerless?

**G) Self-Efficacy and Resilience**

1) Has this experience allowed for something positive to come out of it? i.e meeting new people at the shelter, support group, etc.

2) Have you been active in the community as a result? i.e participated in protests, NGO's, working/volunteering in women's shelter, etc.

3) You are such a strong person to be here and have experienced all of this, what would you say are your strengths? What are your successes?

A debriefing and relaxation exercise will follow (relaxation exercise optional).