



A GENDERED CRISIS: UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF YEMEN'S WAR

By: Dr. Fawziah Al-Ammar, Hannah Patchett & Shams Shamsan

Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Few Yemenis have been spared the catastrophic impact of the Yemen War, but prevailing gender norms mean women and girls, and men and boys, have experienced the conflict differently. This report explores how gender norms have shaped Yemenis' experience of conflict, and how conflict is reshaping gender norms in Yemen.

The report is based on qualitative research, including 88 focus group discussions conducted across Yemen from November 2018 to February 2019, 49 key informant interviews, six case studies and a literature review. The focus group discussions included 674 participants in eight districts representing different political and socio-economic contexts — near and far from the fighting and on both sides of the frontlines. These were: Al-Sabeen and Bani Harith in Amanat al-Asimah, Sana'a city; Mukalla and Sayoun in Hadramawt governorate; Sheikh Othman and Seera in Aden governorate; and Al-Shamayatan and Al-Qahira in Taiz governorate.

Focus group discussion participants and key informants in all areas perceived that financial strain has pressed women into the workforce, severely impacted boys and girls in terms of access to education and vulnerability to gender-based violence, and driven a rise in multiple forms of gender-based violence.

Prior to the current conflict, around half of Yemenis lived in poverty and more than 40 percent were food insecure.⁽¹⁾ The economy contracted by more than 40 percent during the first three years of the war,⁽²⁾ with many businesses collapsing or downsizing. More than 1.2 million public sector workers — and their families — were affected by the suspension of government salaries in September 2016.⁽³⁾ Unemployment and underemployment, as well as salary suspensions and the depreciation of the Yemeni rial, have dragged the middle class toward or into poverty and those already in poverty into destitution. While payments to some public sector workers have resumed, some 20 million of Yemen's 28 million people continue to face severe or acute food insecurity.⁽⁴⁾

Focus group discussion participants and key informants perceived women and men as having navigated the country's new economic reality differently. Many said women were generally proactive and creative in seeking paid work, while some men were reluctant to work in jobs they considered unsuitable or were pressured — economically and by traditional definitions of masculinity — into joining fighting forces to support their families.

1) "Yemen Household Budget 2014," World Bank, as cited in "Yemen Poverty Notes," World Bank, June 2017, documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/147231509378508387/pdf/Yemen-Poverty-Notes-Revised-0612.pdf.

2) "Yemen's Economic Update — October 2019," World Bank, October 9, 2019, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/yemen/publication/economic-update-october-2019>.

3) Mansour Rageh, Amal Nasser and Farea al-Muslimi, "Yemen Without a Functioning Central Bank: The Loss of Basic Economic Stabilization and Accelerating Famine," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, November 2, 2016, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/main-publications/55>.

4) "Yemen's Economic Update — October 2019," World Bank, October 9, 2019, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/yemen/publication/economic-update-october-2019>.

Some participants and key informants in all areas noted more positive male attitudes emerging during the war toward women working, saying, for example, that men increasingly seek brides who are employed in contrast to a pre-war tendency toward seeking a housewife. Indications were more mixed, however, as to whether women's economic empowerment was expanding their influence in family decision-making or would last beyond the conflict – indicating an area where post-war support could be critical.

In exploring the gendered consequences of the conflict on Yemen's youth, this report finds that the prospects of a generation of Yemeni boys and girls as well as young adults have been compromised by the conflict-driven devastation of education. War-related economic and security factors are magnifying the societal problem of early marriage, especially among girls, and are driving boys out of school and into the ranks of fighting forces.

Prior to the conflict, poverty and lack of access to schools in rural areas had limited families' abilities to educate their children, and war has only compounded this problem. Yemenis report having to choose between feeding or educating their children, being unable to afford transport costs or school needs such as uniforms and books. With teachers unpaid or the value of their salaries depreciated by rampant inflation, many lack motivation, are preoccupied with securing extra outside income or have joined frontlines. Stress due to the war and economic collapse has affected teachers' behavior toward students, and students report to class hungry and displaying symptoms of trauma.

War is also magnifying existing gender and power inequalities that lie at the root of gender-based violence (GBV). The imprecision and scarcity of baseline statistics on GBV in Yemen complicates efforts to identify trends, however participants and key informants perceived that the incidence of multiple forms of physical and sexual violence had increased during the conflict in the home and in public spaces. Focus group participants recounted incidents of rapes of girls and boys, within families, in schools and by armed men from security forces and militias. Participants and key informants also perceived increases in kidnappings, groping and verbal harassment of women and girls, and frustration was evident at what some participants said was growing impunity for perpetrators. Participants in all governorates said the absence of a functioning state had reduced access to justice for victims of physical and sexual violence. In addition, social protections against GBV had diminished, they reported, and a general rise in violence and weapons proliferation left bystanders afraid to intervene.

This report focuses on the gendered experience of the war in terms of the economic crisis, which was widely perceived to have magnified other existing domestic and societal issues facing women, girls, men and boys. It also looks closely at the gendered experience of the war on Yemen's youths – boys and girls as well as young adults – and on the nature and, as much as possible within the limitations of the study, the extent of physical and sexual violence at home and in the community.

The following emerged as the key perceptions of focus group participants and key informants:

- **Women have shown resilience to economic challenges, displaying flexibility and innovation as they are pushed into seeking paid work.** Women are starting businesses at home, online and in the community, and working in nontraditional sectors. Opportunities available to illiterate and uneducated women often have been precarious and low-paid.
- **Attitudes appear to be changing toward women working.** Yet, the sustainability of their increased economic empowerment is uncertain. Shifts in household gender roles have been limited. Women's economic empowerment often was associated with a diminution of men's status.
- **Lack of income has undermined men's traditional role as breadwinner and has affected family life.** Men have moved to jobs of lower social status than their previous roles and have been driven to frontlines seeking a salary. Pressure to conform to masculine norms also has influenced the decision to fight.
- **Children are dropping out of school. Rising poverty has left parents unable to afford to educate their children.** Girls are more likely to be withdrawn from school than boys, for cultural, economic and security reasons. Boys leave school to earn money — driven by family financial need — and sometimes to join armed groups. Armed violence at and near schools has stopped some parents from sending their sons and daughters to school.
- **Gender-based violence has increased during the conflict.** Women and girls have been affected by rape, kidnapping, sexual harassment and domestic violence perpetrated by militias and community members as well as husbands, fathers and brothers. Sexual violence against boys is also widespread.
- **Financial insecurity is the primary driver of an increase in gender-based violence.** Women also are blamed, by men and women, for violence against them.
- **The incidence of early marriage has risen.** Girls are married early, driven by economic pressure and fears for their safety in an unstable security environment.
- **Impunity for gender-based violence is growing.** Social protections have diminished and state and judicial systems are not functioning.

Full recommendations are offered at the end of this report to guide domestic and international stakeholders to help alleviate the war's varied impact on women, girls, men and boys. They are aimed at improving immediate situations, economically and in terms of reducing gender-based violence and trauma within families, in schools and in communities. Several recommendations also aim to stabilize families and to capitalize on women's economic gains that have occurred during the war. They also seek to address necessary changes to basic legal, political and social elements that would help address deeper gender-based discrimination and violence — and improve the likelihood any empowerment gained during harsh years of war will be sustained in times of peace and rebuilding.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Women must be meaningfully included in peace talks and in post-conflict political processes.
- The warring parties must immediately release all child soldiers from military conscription.
- The internationally recognized Yemeni government should resume full, regular salaries to public sector staff in all parts of Yemen.
- All stakeholders should prioritize increasing school enrollment and improving the learning environment. Mechanisms could include training female teachers, providing transport and breakfast, as well as psycho-social support and restoring government scholarships.
- Donors should invest in further research to inform interventions to address gender-specific trauma in Yemen.
- Yemeni civil society, with local and international support, should engage tribal leaders to discourage child marriage.
- Women's increased economic participation should be supported. Further research is necessary on women's roles in the informal economy and in rural areas.
- In line with NDC recommendations, the post-conflict government should:
 - Ensure women are represented at all political levels, including cabinet portfolios.
 - Align Yemeni legislation to its international obligations relevant to gender.
 - Set a legal marriage age of 18 years for men and women.

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INTRODUCTION

Patriarchal structures and strict gender norms in Yemen have enforced gender inequalities, imposing social, legal, economic and political discrimination of women and constraining women's opportunities, including their access to education, work and justice. Women's rights have regressed on some fronts since the unification of Yemen in 1990, as the conservative legislation of the north's Yemen Arab Republic prevailed over the more progressive laws of the south's People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. An example of this was the removal of women's equality before the law from the constitution in 1994 and its replacement with an article describing women as the "sisters of men"; a clause prohibiting discrimination based on sex also was removed from the constitution.⁽⁵⁾ However, Yemen's placement as the most unequal country in the world for women — it has ranked last in the Global Gender Gap index every year for the past decade⁽⁶⁾ — may mask a more complex reality. Yemen's rich and diverse traditions — politically, socially and religiously — mean that Yemeni women's experiences have varied, depending in part on their geographical origins and socioeconomic status.⁽⁷⁾

Yemeni women were the first in the Arabian peninsula to gain suffrage, in 1967 for southern women and 1970 in the north,⁽⁸⁾ and they were leaders of the February 2011 uprising that ended the 33-year rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Yet before the current conflict, only one of Yemen's 301 members of parliament was female;⁽⁹⁾ this has since dropped to zero.⁽¹⁰⁾ Only one woman attended the signing of the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative, brokered in November 2011 to facilitate Yemen's post-revolutionary transition, and none were appointed to the military, security and economic committees tasked with following up on the initiative.⁽¹¹⁾

Women made up 28 percent of the 565 delegates at the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), which convened from March 2013 to January 2014 to guide Yemen's post-

5) "Republic of Yemen, The Status of Yemen Women: From Aspiration to Opportunity," World Bank, June 2014, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/640151468334820965/pdf/878200REVISED00Box0385200B00PUBLIC0.pdf>.

6) "The Global Gender Gap Report 2018," World Economic Forum, December 17, 2018, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf.

7) For a full exploration of the diversity of gender norms in Yemen, see: Marta Colburn, "A Situation Analysis of Gender and Development in Yemen," 2002, Oxfam GB Yemen and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

8) "Middle East Suffrage Timeline," Women Suffrage and Beyond, accessed November 26, 2019, http://womensuffrage.org/?page_id=103.

9) Maggy Grabundzija & Wameedh Shakir, "Gender Analysis in Conflict-Affected Yemen August 2018 — January 2019," Particip GmbH and EuroPlus, January 2019.

10) "The Global Gender Gap Report 2018," World Economic Forum, December 17, 2018, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf.

11) "Republic of Yemen, The Status of Yemen Women: From Aspiration to Opportunity," World Bank, June 2014, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/640151468334820965/pdf/878200REVISED00Box0385200B00PUBLIC0.pdf>.

revolutionary transition, resolve the country's grievances and draft a new constitution. The NDC recommended legal reforms to criminalize violence against women, proposed a quota of 30 percent for women's representation in political bodies and called for a minimum age of marriage to be set at 18 years.⁽¹²⁾ However, Yemen's fragile transition ultimately was derailed by the takeover of the capital, Sana'a, by the armed Houthi movement in September 2014 and the subsequent military intervention by a Saudi- and Emirati-led coalition in March 2015.

The ongoing conflict between the armed Houthi movement and the internationally recognized government backed by the Saudi- and Emirati-led coalition has created a catastrophic humanitarian crisis. More than 100,000 people have been killed in direct conflict,⁽¹³⁾ by conservative estimates, and 3.65 million have been displaced.⁽¹⁴⁾ The war has exacerbated poverty and hunger and has led to the collapse of basic services such as healthcare and education. UNDP has estimated that indirect conflict deaths stemming from such issues would reach 131,000 by the end of 2019, bringing the total death toll to at least 231,000.⁽¹⁵⁾

This report explores the experiences of Yemeni women, girls, men and boys during the war, based on focus group discussions, consultative workshops, key informant interviews and case studies. The research finds that the war has exacerbated existing inequalities in Yemeni society, in part driven by widespread unemployment and rising poverty. It also has shifted gender norms. This report begins by exploring the impact of the economic crisis on women and men. It then looks at the gendered consequences of the conflict on Yemen's youth. Finally, it examines the perceived rise in gender-based violence.

12) Ibid.

13) "Press Release: Over 100,000 Reported Killed in Yemen War," Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, October 31, 2019, <https://www.acleddata.com/2019/10/31/press-release-over-100000-reported-killed-in-yemen-war/>.

14) "UNHCR Operational Update," UNHCR, November 15, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR%20Yemen%20Operational%20Update%20-%202015NOV19.pdf>.

15) Jonathan D. Moyer, David Bohl, Taylor Hanna, Brendan R. Mape & Mickey Rafa, "Assessing the Impact of War on Development in Yemen," UNDP and the Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures, 2019, p. 9, <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/yemen/General/Docs/ImpactOfWarOnDevelopmentInYemen.pdf>.



METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research was to document and assess the impact of the Yemen war through a gender lens. The research sought to explore how gender norms have shaped the experience of the war differently for Yemeni women, girls, men and boys, and how the war has shaped gender norms.

Several qualitative research tools were used to produce multiple data sources, including 88 focus group discussions, 49 in-depth key informant interviews, seven case studies and a literature review. Six consultative workshops were held in Sana'a, Aden and Amman to refine the research methodology and to validate and critique the findings of the research.

Literature Review

The researchers conducted a comprehensive literature review of research related to gender and conflict in Yemen and in other contexts. This review encompassed technical studies, academic articles, reports by international organizations and agencies, legislation and statistical data.

Focus Group Discussions

A qualitative data set was collected through 88 focus group discussions conducted in four governorates of Yemen (Taiz, Hadramawt, Aden and Amanat al-Asimah, Sana'a city) from November 2018 to February 2019. They were held in eight districts — two in each governorate — and convened 674 participants. Participants were selected using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. Overall, 54 percent of participants were female (363) and 46 percent were male (311). Of these, 363 were ages 18 to 25 and 335 were ages 26 and older. Focus groups were segregated by gender and age range; male facilitators moderated male focus groups and female facilitators moderated female groups. The discussions were facilitated by 16 field staff trained in qualitative data collection and gender-sensitive research during three-day workshops conducted in Aden and Sana'a.

The districts were selected to shed light on diverse viewpoints and experiences of the conflict, including areas that have experienced fighting and areas far from the war's frontlines. Districts under Houthi control and districts under the control of the internationally recognized Yemeni government were represented. The target areas also reflected varied socio-economic and demographic profiles. Districts represented were in urban areas or on the outskirts of major cities, a limitation of the study that should

be addressed in future research given Yemen's large rural population. Participants were local community members and included internally displaced people, people from host communities, members of female-headed and youth-headed households, and people from the Muhamasheen community, a long-marginalized Yemeni underclass.

The discussions explored the impact of the conflict in relation to livelihoods, household consumption, coping mechanisms, community and domestic violence, and gender roles, among other topics. Because of the intimate nature of some of the discussions, all focus groups were conducted with assurances of confidentiality.

Key Informant Interviews

Researchers conducted 49 semi-structured face-to-face interviews with key informants from December 2018 through March 2019. These included 44 in-depth interviews with key informants (28 male and 16 female) in the eight targeted districts, among them local authority and government officials, community leaders, political and women's rights activists, civil society representatives including staff of local NGOS and women's rights organizations and one academic. Some key informants held multiple roles. A further five interviews were conducted with national-level experts (four female and one male) from international and Yemeni NGOs and women's rights organizations. All interviews were conducted in Arabic.

The questions focused on the economic impact of the conflict, coping mechanisms, education, health, gender norms and gender-based violence, among other topics.

Case Studies

Researchers documented six case studies to provide in-depth context and validation to the findings of the research. Those included in this report have been edited for clarity and brevity.

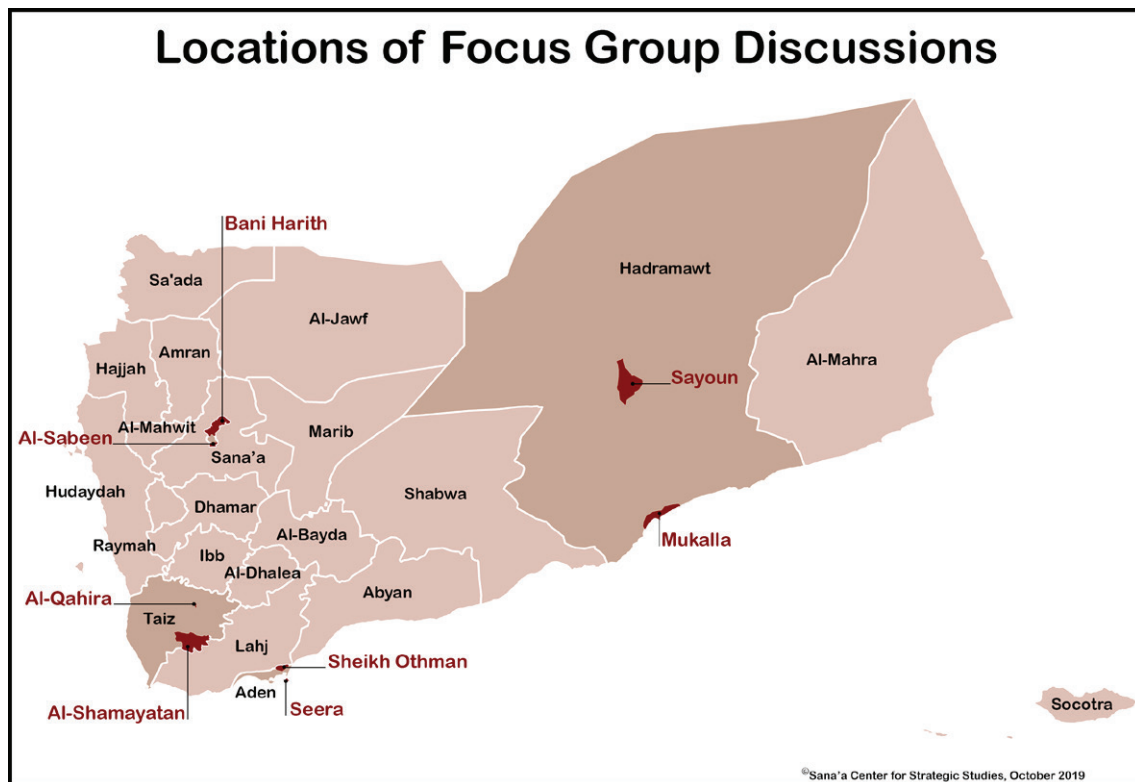
Consultative workshops

Researchers consulted with experts working on gender or in related fields including researchers, consultants, activists, academics, members of the judiciary, local authority and government officials and representatives of civil society organizations, local and international NGOs and women's rights organizations.

Three consultative workshops were held in Sana'a, Aden and Amman in October 2018, convening 27 experts to review the research methodology, including the scope and themes of the research and the selection of target areas. Additionally, 10 face-to-face interviews and seven phone interviews were conducted with experts. Input from these

workshops and interviews was incorporated into the design of the study.

After data were collected and analyzed, three further consultative workshops were held in Sana'a, Aden and Amman in July and August 2019, convening 43 experts. The findings of the research were shared for review, validation and critique. Reflections shared at these workshops provided guidance for the analysis in this report.



DESCRIPTION OF STUDY AREAS

Al-Sabeen, Amanat al-Asimah, Sana'a city

Population size: 612,000⁽¹⁶⁾

Al-Sabeen is a district of Amanat al-Asimah, the administrative zone that includes Sana'a city, under the control of the armed Houthi movement. It has a mix of poor and wealthy neighborhoods. Main sources of employment include private sector enterprises – such as retail stores at shopping malls, as well as several street markets that have opened during the war – and NGOs. Residents rely on solar panels and privately owned electricity generators as no electricity is available through a municipal service provider. Al-Sabeen Square has been used for political rallies and military parades both by late President Ali Abdullah Saleh and the armed Houthi movement, which also has used it for religious commemorations.

The district has been hit hard by airstrikes from the Saudi- and Emirati-led military coalition during the war, especially neighborhoods close to military camps and the presidential palace. Homes, shops and Al-Sabeen Maternity and Child Hospital have been bombed. One of the deadliest airstrikes of the war took place in Al-Sabeen in October 2016, when the coalition bombed the funeral ceremony of the father of a former interior minister, Jalal al-Ruwaishan, killing and wounding hundreds of mourners including military and security officials.

Bani Harith, Amanat al-Asimah, Sana'a city

Population size: 461,000

Bani Harith is on the outskirts of Amanat al-Asimah, the administrative zone that includes Sana'a city, under the control of the armed Houthi movement. It is largely tribal and has a significant Muhamasheen population. Many residents do not have national IDs and struggle to access humanitarian assistance. The Muhamasheen community in particular has limited access to public services like education. Local infrastructure is weak, leading to water and sanitation problems. The use of sewage to irrigate farmland is a health risk and the area has experienced outbreaks of cholera. The main road to the district is paved but secondary roads are not. Agriculture is a main source of income.

The population of Bani Harith has grown during the war. Low rents and property prices have attracted a large number of displaced people. The burgeoning population has put

16) Population data taken from the Yemen Nutrition Cluster Assessment, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, June 2019.

pressure on the inadequate local infrastructure. The district has been bombed by the Saudi- and Emirati-led military coalition; it is close to Sana'a International Airport, which has been targeted by airstrikes.

Seera, Aden Governorate

Population size: 130,000

Seera, also known as Crater, is a densely populated district in Aden city. Seera is the seat of the Yemeni government in the interim capital, including the presidential palace, central bank and ministerial buildings. The district has been the arena for major military confrontations during the war, with street fighting and shelling having damaged homes, hotels, hospitals, courts and electricity and water facilities. In March 2015, Houthi forces entered Aden in pursuit of President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi who had fled to the presidential palace in the city from Sana'a. The Saudi- and Emirati-led military coalition, together with the Yemeni army and its allies, pushed Houthi forces from the city in July 2015. Seera also experienced clashes during confrontations between forces allied to the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and Yemeni government forces in January 2018 and August 2019. It has been under the control of United Arab Emirates-backed forces loyal to the STC since August 2019, with Saudi forces based in the presidential palace in Ma'ashiq.

Seera's population is broadly middle class, with some poor communities. It is known for its diverse population, including natives of the city, people of Indian and Somali origin and families from northern governorates. A minority of poor communities, including Muhamasheen, live on the outskirts of the district. Seera has several markets, including for fish, spices and metalwork, and a commercial district which is slowly recovering. Sources of employment include the public sector and the private sector, notably retail jobs in malls and shops. The aid and relief sector also has created employment in Aden, with many university graduates seeking work with international organizations.

Sheikh Othman, Aden Governorate

Population size: 177,000

A district of Aden city, Sheikh Othman has been under the control of the Al-Mudhar Brigades, which is loyal to the Yemeni government, since 2015. Sheikh Othman has been a working class area since its establishment during the British occupation of Aden, and was a center for the national liberation movement and associated armed struggle.

While most residents were born in Aden, Sheikh Othman historically has been home to rural migrants from Abyan, Lahj and Taiz, specifically from Al-Hujariah region in Taiz. Many rural migrants work in restaurants or in the qat trade. The district also has a Muhamasheen population but, unlike in other parts of Yemen, they do not live in

separate areas or slums and are integrated into the social fabric. The district suffers from poor infrastructure in need of restoration, with deteriorated roads and constant water shortages. The growth of districts around Sheikh Othman has increased pressure on its sanitation, water and electricity infrastructure.

Sheikh Othman has not witnessed large-scale military confrontations or street battles during the current war. Limited clashes occurred between security forces and fighters affiliated with Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in 2016, and between the Al-Mudhar Brigades and STC-aligned Security Belt Forces in 2019. It has hosted people displaced from coastal areas of Aden during the war, including residents of Seera.

Al-Qahira, Taiz Governorate

Population size: 121,000

Al-Qahira is a district of Taiz city under the control of forces backed by the Yemeni government. As well as Taizis, the district hosts internally displaced people. Many Muhamasheen live in the Dhaboa al-Qabalia area of Al-Qahira, a neighborhood close to the city center dominated by slums.

Al-Qahira has experienced fierce fighting between Houthi forces and forces allied to the Yemeni government, as well as airstrikes by the Saudi- and Emirati-led military coalition. The conflict has resulted in widespread destruction of buildings, including schools, courts and cultural facilities. Competing factions allied to the Yemeni government exercise control over different neighborhoods of Al-Qahira, fracturing the district, and residents face obstacles in moving freely within the district. This also has disrupted food aid distribution.

Al-Shamayatan, Taiz Governorate

Population size: 242,000

A district of Taiz governorate under the control of forces backed by the Yemeni government, the center of Al-Shamayatan has become more urbanized during the war, while its outskirts remain rural. The native population of Al-Shamayatan is tribal, and the district also hosts internally displaced people from other districts in Taiz, and from the Red Sea Coast and Al-Mokha city. The district has a large Muhamasheen population. During the war, some people from Al-Shamayatan who had migrated to cities for work returned to the district.

Agriculture is a key local source of income. As well as raising livestock and beekeeping, residents grow crops including corn, mangos and qat. In parts of southwestern Al-Shamayatan, the military is a key employer. The rough terrain also has made parts of the district a haven for arms dealers and smugglers. Infrastructure in the district is generally

weak, although NGOs have paved some roads over the past three years through cash-for-work projects. There is a technical institute and a branch of Taiz University in the district.

Western areas of Al-Shamayatan witnessed direct clashes between Houthi forces and Yemeni government forces from 2015 through 2018, as well as airstrikes by the Saudi- and Emirati-led military coalition. In 2019, fighting broke out in parts of Al-Shamayatan between competing factions within the anti-Houthi alliance. The war also has disrupted development projects in the district, such as paving roads and building schools.

Mukalla, Hadramawt Governorate

Population size: 282,000

Mukalla is the capital of Yemen's largest governorate, Hadramawt, and has the third biggest port in Yemen. Sources of employment include fishing, the public sector, small businesses and handicrafts. Infrastructure development in the city has been hindered by corruption. Power cuts in the summer reach 14 hours per day, the district suffers water shortages and many roads in the city center are in need of repair. Mukalla's Riyan International Airport was closed after the outbreak of war in 2015 but reopened in November 2019.

AQAP seized control of Mukalla in April 2015 and took control of governing authorities as well as the airport and seaport. It withdrew from Mukalla a year later after an offensive by the UAE and its local partner, the Hadrami Elite Forces, to drive them out of the city.

Sayoun, Hadramawt Governorate

Population size: 159,000

A city in central Hadramawt, Sayoun is under Yemeni government control. It has a mix of urban residents and Bedouins. Most people in Sayoun work in agriculture, and some are employed in the public sector. Sayoun airport has remained open throughout the war and was one of only two functioning civilian airports in Yemen until Riyan airport reopened in November 2019.

Sayoun has not witnessed direct confrontations during the war, but it has suffered from the general economic collapse. It hosts a large number of internally displaced people.



An IDP woman carries a dish of bread she is selling. (Makbana, Taiz, 2017) Photo by Khalid al-Saeed

I.

Gendered Impact of the Economic Crisis

Conflict-driven economic collapse in a country where half the pre-war population already was living in poverty⁽¹⁷⁾ has had devastating effects on the daily lives of Yemenis in all areas, even parts of the country that have not experienced direct conflict. The immediate economic consequences of war have left Yemenis unable to afford basic necessities like food, healthcare and education. Participants in focus group discussions across Yemen also perceived that conflict-driven poverty and unemployment had spawned multiple other devastating trends. They consistently cited the economic collapse as a factor in a perceived rise in gender-based violence in the public and domestic spheres and in causing a distortion of Yemen's social fabric.

In 2014, before the current conflict began, the value of Yemen's annual output in goods and services was estimated at US\$43 billion, though the country's economy was severely underdeveloped. Yemen's weak and corrupt state had for decades been over-reliant on oil exports for revenues and had stifled private-sector growth and diversification. Simultaneously, this fueled massive wealth inequality between a rent-seeking elite class and a large rural population living in basic subsistence.⁽¹⁸⁾ Before the ongoing conflict began, the World Bank noted that roughly half of Yemenis lived in poverty and more than 40 percent were food insecure, with some 90 percent of the food Yemenis consumed being imported.⁽¹⁹⁾

The escalation of the conflict and the suspension of oil exports in 2015 led to a collapse in public revenues and the suspension of salaries to most of Yemen's 1.2 million public sector workers in 2016.⁽²⁰⁾ The depletion of foreign currency reserves also spurred downward pressure on the value of the Yemeni rial, causing per capita purchasing power to drop in the face of rapid inflation.⁽²¹⁾ Between 2014 and 2017, Yemen's economy contracted more than 40 percent.⁽²²⁾ By 2017, this economic contraction had led private-sector businesses to, on average, halve their operating hours and cut staff by roughly 55 percent.⁽²³⁾ The World Bank has noted that indicators for 2018 suggest Yemen's gross domestic product had increased slightly, in part due to financial support from Saudi Arabia and increased Yemeni oil exports.⁽²⁴⁾ Increased public revenue has allowed the Yemeni government to

17) "Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty lines (% of population) -- Yemen, Rep.," The World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAHC?locations=YE>.

18) Amal Nasser, "Beyond the Business as Usual Approach: Private Sector Engagement in Post-Conflict Yemen," Rethinking Yemen's Economy, August 2018, https://devchampions.org/files/Rethinking_Yemens_Economy_No3_En.pdf.

19) "Yemen Household Budget 2014," World Bank, as cited in "Yemen Poverty Notes," World Bank, June 2017, documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/147231509378508387/pdf/Yemen-Poverty-Notes-Revised-0612.pdf.

20) Mansour Rageh, Amal Nasser and Farea al-Muslimi, "Yemen Without a Functioning Central Bank: The Loss of Basic Economic Stabilization and Accelerating Famine," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, November 2, 2016, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/main-publications/55>.

21) Amal Nasser and Alex J. Harper, "Rapid currency depreciation and the decimation of Yemeni purchasing power," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, March 31, 2017, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/analysis/89>.

22) "Yemen's Economic Update — October 2019," World Bank, October 9, 2019, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/yemen/publication/economic-update-october-2019>.

23) World Bank, Toward a Blueprint for the Recovery and Reconstruction of Yemen – October 2017, as cited in Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, December 2018, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019_Yemen_HNO_FINAL.pdf.

24) "Yemen's Economic Update — October 2019," World Bank, October 9, 2019, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/yemen/publication/economic-update-october-2019>.

increase its salary payments to civil servants, although some 20 million of Yemen's 28 million people continue to face severe or acute food insecurity, while "nearly 5 million people are either experiencing famine-like conditions or famine."⁽²⁵⁾

Patriarchal structures and traditional gender norms that define masculinity and femininity mean that women and girls, and men and boys, have experienced the economic crisis differently. The war has pushed women into new roles in the workforce and has driven men to the frontlines in search of salaries. This chapter explores the primary impact of the economic crisis on women and men, including its effect on gender norms in Yemen.

Women and Girls

Women in the Workforce: Breaking Taboos and Building Businesses

Assessing labor trends among women in Yemen is difficult due to the lack of comprehensive data and methodological differences over what counts as labor force participation. The International Labour Organization (ILO), for example, determined Yemen has had one of the lowest female labor force participation rates in the world. Prior to the current conflict, just 6 percent of women were active in the labor force and only 7 percent of jobs were held by women, the ILO found in its 2013-2014 Labor Force Survey.⁽²⁶⁾ Notably, this survey did not count own-use producers, in particular subsistence farmers who are often women, as part of the labor force; their inclusion would have pushed women's participation in the labor market to 26 percent.⁽²⁷⁾ In a comprehensive survey of work that recognized unpaid activities like fetching water, care work and housework, women would constitute the majority of working people in Yemen.⁽²⁸⁾ Yemen is the only Arab country to have ratified the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (1981), which promotes equality of treatment and opportunity for workers with family responsibilities, although insufficient attention has been paid to incorporating its provisions into national legislation.⁽²⁹⁾ Working was common among women from some communities before the war, for example among Muhamasheen women.⁽³⁰⁾ As a member of the community noted in one of the focus groups: "The lives of the Muhamasheen are poor, and they have been in dire straits since before the war, so women shouldered responsibilities and looked for work, no matter how menial."

25) Ibid.

26) "Yemen Labor Force Survey 2013-2014," International Labor Organization (ILO), 2015, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-arabstates/-ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_419016.pdf.

27) Maggy Grabundzija & Wameedh Shakir, "Gender Analysis in Conflict-Affected Yemen August 2018 – January 2019," Particip GmbH and EuroPlus, January 2019.

28) Mansour Omeira, "From informality to decent work in Yemen," ILO, March 2013, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-arabstates/-ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_218216.pdf.

29) Mansour Omeira, "From informality to decent work in Yemen," ILO, March 2013, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-arabstates/-ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_218216.pdf.

30) The Muhamasheen are a Yemeni underclass that historically has faced systemic discrimination and exploitation. See: Aisha al-Warraq, "The Historic and Systematic Marginalization of Yemen's Muhamasheen Community," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, June 4, 2019, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/analysis/7490>.

Proportionally, working women were initially hit harder by the conflict than working men in most areas. In 2015, female employment fell by 28 percent, compared to an 11 percent drop among men, although there was strong national variation; almost half of female job losses occurred in Sana'a, where the private sector was severely damaged by the war, while in Aden female employment increased by 11 percent.⁽³¹⁾ Likewise, female-owned businesses were more likely to close than male-owned businesses at the start of the war.⁽³²⁾ In a focus group discussion in Aden, a displaced woman said her perfume business had collapsed, explaining that the cost of supplies had risen as her customers' purchasing power diminished.

Traditionally, Yemeni families have been headed by male breadwinners; the war has challenged this norm. In many families, male heads of households have lost their incomes, due to job loss or because their public sector salaries were suspended; other men have been imprisoned, some have left to battlefields and some have been killed. These are among the factors that have increased the number of female-headed households and pushed women across Yemen into the workforce. Women have broken taboos to work in jobs that were previously not performed by women, or that were previously held by women considered of lower social status or migrant women, and have started new businesses — often from home.

Focus group participants reported that women had navigated the country's new economic reality more effectively than men. "The situation has changed. Women work and men sit at home, jobless," a participant in Al-Shamayatan, Taiz governorate, said. In Sana'a, a young woman explained: "Women have left their homes, and they have had to work to provide a source of income, no matter what, while men have remained at home, using the excuse that they do not have suitable work opportunities or an income that they feel is suitable for them." In Bani Harith, on the outskirts of Sana'a city, a participant said: "If young women cannot find a job, they try to learn some handicrafts, and they start working and excelling. The men, on the other hand, give up hope very quickly." In Aden, participants said women had created businesses or accepted any kind of work, regardless of the pay, while some men refused to work for low salaries. Young women in Taiz said they had succeeded in coping with challenges and overcoming difficulties to find sources of income to support their families, while men despaired when they lost their jobs and lacked the resilience to face the economic challenges of the war.

In some cases, women had started work in jobs that had traditionally been performed by women from lower social classes or by migrant women. In all areas, participants reported that some Yemeni women were working as domestic cleaners, a role mostly filled by Ethiopian migrants before the war. In Al-Shamayatan, Taiz governorate, some women said they hid this cleaning work from their sons, who they said would disapprove. In Sana'a, participants said professions like hairdressing or handicrafts had been perceived

31) "Yemen Damage and Needs Assessment – Crisis Impact on Employment and Labour Market," ILO, January 2016, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_501929.pdf.

32) Some 26 percent of businesses closed in 2015; this rose to 42 percent among female-owned businesses. See: "Rapid Business Survey: Impact of the Crisis on Private Sector Activity," UN Development Program and Small and Microenterprise Promotion Service, November 16, 2015, <http://www.ye.undp.org/content/dam/yemen/PovRed/Docs/UNDP%20SMEPS%20Rapid%20Business%20Survey.pdf>.

as unsuitable for women from elite families, but that during the conflict these jobs had become acceptable for all women. Also in Sana'a, participants noted that women from once-wealthy families had started selling home-baked goods; discussing this, one woman commented: "We never expected, knowing how they were living in the past, that they would be reduced to this." Some women in Taiz who were part of the local elite were embarrassed about starting small businesses such as those selling home-cooked food due to economic necessity, participants said.



A Yemeni woman offers rue, eggs and vegetables for sale. (Sana'a, 2019) Photo by Doaa Sudam

Women across Yemen have entered nontraditional sectors and professions during the war. In Mukalla, Hadramawt governorate, women started working in shops and restaurants while in Aden women became waitresses and worked as hotel receptionists — jobs generally performed by men before the war, participants said. In Taiz city, men reported that during the conflict, women had started working in construction, doing lumberwork, digging and painting war-damaged buildings under repair. Women in Taiz opened small grocery shops; they worked in media and engineering and in military camps, participants reported, describing these developments as consequences of the war. In Sana'a, participants took note of more women working as street vendors.

Women have opened businesses and micro-enterprises during the war. Often, these have been home-based businesses such as tailoring, making perfume, selling home-cooked food. Women in Taiz have been supporting their families through home-based businesses and by opening small shops. In Mukalla, women have opened restaurants and cafés for women. “In the past, it was rare for [women] to have these kinds of businesses, but they are now widespread,” according to a development expert and advocate for young adults in Hadramawt.⁽³³⁾ In the Al-Sabeen district of Sana'a city, women have established women's sports centers and dance halls, which have become popular venues. A coordinator for inclusive governance projects in Sana'a city said the opening of new gyms for women was partly a response to public spaces becoming less safe: “Women are too afraid to go to public parks and gardens because of the strange men there, so they now gather at homes or these new places. There are more gyms for women than for men, and these businesses are opened and managed by women,” she said.⁽³⁴⁾

In Sayoun, Hadramawt, some women have taken over the businesses of their deceased husbands. In Aden, participants said that young men and women had collaborated to start wedding planning businesses, with men arranging decorations and preparing the halls and women working as photographers. Women in Aden also have started working in cellphone repair and graphic design, participants said.

Relatively good quality internet connectivity in Sana'a and Aden has provided online business opportunities for women in those urban areas, with participants reporting that women have started importing clothes and cosmetics from China and selling them on Facebook. This trade was facilitated via Yemeni women studying in China, participants said. Women working as hair stylists and henna artists in Sana'a were using the internet to build networks and grow their businesses, a women's rights activist in Sana'a said, noting the internet provided an opportunity to overcome societal restrictions on their mobility. “Women have become more innovative and have been able to create more opportunities for themselves,” she said.⁽³⁵⁾

The war also has created other sorts of new roles for women. The internationally funded humanitarian response has created new jobs in NGOs, which men complained had mostly benefited women. In Mukalla, women have taken on new roles as police and

33) Interview with Sulaf Aboud al-Hanashi, head of the Rescue Foundation for Development, Mukalla, Hadramawt, December 1, 2018.

34) Interview with Hana'a al-Showafi, inclusive governance coordinator at CARE, Sana'a, January 13, 2019.

35) Interview with Nesmah al-Sameai, leader and co-founder of the “Let Us Live” initiative advocating for women's rights and documenting women's suffering and successes through storytelling and art, Sana'a, January 14, 2019.



Women do clean-up work as part of a cash-for-work program. (Taiz, 2018) Photo by Ahmed al-Basha

prison officers as well as administrative positions in security agencies, the Hadramawt youth advocate said. “These positions were created by the conflict; they were not there before. Around 100 female police officers have graduated,” she said.⁽³⁶⁾

Illiterate Yemeni women and those without qualifications have had fewer opportunities and have been limited to low-paid and often precarious work, participants said. In Sayoun, Hadramawt, some worked in low-paid jobs in factories, with half their wages being spent on transportation to and from work, participants said. In Sheikh Othman, Aden, they have worked as cleaners in homes and hospitals or collected empty cans; in Al-Shamayatan, Taiz governorate, they have washed clothes, worked as domestic cleaners and collected firewood, participants said. A political activist in Taiz noted that while the war brought economic empowerment for some educated women, the opportunities for illiterate and uneducated women — like cleaning and begging — were less empowering.⁽³⁷⁾ Women with college degrees “were able to achieve a breakthrough with regards to patriarchal control,” he said; illiterate women did not have this opportunity. The UNESCO Institute

36) Interview with Sulaf Aboud Al-Hanashi, head of the Rescue Foundation for Development, Mukalla, Hadramawt, December 1, 2018.

37) Interview with Ayban al-Samei, a political activist and member of the sustainable development committee at the National Dialogue Conference, Taiz, January 12, 2019.

for Statistics estimated that in 2015, around 45 percent of adult women in Yemen were illiterate, compared with 15 percent of adult men.⁽³⁸⁾

Some participants across Yemen said women's presence in the public sphere had increased since the war, as more women started working. In Sana'a, participants said women's husbands and brothers had limited female family members' movements outside the home before the war, but that these restrictions had eased as women joined the workforce. This varied among families, however, and participants said many women had started home-based businesses because their families disapproved of them working outside the home. In Aden, participants said some women had started businesses at home because of the unstable security conditions, which made it unsafe for women to work outside in the evenings.

Attitudes Shift Toward Women Working — For Now

This study revealed a broad diversity of attitudes toward the expansion of women's participation in the workforce; perceptions seemed to be primarily defined by individual family dynamics rather than demographic indicators. In a focus group discussion in Taiz, male participants discussed the post-conflict sustainability of women's increased participation in the workforce. One argued: "This is idealistic talk. We are in a state of coercion and are forced to accept this. Many of those who see their wives working or begging are forced to do so, but they are not convinced." Meanwhile, a political activist in Taiz said the future in Yemen belonged to women and predicted a feminist movement would collapse the patriarchy. "Liberating women economically is the first step to liberating them socially and politically at all levels, even in their families. I believe that the future will be better for women, that there will be women's movements and they will break the patriarchal system," he said.⁽³⁹⁾ While recognizing this diversity, some patterns emerged nationally; some participants in all governorates in the study said that attitudes toward women working had become more favorable during the war.

In Mukalla, Hadramawt, participants said that before the conflict men had objected to the idea of women working and were reluctant to marry those who did; the prevailing attitude before the war was that women belonged, "in the home or in the grave," one participant said. Since the conflict had drawn more women into the workforce, however, men increasingly preferred to marry women with jobs, participants said. A social worker in Aden explained: "In the past, [prospective grooms] were usually happy to marry a housewife. ... Now, they want a woman who can help them provide for the family."⁽⁴⁰⁾

In Sheikh Othman, Aden, participants said families had become more flexible about

38) "Adult and Youth Literacy National, Regional and Global Trends, 1985-2015," UNESCO, June 2013, http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/adult-and-youth-literacy-national-regional-and-global-trends-1985-2015-en_0.pdf.

39) Interview with Ayban al-Samei, a political activist and member of the sustainable development committee at the National Dialogue Conference, Taiz, January 12, 2019.

40) Interview with Luwain Naser Kulaib, social worker at the Social Welfare Fund, Sheikh Othman, Aden, December 17, 2018.

women leaving the home to pursue work opportunities. In Bani Harith, on the outskirts of Sana'a city, participants reported that conservative families that did not allow daughters to work or use mobile phones before the war had started allowing them to work in mixed-sex workplaces, in some cases in the evenings. Sometimes, families allowed women to work but kept this secret due to enduring social shame over women's employment. Other families in Sana'a were proud that their daughters were helping to support them, participants said. A women's rights activist in Sana'a said this attitude had created a positive view of women working and cultivated a new leniency toward women coming home late.⁽⁴¹⁾ She said success stories of women supporting their families "had an effect on customs, traditions and social norms as well as how society understands these issues; things have started to change."

Women in Aden said they came to realize they could not depend solely on their husbands and male relatives for financial security. The head of a branch of the Yemeni Women's Union in Hadramawt said a better understanding of the importance of education also has contributed. "Women work, participate and help the breadwinners in their families in light of the conditions, instability and difficult living conditions. This is the opposite of what happened in the past, when girls would get their diplomas and then get married only so that they could raise and teach their children," she said.⁽⁴²⁾ In Al-Shamayatan, Taiz governorate, participants said women had a new freedom to travel to other areas for work and that their fathers were proud of their daughters who worked.⁽⁴³⁾ Widening acceptance of women working in Taiz encouraged more women to seek work, particularly with NGOs, participants said.

Participants in Mukalla said that in many cases, a woman's family would approve of her working, but her husband's family would object and view her employment as a sign of the "submission" of their son. Among those who said that fewer restrictions were placed on women during the war, some viewed this as a negative development and an unavoidable compromise. "It used to be shameful to give your wife's name to anyone. Now, people from organizations come and ask for the name of your wife, and her photo and all her data. Just look how much we compromised," a male participant in Taiz said.

Domestic Gender Roles: A Salary Doesn't Always Buy Family Influence

Across Yemen, some participants suggested that women entering the workforce had shifted traditional gender roles within the household, although participants in all areas noted that this varied and depended on existing family dynamics. In Aden, participants noted that in some families, women had been the decision-makers at home prior to

41) Interview with Nesmah al-Sameai, leader and co-founder of the "Let Us Live" initiative advocating for women's rights and documenting women's suffering and successes through storytelling and art, Sana'a, January 14, 2019.

42) Interview with Fatimah al-Noubi, head of the Yemeni Women's Union for Hadramawt (Wadi Branch), Sayoun, Hadramawt, January 21, 2019.

43) Interview with Ayban al-Samei, a political activist and member of the sustainable development committee at the National Dialogue Conference, Taiz, January 12, 2019.

the conflict, regardless of whether they worked, while in Taiz some participants said decisions were shared between men and women before the war.

In Taiz, Hadramawt, Sana'a and Aden, some female participants said that women gained decision-making authority when they contributed to household budgets. In Bani Harith, on the outskirts of Sana'a city, participants said women who worked gained influence in domestic affairs and more space to express their opinions, particularly if their husbands were not working and they were providing them with cigarettes and qat, the mildly stimulating leaves many Yemenis habitually chew. Some young women in Al-Sabeen, Sana'a city, said they had gained influence in household decisions because they had started providing for their families' financial needs, although others said they were required to give their full salaries to their fathers.

In Mukalla, Hadramawt, "men are unable to provide even the most basic needs. The women are the ones who support the men and provide their qat, pay for them to go out and have fun with their friends," a coordinator in Mukalla for a regional humanitarian organization said.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Key informants in Mukalla said women's new economic role had given them more influence in household decisions.⁽⁴⁵⁾ However, a manager from the Yemeni Women's Union said that women's contributions during the war in supporting their families were not valued or recognized. Despite increasing numbers of women being the sole breadwinners in their households, "the culture still has not changed. Women are still women, and they are looked down upon," she said.⁽⁴⁶⁾

A women's rights activist in Sana'a said men had started to listen to women more, but that decision-making authority remained with men; "the patriarchal authority remains," she said. However, she noted a variance among socio-economic classes. In very poor families, women held more decision-making power because families were dependent on the woman's income. In middle-class families, men often had more power because "the man can just simply not allow the woman to work, and he will pay for everything."⁽⁴⁷⁾

Male and female participants in all areas frequently associated rises in female authority in the household with the diminution of men's status. In Mukalla, Hadramawt, participants said some men had become "marginal" in their homes; in Sheikh Othman, Aden, participants said women's earning power meant men had become "servile"; in Al-Shamayatan, Taiz governorate, participants said men were "broken" and became "inferior" when women's authority increased. Women in Al-Shamayatan said some women became "authoritarian" and "condescending" to their husbands, giving the example that women had started to raise their voices when speaking to their husbands.

44) Interview with Saleh Bamakhshab, project manager for the Benevolence Coalition for Humanitarian Relief, which coordinates and implements projects for the King Salman Center for Relief, Mukalla, December 18, 2018.

45) Interviews with Ahmad Barahman, unit leader of a community committee, which functions like a local council in Hadramawt, Mukalla, December 16, 2018; Saleh Bamakhshab, of the Benevolence Coalition for Humanitarian Relief in Mukalla, December 18, 2018; and Sulaf Aboud al-Hanashi, head of the Rescue Foundation for Development, Mukalla, Hadramawt, December 1, 2018.

46) Interview with Alia Omar al-Hamidi, Head of the Legal Affairs' Department in the Yemeni Women's Union, Mukalla, December 16, 2018.

47) Interview with Nesmah al-Sameai, leader and co-founder of the "Let Us Live" initiative advocating for women's rights and documenting women's suffering and successes through storytelling and art, Sana'a, January 14, 2019.

Some men in all areas rejected the notion of female authority in the household. In Sana'a and Taiz, some male participants said that men remained the patriarchs of their families and that employment did not bestow women with decision-making rights, saying that this was the culture of Yemeni families and tribes. A young man in Taiz said that men would not allow a woman to raise her voice "even if she were a billionaire."



A woman and boy carry snacks bought wholesale to sell at a booth. (Mukalla, 2019) Photo by Abdulla Gumaan

New Roles and Old Responsibilities

An activist in Sana'a who focuses on good governance as well as women's issues noted that when women's decision-making authority increased, this represented an additional responsibility on top of their working life and domestic chores.⁽⁴⁸⁾ "[Working] women have to come back home [from work] and cook and clean, because the roles inside the house still have not changed. This situation has become a burden on women," she said. In all areas, most women said that entering into employment or starting new businesses had not reduced their domestic responsibilities like cooking, cleaning and childcare. "Women have become the mother and the father, and bear responsibility within the home and outside," a manager for the Abductees' Mothers Association in Taiz city said.⁽⁴⁹⁾

However, some participants in Aden, Taiz, Sana'a and Hadramawt said that some men had started to contribute to household chores. As an example of changing gender roles, a

48) Interview with Hana'a al-Showafi, inclusive governance coordinator at CARE, Sana'a, January 13, 2019.

49) Interview with Asma'a al-Ra'ee, Manager of the Office of the Abductees' Mothers Association, Taiz, December 15, 2018.

participant in Al-Sabeen, Sana'a city, described a male military officer whose wife started working after his salary was suspended: he had taken responsibility for childcare, the participant said. In other cases, the daughters of working women became responsible for household duties, participants said, sometimes leading to their withdrawal from school.

Prospects for Lasting Change: Women Speak of Growing Self-Confidence

Women across Yemen reported that their increased participation in the workforce had brought benefits beyond financial gains. In Aden, Taiz and Sana'a, women said they had gained self-confidence because the war had given them new opportunities to work, to leave their homes and to participate in public life. Young women in Aden were encouraged by their fathers to drive, study and work, they said; this was contrasted to the impact of the war on young men, who participants said frequently left school to join armed forces, and in some cases died. In Taiz city, young women said they felt they had succeeded in coping with the challenges of the war, and in Al-Shamayatan, Taiz governorate, women said the war had helped them to leave their homes for jobs that were not open to them before the war.

Participants in all areas were divided over the sustainability of these changes in post-conflict Yemen. Many people — particularly male participants — said the conflict-driven shift in gender roles was a temporary response to extraordinary circumstances and that women and men would revert to their traditional roles after the war. An activist specializing in inclusive governance in Sana'a cautioned that without government interventions such as new regulations and quotas, hard-won gains in women's economic empowerment would be lost after the war.⁽⁵⁰⁾ However, some participants in Aden, Taiz and Hadramawt said that women would not concede their achievements in the war and that it would be difficult for men to return to their traditional roles. Women had proven their abilities and earned the trust and acceptance of their families and communities, and they would not give up these gains, participants in Al-Shamayatan, Taiz governorate, said. "The role of women will not recede, and society is accepting it. ... Women have broken the barrier, and they can work in bigger and better jobs," a sheikh in Al-Shamayatan said.⁽⁵¹⁾

An aid worker in Hadramawt said women's new roles in workplaces had become normalized during the conflict and would continue after the war: "Society has accepted this new culture. ... Women will not give up their gains and the benefits they have achieved."⁽⁵²⁾ A prominent local official in Mukalla, who viewed women's increased authority as a negative development, calling it a "deviant illness," agreed that the new gender roles would outlast the conflict, saying it was "impossible for women to give up

50) Interview with Hana'a al-Showafi, inclusive governance coordinator at CARE, Sana'a, January 13, 2019.

51) Interview with Sheikh Nashwan Abdulsalam al-Asbahi, local council member and sheikh of the Al-Shamayatan sub-district of Asabih, Al-Shamayatan, Taiz, January 20, 2019.

52) Interview with Saleh Bamakhshab, project manager for the Benevolence Coalition for Humanitarian Relief, which coordinates and implements projects for the King Salman Center for Relief, Mukalla, December 18, 2018.

[their new roles].”⁽⁵³⁾ He added: “Their work has become normal. Men have accepted this. This change is one of the results of the war, caused by it, and society has accepted this idea.” A community leader in Taiz said changes could not be reversed: “We are very stubborn women to be honest, and it is impossible for us to go back to how things were. If you have worked for five or six years, and you have work you are happy with, it is impossible for you to go back and just sit at home.”⁽⁵⁴⁾

Men and Boys

Unemployment and a Changing Social Fabric

Men tend to be direct victims of conflict, at the frontlines and as targets for arrest and torture, but male participants in all areas of Yemen described lack of income as their primary concern. Some men spoke about how the economic crisis had altered family life. A man in Taiz said: “The biggest problem with my family before the war was my inability to devote time to them or take them out. Now, during the war, my biggest concern is my frequent staying at home and the pressure on me to go out and look for work.” The conflict-driven economic collapse has left many men struggling to fulfil their traditional role as head of household, providing financially for the family. Across Yemen, participants said that currency depreciation meant that even employed men struggled to meet their families’ needs. A participant in Al-Shamayatan, Taiz governorate, explained: “Your salary is equivalent to the value of two bags of flour.”

Widespread unemployment and the suspension of some public sector salaries also added to the pressure on small businesses as it further reduced the spending of unemployed Yemenis and hundreds of thousands of government employees. Participants said this led to the closure of shops like grocery stores, small supermarkets and pharmacies, creating more unemployment across Yemen, but particularly in the northern governorates. Participants in Bani Harith, a Sana’a district, noted that the closure of the local health center had led to the dismissal of all its employees. A local supermarket owner in Bani Harith went bankrupt, participants said, because of fluctuating prices and people’s inability to repay their debts to the store.

Displaced men and those who returned to their home villages due to the conflict struggled to find work, participants said. These included people who had worked in factories in Hudaydah that were bombed during the war, and those whose businesses were destroyed either physically by airstrikes and shelling or financially by the economic crisis. In Al-Shamayatan, Taiz governorate, Yemenis who had earlier migrated to cities including Taiz, Sana’a and Hudaydah for work had returned to their villages; many were unemployed, while some had precarious work as day laborers in construction and car

53) Interview with Ahmad Barahman, unit leader of a community committee, which functions like a local council in Hadramawt, Mukalla, December 16, 2018.

54) Interview with Sumayah Tawfiq Othman, neighborhood leader of the lower Tahrir neighborhood, Taiz, December 12, 2018.

washing, or as street vendors. The influx of displaced people to Sana'a had overcrowded a weak job market, participants said, and employers took advantage of this by lowering salaries.

In Taiz city, men experienced widespread unemployment; the city saw some of the worst fighting in the conflict and parts of Taiz have been besieged by opposing Yemeni forces seeking control of the city since 2015. Fighting and roadblocks hobbled the city's manufacturing industry and shuttered many businesses and shops; few in Taiz were spared, from small merchants to large companies, participants said. The war has reduced investment; participants said that carrying arms and extortion were the only remaining profitable enterprises. The lack of security also limited employment options for men and women, participants said, explaining that they were afraid to work in the evenings or at night.

In Sana'a, many people lost their jobs early in the war due to the closure of embassies and the departure of international companies, as well as the bombing of factories and industrial sites, participants and key informants said. In Mukalla, many factories and shops closed when Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) took control of the city in April 2015. Some reopened after AQAP surrendered its control over the port city a year later, but others remained closed at the end of 2018, participants said, while the economic crisis has paralyzed agriculture and fishing, traditional occupations in Mukalla. Fishermen went to sea twice weekly instead of six days a week because they struggled to sell their catch, and high fuel prices made fishing trips expensive, participants said.

New Types of Work Emerge from a Broken Economy

While most focus group discussions concentrated on the destruction of businesses, participants also noted the emergence of new industries. The high cost of fuel and electricity has created more demand for solar power, creating jobs in the solar panel industry, although participants said the high cost of solar panels had limited this trend. Rising fuel costs also encouraged the use of motorcycle taxis as a cheaper form of transport; in Sana'a, participants reported that women also were using motorcycles, although this used to be taboo. Across Yemen, participants reported a proliferation of street vendors, who were popular because they sold vegetables, food and other goods more cheaply than shops. In Sana'a and Aden, some young men and women reported finding work with "cash for work" programs run by humanitarian agencies and NGOs.⁽⁵⁵⁾

Participants described multiple new small businesses that have emerged during the conflict, often started by young men. In Taiz, young people had converted electrical appliance stores into snack bars and opened small businesses like fast food restaurants.

55) Multiple international agencies, including the World Bank, USAID, UNESCO, UNDP and the EU, as well as INGOs such as ACTED and Mercy Corps fund or implement "cash for work" programs in Yemen. These programs provide short-term work opportunities in various fields, ranging from paving roads to rehabilitating schools or harvesting water. See: "YECRP Fact Sheet - March 2019," UN Development Programme, June 25, 2019, <https://www.ye.undp.org/content/yemen/en/home/library/yecrp-fact-sheet---march2019.html> and "Cash-for-work Programs Empower Yemenis," USAID, January 25, 2018, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/cash-work-programs-empower-yemenis>.

In Sana'a, participants said young people had lost confidence in public sector jobs, which were once regarded as stable professions, and some young men had started small businesses in fields like technology and graphic design. Displaced people in Sana'a also have opened small businesses in the city, including cafes, grocery shops and sandwich stalls. In Al-Shamayatan, Taiz governorate, four new wedding halls opened during the conflict. In Mukalla, participants said dozens of new falafel shops were among the small businesses that emerged during the war.

The economic crisis has changed the social strata in Yemen, according to participants in different parts of the country. A participant in Taiz said: "The war destroyed the middle class and turned them into poor people." This sentiment was echoed by participants in Aden. The salaries of teachers, government employees and university professors have depreciated rapidly due to the collapse of the Yemeni rial, another development participants in Taiz and Aden said had dragged the middle class toward the poverty line. An academic specializing in gender in Sana'a said the economic collapse, and in particular the suspension of public sector salaries, had disrupted the economic structure of Yemen: "The middle class has evaporated."⁽⁵⁶⁾

Many men have moved into jobs considered to be lower in status than their previous roles, participants said, often describing this as a highly negative development and a form of social disintegration. The employment of professionals in jobs that did not correspond to their education was viewed by many participants as a loss for Yemeni society. In Taiz, Sana'a, Aden and Hadramawt, participants reported that university professors, teachers, doctors and civil servants were frequently working as street vendors, construction workers, waiters and motorcycle taxi drivers. Participants in Aden described seeing architects driving buses. In Sana'a, participants said teachers were particularly affected by the suspension of government salaries. "A teacher who works as a porter, for example, used to be respected and have dignity, but now he works with the same students that he used to teach. This is a horrible position that is hard to describe," a participant in Al-Sabeen district of Sana'a city said. In Taiz, a participant lamented that the war had taken teachers out of the classroom "to sell potatoes to their students instead of teaching them." Participants across Yemen said some teachers had abandoned teaching completely in favor of the more lucrative qat trade, which also has attracted university professors, doctors and engineers, participants across Yemen reported.

Many graduates were reported to be working in jobs unrelated to their qualifications. A graduate in Taiz explained: "I was an executive manager, but my salary was suspended. ... I worked as a baker; my hands were burned and I lived in a miserable situation. I then took work as a stone and clay worker in construction, which is arduous." In Seera, Aden, participants said graduates with degrees in engineering, medicine and accounting were driving buses or selling goods on the street, or were engaged in the qat trade. An advocate for working women and children in Aden described the employment of graduates in work outside their fields as a positive development: "I would like to salute [the youth] because they have worked through the fear, humiliation, and the social belief that they should

56) Interview with Dr Husnia Al-Qadri, faculty member of the Gender-Development Research and Studies Center at Sana'a University and Country Gender Program Coordinator for Oxfam, Sana'a, March 12, 2019.



*A woman who said her husband died in the war carries her baby as she begs in the street. (Sana'a, 2019)
Photo by Afnan Yahya*

not work in these kinds of professions. They have encouraged each other, as youth, that work is not shameful.”⁽⁵⁷⁾

The rising number of men working in daily wage jobs like construction has pushed out those who did this work before the conflict, participants in Sana'a and Aden said. In Sheikh Othman, some members of the Muhamasheen community who had worked in low-paid or precarious positions in agriculture and construction before the war had become beggars during the conflict. Prior to the war, jobs in construction and agriculture in Aden often were done by people from northern governorates but had been increasingly taken by locals from Aden. In Sana'a, the suspension of government salaries, the closure of private companies and the influx of displaced people had further swelled an overcrowded labor force, putting pressure on people who had worked in fields such as construction before the war.

57) Interview with Fatimah Muhammad Yaslam, head of the Association to Protect the Rights of Working Children, Aden, January 8, 2019.

Seeking a Salary or a Purpose, Men Become Fighters

Focus group participants identified joining military forces as a prominent source of income for men during the conflict. Men across Yemen have headed to the conflict's frontlines, often to secure a salary and support their families, although participants said some fighters were motivated by ideological reasons. The vast majority of recruits to security forces and militias have been men, although women have also participated in the conflict. Women in Taiz have taken part in home raids and manned checkpoints in Taiz, within the Popular Resistance forces.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Women also have been enlisted by the armed Houthi movement to their female militia, the Zainabiat.⁽⁵⁹⁾

Women in Taiz said men went to frontlines because they felt they had no future, and in some cases to escape difficult situations at home. "He joins the resistance and leaves his family behind," a woman in Taiz said. Many government employees, whose salaries were suspended or had depreciated due to inflation, became fighters. "I tell you, I used to be a manager, but they suspended my pension so I joined to feed my children," a man in Aden said. The widespread recruitment of teachers into militias and armed forces has had multiple negative repercussions on education in Yemen, participants said, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

Women participants said that societal pressure on men to conform to masculine norms was a factor influencing men's decisions to become fighters, particularly in light of the economic crisis that had undermined men's roles as financial providers. A woman in Sana'a explained: "The young men are being battered at home and outside. Their manhood is being tested, and if they are men, they are supposed to go to the frontlines and fight, meaning that they have to go to die. ... The young men who remain at home are being assaulted, and they are told that they are not men." In Taiz, women spoke of the war sparking insecurity in men's sense of masculinity that eased when men started to join anti-Houthi coalition forces in the city. "He began to feel like a man and let you rest a bit. Early in the war, you'd find them either sitting or shouting," a woman in Taiz said.

Participants reported that the financial benefits of joining militias varied between the conflict parties and on different fronts. Participants in Aden said that those recruited in the city to join the UAE-backed Security Belt Forces were paid around 1,000 Saudi rials monthly, leading to high numbers of recruits. In Taiz, participants said salaries for some fighters in anti-Houthi forces in the city were erratic. A woman in Taiz said: "My husband joined the resistance, and we get the salary every third or fourth month. We are in a state of destitution." Others in Taiz said some fighters were paid well and in Saudi rials. Some men from Taiz were fighting Houthi forces in the city, while others left for lucrative positions with the Saudi-led coalition camps on the Saudi border. An insight into the toll of the war on fighters was shared by a male participant in Taiz who described the scene at a humanitarian aid distribution site for the war-wounded. "I saw young men,

58) "Yemeni Women: Armed and Dangerous," The New Arab, December 21, 2015, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/society/2015/12/21/yemeni-women-armed-and-dangerous>.

59) Samia Al-Aghbari, Houthis 'Zainabia' - Soft Hands for Dirty Work," Al Masdar, November 22, 2018, <https://www.almasdaronline.com/articles/161296>.

with full physical strength but missing limbs. One had his hand amputated, another was missing his leg, another had both his legs amputated and another had no hands.” He added: “I remained in agony over this scene for over a week. ... If you see one man in this state, you pray for him, but they were gathered in the hundreds.”

The conflict and the economic crisis has driven Yemen’s young men and boys out of schools and universities and onto battlefields and frontlines; the recruitment of youth to armed groups will be explored in the following chapter.



*Fairouz, a Sana'a businesswoman, works in her semi-precious stones and jewelry shop. (Sana'a, 2019)
Photo by Majd Fuad*

CASE STUDY: FAIROUZ, A BUSINESSWOMAN IN SANA'A

After this war started, every time I would find work in a company it would go bankrupt, and I would go to find another job, and so on. Anyway, I have children, my daughter studies pharmacology and both of my sons are in private school or private university. Finally, I gave up, and I had a mental breakdown and depression. I was addicted to Facebook, and I spent way too much time on Facebook doing silly things.

Then, because my name is Fairouz, which comes from the name of a precious stone, I thought about working in precious stones. I began to see that my addiction to Facebook could become something positive, and I started using it for marketing. I would go to the silversmiths and to those who sold agate, and I would tell them that I would market their goods for them. I used Facebook to market these precious stones.

I started working with people, and I thought about opening up a shop. I wanted to open something for myself, a shop of my own, because I felt like I was being humiliated by men. For example, someone would say, 'bring me a ring,' and after we would agree on a specific ring, they would then say 'OK, let us meet next to Al-Hamra restaurant.' I would go there, and they would tell me, 'OK, how about we go have lunch now.' I was subjected

to things like this, and I really hated it. I wanted someplace of my own where I could work with dignity. So I took a small shop, and the rent was 10,000 rials.

I started coming home late, and my husband would be at home, not doing anything. I wish that he could have at least kept quiet while I did everything, but he could only criticize. When I would get home, he would say: 'Oh, wow, look at this. What an honor, the madam has decided to grace us with her presence.' As if I was coming home from a party or social occasion, and not from working.

I was afraid of opening this shop for agate because there is a lot of competition in the field. I was the first woman, so that gave me a boost. You have to work in something that you love, and you also have to be educated. I took a class with the Geological Survey Authority of the Ministry of Oil and Minerals, and I got a certificate for it. Afterward, they told me: "Fairouz, you have to work in a mall." I was afraid, but I went to Yemen Mall, and I worked there. But I still relied, for 99 percent of my sales, on Facebook.

I became somewhat famous because I was the first woman. Now, I support my whole family, and my mother and her husband. I have also opened a hair salon, where I own half of it, and I have opened a nail salon next to it. I took it like it was, with even the same employees, because I do not have experience. I took the whole business. We are among the Sheikhs of Udain (an area in Ibb), and even until now, my brother asks me why I have opened a hair salon. My brother always tells me: 'Be careful, we are Sheikhs.' They want to go hungry until they die, and they will keep saying they are Sheikhs.

Step by step, I have changed from my major [in English]. My dreams in the past had been to start a master's degree and to be a university professor or teaching assistant, and I was one of the four top scorers in Taiz University. When I came to Sana'a, however, I saw that this field was not very lucrative for the responsibilities I would have. And everyone was waiting for Fairouz to give them something – there is a blessing in business.

– Fairouz, 39, a former teacher and office manager who married at age 13. Businesses she started in Sana'a during the war support her extended family and have allowed her to divorce her now ex-husband.





Students sit on the floor, listening to their teacher. (Marib, 2018) Photo by Harith al-Mallimi

II.

The War on Yemen's Youth

Future prospects for a generation of Yemeni youths are diminishing as parents can no longer afford to educate their children. Young men and boys are fighting on the country's frontlines instead of attending school or university; increasingly, young girls are married to ease the financial pressure on their families, participants and experts said. The suspension and depreciation of teachers' salaries mean that students who are still able to attend school often find teachers absent and school days shortened, participants said. Fearing few prospects for their futures, many Yemeni youths appear to have lost their motivation to study. "We hate school, and what do those who studied earn? Most of them can barely eat," said a young participant in Sayoun, Hadramawt, echoing his peers across the country.

Parents Must Choose to Feed or Educate Their Children

Lack of access to schools in rural areas and high rates of poverty had limited families' abilities to educate their children before the current conflict.⁽⁶⁰⁾ While data on school attendance in Yemen are limited, reports suggest school enrollment rates had been rising prior to the conflict.⁽⁶¹⁾ This trend appears to have reversed during the war; UNICEF estimated in September 2019 that 2 million children were out of school in Yemen, including half a million children who had dropped out since March 2015 when the Saudi-led military coalition entered the Yemen war.⁽⁶²⁾

In focus group discussions across Yemen, participants said the economic collapse during the war had left them unable to afford to send their children to school. Parents reported going without food to pay school expenses; others said they were forced to send their children to work instead of school. Fuel shortages have driven transport costs up, and across Yemen participants said they could no longer afford transportation to school or university. In Al-Shamayatan, Taiz governorate, participants complained that bus fares had doubled during the war from 50 to 100 Yemeni rials. In Sayoun, Hadramawt, some students left home three hours early to walk to school, arriving to class exhausted and often late. "People used to take their children by bus, but because of the circumstances, they can either eat or give them transportation money," a woman in Sayoun said.

Across Yemen, participants reported struggling to buy basic school necessities like notebooks, pens, school bags and uniforms, as well as breakfast. In Mukalla, some local businessmen were providing breakfast for school children living in extreme poverty, while in Sana'a participants said students were often dizzy and hungry from not eating. "Children go to school without eating and they fail because of hunger," an academic specializing in gender in Sana'a said.⁽⁶³⁾ In Sayoun, participants said skipping breakfast had affected students' ability to learn, leaving them fatigued and nauseous at school.

60) "Republic of Yemen, The Status of Yemen Women: From Aspiration to Opportunity," World Bank, June 2014, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/640151468334820965/pdf/878200REVISED00Box0385200B00PUBLIC0.pdf>.

61) "UNICEF Annual Report 2012 for Yemen, MENA," UNICEF, https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Yemen_COAR_2012.pdf.

62) "As school year starts in Yemen, 2 million children are out of school and another 3.7 million are at risk of dropping out," UNICEF, September 25, 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/school-year-starts-yemen-2-million-children-are-out-school-and-another-37-million>.

63) Interview with Dr Husnia al-Qadri, faculty member of the Gender-Development Research and Studies Center at Sana'a University and Country Gender Program Coordinator for Oxfam, Sana'a, March 12, 2019.



A girl helping to support her family studies as she waits for passersby who will pay a small amount to be weighed. (Sana'a, 2019) Photo by Afnan Yahya

Some government schools have started charging students monthly fees, participants in Sana'a, Hadramawt and Aden reported, leading families who could not afford to pay the fees to withdraw their children from school. In Sana'a, the fees were collected to help pay transportation costs for teachers whose salaries were suspended, participants said. "Students are made to feel guilty if their families do not pay the fees, and they are taken out of lessons and moved to the schoolyard," a woman in Sana'a said. A teacher in Sana'a said she was forced to collect money from students to cover the cost of basic needs like printing tests for students. "We try as much as possible to help students save money. We tell them to bring used notebooks and to reuse them. Students cannot bring notebooks for each subject because they just can't afford it." In Aden, participants said some public schools demanded ad-hoc payments of between 500 and 1,000 Yemeni rials for students to take monthly or mid-year tests, and students who could not pay were not allowed to sit exams. The head of a branch of the Yemeni Women's Union in Hadramawt, said Yemenis were entitled to free public schooling. "Education was free, but due to the current situation, school fees and other fees are being forced from time to time, which is illegal," she added.⁽⁶⁴⁾

Students also have dropped out from universities across Yemen due to the cost, with a university student in Taiz saying there had been 300 students in his year's class before the war but nearly half had dropped out because of the financial strain.

64) Interview with Fatimah al-Noubi, head of the Yemeni Women's Union for Hadramawt (Wadi Branch), Sayoun, Hadramawt, January 21, 2019.

Salary Suspensions: Shorter School Days, Fewer Teachers

Participants across Yemen attributed a general decline in the quality of education to the suspension of teachers' salaries. By December 2018, when focus group discussions were conducted, payment of teachers' salaries had resumed in Aden, Taiz and Hadramawt but were still suspended in Sana'a and 10 other northern governorates, affecting more than 135,000 teachers and more than 10,000 schools, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).⁽⁶⁵⁾ Even in areas where salaries had resumed, monthly wages had depreciated in real value due to rampant inflation. Some teachers stopped going to school because they could not afford the transportation costs, participants said, while many were forced to seek other work, either working at school part time to retain their positions or leaving their jobs completely. In all areas, some teachers had been replaced by substitutes and volunteers, some of whom had no higher education. Low motivation among teachers was reported across Yemen. "I only teach my class, then I leave. I no longer have the desire or the will to teach students and help them understand like I did in the past," a teacher in a public school in Sana'a said. In all areas, participants said teachers were preoccupied with securing living expenses through other jobs. The school day has been reduced, and some schools close for the day at 10 a.m., participants reported in Taiz, Hadramawt, Aden and Sana'a.

In Sana'a, where teachers remained without state salaries at the time of this research, participants said the suspension of salaries had been disastrous for the education sector. Houthi authorities were forcing teachers to work, participants said, but some attended for only one or two days a week to maintain their positions.

In Taiz governorate, participants said teachers had left their work seeking other income when salaries were suspended. A high number of teachers, they said, had joined fighting forces. "There are great problems in education; now, there are teacher officers, teacher soldiers, even some principals who have joined the fronts," according to the dean of a private education institute in Taiz.⁽⁶⁶⁾ Some teachers held high military ranks and had bodyguards; this disrupted the ability of school administrators to manage and discipline teachers.

Other teachers in Taiz had started selling qat or working as motorcycle taxi drivers. Many teachers remained in these roles, or in the military, even after salaries resumed in Taiz in 2017 because they were more profitable. "We cannot pressure teachers to teach the required hours because their salaries are not enough to cover the whole month's expenses, so teachers look for other jobs," a participant in Al-Shamayatan, Taiz governorate, said. Unqualified substitute teachers were brought in because of the shortage of teachers, participants said.

In Taiz and Aden, participants said the psychological stress of the war and the economic crisis had affected teachers' behavior toward students, describing multiple incidents of

65) "2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview," UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, December 2018, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019_Yemen_HNO_FINAL.pdf.

66) Interview with Mufeed al-Howaish, dean of Ideal Modern Institute in Taiz and community activist with the Green Earth Organization, Taiz, December 15, 2018.

students being abused by teachers. A young woman in Taiz said a teacher had punished her brother by holding him by the ear and encouraging the whole class to beat him. When her father complained, she said the principal told him the teacher was mentally ill. In Aden, participants said teachers physically abused students. While corporal punishment is prohibited in schools in Yemen,⁽⁶⁷⁾ it was widely practiced prior to the conflict.⁽⁶⁸⁾

Schools Bombed, Converted to Military Barracks, Shelters

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported in December 2018 that 2,000 schools had been affected by the conflict.⁽⁶⁹⁾ Of these, 256 were destroyed by airstrikes or shelling and 1,520 were damaged, while 167 were being used as shelters for internally displaced people and 23 were occupied by armed groups. Focus group participants in Taiz, which has experienced some of the fiercest fighting of the conflict, said schools near the frontlines were damaged by fighting and airstrikes; some schools were converted into military barracks or shelters for displaced people. Some school buildings in Taiz city housed both army barracks and functioning classrooms. “Government schools are still military barracks, and even if they were ostensibly handed over, they are still full of militiamen. Some schools are used by students in the morning, and then in the evening they are returned to the militia,” a participant in Taiz city said.⁽⁷⁰⁾

Students have been hit by sniper fire on the way to school in Taiz, participants said, and sporadic clashes near schools have led to temporary closures. Parents feared sending their children to school due to these clashes. Students are psychologically affected by the trauma of war; participants reported nail-biting, absent-mindedness and other symptoms of trauma among schoolchildren in Taiz city. Conflict-induced trauma can have permanent effects on brain development in children and impact their attachment and early learning abilities, according to research by War Child, which found that post-traumatic stress disorder has led to impaired learning and poor achievement in schools in other conflict-affected contexts.

In Sana’a, some school buildings have been destroyed by Saudi-led coalition airstrikes, while others have been used to shelter displaced people. Participants said schools had been bombed during end-of-year exams, after which some parents were afraid to send their children to school.

67) “2005 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor - Yemen,” United States Department of Labor, 29 August 2006, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/48d7491422.html>.

68) A study conducted in Aden in 2010 found that 55.7 percent of students surveyed reported experiencing physical abuse in school; see: A S Ba-Saddik & A S Hattab, “Physical abuse in basic-education schools in Aden governorate, Yemen: a cross-sectional study,” *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal* Vol. 10 no. 4, 2013, http://applications.emro.who.int/emhj/v19/04/EMHJ_2013_19_4_333_339.pdf?ua=1. See also: Farea al-Muslimi, “Yemen’s children in crisis,” *Al Monitor*, April 3, 2014, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/04/yemen-children-unicef-education-poverty.html>.

69) “2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview,” UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, December 2018, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019_Yemen_HNO_FINAL.pdf.

70) “Being kept behind; The impact of conflict on the education of Yemen’s children,” War Child, May 2019, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/War_Child_UK_Yemen_Report_Being_Kept_Behind_FINAL.pdf.

The general deterioration in security in Aden and the proliferation of openly carried arms has prompted frightened parents to keep their children home, participants in Aden said. A growing militarization of the community in Aden also had affected the school environment, according to participants who described multiple incidents of armed violence in schools. At least two teachers have been assassinated by militants, participants said; students have come to school armed, and teachers have been threatened by parents who are members of security forces or militias. A female teacher supervising exams was threatened by a father who entered the exam hall with a hand grenade, and a military response team was sent in to disarm him, participants in Seera, Aden, reported. Shootings and armed clashes sometimes took place in the vicinity of schools. A participant who volunteered at a school described one such incident: "A round of clashes broke out between armed groups that reached the classrooms. We were lying on the ground, in terror, and we had no idea how we would return to our homes. This has happened more than once," he said. Gunmen have engaged in firefights on school premises, other participants reported, terrorizing students.

Gendered Impact of the Conflict on Youth

Boys' Education Often Prioritized When Families Can't Afford School

Prior to the current conflict, the enrollment rate of Yemeni girls in schools lagged behind that of boys, with girls in rural areas the least likely to be educated.⁽⁷¹⁾ Multiple factors contributed to this gender gap, including family preferences for educating boys; early marriage of girls; lack of girls' schools and female teachers in rural areas, and concerns for the safety of girls.⁽⁷²⁾ However, the gender gap appeared to be narrowing in the years before the conflict.⁽⁷³⁾

Focus group discussions suggested the conflict has exacerbated the existing drivers that pushed Yemen's children out of school, such as poverty, and created new challenges for boys and girls. While participants in all targeted areas said girls performed better in school than boys, it was often girls who were pulled out of school first when parents could not afford to educate all of their children. Rates of early marriage among girls were perceived to have increased during the conflict, while Yemen's boys have been recruited to the conflict's frontlines. While early marriage and recruitment to armed groups may be a cause for children to leave school, those who have dropped out of education are also more vulnerable to these practices.

71) "UNICEF Annual Report 2012 for Yemen, MENA," UNICEF, https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Yemen_COAR_2012.pdf.

72) "Republic of Yemen, The Status of Yemen Women: From Aspiration to Opportunity," World Bank, June 2014, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/640151468334820965/pdf/878200REVISED00Box0385200B00PUBLIC0.pdf>.

73) Ibid; "Yemen National Health and Demographic Survey 2013," Ministry of Public Health and Population Yemen & Central Statistical Organization, July 2015, <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR296/FR296.pdf>.



Schoolboys in a Sana'a street. (2019) Photo by Asem Alposi

Lack of motivation for school was mentioned more frequently as a problem among boys than girls. Participants in Aden said young men saw no purpose in education when educated people were unemployed or not receiving salaries. Across Yemen, participants perceived that girls were more willing to learn, more disciplined and more diligent than boys. “This might be because of their social upbringing, because they have had to remain at home all of their lives so they feel like education is an opportunity for them to change their social status,” a political activist in Taiz suggested.⁽⁷⁴⁾ In all areas, however, some parents educated their sons ahead of their daughters, sometimes because of perceptions that boys would need an education to work while girls would marry and were less likely to work.

In some cases, boys’ education was prioritized because school expenses were higher for girls than for boys. In Taiz, participants said girls’ uniforms were more costly and more strictly enforced than boys’ uniforms. In Mukalla and Sana’a, participants said the high transportation costs — driven by the fuel shortages during the war — affected girls more than boys. Participants noted that boys could seek alternative forms of transport — like hanging onto the side of a vehicle, hitchhiking or walking — but this was often considered inappropriate or unsafe for girls.

Girls were perceived as more vulnerable to the unstable security situation than boys, particularly in rural areas where girls had to travel long distances to school. In Taiz city, participants said they feared that girls would be harassed by armed men. In Bani Harith, on the outskirts of Sana’a city, participants said they feared their daughters would be kidnapped. There is some support for such fears, with the UN-affiliated group of eminent

74) Interview with Ayban al-Samei, a political activist and member of the sustainable development committee at the National Dialogue Conference, Taiz, January 12, 2019.

experts documenting what it described as an “emerging trend” in 2018-19 of Houthi authorities and fighters in Sana’a and Hudaydah accusing women and girls of traveling without a guardian and holding them until a ransom is paid.⁽⁷⁵⁾

In Hadramawt, Sana’a and Al-Shamayatan, Taiz governorate, participants and key informants said that traditionally boys’ education was considered a higher priority than girls’ education. However, some participants in Taiz city said the more progressive social outlook of the city meant that girls were more likely to stay in education. One participant in Taiz city explained: “Girls are more interested in education and are smarter, so we care about educating girls more, while we send our boys to the labor market.” However, women in Taiz city said that in very poor families or families with high numbers of children, girls were kept at home while boys remained in school as families believed boys

would be responsible for providing for the family later. A manager at the Yemeni Women’s Union in Mukalla said some families could no longer afford to provide the basic necessities for their children’s education, such as pens and notebooks. Usually, she said, girls were removed from school first: “This is because customs say that girls should stay at home while boys should get an education.” In other cases, the enrollment of girls in school was delayed to save money, she added.⁽⁷⁶⁾



*A girl carries water jugs at a camp for displaced people. (Taiz, 2019)
Photo by Ahmed al-Basha*

75) “Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014; Report of the detailed findings of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen,” (A/HRC/42/CRP.1*) UN Human Rights Council, September 3, 2019, reissued September 9, 2019, p. 156, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/GEE-Yemen/A_HRC_42_CRP_1.PDF.

76) Interview with Alia Omar al-Hamidi, head of the legal affairs department in the Yemeni Women’s Union, Mukalla,

In Aden, too, girls were increasingly removed from school as families prioritized the education of boys, an advocate for child workers in Aden said.⁽⁷⁷⁾ “For girls, parents say ‘why would I teach them?’ The boy will help us in the future, but the girl will stay at home and then get married,” she said, noting that some families diverged from this view.

Girls were also more likely to be burdened with household chores such as collecting water and firewood, cooking and cleaning, which sometimes kept them at home instead of at school. In some cases, the increase in the number of women working during the war led to their daughters leaving education: some girls were withdrawn from school to take over household chores when their mothers started working. Boys, however, were more likely to leave school to earn money through precarious work like selling candy, washing cars or collecting plastic, participants in Taiz and Sana’a said.

Girls and Early Marriage: Too Many Mouths to Feed, Debts to Pay

Child marriage is legal in Yemen and was widespread prior to the current conflict.⁽⁷⁸⁾ A violation of human rights, early marriage brings childhood to a premature end, often imposes social isolation and can lead to enslavement and bonded labor.⁽⁷⁹⁾ It exposes children to domestic and sexual violence. Like in many countries, marital rape is not a criminal offense in Yemen, which means that without a minimum marriage age or age of sexual consent, girls are legally allowed to be raped within the confines of marriage. Pregnancy at a young age is a major health risk, sometimes causing death or lifelong disabilities. In April 1999, Yemen abolished the minimum age for marriage — previously set at 15 years. The new law stipulated that child marriages could not be consummated until the onset of puberty, although no sanctions were put in place for those who violated this.⁽⁸⁰⁾ The Rights and Freedoms Working Group of the National Dialogue Conference recommended setting a minimum age for marriage of 18 years for men and women, and the legal affairs minister submitted a draft amendment to Prime Minister Mohammed Basindawa to implement this in April 2014.⁽⁸¹⁾ However, this draft law was never passed

December 16, 2018.

77) Interview with Fatimah Muhammad Yaslam, head of the Association to Protect the Rights of Working Children, Aden, January 8, 2019.

78) “Republic of Yemen, The Status of Yemen Women: From Aspiration to Opportunity,” World Bank, June 2014, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/640151468334820965/pdf/878200REVISED00Box0385200B00PUBLIC0.pdf>; UNICEF defines child marriage as: “[A]ny formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child.” See: “Child Marriage,” UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-marriage>.

79) “Marrying too young: End child marriage,” United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2012, <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MarryingTooYoung.pdf>; Child marriage is a violation of Article 16(2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states: “Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.” See: “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>; It also violates childrens’ rights to education, freedom from violence, reproductive rights, access to reproductive and sexual health care, employment and freedom of movement. See: “Q&A: Child Marriage and Violations of Girls’ Rights,” Human Rights Watch, June 14, 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/06/14/q-child-marriage-and-violations-girls-rights>.

80) “Marrying too young: End child marriage,” United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2012, <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MarryingTooYoung.pdf>.

81) “Pilot Study: Tourist Marriage in Yemen,” International Organization for Migration, 2014, https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/tourist_marriage_yemen.pdf.

and the implementation of NDC recommendations was derailed by subsequent events.

Comprehensive data on the incidence of child marriage is unavailable. Yemen's 2013 Demographic and Health Survey found that 31.9 percent of women aged between 20 and 24 had married before the age of 18, and 9.4 percent before age 15.⁽⁸²⁾ While the scarcity of data makes it difficult to identify trends, the results from different age groups in the survey indicate that early marriage was becoming less prevalent before the war.⁽⁸³⁾ The survey also revealed a correlation between low education levels and child marriage, although whether low education was a cause or consequence of early marriage was not clear.⁽⁸⁴⁾

Key informants and participants in focus group discussions across Yemen perceived that there has been an increase in the number of early marriages during the conflict, driven by the economic collapse and lack of security. This was identified as a key factor driving girls out of education. This tallies with the findings of other research: OCHA reported a threefold rise in early marriage between 2017 and 2018.⁽⁸⁵⁾ A women's rights activist in Sana'a said the war had reversed progress toward ending early marriage.⁽⁸⁶⁾ "[Before the conflict] there was social awareness of this problem and there was a change being created. ... The war was a setback for this issue," she said. An academic in Sana'a, who has researched child marriage in Yemen, said campaigns by the Yemeni Women's Union and the Women's National Committee had succeeded in raising awareness about child marriage before the war.⁽⁸⁷⁾ "In my village, fathers began to say girls should marry after the age of 18. There was an increase in awareness," she said. "This was before the war, but the phenomenon has greatly increased [since then] because it became a mechanism to adapt to the circumstances of the war."

Participants in Taiz governorate, Bani Harith and Hadramawt estimated that the average age for girls to marry had dropped from 18-20 years to 13-15 years during the conflict. In Aden, the average age of marriage had dropped to 12-14 years for girls, participants said. Reliable statistics are not available to support or refute these perceptions. In Mukalla, participants said that in exceptional cases girls were married as young as 8 years old; a teacher in Mukalla described the cases of two young girls who had been married early and died in childbirth.

Perceptions of the scale and scope of the rise in early marriage varied across Yemen. In Aden, key informants said that prior to the conflict, early marriage had been restricted to poor neighborhoods but that during the war it had become common among all social

82) "Yemen National Health and Demographic Survey 2013," Ministry of Public Health and Population Yemen & Central Statistical Organization, July 2015, <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR296/FR296.pdf>.

83) "Yemen Country Brief: UNICEF Regional Study on Child Marriage in the Middle East and North Africa," UNICEF, 2017, <https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/1821/file/%20MENACMRReport-YemenBrief.pdf>.

84) Ibid.

85) "2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview," UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, December 2018, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019_Yemen_HNO_FINAL.pdf.

86) Interview with Nesmah al-Sameai, leader and co-founder of the "Let Us Live" initiative advocating for women's rights and documenting women's suffering and successes through storytelling and art, Sana'a, January 14, 2019.

87) Interview with Dr Husnia al-Qadri, faculty member of the Gender-Development Research and Studies Center at Sana'a University and Country Gender Program Coordinator for Oxfam, Sana'a, March 12, 2019.

groups.⁽⁸⁸⁾ Participants in Taiz city also reported that early marriage had become common where previously it had been restricted to rural areas. A woman who worked with youth in Mukalla said early marriage had been common in Wadi Hadramawt before the war, but rare in coastal areas of the governorate including Mukalla. However, she said that during the conflict, early marriage had spread throughout Hadramawt because of the economic burdens on families, as well as the decline in activism to raise awareness of this issue due to the war.⁽⁸⁹⁾

The economic collapse was the primary driver of the increase in early marriage, participants across Yemen said. In Mukalla, poverty forced families to accept early marriage for their daughters, an NGO worker said, adding that some men exploited the poverty of families to marry their young daughters.⁽⁹⁰⁾ Participants in Mukalla said that fathers sometimes agreed to their daughters' marriages to repay debts, a practice that was also reported in Aden where fathers settled debts to qat dealers through their daughters' marriages. "It has nothing to do with building a family," a public school teacher in Aden said.⁽⁹¹⁾ "Fathers marry off their daughters at a young age in the sense of buying and selling – a trade in exchange for a financial return. ... Unfortunately this has increased since the war." The academic specializing in gender in Sana'a who has researched child marriage recalled a father in Amran who was asked to settle his debts by giving his two daughters, ages 3 and 8, to a man he owed money to, "one to marry and one to raise."⁽⁹²⁾

Once married, families no longer had the financial burden of providing for a daughter. "Fathers marry off their daughters so their husbands will handle their expenses," one participant in Al-Shamayatan, Taiz governorate, explained. A community leader in Taiz said families would not agree to early marriages for their daughters except out of financial desperation: "They have to be in need and unable to support her. They want her to go to her husband so he can provide for her and at the same time the father can get some money to feed his family and provide for them."⁽⁹³⁾ A woman in Bani Harith, on the outskirts of Sana'a city, gave the example of a displaced man who could no longer afford to support his four daughters: "He went to the mosque and presented them to the people, asking for someone to marry them and take responsibility for them. He did not ask for any bride price for his daughters." In some cases, families kept all or part of the bride price paid for their daughters' marriages, a manager of the Yemeni Women's Union in

88) Interview with Ashjan Shurag, head of the Yemeni civil society group Alef Ba Foundation for Peaceful Coexistence, Aden, January 5, 2019; Interview with Fatimah Muhammad Yaslam, head of the Association to Protect the Rights of Working Children, Aden, January 8, 2019.

89) Interview with Sulaf Aboud al-Hanashi, head of the Rescue Foundation for Development, Mukalla, Hadramawt, December 1, 2018.

90) Interview with Saleh Bamakhshab, project manager for the Benevolence Coalition for Humanitarian Relief, which coordinates and implements projects for the King Salman Center for Relief, Mukalla, December 18, 2018.

91) Interview with Amaal Muhammad Ahmad Asiri, public school teacher in Aden, January 6, 2019.

92) Interview with Dr Husnia al-Qadri, faculty member of the Gender-Development Research and Studies Center at Sana'a University and Country Gender Program Coordinator for Oxfam, Sana'a, March 12, 2019.

93) Interview with Sumayah Tawfiq Othman, neighborhood leader of the lower Tahrir neighborhood Community Councils, Taiz, December 12, 2018.

Mukalla said.⁽⁹⁴⁾ According to Islamic law the bride price is the property of the bride,⁽⁹⁵⁾ although in parts of Yemen the bride's family sometimes keeps part of it, a practice that predates the current conflict.

Marriage to wealthy older men from other governorates or outside Yemen was also identified as a growing concern during the war. In eastern Mukalla, girls were married to older men from Oman in what participants described as "tourist marriages," in which the groom paid the young bride's family for a temporary marriage. The grooms in these marriages were often elderly or disabled; most disappeared after a short time, sometimes without divorcing their wives, a development expert who worked with youths in Mukalla said.⁽⁹⁶⁾ In Aden, participants reported that young girls were married to wealthy men from northern Yemen and Saudi Arabia to ease financial pressure on their families. While participants said this practice had spread during the conflict, there were reports of temporary marriages to men from Saudi Arabia, Oman and the United Arab Emirates before the war in Hadramawt, Aden, Ibb, Sana'a, Hudaydah and Taiz.⁽⁹⁷⁾ While families often hoped these marriages would protect their daughters, ease their poverty and provide citizenship outside Yemen, in practice they were usually short-lived and rarely achieved these benefits, instead causing trauma for the young brides. The practice has been described as a form of human trafficking.⁽⁹⁸⁾ Government figures for registered marriages between Yemeni women and foreign men suggest the number of these unions may have been in decline in the five years before the conflict, although these figures may not include all such marriages.⁽⁹⁹⁾

Participants and key informants in Mukalla said the use of "matchmakers" had emerged during the conflict to arrange marriages for Hadrami girls to men from outside the governorate. "This phenomenon did not exist before the conflict and most of these marriages ended in divorce," according to a community activist interviewed in Mukalla.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ Before the conflict, engagements in Hadramawt would be facilitated between families without intermediaries. Participants in Taiz also reported that women profited from early marriages by acting as brokers and searching for girls from poor households to be brides. "When the father agrees to the marriage, each one takes their share," a participant in Al-Shamayatan, Taiz governorate, explained. Meanwhile, in Aden, young girls were being married to fighters who returned from the front with Saudi rials and could afford bride price payments, participants said.

94) Interview with Alia Omar al-Hamidi, manager of the Legal Affairs' Department in the Yemeni Women's Union, Mukalla, December 16, 2018.

95) Susanne Dahlgren, "Revisiting the Issue of Women's Rights in Southern Yemen: Statutory Law, Sharia and Customs," *Arabian Humanities: International Journal of Archaeology and Social Sciences in the Arabian Peninsula*, 2013, <https://journals.openedition.org/cy/2039?lang=en>.

96) Interview with Sulaf Aboud al-Hanashi, head of the Rescue Foundation for Development, Mukalla, Hadramawt, December 1, 2018.

97) "Pilot Study: Tourist Marriage in Yemen," International Organization for Migration, 2014, https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/tourist_marriage_yemen.pdf.

98) Ibid.

99) Ibid.

100) Interview with a community activist, identity on file, in Mukalla, December 16, 2018.

Children cannot give informed consent to marriage, and they may be subject to coercion such as emotional and social pressure to marry.⁽¹⁰¹⁾ Participants said young girls' attitudes toward early marriage varied. Women in Taiz city said some young girls felt obliged to agree to marriage to reduce the financial burden on their families. In Aden, participants said that some girls were increasingly inclined toward early marriage because the conflict had restricted their access to school and university. In Al-Shamayatan, Taiz governorate, young women reported that families arranged marriages for their daughters without telling them. "Some parents say to their daughters, 'today is your wedding,' and she is forced into it," a young woman in Al-Shamayatan said. Among Muhamasheen girls, marriages sometimes occurred without the girls' consent, participants from the community said. Before the conflict, marriages took place in courts after confirming the girl's consent and age, a Muhamasheen participant said, "but now, we bring witnesses and we marry her without her presence."

Women in Taiz city said the frequency of marriage ceremonies had increased during the war, and that families were setting lower conditions and fewer demands when negotiating their daughters' marriage contracts due to financial desperation. In Al-Shamayatan, the district in Taiz governorate where four new wedding halls were established during the war, participants described the industry as one of the few to flourish in the conflict.

While financial need was cited as the primary driver of early marriages, families also arranged their young daughters' marriages to protect them from the chaotic security environment of the conflict, participants said in Taiz, Sana'a and Aden. A father in Aden explained: "Even if I were an educated man, I would still think the girl must marry rather than let her be educated because the situation is not secure. ... I cannot protect her from the community around her, so she must get married, and then her husband will educate her." Some women in Bani Harith, greater Sana'a, said they approved of marrying girls as young as 10 years old because girls had become "more liberal" as a result of exposure to Turkish soap operas and social media.

Boys Becoming Fighters: When the Only Future in Sight is the Frontline

While early marriage was identified as a driver for girls' withdrawal from education, recruitment to security forces and militias was identified as a primary factor in boys and young men leaving school or university. Documenting actual numbers of child soldiers can be difficult given access and other issues. However, the United Nations verified the recruitment of 3,018 boys and 16 girls in Yemen between 2013 and 2018, predominantly teenage boys between the ages of 15 and 17.⁽¹⁰²⁾ Most verified cases were attributed to the armed Houthi movement (1,940), followed by the popular committees (317),

101) "Marrying too young: End child marriage," United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2012, <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MarryingTooYoung.pdf>.

102) "Children and armed conflict in Yemen: Report of the Secretary-General," Office of the Special Representative to the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict, June 3, 2019, <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/document/report-of-the-secretary-general-on-children-and-armed-conflict-in-yemen-2/>.



A fighter walks with schoolboys (Khokha, Hudaydah, 2016) Photo by Majd Fuad

both of which had recruited boys as young as 10. The Yemeni army, the Security Belt Forces and AQAP also had recruited children, the UN found. They were used to guard checkpoints and government buildings, for patrolling, fetching water and bringing food and equipment to military positions, and in active combat. The UN, which said large-scale recruitment took place in schools, orphanages and communities, verified 370 cases of child recruitment in 2018, a decrease from 842 in 2017 that it attributed to access and security constraints as well as fear of reporting among local communities rather than any decline in the use of children.⁽¹⁰³⁾ The human rights group Mwatana reported it had been able to verify 1,117 children being used for military purposes in 2018, with nearly three-quarters of those recruits among Houthi forces.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾

Focus group participants said some boys were ideologically motivated to fight but most were drawn to the frontlines by financial need. In Bani Harith, on the outskirts of Sana'a city, participants said some boys joined the fighting in pursuit of a daily wage, qat or cigarettes, while others were motivated by war songs and poems. In Al-Shamayatan, Taiz governorate, participants said some boys joined the fighting before reaching ninth grade. Some went to Yemen's border with Saudi Arabia and others to the west coast, participants said, adding that some had returned with missing limbs and others' bodies had been

103) "Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary General - A/73/907-S/2019/509" UN Security Council & UN General Assembly, June 20, 2019, <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/document/2018-secretary-general-annual-report-on-children-and-armed-conflict/>.

104) "Withering Life," (Section 4: Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers), Mwatana for Human Rights, July 2019, <https://mwatana.org/en/withering-life/part-two/section4/>.

brought back for burial. In Taiz city, participants said conflict-driven destitution had opened a space for parties to the conflict to exploit the needs of boys and young men and drag them to battle. “They go to fight, even if they oppose the idea of fighting, just to make 2,000 rials a day. They sacrifice themselves to fight for extremist groups and parties,” one participant said.

Fighting has become preferable to studying, participants said in focus groups across Yemen. Students in Aden noted that jobs in the private and public sectors were scarce and precarious, even for university graduates. A participant in Aden said: “Why spend four or five years of my life going to university, when my fate is to join the military camps? There are those who have bachelor’s degrees in engineering, accounting and petroleum studies who also joined the battlefronts.” Young men said they saw joining militias and security forces as the easiest way to provide an income for themselves and their families. A political activist in Taiz city said enrollment in military forces was new in the city, which had previously been known for professions and trades; young men resorted to fighting because of the economic collapse, joining militias and security forces rather than going to university.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ A human rights activist who worked with youth in Taiz city said boys had lost interest in school, preferring to fight.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ “When you go to a boys’ school, some of them are even wearing military uniform,” he added. In Mukalla, participants said boys dropped out of school to join forces funded by members of the coalition as well as Yemeni army units because they saw enlisting as the only way to create a future.

The attitudes of families toward their sons and brothers joining militias and security forces varied and seemed to depend on the individual family dynamics; trends did not emerge according to areas or demographic differences. Across Yemen, participants said some families pushed their sons to fight, while others opposed their sons fighting. Participants in Bani Harith, on the outskirts of Sana’a, said there had been multiple cases of fathers publicly disowning their sons who went to the frontlines against their families’ wishes and refused to return. In other cases, families encouraged their sons to fight: “The mother says no good will come from school, you might as well join the fronts,” a participant in Al-Shamayatan, Taiz governorate, said. In Sana’a, participants described cases in which fathers forced their sons to fight, causing family disputes, as well as cases in which boys left for the frontlines without their families’ knowledge or permission. A participant in Bani Harith described a young man who had left for the frontline against his family’s will: “His family has been looking for him for three months, but they have yet to find him.” In Mukalla, a community leader said a young man’s family found out he had gone to fight only when they learned he had been killed; he had told his family he was leaving home to find work to help his family.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾

Fighting was viewed as a path to marriage for some young men, participants said. Saudi and Emirati financial backing of forces fighting the armed Houthi movement has ensured

105) Interview with Ayban al-Samei, a political activist and member of the sustainable development committee at the National Dialogue Conference, Taiz, January 12, 2019.

106) Interview with Akram al-Showafi, chairperson of Watch for Human Rights, Taiz, December 16, 2018.

107) Interview with Atiyat Aboud Badhawi, head of the Mukalla women’s community committee, Mukalla, December 12, 2018.

salary payments are made. Young men in Aden who did not fight and could not afford to pay bride prices sometimes married divorced women, whose bride price requirements were lower, participants said. “The men who can afford to marry these days are [fighters] who receive Saudi rials, while the average young man works to death and still cannot marry or start a family,” a participant in Sheikh Othman, Aden, said. In Taiz and Mukalla, participants said the age of marriage had risen among men with the exception of those who had joined militias or security forces and could afford to marry.

In Aden, participants described the active recruitment of boys, particularly to the UAE-backed Security Belt Forces, which participants said paid recruits 1,000 Saudi rials per month. Boys from Aden were sent to fight on the Red Sea Coast, participants said. In some schools in Sheikh Othman, there were few older students as such large numbers of teenage boys had left to fight, participants reported. “A large number of children went to fight in Al-Mokha camp. When students leave the school, one only sees younger boys,” one participant said.

Youth recruitment into armed forces in Sheikh Othman had reached such a high level that multiple participants interpreted this as a conspiracy to destroy Aden’s youth. Participants estimated that in some neighborhoods as many as 80 percent of young men had left to fight. Recruiters and “brokers” were active in many neighborhoods to recruit young men to join the frontlines, participants said, alongside efforts to destroy all local sports and cultural clubs. Participants perceived this as an attempt to promote fighting as the only option for young men. A participant in Sheikh Othman explained: “We founded a club in our neighborhood to attract young men to sports, and keep them away from arms and thuggery ... but people supported by the local council tried to seize the courtyard, and we are being fought so that the club fails.” The high salaries paid to fighters in Aden had created new wealth inequalities in the city, participants said, particularly as some families had several members join coalition-backed forces.

Ideological beliefs emerged as a secondary factor in recruitment, and in many cases were irrelevant, participants said, however they spoke of some young fighters experiencing ideological changes on the battlefields. In Sana’a, some boys joined Houthi forces because they wanted money and qat, participants said, but returned from the frontlines indoctrinated in Houthi ideology. In Aden, participants said recruits signed up to fight because joining coalition-funded forces and militias was lucrative. However, they, too, returned from the frontlines with changed ideological convictions as well as a new capacity for violence. “You find fighters who never pray or fast but call others infidels,” a civil society expert in Aden said, discussing the psychological impact on young fighters and society.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ “They fight with all this ferocity and malice, but where does it come from? There was a slaughter of [Houthi fighters] by the educated and intellectual youth of Aden. It is surprising how these educated young men committed such violence, murder and heinous acts. This suggests a negative value change in the beliefs of those joining the battlefronts, and society in general.”

108) Interview with Ashjan Shurag, head of the Yemeni civil society group Alef Ba Foundation for Peaceful Coexistence, Aden, January 5, 2019.



Women carry water in an IDP camp. (Khokha, Hudaydah, 2018) Photo by Afnan Yahya

III.

Few Safe Spaces: Gender-Based Violence at Home, in the Community

War can magnify the power and gender inequalities that lie at the root of gender-based violence, which, as defined by the Global Protection Cluster, includes “any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will, and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females.”⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ This includes physical and sexual violence as well as acts that cause psychological harm. This chapter focuses on physical and sexual violence; early marriage, also a form of GBV, is addressed in Chapter II.

Reliable baseline statistics for GBV in Yemen are rare, and published figures often are imprecise and based on reported incidents. For example, when the UN humanitarian chief briefed the Security Council in 2017 on GBV incidents “shockingly” rising, he said such cases had “reportedly increased” more than 63 percent since before the war and cited a monthly figure for reported cases.⁽¹¹⁰⁾ Likewise, 2018 figures from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) were both staggering and imprecise, with an estimated 3 million women and girls in Yemen considered at risk of gender-based violence (GBV) and 65,000 at risk of sexual violence, including rape.⁽¹¹¹⁾ Such imprecision is not surprising given the sensitivity of the subject and taboos about discussing it, especially when perpetrated against men, as well as a general lack of reporting. As focus group participants and key informants noted, options for justice are limited when state institutions are in disarray. Inherent difficulties gathering data in largely rural Yemen, especially during war, further complicate information-gathering.

Still, the issues participants and key informants perceived as worsening, including domestic violence, rape of girls and boys, child marriage, harassment of women and girls, generally aligned with the types of violence aid workers were reporting. Although focus group participants in all areas spoke out about sexual violence toward boys — perceiving a significantly worse situation since the war began — they did not engage with the issue of adult male rape and sexual assault. UNFPA found that of all reported GBV incidents in 2018, almost half comprised physical assault, almost a quarter psychological abuse, 17 percent denial of resources, 11 percent child marriage, 3 percent sexual abuse, and 1 percent rape.⁽¹¹²⁾ And despite a widely accepted link between conflict and increased risk of GBV, less than 1 percent of all funds directed to humanitarian assistance worldwide is allocated to protection from this type of violence.⁽¹¹³⁾

109) “Handbook for Coordinating Gender-based Violence Interventions in Emergencies,” Global Protection Cluster, June 2019, https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/report/handbook-for-coordinating-gender-based-violence-interventions-in-emergencies/Handbook_for_Coordinating_GBV_in_Emergencies_fin.01.pdf.

110) “ERC O’Brien’s statement to the Security Council on Yemen,” United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), January 26, 2017, <https://www.unocha.org/es/story/yemen-child-under-age-five-dies-every-10-minutes-preventable-causes-un-humanitarian-chief>.

111) “UNFPA Humanitarian Response Plan in Yemen 2018” United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), February 2018, <https://yemen.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA%20Yemen%202018%20Response%20brochure%20-%20English%20-%20printed%20final.compressed.pdf>.

112) UNFPA as cited in “Being a girl in Yemen: Jehan and Hamamah’s story,” United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), May 9, 2019, <https://www.unocha.org/story/being-girl-yemen-jehan-and-hamamah%E2%80%99s-story>.

113) “Acting together to end sexual and gender-based violence in humanitarian crises” United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), May 24, 2019, <https://www.unfpa.org/press/acting-together-end-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-humanitarian-crises>.

Due to the lack of comprehensive data, it is difficult to assess the prevalence of GBV in Yemen prior to the conflict. The absence of baseline data also makes it difficult to assess the significance of perceived increases. Specific legislation against domestic violence and marital rape is lacking in Yemen, and laws around GBV are closely tied into concepts of “morality” and the status of women and men in Yemeni society.⁽¹¹⁴⁾ After the unification of Yemen in 1990, women’s legal rights diminished in some areas and the country’s legal system on the whole systemizes gender inequality.⁽¹¹⁵⁾ Yemen’s Personal Status Law of 1992 bestows men with guardianship rights over their female relatives and enshrines Yemeni women’s caregiver responsibilities, while stating no minimum age for marriage.⁽¹¹⁶⁾ Under the Penal Code, a woman’s testimony is held to be of less worth than that of a man’s, and murders of women that are considered “honor killings” receive reduced sentences.⁽¹¹⁷⁾

Increases in GBV during the war have been attributed in part to economic factors, including loss of livelihoods and price rises; the shifting of gender roles as more women enter the labor market; displacement; the breakdown of law and order and the removal of formal and informal protection mechanisms against violence.⁽¹¹⁸⁾

Violence against Women and Girls

Physical and Sexual Violence, Exploitation in Homes and Communities

Women have experienced multiple forms of violence throughout the war, far beyond direct conflict-related incidents. Focus group participants perceived a war-time increase in incidences of rape, kidnapping, sexual harassment and domestic violence in their communities. Violence against women and girls has been perpetrated by militias and community members as well as husbands, fathers and brothers.

Focus group participants said that displaced women, poor women, female beggars and Muhamasheen women were the most vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Child workers and children from poor families also were identified as especially vulnerable to sexual harassment. In Sheikh Othman, Aden, participants said camps for internally displaced people were sites of gender-based violence, which they attributed in part to a mixing of the sexes and unisex bathrooms.

114) “Gender Justice & The Law,” United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), December 2018. <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/Gender%20Justice/English/Full%20reports/Yemen%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English.pdf>.

115) “Changes Ahead: Yemeni Women Map the Road to Peace,” Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, December 2018, https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/WILPF_Yemen-Publication2018.pdf.

116) “Republic of Yemen the Status of Yemeni Women: From Aspiration to Opportunity,” World Bank, June 2014, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/640151468334820965/pdf/878200REVISED00Box0385200B00PUBLIC0.pdf>.

117) “Yemen: Collective failure, collective responsibility,” Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen Report, September 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/YemenGEE/Pages/Index.aspx>.

118) “Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen: Preventing Gender-based Violence & Strengthening the Response,” Humanitarian Response Plan in Yemen 2018 United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), October 2016, <https://yemen.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/Final%20-%20GBV%20Sub-Cluster-%20Yemen%20Crisis-Preventing%20GBV%20and%20Strengthening%20the%20Response.pdf>.

Financial Strain, Resentment Blamed for Domestic Violence

Yemenis in all governorates covered by this study reported a rise in domestic violence during the conflict. Women recounted personal stories of abuse by husbands, fathers and brothers. Men and women described violence inflicted on their female neighbors and women in their communities.

In Aden governorate, participants described incidents of men beating their wives and younger men beating their sisters, and said young men had become more controlling of their sisters during the conflict. Some attributed this to an increased use of illegal drugs, while others pointed to the rising number of women in the workforce and said this violence was driven by men's and boys' resentment over their wives' and sisters' incomes. Rape within families had also increased, participants in Sheikh Othman said, describing multiple cases of men raping their young female relatives.

In Mukalla, Hadramawt, participants recounted multiple stories of women being beaten by their husbands while in Sayoun, Hadramawt, women described being beaten by their husbands and in some cases returning to their parents' homes due to physical abuse. A woman from Sayoun said: "I live an exhausting life. I consider myself comfortable if a week passes without problems. I came here for training and left my kids with their father, but I am still worried about what he might do. He hits us with everything – a mini-stove or teapot, day or night." The head of a branch of the Yemeni Women's Union in Hadramawt said women had suffered multiple types of violence from their husbands. "We are dealing with the problems that come to us on a daily basis. Some of them are simple problems while others are very violent, like attempted murder ... stabbings and burning with boiling water," she said.⁽¹¹⁹⁾

In Al-Shamayatan, Taiz governorate, women said that a rise in domestic abuse had led to a high number of divorces and an increase in suicides. Taiz city was the only area in which some male participants said violence against women had decreased during the conflict, citing what they described as improved understandings between men and women. These men said they had become calmer and more compassionate. Women and key informants in Taiz city, however, disagreed, reporting a rise in domestic violence as well as increased verbal and sexual harassment. A community leader who works in a court in Taiz said she had observed a rise in divorce cases filed on the basis of domestic violence, which she said were often blamed on women asking their husbands for money. She described multiple cases of women seeking divorces because their husbands had beaten them when they asked for groceries or argued about money.⁽¹²⁰⁾

119) Interview with Fatimah al-Noubi, head of the Yemeni Women's Union for Hadramawt (Wadi Branch), Sayoun, Hadramawt, January 21, 2019.

120) Interview with Sumayah Tawfiq Othman, neighborhood leader of the lower Tahrir neighborhood, Taiz, December 12, 2018.

Perceived Rise in Gender-Based Violence in Public Spaces

Across all governorates included in the study, participants said that while, in some cases, women and girls have had more access to the public sphere since the beginning of the conflict, public spaces had become less safe for them. While the patterns of violence varied, participants in all areas said that there had been an increase in sexual violence and harassment. In several cases, participants specifically mentioned the problem of sexual violence perpetrated by armed forces or members of militias — an issue also addressed by a panel of UN-appointed experts that said perpetrators of GBV in Yemen could be prosecuted for war crimes.⁽¹²¹⁾

The UN-affiliated panel found that members of the 35th Armored Brigade, backed by the United Arab Emirates but officially part of the Yemeni armed forces, kidnapped and raped or gang-raped displaced people and Muhamasheen in Al-Shamayatan, Taiz governorate, from 2017 to 2019, using sexual violence as a way to subjugate those communities. The UN group of eminent experts also recorded “widespread cases of rape of migrant women, girls and boys” by Security Belt Forces in 2018 in Aden. Gender-based violence in Houthi-controlled northern areas involved kidnapping women and girls and holding them for ransom, the panel reported, stigmatizing them in Yemen’s patriarchal society.⁽¹²²⁾

Focus group participants spoke about the extent of gender-based violence and its impact on their families and communities. In Al-Shamayatan, Taiz governorate, women reported living in “deep fear” due to the lack of security, the spread of weapons and the presence of militants. They said they had heard multiple stories of children being raped, and recounted two incidents of the sexual assault and murder of young children in the two months prior to the focus group discussions. In villages, girls performing chores such as fetching water reported having to travel farther, and said they traveled in groups due to the risk of harassment. They explained that they no longer felt safe traveling alone due to the rise in violence, the spread of weapons and increased harassment since the war began. Much of Yemen’s water infrastructure has been destroyed or fallen into disrepair during the war, exacerbating the country’s existing water scarcity and necessitating longer treks to reach functioning wells.⁽¹²³⁾

In Taiz city, participants highlighted the rape of women by armed men and the phenomenon of women being robbed by men on motorcycles — a trend that was also described during discussions in Aden. While some participants said the “social outlook” of Taiz city — which has a reputation as a more liberal Yemeni city — meant that girls felt safe, other participants and experts said Taiz girls faced harassment by armed men and that sexual harassment including groping had become widespread. Women participants also recounted being verbally abused and threatened. A local community leader said

121) “Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014,” from the Report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts as submitted to the UNHCR, August 9, 2019, p.13-14, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/240/87/PDF/G1924087.pdf?OpenElement>.

122) Ibid.

123) “They Die of Bombs, We Die of Need - Impact of Collapsing Public Health Systems in Yemen,” International Rescue Committee, March 26, 2018, <https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/2604/theydieofbombswedieofneedfinal.pdf>.

a woman working for an NGO was attacked in the street while registering people for humanitarian aid by some people who were not listed as beneficiaries. She explained: “They took her lists and attacked her with weapons, saying, ‘Why don’t you register us? Register all of us or don’t register anyone’. They really messed her up.”⁽¹²⁴⁾

In Al-Sabeen, Sana’a city, some men said strong social links had prevented sexual harassment in their area, however, women on the whole reported a wartime increase in sexual violence and harassment, including groping on the street and public transport. Participants and key informants said the incidence of child rape had risen, as well as the verbal, psychological, sexual and physical abuse of women. Participants said that the rape and kidnapping of girls was routinely covered up, and that children were sexually harassed in schools. Participants from Bani Harith, on the outskirts of Sana’a city, recalled multiple accounts of girls being raped. Participants described the case of a 6-year-old girl who was on her way to her grandmother’s home in July 2018 when a man approached her and took her to a farm where he raped her. She did not understand what had happened to her, the participants said, but her teacher noticed she was hemorrhaging the next day and the girl subsequently died from the loss of blood.

In Sheikh Othman, Aden, focus group participants described numerous incidents of the rapes of young girls during the conflict. In a particularly severe incident in October 2018, participants told the story of a female student who had been dragged by 10 boys into the gravedigger’s room of a cemetery and gang-raped on her way home from university. Participants said the young woman’s family retaliated by killing all of the attackers except one who escaped. This incident of personal revenge was a rare account of any form of retribution reported throughout this research; women across Yemen reported a rising impunity for perpetrators of gender-based violence, as will be discussed below. Sexual harassment also had become rampant on the street and on public transport in Aden, perpetrated by both young and elderly men, participants said. Rapes have occurred in schools, with no response from administrators, participants reported.

In Seera, Aden, key informants and participants described an increase in rape and kidnapping and said some families confined girls to their homes due to fears of kidnapping. Participants said sexual harassment had become prevalent in schools. They added that working women were harassed by armed groups, especially women who worked at night, and women and girls — particularly those doing domestic work — were harassed at work by employers.

In Mukalla, Hadramawt, some participants said the frequency of rape had increased to the extent that participants said some parents shaved their daughters’ hair to try to protect them by making them look less feminine. A young woman working in a hospital spoke of multiple rape victims having been treated there. Security personnel and drug traffickers were sexually exploiting youths, participants said, adding that children living in poverty were most vulnerable to these abuses. One participant described the case of a 12-year-old girl from a family in financial need who was employed by a neighbor who

124) Interview with Sumayah Tawfiq Othman, neighborhood leader of the Lower Tahrir neighborhood, Taiz, December 12, 2018.

then raped her; their families forced them to marry to “protect her reputation.” They then divorced and the rapist was shunned by the community, the participant said. Young people in Mukalla said sexual harassment took place in the streets and in workplaces, a view shared by a key informant working in civil society. “[Sexual harassment] has increased in government buildings, at work, in hospitals, in offices and in any crowded areas,” he said.⁽¹²⁵⁾ In Sayoun, Hadramawt, focus group participants said the kidnapping and rape of girls and women had increased during the conflict. In one account, a female high school student was kidnapped outside her home, in front of her father, and raped by a man who participants said was a serial rapist.

A youth empowerment coordinator working for an international NGO in Yemen said social cohesion has diminished since the start of the war, and the concept of gender has changed at a time when conflict has displaced many families. This, she said, along with an absence of rule of law, had combined to create a space for GBV.⁽¹²⁶⁾ “There is no ethical or social deterrent, and this creates different forms of gender-based violence,” she said, but she noted that this space also accommodates an acceptance of new roles for women. “I think that there is a crack in the cultural understanding of gender dynamics. Women, in the past, used to be protected by community standards, but now these community principles have been shaken.”

Perceived Drivers of Violence Against Women and Girls

Across Yemen, men and women perceived unemployment and financial insecurity as a primary driver of domestic violence. In Taiz, Sana’a and Aden, participants said poverty and the inability to provide for families caused psychological problems in men, which participants said led to domestic violence. In Bani Harith, on the outskirts of Sana’a city, participants said unemployment had diminished men’s sense of masculinity and purpose, saying that this had led to domestic abuse, a phenomenon also observed by an academic specializing in gender in Sana’a.⁽¹²⁷⁾ Financial worries propelled fights between spouses, both men and women said; a woman in Taiz explained that in the past, couples quarrelled over spending too much money or preparing too few sweets. “Now, we fight because they didn’t leave us anything to eat,” she said.

Participants in several areas said the unaffordability of qat led to domestic violence; in Bani Harith, participants said a man broke his wife’s nose out of frustration because he could not afford qat. In Taiz, a man murdered his grandmother for money to buy qat, participants said. Women in Aden said their husbands’ addiction to qat was a cause of domestic violence; in some cases, men arranged marriages between their daughters and qat dealers to settle their debts, they said.

125) Interview with Saleh Bamakhshab, Project manager for the Benevolence Coalition for Humanitarian Relief, which coordinates and implements projects for the King Salman Center for Relief, Mukalla, Hadramawt, December 18, 2018.

126) Interview with Lina Al-Safi, youth empowerment coordinator at CARE, Sana’a, February 18, 2019.

127) Interview with Dr Husnia al-Qadri, faculty member of the Gender-Development Research and Studies Center at Sana’a University and Country Gender Program Coordinator for Oxfam, Sana’a, March 12, 2019.

Unemployment also was perceived as a driver of the rise in sexual harassment in Taiz and Aden. Participants explained this connection by saying that men had more free time to harass women. "There is no longer work, and most of them loiter in the streets and have become occupied with looking at girls," a participant in Taiz said. Men are less able to afford the costs associated with marriage, and this was also cited as a driver of sexual harassment and rape in Sana'a and Aden.

Across all gender and age groups, and in all areas, some participants blamed women for inviting the violence they experienced. Some young women in Al-Sabeen, Sana'a city, said that women's "declining morals" drove sexual harassment, and they said women had started giving out their phone numbers freely. Women also said women's dress invited sexual harassment. Participants in Al-Sabeen blamed women's increased presence outside the home for the rise in violence, while in Bani Harith, on the outskirts of Sana'a city, and Al-Shamayatan, Taiz governorate, participants' perception was that women's lack of adherence to religious norms was responsible. In Aden, female participants said that women wearing more makeup in public had caused increased harassment. Similar attitudes existed prior to the conflict. In a survey conducted by the Yemeni Women's Union in January 2011, 35 percent of respondents associated domestic violence with a wife doing something wrong, while 37 percent said violence was justified against "disobedient" women.⁽¹²⁸⁾

Some male and female participants in all areas referred to the growing participation of women in the labor market as a driver of violence against women, in both public and domestic spheres. While the evidence base is limited, previous studies have found that women may be at lower risk of violence once they have established economic power but that a short-term rise in male violence against women sometimes occurs during transitional periods as women gain economic power.⁽¹²⁹⁾ Some research also suggests the risk of violence against women is greatest when women gain sole decision making authority alongside their economic empowerment, suggesting violence may be a response to men's feelings of powerlessness; where household authority is shared, the risk of violence appears to be lower.⁽¹³⁰⁾ In contrast to the views of most participants, a women's rights activist in Sana'a said that while domestic violence had increased during the war, it may have diminished in households in which women worked, as their salaries eased the burden on their husbands.⁽¹³¹⁾ In their workplaces, however, women faced sexual harassment and had little choice but to put up with it, she said. An academic specializing in gender in Sana'a also noted while increases in women's mobility were a positive development during the war, "at the same time, we fear there will be rebellion that causes familial conflicts."⁽¹³²⁾

128) "Republic of Yemen the Status of Yemeni Women: From Aspiration to Opportunity," World Bank, June 2014, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/640151468334820965/pdf/878200REVISED00Box0385200B00PUBLIC0.pdf>.

129) Erika McAslan Fraser, "Helpdesk Research Report: Economic Empowerment and Violence Against Women and Girls," February 3, 2012, Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, <http://gsdrc.org/docs/open/hdq790.pdf>.

130) Ibid.

131) Interview with Nesmah al-Sameai, leader and co-founder of the "Let Us Live" initiative advocating for women's rights and documenting women's suffering and successes through storytelling and art, Sana'a, January 14, 2019.

132) Interview with Dr Husnia al-Qadri, faculty member of the Gender-Development Research and Studies Center at Sana'a University and Country Gender Program Coordinator for Oxfam, Sana'a, March 12, 2019.

A political activist in Taiz said the violence of the conflict trickled down to the household level: “Those who are strong use violence against anyone weaker than them, and so men with power in the government, for example, use violence against their loyalists, and their loyalists, who are armed, use violence against defenseless civilians. This leads the civilians to go home and use violence against their own families, with the mother using violence against her children, and so on. It is a spiral.”⁽¹³³⁾ A female participant in Al-Sabeen, Sana’a city, described a similar pattern of abuse: “Because of the war, everyone has become at risk of being a victim of violence. ... I am violent with the children, I hit them. The husband will come home and, because of the conditions, beat his wife. The children will also be violent, and if they cannot be violent with their siblings, they will be violent with animals like cats and dogs in the street. This violence is unnatural, and it is a cycle that only gets worse.”

A perceived increase in brothers abusing their sisters was attributed in Taiz city to boys and young men copying the behaviors of their fathers, who had become more violent. In Al-Sabeen, Sana’a city, participants said brothers beat their sisters because they did not approve of their choice of clothes. In Aden city, participants said the rise in women in paid work had resulted in them neglecting their families and had led to an increase in violence by boys against their sisters. They also said boys beat their sisters because they resented them for earning money.

In Sheikh Othman, Aden, participants blamed drug use — which they perceived as rising during the war — for multiple forms of violence against women, including young men abusing their sisters. Overcrowding due to war displacement also was noted as a risk factor for violence in the home. At the end of 2018, an estimated 2.3 million people were internally displaced across Yemen, driven from their homes by airstrikes and fighting as well as the lack of jobs or basic services.⁽¹³⁴⁾ Often, families would join relatives, and focus group participants in Aden and Taiz said that in some cases, three or four families resided in a single home due to displacement.

133) Interview with Ayban al-Samei, a political activist and member of the sustainable development committee at the National Dialogue Conference, Taiz, January 12, 2019.

134) “Yemen - Urban displacement in a rural society,” Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, October 2019, http://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/201910-urban-yemen_0.pdf.

Sexual Violence Against Boys

Exploitation Includes Rape, Recruitment to Prostitution

Although focus group discussions concentrated on violence toward women and girls, participants in all governorates relayed stories of severe, widespread sexual violence against boys. Youth participants were most vocal about this issue, and it was raised across all groups. While focus group participants, male and female, at times offered numerous justifications or excuses for sexual violence toward women and girls, this was seen to a lesser extent and generally from men only in discussions of incidents involving boys. While participants were forthcoming in discussing sexual violence toward boys, they did not engage with the issue of adult male rape in Yemen — a problem identified in other research and investigations.⁽¹³⁵⁾

A Taiz participant spoke of a teacher who “died from sorrow” after witnessing a man rape her son. In other cases, Taiz participants said, boys had killed men who had tried to molest them. In Bani Harith, on the outskirts of Sana’a city, participants said that a boy died after he was raped by the son of a powerful family, a case which reached the courts, they added. Boys working in traditional bath houses were sexually abused multiple times, participants said; after locals intervened, the young workers were replaced by men older than 20. A woman in Al-Sabeen, Sana’a city, said her son had been raped in the toilets at his school; the mother said she approached his teacher, who asked her: “What do you want me to do, go to the bathroom with him?” Meanwhile, some men said sexual violence against boys had risen because men could not afford to get married.

In Mukalla, participants said that boys were being recruited into prostitution as well as the drug trade. A local official in Mukalla said the poverty of young boys was exploited and that they were offered goods like mobile phones in exchange for sex.⁽¹³⁶⁾ Another key informant who worked with youth in Mukalla said the gang rape of boys by other students had been documented in schools; rapists avoided punishment because their families threatened to kill the victims if they spoke out, she said.⁽¹³⁷⁾ Participants recounted multiple incidents of boys being raped, and then in some cases killed. In Sayoun, participants described the sexual exploitation and rape of boys as “rampant,” adding that rapists sometimes exploited boys’ financial needs. Participants in Sayoun said boys also were subject to domestic violence by their fathers, including verbal and physical abuse.

Sexual violence against boys also increased in Aden, participants said, with one woman perceiving the rape of boys as becoming more common than the rape of girls. Participants gave an example of a gang who filmed themselves raping a 10-year-old boy, and then blackmailed him, using the video to force him to steal from his family.

135) “Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014; Report of the detailed findings of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen,” (A/HRC/42/CRP.1*) UN Human Rights Council, September 3, 2019; reissued September 9, 2019, p. 155, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/GEE-Yemen/A_HRC_42_CRP_1.PDF; Maggie Michael, “Sexual abuses rampant in UAE-controlled prisons in Yemen,” The Associated Press, June 21, 2018, <https://apnews.com/df23b77019d34564ae3ee2dddb222279>.

136) Interview with Ahmad Barahman, unit leader of a community committee, which functions like a local council in Hadramawt, Mukalla, December 16, 2018.

137) Interview with Sulaf Aboud al-Hanashi, head of the Rescue Foundation for Development, Mukalla, Hadramawt, December 1, 2018.

Impunity

No State, No Security: Justice for GBV Victims is Rare

Participants across Yemen reported a growing impunity for perpetrators of gender-based violence, particularly against women, and said social protections against violence had diminished during the conflict. Participants in Taiz city said it had become harder for women to find justice, while women reported feeling defenseless.

In Taiz governorate, Yemenis said the general rise in violence and the spread of weapons during the war had made bystanders less likely to intervene when women were harassed or robbed in the street. Before the war, if a woman screamed, people would come to help, but as a result of the conflict, people had become afraid to respond, participants said. A community leader in Taiz said armed men harassed women and girls with impunity in the streets. She explained: “If you say anything to them, they will shoot you, assault you or kidnap you. There is no security and there is no stability ... Things are different now. In the past, if something happened, you could file a complaint and you would get justice. Now, no one will do anything for you.”⁽¹³⁸⁾

An educator in Taiz also said kidnapping and street harassment, including groping, had become routine in Taiz due to the absence of accountability. “Where is the state? Where are the security agencies? No one will come here to investigate what happened, and no one will come to tell the perpetrators that they are being charged with a crime,” she said.⁽¹³⁹⁾

This concern was echoed in Aden, where participants said locals were reluctant to intervene to protect women. “The rape of children occurs and no one lifts a finger,” one participant in Aden said, while others described cases of known rapists being socially accepted instead of ostracized. Women in Aden condemned what they called the community’s indifference to violence against women; “People’s hearts have become dead, and they have no mercy,” a woman in Aden said.

Two experts in Sana’a, a women’s rights activist and a gender issues consultant, spoke of a culture of silence around sexual violence in the city that discouraged reporting. “We are a conservative society, and people do not talk about these issues here,” the women’s rights activist said.⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ She contrasted this to a more progressive atmosphere in Taiz, and said rape appeared more prevalent there only because people were more vocal about abuses and sought to punish abusers to stop them committing more violence. The activist gave the example of a mother in Taiz, saying her son had been raped by a military officer; the woman had refused to conceal the crime, instead insisting on justice for her son. “In Taiz, the women are more aware and know more about recording and documenting

138) Interview with Sumayah Tawfiq Othman, neighborhood leader of the lower Tahrir neighborhood, Taiz, December 12, 2018.

139) Confidential interview with an educational sector employee, identity on file, Taiz, December 12, 2018.

140) Interview with Nesmah al-Sameai, leader and co-founder of the “Let Us Live” initiative advocating for women’s rights and documenting women’s suffering and successes through storytelling and art, Sana’a, January 14, 2019.

these incidents,” she said, adding that in Sana’a women are more likely to accept being told to “cover it up and move on with their lives.” A gender expert based in Sana’a who has researched GBV in northern governorates explained that incestual rapes were often covered up, even when the victim was hospitalized.⁽¹⁴¹⁾ Doctors treating patients who have been raped have a legal duty to inform the security forces, this expert said, but in many cases the rapist was the victim’s father and he would threaten the doctor to prevent any report being filed. Despite Taiz’s reputation as a more progressive city, an activist in Taiz said sexual violence and harassment remained a taboo subject: “Society does not deal with these issues because they are very sensitive. They are covered up and people do not talk about them at all,” he said.⁽¹⁴²⁾

In Sayoun, participants said fathers had confined girls to their homes due to the lack of security, which participants described as a form of abuse itself. One participant highlighted that when violence occurred at home, girls had few avenues to escape. Domestic violence was the most psychologically difficult violence to cope with, youth participants said, explaining that violence outside the home was tolerable with support from the family but violence perpetrated by family members stripped victims of any sense of safety. Participants said that while boys in abusive homes were more able to defend themselves, flee, join armed groups or seek work, girls had fewer options. Some girls married elderly men or become second wives in order to escape their homes and survive, participants said, adding that any girl who fled risked being killed upon her return. Some girls in Sayoun had set themselves on fire because of abusive living situations, participants said. A young woman explained: “There is no place for the girl to escape to except death or suicide. Everywhere she goes, she will be exposed to abuse and exploitation.”

141) Interview with Nibras Anam, research specialist in gender and peacebuilding and executive director of Civilian Alliance for Peace, Sana’a, January 22, 2019.

142) Interview with Ayban al-Samei, a political activist and member of the sustainable development committee at the National Dialogue Conference, Taiz, January 12, 2019.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this report, Yemenis have narrated the gendered impact of war: many women have entered the workforce, sometimes securing fulfilling jobs or opening successful businesses, but often pushed into low-paid, precarious work. Women have perceived increases in violence directed against them — in public and in the home — along with rising impunity for the perpetrators and diminishing social protections for the victims. As women's access to public spheres has increased, they have reported finding these spaces more hostile to them. In war-time Yemen, with its broken education system and economic collapse, girls have become especially vulnerable to early marriage, while boys have left school for the frontlines. Yemeni men have struggled to support their families, either due to unemployment, rampant inflation or the suspension of their salaries, and some have become fighters to secure a salary. In some cases Yemenis have witnessed shifts in traditional gender roles.

This report also has documented Yemenis' perceptions of the drivers of these changes, as well as their attitudes toward them. Violence against women was often attributed to the grinding poverty deepened by the war, but women also were blamed for the abuse they suffered. Promisingly, a growing social acceptance of women leaving their homes to work also was described.

Quantifying trends is difficult in Yemen, a war-torn country where reliable, consistent data — current or historical — is scarce; where data exists, it is not always gender disaggregated. Measuring sexual and domestic violence is especially challenging; underreporting of gender-based violence is a global problem.⁽¹⁴³⁾

This report signposts developments that should be explored further, and areas which may benefit from support. Yemeni women revealed a determination not to lose hard-won gains in their economic empowerment during the war. Research in other contexts suggests the post-conflict opportunity to sustain women's increased war-time economic participation is brief, as pressure soon builds on women to return to their pre-conflict roles.⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ The economic empowerment that women have wrought from the war has been uneven. While the economic collapse in Yemen has affected women from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, power differentials between them — such as class, education and social status — have defined their experiences; many women have been forced into insecure, low-paid work to survive. Transforming war-time survivalist activities

143) Tia Palermo, Jennifer Bleck & Amber Peterman, "Tip of the Iceberg: Reporting and Gender-Based Violence in Developing Countries," *American Journal of Epidemiology*, March 2014, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3927971/>.

144) "Republic of Yemen, The Status of Yemen Women: From Aspiration to Opportunity," World Bank, June 2014, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/640151468334820965/pdf/878200REVISED00Box0385200B00PUBLIC0.pdf>.

into sustainable jobs or businesses in peacetime is a challenge for post-conflict states.⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ While new, women-led home-based businesses have emerged during the war — partly due to an enduring lack of mobility for women — their long-term viability will depend on markets to sustain them, among other factors. While they should be supported, individual entrepreneurial activity alone will not offer transformative change in the absence of securing women's increased access to general labor force participation.⁽¹⁴⁶⁾

This report also highlighted repercussions of war that could reverberate for generations. A generation of Yemeni girls and boys has either missed out on several years of schooling or experienced an education sector in crisis, diminishing their future prospects. Gender-based violence has long-term consequences, and not only for its immediate victims; boys who witness their fathers abusing their mothers, or who experience violence at home themselves, are more likely to abuse their partners as adults.⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ The end of war is often associated with a rise in domestic violence, a trend attributed in part to the return of traumatized former fighters to their homes: "When men, brutalized by fighting, return home, they are liable to turn the home itself into a battleground," the feminist scholar Cynthia Cockburn has warned.⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ This underscores the need for the meaningful participation of women in peace negotiations to work for a peace that addresses the concerns and perspectives of all of Yemeni society.

Despite the price women have paid for this war, chronicled throughout this report, the warring parties have refused to include women in their negotiating teams. The UN has worked to bring women into the peace process: UN Women assisted in the creation of the Yemeni Women's Pact for Peace and Security in 2015 to observe peace talks and as a consultative body to the UN special envoy.⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ However, this has been challenged by the warring parties' lack of cooperation with the group,⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ and the siloing of women into separate sideshows — away from the negotiating table — has been criticized.⁽¹⁵¹⁾ Only one woman participated in the last round of UN-led peace talks in Sweden in December 2018,

145) Simel Esim & Mansour Omega, "Rural women producers and cooperatives in conflicts settings in the Arab States," International Labour Organization, March 2009, https://www.academia.edu/1522696/Rural_women_producers_and_cooperatives_in_conflicts_settings_in_the_Arab_States.

146) "Issue Brief 3: Rural women producers and cooperatives in conflict settings in Arab States," International Labour Organization, April 2010, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_348060.pdf.

147) "Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – Middle East and North Africa," UN Women & Promundo, 2017, <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2017/images-mena-multi-country-report-en.pdf?la=en&vs=3602>.

148) Cynthia Cockburn, "Against the odds: Sustaining feminist momentum in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina," Women's Studies International Forum, 2013, cited in: Samantha Bradley, "Domestic and Family Violence in Post-Conflict Communities: International Human Rights Law and the State's Obligation to Protect Women and Children," Health and Human Rights Journal, December 2018, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6293353/>.

149) "Women's Meaningful Participation in Negotiating Peace and the Implementation of Peace Agreements: Report of the Expert Group Meeting," UN Women, May 2018, https://iknowpolitics.org/sites/default/files/egm-womens-meaningful-participation-in-negotiating-peace-en_0.pdf.

150) Ibid.

151) "Time to Resist. It is Time to Reclaim the UN," Said the Participants of a Major Convening that Gathered Together Women-Led Civil Society from Around the World," Women's International League for Peace and Freedom International, May 2017, <https://www.wilpf.org/it-is-time-to-rebel-it-is-time-to-reframe-it-is-time-to-resist-it-is-time-to-reclaim-the-un-said-the-participants-of-a-major-convening-that-gathered-together-women-led-civil-soci/>.

while eight women participated in the Women's Technical Advisory Group, an initiative of the UN special envoy's office.⁽¹⁵²⁾

Women must also participate meaningfully and at decision-making levels in the post-conflict political processes. Political and economic structures produce and perpetuate gender norms;⁽¹⁵³⁾ post-conflict state-building offers an opportunity to create new, more equal state structures and to implement new legal frameworks.⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ The end of war has been accompanied by significant advances in legislation related to violence against women in other post-conflict states.⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ Critical legal reforms were recommended by the NDC, which women played a prominent role in developing. These included legal reforms to criminalize violence against women, a quota of 30 percent for women's representation in political bodies and a minimum age of marriage to be set at 18 years for men and women.⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ Women's political participation alone may not guarantee that women's needs and interests are reflected and met, but their continued exclusion risks gender-blind peace and state-building processes.⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ National legislative and policy reform is a necessary first step. However, in other post-conflict contexts, such reforms have not translated into a reduction of violence against women on the ground.⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ Therefore, these must be accompanied by grass-roots initiatives to address gender-based violence.

152) Afrah Nasser, "Yemen: Women, War and Political Marginalisation," Atlantic Council, January 2019, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/yemen-women-war-political-marginalization/>.

153) "Gender analysis of conflict toolkit," Saferworld, June 2016, <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/downloads/pubdocs/gender-analysis-of-conflict-toolkit.pdf>.

154) "Intersections of Violence against Women and Girls with State-Building and Peace-Building: Lessons from Nepal, Sierra Leone and South Sudan," CARE, George Washington University, International Rescue Committee, September 2018, https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/media/k2/attachments/What-Works_Intersections-of-VAWG-with-SBPB-report_2018.pdf.

155) Ibid.

156) "Republic of Yemen, The Status of Yemen Women: From Aspiration to Opportunity," World Bank, June 2014, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/640151468334820965/pdf/878200REVISED00Box0385200B00PUBLIC0.pdf>.

157) "Intersections of Violence against Women and Girls with State-Building and Peace-Building: Lessons from Nepal, Sierra Leone and South Sudan," CARE, George Washington University, International Rescue Committee, September 2018, https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/media/k2/attachments/What-Works_Intersections-of-VAWG-with-SBPB-report_2018.pdf.

158) Ibid.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The top priority in Yemen in terms of mitigating overall human suffering is the cessation of the ongoing armed conflict. As this report reflects, however, the war is being felt differently among women, girls, men and boys. The following recommendations are offered as a guide for domestic and international stakeholders to help mitigate the war's varied consequences, foster empowerment post-conflict and capitalize on women's economic gains that have occurred during the war.

- **The warring parties must include women in delegations to peace talks.**

- The meaningful inclusion of women at all levels of peace negotiations — including at the negotiating table — is a necessary step toward achieving a gender-just peace and cementing gains made by women during the war.
- Women's presence alone does not guarantee their meaningful inclusion or engagement, especially within patriarchal political structures. Work must continue to support women's influence at the negotiating table and in all tracks of negotiations.
- UN and diplomatic delegations to Yemen, particularly those involved in peace negotiations, should also strive for gender equality and ensure that women are well represented at all levels on their teams so as not to undermine calls for Yemeni parties to do the same.
- Similarly, the needs and ideas of Yemeni young adults — men and women — must be addressed and integrated. In regard to peace negotiations and building a new system of governance, special attention must be paid to requiring all parties to include youths.

- **The warring parties must immediately release all child soldiers from military conscription.**

- Rehabilitation and reintegration programs should be established and funded to support former child fighters, helping boys return to school and former fighters of working age to receive an income while undertaking skills training to join the workforce.

- **The internationally recognized Yemeni government should resume full, regular salaries to public sector staff in all parts of Yemen.**

- The government is Yemen's biggest employer and the full resumption of salaries would immediately help alleviate the hardship of public sector workers, men and women, and the families they support. Easing the financial strain on families would address a key aggravating factor perceived to be driving increases in domestic violence, child marriage and child recruitment by armed groups.
- Employees of the health and education sectors should be prioritized; the suspension of their salaries has deteriorated these vital public services.
- Gulf countries should establish a mechanism to provide budgetary support to the Yemeni government to help cover the cost of deploying these basic services, while also ensuring transparency and accountability in spending.

- **All stakeholders should prioritize increasing school enrollment and improving the learning environment.**
 - Support teachers who have left the profession to return, and train new teachers. This is critical to help mitigate the ongoing negative impact of the conflict on children, and will be essential to rebuilding the education sector post-conflict and improving the accessibility of education.
 - Female teachers in particular should be trained, recruited and offered incentives to fill teaching vacancies in rural areas. As well as increasing female participation in the workforce, this could boost girls' enrollment in rural schools where some families are reluctant to send their daughters to school in the absence of female teachers.
 - Prioritize the rebuilding of damaged or repurposed schools, a process that can begin immediately in government-controlled areas.
 - Provide free school breakfasts and school transportation nationwide so parents are not forced to prioritize between necessities, such as having to choose between bus fare and food.
 - Provide psycho-social support for teachers and students at schools and in the community as a way to improve the existing learning environment, help make schools safe havens and reduce trauma symptoms showing up in classrooms.
 - Restore government scholarship funding for students to study in universities abroad. Donors should consider supporting graduate-level scholarships for Yemeni students to further their studies abroad.
- **Donors should invest in further research to inform interventions to address gender-specific trauma in Yemen.**
 - Psycho-social support targeting men and boys is needed to help them cope better with the crisis and, more broadly, to help redefine masculinity with the goal of improving gender dynamics within society and reducing the incidence of gender-based violence.
- **Yemeni civil society, with local and international support, should engage tribal leaders to discourage child marriage.**
 - While war-related economic factors are likely driving an increase in child marriage and should be addressed, the problem requires social and legal as well as economic action. Tribal leaders should be engaged to promote understanding of the detrimental effects of child marriage on both the individual girl's well-being and society more generally, and to support the creation of a code of honor against child marriage.
- **All stakeholders should support women's increased economic participation.**
 - Vocational training for women should not be limited to traditionally female occupations like sewing and handicrafts, which reinforce gender norms, are often low paid and are generally not in high demand. Instead, training for women in trades – as plumbers, electricians, carpenters, etc. – could provide more profitable opportunities and challenge gender norms, and deliver a service to women who would prefer to hire a woman. Likewise, female taxi drivers could specifically capitalize on demand from women. As well as training, women should be supported with start-up costs for these professions, such as equipment and workspaces. Similar models have been successfully tested in other countries, including Jordan, where women tradespeople and taxi drivers serve a largely female client base.

- Transformative changes to women's labor force participation will require interventions that go beyond micro-economic initiatives such as promoting individual entrepreneurship and home-based businesses. Further study is needed to explore the constraints to women's access to work and to understand their current participation in the workforce, especially in the informal economy and particularly for women in rural areas.
- **The post-conflict government should conduct nationwide surveys to identify the most successful women-owned businesses.**
 - Businesses that have emerged during the war and those that have survived the conflict should be surveyed to assess their potential to grow, provide general employment and adapt to any post-conflict scenario.
 - Domestic and international efforts should then focus on providing financing, training and resources to help these businesses upscale. International support must be responsive to local business needs and market conditions, rather than pre-selected donor criteria for the deployment of this support.
 - Women reported engaging in e-commerce in different parts of Yemen. Further study should be conducted on how this emerging sector could be supported.
 - Invest in further research on best practices internationally to support newly working women in conservative societies in order to build on women's increased participation in the workforce. Potential areas of assistance would be in helping local communities establish professional organizations, unions or women's savings schemes for working women.
- **Donors and international organizations should be responsive to local diversity and realities.**
 - Yemenis' experiences of conflict have varied nationally, and Yemen contains multiple cultural, social and political histories and traditions. Humanitarian and development interventions must recognize this diversity and should be flexible and responsive to dynamic local realities: what works in Taiz may not be appropriate in Hadramawt.
- **The post-conflict government must ensure women are represented at all political levels, including cabinet portfolios.**
 - Post-conflict transitional periods offer a window to enact legislation and rebuild state structures that advance gender equality. It is critical that women are included in post-conflict political processes at all levels — including in decision-making positions.
 - The post-conflict government should set a quota of 30 percent for women's representation in political bodies, in line with NDC outcomes.
- **The post-conflict government should align Yemeni legislation to its international obligations relevant to gender.**
 - The post-conflict government should draft enabling legislation for Yemen to meet its obligations as defined in international conventions to which it is a signatory, in line with the NDC outcomes.
 - Special focus should be on crafting national laws that align with conventions relating to family, women's issues and children's rights, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages.

- **The post-conflict government should implement the NDC recommendation to set a minimum marriage age of 18 years.**
 - In the post-war era, a national identification system should be established to allow all citizens to have official paperwork containing their date of birth, which will provide, among other things, a way to require age verification prior to marriage. Monitoring of marriage certificates filed with local civil affairs offices should be instituted to ensure compliance.

ANNEX 1 - ADDITIONAL CASE STUDIES

Case study: Hanan*, an internally displaced woman from Taiz

Before the war, we were well off, praise God, and my brother had a job. We were doing well, and we were comfortable. I have a sister who is sick, but we were able to buy the medicine that she needed when she needed it, every month, and she had started to improve. We, praise God, were surviving. Then, the war came, and everything changed.

We were displaced to Al-Turbah [a town in Taiz governorate], and we left our home, our furniture and everything we had. My brother lost his job [as a government accountant]. He also got sick and had to do medical tests and found out that he had swelling and kidney stones. He became really thin due to the conditions we are living in, with the war and with all of the worries. My sister's condition also worsened because we were no longer able to get her the medicine she needed. Now, we can only get her the medicine for one month, then two months we cannot, or we cannot get her the medicine for two, three or four months.

I called my cousin here [in Al-Turbah], and I told him to find a house for me. My brother was against this idea, of leaving our family's home and looking for a place to rent, but I told him this was better because we did not want to be a burden on relatives. People are in a position where they cannot even support themselves and their own close family members. So, we told them to look for a house. I did not want to go live in the streets. We did not want to have to live in other people's homes or in schools.

We rented, and before the war got worse my brother still got his salary, and we used it to pay the rent. Suddenly — and for three and a half years — he stopped getting his salary, and we have accumulated a lot of unpaid rent. Now, we owe 300,000 rials, and the issue of the medicine is also difficult because it is just not available.

My father, may God have mercy on him, got sick and died here in Al-Turbah. I am now the one who is responsible, even though I am the youngest. I am the one who follows the [humanitarian aid] organizations and tries to get registered here and there. Even the process of registering is difficult. It is exhausting and depends on your luck. We are living, to be honest, on the organizations. If we register with an organization and get a little bit, then we can live a bit longer, and so on, like other people. And if there is nothing, then we have to live on debt, which is accumulating, 5,000 here, 10,000 there, 15,000, another 10,000, and so on, until the aid from the organizations finally arrives -- and then we do not know what to do with it. Should we buy medicine or should we use it to pay back our debts, or should we buy the things that are missing at home, like oil or sugar?

I went to Taiz a while ago so I could sell our furniture to pay back our debts. Now, the house is closed and it is empty; there is nothing in it. We paid a quarter of the debts, but there is still a lot left to pay off. It (the war) has affected our economic, mental and physical conditions. It has destroyed us to the very core, and there is nothing in us that has been left untouched.

--Hanan, 30, an IDP from Taiz

Case Study: Ali*, an inmate in Sayoun and father of four

I started producing alcohol after last Ramadan [in 2018] because of the price increases and the fluctuation in the exchange rate. The price of a sack of rice had reached around 10,000 rials, and I couldn't provide for my family. Sometimes, we'd have no food, so I had to take the leftovers from a restaurant, and [my family] thought it was freshly cooked food. During the Eid after Ramadan, I could not afford new clothes for my children, and other kids teased them because their clothes were old. This pushed me to produce alcohol at home.

Before that, however, I looked for other jobs. Sometimes I was hired to work with other cleaners to clean the streets. I asked for help from everyone, from associations, organizations and others, but no one helped me. My son is also ill, and he needs an operation, so I sought help but no one helped me. So, I started to produce alcohol at home.

It changed a lot. Instead of buying the small bags of rice and sugar, I was able to buy one or two big bags. I was able to spend on my family, and our financial situation improved as I sold five liters for between 20,000 and 30,000 rials. My wife objected to this, so she left me and went to her parents' house. She refused to take the children with her, and they stayed with me until I was arrested.

Security forces raided the house while I was going to perform Asr prayer at the mosque. I saw them from the staircase. A soldier beat me on the back and they took me to the Sayoun security directorate after they confiscated the equipment used to produce alcohol and took photos of it. I was tried. I was sentenced to a year in prison. I did not appeal the verdict. I explained to the judge my circumstances and the reason that pushed me to produce alcohol, and that is poverty.

--Ali, 41, who switched from making perfume to brewing and selling alcohol to support his family at a time of conflict-driven price increases and currency depreciation. At the time of the interview, he had served four months of his sentence.

* Names have been changed.

DR. FAWZIAH AL-AMMAR is a senior research fellow with the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies where she is currently leading the center's research on mental health in Yemen and the psychological impacts of the ongoing conflict on individuals, families and communities. Al-Ammar is an assistant professor of psychology at Amran University, former head of the Department of Psychology, and a lecturer at the Gender-Development Research & Studies Center at Sana'a University. She holds a PhD in educational psychology from the Institute of Education at the International Islamic University Malaysia, specializing in educational and psychological assessment, and an MA in educational measurement from Sana'a University.

HANNAH PATCHETT is an Editor at the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, An award-winning journalist, she worked for a decade across the Middle East as a reporter, producer and editor for media outlets including BBC Arabic, the Guardian and Ma'an News Agency, focusing on investigative, political and humanitarian stories. She is also a co-founder of Justice Clinic, an Amman-based legal organisation that works to improve access to justice for all. Hannah holds a masters in development studies from the University of Sydney and a bachelor of arts in music from the University of Cambridge.

SHAMS SHAMSAN is Project Coordinator and Research Assistant at the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, holds a B.Sc. in Business from the Lebanese American University in Lebanon. Has previously worked for Grant Thornton-Yemen where she was engaged in different advisory projects and had first-hand experience on working with International and local organizations.



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