



# THE LIFE PHASES OF A YEMENI WOMAN

By Marta Colburn

Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies

March 10, 2021



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*Cover photo: Spectators watch a performance of traditional dancing and music, in Ataq, Shabwa governorate, on November 12, 2020 // Photo credit: Sam Tarling/Sana'a Center*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This study examines the diversity of experiences of women and girls in Yemen, who face differing gender dynamics and challenges at various stages in their lives. It explores age-specific issues during five phases of life for girls and women in the following categories:

- Birth, Infancy and Childhood (0-9 years of age);
- Puberty and Adolescence (10-17 years of age);
- Youth (18-29 years of age);
- Middle Age (30-49 years of age);
- The Twilight Years (50+ years of age).

This study looks at underlying gender dynamics and cultural, social, political and economic challenges at each phase, as well as noting salient changes in the context of the war and the massive humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Proverbs are presented in each section to illustrate commonly encountered attitudes and beliefs about women at various stages in their life, which reflect complexities in Yemeni society and encompass contradictory ideas and norms.<sup>[1]</sup> Each section also includes profiles which are composites of real women and girls whom the author has encountered over decades of living, working and conducting research in Yemen. The study seeks to present information that can contribute to gender-sensitive programming in Yemen. The final section includes recommendations for each age category addressing key issues examined in the study.

## Findings and Recommendations

The following table presents findings from this study and recommendations organized by age group. These offer guidance for donors and those implementing programs to better address the needs of girls and women.

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1) The Yemeni proverbs presented in this study were gathered from diverse sources over the decades including during the research conducted for *A Situation Analysis of Gender and Development in Yemen* (2002, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Oxfam, Amman Jordan). Additionally, some proverbs were compiled by Majda Al-Haddad from Ibb ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDf-7\\_kCPi8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDf-7_kCPi8)) and translated by the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies.

	Findings	Recommendations
<b>BIRTH, INFANCY AND CHILDHOOD (0-9 years of age)</b>		
1	With the conflict, school enrollment rates have deteriorated for all children, including girls. Education is critical to addressing a wide range of gender issues. In the current crisis the government and local authorities face challenges to maintain the functioning of the education system.	It is suggested that efforts to improve girls' enrollment seek community and family support to provide incentives for female teachers, engage mothers and fathers in awareness raising efforts about girls' education and emphasize that education for girls can contribute to better employment and income earning opportunities.
2	Corporal punishment of children is a challenge both in the home and in school. This phenomenon negatively impacts the emotional and educational development of children.	In more stable areas of the country, consider piloting an awareness raising campaign combatting corporal punishment, potentially as part of a broader social cohesion initiative addressing conflict dynamics and the increase in violence in schools.
<b>PUBERTY AND ADOLESCENCE (10-17 years of age)</b>		
3	Cultural gender beliefs in Yemen (i.e. women being categorized as <i>du'afa</i> , the potential for <i>fitna</i> and conceptions of family honor) shape 'protective' practices designed to shelter girls and women.	Organize tandem workshops for young women and their <i>maharim</i> to: magnify the impact of training; foster changes in family gender dynamics; and support women's careers, as well as contribute to employment readiness for young men.
4	Child marriage has been a challenging issue in Yemen for decades, but since 2015 it is believed to have increased significantly as a negative coping strategy for destitute families to mitigate economic vulnerability and insecurity.	Seek to implement interventions to improve income-earning capacities and skills with girls at risk and survivors of child marriage and other forms of gender-based violence, mixed with other categories of vulnerable women (to mitigate against stigmatizing individuals), folded into broader economic empowerment activities.
<b>YOUTH (18-29 years of age)</b>		
5	Entrepreneurship and resilience are hallmarks of Yemeni culture and have mitigated the devastating impact of the current crisis, with women playing an active role, particularly in urban areas, though humanitarian and development efforts seeking to improve income earning often reinforce gender roles.	It is suggested to conduct low profile research among female entrepreneurs to provide strategic insights. Microfinance and income-generating activities for women should seek to build self-confidence, negotiating skills and creative problem solving. Explore ways for such activities with vulnerable women to engage men in the family.

	Findings	Recommendations
6	A positive development observed has been that with increasing economic activity among women there is now growing social acceptance of such activities, which may signify more enduring changes to gender norms. It is unclear if such changes are temporary in nature.	Consider launching a broad public campaign that highlights the positive contributions of women during the conflict, seeks to impact the public discourse on gender and celebrates the positive roles of both men and women during the crisis. The campaign could engage public opinion influencers such as imams, tribal leaders and media figures.
<b>MIDDLE AGE (30-49 years of age)</b>		
7	The lack of affordable female-friendly transportation options in rural and urban settings exacerbates gender disparities in accessing services and existing gender biases.	Options to explore in urban areas could include: mobile phone taxi apps in cities (similar to Kareem or Uber); transportation vouchers for vulnerable women; and women-driven taxis. Outside of cities options could include motorcycles operated by women, and hybrid taxis.
8	Yemeni women's experiences and gender dynamics are diverse; humanitarian response efforts too often prioritize quick impact activities, thus potentially harming the elderly, disabled and socially marginalized groups, including girls and women.	It is suggested that gender analysis is integrated into all project phases, with meaningful input from qualified local gender specialists. Support local academic and civil society activities to build additional capacity in the area of gender analysis to improve gender-sensitive programming.
<b>THE TWILIGHT YEARS (50+ years of age)</b>		
9	Despite the depth of the crisis in the country, Yemenis demonstrate high levels of resilience, both at the individual and communal level. Support networks contribute to resilience and women play a significant role in building and maintaining social solidarity through various practices.	Consider supporting research on sources of resilience in the Yemen context, examining how social solidarity works in specific areas and exploring the role of women in resilience. Additionally, small scale research initiatives can explore resilience factors among women to help inform interventions that will sustain and not damage such elements.
10	The elderly, with a preponderance of older women, and the disabled, often face challenges in collecting food rations and other aid. Such challenges lead to a reduction in assistance, as vulnerable beneficiaries often have to give a portion of their ration to others for collection and transportation.	Ensure that distribution sites accommodate the needs of the physically vulnerable such as elderly women. Engage third party monitoring entities to assess if such practices are in place. If such distribution arrangements prove too complex, those with mobility issues could be provided additional rations or cash to cover transportation costs.



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## ACRONYMS

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance
CARPO	Center for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient
CIVIC	Center for Civilians in Conflict
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease-19
CSO	Central Statistical Organization
CSSF	Conflict, Stability, and Security Fund
DHS	Demographic Health Survey
DPO	Disabled Persons Organization
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GPC	General People's Congress
HH	Household
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
IDA	Iron deficiency anemia
IDP	Internally displaced person
ILO	International Labour Organization
LFPR	Labor Force Participation Rate
MOPIC	Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation
NDC	National Dialogue Conference
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PDRY	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen

PWD	Person with Disabilities
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SWF	Social Welfare Fund
TFR	Total fertility rate
UHS	Unpaid Household Services
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization
YAR	Yemen Arab Republic



*Spectators watch a performance of traditional dancing and music, in Ataq, Shabwa governorate, on November 12, 2020 // Photo credit: Sam Tarling/Sana'a Center*

# I. Introduction: Broader Context of Gender Dynamics for Women

Gender relations in Yemen are shaped by diverse religious, cultural, social and political traditions (see definition of gender in Annex A), with many unique aspects found in the different geographic regions of the country. Practices in gender segregation, mobility, employment and education vary widely depending on where a woman is raised, where her family is from and her social and economic status. Furthermore, significant rural and urban differences prevail with regard to the gender division of labor, fertility levels and other dimensions of gender. For example, sex segregation and veiling, which are seen as ubiquitous in urban areas, have traditionally not been practiced in many rural areas. Finally, Yemen's highly stratified social structure also contributes to gender dynamics as women from groups such as *muhammasheen*,<sup>[2]</sup> *muwalladeen*,<sup>[3]</sup> internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees or persons with disabilities face multiple layers of discrimination and exclusion. This introduction will touch on a number of salient issues and sources of gender inequalities which impact the lives of Yemeni girls and women at all ages.

**Table 1: Sex Disaggregated Demographics, 2017<sup>[4]</sup>**

Age Category	% Female	% Male	% of Population
0-9 Years	14.27	14.93	29.2
10-18 Years	9.72	10.17	19.89
19-29 Years	10.46	11.29	21.75
30-49 Years	10.03	10.14	20.17
50 Years and Above	4.64	4.35	8.99
<b>Total Percentages</b>	<b>49.12</b>	<b>50.88</b>	<b>100</b>

Key factors driving Yemen's gender inequalities are cultural norms and beliefs, rooted in tribal, religious and social traditions. One source of such discrimination is that the legal and religious responsibilities of men accrue higher status and, therefore, more rights and privileges, such as covering household expenses and protecting women and other social groups who are considered 'weak' (*du'afa*)<sup>[5]</sup>. During the current conflict at times such traditions benefit women and girls, as the principle of weakness can serve to shelter and protect female humanitarians and peacemakers. For example, women travelling in a vehicle provide shelter to male passengers at checkpoints in many parts of the country,

2) Literally meaning marginalized, a recent term used to describe the lowest level of traditional Yemeni social stratification. Muhammasheen are Yemenis most commonly described as the remnants of a historic Ethiopian invasion and excluded socially, politically and economically.

3) This derogatory term categorizes Yemenis of mixed ancestry, with the African and Indian mixture being the most negatively viewed.

4) 2017 estimates from Yemen Central Statistical Organization: <http://www.cso-yemen.com>

5) Du'afa - meaning weak (singular, da'if). A Yemeni tribal category assigned to women, religious and social minorities, also nuqqas (the deficient or lacking), or naqis al-asl (lacking origin). Those seen as du'afa are accorded tribal protection due to their unarmed status.

since in tribal areas to harm anyone in the car with women would be considered *'ayb aswad* (black shame)<sup>[6]</sup> and result in severe financial consequences.<sup>[7]</sup>

A further aspect of gender inequalities in Yemen is the legal context. Yemen's complex system builds on *shari'a*,<sup>[8]</sup> customary or tribal law (*'urf al-qabali*)<sup>[9]</sup> and legal traditions from the former Yemen Arab Republic and the socialist-inspired legal system in the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). These earlier legal codes incorporate elements from Egyptian and other Arab laws, and Ottoman or Turkish traditions, as well as comprising commitments to international conventions and treaties.<sup>[10]</sup> Events of the Arab Spring and the National Dialogue Conference (NDC)<sup>[11]</sup> provided a glimmer of hope in terms of women's empowerment and gender equality, with 28 percent of the 565 delegates being female. The consequent NDC recommendations sought to shift the status of women from being affiliated to their male family members to being considered as independent citizens in their own right in social, political, economic and legal terms.<sup>[12]</sup> Although the draft constitution prepared following the NDC sought to significantly contribute to gender equality,<sup>[13]</sup> it was not approved and is unlikely to be accepted when a political resolution emerges with the parties to the conflict.

Further systemic legal issues are gender inequalities in laws, the incomplete application of laws, the absence of adequate legal protections for women and the misalignment of national legislation to Yemen's international obligations. Thus, the legal framework is weak in protecting civil liberties and human rights writ large, as well as in providing protections for Yemeni women, girls and other vulnerable groups in society. A recent study on gender justice in Yemen jointly produced by UNDP, UN Women, UNFPA and ESCWA identifies a wide range of legal challenges faced by women and girls.<sup>[14]</sup>

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6) Black shame, a tribal tradition sanctioning severe financial consequences against any act of assault on women, or other categories of protected individuals, especially egregious during conflict. A result of such protective measures is that women are able to perform tasks that are not considered safe for men during times of conflict, e.g. bringing food to male fighters, providing relief to the injured, etc

7) Awadh, Maha; Shuja'adeen, Nuria (2019). "Women in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding in Yemen." Edited by Sawsan Al-Rafaei. Nahj Consulting, Yemen: UN Women. p. 21.

8) The majority of Sunni Muslims in Yemen follow the Shafei School of Islamic jurisprudence and the dominant Shi'a school is Zaidi.

9) 'Urf, from the root meaning 'to know or to be aware', refers to common knowledge embodied in age-old practices, precedence, agreements and the wisdom of judges and mediators. Transmitted through oral and written texts, at the most basic level 'urf seeks inter alia to channel, minimize and resolve conflicts between individuals and groups.

10) Yemen is party to a wide range of international treaties and conventions addressing key gender issues, primarily via international treaty obligations incurred by the PDRY, including the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, acceded to on May 30, 1984 via the PDRY.

11) The NDC was the cornerstone to the UN and GCC brokered political transition process from March 2013 to January 2014.

12) For an overview of the national women's machinery and policies for mainstreaming gender see: Grabundzija, Maggy, Shakir, Wameedh (2019). "Gender Analysis in conflict-affected Yemen." Particip GmbH and EuroPlus, European Commission.

13) Salient elements included: guaranteeing equality before the law (Article 74); non-discrimination based on sex or creed (Article 75); prohibiting physical and sexual exploitation (Article 77); and proposing 18 years as the minimum age for marriage for both men and women (Article 124).

14) UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and ESCWA, "Yemen: Gender Justice and the Law," December 2019, <https://arabstates.unfpa.org/en/publications/gender-justice-law-yemen>



Incarcerated women are particularly vulnerable. One study on violence against women in Yemen found that women were often unaware of their legal rights and lacked resources to hire a lawyer.<sup>[15]</sup> Thus, even when there are laws protecting them (such as the right to legal counsel and immediate release upon serving their sentences), prison officials and the legal system may deny them such rights. Women who have been imprisoned often face social stigma and in some cases are abandoned by their families. This is a particular risk for women convicted of perceived moral offenses such as adultery, and can lengthen their imprisonment, as sometimes authorities will only release women to the custody of their families.<sup>[16]</sup>

The onset of the conflict has exacerbated existing gender justice issues and meant that numerous initiatives seeking to further gender equality and women's empowerment agendas have been halted or significantly hampered including United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. During the current conflict, with the internationally recognized Yemeni government, backed by the Saudi-led coalition,<sup>[17]</sup> at war with the armed Houthi movement (also known as *Ansar Allah*), governance has been fragmented and the rule of law weakened. As a result citizens have often reverted to more informal mechanisms to address their grievances and disputes through tribal channels or through the intervention of community leaders.

## An Urban-Rural Divide

Table 2: Urban-Rural Comparison of Key Data on Women, 2013<sup>[18]</sup>

No.	Indicator	Urban	Rural	Total
<b>Respondent Household Characteristics</b>				
1	% HH with improved drinking water source	78.7	49.7	58.8
2	% HH with an improved toilet facility	63.4	4.8	23.1
3	% HH who use wood for cooking	2.3	49.3	34.7
4	% HH with a radio	41.2	39.4	39.9
5	% HH with a mobile phone	93.5	74	80
6	% HH in the lowest wealth quintile	1.1	28.4	20
<b>Women's Status</b>				

15) United Nations Women Watch, "Country Assessment on Violence against Women Yemen," 2010, [https://www.un.org/womenwatch/ianwge/taskforces/vaw/Country\\_Assessment\\_on\\_Violence\\_against\\_Women\\_August\\_2\\_2010.pdf](https://www.un.org/womenwatch/ianwge/taskforces/vaw/Country_Assessment_on_Violence_against_Women_August_2_2010.pdf)

16) Ibid.

17) Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Sudan, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Djibouti, Eritrea, and Somalia all have been involved in the Saudi-led coalition by providing ground troops, air support or making their airspace, territorial waters, and military bases available.

18) Republic of Yemen, Ministry of Public Health and Population and the Central Statistical Organization, "National Health and Demographic Survey - 2013," July 2015, <https://dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-fr296-dhs-final-reports.cfm>

No.	Indicator	Urban	Rural	Total
7	% Women with secondary or higher education (ages 15 to 49)	40	11.6	21.2
8	% Female literacy (ages 15 to 49)	76.1	41.1	52.9
9	Median age at first marriage (ages 49-25)	18.9	17.9	18.2
10	Median age at first birth (ages 49-25)	20.7	21.1	20.8
11	Total fertility rate	3.2	5.1	4.4
12	% Women using any modern method of contraception	40.2	24	29.2
13	Maternal mortality ratio <sup>[19]</sup>	97	164	148
14	% Women suffering from anemia	65.5	73.2	70.6
15	% Delivering in a health facility	49.1	22.6	29.8
16	% Women controlling their own cash earnings	57.4	48.9	53.8
17	% Women making decisions about their own health care	64.4	50	54.6
18	% Women participating in decisions about major household purchases	59.9	45.4	50
19	% Women who agree with at least one reason for wife beating <sup>[20]</sup>	37.4	54.5	48.7

A key factor shaping the lives of women in Yemen are the differences in urban versus rural residency (66 percent of women in Yemen live in rural areas, according to the National Health and Demographic Survey, henceforth referred to as the DHS 2013). Table 2 highlights some salient differences in the lives of women in urban and rural settings. Women in urban areas have much better access to basic household services and educational and work opportunities. Although women in rural areas shoulder a heavy burden of chores (fetching water, fodder and firewood and agricultural duties), moving to an urban area often means changes in their mobility, with urban women being much more restricted in their freedom of movement and having to take up the face veil.

The urban-rural divide for women in Yemen is deeply impacted by the extremely mountainous topography and small scattered communities lacking road infrastructure.<sup>[21]</sup> Rural isolation and a lack of qualified personnel translates into high rates of illiteracy, poverty and illness. Even prior to the conflict the government did not prioritize prenatal care, emergency obstetrics and postpartum services, thus failing to address high fertility rates, as well as child and maternal morbidity and mortality. Rural isolation and limited

19) Ratio of live births - maternal deaths per 100,000 live births.

20) Five reasons given include: 1) burning food; 2) arguing with her husband; 3) going out without telling her husband; 4) neglecting the children; and 5) refusing sexual intercourse with her husband.

21) According to the "2014 Statistical Yearbook" (the last unified reporting year) there are only 17,080 kilometers of asphalted road in a country of 575,428 square kilometers in size. Central Statistical Office, "2014 Statistical Yearbook," Republic of Yemen, <http://www.cso-yemen.com/content.php?lng=english&id=680>



government investment also contributed to a lack of education infrastructure and absence of female teachers in rural areas, significantly impacting the urban-rural divide as well as the gender gap in literacy and education.

Despite the diversity of experiences of Yemeni women and gender dynamics, in more recent decades factors such as urbanization, politics and religious trends have mitigated regional specificities in clothing, behaviors and social practices. A few such factors include: unification in 1990; the spread of Wahabi and Salafi traditions in the country; the dissemination of modern communications channels and mass media; and the preeminence of urban culture over rural lifestyles. This homogenization process has influenced the spread of gender segregation practices in schools and homes and even fashion in women's outerwear. The *balto-niqab*<sup>[22]</sup> is ubiquitous in urban environments and professional settings, replacing indigenous traditions of unique coverings from each part of the country (see textbox in section III for more details).

Despite increasing homogenization, gender segregation in the private realm and public sphere still varies considerably between areas of the country, with mixed gender schools more common in Taiz, Aden and parts of the south. To some degree in all areas of Yemen it is common in homes and public spaces to maintain an element of gender segregation. Initiatives which fail to reflect such patterns of interaction face serious challenges. For example, in reconstruction efforts following the 1982 earthquake in Dhamar, which killed 1,500-2,500 people, international response activities included building thousands of concrete block homes costing tens of millions of dollars. Among the many flaws of these cookie cutter homes was the lack of separate entrances for men and women, and an inability to maintain gender segregated spaces inside. For this and other reasons, the thousands of units constructed were never utilized optimally as residences, with many serving primarily as shelter for livestock and storage of agricultural products.<sup>[23]</sup>

Within the broader context of the devastating humanitarian crisis, the current conflict has generally aggravated existing gender inequalities in Yemen and contributed to deteriorating conditions for many girls and women. The circumstances facing women and girls are clearly indicated by Yemen's continuing ranking as the lowest country globally since 2006 on the World Economic Forums' Global Gender Gap Index.<sup>[24]</sup> However, despite such dire circumstances Yemeni women and girls have sought ways to positively impact their communities by carving out space in the public sphere to contribute to humanitarian relief efforts and play a leadership role in Yemeni civil society. Additionally, women and girls are taking on new responsibilities and roles in the home as they struggle to contribute to household income and negotiate within the family to access basic services and education amidst insecurity, conflict and dire economic conditions.

22) *Balto* is a full-length loose fitting coat in various colors which buttons or snaps down the front, sometimes with cuffs and a belt, popular among younger women professionals and students. *Niqab* is a generic term for a veil that covers the face except for the eyes.

23) For details on higher level challenges of the reconstruction effort see: Khaled Hamid, "An Institutional Framework for Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Yemen," Rethinking Yemen's Economy, Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, DeepRoot Consulting and CARPO, May 29, 2018, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/main-publications/5932>

24) "Mind the 100 Year Gap," World Economic Forum, December 16, 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/reports/gender-gap-2020-report-100-years-pay-equality>

This study seeks to highlight traditions and practices impacting Yemeni women and girls at different phases of their lives, and to note changes and factors that have arisen as a result of the current conflict. In introducing this study, a caveat is needed about the challenge of reliable statistics in Yemen, particularly when it comes to gender-specific data. Accurate statistics have been a perennial problem in Yemen, but the conflict has halted the collection of nationwide statistics and greatly impaired the environment for conducting assessments. In Houthi-controlled areas of the country data collection has become increasingly complicated on sensitive issues such as gender, gender-based violence (GBV), youth and peacebuilding. As a result, the tools the UN system uses to identify humanitarian needs have become one of the few reliable sources of information.<sup>[25]</sup> This study utilizes diverse sources of information from academic studies, development and research the author has conducted in Yemen over the past 35 years.

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25) Such as the Multi Cluster Locations Assessment which provides nationwide data for the Humanitarian Needs Overview or the Comprehensive Food Security Survey, a baseline study last administered in Yemen in 2014 by the World Food Programme.



*A young girl with her hair decorated with jasmine buds, red antimony and sweet-smelling spices attends a wedding in 'Abs, northern Tihamah, Hajjah governorate, 1989 // Photo credit: Marta Colburn*

## II. Birth, Infancy and Childhood (0-9 years): Gender Dynamics Emerge

The birth of a child in Yemen is a much celebrated event surrounded by cultural practices in the care of the newborn and mother. Traditionally there were distinct differences in how baby boys and girls were embraced into the family. As noted in a 1995 study on childhood in northern Yemen, “from the congratulatory statements given new mothers onward, the fuss is over sons.... because they are more highly valued, sons are considered likely targets for the evil eye and are accorded greater protection from harm than are daughters.”<sup>[26]</sup> While in some families such traditions are changing, in many families the birth of a boy is still celebrated much more than that of a girl, in part because it is assumed that daughters will leave the natal home when they marry, while sons will remain close to the family.<sup>[27]</sup> However, there is evidence that this early gender bias has not always been the case in South Arabia, such as ancient inscriptions celebrating the birth of female children.<sup>[28]</sup>

#### **Yememi Proverbs:**

*Mawt al-banat mn al-makramat*  
(The death of a girl is a blessing).

*Hariwah bel markab ye'lam allah li man tuktab* (A bride's destiny is unknown until she's delivered to her husband).

*Al-bint wanaa wa al-walad jana* (A daughter is mourning and a son is a heavenly joy).

*Zawwaj al-banat qabla al-thaman wa 'alla al-daman* (Marry your daughters before they are eight and I guarantee [that they will be safe and you will be serene]).

*Abu al-Banat brah, yikhsar wa ma yirbah* (The father of many daughters is like a wasteland, he only has losses and never profits).

This gender preference in the early years is reflected in nutrition and health-seeking behaviors, as well as educational opportunities. A study published in 2014 looked at the incidence of iron deficiency anemia (IDA) among children in Taiz and Hudaydah, finding that girls were three times more likely to suffer from IDA than boys.<sup>[29]</sup> While IDA is globally more prevalent among girls of reproductive age, the study's authors suggested the high rate of IDA among Yemeni girls may also be due to gender bias, expressed in unequal food distribution.

26) Dorsky, Susan; Stevenson, Thomas B. (1995). “Childhood and Education in Highland North Yemen,” *Children in the Muslim Middle East*. Austin, University of Texas Press, p. 312.

27) A recent study found that 21.5 percent of Yemeni mothers prefer sons, compared to 19.1 percent in Jordan and 13.3 percent in Egypt. Sharaf, Mesbah; Rashad, Ahmed; Mansour, El-Hussien (2019). “Son Preference and Child Under Nutrition in the Arab Countries: Is There a Gender Bias Against Girls?” Working Papers, University of Alberta, Department of Economics. p.15, [https://ideas.repec.org/p/ris/albaec/2019\\_008.html](https://ideas.repec.org/p/ris/albaec/2019_008.html); Colburn, Marta (2002). *A Situation Analysis of Gender and Development in Yemen*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Oxfam, Amman Jordan. p. 27.

28) An inscription from “Marib records the dedication of a statue of a woman - by a group of women - as an expression of thanks for the god's having delivered a daughter from the perils of disease. One inscription records thanks rendered to the god Ashtar for having granted the happy parents a daughter.” Another dedication on a statue by a woman named Lutef gives thanks not only for her husband's safe return, but also for her rescue from near death when bearing a stillborn son, with no word of sorrow at the loss, and concludes by giving thanks for the welfare of her daughters. Warburton, David A. (1995). “Women in Ancient Yemen.” *Yemen Update*, No. 36, American Institute for Yemeni Studies. p 33.

29) Additionally, other factors associated significantly with IDA included: mothers' low educational level, which increased the odds for IDA by 4.1 times compared to children of educated mothers; children from families with low household monthly income (< YR20,000) had significantly higher odds of having IDA when compared with those from families with higher household income. Al-Zabedi, Ebtesam Mahdi; et al. (2014). “Prevalence and Risk Factors of Iron Deficiency Anemia Among Children in Yemen.” *American Journal of Health Research*, Vol. 2, p. 319-326.



Given names for baby girls in Yemen are diverse with unique naming traditions in various regions of the country.<sup>[30]</sup> Yemeni women do not change their name at marriage, but retain their patronymic names throughout life.<sup>[31]</sup> A woman is expected to remain loyal to — and the responsibility of — her father and his tribe or family for life. Traditionally, this practice meant that if a woman's husband mistreated her, her father/guardian and/or brother(s) should intervene on her behalf to address wrongs or to allow her to return to her natal home. In tribal areas, by extension, a woman who has married outside her tribe can call on her father's tribe for support.<sup>[32]</sup> Thus a woman remains under the protection of her father's family and tribe throughout her life. Girl children are valued, but it is anticipated that when they marry they will leave the agnate home and there is no expectation that they will contribute financially, though they are expected to maintain connection and care for their parents as they age.

### ***Bilqis:***

In a small village outside of Marib city, at 9 years of age Bilqis is the oldest girl in her family and thus carries considerable responsibility in the home. Like many girls in rural areas, she helps her mother care for the younger children, and is responsible for collecting water for household use and assisting her mother in fetching firewood and fodder for their cow and the goats. The chickens fend for themselves. Due to the war, there are many displaced people living in their area in tents and makeshift housing, contributing to competition for water, wood and fodder which has led to tension. Bilqis' father was injured in the war and so is not able to work on their small piece of land. She dreams of being able to return to school along with her older brother who, due to the situation, was the only one the family could afford to continue studying. The family lives on charity and what they can raise on their own. The six children often go to bed with a knot of hunger in their bellies and Bilqis does what she can to help her parents put food on the table.

Veiling and gender seclusion may begin during this phase of a young girl's life, although practices will vary depending on a number of factors including a family's economic or social status, as well as education and where the family is from in the country.

## ***Gender Roles Among Siblings***

Traditionally, in both rural and urban areas, girls and boys carried out differing types of chores, with girls caring for other children and more often responsible for fetching water, fodder and wood for cooking, as well as cleaning and helping in the kitchen. Boys are more often exempted from household chores in favor of their studies. This gender dynamic is illustrated by the reality that 41.3 percent of girls from ages 6 to 11 are engaged in Unpaid Household Services (UHS), versus 28.6 percent of boys.<sup>[33]</sup>

30) Two articles from different parts of Yemen which highlight fascinating naming traditions are: Walter, Mary Ann (2006). "The Meaning of Names in Hadramaut." Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and Al-Zumor, Awq (2009). "A socio-cultural and linguistic analysis of Yemeni Arabic personal names." Gema Online Journal of Language Studies, p. 15-27.

31) i.e. following a child's (male and female) given name, is that of one's father, then grandfather, often concluding with the father's tribal name, place name (birth place or country of origin), profession or significant early ancestor.

32) Weir, Shelagh (2007). *A Tribal Order: Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen*. University of Texas Press. p. 47.

33) "Working Children in the Republic of Yemen: The Results of the 2010 National Child Labour Survey," International Labour Organization, November 2012, [https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/research\\_file\\_attachment/Yemen\\_NCLS\\_Report\\_En\\_Web\\_20130312.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/research_file_attachment/Yemen_NCLS_Report_En_Web_20130312.pdf)

Although there is legislation to prevent children under the age of 14 years from working,<sup>[34]</sup> child labor remains a serious issue in Yemen. According to the International Labour Organization's (ILO) 2010 National Child Labor Survey, 11 percent of children from ages 5 to 11 worked, with most engaged in the agricultural sector and UHS.<sup>[35]</sup> In rural areas children often labor on their family's land, but children from landless families may work as daily or low paid manual labor on *qat*<sup>[36]</sup> plantations or coffee farms, or shepherding livestock. In urban areas in the home, girls help with cooking, cleaning and caring for younger children, with young boys often responsible for shopping for the family, running family errands and taking out the garbage. In cities boys often work in shops and restaurants, delivering tea and cleaning, for example, with girls from lower echelons of society more commonly found begging on the street, scavenging garbage or shepherding goats and sheep in crowded city streets. Urban environments are often more gender segregated than rural communities, particularly in larger settlements with a high degree of anonymity. "Children in Yemen engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation and armed conflict," a 2018 US Department of Labor report noted.<sup>[37]</sup>

Gender inequalities also play out in education, with families being more likely to educate boys. In recent decades, there has been some improvement in girl's primary education enrollment through the efforts of the Yemeni government, with support by international organizations and significant donor investment.<sup>[38]</sup> In 1994 the primary school enrollment rate for girls had risen from nearly 0 percent in 1962, to 37.4 percent,<sup>[39]</sup> increasing to a net enrollment rate of 73 percent in 2010 and to 79 percent in 2016, as compared to boys' enrollment in 2016 of 89 percent.<sup>[40]</sup> A variety of social, economic and cultural issues influence this gender gap in education including "women's workload, early marriage, lack of separate girls' schools and female teachers, and the idea that women do not need schooling."<sup>[41]</sup>

34) Article 5 of Ministerial Order No. 11 of 2013 (52), sets the minimum age for work at 14.

35) ILO (2012). "Working Children in the Republic of Yemen: The Results of the 2010 National Child Labour Survey."

36) A mildly narcotic leaf of an evergreen that in Yemen is chewed daily by the majority of men, with 33.6 percent of women over the age of 15 years old also using qat. Qat contains the alkaloid cathinone, a stimulant, which is said to cause excitement, loss of appetite, and euphoria. The shrub grows to a height of 10 meters and is known as khat or miraa in the Horn of Africa (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya and Somalia).

37) "2018 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Yemen," Bureau of International Labor Affairs, US Department of Labor, 2018, [https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child\\_labor\\_reports/tda2018/Yemen.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child_labor_reports/tda2018/Yemen.pdf)

38) Government expenditure on education has been low for decades. In 2000 it was 9.65 percent of GDP, though dropped to 5.15 percent in 2008 (the most recent data from the World Bank). "Government expenditure on education, total (% of GDP) - Yemen, Rep." World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GD.ZS?locations=YE>

39) Republic of Yemen (1998). "Children and Women in Yemen: A Situation Analysis Summary." Government of Yemen, UNICEF, the World Bank and Radda Barnen. p. 64.

40) Data for the Sustainable Development Goals - Yemen, UNESCO, accessed December 10, 2020, <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/ye>

41) De Regt, Marina (2007). Pioneer or Pawns? Women Health Workers and the Politics of Development in Yemen. Syracuse University Press. p 56.

### *For Some Children, Violence in the Home and at School*

It is during this phase of life that some Yemeni girl children undergo female genital mutilation (FGM), with the practice affecting 21 percent of women in the country, according to the DHS 2013.<sup>[42]</sup> In 2013, Al-Mahra governorate had the highest percentage of women affected by the practice (84.7 percent), followed by Hadramawt governorate (80 percent), while the lowest rates were in the governorates of Al-Bayda (0 percent) and Al-Mahwit (0.3 percent). According to the DHS 2013, 85 percent of girls who are subjected to the procedure undergo it in the first week following birth, and 14 percent within one year. Eighty-five percent of such procedures are conducted by traditional practitioners, with the remaining performed by health professionals. While FGM has decreased in recent decades in Socotra, it still has deep cultural meaning and in earlier times if a girl or woman from the island were going on pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj) she must first stop in Hadramawt and undergo the procedure.<sup>[43]</sup> In Zabid on the Tihama coastal plateau, the practice is also common (with 62.3 percent of women in Hudaydah subjected to FGM), although there is a perception that the practice is diminishing.<sup>[44]</sup>

According to the DHS 2013, 79 percent of children ages 2 to 14 years had been physically punished in the month before the survey,<sup>[45]</sup> with severe physical punishment<sup>[46]</sup> experienced by 42 percent of children. Severe discipline methods for children are more common in rural areas in Yemen, where 45 percent of parents used such methods versus 34 percent in urban areas. According to a number of studies, male children are slightly more likely to suffer from physical punishment than female children,<sup>[47]</sup> and the lower a mother's education level the more likely she is to use corporal punishment.<sup>[48]</sup> A further study from 2008 found that more than half of rural and about a quarter of urban caregivers reported using harsh corporal punishment with children.<sup>[49]</sup> Another study from 2017 found that harsh corporal punishment in the home was significantly associated with poor school performance and both behavioral and emotional difficulties for the child, with risk factors including "rural area, male gender of the child, low maternal education, and large family size."<sup>[50]</sup>

42) The practice of FGM in Yemen is most commonly found in areas with ethnic, trade, religious, seafaring or migration connections to Africa.

43) Naumkin, Vitaly (1993). (1993). *Island of the Phoenix: An Ethnographic Study of the People of Socotra*. Translated from Russian by Valery A. Epstein. Ithaca Press, Reading. p. 334.

44) Meneley, Anne (1996). *Tournaments of Value: Sociability and Hierarchy in a Yemeni Town*. University of Toronto Press. p. 85.

45) Defined as hitting the child either with or without a tool. DHS 2013, p. 23.

46) Defined as hitting the child on the face or head, hitting the child very hard with a tool. Ibid.

47) DHS 2013 found the difference between male and female children to be 81 percent versus 77 percent, and in another study it was 68 percent of versus 57.6 percent. (2011.b.) SIDA "Country Profile of Yemen: A Review of the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child." p. 40.

48) (2011.b.) "Country Profile of Yemen: A Review of the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child." p. 40.

49) Defined in this study as hitting children with implements, tying them up, pinching them, or biting them. Al-Yahari, Abdullah; Goodman, Robert (2008). "Harsh Corporal Punishment of Yemeni Children: Occurrence, Type and Associations." *Child Abuse & Neglect*, Vol. 32, Issue 8, p. 766-773. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/01452134>.

50) Alizzy, Arwa; et al (2017).



Corporal punishment in schools in Yemen is a serious issue that has long-term consequences for children physically, psychologically and emotionally, as well as having a negative impact on educational outcomes.<sup>[51]</sup> While corporal punishment in schools is prohibited by the decree of the Ministry of Education No. 10 of 2001,<sup>[52]</sup> such practices continue, as the regulation lacks penalties for non-compliance and victim complaint mechanisms. A number of studies have found the incidence of corporal punishment very high in Yemen.<sup>[53]</sup> A study based on an anonymous self-administered survey in 2011 in Aden among 1,066 pupils (grades 7-9) found that “55.7 percent of pupils reported physical abuse at least once in their school lifetime (73.2 percent of males versus 26.6 percent of females).”

A study by the Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood in Yemen found that hitting with a stick was the most widespread form of punishment in school, experienced by 65 percent of children. Boys were more commonly the victim; 76 percent of boys reported having been hit by a stick, compared to 54 percent of girls.<sup>[54]</sup> There is widespread acceptance in Yemen of corporal punishment of children in the home and school, including by children themselves.<sup>[55]</sup> A study by Save the Children in 2012 found that “one quarter of children agree that teachers and administrators need to hurt children as a disciplinary measure.”<sup>[56]</sup> Unfortunately, although Yemen is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, there are many issues facing children in the country that require donor investment, government action and civil society engagement in order to be addressed.<sup>[57]</sup>

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51) Ba-Saddik, A.S.; Hattab, A.S. (2013). “Physical Abuse in Basic Education Schools in Aden Governorate, Yemen: A Cross-sectional Study.” *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal*. Vol 19., No. 4.

52) Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (2011.a.). “Violence Against Children in Schools: A Regional Analysis of Lebanon, Morocco and Yemen.”

53) “In Yemen, physical punishment at school takes several forms such as beating, tying the feet, pinching and biting, pulling hair or ear, hitting on the head and forcing children to stand in the midday sun.” Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (2011.b.). “Country Profile of Yemen: A Review of the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.” p. 17.

54) “Violence against Children in Selected Areas of Yemen,” The Higher Council for Motherhood & Childhood, October 2004, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/7224/pdf/7224.pdf> Table 12, p. 41

55) In a Save the Children study the three main reasons given for corporal punishment in schools were: not doing homework (47 percent); misbehaving in class (21 percent) and not obeying orders of teachers or school staff (10 percent). Save the Children (2012). “Child Rights Situation Analysis: Yemen 2012.” p. 31.

56) Ibid.

57) Ratified 1 May 1991 via YAR’s signature 13 Feb 1990.

## Changes in the Current Crisis

Mental health is a serious issue due to the ongoing war and related crises, and children have not been spared. A recent study by Dr. Fawziah al-Ammar found that 79 percent of 902 children surveyed reported experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, with girls reporting them more frequently than boys.<sup>[58]</sup> This is a high rate compared to results from similar studies in other countries experiencing conflict. Airstrikes have been used regularly by the Saudi-led coalition in many parts of Yemen including Sana'a, the densely populated capital city, as well as Sa'ada, Hudaydah, Taiz and other parts of the north, injuring and killing civilians. In some areas of Sa'ada, families have sought refuge in caves during the current conflict, a practice well used during the six wars fought with the central government of Yemen from 2004 to 2010. The environment of being confined to basements, bathrooms or caves, while airstrikes are potentially killing neighbors, family and/or tribe members can contribute to trauma. There is also a significant mental health impact in frontlines areas or locations that have been under siege, such as in Taiz where the Ansar Allah blockade has resulted in a huge loss of civilian life including hundreds of children. A recent study by the Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) highlights the impact of the conflict on the mental and emotional health of children.<sup>[59]</sup> One mother interviewed in this research shared, "I saw the fear drilling deep into my children's souls. It is hard to ask children to hold on, to become strong. How can I explain to my children that it is not their right to play outside freely? Going outside to play can bring death. How can I tell them why their schools were closed and became military depots?"<sup>[60]</sup>

Also, for unborn fetuses and newborns, there are additional risks during the current crisis from maternal malnutrition, illness, trauma and environmental risks, which can lead to miscarriage or result in poor birth outcomes.<sup>[61]</sup> According to a 2019 report by Save the Children "from 2017 to 2018 the number of pregnant and breastfeeding women admitted for malnutrition rose in 17 out of 22 governorates, but in some areas the numbers spiked particularly sharply. In Al-Jawf, maternal malnutrition admissions were 14 times higher in 2018 than 2017. In Hadramawt and Dhamar they were nearly eight and six times higher, respectively. In Taiz, the number of admissions rose by nearly 40,000 in 2018 compared to the previous year."<sup>[62]</sup> Maternal malnutrition also plays a significant role in infant and child mortality and morbidity.

As outlined above, child labor for boys and girls was a serious issue in Yemen prior to the conflict. However, with the devastation of household incomes and the near collapse of the economy, there has been an increase in child labor as children are forced or seek to contribute financially to household income. Although Yemen has ratified most

58) Al-Ammar, F. (2018). "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder among Yemeni Children as a Consequence of the Ongoing War." Brief #10. Center for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient (CARPO). p. 7.

59) Center for Civilians in Conflict (2019). "We Did Not Know If We Would Die from Bullets or Hunger: Civilian Harm and Local Protection Measures in Yemen." p. 31.

60) Ibid, p. 32.

61) Save the Children (2019). "Conflict in Yemen: Devastating Toll on Pregnant Women and New Mums Becomes Clear as Malnutrition Admissions Soar."

62) Ibid.

key international conventions concerning child labor and, prior to the conflict, the government had passed laws and regulations related to child labor, serious gaps exist in the legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking. With the ongoing war the worst forms of child labor are taking place – child soldiers among boys and sexual exploitation of both boys and girls. The extent of such severe forms of child labor is difficult to determine, but the UN has documented a number of cases in the context of the conflict.<sup>[63]</sup>

Yemen's humanitarian crisis has hit children particularly hard. The following provide a snapshot of some of the issues facing children in general, focusing on the impact of the current conflict on girls:

- Infant mortality rates have risen due to the war, with UNDP estimating an increase from 46.3/1,000 in 2014 to 69.6/1,000 in 2019, although sex disaggregated data is not available.<sup>[64]</sup>
- Since 2016, Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) estimates that more than 112,000 people have died as a direct result of the violence, including more than 12,600 civilians who were killed in targeted attacks.<sup>[65]</sup> The UN reported that “at least 7,825 civilians were killed (including at least 2,138 children and 933 women) and 12,416 civilians injured (including 2,898 children and 1,395 women) in Yemen as a direct result of the armed conflict between March 2015 (when it began such tracking) and June 2020.”<sup>[66]</sup>
- With the conflict, education at all levels has been deeply compromised and an estimated 2,000 schools have been damaged or occupied by IDPs or armed groups.<sup>[67]</sup> Recent data demonstrates a continuing gender gap with some 36 percent of Yemeni girls out of school, compared with 24 percent of boys,<sup>[68]</sup> yielding an estimated 20 percent drop in enrollment since the beginning of the conflict.<sup>[69]</sup>
- Young girls are suffering from increasing rates of child marriage,<sup>[70]</sup> with reports of girls as young as 8 years of age being forced into marriage, most often to much older men<sup>[71]</sup> (section III of this report discusses this form of GBV in more detail). This phenomenon impacts a range of issues for young girls including their educational enrollment rates and their overall health and mental well-being which is deeply affected by the trauma

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63) Bureau of International Labor Affairs, US Department of Labor (2018). “2018 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Yemen.”

64) Moyer, Jonathan D.; et al (2019). “Assessing the Impact of the War on Development in Yemen.” UNDP and Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures, Joseph Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver. p. 9.

65) ACLED (2020). Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (2020). “ACLED Resources: War in Yemen.”

66) Office of the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen (2020). p. 14.

67) UNOCHA (2019). “Yemen: Humanitarian Needs Overview.” p. 47.

68) UNOCHA (2019). “Yemen: Humanitarian Needs Overview.” p. 47.

69) Moyer, Jonathan D.; et al (2019). “Assessing the Impact of the War on Development in Yemen.” UNDP and Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures, Joseph Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver. p. 26

70) UNOCHA (2019). “Yemen: Humanitarian Needs Overview.” p. 17.

71) Ferguson, Sarah (2017). “After Years of Civil War, Child Marriage Is on the Rise in Yemen.” UNICEF.

of forced child sexuality and marital rape. Furthermore, the premature onset of childbearing during adolescence has a detrimental impact on the reproductive health of young mothers, as well as resulting in higher infant and child mortality rates.<sup>[72]</sup>

- UNICEF observes that after over five years of conflict, more than 12 million children need some kind of humanitarian assistance, with their health, nutrition and safety at risk as systems collapse from the fighting and ongoing violence.<sup>[73]</sup>
- A December 2019 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report noted that one child dies from the war or its side effects every 11 minutes and 54 seconds.<sup>[74]</sup> This includes death from malnourishment and diseases such as malaria, cholera, diphtheria and now COVID-19, which are proving fatal for tens of thousands of children living in urban areas.<sup>[75]</sup>

72) According to the 2013 DHS the infant mortality rate for mothers under the age of 20 was 69 per 1,000 live births, nearly double that for children born to mothers age 30-39 (37 per 1,000). p. 77.

73) UNICEF (2020.c). "Yemen Crisis: Yemen is the Largest Humanitarian Crisis in the World – and Children Are Being Robbed of Their Futures."

74) Moyer, Jonathan D.; et al (2019). "Assessing the Impact of the War on Development in Yemen." UNDP and Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures, Joseph Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver. p. 7.

75) TRT World (2020). "In Yemen 50,000 Infants Die Every Year, Rebel Group Reports."



*Women dye cloth in Matlas, Raymah (formerly in Sana'a governorate), 1988  
Photo credit: Marta Colburn.*

### III. Puberty and Adolescence (10-18): Shrinking Space, Movement Challenges and Veiling



Young women at this age live within the context of their natal families, which provides a protective element but which can also impose limitations in accessing opportunities for studies or work. In some cases, young women prefer to marry early to escape the constraints imposed by fathers and brothers, hoping that they can more effectively negotiate with their husbands, a strategy which occasionally works.

This phase of a girl's life encompasses puberty, signifying greater scrutiny and narrowing of movement and increasing gender segregation. One cultural belief which contributes to the practice of gender segregation and discrimination is the perceived threat of *fitna* (disorder or chaos) as a result of female sexual attractiveness, thus providing rationalization for monitoring and controlling the female body and female behavior. Belief in female-driven *fitna* also contributes to the practice of placing women under male authority, with fathers/guardians, brothers and husbands making decisions on behalf of girls and women.<sup>[76]</sup> Additionally, a number of cultural traditions contribute to such limitations, including the social categorization of women as "weak" and thus requiring protection discussed in the introduction, as well as the belief that a woman's behavior is bound to her family's honor and reputation.

In many parts of the country families insist that a *mahram* (male family escort) accompany women shopping, visiting or traveling, although the practice was diminishing prior to the conflict. In the contemporary professional context, *maharim* (plural of *mahram*) may also accompany younger working women when they are conducting field work, attending a conference or training in another city or even traveling in the region or internationally for work. Within the family, changing gender dynamics may contribute to increasing tensions in the home. The DHS 2013 found that sibling violence was the most common form of violence against women in the home, with 35.3 percent of respondents identifying this as problematic.

This phase of a woman's life is also when most girls will begin covering their faces when around men who are potential marriage partners, i.e. outside their immediate family members (fathers and brothers) and male "milk" relations (those breastfed by the same woman and thus precluded from marriage).<sup>[77]</sup> The precise age when a young woman will start to cover her face depends on a variety of factors, including geography, with a generally steady increase in the practice in urban areas from the 1980s onward.<sup>[78]</sup> This

#### Yemeni Proverbs:

*Weleid 'assi wala 'ashr banawet mutiy'at* (One disobedient son is better than ten obedient daughters).

*Zawwig bint a thaman wa alya ath-thaman* (Marry your daughter when she's young, of this I'm sure).

*Zawg wila khoomeh low yaksir al-jumjuma mahad ya qulo lelme* (A good husband or a bad one hits you and breaks your skull, no one asks him why).

*Bab al-Arsh lil walida maftuh* (For a woman in labor the door to God's throne [paradise] is open).

76) Heinze, Marie-Christine (2016). "Literature Review: Women's Role in Peace and Security in Yemen." Center for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient (CARPO), Yemen Polling Center (YPC), and Saferworld.

77) In some areas women will intentionally form permanent "milk" relations with unrelated families by breastfeeding, which allows children to behave as close family members and yields other social and economic benefits. Weir, Shelagh (2007). *A Tribal Order: Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen*. University of Texas Press. p. 42.

78) Women in Aden, Taiz and Hudaydah were traditionally less conservative in covering their bodies and faces. However, conservative attire was common among women in other urban areas of the North and even in the South in the Wadi Hadramawt, Abyan, Shabwa and Al-Dhalea.

trend also impacted women in Aden after unification in 1990 and the 1994 civil war when they began initially covering their hair with a scarf or *hijab* and later many started to cover their face and donned the *niqab*.<sup>[79]</sup> However, veiling practices saw significant changes in 2011 with the leading role that women played in the youth revolution (as it is called by many Yemenis) and the NDC era, which contributed to more uncovered faces in the public sphere. While difficult to quantify, following this era and prior to the onset of the conflict in Sana'a and Aden there was a noticeable increase in younger women exchanging the *niqab* for the *hijab*. It is unclear if this trend has impacted rural areas, where traditionally women worked hard physically and were less likely to cover their faces. In addition to regional variation, face veiling in rural areas also increases with improved road access as outsiders and strangers become more common. Additionally, with the arrival of smartphones in rural areas, for various reasons there has been a reported spread of conservative outerwear and veiling traditions even in isolated communities.

### 'Arwa

Raised in Sana'a in a family originally from Taiz, 'Arwa is an inquisitive 15-year-old living in a three-room home in Nuqum neighborhood with her parents, four siblings and her father's widowed sister with her two young children, displaced from her home in Taiz by the war. The house is never quiet and 'Arwa often seeks chores or errands outside the home to escape from the noise and chaos. 'Arwa's family struggles financially to keep her in school in order to give her a chance at getting a job and building a better life. However, due to their poverty and the current crisis, her father considered accepting a recent marriage proposal by an older successful businessman from their village. When 'Arwa heard her parents arguing about it, she reasoned with them to wait until she finishes middle school before marriage. Her mother supported this plan, as she prays for a better life for her daughters than her own forced marriage at age 13, with eight pregnancies, three miscarriages and the death of an infant boy at six months whom she still mourns. With reluctance, her father agreed to wait until she finishes middle school.

This phase of a young woman's life may also include halting studies for various reasons including: early marriage; lack of female teachers, no toilets for girls or segregated classroom options; increasingly heavy work chores in the home, particularly in rural areas; poverty, preventing school enrollment due to a lack of cash or because children are needed to earn income; or prioritizing boys' education over that of girls.<sup>[80]</sup> According to UNDP's 2019 Human Development Report, the gender gap in expected years of schooling has been narrowing; in 2019, for males it was 10.2 years, and for females 7.4 years, versus 10.3 and 4.7 years in 1995, respectively.<sup>[81]</sup>

79) During the PDRY era in the South, there were campaigns against the veil, including one in 1972 where public demonstrations against the sheidar and face veil were conducted and in schools girls were not required to wear modest external clothing. Molyneux, Maxine; Yafai, Aida; Muhsen, Aisha; and Ba'abadd, Noor (1979). "Women and Revolution in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen." *Feminist Review*, No. 1 (1979), p. 17. The issue of veiling was a topic of controversy in parts of the South throughout the Socialist era. "In late 1987, the authorities began to crack down on young women wearing Islamic dress by denying them entry to university and secondary school buildings. When the YSP decided to remove students' veils forcibly, however, the Minister for Security reportedly refused to carry out the order fearing popular discontent." Cigar, Norman (1990). "Islam and the State in South Yemen: The Uneasy Coexistence." *Middle Eastern Studies*, Taylor & Francis, Ltd, Vol. 26, No. 2, p. 191.

80) According to the ILO child labor survey of 2012, a much lower percentage of girls than boys aged 6-17 focus exclusively on their studies, 22.2 percent and 35.1 percent respectively. ILO (2012). "Working Children in the Republic of Yemen: The Results of the 2010 National Child Labour Survey." p. xii.

81) UNDP "Human Development Report 2019: Yemen." <http://hdr.undp.org/en/indicators/123406>.



### Modest Women's Outerwear in Yemen

**Abaya** – Robe-like, usually black silk or synthetic wrapped cover which is similar to the male wrap-around garment worn by men in other parts of the Arabian Peninsula. Women's *abayat* are often black and embroidered, tasseled or studded with a separate head or face covering.

**Balto** – Full-length loose-fitting coat in various colors which buttons or snaps down the front, sometimes with cuffs and a belt, popular among younger women professionals and students.

**Burqa'** – One-piece face covering that ties to the back of the head with a strap, snaps or Velcro, with two layers of material, a lower opaque level with a slit for the eyes and a top layer that can either be thrown back over the head or pulled over the face to cover the eyes. In Sana'a, the *burqa'* is worn over a *maqrana*. The *burqa'* is similar to the *niqab*, but is a more colloquial term.

**Al-Fotha** – Large rectangle of cloth similar to a *maswan* and *sitara*. Worn by tribal women in the northern regions, it is often of colorful fabric.

**Hijab** – Scarf tightly wrapped around the hair and secured under the chin, leaving the face exposed.

**Khimar** – Two-piece garment that consists of a small narrow under-scarf that covers the forehead and a larger thicker tent-like hooded garment that drapes to knee-length, seen in Sana'a and other urban centers.

**Lithma** – Traditional women's face covering which consists of a lightweight scarf wrapped around the upper and lower part of the face and head leaving the eyes exposed.

**Al-Majwal** – Traditional clothing from rural areas in the south and famous in Al-Bayda Governorate, it is a black silk fabric tube-shaped garment with a separate fabric to cover the head and face lightly.

**Maghmuq** – Traditional type of face veil which covers the upper and lower face, leaving the eyes exposed. It is black with white and red circles and is worn with the *sitara*.

**Mandil** – A simple headscarf covering the hair, used in Aden and southern parts of the country.

**Maqrana** – Large headscarf which is wrapped to cover the hair and sometimes the face.

**Maswan** – Wide black, red and gold metallic striped cloth worn over the head by women from the northern mountainous regions of the tribes, including shepherdesses and women farmers. Similar to a *sitara*.

**Niqab** – Generic term for a veil that covers the face except for the eyes. It is a free-flowing piece of cloth, usually black, that is tied around the head and over the head veil. It is preferred to the traditional *lithma* or *marmuq* as the lower part can be lifted to allow eating and drinking without showing the face.

**Rida** – Cotton all-covering colored patterned dress worn by Dawoodi Bohra Ismaili women, with a white head covering exposing the face.

**Sharshif** – Three-piece ensemble consisting of a skirt, waist-length cape and veil (called *khona*) of lightweight transparent fabric covering the face to allow the wearer to see through. The *sharshif* has been popular since the revolution, particularly in urban areas, and has been called the Republican flag of Yemen, although its popularity has waned recently in favor of more "modern" outerwear.

**Sheidar** – (from the Persian *chador*) A black one-piece tube-like garment favored by older women from southern parts of the country.

**Sitara** – Brightly-colored cotton or silk large rectangle of fabric that highland women traditionally drape over their heads, which comes in regional variations in color and design and is favored by older women

*From various sources including Colburn, Marta (2002). A Situation Analysis of Gender and Development in Yemen. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Oxfam, Amman Jordan. p. 20, with support from Bushra Eshaq for more contemporary terms.*

### ***Child Labor and Gender-Based Violence***

According to the ILO, child labor is a serious issue for this cohort of children and youth, with 28.5 percent ages 12 to 14 and 39.1 percent ages 15 to 17 working.<sup>[82]</sup> Interestingly, the “the employment rate of girls (12.3 percent) surpasses that of boys (9.8 percent) among younger children aged 5-11. Among older children aged 15-17, the employment rate of boys (44.8 percent) is higher than that of girls (32.3 percent).”<sup>[83]</sup> Some women’s tasks are particularly onerous and 44.8 percent of employed girls (ages 6 to 17) work in agriculture,<sup>[84]</sup> contributing to tasks such as grinding grain, fetching water, and gathering fodder and firewood, as well as helping in rainfed agriculture, livestock rearing and winnowing grains, etc. In addition, girls and young women in both rural and urban environs contribute to female reproductive tasks such as cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, caring for children and the elderly, as well as after marriage birthing the next generation of family members. Young girls contribute to such tasks to prepare them for such burdens in their future husband’s home and as a way of proving their value to the families of potential grooms. Particularly in rural areas, strong and hardworking women are seen as desirable brides.<sup>[85]</sup> The hard labor of women is even more important in light of rural labor shortages as a result of men working in Yemeni cities or as migrants in Saudi Arabia or the Gulf.<sup>[86]</sup>

An issue of grave concern for children is that of sexual abuse. However, there is limited information on its incidence, due to the stigma associated with such crimes, as well as the lack of child-friendly policing and justice systems. One study from 2004 conducted among 267 male and female children ages 12 to 15 by the Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood, found that reports of sexual harassment were 4.7 percent overall, with a higher rate in urban areas (6.5 percent) than rural areas (2.9 percent). Interestingly, there was a higher rate of such reports among boys (6.1 percent) than among girls (4.1 percent).<sup>[87]</sup>

Gender-based violence is a reality for many women and girls in Yemen and the risks to younger women include: early or forced marriage; domestic violence in the home at the hands of male family members; intimate partner violence; or sexual abuse or rape of young IDP, refugee or marginalized women, who are particularly at risk. A further form

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82) ILO (2012). “Working Children in the Republic of Yemen: The Results of the 2010 National Child Labour Survey.” p. ix.

83) Ibid.

84) Ibid, p. xii.

85) In rural areas the proverb, “Better a strong woman than a pretty face” demonstrates the importance of women’s labor. Research from the 1970s in Razih, Sa’ada Governorate, found that women were proud of their physical strength and would even boast about the loads they could carry and the distances they climbed. Weir, Shelagh (2007). *A Tribal Order: Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen*. University of Texas Press. p. 44.

86) While outmigration patterns vary depending on labor market demands and the region of Yemen, historically Yemeni males have often spent long periods of time outside their villages earning income and sending remittances to their families.

87) Al-Thabhani, Naser (2004). “Violence Against Children in Selected Areas of Yemen.” The Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood. Save the Children (Sweden), UNICEF and WHO.

of GBV is honor killing. While there is limited data on the incidence of honor killing in Yemen<sup>[88]</sup> it is a risk as the legal context in Yemen fails to protect women and punish male family members for such crimes.<sup>[89]</sup> Factors which contribute to the incidence of honor crimes in Yemen (and other countries) include conflict, displacement, inadequate legal protection for women and a lack of legal consequences for the murders, and the undermining of male social and cultural identities. In the current conflict, the ability of men to fulfill their obligations to financially support and care for their families in traditional ways has been gravely undermined and there is a perception that this has sometimes contributed to an increase in domestic abuse.

## Marriage

It is often during this life phase when families of young women begin considering marriage, given that almost half of women between the ages of 25 and 49 were married by the age of 18, and six in ten were married by age 20.<sup>[90]</sup> Marriage in Yemen is a family affair with deep economic and social consequences, and the family is viewed as the building block of Yemeni society. Traditionally, marriage was an arrangement made by families and for many it was not a decision that the prospective bride and groom played a significant role in. Yemen's Personal Status Law of 1992 requires the bride's consent for marriage; in a woman's first marriage, her silence is considered consent, while her verbal agreement is required in any subsequent marriages.<sup>[91]</sup> However, such practices are by no means stagnant and there have been changes in some areas and among some families.

The significant cost of marriage for the groom and his family varies in different parts of the country but generally includes: the expense of the festivities; a transfer of money to the bride's father or guardian and sometimes her brothers; and an endowment for the bride at marriage which includes the *mahr*,<sup>[92]</sup> payments from the groom to the bride at the time of the marriage contract and upon consummation, as well as deferred payments in case of divorce or death of the husband. Additionally, the cost of marriage entails setting up a house for the newlyweds, an expense which is mitigated for many by living

88) The only study identified which discusses the incidence of honor crimes in Yemen dates from 1997, when it was estimated that 400 women were killed under such circumstances. Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (2004). "Yemen: The status of women in Yemen; whether women threatened with domestic violence have access to state or other protection (2001 - July 2004)."

89) Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor (2020). "Girl Killed in Yemen in Shocking Circumstances: Perpetrators Must be Held Accountable." <https://euromedmonitor.org/en/article/3427/Girl-killed-in-Yemen-in-shocking-circumstances--Perpetrators-must-be-held-accountable>.

90) DHS 2013, p. 39. The age at first marriage has been steadily increasing, with the median age at first marriage among women aged 25-49 rising by about two years, from 16 years in 1997 to 18.2 years in 2013.

91) Colburn, Marta (2002). A Situation Analysis of Gender and Development in Yemen. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Oxfam, Amman, Jordan. p. 81.

92) Various (incorrectly) translated as dowry, bridal payment or bride-wealth, it is the groom's obligation to the bride in the form of money or possessions at the time of the marriage contract which becomes the property of the bride, either immediately or in the case of divorce. *Mahr* traditions vary considerably in different parts of the country and among various economic, social and ethnic groups. For details on various traditions see: in Aden, Dahlgren, Susanne (2005); in Wadi Dahr, Mundy, Martha (1995); in Amran, Dorsky, Susan (1986); in rural Yemen, Myntti, Cynthia (1978); and in Yemeni legal context, Glander, Annelies (1998).

with the groom's family. A study from 2003 found that nearly 40 percent of married young women lived with their in-laws compared to 60 percent of married young men who moved in with parents. This gender difference in extended family residency is due to a number of factors, including that women tend to marry older men, making it more likely that these men can afford independent living in a nuclear household.<sup>[93]</sup>

One factor contributing to young women marrying older men is the cost of the *mahr*, which has been on the rise since the 1970s when waves of Yemeni men began working in the Gulf in the oil industry. Such costs vary considerably between geographic areas and among various social and economic strata. While there have been attempts to curtail the cost of the *mahr*,<sup>[94]</sup> such efforts have had limited impact. As a result, there has been a steady rise in the average age of marriage for young men, particularly those in urban areas, versus a more modest rise for young women.<sup>[95]</sup> Costs for various marriage expenses have risen in tandem with poverty levels,<sup>[96]</sup> thus contributing to changing marriage practices in Yemen. Economic challenges have contributed to an increasing incidence of mass marriages and *shighar* marriages.<sup>[97]</sup> Consanguineous marriages (marriage between closely related individuals,

### Khadijah

Khadijah was an adolescent *Sharifah* Yemeni girl during Imam Ahmed's era (1948-1962), who celebrated her *Khatm* of the Holy Quran (recitation from the beginning to the end) when she was 13 or 14 years old. This multi-year educational investment prior to state-run education was rarely made for girls, but among Yemen's *Sada* (descendants of the Prophet Mohammed) who value religious education, was not uncommon. In this era the celebration for Khadijah's accomplishment was to join other girls who also were also *khitma* and their female relatives in a special lunch, then a *zaffa* (chant) was performed by a woman reciter and Khadijah gave a speech to her gathered relatives wearing a white dress, make-up (the only time she was allowed this privilege prior to marriage) and pearls. The following day a *Mawlid* was performed for her, although she was not allowed to attend the whole event as she was still unmarried.

*From Vom Bruck, Gabriele (2005). Islam, Memory and Morality in Yemen: Ruling Families in Transition. Palgrave Macmillan.*

93) Ibid.

94) For efforts in the 1980s to limit *mahr*, see Adra (2013). "The Impact of Male Outmigration on Women's Roles in Agriculture in the Yemen Arab Republic." p. 28.

95) "The average age of marriage for urban males born in 1960 was 22 years of age. This average rose to 24 for cohorts of urban males born in 1966 through 1975 and, finally, to 26 for cohorts born in 1977 and 1978. In contrast, the average age of first marriage for rural males rose only slightly during this time period. For cohorts of rural males born between 1960 and 1978, the average age of marriage rose only two years, from 21 to 23." Assaad, Ragui; et al (2009). "Youth Exclusion in Yemen: Tackling the Twin Deficits of Human Development and Natural Resources." Middle East Youth Initiative Working Wolfensohn Center for Development and Dubai School of Government. No. 9. p. 37.

96) Poverty levels have risen dramatically from before the crisis; 54.5 percent were living below the poverty line in 2012, while in 2020 it is estimated at 71 percent to 78 percent of the population, with women more severely affected than men. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/yemen/overview>.

97) Swap marriage, when the brother and sister of one family marry those of another family (often related but not necessarily).

with first cousins being common)<sup>[98]</sup> have traditionally been a desired choice,<sup>[99]</sup> and with the continually rising poverty levels it is likely to be even more attractive. However, for some families consanguineous marriages are not seen as ideal, as divorce or tension in a marriage can have a negative impact on broader family relationships. This potential is indicated by the Yemeni proverb *Bint al'am 'ala al-muaqum wa bint annas 'ala ras* (The cousin who married her cousin sits on the doorstep and the girl that married outside the family has a good position).

Traditionally, a principle in marriage in many parts of the country reflecting Yemeni social stratification was that of *kafa'a* (equivalency in marriage partners), which discourages higher social classes from marrying below their status group. This principle is still evident among *sada* women (descendants of the Prophet Mohammed), with the principle closely adhered to in Hadramawt,<sup>[100]</sup> and among families of significant means. While it is not uncommon for *sada* men to marry outside their status group, it remains relatively uncommon for women to do so. This means that in many *sada* families,<sup>[101]</sup> and also among wealthier families, some women remain single. For example, in the town of Zabid in Yemen's Tehama region, it is not uncommon in wealthier families that the sister of the head of the household remains unmarried, and a couple of his daughters, often the eldest two. Such practices sometimes relate to keeping land in the family, in addition to the need to retain certain types of female labor for large families to function properly. Additionally, there are women who prefer, or who do not object, to such familial arrangements.<sup>[102]</sup>

Tourist marriage is a phenomenon that emerged in Yemen in recent decades, understood as a "legal union between a Yemeni woman and a man from an Arabian Gulf country which was intended by the groom to be of a limited duration – a fact not clearly communicated to the parents, bride or Yemeni officials. Such marriages often occur during the summer months when there are significant tourists from Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) countries visiting Yemen."<sup>[103]</sup> The practice has been fueled by poverty as poor families see such a marriage as attractive for their young, uneducated daughters, with their poverty posing a challenge for them to scrutinize the intentions of a foreign prospective groom.<sup>[104]</sup> Unfortunately for these young brides the marriages are very short in duration and many

98) A study in 2004 in Sana'a found that the total incidence of consanguinity was 45 percent with first-cousin marriages constituting 72 percent of the total consanguineous marriages and 32 percent of all marriages. Gunaid, Abdullah Ahmed, et al (2004).

99) Mahr costs tend to be lower and such marriages keep inherited property and assets in the family. Gerholm, Thomas (1985). "Aspects of Inheritance and Marriage Payments in North Yemen." *Property, Social Structure and Law in the Modern Middle East*. State University of New York Press, p. 129-151.

100) Colburn, Marta (2014.a). "Pilot Study: Tourist Marriage in Yemen." International Organization for Migration. p. 54.

101) Vom Bruck, Gabriele (1999). "The Zaydi Sadah of the Yemen: The Temporalities of Religious Tradition." *Oriente Moderno*, Nuova serie, Anno 18 (79), No. 2.

102) Meneley, Anne (1996). *Tournaments of Value: Sociability and Hierarchy in a Yemeni Town*. University of Toronto Press. p 73-74.

103) Tourist marriage is prime facie categorized as human trafficking, due to deception on the part of the groom and the marriage broker about the "temporary" nature of the marriage for the sole purpose of sexual exploitation. Colburn, Marta (2014.a). "Pilot Study: Tourist Marriage in Yemen." International Organization for Migration. p. vii.

104) A 2005 study by a professor at Ibb University found that 35 percent of such brides were aged 15-19 and 38 percent aged 20-24, with 92.5 percent from urban areas and 7.5 percent from rural communities. *Ibid.* p. 26.



are left in limbo with no divorce papers, sometimes pregnant, and with no resources to secure a divorce or raise their children. While the Yemeni government made some progress in addressing the issue of tourist marriage,<sup>[105]</sup> with the onset of the current conflict in 2015 it is unclear how this phenomenon has been affected, particularly in areas under the control of the internationally recognized government where GCC troops have had a presence.

Yemen is traditionally a highly stratified society, with youth, women and marginalized groups facing various forms of exclusion.<sup>[106]</sup> IDP women and women from marginalized groups, such as *muwalladeen* and *muhammasheen*, struggle with multiple layers of exclusion and discrimination. The discrimination younger women face based on their gender is exacerbated by their age,<sup>[107]</sup> thus silencing their voices in broader society and often within their own families. Gender inequalities are often reinforced and interwoven with social hierarchies. As one author writing about Zabid notes: “Styles of female deference to men (control of body and emotion, veiling and avoidance behavior, which are thought to demonstrate Muslim piety) ensure the subordination of women to men at the same time they legitimize the superiority of elite women over their servants.”<sup>[108]</sup> The exclusion of young men begins easing up when they start contributing to family finances, marry and take on the responsibilities of adulthood. The phenomenon of women contributing to household finances is an increasingly common development in urban areas in recent decades and has meant that women’s ideas, needs and views are more likely to be included in family decision making.<sup>[109]</sup>

## Changes in the Current Crisis

The conflict has had a deleterious impact on many aspects of life for girls and young women in puberty and adolescence. This has included the massive displacement of millions of Yemenis since 2015, with about half of IDPs being female, including 27 percent who are below the age of 18.<sup>[110]</sup> Overall, UNOCHA assessments indicate that 21 percent of female heads of IDP households are under the age of 18.<sup>[111]</sup> This situation has placed a heavy burden on such young women, many of whom lack national identification (ID) cards, as well as work experience and education, thus increasing their vulnerability to GBV and exploitation.

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105) For details on government action see: Colburn, Marta (2014.a). “Pilot Study: Tourist Marriage in Yemen.” International Organization for Migration. p. vii.

106) Colburn, Marta (2020). “USAID/Yemen Gender Analysis.” Banyan Global. p. 29.

107) *Jahl*, meaning ignorance, is a cultural belief which contributes to the exclusion of the ideas and opinions of young men and women who are perceived as *jahl*, or irrational, and therefore acceptably ignored.

108) Meneley, Anne (2000). “Living Hierarchy in Yemen.” *Anthropologica*, Vol. 42, No. 1, p. 61.

109) De Regt, Marina (2007). *Pioneer or Pawns? Women Health Workers and the Politics of Development in Yemen*. Syracuse University Press. p. 179.

110) UNOCHA (2019). “Yemen: Humanitarian Needs Overview.” p. 17.

111) *Ibid.* p. 18.

### *Increasing Risks of GBV*

With the crisis and increasing economic vulnerability, family members, including girls and young women, are being forced to contribute financially to survival. For many girls and young women in this age category options are extremely limited and primarily in the informal sector. Begging and reliance on the charity of others have become a norm for many women and children in Yemen. However, with the increasing challenge of COVID-19, reduction in remittance incomes, lack of consistent civil servant salaries and humanitarian funding challenges, there is less household income and assistance to be shared among family, neighbors, fellow tribesmen and with strangers. Begging and informal activities such as selling gum, food items, or small products on the street put children and women at risk of GBV. A 2019 study found that “displaced women, poor women, female beggars and *muhammasheen* women were the most vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Male and female child workers and children from poor families also were identified as especially vulnerable to sexual harassment.”<sup>[112]</sup>

One impact of the conflict on girls and young women in puberty and adolescence is consistent reports that girl child marriage has increased significantly. In IDP camps and among conflict-affected communities, desperate parents have viewed child marriage as a way to protect girls from sexual harassment and abuse. According to UNOCHA’s Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) 2019, “72.2 percent of respondents indicated awareness of child marriage and that child marriage rates were rising. Between 2017 and 2018, child marriage rates increased threefold for girls under age 18.”<sup>[113]</sup> This negative coping strategy is driven by economic desperation, the absence of a legal minimum marriage age and a patriarchal culture which allows fathers or male guardians to force children into abusive situations with life altering consequences.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen has documented a wide range of GBV incidents against girls and boys (although ages of the survivors are not generally provided in the report).<sup>[114]</sup> The types of abuses against girls cited in the September 2020 report include routine humiliation, indoctrination and torture, including rape and threats of rape by Security Belt Forces, the 35<sup>th</sup> Armored Brigade and Ansar Allah forces. The section of the report on gender-based violence includes extensive details on credible reports of GBV against girls, and women, perpetuated by Houthi security personnel under the guise of fighting “immorality” and prostitution, including the detention of “an estimated 279 women and girls, some as young as 14 years old according to witnesses, in five former residential buildings in and around Sana’a, which had been converted into secret detention facilities.”<sup>[115]</sup>

112) Al-Ammar, Fawziah; Patchett, Hannah; Shamsan, Shams (2019). “A Gendered Crisis: Understanding the Experiences of Yemen’s War.” Sana’a Center for Strategic Studies. p. 58.

113) UNOCHA (2019). “Yemen: Humanitarian Needs Overview.” p. 17.

114) OHCHR’s Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen (2020). p. 53-62.

115) Ibid. p. 56.



## ***Education and Social Media***

Like their younger counterparts, girls aged 10-18 face a range of factors that have negatively impacted their access to education.<sup>[116]</sup> The conflict has created new factors and exacerbated existing gender-specific issues, including child marriage; preference for educating boys; more limited transport options for girls; higher GBV risks in schools; and diminishing space for girls' education in areas controlled by extremists and conservatives.<sup>[117]</sup> Additional factors include: higher cost and more strict enforcement of girls' uniforms than for boys; new chores for girls who must take over household tasks for working mothers; and higher levels of safety and security concern among families for girls attending school, particularly in conflict-affected communities and in rural areas where distances to school are much longer.<sup>[118]</sup> Despite such issues, there is the distinct perception that girls are generally more highly motivated and disciplined in their studies than boys.<sup>[119]</sup> A positive development that has emerged in some areas of the country is a growing recognition that girls' education can translate into better paying jobs.

With the crisis, initiatives addressing the needs of girls and young women are increasingly rare. However, many are generating their own opportunities as entrepreneurs, artists, creatives, cultural practitioners and civil society activists who are seeking to have a positive impact in their homes and communities. Such efforts among this age group include volunteering in humanitarian response efforts and utilizing social media channels to network and work with others.

While there is a significant gender gap in internet access, internet penetration overall has risen significantly since 2012, from 14.9 percent to 26.5 percent.<sup>[120]</sup> Meanwhile, in social media usage, the gender gap is slowly shrinking: in September 2020, 15.1 percent of Facebook users in Yemen were female, up from 13.7 percent in September 2018. Over the same period, the percentage of Instagram users who were female rose from 26.2 percent to 27.7 percent.<sup>[121]</sup> WhatsApp is also a common social media channel for women, including among older women. The lack of female-only internet cafes and family concerns about mixed gender interactions online contribute to the lower internet penetration rate among women.<sup>[122]</sup> However, young women are finding ways to navigate such challenges through closed Facebook groups, negotiating with their families about how to safely use such communication channels and by having second SIM chips that are swapped out before families scrutinize their mobile devices. Such practices are indicators of girls' and

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116) See: Colburn, Marta (2020). "USAID/Yemen Gender Analysis." Banyan Global. p. 18.

117) Colburn, Marta (2020). "USAID/Yemen Gender Analysis." Banyan Global. p. 18.

118) Al-Ammar, Fawziah; Patchett, Hannah; Shamsan, Shams (2019), "A Gendered Crisis: Understanding the Experiences of Yemen's War," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, December 15, 2019, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/main-publications/8480> p. 45-48.

119) Ibid. p. 46.

120) Internet penetration increased from 14.9 percent in 2012 to 26.5 percent in 2020 ([www.internetworldstats.com/me/ye.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/me/ye.htm)).

121) In June 2020 there were 540,000 Instagram users in Yemen (the largest gender gap occurring with users aged 25 to 34), 2,507,700 Messenger users and 2,995,900 Facebook users. Napoleon Cat. <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-yemen/2020/09>

122) Colburn, Marta (2020). "USAID/Yemen Gender Analysis." Banyan Global. p. 24.

young women's commitment to express their needs and ideas and work with others to find creative solutions to challenges Yemenis face in the current crisis. Unfortunately, the internet, social media and connectivity are becoming casualties of the conflict, which contributes to the isolation of many Yemenis, including young women.<sup>[123]</sup>

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123) Casey Coombs, "In Yemen, the Internet is a Key Front in the Conflict," .coda, March 10, 2020, <https://www.codastory.com/authoritarian-tech/yemen-internet-conflict/>.



*Women dry clothes after handwashing in the spring in Matlas, Raymah (formerly Sana'a governorate), 1988 // Photo credit: Marta Colburn*

## IV. Youth (19-29): Motherhood & Work

The Yemeni population is very young, with nearly 71 percent of the population under the age of 30, including a substantial youth cohort (age 19-29) of 21.75 percent. This demographic reality presents significant challenges to education and healthcare systems, as well as the labor market,<sup>[124]</sup> requiring massive job creation in order to avoid widespread unemployment. Additionally, the demographic age distribution in Yemen means there is a high dependency ratio in the country of 0.9,<sup>[125]</sup> indicating that for every child or elderly person there is on average less than one person of core working age.<sup>[126]</sup>

Events in a young woman's life in this age category are dependent on a variety of circumstances.<sup>[127]</sup> For some, this period is about acquiring education and establishing a career, while for others it is about marriage and building a family. Family dynamics are an influential factor shaping the path of young women at this age. It is often said in Yemen that if you meet a strong woman, you are seeing the daughter of a supportive and empowering father. Such fathers may actively encourage girls' education and professional achievements, often with the support of mothers. In some families the supportiveness, or lack thereof, from brothers or uncles can also be a deciding factor, as well as the ambition and tenacity of the young woman herself. In recent decades young women have been exposed to an increasing number of female Yemeni role models who have been highly successful. Such women are often mentors to younger women, thus fostering a younger generation of women leaders and professionals.

Data from official statistics note that, given the opportunity, female students outperform male students in the *tawjihi* (secondary education exit exam), although subsequently a small percentage pursue higher education, compared to their male counterparts. In 2017, fewer than 8 percent of women who passed the *tawjihi* went on to enroll in university. Since the onset of the war, there is scant data for university enrollment, however experts assume participation levels for both sexes have sharply decreased to around 15 percent

### Yemeni Proverbs:

*Al-banat menakesat al-'amaem*  
(Girls bring the turbans down, i.e. bring shame).

*Al-bayt al-marrah'* (The woman is the home).

*Min habah Allah jabarah bil 'ayyal*  
(He who is loved by God is rewarded with children).

*Rabha qabl ma tarkab* (Discipline it [female horse] before you ride).

*Shallu 'uqul al-nisa hinn bi-ghayr dira'*  
(May women's brains be taken away from them, since they do not comprehend [anything]).

124) The ILO estimates that in order "to maintain an employment-to-population ratio of 75 percent, 150,000 new jobs need to be created annually." Al-Awlaqi, Wadhah; Zaid, Saleh; Mohsen, Yousef (2019). "Yemen's Expatriate Workforce Under Threat: The Essential Role of Remittances in Mitigating Economic Collapse." Rethinking Yemen's Economy. Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, DeepRoot Consulting and CARPO, May 31, 2019, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/main-publications/7471>

125) Defined as the number of dependents (children 0 to 14 years old and 65 years old and over) relative to the size of the core working age population (15-64 years old).

126) "National Labour Force Survey 2013-14," ILO & CSO, 2015, [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms\\_419016.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_419016.pdf) p. 15.

127) Sharaf, Mohammad. "For Yemeni Women, the Path to Universities Gets Tougher." Al-Fanar Media, August 14, 2019, <https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2019/08/for-yemeni-women-the-path-to-universities-gets-tougher/>



for men and no more than 7 percent for women.<sup>[128]</sup> In Marib governorate's new Saba Regional University, female students comprise approximately 19 percent of the student body. Of these, 28 percent are native Maribis from various districts, and the remainder are from among female IDP students residing in the area, reflecting the high number of displaced Yemenis in the governorate.<sup>[129]</sup>

### ***Motherhood and Birthing Practices***

Fertility rates in Yemen are high with a Total Fertility Rate (TFR<sup>[130]</sup>) in 2013 of 4.4, with rates among urban women much lower at 3.2 and among rural women 5.1, although they have significantly dropped from 7.7 TFR for women aged 15-49 (urban 5.6 and rural 8.2) in the first DHS in 1991-92. In 2014 the global TFR was 2.5.<sup>[131]</sup> In 2013, the Yemeni TFR ranged from a low of 2.9 children per woman in Aden governorate to a high of 6.2 in Dhamar governorate. Education and wealth are closely linked to a woman's fertility, with TFR decreasing uniformly as education increases, from 5.3 for women with no formal education to 2.2 for women who have higher education. The TFR also falls with increases in wealth, ranging from 6.1 children per woman in the lowest wealth quintile to 2.9 in the highest wealth quintile.<sup>[132]</sup> In 2013, the maternal mortality rate in Yemen (385 out of 100,000 live births) was high relative to the global average (210 maternal deaths per

#### ***Amat Al-Salam***

Amat Al-Salam is 29 years old and lives in the historic city of Zabid, the capital of Yemen in the 13th-15th century and home to one of the oldest universities in the world. Despite this cultural heritage, Amat does not know how to read or write but makes a good living hand-painting the bands of intricate colored Islamic calligraphic, geometric and organic designs on the inside of the domed thatched homes.\* Amat was taught this highly valued, and increasingly rare, profession by her mother, who was taught by her mother, and so forth for generations. Married to a cousin at the age of 17, Amat has three children, who she struggles to protect from the rages of her husband's temper. Living in a compound with her aunt and uncle, the parents of her husband, she silently suffers through the regular beatings and abuse by her husband for the sake of her children. Amat works hard in the home cooking and clearing, as well as outside earning money house painting. Despite the shame of it, her husband takes all her earnings, spending it on qat and who knows what else, and barely covering their household needs. She is teaching her daughters her profession and prays they will marry outside the family to have more options than she has had. Her biggest fear is that her husband will soon marry off her oldest daughter who is now 11 years old.

*\* In Al-Jawf, women are responsible for brightly colored painting in the interiors of homes, as well as decorative bands on the outside. This practice is also found in areas of Saudi Arabia – Asir, Jizan, and Najran – formerly parts of Yemen.*

128) Ibid.

129) Al-Oqabi, Ali; Al-Sakani, Ali. "Breaking stereotypes, women from Marib are attending university in record numbers." Al-Masdar Online, March 6, 2020, <https://al-masdaronline.net/national/430>

130) Defined as the "the average number of children a woman would have assuming that current age-specific birth rates remain constant throughout her childbearing years." In 2015, the global TFR was 2.5 and in the MENA it was 2.8. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=ZQ>.

131) Suzuki, Emi (2014). "Between 1960 and 2012, the world average fertility rate halved to 2.5 births per woman." World Bank Blogs.

132) DHS 2013. p. 42.



100,000 live births),<sup>[133]</sup> as was maternal morbidity. Furthermore, only 45 percent of births were attended by skilled health personnel, ranging from 13 percent of births in Raymah to 84 percent of births in Aden.<sup>[134]</sup>

Becoming a mother is an important life event which is recognized and honored in Yemen. Research in Aden, Hudaydah, Hadramawt, Lahj and Taiz in 2013 on women's perceptions of their own authority found that women at home in traditional childbirth settings felt more empowered than in modern medical settings.<sup>[135]</sup> This finding has deep implications for maternal and infant morbidity and mortality rates, a major challenge in Yemen, and is essential to understanding why many Yemeni women are reluctant to change practices where they are treated as special and valued by their husbands, family, community and society. One 23-year-old interviewee in the research said about the postpartum period, "This is the only time I feel I am an important person, cared for and well-looked after."<sup>[136]</sup> Such perceptions may also contribute to high fertility rates, and consequently to infant mortality and morbidity, and are a clear challenge in the field of obstetrics in Yemen.

While customs vary, traditionally during the 40 days after childbirth restrictions for new mothers may include exemptions from: hard labor, particularly in an extended family setting; taking the baby in public;<sup>[137]</sup> fasting or prayer;<sup>[138]</sup> or sexual intercourse with her husband. During this period new mothers are also fed special foods and provided new clothing and gifts of money and jewelry by their husbands or other family members. Postpartum foods are usually rich in protein, animal fat and sugar. For example, in Zabid, the day after childbirth a woman is served a special breakfast of bread, *samn* (clarified butter), *karawi* (a soup made of goat or sheep feet), *hanid* (roasted meat) and *ra'ib laban* (slightly soured milk).<sup>[139]</sup> New mothers in most areas of Yemen will also receive guests during the 40 days after childbirth, often in the late afternoon, and if resources allow, such gatherings are celebrated as a party.<sup>[140]</sup> In many homes, at the conclusion of the 40-day seclusion period a childbirth celebration may be held, where the new mother will wear special clothing, flowers and jewelry designed to ward off the evil eye, and she will sit on a dais, with women taking turns sitting next to her.<sup>[141]</sup>

133) The global maternal mortality rate in 2013 was 210 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, the World Bank and the United Nations Population Division (2014). "Trends in Maternal Mortality: 1990 to 2013."

134) DHS 2013. p. 91.

135) The three themes that emerged from interviews with 220 from urban and rural areas were: i) women felt they were at the center and that they were able to follow through on their own wants; ii) they gained a sense of belonging and support from other women and the broader community; iii) and an opportunity to feel authority over their husbands. Kempe, Annica; et al (2013). "Yemeni Women's Perceptions of Own Authority During Childbirth: What Does it Have to do With Achieving the Millennium Development Goals?" *Midwifery*, Vol. 29, Issue 10, p. 1182-89.

136) *Ibid.* p. 1184.

137) For fear of exposing the child to the evil eye or illnesses.

138) In Amran, new mothers do not pray during the 40-day period. Dorsky, Susan (1986). *Women of Amran*. University of Utah Press. p. 158.

139) Al-Salimi, Abdulkarim Ahmad; Schonig, Hanne (2006). "Birth Customs in Zabid (Yemen)." *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*. Nuova Serie, Vol. 1. p. 174.

140) In Amran, a new mother will have at least two parties, one at her father or brother's expense one month after the birth and a second one paid for by her husband on the final day of her confinement. Dorsky, Susan (1986). *Women of Amran*. University of Utah Press. p. 163.

141) Pandya, Sophie (2009). "Religious Change Among Yemeni Women: The New Popularity of 'Amr Khaled." p. 60.

### ***Young Professional Women in the Labor Force***

As mentioned earlier in this section, while many women marry during this phase of their lives, in urban areas there is a small but growing number of young educated professional women taking on leadership roles in international organizations, the private sector, the arts and media, government and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Members of this growing cadre often have advanced degrees and strong language skills in English. Such highly motivated young women are rising in responsibility in organizations and growing their own businesses to challenge gender norms in the workplace and the home. Many of these successful women have relatively high salaries and have successfully negotiated with families to pursue their career and educational goals, which often requires international travel and study abroad without *maharim*.

These young professional women are generally social media savvy, often have disposable income and some regularly gather in the afternoons with female professional colleagues and friends to socialize, chew *qat* and smoke *shisha* (small water pipe filled with molasses-based, often fruit flavored, tobacco).<sup>[142]</sup> Despite strong traditional norms which held that unmarried women should not chew *qat*, in recent decades through such *jalasat* (literally, sitting down sessions) young women are increasingly signaling “their financial independence (from their families), their outlook on life, stressing the values such as freedom (for women) and modernity.”<sup>[143]</sup>

In the ILO 2013-2014 Labor Force Survey the gender gap in employment was significant. The survey essentially defined employment as work done in exchange for pay, meaning “own-use producers” – such as agricultural workers who produced goods mostly or totally for themselves and their families – were not accounted for in the statistics. For those with a bachelor’s degree, the unemployment rate was 33.1 percent for women, versus 12.6 percent for their male counterparts.<sup>[144]</sup> The unemployment rate for women with only a secondary or equivalent education was considerably higher at 52 percent, versus that of their male counterparts at only 15.7 percent. Interestingly, more education did not necessarily translate into higher employment rates for women, with illiterate women having a significantly lower unemployment rate at 13.6 percent.

While the vast majority of employment in Yemen has long been in the informal sector, since the revolutions in the North and the South in the 1960s there has been an increasing role for women in the formal labor market. The percentage of women employed in the civil service has steadily increased, although the pre-conflict gender gap in the sector was significant (with only 17.8 percent female)<sup>[145]</sup>. While the young professional women described in the previous paragraphs are a growing phenomenon, the vast majority of

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142) Van Oorschot, Irene). “Qat, Cosmopolitanism, and Modernity in Sana’a, Yemen.” *Arabian Humanities* [Online], January 2013, [http:// journals.openedition.org/cy/2072](http://journals.openedition.org/cy/2072)

143) Ibid.

144) ILO and CSO (2014). “National Labour Force Survey 2013-14.” p. 99.

145) Nasser, Salma (2018). “Boxed Women in Public Administration - Between Glass Ceilings and Glass Walls: A Study of Women ‘s Participation in Public Administration in the Arab States.” *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, Bridgewater State University, Vol. 19, Issue 3, p. 160. <https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=2031&context=jiws>.

young women working in the formal sector are not in management positions, but rather employed as teachers or in healthcare, and of all employed women, 83 percent work hold informal jobs, most commonly as wage laborers in agriculture.<sup>[146]</sup>

## *Trends in Religion and Politics*

Yemenis are generally devout Muslims, whether from the Zaidi,<sup>[147]</sup> Shafei<sup>[148]</sup> or Ismaili<sup>[149]</sup> traditions. For many women this means that life is punctuated by five daily prayers – dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset and night – which are sometimes clustered due to studies, work or other obligations. Religious holidays and observances are spread throughout the lunar calendar year<sup>[150]</sup> and the most important are Ramadan (the month of fasting), followed by *'Eid Al-Fitr* (Feast of Breaking the Fast) and *'Eid al-Adha* (Feast of Sacrifice), which follows the end of the *Hajj* season (annual pilgrimage to Mecca). Ramadan is a very special time of the year when Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, smoking and sexual intercourse from dawn until sunset. During this month women have an increased burden of cooking special foods to break the fast at sunset and prepare for the fast before dawn. It is also a time of visiting and receiving in their home relatives and friends during the evening hours. In preparation for the two feasts, women shop for new clothing for themselves and the family and gather ingredients for special dishes which are part of such holiday traditions. While women are exempted from fasting while pregnant and lactating, it is a trend in Yemen, and many parts of the Muslim world, for women to fast despite the exemption. A study from 2002 in four hospitals in Sana'a city found that more than 90 percent of pregnant women fasted for more than 20 days during the month of Ramadan.<sup>[151]</sup>

While religion remains an important dimension in the lives of young women, a study from 2009 found that many young professional educated women, particularly in urban areas, were not participating in the same religious traditions as their mothers.<sup>[152]</sup> Such

146) ILO and CSO (2014). "National Labour Force Survey 2013-14." p. 30.

147) Approximately 43 percent of Yemenis follow the Zaidi branch of Shi'a Islam which was established in Yemen by Al-Hadi ila Al-Haqq Yahya ibn Husayn in 896 AD, who was invited to Yemen as an arbitrator by local tribes. Al-Hadi's 14 years of leadership in Yemen inaugurated the nearly 1,000-year Zaidi Imamate which ruled various parts of Yemen until the 1962 Revolution. The Zaidi branch of Islam is a sect almost exclusively present in Yemen. Burrowes (1995). *Historical Dictionary of Yemen*. p. 430-1.

148) Approximately 55 percent of Yemenis follow this madhhab, which is one of the four Sunni (Orthodox) schools of Islamic jurisprudence. The Shafei *madhhab* first appeared in the central highlands of Yemen in 912-13 and by the end of the Rasulid dynasty in Yemen (1229-1454 AD) it was permanently established as the dominant tradition in southern regions of the country. Ibid. p. 333.

149) Branch of Shi'a Islam with a long history in Yemen. It is estimated that prior to the conflict Ismailis comprised approximately 1 percent of Yemenis, in both Al-Makarem and Dawoudi Bohra communities, including an estimated 50,000 in Haraz Sub-District, Manakha District, southwest of Sana'a City and a further 18,000 in Ibb. Al-Mahfali, Mohammed; Homaïd, Eman (2019). "Minority Rights in Yemen: Reality and Challenges." INSAF Center for Defending Freedoms & Minorities Publications No. 01.

150) The lunar year is approximately 11 days shorter than the solar year, thus Islamic holidays cycle through the year over the course of about 33 years.

151) Makki, Abdulwahab M. (2002). "Impact of Ramadan fasting on birth weight in four hospitals in Sana'a city, Yemen." *Saudi Medical Journal*. Vol. 23. p. 1419-20.

152) Pandya, Sophia (2009). "Religious Change Among Yemeni Women: The New Popularity of 'Amr Khaled." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Duke University Press. p. 53.

young women, both Sunni and Shi'a, reject what they perceive as rigid Salafi traditions, as well as more popular forms of Sufism<sup>[153]</sup> and folk Islam practices, which they perceive as backwards and incorrect.<sup>[154]</sup> Research on women's political engagement found that middle class young women, often in their late teens or early 20s, form a significant group within the Al-Islah<sup>[155]</sup> political party.<sup>[156]</sup> Prior to the conflict, many of these deeply religious young women were engaged in women's *nadawat*,<sup>[157]</sup> organized by the political party or the Al-Islah Charitable Society as a venue to generate charitable contributions and involvement, as well as political activism.<sup>[158]</sup>

Yemeni women's political participation — and leadership — dates back to ancient<sup>[159]</sup> and historic<sup>[160]</sup> times. Yemeni women were the first in the Arabian peninsula to gain suffrage — in 1967 in the PDRY and 1970 in the YAR — and in modern times they have served as government ministers and ambassadors, and, with Tawakul Karman, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate.<sup>[161]</sup> Many observers of Yemeni politics have described the political uprising in 2011, transition phase and NDC era as a 'golden era' for women's participation in the public sphere. In the NDC women achieved an impressive 27 percent representation<sup>[162]</sup> with women heading three of the nine committees and making up 23.5 percent of the constitutional drafting committee. More importantly, the content of the NDC outcomes and the draft constitution included a 30 percent quota for women, addressed significant gender inequalities and promoted inclusion and justice for all Yemenis.

An example of young politically engaged women prior to the conflict was that of Al-Watan (Homeland), a registered political party established by youth activists who had been involved in the 2011 movement, which had 30 percent female membership.<sup>[163]</sup> However, such female activism in politics was negatively impacted once entrenched elites hijacked the process of political transformation and the country sank into a devastating civil war and humanitarian crisis, undermining civil society and indigenous democratic traditions.

153) Mystical Islamic belief and practices (adjective/noun, sufi). Followers of a particular Sufi tariqa (literally path, referring to a school or order of Sufism) are seeking to find the truth of divine love and knowledge through direct personal experience of God. Yemen has a long Sufi tradition which has been intimately associated with the veneration of local saints (or more accurately in Sufi terminology "friends of God"), reflected in the well-cared for white domed shrines of such saints that are found in many parts of the country. Hadramawt, the Tihama plateau, Taiz and Ibb areas inter alia all have continuing Sufi traditions.

154) Pandya, Sophia (2009). "Religious Change Among Yemeni Women: The New Popularity of 'Amr Khaled." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Duke University Press. p. 53.

155) Formally, Tajammac al-Yamani li-i Islah (Yemeni Reform Group).

156) Clark, Janine A. (2004). *Islam, Charity and Activism: Middle-Class Networks and Social Welfare in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen*. Indiana University Press. p. 135.

157) Informal weekly or bi-weekly gatherings convened in private homes for the purposes of Quranic study or religious discussion. *Ibid*, p. 116.

158) *Ibid*.

159) The Queen of Sheba is proudly claimed by Yemenis as a ruler in the Sabaean Kingdom that flourished in Yemen from the 10th century BC to the 6th century AD and built the Marib dam.

160) One such historical figure was Queen 'Arwa Bint Ahmad Al-Sulayhiyya (1048–1138), who at the age of 19 began her long-reign as ruler of Yemen. Queen 'Arwa and her mother-in-law Queen Asma bint Shihab were the only female monarchs in the Muslim Arab world to have had the khutba (Friday prayer sermon) proclaimed in their name.

161) Colburn, Marta (2020). "USAID/Yemen Gender Analysis." *Banyan Global*. p. 31.

162) 152 female delegates out of 565. Shakir, Wameedh (2015). "Women and Peacemaking in Yemen: Mapping the realities." *Crisis Management Initiative*. p. 13.

163) Alwazir, Atiaf Z. (2016). "Yemen's Enduring Resistance: Youth Between Politics and Informal Mobilization." *Mediterranean Politics*, 21:1, p. 170-191.

## Changes in the Current Crisis

During the current crisis young women, and many others in Yemen, struggle with mental health issues related to a variety of challenges including, among other things: more limited mobility due to gender norms, conflict, insecurity and now COVID-19; increased household tension and conflict and rising levels of domestic violence; loss of educational and employment opportunities; stresses, shocks, and traumatic events including the loss of siblings, parents, children, husbands and other family members to conflict or disease; financial pressures in the home, which are particularly acute among female-headed households; displacement due to fighting, shelling, or airstrikes; rising levels of street harassment of young women and various manifestations of GBV; a lack of services and insecurity for their children; and loss of community due to displacement and increasing social divisions. For some women and men psychological stress and the sense of fear have been linked to physical illness and diseases.<sup>[164]</sup>

A key challenge in addressing psycho-social needs is the limited cadre of mental health professionals in Yemen. In 2011, there were only 44 psychiatrists in the country, with four specialized hospitals (Aden, Sana'a, Hudaydah and Taiz).<sup>[165]</sup> One local NGO-operated mental health hotline noted that suicidal callers had nearly doubled in 2019, with 92 percent of callers being women.<sup>[166]</sup>

As noted in the introduction, the situation of women in prisons was dire before the conflict, but with increasing budgetary challenges for the government and local authorities support for prisons has dramatically diminished. A recent report by a local human rights organization found that minimum standards for the treatment of prisoners were not being met, and that torture and abuse were rampant in both official prisons and informal detention facilities in both Houthi and Yemeni government controlled areas.<sup>[167]</sup> Charitable efforts by some businessmen and a few projects have provided humanitarian relief in prisons but needs are overwhelming with thousands of prisoners in the 21 formal prisons in the country. The UN Group of Eminent Experts 2020 report contains information on credible human rights violations in formal and informal prisons with reports of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, torture and sexual abuse in prisons, including to female prisoners. The UN report, "Conflict-related Sexual Violence Report of the Secretary-General," issued in June 2020 documented the arrest, detention and ill-treatment by the Houthis of 11 women, three of whom were repeatedly raped in custody, with *Zaynabiyat* implicated in abetting the rape of women.<sup>[168]</sup>

164) Haneef, Christine (2019). "CARE Gender and Conflict Analysis Taiz and Aden Governorates." CARE International. p. 25.

165) Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies; Columbia Law School Human Rights Clinic; Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health (2017). "The Impact of the War on Mental Health in Yemen: A Neglected Crisis." <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/analysis/5119>

166) Of the 780 suicidal callers to a local NGO hotline in 2019, 150 stated they called because of forced marriage and another 160 because of domestic violence. 100 had tried to kill themselves on more than three occasions. Colburn, Marta (2020). "USAID/Yemen Gender Analysis." Banyan Global. p. 20.

167) Mwatana for Human Rights (2020). "In the Darkness: Abusive Detention, Disappearance and Torture in Yemen's Unofficial Prisons." p. 106

168) United Nations Security Council (2020). "Conflict-related sexual violence Report of the Secretary-General."



During the crisis, economic circumstances have forced women into manual labor, domestic labor and typically male-dominated professions such as retail and waitressing.<sup>[169]</sup> While women-owned businesses were only 4 percent of the private sector, for various reasons they were harder hit than male-owned businesses at the start of the conflict.<sup>[170]</sup> However, as the conflict evolved female entrepreneurs have created their own opportunities by initiatives such as opening bakeries, becoming street food vendors, and connecting to Yemenis studying in Malaysia, China and Japan to import consumer goods.<sup>[171]</sup>

Women are also entering Yemen's burgeoning solar energy industry. One particular success story related to female IDPs who researched, sourced materials for and began producing fuel efficient and solar operated cooking devices, becoming entrepreneurs who now distribute them widely in the country.<sup>[172]</sup> Other women are learning to install and repair solar panels, where their gender can serve as an advantage to access homes during the day when men are absent and women are at home. In several areas it has been documented that women and youth are operating solar microgrids, with international donor support, to provide their communities with clean and affordable energy.<sup>[173]</sup> Prior to the conflict only two-thirds of Yemenis (66 percent) had access to electricity. The country's largest power plant in Marib went offline in March 2015, and with shortages in diesel (for generators), many in Yemen have turned to solar to address their energy needs. Today, it is estimated that half of the country relies on solar as their main source of lighting<sup>[174]</sup> and solar powered water pumps and water heaters are thriving sub-sectors of the economy.

Similar to the trend before the crisis, when young women contribute financially to their natal or marital home their voice potentially increases within the family. However, in a patriarchal culture where overt power of women may be limited and socially discouraged, women sometimes seek to influence situations indirectly. Employment and empowerment training programs for young women in Yemen often include skills in negotiations and persuasion, which participants highly value as they bolster confidence in expressing their opinions, needs and dreams.

With the crisis, international and local organizations are increasingly supporting Yemenis to earn income through training, microfinance and cash-for-work programs designed to address poverty, combat malnutrition and improve household resilience. Such efforts

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169) Al-Ammar, Fawziah; Patchett, Hannah (2019). "The Repercussions of War on Women in the Yemeni Workforce." Rethinking Yemen's Economy. Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, DeepRoot Consulting and CARPO, p. 1, [http://sanaacenter.org/files/Rethinking\\_Yemens\\_Economy-policy\\_brief\\_13.pdf](http://sanaacenter.org/files/Rethinking_Yemens_Economy-policy_brief_13.pdf)

170) Ibid, p. 5.

171) Personal interview by author with female Yemeni activist, October 2019.

172) Sayers, Mohamed (2020). "Displaced Women in Yemen Become Entrepreneurs: Alternative stoves, special heat-retaining cooking bag help people cope with gas shortage in time of war." The Media Line. <https://www.srnnews.com/the-media-line-displaced-women-in-yemen-become-entrepreneurs/>

173) Mistiaen, Veronique (2020). "The Community Respects Us': How Solar Projects are Empowering Women in Yemen." Positive.News, <https://www.positive.news/environment/sustainable-development/the-women-run-solar-grids-powering-homes-in-yemen/>

174) Al-Akwaa, Ghassan Khaled Ismail (2019). "Measuring electricity access amidst active conflict: Lessons from Yemen." World Bank. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/energy/measuring-electricity-access-amidst-active-conflict-lessons-yemen>

have included women as targeted beneficiaries, although few programs challenge dominant gender norms. Income-earning initiatives often perpetuate traditional gender roles, providing training in skills such as incense-making, hairdressing and sewing for which demand is limited. Some salient exceptions are initiatives that have trained women in mobile phone repair, solar panel installation and maintenance, and support women in the safety and security sector.<sup>[175]</sup> However, efforts to expand employment opportunities face considerable challenges including: inconsistent funding of such initiatives; a dysfunctional economy in which it is difficult to capitalize on temporary windows for income generation; and dwindling household incomes and remittances and deepening poverty which limit capacity for entrepreneurial investments or economic risks.

While for some women, new opportunities that emerged from the crisis have been empowering, for others new roles are an additional burden that has created domestic tension and may have contributed to increased intimate partner violence.<sup>[176]</sup> Childcare options for many working mothers which have primarily relied on other female household members are increasingly stretched thin, as more women are engaged in seeking income. There is evidence that gender roles in childcare and other household chores have not changed significantly, despite the fact that women are working more outside the home. A 2019 study in Taiz and Aden on gender and conflict conducted by CARE International found that the number of hours that men contribute to household chores has increased only slightly since 2015. For example, cooking has risen from .34 to .41 hours daily and childcare has risen from 1.69 hours daily to 1.96. A decrease was reported in men's contribution to house cleaning chores, dropping from .53 hours daily prior to the conflict to .44 hours.<sup>[177]</sup> This means that many women carry a double burden of earning income and continuing with household chores and may contribute to rising tensions between spouses.

The growing perception that women are competing with men for jobs is a further source of tension.<sup>[178]</sup> One segment of the job market in which this is particularly noticeable is employment with international aid agencies or their local affiliates which – with massive private and public sector job losses amid war-driven economic collapse – has been among the few sectors with increased employment opportunities since the war began. Many of these organizations prefer to hire young Yemeni women, particularly for tasks such as monitoring, evaluation, assessments and community mobilization. Organizations have found that pairing women with men for field work facilitates engagement with vulnerable community members, while also providing a protective factor for male team members when traveling between areas. For young men, the conflict has dried up many job opportunities, except for taking up arms with parties to the conflict, and there are fewer opportunities for jobs outside the country, translating into fewer family resources for young men to marry.<sup>[179]</sup> A 2019 study found that violence in the family has been

175) UNFPA (2019). "Meet the Woman Protecting Women in Yemen."

176) Colburn, Marta (2020). "USAID/Yemen Gender Analysis." Banyan Global. p. 22.

177) Haneef, Christina (2019). "CARE Gender and Conflict Analysis Taiz and Aden Governorates." CARE International. p. 15.

178) Colburn, Marta (2020). "USAID/Yemen Gender Analysis." Banyan Global. p. 23

179) Recent research by CARE in Taiz and Aden found that young men are postponing marriage due to rising costs.

impacted by the conflict, including increasing tension between siblings due to resentment among men and boys over their sisters' incomes.<sup>[180]</sup>

Marriage practices have significantly changed since 2015. In addition to widespread reports of increasing rates of child marriage there have also been reports of the forced marriage of widows whose husband were killed in the conflict.<sup>[181]</sup> According to ACLED, by March 2020 there were close to 100,000 combat deaths, many of whom were married with children.<sup>[182]</sup> With the moral obligation<sup>[183]</sup> to support such dependents, reports of forced marriage (often as a second or third wife) have proliferated as a way to protect widows and their children from insecurity and economic vulnerability. While there is no data on the incidence of forced marriage in Yemen in general, in Houthi-controlled areas reports are commonly heard about such a practice, particularly with the wives of war 'martyrs.'<sup>[184]</sup>

### *Women's Role in Conflict and Its Resolution*

Historically Yemen has been known for its religious tolerance,<sup>[185]</sup> with marriages between Zaidi and Shafei not uncommon prior to the conflict. The war, however, has stoked sectarian tension, as have the extremist groups Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Islamic State.<sup>[186]</sup> Throughout the crisis women have not been passive bystanders, and *zaynabiyat*<sup>[187]</sup> are seen to contribute to the sectarian conflict and divisions, while women have enlisted in Popular Resistance forces and joined pro-Hadi, as well as pro-secessionist, militias.<sup>[188]</sup> A 2018 study on women peace builders in Yemen notes, "Changes in the religious environment have had particular effects on women, especially a rise in radical religious rhetoric and greater influence of Islamist actors. In some areas (Taiz and Lahj), this has resulted in severe threats and violence against women activists and restrictions on women's movement."<sup>[189]</sup> In Houthi-controlled areas there has been a trend to impose sex segregation, including recently enforcing such changes in coffee

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Haneef, Christine (2019). "CARE Gender and Conflict Analysis Taiz and Aden Governorates."

180) Al-Ammar, Fawziah; Patchett, Hannah; Shamsan, Shams (2019). "A Gendered Crisis: Understanding the Experiences of Yemen's War." Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies. p. 64.

181) There is anecdotal evidence that forced marriage of widows of men killed while fighting is a serious issue and contributes to the increase in polygamy. On the increase in polygamous marriage see Haneef, Christine (2019). "CARE Gender and Conflict Analysis Taiz and Aden Governorates." CARE International. p. 26.

182) ACLED (2020). Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (2020). "ACLED Resources: War in Yemen."

183) Article 56 of the Yemeni constitution guarantees support to the families of those killed in war.

184) Colburn, Marta (2020). "USAID/Yemen Gender Analysis." Banyan Global. p. 19.

185) A traveler to Yemen in the early 20th century wrote, "The Yemeni is not fanatical. He has his own religious views, but realizes, from the sects into which his own people are divided, that there are at least two sides to every religious question." Bury, G. Wyman (1915/1998). *Arabia Infelix: Or the Turks in Yamen*, Reading, Garnet Publishing.

186) Colburn, Marta (2020). "USAID/Yemen Gender Analysis." Banyan Global. p. 28.

187) Female military enforcers of vice and virtue mobilized by Ansar Allah.

188) Nasser, Afrah (2018). "Yemen's Women Confront War's Marginalization." *Middle East Report* 289 (Winter 2018). *Yemen's Women Confront War's Marginalization - MERIP*.

189) Heinze, Marie-Christine; Stevens, Sophie (2018). "Women as Peacebuilders in Yemen." *Social Development Direct and Yemen Polling Center for UK Foreign Commonwealth Office CSSF*.

shops and restaurants in Sana'a, and imposing modest clothing in public for women.<sup>[190]</sup>

Historically and during the conflict in Yemen, women have played important roles in conflict resolution and social cohesion.<sup>[191]</sup> The positive role of women-led civil society organizations in Yemen has been documented in numerous studies, including a 2019 study by CIVIC. This study highlighted the work of the Abductees Mothers Association, which successfully helped obtain the release of more than 600 civilian detainees, and the Marib Girls Foundation who successfully advocated with key military and security officials to end child recruitment by government forces in their area.<sup>[192]</sup>

The activism of young women in the development and humanitarian response is facilitated by protective tribal traditions. It is a great dishonor for a tribesman to harm the protected, and amends for such an offense can be up to 40 times higher<sup>[193]</sup> than the normal *diya* (blood money) for a man.<sup>[194]</sup> It is considered *'ayb aswad* (black shame) to target women during conflict, or even to target a man who is accompanied by a woman. Thus, women can more easily move in and out of conflict zones without being targeted,<sup>[195]</sup> facilitating women to engage in community-level activities of mediation, and to help the injured and provide humanitarian aid.<sup>[196]</sup> While there are increasing reports of such protective norms being violated, in general such traditions continue to be observed in many parts of the country, particularly in more tribal areas.

190) Agence France-Presse (2020). "Women Harassed and Cafes Closed as Houthis Clamp Down on Freedoms." The National.

191) Colburn, Marta (2020). "USAID/Yemen Gender Analysis." Banyan Global. p. 29.

192) Center for Civilians in Conflict (2019). "We Did Not Know If We Would Die from Bullets or Hunger: Civilian Harm and Local Protection Measures in Yemen." p. 34-35.

193) Interview with expert on Yemen tribes Nadwa Al-Dawsari, September 1, 2020.

194) Diya is indemnity money paid to the victim, or their heirs, by the party that caused bodily injury, an Islamic legal practice observed in many countries as a form of social insurance. In Yemen, the rate of diya is periodically adjusted for inflation and the amount paid depends on the circumstances surrounding the death or injury, and the profile of the victim.

195) Al-Dawsari, Nadwa (2014). "Case Studies on Women and Conflict in Tribal Yemen, Al-Jawf." Yemen Tribal Voices.

196) Awadh, Maha; Shuja'adeen, Nuria (2019). "Women in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding in Yemen." Edited by Sawsan Al-Rafaei. Nahj Consulting, Yemen: UN Women.





*A woman fetches fodder for livestock in Matlas, Raymah (formerly Sana'a governorate), 1988  
Photo credit: Marta Colburn*

## V. Middle Age (30-49): Changing Family Dynamics & Social Capital



As a woman matures in her roles as mother and wife, her situation within the family may improve, depending on many factors. In some cases this may mean that she gains more agency and ability to influence important family decisions, and in other cases a mother may ally with her son(s) in seeking to impact family decisions. Yemenis often note that the mother is the ‘Minister of Interior’ in the home, while the father is the ‘Minister of Foreign Affairs,’ i.e. responsible for family external relations. While this reflects a simplified conceptualization of the partnership of marriage, it ignores the reality that a mother has a significant role in external relations through her family, tribal, neighborhood or professional networks. Reciprocal visits and attendance at important *munasabat* (social gatherings and rites of passage events such

as weddings and births) mediate social hierarchies and contribute to gains and losses of personal and family honor.<sup>[197]</sup> Attending women’s social events also plays a role in selecting spouses for children, bartering exchanges of food and other basic goods, and charitable giving and receiving. Such regular social interactions also provide support for women going through hard times and socializing with other women can build community, resilience and contribute to empowerment and self-confidence in a female-only context.

An anthropological study conducted in Taiz in the late 1980s with mothers aged 25-39 found that child health was clearly impacted by a number of factors including: the mother’s control and management of available resources; networks and social support or lack thereof; and her passive or active attitudes toward life.<sup>[198]</sup> The importance of social support (from husbands, in-laws, relatives, neighbors and friends) “suggests that isolation and alienation can exist even in a traditional village society where social integration is high, and that a mother’s social disconnection can have a negative effect on the well-being of her children.”<sup>[199]</sup> This study demonstrates that women’s social capital is a key asset in many aspects of life, including in promoting her children’s health.

With age, women generally increase their decision-making role in the family. For example, most young men rely on the judgement of their mothers and sisters to select a marriage partner. When it comes to arranged marriages for daughters there is social stigma in being seen as looking for a husband; the cultural norm is to wait for proposals and then choose the best among them. However, such traditions are changing, particularly in urban areas and among professional and educated men and women who have more independence and ability to negotiate in such matters.

### **Yemeni Proverbs:**

*Itiha keber ibnak akheikuh wa itha kobra bentak shul lak assamil* (If your son comes of age be a brother to him [befriend him] and if your daughter comes of age pick up your stick).

*Ibn ibni li, wa ibn binti fla* (My son’s son is mine and my daughter’s son is not).

*Min a’ad umah la tihmuh* (He who still has his mother around, is on the safe side).

*Al-Rijal heroof al-thahab wa al-nisa awadeen al-hatab* (Men are golden letters and women are firewood).

*Maa za’amah min marrah’* (A woman has nothing to do with leadership).

197) Meneley, Anne (1996). *Tournaments of Value: Sociability and Hierarchy in a Yemeni Town*. University of Toronto Press.

198) Myntti, Cynthia (1993). “Social Determinants of Child Health and Yemen.” *Sac. Sci. Med.* Vol. 37, No. 2.

199) *Ibid.* p. 238.

As they age and gain experience in managing household assets, Yemeni women become increasingly involved in deciding how family resources are spent for essentials, purchasing household appliances or land and in decisions such as the marriage of their children.<sup>[200]</sup> Legally and culturally, men are required to provide for the household maintenance of their wives and children. Traditionally, a woman controls spending of any of her own income or inherited assets, including her *mahr*. While overall a woman's control over her husband's earnings is uncommon, the rate at which it does happen increases with age and among urban dwellers, on balance rising from 2.7 percent for wives aged 15-19 to 10.6 percent for wives aged 45-49.<sup>[201]</sup> A woman's control over her own income also increases in frequency with age, from 51.1 percent for wives aged 20-24 to 62.6 percent for women aged 45-49.<sup>[202]</sup> Interestingly, 81 percent of women felt that "no participation in decision-making in household matters" constituted a form of domestic abuse.<sup>[203]</sup>

### Aisha

Divorced and living in her native Aden, Aisha is 45 years old and already a grandmother. Aisha's father was from Hajjah and her mother from Abyan, and they met and married in the former Soviet Union when they were studying on scholarships. As educated professionals they supported their three daughters in pursuing their education and dreams until their untimely death in a car accident when Aisha was 23. While studying at university, Aisha fell in love with a fellow student and her parents supported her to marry. After the passing of her parents, Aisha and her husband took her two younger sisters into their home, and their family soon grew with their first child. Aisha began her career as a teacher and eventually became a school principal. Although her marriage ended in divorce, she and her ex-husband have cordial relations and continue to co-parent their children and interact regularly with their grandchildren. Aisha has good relations with her son, and usually with his wife, who live in an apartment above her own modest home that she struggled to build in Crater. She worries that when she retires she will lose her independence and ability to make her own decisions, so she invests in building a strong relationship with her children and grandchildren.

Yemeni women are often active savers, organizing or joining informal group savings schemes (called a *jam'iyya* or *hakba*), where a group of women will each pay in a certain amount per month and then take turns collecting the joint savings. The amount paid in will depend on the economic situation of the women, as will the number of women involved (rarely with more than 10-15 members), as savers must trust one another to be able to pay in each month. Depending on the amounts, such group savings may be used to purchase a new appliance, cover university tuition fees for children, or contribute toward a larger expense such as buying land or a son's marriage costs. This informal social solidarity practice has declined with the war and economic crisis, as many are now unable to participate.<sup>[204]</sup>

200) Ages 40-44 women have the most control over decisions about their earnings, at 63.5 percent, versus 51 percent of women ages 20-24. DHS 2013, p. 176.

201) Ibid, p. 177.

202) Ibid, p. 176.

203) Ibid, p. 186.

204) Gressmann, Wolfgang (2016). "From the Ground Up: Gender And Conflict Analysis In Yemen." Oxfam. p. 21.

## ***Family, Social Groups and Status***

Within the various social and economic status categories, the situation of women in this age group remains closely tied to their family or social group. Despite the 1960s revolutions in the north and the south of the country which sought to eliminate status inequalities, such inequalities continue to prevail contributing to discrimination and inequities based on gender, ethnicity and status.<sup>[205]</sup>

Traditionally Bedouin (*bedu*) women, who eschew many urban and settled norms, have often been little understood by settled people. As one Yemen scholar writing on Hadramawt notes, “Bedu women do not follow the same standards of modesty as settled women. Heavily adorned, they traveled about freely with their flocks, which was deemed unseemly behavior for women of other groups. It was understood that *bedu* have different standards of behavior for unmarried women.”<sup>[206]</sup> City folks often exhibit contradictory sentiments of idealizing the *bedu* existence while at the same time holding a pejorative attitude toward less ‘civilized’ folks. Yemen has a long history of both settled (*hadhar*) and *bedu* traditions, and while historically the lines between such ways of life were more distinct, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century many *bedu* tribes have adopted more settled ways of life.

Like marriage, divorce is a broader family affair, with social and financial consequences. The most recent national data on divorce is from the DHS 2013, which found that 3.5 percent of ever-married women aged 15-49 were divorced.<sup>[207]</sup> The challenges to secure a divorce and the ensuing complexities for women vary significantly depending on

### ***Remittances as Social Capital in Yemen***

One illustration of the role of social capital in Yemen is the 1970s development efforts fueled by citizen-controlled remittances. The 1973 Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries’ oil embargo led to an expansion of labor markets in GCC countries, and Yemenis constituted a substantial proportion of workers in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries; their wives and mothers at home had considerable sway in how the remittances were spent. Remittances increased incomes and built schools, roads, and water projects. Since the oil boom in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf in the 1970s, remittances have continued to have a substantial economic role in Yemen. Today, remittances and charity from the Yemeni diaspora remains a key support system for many families. Unofficial sources estimate that annual remittances to Yemen could total as much as US\$10 billion. Continuing shocks have been weathered by families through social capital. In mid-2020, remittance income in Yemen dropped significantly with the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic which impacted the ability of the Yemeni diaspora to send money to their loved ones in Yemen. With businesses around the world closing and workers laid-off or furloughed, it is anticipated to lead to a massive decline in remittances Yemenis send home each year. Remittances are an important source of resilience and women, particularly older ones, often have more control over remittances than they do over other sources of income.

205) Colburn, Marta (2002). A Situation Analysis of Gender and Development in Yemen. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Oxfam, Amman Jordan. p. 29.

206) Boxberger, Linda (2002). On the Edge of Empire: Hadramawt, Emigration and the Indian Ocean, 1880s-1930s. State University of New York Press. p. 28-29.

207) DHS 2013, p. 28.

factors including: the reasons for the divorce;<sup>[208]</sup> the wife's socio-economic background and status; relations with her father/guardian and brothers; and the personality and status of her husband.

It has been observed that among tribes in Marib, Al-Jawf and Sa'ada, *'urf* traditions grant women the same right of divorce as men, though this right is most commonly exercised by women from higher status groups such as the *mashayikh* (tribal leaders).<sup>[209]</sup> Divorcees in many parts of the country traditionally faced significant challenges, due to financial concerns, custody issues, inheritance, etc. Among women in rural tribal communities and from lower strata of Yemeni society, divorce and remarriage are quite common.<sup>[210]</sup> Most divorced women return to their father's home, although if they work they may choose to live on their own with their children. One of the most significant challenges in divorce is custody<sup>[211]</sup> and financial responsibility

208) According to the 1992 Personal Status Law, *faskh* (dissolution of marriage) is the legal basis for a woman to terminate her marriage if her husband refuses to repudiate her with admissible grounds including: a defect in the marriage contract or the person; *darar* (damage) due to prolonged absence, non-payment of maintenance, alcohol or drug abuse; and *karahiyya* (deep hatred). Other grounds for divorce include adultery, impotence, disease (like leprosy), or marriage to a second wife without permission. Colburn, Marta (2002). *A Situation Analysis of Gender and Development in Yemen*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Oxfam, Amman Jordan. p. 86.

209) Ibid. p. 87.

210) Al-Dawsari, Nadwa (2014). "Case Studies on Women and Conflict in Tribal Yemen, Al-Jawf." *Yemen Tribal Voices*.

211) "Child custody laws are set out in Articles 141 and 142 of the 1992 Personal Status Law. They recognize that, in cases of divorce or death of the father, the mother is the most deserving party to guardianship of her children until a male child is nine years of age and a female is twelve. Conditions that a woman must fulfil to be awarded guardianship include maturity, sanity, faithfulness, moral and physical ability. If the mother remarries or misbehaves the father or his family may revoke or prevent her from taking custody." Ibid. p. 86.

### ***A Day in the Life of a Rural Yemeni Woman***

A typical day for many rural women who live in an independent household with a husband and children starts with rising very early to pray and cook breakfast for the family, getting the children fed and off to school, then starting household chores such as fetching water, wood or fodder, and contributing to agricultural tasks. Outdoor chores are often accomplished with other women, allowing for socializing and support of one another while working hard. If chores allow, a woman may possibly share a quick cup of tea or *qishr* with her neighbor or friend in the morning and then cook the main meal of the day at lunch and then clean up after lunch. If her husband is chewing *qat* at their home she will also prepare coals for the water pipe, water, drinks and tea following the *qat* session. In the afternoon, she will also finish tasks that she did not complete in the morning. Throughout the day the woman will juggle childcare duties, relying on older girl children to assist in such tasks and, if she is literate, may assist her children in completing their homework in the evening. If life events and workload allow, occasionally, this hardworking woman will join in women's social gatherings. The most common gathering is a *tafrita*, a women's afternoon party where attendees socialize, usually wear their best clothes and jewelry and share savory and sweet snacks, and often chew *qat*, smoke tobacco in a *mada'a* (Yemeni tall brass water pipe) or *shisha* (smaller more modern water pipe favored by younger women with flavored tobacco). In the evening she will prepare dinner for the family, put the children to bed and complete her five daily prayers, if she was unable to do so at the appropriate times. These demanding labor and child-bearing tasks mean that rural women may be worn down by their forties and sometimes referred to as *'ajuza*, a word with connotations of being useless or weak.

for children.<sup>[212]</sup> Many women stay in unhappy or abusive relationships for the sake of their children, indicated by the proverb, “*Lo ma hanaj fi al-walid, ma sabir wa la aghtalib yowm*” (If I didn’t love my child I wouldn’t be patient or keep silent for another day).

While rural women have unrelenting chores and household responsibilities, women in this age category may have help from older daughters or daughters-in-law. In urban areas, middle class or more affluent women in this age group who do not work outside the home will usually have a washing machine, butane gas cooker, piped water and electricity, and may have a maid or domestic help.

According to the DHS 2013, smoking prevalence, while generally low in women, increases with age, peaking at 14.5 percent among women aged 45-49, decreasing to 5.5 percent among women aged 80 and older. The highest levels of tobacco usage among women in 2013 were in Hudaydah (16.4 percent) and Al-Mahwit (15.2 percent) and the lowest percentage of female smokers in Al-Mahra (0 percent), Hadramawt (0.1 percent) and Al-Bayda (0.1 percent). The highest percentage of women who currently use *qat* is in the age category of 45-49 (51.9 percent), dropping among women 80 years and older (18.6 percent). The highest percentage of women who were *qat* users in 2013 was in Raymah (43.2 percent), followed by women in Ibb (41.6 percent), with the lowest rates in Hadramawt (0.1 percent) and Al-Mahra (0.7 percent).<sup>[213]</sup> A study from 2014 noted that among pregnant women 41 percent chew *qat*.<sup>[214]</sup>

## Changes in the Current Crisis

Within the context of the current crisis in Yemen, traditional support structures and capacities of families to care for vulnerable family members have been severely stretched. The interruption of the Social Welfare Fund payments, with 45 percent of beneficiaries being female,<sup>[215]</sup> for two years had a very negative impact on family dynamics and social solidarity. In 2017, UNICEF, with support from the World Bank and other donors, restarted such quarterly payments. However, there remain challenges with beneficiary lists and eligibility verifications, particularly in the radically changed circumstances for so many Yemenis as a result of the crisis. Additionally, the lack of consistency in paying civil servants (17.8 percent female) since 2016, as well as the absence of social security insurance payments to 123,000 pensioners (12 percent of whom were female), have

212) According to Article 149 of the 1992 Personal Status Law, after divorce the father is obliged to provide financial support to his children for food, clothing, accommodations and medical treatment. However, “many women when granted custody refuse child-support in order to strengthen their position in a potential legal battle if the father attempts to revoke custody (for instance if the wife remarries) or when the children reach the age that custody reverts to the father.” Ibid.

213) DHS 2013, p. 190.

214) Al-Abed, Ali Al-Abed; Sutan, Rosnah; Al-Dubai, Sami Abdo Radman; Aljunid, Syed Mohamed (2014). “Family Context and Khat Chewing among Adult Yemeni Women: A Cross-Sectional Study.” Hindawi Publishing Corporation, BioMed Research International, Volume 2014. p. 2.

215) ROY, CSO (2014). Yemen Statistical Yearbook 2014.



devastated incomes, including those of female- and elderly-headed households.<sup>[216]</sup> An estimated 80 per cent of Yemenis are in debt, and more than half of all households have had to buy food on credit.<sup>[217]</sup>

Men and women who are journalists and human rights activists in Yemen have been targeted by various parties to the conflict. One study from 2017 documented challenges since 2015 faced by female journalists including loss of jobs, damage to their reputation, detention, attempted assassination and assassination.<sup>[218]</sup> According to OHCHR's Group of Eminent Experts, Houthi authorities, the internationally recognized Yemeni government and the Southern Transitional Council "are responsible for violating the rights of journalists and human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders, their rights to liberty and physical security, as well as their freedom of expression."<sup>[219]</sup>

A number of recent assessments have identified freedom of movement as the most common constraint affecting women and girls' access to services, education and income-generating opportunities.<sup>[220]</sup> Specific issues include: that families are increasingly insisting on a *mahram* to accompany women as they move about in public spaces;<sup>[221]</sup> perceived rising levels of street harassment of women; and a perception of the rising frequency of GBV contributing to heightening fears for vulnerable family members, including women and young boys. The lack of female-friendly transportation options has resulted in high levels of frustration and powerlessness among many women who are more present in public spaces, working and seeking basic services. With increasingly stressed household finances, many families have had to sell off assets, including vehicles, to meet their basic needs. Other factors restricting women's mobility include lack of street lighting, which makes public spaces less safe; less access than men to financial resources to pay transport costs; and fewer options than men, who are able to hitchhike or use over-crowded buses.<sup>[222]</sup>

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216) Al-Bashiri, Mansour Ali (2019). "Economic Confidence Building Measures – Civil Servant Salaries." Rethinking Yemen's Economy. Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, DeepRoot Consulting and CARPO. p. 4

217) UNOCHA (2018). "Yemen: Humanitarian Fund helps Displaced Families Survive the Harsh Winter."

218) Farhan, Mohammed (2017). "Current Status of Yemeni Women Journalists Challenges in Peace and War." Studies and Economic Media Center. P. 13-14.

219) OHCHR's Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen (2020). p. 83.

220) See: Gressmann, Wolfgang (2016). "From The Ground Up: Gender And Conflict Analysis In Yemen." Oxfam; UNOCHA (2019). "Yemen: Humanitarian Needs Overview"; Haneef, Christina (2019). "CARE Gender and Conflict Analysis Taiz and Aden Governorates." CARE International; International Rescue Committee (2020). "Narrowing the Gender Gap in Yemen: A Gender Analysis."

221) Haneef, Christina (2019). "CARE Gender and Conflict Analysis Taiz and Aden Governorates." CARE International. p. 29.

222) Colburn, Marta (2020). "USAID/Yemen Gender Analysis." Banyan Global. p. 17.

Other themes and trends that women in this age cohort may encounter include:

- The exodus of many highly educated Yemeni women joining the diaspora has contributed to a leadership gap, particularly in Yemeni civil society. Women in this age cohort have left the country for diverse reasons including escaping the conservative environment in Houthi-controlled areas, as well as seeking higher education and economic opportunities as the economy has collapsed.<sup>[223]</sup>
- A CARE study from 2019 noted a positive trend in dynamics in the home, “where control and decision-making over resources is becoming increasingly shared between husband and wife.”<sup>[224]</sup>
- Gendered differences in how men and women respond to the crisis have left many men struggling with their inability to care for their families. In a recent assessment conducted in rural Sana’a one woman stated, “If young women cannot find a job, they try to learn some handicraft, and they start working and excelling. Men, on the other hand, give up hope very quickly.”<sup>[225]</sup>
- Prior to the conflict Yemeni women struggled with securing their own national ID documents, despite their legal right.<sup>[226]</sup> Vulnerable members of society such as *muhammasheen* and rural women rarely have such documents, which means they have difficulties in accessing basic services and humanitarian assistance.
- With the crisis and the absence of men from rural areas (fighting, seeking income in cities or migrating outside the country) women are shouldering additional agricultural tasks traditionally carried out by men, in addition to their existing duties such as housework, childcare and fetching water and firewood.<sup>[227]</sup>

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223) Ibid. p. 25

224) Haneef, Christine (2019). “CARE Gender and Conflict Analysis Taiz and Aden Governorates.” CARE International. p.2.

225) Al-Ammar, Fawziah; Patchett, Hannah; Shamsan, Shams (2019). “A Gendered Crisis: Understanding the Experiences of Yemen’s War.” Sana’a Center for Strategic Studies. p. 23.

226) Passport Law No. 7 (1990) does not require a male consent for a woman to be issued her own passport or national ID card. UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and ESCWA. “Yemen: Gender Justice and the Law: Assessment of Laws Affecting Gender Equality and Protection Against Gender-Based Violence.” December 2018.

227) Ali, Abdullah (2020). “Empowering Women in Yemen’s Countryside: Securing Ibb.” The Washington Institute.



*A displaced woman carries a dish of bread she is selling in Makbana, Taiz governorate, 2017  
Photo credit: Khalid al-Saeed*

## VI. The Twilight Years (50+): Respect for the Elderly

There is tremendous veneration of elders in Yemen<sup>[228]</sup> with deep religious and cultural norms to respect and care for one's parents, as well as state legal responsibility to address the needs of the elderly.<sup>[229]</sup> A powerful aspect of that veneration is the social pressure to honor and respect mothers and grandmothers. By the age of 50 many Yemeni women are already grandmothers and with historically high levels of early marriage, some may be great-grandmothers. The sanctity of motherhood is evident in the practice of swearing an oath on a mother's grave or on a mother's head. With limited state-operated social safety net initiatives, and only four care facilities for the elderly in the whole country, the responsibility is on children or extended families to care for the elderly as they age. To many Yemenis, it is unimaginable to sequester parents in facilities far from their families, despite the challenges of multi-generational family living. It is exceedingly rare for an elderly person to live on their own, as children are socially and religiously obliged to care for their aging parents.

#### **Yemeni Proverbs:**

*Min akbar mink ba yaum a'lam mink ba sanah* (He who is older than you by one day is a year wiser than you).

*Ma mal ala rijaal* (The best wealth/investment is men), in other words, care well for a son so he will care for you in your old age.

*Lakibir ashaba idatala sabiya wala ajazat al-mara' rajmt bah al-hawiyah* (When the man gets old, bring him a new young wife, and when the woman gets old throw her in the yard [and divorce her]).

*Man a'ad umah la tihmuh* (He who still has his mother around is on the safe side).

As in all phases of a woman's life in Yemen, family plays a significant role. Older women often shoulder childcare responsibilities for their grandchildren or great grandchildren, while their daughters work in agriculture in rural areas, or outside the home in urban areas. Even in Aden during the PDRY era, one study found that among female factory workers 81 percent of childcare for their children was provided by mothers, mothers-in-law and other female family members.<sup>[230]</sup> Living in a multi-generational home used to be the norm in both urban and rural settings where shared female household responsibilities may also include cooking and cleaning chores, with younger women shouldering outdoor chores in rural communities. In 2018, the life expectancy for women in Yemen is 67.8 years, higher than that of men at 64.4 years,<sup>[231]</sup> so older women are often widowed and must rely on their families for support. There is the expectation that an older woman will live with her oldest son, or other sons, but sometimes it will be with a daughter, as relations between mothers and their daughters-in-law can create tension over decision-making in the home.<sup>[232]</sup>

228) There is a lack of hard data regarding this age group of Yemeni women, thus this section reflects the accumulated experience of the author's decades of working in Yemen.

229) The Yemeni Constitution Article 56 requires state care of the elderly and there are nine NDC outcomes addressing the rights and state obligations to care for the elderly.

230) Molyneux, Maxine (1982). p. 70.

231) "Life expectancy at birth, total (years) - Yemen, Rep." World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.IN?locations=YE>

232) One study from 2013 found that familial conflict within intergenerational homes had an influence on the decision to migrate from a rural to an urban area. Mahuob, Walid A. F. (2013). p. 37.



## Piety, Charity and Leisure Time

Piety-focused activities are common among this age group of women, as they often have more free time. Such activities vary depending on a number of factors including where a woman lives in the country, her network of friends and family, personal religious beliefs, education and socio-economic background. Examples of religious activities might include: undertaking *Hajj* to Saudi Arabia, which many have saved for during their whole lives; visiting the tombs of saints, a common practice in Wadi Hadramawt; attending religious educational classes, which often help older women who are illiterate to memorize the Quran; participating in a *mawlid*,<sup>[233]</sup> *zar*,<sup>[234]</sup> or other celebrations which arise from distinctive Sufi traditions; fasting outside of Ramadan or other religious days when fasting is common, to make up for days not fasted when they were younger; reading the Holy Quran or other religious texts; and conducting additional prayers

outside of the five daily prayers. During this phase of life some older women may focus on superstitions such as *al-'Ayn* (the evil eye),<sup>[235]</sup> the influence of *jinn* (supernatural beings<sup>[236]</sup>) and evil spirits in their own lives, and that of their loved ones. Also during this phase, if a woman is from a more affluent family she may also establish a *waqf*<sup>[237]</sup> or

### Um Ahmed

A widow living in Wadi Hadramawt, Um Ahmed was married at the age of 8 to her first cousin. She moved into his natal home and the union was consummated when her monthly cycles began at 12. Um Ahmed bore 10 children, only four of whom survived, and she now lives with her son Ahmed and his large multi-generational family. Um Ahmed is unsure of her age, but remembers the severe famine of 1943-45, when she and her surviving siblings were sent to Mukalla from Tarim as part of the belated British relief efforts. Um Ahmed feels the weight of the current war-driven famine differently than food insecurity caused by drought or flooding. Such miseries were stoically endured, hidden or ignored, while this time the world has front row seats witnessing the starving bodies of Yemeni children, and yet seems to ignore cries for help. In the last food distribution, Um Ahmed's foot was broken due to the chaos of the crowds. She now pays a portion of her meagre ration to a neighbor with a car to collect her food basket. She contributes this to the household resources, but given the situation she often goes without food to give a morsel to her favorite great-grandson.

233) Celebrations of the Prophet Muhammed's life in recitations of poetry and chanting, as distinct from the holiday of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammed which is commemorated in the third month in the Islamic lunar calendar. Attending mawlid celebrations held in private homes remains relatively common in Yemen among women, particularly older women, marking various life-cycle occasions (such as marriage, childbirth, serious health concerns, and death, as well as celebrating auspicious events such as returning from the Hajj, occupying a new home, or to fulfill a vow). Katz, Marion Holmes (2008). Female Mawlid gatherings usually last 3 to 4 hours, although male Mawlid gatherings often continue much longer (personal interview by the author with gender expert Wameedh Shakir, May 29, 2020).

234) An event held to appease a jinn (mischievous spiritual and mythical creature), who is believed to have invaded a woman's body.

235) The evil eye. A concept found in Yemen which holds that misfortune can be transmitted from one person to another out of jealousy or envy. The misfortune of the victim may be manifested as illness, loss of wealth or loved ones, or just bad luck.

236) A supernatural creature (collective noun, singular, jinni). The belief in jinn dates from pre-Islamic times and is found in Arabian and Muslim mythology. Jinn are believed to be intelligent spirits of lower rank than the angels, who are able to appear in human and animal forms and to possess humans. It is believed that jinn are neither innately evil nor good.

237) Religious endowment.



contribute money or time to charitable institutions or causes. Yemeni women across social and economic layers are often involved in charitable works at this age, becoming involved in gathering donations for the poor and those in need of assistance.

Female patronage of religious structures has a long history in Yemen including among older Sulayhid,<sup>[238]</sup> Rasulid,<sup>[239]</sup> Tahrid,<sup>[240]</sup> Zaidi and Sada women. Queen 'Arwa Al-Sulayhid was a great patron of architecture, leaving a legacy of monuments, buildings, roads and mosques throughout her domain in Yemen.<sup>[241]</sup> During the Rasulid era, female patrons commonly constructed buildings and established *awqaf* (plural of *waqf*) to support their maintenance. One scholar identified 42 religious monuments built by 19 different Rasulid women patrons including 32 religious schools, six mosques, two *sabael* (public fountains) and one independent *khanqa* (Sufi building sometimes used as a hostel).<sup>[242]</sup> In two key Rasulid towns – Zabid and Taiz – it is estimated that of the extant buildings from the era, more than one-third were constructed by Rasulid women.<sup>[243]</sup> An example from the early 20th century of religious patronage in Wadi Hadramawt is that of an older woman and her daughter who established a *waqf* to support a women's prayer place in Tarim with proceeds from their properties – which included a house and irrigated date farm in the Wadi and a house in Singapore.<sup>[244]</sup> *Sada* women under the Zaidi Imamate often distinguished themselves in their religious learning and charitable work, were often highly trusted by their brothers and fathers, and may have remained unmarried.<sup>[245]</sup>

An example of a more recent religious tradition for older women is highlighted in a study looking at the ways in which older women in Sana'a negotiate religious change.<sup>[246]</sup> The study notes that in recent decades there has been an increase in Salafi and Wahabi attacks on Sufism and popular folk Islam that are prevalent in Yemen, targeting older, illiterate women who have had little to no opportunity to study Islam. While such efforts provide women with Quranic education (*halqa*, or Quranic study circle) and literacy training, they often come at a cost of destroying indigenous traditions.

238) Ismaili Shi'ite Arab dynasty established in 1047 by Ali ibn Muhammad Al-Sulayhi that ruled most of historical Yemen at its peak and ended in 1138 with the death of Queen 'Arwa, who along with her mother-in-law Queen Asma bint Shihab were the only female monarchs in the Muslim Arab world to have the khutba (Friday prayer sermon) proclaimed in their name. Mernissi, Fatima (1993). *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

239) The Rasulid dynasty ruled major portions of Yemen from 1229 to 1454 AD.

240) An Arab Muslim dynasty that ruled parts of Yemen from 1454 to 1517, succeeding the Rasulid Dynasty and who were themselves replaced by the Mamluks of Egypt after only 63 years in power.

241) Lauralee (2018). "Queen Awra of Yemen – The Pearl Who Brought Light to a Place of Darkness." *History of Royal Women Website*.

242) Sadek, Noha (1989). "Rasulid Women: Power and Patronage." *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, Vol. 19, p. 124.

243) This paragraph is based on Sadek (1989). "Rasulid Women: Power and Patronage." *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, Vol. 19.

244) Carapico, Sheila (1998). *Civil Society in Yemen: The Political Economy of Activism in Modern Arabia*. Cambridge University Press, p. 70.

245) Vom Bruck, Gabriele (2005). *Islam, Memory and Morality in Yemen: Ruling Families in Transition*. Palgrave Macmillan, p. 140.

246) Sophia Pandya (2014). "Religious Flexibilities of Older Yemeni Women in Sana'a." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2. Duke University Press, p. 52-79.

As noted above, the additional time that older women may have is sometimes spent in attending social occasions such as *zeffaf*,<sup>[247]</sup> *tafrita*, women's *qat* chews,<sup>[248]</sup> condolences, and informal gatherings with friends. Often older women fulfill reciprocal visiting obligations to attend events organized by family, neighbors or fellow tribe members. Such visiting obligations in some parts of the country are an important form of social capital that families invest in and which yield material and non-material benefits. Older women also stay connected to the world via the radio, with approximately 40 percent of Yemeni households owning a radio and older women often listening to the radio while working, chewing *qat* or socializing. According to the DHS in 2013, 47 percent of women in Sana'a governorate listen to the radio at least once weekly and 42 percent of women in Dhamar, with women in Al-Mahra and Aden tied at the lowest (8.5 percent).

The culturally perceived asexuality of older women means they are perceived as having their passions under control, and having benefited from the wisdom of experience, thus there is less risk of *fitna* (disorder or chaos). This changing role means they can more easily serve as mediators in conflict resolution efforts, although their acceptance in this role may require certain social standing or tribal lineage. Older women who have experience, connections and knowledge of tribal traditions are often able to play a positive role in conflict resolution, though younger women sometimes face less acceptance of such efforts given growing conservatism in recent years.<sup>[249]</sup>

Older women are also sometimes allowed to transgress gender-segregated spaces and raise their voices, as with age they are seen to bring wisdom and experience. As one scholar working in Razih, Sa'ada governorate, notes: "Women therefore influence men, and not only their relatives; they can also act as moral arbiters in tribal affairs, and sometime goad their men into military action by loud ululations or (unintentionally ironic) cries of '*Are you all women!*'"<sup>[250]</sup>

While Yemeni women have low levels of employment in the formal sector, female public sector employees are eligible for retirement at the earliest at 45 years of age (with 20 years of contributions).<sup>[251]</sup> However, many women work in the informal economy and older women may continue to be economically active, particularly if they have a skill or profession, such as being a traditional birth attendant (*qabela* or *jada*), making incense (*bakhur*), tailoring, selling *qat* (found in Taiz city where women from Jebal Sabr region above the city come to sell their wares), or as female circumcisers in areas such as Hudaydah, Hadramawt or Al-Mahra where such traditions are common.<sup>[252]</sup> Among older women from marginalized groups, begging is not uncommon at intersections on a daily basis and on Fridays near mosques around the noon prayer time. In agriculture, older women are often responsible for feeding livestock, shepherding cows, goats and sheep,

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247) Wedding celebration.

248) Women in this age group are not the heaviest users of *qat* and tobacco, rather it is women aged 40-49.

249) Awadh, Maha; Shuja'adeen, Nuria (2019). "Women in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding in Yemen." Edited by Sawsan Al-Rafaei. Nahj Consulting, Yemen: UN Women.

250) Weir, Shelagh (2007). *A Tribal Order: Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen*. University of Texas Press. p. 46.

251) However casual workers, self-employed persons, agricultural workers, household workers, seamen, and fishermen are excluded from both systems.

252) See DHS 2013 for percentages of women who undergo FGD.

milking cows, grinding grain or preparing food products for sale or home use such as ghee (*samn*), pickling vegetables or lemons, fermenting yoghurt (*hakeen*) or processing various cheeses. Older women may also engage as traders and sell artisan crafts (baskets, carpets, embroideries, pottery, etc.) in weekly markets as younger women in the family have taken on agricultural tasks that they used to perform.<sup>[253]</sup> The microfinance industry grew steadily from its beginning in 1997 in the country, in part due to the entrepreneurial nature of Yemeni society.

The Yemeni Constitution (1994) affirms the right of inheritance to all Yemenis. The Personal Status Code (1992) identifies six inheritance categories and confirms that women have a share according to Islamic law and cannot be denied access to their share. However, with some exceptions, a woman's share of inheritance is generally half the amount of a man's share, if both have the same relationship to the deceased. This recognizes the financial responsibility under Islamic law and Yemeni culture of the man to provide for his wife and children and for a brother to provide for his sisters. There are numerous exceptions to the one-to-two ratio, including that of a uterine sister (half-sister with the same mother but a different father) inheriting equally with her brother, and a mother and father inheriting equally from their deceased child.<sup>[254]</sup> Rarely, women inherit more than men.<sup>[255]</sup> Additionally, there are cases in which a woman inherits while a man would not, for example, if a man dies while his maternal grandparents are alive. The grandmother would inherit while the grandfather would not.<sup>[256]</sup>

Many older women and men struggle with ill health and chronic illnesses. Just under half of those age 70 and older (48 percent) have at least one chronic illness, and 18 percent suffer from more than one chronic illness, with similar rates reported among men and women.<sup>[257]</sup> Financial means and education are contributing factors to health-seeking behavior, with women in this age group often dependent on their children or charity for health care assistance. Also this age group is more likely to seek alternative practitioners (cupper, bloodletting, cautery, bone setters, etc.) and use folk practices to ward off the evil eye or *jinn* to address health concerns (due to attitudes that attribute disease and illness to superstitious causes).

Mourning rituals vary between areas of the country and depend on the economic and social status of the individual who has passed away. In Wadi Dhahr, located northwest of Sana'a, the body of the deceased woman is washed and incensed and buried with mourning ceremonies that vary depending on the individual woman's status, with mourners visiting the home of the departed in the late afternoon for seven to ten days. If a family has means they will hire a reciter of religious verses on the third, seventh and tenth days. In such women's gatherings the bereaved are encouraged to express

253) Adra (2013). "The Impact of Male Outmigration on Women's Roles in Agriculture in the Yemen Arab Republic." p. 32.

254) Glander, Annelies (1998). *Inheritance in Islam: Women's Inheritance in Sana'a (Republic of Yemen) - Law, Religion, and Reality*. Peter Lang, European University Studies. p. 78.

255) UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and ESCWA (2019). "Yemen: Gender Justice and the Law." p. 17.

256) Barakat, Sarah (2018). "The Cost of Justice: Exploratory Assessment of Women's Access to Justice in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Yemen." Oxfam.

257) DHS 2013, p. 199.

their grief, though such expressions are monitored by older women who will keep such expressions within acceptable limits.<sup>[258]</sup> In many parts of the country a *mawlid* may be organized for both male and female mourners to mourn together, honor the departed and express their grief through such a religious practice.

When an older woman dies, she may have already disposed of any wealth that she has accumulated to her children, or have gone on *Hajj*. This distribution of assets prior to death avoids difficulties in inheritance that a woman's female inheritors may face, as women rarely are able to control the land on which they have a claim.<sup>[259]</sup> For various reasons, families sometimes deny women their inheritance of land through a wide range of practices, such as forcing women to accept jewelry, animals, or a room in the ancestral home rather than land assets. Women face many challenges to engage with the formal legal system to pursue their inheritance, including the cost and difficulty of securing legal counsel.

## Changes in the Current Crisis

Elderly women have been particularly vulnerable during the current crisis. They suffered a disproportionate number of cholera deaths: 4.6 percent of the population is over the age of 60, but they constitute 49 percent of cholera deaths, 57 percent of whom were female.<sup>[260]</sup> This statistic is an indicator of the vulnerability of this demographic group, particularly those who are displaced or from marginalized communities. They face many barriers in accessing often free treatment, such as insecurity, inability to afford transport or arriving too late for successful treatment.<sup>[261]</sup> According to the UN's 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, "female-, elderly- and disabled-headed households are seriously affected. All these population groups have virtually exhausted their coping strategies and have limited social support."<sup>[262]</sup>

One coping strategy that families have adopted in response to the current crisis is to share housing with relatives who have been displaced by conflict or poverty to combine limited resources. While such a measure has many advantages for families, vulnerable family members such as widowed older women are often at a disadvantage within these desperate families to receive adequate food and services such as healthcare, contributing to high levels of vulnerability. UNOCHA's Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mark Lowcock stated, "The immune systems of millions of people are now literally collapsing, making them – especially children and the elderly – more likely to succumb to malnutrition, cholera and other diseases."<sup>[263]</sup> One international NGO specializing in

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258) Mundy, Martha (1995). *Domestic Government: Kinship, Community and Polity in North Yemen*. I.B. Tauris Publisher, p. 146-147.

259) Ibid.

260) The highest cholera fatality ratio of all age groups. WHO. *Yemen Cholera Situation Update: Weekly Epidemiological Bulletin*—11 to 17 Mar 2019.

261) UNOCHA (2019). "Yemen: Humanitarian Needs Overview." p. 26.

262) Ibid, p. 33.

263) Help Age USA (2018). "The Yemen Crisis: How Older People are Affected."

the needs of the elderly, HelpAge International, estimates that 1.65 million older people in Yemen are at risk and in need of humanitarian assistance. Utilizing the best available data, they identified three urgent challenges for older Yemenis:

- “50 percent of older women and 60 percent of older men surveyed were unable to access healthcare.
- Just 2 percent of women and 3 percent of men can afford essential medications.
- 95 percent of older people have no access to any income.”<sup>[264]</sup>

The incidence of chronic illnesses (diabetes and hypertension, etc.) among older people is high in Yemen, thus contributing to weakening immunities. In addition, a lack of income prevents procuring health care or medicines to treat such illnesses. Malnutrition among older Yemenis is alarmingly high, in part because many older people find standard food rations difficult to digest and may lack clean water to prepare food.<sup>[265]</sup> Finally, older women also face mobility problems to reach food distribution sites and often end up paying others to collect rations or fetch clean water for them. Lack of information is also a barrier to accessing humanitarian assistance, and older women from marginalized groups are likely to face greater challenges in accessing shelter or non-food items due to discrimination.<sup>[266]</sup>

Disabled Yemenis faced significant challenges prior to the conflict, but since 2015 for many the situation has deteriorated dramatically. Government support provided before the conflict to persons with disabilities (PWDs) and to Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) has been radically reduced or eliminated.<sup>[267]</sup> Although the Social Welfare Fund quarterly cash assistance to vulnerable Yemenis, which include PWDs, was reactivated in 2017 by UNICEF with support from the World Bank, it is unclear how many people with disabilities remain on the list in light of massive humanitarian needs in the country. With the conflict there has been a rise in the number of PWDs with conflict-related injuries from airstrikes, shelling and landmines, though precise numbers are not available.<sup>[268]</sup> Disabled girls and women have additional layers of vulnerabilities compared to boys and men with disabilities in displacement and more broadly as a result of gender-based discrimination and other risks. A 2019 Amnesty International report on disabilities in Yemen highlights that women and girls with disabilities globally face additional risks of GBV, particularly in conflict-affected contexts.<sup>[269]</sup> This research found that conflict-affected female PWDs in Yemen encountered significant challenges in fleeing violence

264) Ibid.

265) Help Age International (2018). “Cholera in Yemen killing mostly older people.”

266) UNOCHA (2019). “Yemen: Humanitarian Needs Overview.” p. 43.

267) The Protection and Rehabilitation Fund for Persons with Disabilities is a government fund fueled by commercial tax revenues to support people with disabilities and Disabled Persons Organizations. Curtis, Bruce; Geagan, Jennifer (2016). “Disability Inclusion Among Refugees in the Middle East and North Africa A Needs Assessment of Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Jordan, and Turkey.” IREX. p. 12.

268) Amnesty international notes that the World Health Organization estimates there are 4.5 million disabled Yemenis. Amnesty International (2019). “Excluded: Living with Disabilities in Yemen’s Armed Conflict.” p. 5.

269) Ibid. p. 23.



and accessing assistance.<sup>[270]</sup> While there are disabled women of all ages in Yemen, with age their situation may deteriorate, and many elderly women are disabled by the chronic illnesses they may suffer from.

However, older women are not just victims in the current crisis in Yemen; they also play a role in community leadership in both urban and rural areas. CARE's 2019 Gender and Conflict Analysis found that women's coping mechanisms, resilience, and ability to carve out space for agency were commonly cited.<sup>[271]</sup> With the crisis, older Yemeni women are taking on new roles as income earners for their families, and as community mediators. Such efforts warrant support and hold promise of addressing multiple layers of inequalities and vulnerability by building resilience. While many older women feel they are a burden to their families, many remain strong providing leadership in their homes and communities.

One scholar writing on the aging process of Yemeni women eloquently writes, "Thus while some older women, by conjuncture of relation in their household, remain cathedrals in presence, others supplanted in the management of their own homes become shadows of themselves."<sup>[272]</sup>

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270) Ibid.

271) Haneef, Christina (2019). "CARE Gender and Conflict Analysis Taiz and Aden Governorates." CARE International.

272) Mundy, Martha (1995). *Domestic Government: Kinship, Community and Polity in North Yemen*. I.B. Tauris Publisher. p. 145.



*A woman offers rue, eggs and vegetables for sale in Sana'a, 2019 // Photo credit: Doaa Sudam*

## VII. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study was developed to further the understanding of how women's lives have been shaped by gender dynamics in Yemen, both prior to the current conflict and during the unprecedented humanitarian crisis it has unleashed. Each section covered a life phase of a Yemeni woman and sought to highlight salient issues and provide age-specific background information, as well as to identify changes in context as a result of the current crisis. This is by no means a comprehensive examination of gender dynamics more broadly in Yemen, but rather a focused study of the specificities, cultural norms and influences impacting the lives of girls and women. The following list of findings from this study and recommendations organized by age group are designed for donors and those implementing programs to better address the needs of girls and women.

### ***Birth, Infancy and Childhood (0-9 years of age)***

- 1. Finding:** With the conflict, school enrollment rates have deteriorated for all children, with girls' enrollment likely more deleteriously impacted for various reasons. Education is a key determinant in addressing a wide range of gender issues, with lower education levels among women correlated to reliance on corporal punishment and the incidence of iron deficiency anemia (IDA) in children, to mention but a few issues raised in this report. In the current crisis, the government and local authorities have struggled to keep the education system functioning, negatively impacting the future of millions of children.

**Recommendation:** It is suggested that interventions in education should focus on improving community and family support for girls' education through efforts including incentives for female teachers, engaging mothers and fathers in awareness raising efforts about the importance of girls' education and capitalizing on emerging understanding that better education for girls will contribute to better employment and income-earning opportunities. Consider possible unintended negative consequences of interventions. For example, incentivizing girls' enrollment over boys' education through cash payments or food rations often forces families to choose between educating boys or girls, and may fuel sibling tensions.

- 2. Finding:** In Yemen corporal punishment of children, affecting boys and girls in different ways, is a challenge both in the home and in school. This phenomenon negatively impacts the emotional and educational development of children.

**Recommendation:** In more stable areas of the country, consider a pilot campaign raising awareness about the negative consequences of corporal punishment on children through radio, social media and other communications channels. The campaign should build on earlier efforts by UNICEF and the government to address corporal punishment, benefiting from lessons learned and integrating creative strategies from other MENA countries. In preparation for the campaign, work with local authorities to raise awareness about the negative consequences of corporal punishment for children and engage them



in the design and implementation of activities. Such a campaign could be part of broader social cohesion efforts, engaging Yemeni civil society to play a leadership role, as a way to address conflict dynamics and the increase in violence as a result of the current crisis, rather than separating it out as a stand-alone intervention.

### ***Puberty and Adolescence (10-17 years of age)***

3. **Finding:** Cultural gender beliefs in Yemen (i.e. women being categorized as *du'afa*, the potential for *fitna* and conceptions of family honor) shape 'protective' practices designed to shelter girls and women from the vicissitudes of broader society and from the consequences of their own behavior. Deeply entrenched gender traditions including gender segregation, veiling, child marriage and practices such as using *maharim*, are closely tied to such beliefs and sometimes present challenges to development and humanitarian interventions.

**Recommendation:** Consider organizing tandem workshops for young women and their *maharim* to contribute to a variety of positive factors including: magnifying the impact of training and awareness raising activities; fostering changes in family gender dynamics; and supporting young women's career aspirations, as well as contributing to employment readiness for young men. Younger *maharim* can often serve as an ally to their sisters in the family, particularly if organizations offer training or awareness activities to engage such young men.

4. **Finding:** Child marriage has been a challenging gender issue in Yemen for decades, but since 2015 it is believed to have increased significantly as a negative coping strategy for destitute families to mitigate economic vulnerability and insecurity.

**Recommendation:** Utilize interventions that seek to improve income-earning capacities and skills with girls at risk and survivors of child marriage and other forms of GBV, mixed with other categories of vulnerable women (to mitigate against stigmatizing individuals). Interventions that explicitly target at-risk girls and survivors are unlikely to be approved as stand-alone projects, particularly in Houthi-controlled areas, so folding them into broader economic empowerment activities is recommended.

### ***Youth (18-29 years of age)***

5. **Finding:** Entrepreneurship and resilience are hallmarks of Yemeni culture and have mitigated the devastating impact of the current crisis. Women are very active in the entrepreneurship landscape, particularly in urban areas, yet they face a range of challenges in the current crisis. One challenge is that

humanitarian response and development efforts seeking to improve income earning often reinforce gender roles. This can limit the effectiveness of activities by saturating the market for products such as incense, handicrafts, sewing or salon services.

**Recommendation:** It is suggested to conduct low profile research among women entrepreneurs who are increasingly seen in urban areas in order to strategically invest in and expand such initiatives. In addition to building income-generating skills it is recommended that such interventions should also support women to gain self-confidence, negotiating skills and creative problem solving, followed by providing access to microfinance funding, and building on findings from the entrepreneur research conducted. Explore ways that income-earning opportunities with vulnerable women (including IDPs) can engage men in the family as well, to get them involved rather than remaining at home. Such efforts to support female entrepreneurs could include older women, in microfinance or cash-for-work programs integrating gender-sensitive interventions and prioritizing the needs of vulnerable groups.

- 6. Finding:** Gender norms are not static and the question remains if current gender role changes are of a temporary nature. Efforts to support positive changes in gender norms are limited. One positive outcome observed with the increasing economic activity of women is that there is now growing social acceptance of such activities, which may signify more enduring changes.

**Recommendation:** Consider launching a broad public campaign that highlights the positive contributions of women during the conflict (including as breadwinners), seeking to impact the public discourse on gender, and celebrate the roles of both men and women during this challenging period in Yemen. The campaign could build on women's newfound economic contributions and humanitarian efforts, as well as highlight their roles in community conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The initiative could seek to engage influencers of public discourse by recruiting male champions for the effort, such as imams, tribal leaders and media figures. The campaign could include signs showing women and men working together toward a better future.

### ***Middle Age (30-49 years of age)***

- 7. Finding:** The lack of affordable female-friendly transportation options in rural and urban settings exacerbates gender disparities in accessing services and existing gender biases.

**Recommendation:** Options to address this need could include: support to mobile phone taxi apps that work with Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinators (similar to Kareem or Uber) in cities; transportation vouchers for vulnerable women for taxis or *dabbabat*; women-driven vehicles could be an



income-generating opportunity (in Aden, there is at least one pink van, which is driven by a woman who transports other women to weddings and female outings); outside of cities, other transportation options to be explored could include women-operated motorcycles and mopeds (seen in Sana'a and Aden), and hybrid taxis in more rural areas.

- 8. Finding:** There is a diversity of Yemeni women's experiences and gender dynamics within particular areas. Humanitarian response efforts too often prioritize quick impact activities, thus potentially harming the elderly, disabled and socially marginalized groups, including girls and women. Gender-sensitive programming in humanitarian action is informed by an understanding of the local context with the aim to promote access and mitigate against unintended harm.

**Recommendation:** It is suggested to conduct in-depth gender assessments and analysis tailored to specific humanitarian or development interventions in different areas. Gender considerations need to be integrated into all project phases, with meaningful input from qualified local gender specialists. Support local academic and civil society activities to build additional capacity in the area of gender analysis in order to improve gender-sensitive programming.

### *The Twilight Years (50+ years of age)*

- 9. Finding:** Despite the depth of the crisis in the country, Yemenis demonstrate high levels of resilience, both at the individual and communal level. Support networks between Yemenis contribute to resilience and women play a significant role in building and maintaining such social solidarity and networks through a variety of practices.

**Recommendation:** Seek ways to support expanding understanding of indigenous resilience. Ensure that assessments and analysis of the broader context explore how social solidarity works in specific areas and the role of women. Interventions at the least need to understand and not damage social solidarity and at best should seek to enhance such practices. Additionally, small scale research initiatives can explore resilience factors among women to help inform interventions that will sustain and not damage such elements.

- 10. Finding:** The elderly, with a preponderance of older women, and the disabled face challenges in collecting food rations and other aid distributions due to overcrowding and organizational issues. Such challenges lead to a reduction in assistance, as vulnerable beneficiaries are often forced to give a portion of their ration to others for collection and transportation.

**Recommendation:** Ensure that at distribution sites there are separate locations or times for the physically vulnerable such as elderly women and the

disabled. Engage third party monitoring entities to assess if such practices are in place. If such distribution arrangements prove too complex, those with mobility issues could be provided additional rations or cash to cover transportation costs.

The challenges that Yemeni women face – traditionally, and in the context of the current conflict and humanitarian, economic and political crises – are overwhelming for many women, and at times life threatening. Despite such daunting circumstances, many Yemeni women are rising to meet such challenges, succeeding, gaining experience and in the process empowering themselves.

Yemeni women have risked their lives to open humanitarian corridors to move food and water across frontlines, and have sheltered displaced people and shared food with neighbors even when facing extremely challenging circumstances themselves.<sup>[273]</sup> These efforts reflect high levels of social solidarity and communal resilience, despite the conflict. Even in desperate circumstances, Yemenis continue to have compassion and empathy with their neighbors, other villages and those in need. Women play a significant role in promoting resilience through connecting to neighbors and social networks that contribute to social capital, which in urban areas often cross geographic, family, tribal and economic divisions.

Gender dynamics are diverse and inadequately summed up in statistics which overly generalize and diminish aspects of culture and religion that are supportive of women and girls. Yemeni culture is very traditional, with patriarchal elements that can disempower and have led to the abuse of women and girls. However, Yemeni culture also has many beneficial elements which encourage fathers and mothers to educate their daughters, protect them from harm and support them to achieve their dreams, albeit through traditional channels. Unfortunately, the current crisis is destroying many positive gender traditions as it jeopardizes the ability of families to feed and care for their children and elderly.

Too often gender analyses focus only on the negative aspects, without recognizing beneficial elements present in the private sphere of the home or that are emerging in this time of crisis. This study has sought to highlight challenges, as well as focus on positive factors which can be supported. It is incumbent on those supporting positive coping mechanisms, resilience, social cohesion, humanitarian action and development to understand gender dynamics to better support women and girls and empower them as active participating members of broader Yemeni society.

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273) Colburn, Marta (2020). "USAID/Yemen Gender Analysis." Banyan Global. p. 15.

# ANNEX A: LEXICON ON ARABIC TERMINOLOGY AND KEY CONCEPTS<sup>[274]</sup>

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<i>Al-'Ayn</i>	The evil eye. A concept found in Yemen, and the wider Arab world, which holds that misfortune can be transmitted from one person to another out of jealousy or envy. The misfortune of the victim may be manifested as illness, loss of wealth or loved ones, or just bad luck.
<i>'Ajza</i>	An old woman, though also a word with connotations of being useless or weak.
<i>'Ayb aswad</i>	Black shame, a tribal tradition sanctioning severe financial consequences against any act of assault on women, or other categories of protected individuals, especially egregious during conflict. A result of such protective measures is that women are able to perform tasks that are not considered safe for men during times of conflict, e.g. bringing food to male fighters, providing relief to the injured, etc. <sup>[275]</sup>
<i>Bakhur</i>	Incense.
<i>Dabbabat</i>	Shared minivans (singular, <i>dabbab</i> ).
<i>Darar</i>	Damage, one of the legal grounds (in the 1992 Personal Status Law) for a woman to seek to terminate her marriage due to prolonged absence, non-payment of maintenance, alcohol or drug abuse.
<i>Diya</i>	Blood money. Indemnity money paid to the victim, or their heirs, by the party that caused bodily injury, an Islamic legal practice observed in many countries as a form of social insurance. In Yemen, the rate of <i>diya</i> is periodically adjusted for inflation and the amount paid depends on the circumstances surrounding the death or injury, and who was harmed.
<i>Du'afa</i>	Meaning weak, in need of protection (singular, <i>da'if</i> ). A Yemeni tribal category assigned to women, religious and social minorities, also <i>nuqqas</i> (the deficient or lacking), or <i>naqis al-asl</i> (lacking origin). Traditionally, those seen as <i>du'afa</i> are accorded tribal protection due to their unarmed status.
<i>'Eid Al-Fitr</i>	Feast of Breaking the Fast, the Muslim religious holiday celebrated at the end of the month of Ramadan.
<i>'Eid Al-Adha</i>	Feast of Sacrifice, the Muslim religious holiday honoring the willingness of Ibrahim (Abraham) to sacrifice his son Ismael as an act of obedience to God's command. This holiday follows the end of the <i>Hajj</i> season (annual pilgrimage to Mecca).
<i>Fitna</i>	An Arabic term with extensive connotations including: charm, attractiveness; enchantment, captivation, fascination, enticement, temptation; infatuation, intrigue; sedition, riot, discord, dissension, civil strife. In Yemen, the term is reflected in the practice of gender segregation and discrimination, as <i>fitna</i> is perceived as a threat of female sexual attractiveness, providing a justification for monitoring and controlling the female body and behavior.

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274) Transliterating Arabic in a consistent and readable manner is no easy task. For this document I have relied on Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies English language style guidance for geographic terms and some other common Arabic words. I have limited diacritical marks to words with ع (i.e. 'ayn), using an apostrophe.

275) Awadh, Maha; Shuja'adeen, Nuria (2019). "Women in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding in Yemen." Edited by Sawsan Al-Rafaei. Nahj Consulting, Yemen: UN Women. p. 7.

Gender	“Refers to the roles, behaviors, activities and attributes within a particular social context which are considered appropriate for men and women, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/time-specific and changeable.” <sup>[276]</sup> In Yemen the term “gender” has been controversial and while difficult to translate into Arabic it is generally translated as <i>nu’ ijtima’i</i> .
<i>Hajj</i>	Pilgrimage to Mecca, one of the five pillars of Islam.
<i>Hakeen</i>	Fermented milk.
<i>Hanid</i>	Roasted meat.
Ismaili	Branch of Shi’a Islam with a long history in Yemen. Prior to the conflict it was estimated that Ismailis comprised approximately 1 percent of Yemenis, in both Al-Makarem and Dawoudi Bohra communities, including an estimated 50,000 in Haraz Sub-District, Manakha District, southwest of Sana’a City and a further 18,000 in Ibb. <sup>[277]</sup>
<i>Jadda</i>	Traditional birth attendant, sometimes called <i>qabela</i> . Also means grandmother.
<i>Jahl</i>	Ignorance. A cultural belief which contributes to the exclusion of the ideas and opinions of young men and women who are perceived as <i>jahalah</i> , or irrational, and therefore acceptably ignored. The concept is evident in the word for child <i>jaahil</i> or <i>juhal</i> in Yemeni dialect. <sup>[278]</sup>
<i>Jalasat</i>	Term used to describe qat sessions, literally sitting down sessions (singular, <i>jalsa</i> ).
<i>Jam’iyya</i>	An informal group savings scheme (plural, <i>jam’iyyat</i> ), sometimes called a <i>hakaba</i> (plural, <i>hakibat</i> ), where a group of women will each pay in a certain amount per month and then take turns collecting the joint savings.
<i>Jinn</i>	A group of supernatural creatures (singular, <i>jinni</i> ). The belief in <i>jinn</i> dates from pre-Islamic times and is found in Arabian and Muslim mythology. <i>Jinn</i> are believed to be intelligent spirits of lower rank than the angels, who are able to appear in human and animal forms and to possess humans. It is believed that <i>jinn</i> are neither innately evil nor good.
<i>Kafa’a</i>	Equivalency in marriage partners. In Yemen this practice discourages higher social classes from marrying below their status group, a principle most strongly evident among <i>sada</i> women who are descendants of the Prophet Mohammed.
<i>Karahiyya</i>	Deep hatred, one of the legal grounds (in the 1992 Personal Status Law) for a woman to seek to terminate her marriage.
<i>Karawi</i>	A soup made of goat or sheep feet.
<i>Khanqa</i>	Sufi building sometimes used as a hostel, but more generally as a gathering place for a Sufi brotherhood or <i>tariqa</i> (literally path, referring to a school or order of Sufism).

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276) “Concepts and definitions,” Gender Mainstreaming, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsanddefinitions.htm>

277) Al-Mahfali, Mohammed; Homaid, Eman (2019). “Minority Rights in Yemen: Reality and Challenges.” INSAF Center for Defending Freedoms & Minorities Publications No. 01.

278) Colburn, Marta (2020), “USAID/Yemen Gender Analysis,” Banyan Global, January 30, 2020, <https://banyanglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/GITA-II-USAID-Yemen-Gender-Analysis-30-January-2020-DEC-version-No-Track-Changes-1.pdf> Footnote 94, p 29.

<i>Khitma</i>	Recitation of the Holy Quran from the beginning to the end (plural, <i>khitmat</i> ).
<i>Khulwa</i>	Being alone in a public or private place with a non-relative male, as well as a term designating a private place or retreat.
<i>Mada'a</i>	Yemeni tall brass water pipe.
<i>Madhhab</i>	School of thought within <i>fiqh</i> (Islamic jurisprudence) (plural, <i>madhahib</i> ).
<i>Mahr</i>	Various (incorrectly) translated as dowry, bridal payment or bride-wealth, it is the groom's obligation to the bride in the form of money or possessions at the time of the marriage contract which becomes the property of the bride, either immediately or in the case of divorce. <i>Mahr</i> traditions vary considerably in different parts of the country and among various economic, social and ethnic groups.
<i>Mahram</i>	A husband or a male relative with whom marriage would be considered <i>haram</i> (forbidden) according to Islamic law. In the contemporary professional context, a family may require a <i>mahram</i> to accompany a young woman while she is conducting field work, attending a conference or training in another city, or even traveling regionally for work purposes.
<i>Mashayikh</i>	Tribal leaders (singular, <i>sheikh</i> ).
<i>Mawlid</i>	Celebrations of the Prophet Muhammed's life in recitations of poetry and chanting, as distinct from the holiday of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammed which is commemorated in the third month in the Islamic lunar calendar. Attending <i>mawlid</i> celebrations held in private homes remains relatively common in Yemen among women, particularly older women, marking various life-cycle occasions (such as marriage, childbirth, serious health concerns, and death, as well as celebrating auspicious events such as returning from the <i>Hajj</i> , occupying a new home, or to fulfill a vow).
<i>Muhammasheen</i>	Literally meaning marginalized, a recent term used to describe the lowest level of traditional Yemeni social stratification. Muhammasheen are Yemenis, most commonly described as the remnants of a historic Ethiopian invasion, who are excluded socially, politically and economically.
<i>Munasabat</i>	Social gatherings and rites of passage events such as weddings and births.
<i>Muwalladeen</i>	This derogatory term categorizes Yemenis of mixed ancestry, with the African and Indian mixture being the most negatively viewed in broader society.
<i>Nadawat</i>	Seminars, also refers to informal weekly or bi-weekly women's gatherings ( <i>nadwa</i> , singular) convened in private homes for the purposes of Quranic study or religious discussion commonly organized by Islah political party or Islah Charitable Society. <sup>[279]</sup>
<i>Qat</i>	The mildly narcotic leaf of an evergreen shrub that in Yemen is chewed daily by the vast majority of men and many women. <i>Qat</i> contains the alkaloid cathinone, a stimulant, which is said to cause excitement, loss of appetite and euphoria. The shrub grows to a height of 10 meters and is known as <i>khat</i> or <i>miraa</i> in the Horn of Africa (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya and Somalia).
<i>Qishr</i>	Hot drink brewed from roasted and spiced coffee bean husks.
<i>Ra'ib laban</i>	Slightly soured milk.

279) Clark, Janine A. (2004). *Islam, Charity and Activism: Middle-Class Networks and Social Welfare in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen*. Indiana University Press. p. 133.



<i>Ramadan</i>	The ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, observed by Muslims worldwide as a month of fasting from dawn until dusk, as well as a time for prayer, reflection and focusing on family and community.
<i>Sabael</i>	Public fountains (singular, <i>sabeel</i> ).
<i>Sada</i>	Descendants of the Prophet Mohammed (singular, <i>Sayyid</i> ). Sayyid is an honorific title used for those whose lineage is accepted as tracing back to the Prophet Mohammed.
<i>Samn</i>	Ghee or clarified butter.
<i>Shafei</i>	Most common Sunni school of Islamic law in Yemen. The Shafei <i>madhhab</i> first appeared in the central highlands of Yemen in 912-13 and by the end of the Rasulid dynasty in Yemen (1229-1454 AD), it was permanently established as the dominant tradition in southern regions of the country.
<i>Shari'a</i>	Islamic law.
<i>Shighar</i>	Swap marriage, when the brother and sister of one family marry those of another family (often related but not necessarily).
<i>Shisha</i>	A small water pipe filled with molasses-based, often fruit-flavored, tobacco, favored by many including younger women.
<i>Sufism</i>	Mystical Islamic belief and practices (adjective/noun, <i>sufi</i> ). Followers of a particular <i>Sufi</i> tariqa (literally path, referring to a school or order of Sufism) are seeking to find the truth of divine love and knowledge through direct personal experience of God. Yemen has a long Sufi tradition which has been intimately associated with the veneration of local saints (or more accurately in Sufi terminology "friends of God" <sup>[280]</sup> ), reflected in the well-cared-for white domed shrines of such saints that are found in many parts of the country. Hadramawt, the Tihama plateau, Taiz and Ibb areas among others all have continuing Sufi traditions.
<i>Tafrita</i>	A women's afternoon gathering where attendees usually wear their best clothes and jewelry and share savory and sweet snacks, and often chew <i>qat</i> , smoke tobacco in a <i>mada'a</i> or shisha and socialize.
<i>Tawjihi</i>	Secondary school final examination.
<i>'Urf</i>	Customary law. <i>'Urf</i> , from the root meaning 'to know or to be aware,' refers to common knowledge embodied in age-old practices, precedence, agreements and the wisdom of judges and mediators. Transmitted through oral and written texts, at the most basic level <i>'urf</i> seeks, among other things, to channel, minimize and resolve conflicts between individuals and groups.
<i>Waqf</i>	Religious endowment (plural, <i>awqaf</i> ).
<i>Zeffaf</i>	Wedding celebration.
<i>Zar</i>	An event held to appease a <i>jinn</i> (see definition above), who is believed to have invaded a woman's body.
<i>Zaidi</i>	Branch of Shi'a Islam which was established in Yemen by Al-Hadi ila Al-Haqq Yahya ibn Husayn in 896 AD, who was invited to Yemen as an arbitrator by local tribes. Al-Hadi's 14 years of leadership in Yemen inaugurated the nearly 1,000-year Zaidi Imamate which ruled various parts of Yemen until the 1962

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280) Buchman, David (1997). "The Underground Friends of God and Their Adversaries: A Case Study and Survey of Sufism in Contemporary Yemen." *Yemen Update*, Issue 39. p. 21-24.

Revolution. The Zaidi branch of Islam is almost exclusively present in Yemen, with approximately 43 percent of Yemenis following this madhhab.

*Zaynabiyyat* Female military enforcers of vice and virtue mobilized by the armed Houthi movement, also known as *Ansar Allah*. *Zaynabiyyat* are similar to religious police in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, Sudan and Somalia (though only Iran is known for using women in such roles).

## ANNEX B: RESOURCES CONSULTED

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Adra, Najwa

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