

RAPID ASSESSMENT THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GENDERED SOCIAL NORMS

A SNAPSHOT FROM NINE COUNTRIES IN THE ARAB STATES



PRELIMINARY RESULTS



BACKGROUND

In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 infection as a pandemic. The majority of the affected countries put in place precautionary measures to mitigate the exposure risk. Many countries in the Arab States region have fragile health systems, an emergency response was put in place through establishing isolation and/or quarantine measures to reduce transmission risks and curb the spread of the virus. This resulted in the closure of public spaces, schools, and the closure of all international travel. Citizens have been asked to self-isolate and remain at home, while the countries were going through a complete lockdown.

While self-isolation could mean safety for many in a time of chaos and uncertainty, for thousands of women across the Arab States, home is a place of violence and fear. UN Women Office for the Arab States conducted a study to document the gendered impact of COVID-19 on men and women in the region, with a focus on gender roles and attitudes and practices related to gender equality and violence against women.

METHODOLOGY

UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States partnered with [RIWI corp.](#) to conduct a web-survey in 9 countries in the region, namely Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia and Yemen. The targeted sample size was 1,000 respondents in each country with two strata consisting of a minimum of 500 men and 500 women; with a confidence level 97 percent and 5 percent margin of error. A total of 16,462 respondents took part in the survey, including 5,070 women (30 percent).¹

Data was collected using a method invented and patented by RIWI Corp. by which web users encounter random anonymous opt-in surveys when they encounter lapsed or dormant website destinations (e.g., phonyurl.com) into the Web address (URL) bar. All Internet users over the age of 18 in the targeted countries had an equal

random probability of inadvertently landing on the web page where the survey is posted.

The questionnaire included 30 questions and was administered in Arabic, English and French as per the respondents' preference. 72 percent of the respondents filled the survey via a smartphone- 25 percent used a desktop.

Data was collected between May 4th and 27th, 2020. Data was analyzed by El Zanaty Company using SPSS. Weights were applied to adjust for age, sex and educational attainment. Accordingly, all the figures presented here are weighted. This report articulates findings from the web-survey for the 9 countries compiled together.

KEY RESULTS

COVID-19 HAS INCREASED THE BURDEN OF UNPAID CARE AND DOMESTIC WORK FOR BOTH MEN AND WOMEN IN THE REGION

From before the pandemic, evidence has shown that women in the region spend on average 4.7 times more hours in unpaid care and domestic work compared to men.² As a result of the measures taken to curb the spread of the virus and the increased time spent at home, household chores, supporting children in remote schooling and caring for the elderly and the sick are taking up more of people's time.

COVID-19 has also imposed changes in work modalities, with an increased rate of telecommuting. In most of the countries in the region (6 out of 9), [a shift to this working modality has been reported by women more than men](#), highlighting the social attribution to women's roles as primary caregivers.

Although both women and men are facing some of

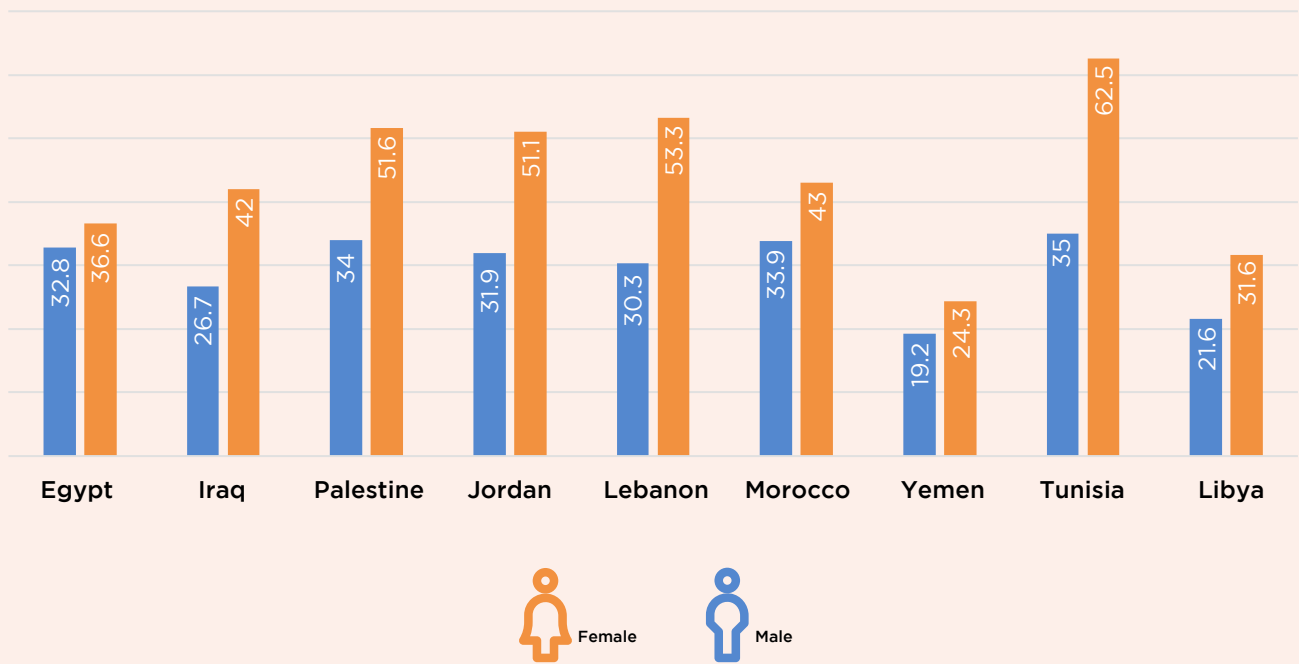
these burdens, women are substantially more likely to perform many of the unpaid care and domestic tasks. Domestic tasks involving cleaning, cooking and serving meals, in particular, appear to almost exclusively be women's responsibilities.

More men than women respondents reported not being usually involved in this type of responsibilities. Furthermore, in all countries surveyed, more women than men reported that the time devoted to household chores has increased because of COVID-19. This difference was statistically significant in all surveyed countries. The gender gap was more important among currently married respondents; however, it is worth noting that the majority of married women in all the surveyed countries indicated that their husbands were more involved in housework since COVID-19.

1 In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the mobile ownership and mobile use of internet are below the global average by 1 percent and 5 percent respectively. Women in the region are 9 percent less likely than men to own a mobile and 20 percent less likely than men to use the mobile internet.

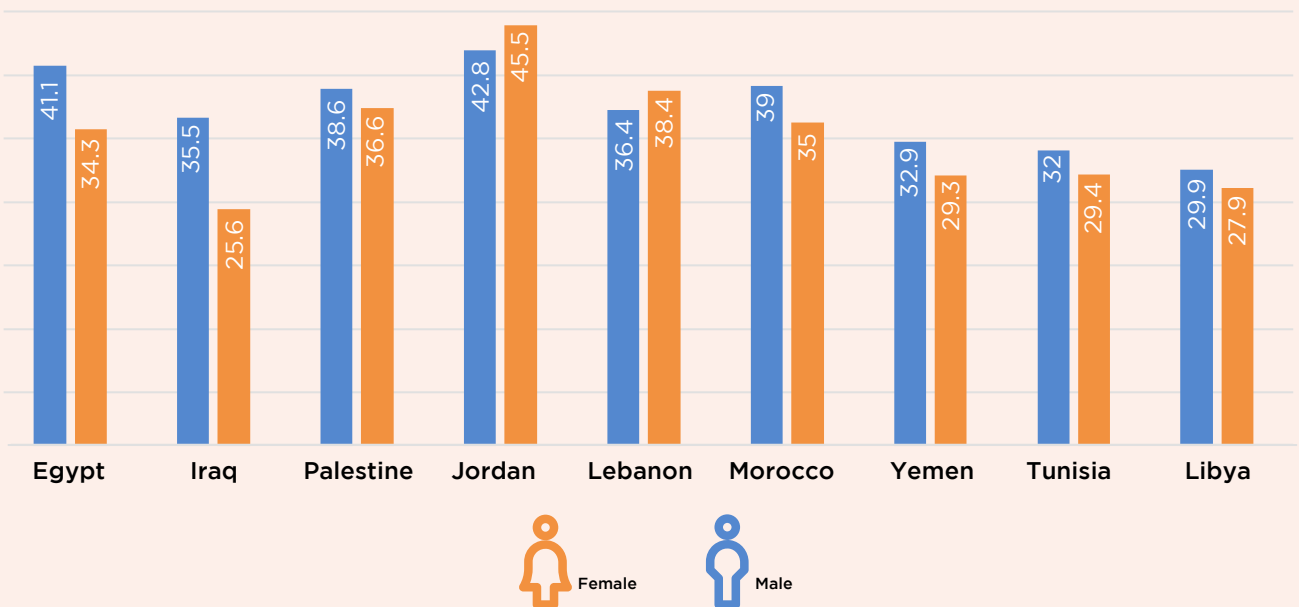
2. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_633166.pdf

Proportion of currently married respondents who reported increased time devoted to household chores

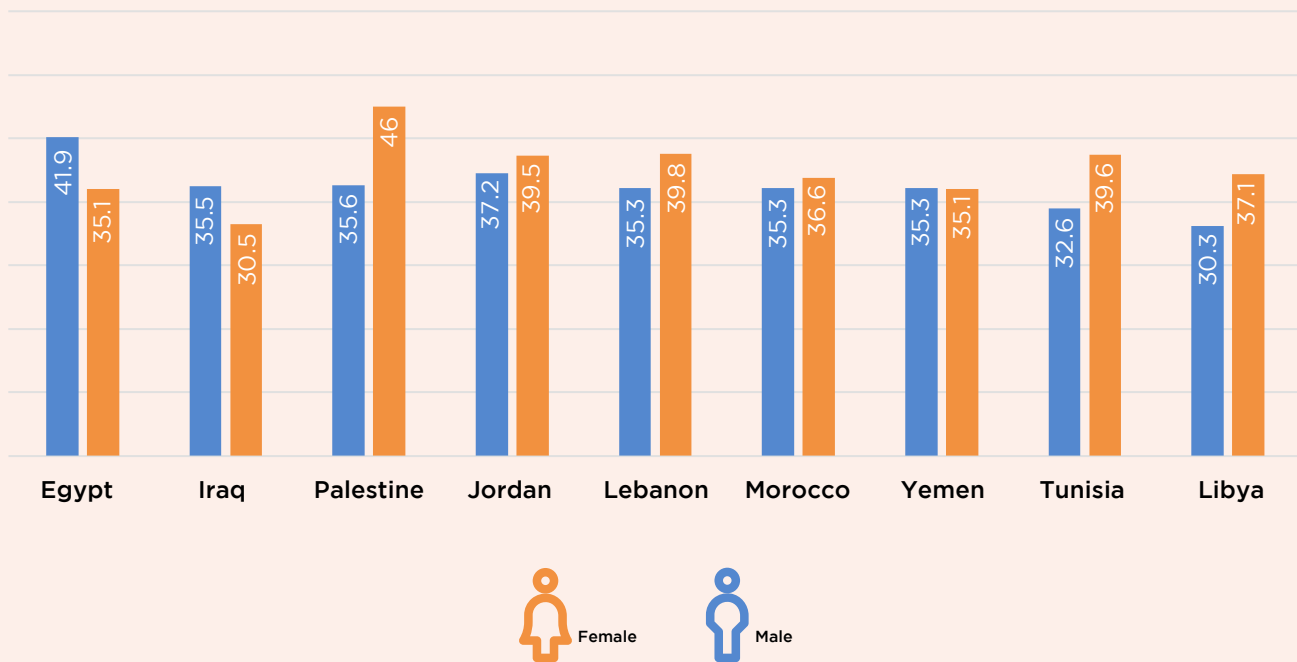


Unpaid care work responsibilities among currently married respondents are distributed a little more evenly, with women typically more likely to be in charge of the physical care of the children and men more likely to provide teaching support.

Proportion of currently married respondents who reported increased time devoted to teaching children



Proportion of currently married respondents who reported increased time devoted to physical care of children



COVID-19 seems to have influenced the time men and women in the region dedicate to care for the elderly and sick within the family. Male respondents in all 9

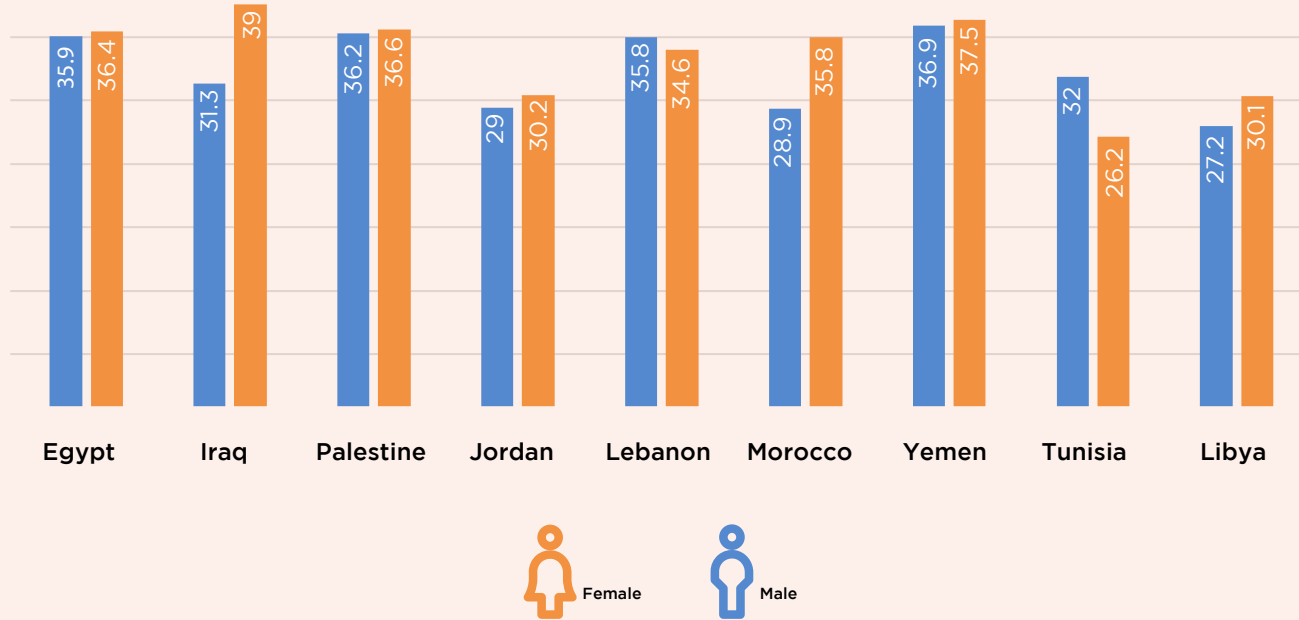
countries were more likely than female respondents to report increasing the time spent in caring for elderly, disabled or sick household members.

WOMEN WERE AT HIGH RISK OF VIOLENCE IN TIMES OF COVID-19, INCLUDING IN THE ONLINE SPACE

In most of the countries surveyed, slightly more women than men reported feeling unsafe in their homes. Among those who reported feeling unsafe, at least 1 in 5 women in the surveyed countries expressed being afraid of domestic violence (by spouse or family member) at the exception of one country (**Lebanon**) where the proportion was lower (15 percent).

In two countries (**Jordan** and **Palestine**), this proportion was higher, with at least one in three women expressing fear of domestic violence. Witnessing or knowing a person who has been subjected to violence can also cause emotional distress. Among respondents who reported feeling unsafe in their homes, more women than men have reported having witnessed or knowing a woman who have been subjected to violence.

Proportion of respondents who reported feeling unsafe in their home



Online harassment was the highest reported type of violence against women in all countries. Respondents in **Egypt** were more likely than respondents in other countries to report knowing or witnessing online harassment against a woman (42 percent), while respondents from **Lebanon** were the least likely to report that (24 percent). The variation in reporting between male and female respondents is quite

significant in **Morocco** and **Egypt**. In **Egypt**, slightly less than half of the female respondents reported knowing or witnessing a woman who experienced online harassment compared to 38 percent among male respondents. In **Morocco**, male respondents were 10 percentage points more likely than females to report knowing or witnessing a woman who experienced online harassment.

REPORTED HELP SEEKING BEHAVIOR OF SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE IN TIMES OF COVID-19.

From before the pandemic, under-reporting of domestic and other forms of violence has always been a challenge, with less than 40 percent of women who experience violence seeking help of any sort or reporting the crime.³ The lockdown measures have made the situation more difficult.

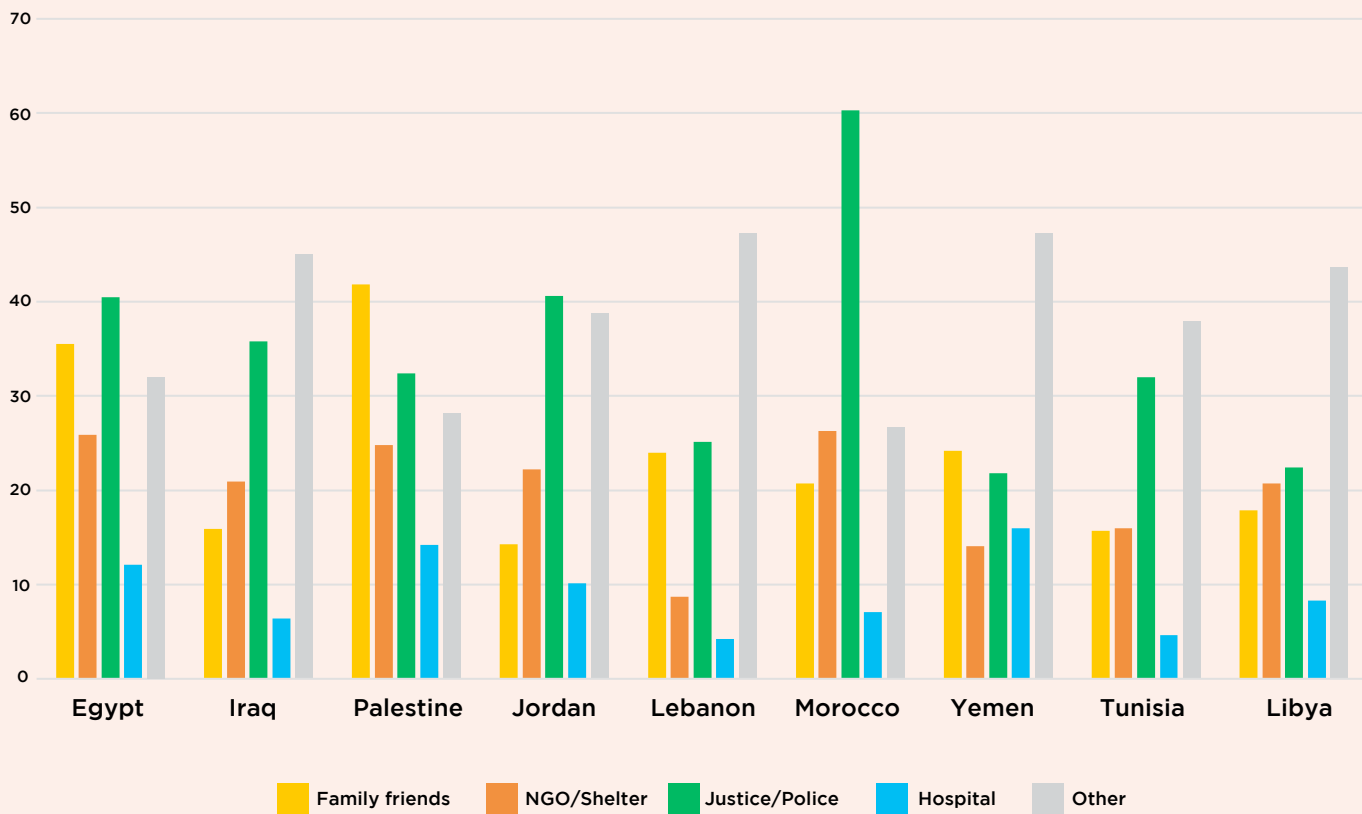
Findings from the survey concur with this data with less than 40 percent reporting rate. Among respondents who expressed knowing a woman who has been subjected to violence, proportions of those who reported that support was sought ranged between 23 percent in **Morocco** and 38 percent in **Iraq**. Out of the list of services (Family and Friends/Police and Justice / NGOs and Shelters/Health), respondents reported that women mainly

turned to police and justice to seek support in the majority of the surveyed countries. This was not the case in **Palestine** and **Yemen**, where family and friends were reported as main gateway for support sought and police and justice ranked second. NGOs and shelters for women survivors of violence ranked as second entry point to seek support, at the exception of **Lebanon** and **Egypt** where family and friends were second after police and justice.

Yemen was the only country where the health sector was reported as the second sectoral entry point. It is worth noting that in all countries, a large proportion of respondents referred to other services as a main source of support. This should be further explored through qualitative research.

³ United Nations Economic and Social Affairs (2015). The World's Women 2015, Trends and Statistics, p. 159.

Proportion of respondents who reported services sought by survivors of violence among those who witnessed or know a women who has been subjected to violence and sought support



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS WAS RECOGNIZED AS A REAL THREAT AND A PRIORITY IN TIMES OF COVID-19 IN THE ARAB STATES

About half of the respondents from all 9 surveyed countries agree that women are currently facing an increased risk of violence from their husbands because of COVID-19, with slightly more women agreeing to this statement than men at the exception of **Libya**

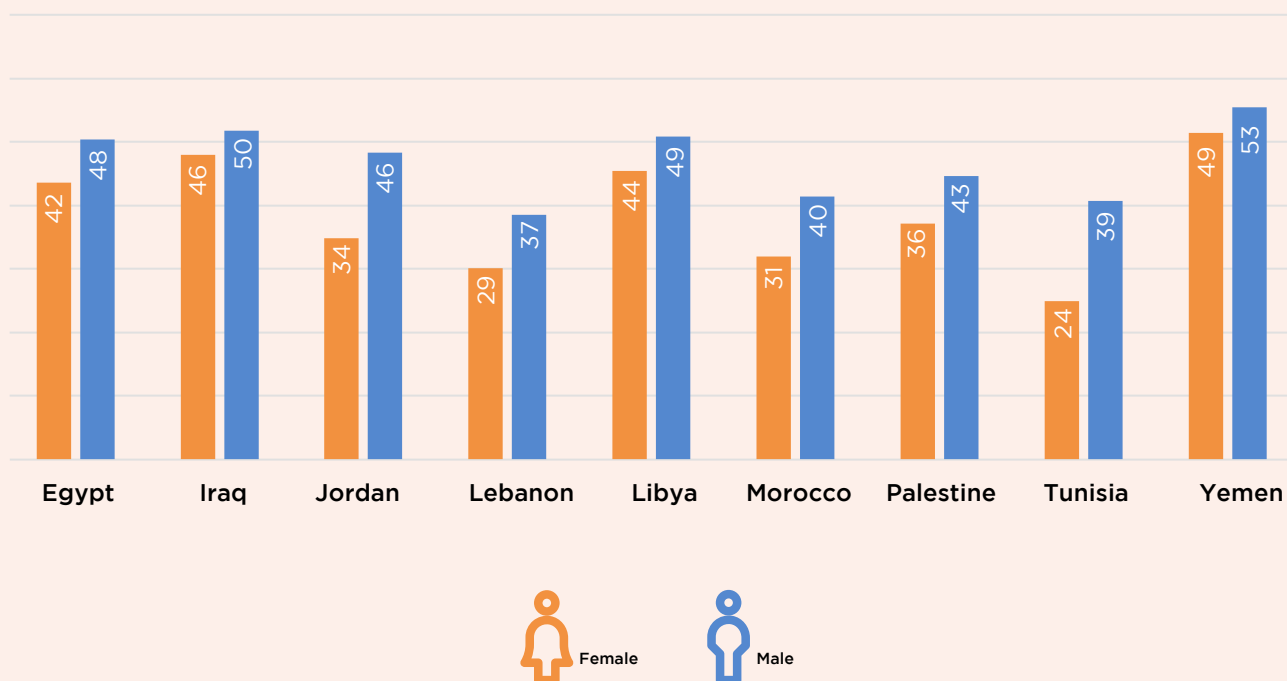
where the proportion was equal. In most countries, respondents with a high educational level (bachelor's degree or higher) were more likely than respondents with a lower educational level to agree with that statement along with respondents of younger age groups.

The majority of respondents from all 9 countries were in agreement with the statement “Addressing violence against women should be a priority even during the COVID-19 outbreak”. Gender differences in the level of agreement to that statement is limited across most countries except for **Jordan, Palestine** and **Tunisia** where more women than men agreed with this statement. More clear variations are observed by education, residence and marital status. In all 9 countries, respondents with a bachelor’s degree or higher, those living in big cities and respondents who are currently married are more likely than their counterparts to be in agreement with that statement.

NEARLY 1 IN 3 RESPONDENTS AT LEAST AGREE THAT WOMEN SHOULD TOLERATE VIOLENCE DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC TO KEEP THE FAMILY TOGETHER.

A considerable proportion of respondents in most countries agree that “A woman should tolerate violence to keep her family together, especially in these difficult times”; with the highest observed in **Yemen** (52 percent) and lowest in **Tunisia** (31 percent). In all countries, more men than women agreed with this statement.

Percentage of respondents who strongly agree or agree that “A woman should tolerate violence to keep her family together, especially in these difficult times”, by sex



THE MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS IN ALL 9 COUNTRIES ARE WILLING TO REPORT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ENGAGE IN ACTIONS TO PREVENT IT

Overall, respondents showed positive attitudes on willingness to report domestic violence incidents, as well as on their willingness to get engaged in actions

that would prevent violence against women in their community. Male respondents are more willing than female respondents to engage in activities to prevent violence against women in their community in most countries except **Egypt**, and **Tunisia** where female respondents are more willing than males to engage in such activities. In most countries, currently married respondents were more willing to engage in actions to prevent domestic violence against women in their community than ever married or single respondents.

CONCLUSIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic has deepened pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social and economic systems which are in turn amplifying the impacts of the pandemic. All of these impacts are further exacerbated in contexts of fragility, conflict, and emergencies where social cohesion is already undermined, and institutional capacity and services are limited.

Documenting these effects, the study conducted by UN Women ROAS shed light on the impact of COVID-19 in 9 countries in the region. It helps understanding

the attitudes and perceptions around gender equality and violence against women in times of crisis.

Despite the challenges, the pathways to progress are promising. While men's inequitable attitudes prevail across the nine countries, it is evident from this research that there are some opportunities through the life experiences of men and women who participated that show that gender equality is possible and that preventing violence against women could be prioritized.

