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Marwan Khawaja and Rana Barazi

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Prevalence of wife beating in Jordanian refugee camps: reports by men and women

Marwan Khawaja, Rana Barazi

METHODS
This exploratory study used data from the recently completed living conditions survey of Jordan’s refugee camps. This was a cross sectional survey of 2590 households selected randomly from 12 refugee camps using a sampling frame provided by Jordan’s Department of Statistics. Some of the camps housed refugees displaced as a result of the 1948–49 Arab-Israeli war, others included refugees from the 1948–49 Arab-Israeli war, and still others included refugees from the 1967 war. The instrument consisted of three questionnaires: one for the household, one for a randomly selected adult aged 15 years and older, and the third for all ever-married women. The data pertaining to wife beating were obtained by face to face interviews with randomly selected adults (adult questionnaire). The study was approved (including an ethical review) by Yarmouk University and the government of Jordan. Fieldwork took place in the spring and summer of 1999, with an overall response rate of 95%. Our original sample was reduced because of the eligibility criteria used for answering the domestic violence questions: currently married, living with spouse, and privacy during the interview. Of the total sample of 801 married adults, 395 persons (262 women and 133 men) were included in the study. There was remarkable similarity between our sample and the original one in terms of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. However, the selected sample was slightly younger (mean age 37.5) than the original (mean age 40), and hence included better educated respondents (29.8% compared with 25.8% with secondary education).

RESULTS
The prevalence rate of lifetime beating was 44.7%, with men reporting higher overall prevalence (48.9%) than women (42.5%). As table 1 shows slapping was the most common (36.0%) beating behaviour, followed by pushing, grabbing or shoving (23.5%), and other unspecified acts of violence (22.9%). Lower prevalence rates were reported for kicking or hitting with the fists (12.6%), throwing harmful objects (11.1%) and choking (9.3%).

Table 1  Lifetime wife beating behaviour reported by currently married men and women, Jordan refugee camps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Total sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slapped her</td>
<td>54 (40.7)</td>
<td>32.2 to 49.5</td>
<td>88 (33.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was violent toward her</td>
<td>37 (27.5)</td>
<td>20.4 to 36.3</td>
<td>54 (20.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushed, grabbed, or shoved her</td>
<td>35 (26.6)</td>
<td>19.1 to 34.7</td>
<td>57 (22.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kicked or hit her with fists</td>
<td>12 (9.4)</td>
<td>4.7 to 15.2</td>
<td>37 (14.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Throw things at her</td>
<td>10 (7.1)</td>
<td>3.7 to 13.4</td>
<td>33 (12.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hit her with an object</td>
<td>7 (4.9)</td>
<td>2.1 to 10.5</td>
<td>21 (8.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choked her</td>
<td>3 (2.4)</td>
<td>0.5 to 6.5</td>
<td>9 (3.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least one behaviour</td>
<td>65 (48.9)</td>
<td>40.1 to 57.7</td>
<td>111 (42.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p Values for \( \chi^2 \) test of association.
Although reports by men, the perpetrators of violence, may yield similar overall prevalence estimates as those of women, caution should be taken in studies investigating injuries and specific acts of violence.

(10.8%), hitting with hurtful objects (7.0), and choking (3.1%). Remarkably, the prevalence rates were strikingly similar between men and women across all behaviours. However, there was a clear sex specific pattern of reporting, with women slightly more likely than men to report the more serious behaviours such as kicking, throwing harmful objects, and choking. Conversely, men were slightly more likely than women to report less severe forms of physical violence including slapping, pushing, and shoving.

Prevalence estimates for past year beating were much lower, and 17.4% of the respondents experienced beating at least once in the past year overall. Unlike lifetime beating, estimates of past year beating were also slightly different for men and women. While 19.2% of women reported being beaten during the past year, 13.7% of men reported that they beat their wives during the same period. However, $\chi^2$ test showed no statistical differences ($p = 0.176$) by sex. Similar trends were shown for beating behaviour during pregnancy: 16.6% of women and 9.8% of men reported such behaviour.

Results showed that 8.4% of all respondents reported that women suffered from any type of physical injury as a result of beating. Here, significantly more women (10.4%) reported wives’ injury than men (3.8%). Among all respondents, 3.7% reported bruises, 3.4% reported cuts, scratches or burns, and 2.3% reported miscarriages.

**DISCUSSION**

The overall prevalence of lifetime beating reported here was quite high (44.7%) in comparative perspective, but corroborates with a previous study conducted in a similar context. Our findings, based on independent reporting by men and women, were also consistent with a recent study of married couples in Lebanon, showing remarkably similar rates of lifetime wife beating by sex. The similarity in reporting reflects the fact that domestic violence may not be considered as taboo in this context. However, sex specific patterns of reporting were evident, with women slightly more likely than men to report the more severe behaviours such as kicking or choking. Furthermore, women were more likely than men to report current—past year—wife beating, violence during pregnancy, or injuries. A number of methodological limitations emerged during analysis, including the cross section design, small sample size, descriptive analytical methods, the emphasis on physical violence, and the inclusion of only camp residents. These clearly limit our ability to generalise the findings to other disadvantaged populations. However, one important implication of our findings can be drawn: although reports by men, the perpetrators of violence, may yield similar overall prevalence estimates of wife beating as those of women, caution should be taken in studies investigating injuries and severe forms of violence based solely on men’s reports.

What this paper adds

Reporting of wife beating by independent samples of men and women. Sex specific patterns of reporting were evident, with women slightly more likely than men to report the more serious behaviours such as kicking or choking. Furthermore, women were more likely than men to report current—past year—wife beating, violence during pregnancy, or injuries.

**Authors’ affiliations**

M Khawaja, R Barazi, Centre for Research on Population and Health, American University of Beirut, Faculty of Health Sciences, Beirut, Lebanon

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Conflicts of interest: none.

Correspondence to: Dr M Khawaja, Centre for Research on Population and Health, American University of Beirut, Faculty of Health Sciences, Beirut, Lebanon; mk36@aub.edu.lb

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