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WOMEN IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Female employment in the Public Sector in Lebanon, between opportunities and constraints: the gendered experience.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study explores the main constraints facing women working in the public sector in Lebanon, when it comes to the prospects for promotion and career advancement and the day-to-day gendered experience within public institutions. The interest in this topic stems from the lack of data on employment in the public sector in general, and more specifically, that of women. Being a host to an important part of the female labor force in Lebanon, the public sector thus needs more attention.

The data collection methodology relies on speech-based participation, mainly in-depth interviews. The methodology called for forty semi-structured individual interviews with women working in the public sector, whether in ministries, independent public institutions or security forces. There were five major topics that surged throughout the fieldwork and are as follows:

ON SATISFACTION AND PROMOTION

1. Gender plays a secondary role in career advancement
2. Predominance of Wasta and political affiliation
3. Lack of motivation and frustration from performing the same job for a long period of time, notably for women in grade 3

ON WORK ENVIRONMENT AND ATTITUDES

1. Lack of awareness on the embedded impacts of gender stereotypes and relations
2. Stereotypical perceptions of attitudes of women and men
3. In the security forces, challenging environment because of the recent presence of women

ON THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER, FAMILY, SOCIETY AND CAREER

1. Balancing work life and family life is a major issue women deal with: being 'good' mothers and at the same time advancing in their careers
2. Lack of change in mentality and social reproduction: burden of children's upbringing and domestic shores solely fall on women's shoulders

ON HARASSMENT

1. Lack of awareness of the definition of the concept of harassment and the embedded manifestations it can have in the workplace
2. Lack of complaint mechanisms or safe spaces for women who endure harassment in their instittions

ON PERCEPTIONS OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR

1. Although the private sector has its perks, almost all participants would prefer to remain in the public sector

These findings call for the following main recommendations and actions to be implemented (a detailed exposé of the recommendations is developed in the last section of the report):

1. Design training modules and workshops aimed at raising awareness regarding the definition of gender dynamics
2. Create pressure groups that work on pushing the gender agenda with members of parliament and influential stakeholders
3. Lobby the parliament for the passage of a Civil Service Gender Equity Law that calls the introduction of gender audits in the public sector
4. Procure funding for quantitative research on female employment in the public sector
5. Lobby pioneer private sector companies to create pilot projects that provide support structures that enable mothers to work (including paid maternity leave of adequate length, quality childcare for working mothers, and provisions for elderly care)
6. Launch a media campaign that works towards the change in the depiction of gender roles
7. Lobby for the introduction of awareness workshops on harassment targeting both male and female public servants
8. Push for designing a clear and accessible complaint system regarding harassment in the workplace
9. Work towards providing social assistance and psychological support for women who experience harassment

01
INTRODUCTION

Traditional gender roles and relations are perceived, to a certain extent, as impediments to the economic empowerment and career advancement of women. In fact, especially in highly patriarchal societies, the concept of complementarity between genders tends to confine women to the private space of the household, ascribing to them the upbringing of the children and the catering to the wellbeing of the family. However, an increasing number of women in Lebanon have obtained a university degree which has prompted them to seek employment and to shape a career for themselves. Also, out of economic and financial needs, more women are entering the labor force in order to support their families given the high living expenses.

The public sector represents a stable gateway for women seeking work, which raises the question of assessing female employment in the public sector through identifying the opportunities that it offers but mostly through shedding light on the constraints women working in the public sector face. Agency plays a big role in approaching what working women have to say about their workplace environment, their careers,and the work-life balance they seek. Asking them their opinions about their situation, their achievements, their needs and their satisfaction – or lack thereof – with their careers is of utmost importance in defining the ways to tackle gender-based discrimination in the public sector, gendered obstacles to promotion and the implications of ascribed gender roles for women.

This study explores the main constraints facing women working in the public sector in Lebanon, when it comes to the prospects for promotion and career advancement and the day-to-day gendered experience within public institutions. The importance of this study stems from the fact that it focuses on the public sector, rather than the usual focus on the private sector. In fact, the public sector hosts a substantial female labor force which explains the need for such a study, shedding light on the perceptions of women working in public administrations. With this in mind, we have designed a multi-dimensional and intersectional approach carried throughout the primary research, whereby

nuances were showcased between different grade-levels *(low, middle, and high grades)* and amongst the different types of institutions *(ministries and independent public institutions, and security forces).*

We will now present the outline of the report. Section two introduces the methodology and the approach adopted for the collection of the primary and secondary data. Section three provides a brief overview of the existing literature that helped in the design of the questionnaire that was used during the in-depth interviews. Section four sets out a brief overview of the current female employment environment in Lebanon. Section five discusses in details the results of the fieldwork and analyses its main trends. Section six explores the main recommendations identified throughout the research and possible further steps.
The last section presents some thoughts and anecdotes gathered during the fieldwork, that are helpful in achieving a holistic understanding of the context.

02
METHODOLOGY

The available academic and research data related to our topic of study mostly focuses on general trends of female employment in the MENA region, with an emphasis on the private sector. Gaps in literature explain the need for field research to better dissect the issue at stake. Discussing the obstacles facing women working in the public sector requires a qualitative primary research that is based on these women's narratives and stories. The experiences of the respondents are at the core of understanding the gendered experience of working in the public administration, the main constraints and the axes of improvement.

The questionnaire was designed after thorough secondary research, focusing on literature regarding inclusion of women in the labor force of the public sector in general, more specifically in Lebanon and the MENA region. It is inspired by the validation of women workplace culture questionnaire that was designed in Sweden by Bedil Bergman and is structured along three main factors: perceived burdens on me *(the individual woman)*, perceived burdens on women in general, and sexual harassment. The data collection methodology is based on speech-based participation mainly in-depth interviews. Initially the methodology called for thirty semi-structured individual interviews with women working in the public sector, whether ministries, independent public institutions or security forces.

We have expanded the number to forty in order to enrich the analysis and to include a larger number of security forces members. The sample is distributed as follows:

	Institution
Ministries and Independent Public Institutions	Central Inspection Board CRDP Civil Organizing Ministry of Social Affairs Ministry of Industry Ministry of Agriculture Ministry of Justice Ministry of Environment Ministry of Water and Energy Ministry of Youth and Sports Ministry of Economy Ministry of Telecommunications Ministry of Education and Higher Education
Security Forces	Internal Security Forces Lebanese Army

The choice of interviewing women working with the security forces comes from our firm belief that such institutions are historically male-dominated and aligned with the ascribed gender stereotypes and gender roles prevalent in our society. Thus, the environment in which women officers are evolving can be an interesting lens of comparison to the environment of civil servants in ministries and public institutions. The latter hosts a large number of female employees, which theoretically might influence the daily experience and the prospects of career advancement.

Moreover, our aim was also to avoid focusing on female-intensive public sector jobs in education and health, since these arenas are perceived as 'favorable' and 'appropriate' for women. The interview targets were selected through

snowball sampling and hinged on the availability of the women we have contacted and their responsiveness. However, there was an effort to reflect the diversity of these women's backgrounds and to involve women from different institutions, positions, grades, and age groups. The final sample is distributed as follows:

	GRADE	TOTAL
Ministries and Independent Public Institutions	1	3
	2	7
	3	14
	JUDGE	1
Security Forces	High ranking officers	5
	Low ranking officers	10
		40

Education Level		Civil Status	
Bachelor degrees	17	Married	28
Master degree	6	Single	11
Doctorates	3	Divorced	1
Medicine	1		
Engineering / Architecture	8		
Baccalaureate	4		
Judge	1		

It must be stressed that the sample does not claim to statistically represent all women working in the public sector in Lebanon. Rather, it aims to provide a few major trends regarding these women's perceptions of their careers, professional and personal self-image and work environment.

Regarding the data analysis process, note-taking was conducted by the researcher during each interview. An excel matrix was then elaborated, to include the main themes of the questionnaire. Each interview was transcribed into the matrix thus jumpstarting the process of analyzing the data. Major trends and findings were identified and analyzed in view of the main concepts extracted from the literature review.

Moreover, several obstacles were faced when getting in touch with the participants. A few of them requested official approval from their respective director general before accepting to participate in the process. Some of the collaboration requests we sent were met by rejection from the respective authorities and thus, we were unable to conduct interviews in certain public institutions. This was especially the case when dealing with the security forces and the ministries dealing with security issues.

03
LITERATURE REVIEW & STUDY'S FRAMEWORK

The State is undoubtedly a major element in what Connell (Connell, 2006a) calls "gender order" whether through shaping certain social and societal advancements that have happened through a change in policies, laws and practices requiring the intervention of the State; or through the power of the State in regulating the lives of women in the private and public realms. In this section, different themes encountered in existing literature on the subject are explored which in turn introduces the logic that shaped the questionnaire.

1. Barriers to Promotion: the glass ceiling?

The gender glass ceiling effect argues for the presence of an invisible barrier facing the career advancement of women, mostly towards senior management positions. This theory was introduced in the 1980s by feminist researchers and has since been used as a lens of analysis in policy-making recommendations routing for gender equality in the workplace. Gender equality is deemed a key driver of economic growth: the average loss of potential output for Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries amounts to more than 54 percent of GDP (Booz and Co, 2012). What seems interesting to discuss throughout the interview process is the relevance of gender equality in the public administration. In fact, the process of recruitment, the social benefits and the salaries in the public sector are the same for both men and women. However, the question is: what are the impacts of the predominant gender power dynamics on the career advancement of women in the public sector?

According to a recent report tackling female employment in the public sector in the MENA region (OECD, 2014), equal representation of women in public employment is a key indicator of progress towards a diverse and inclusive workforce. Moreover, at senior levels, gender balance is an important indicator of the role that women play in decision-making processes and policy making. In Lebanon, the female labor force is highly present in the public administration, but not equivalently in high-ranked positions. Economic and financial decision-making positions in both public and private sectors are largely held by men. Understanding the layers behind such a status will be helpful in identifying ways to improve women's situation in public employment.

However, the glass ceiling model of gender equality does not seem enough to understand the disparities. Gender equality within the arrangements of public sector organizations does not necessarily mean gender equity, whereby the initial power dynamics are disregarded as crucial in maintaining gender-based discrimination (Connell, 2006b), which we analyze in the findings section.

2. Gender, Family, society and career

A recent study (Kauser and Tlaiss, 2011) has explored the impact of the intersection of gender, work and family factors on the career advancement of female managers in the Lebanese private sector. The main insights that were identified are not aligned with the common conception in existing literature regarding the 'negative' effect of family responsibilities on career progress. The women who were interviewed do not seem to perceive their role as caregivers as a barrier to their professional advancement. The paper concludes with the omnipresence of the role of Wasta and the reliance on networks and connections in achieving career progress, which showcases that, according to these women, gender is less of a determining criterion comparatively. Is that the case in the public administration? How do women working in the public sector perceive the differentiated roles of gender and Wasta on their day-to-day experience at work and on their career progress?

Additionally, family plays a central role in the MENA region and is perceived as a cultural asset. In a report published by the World Bank in 2016, a substantial number of women in the MENA region have voiced their concern regarding the appropriation of their narratives regarding their role as mothers and their careers. According to them, on the one hand, one does not exclude the other; and on the other hand, they do not wish to see their role as mothers shrunk or questioned. This output is seemingly crucial for a holistic and uncondescending approach that we have decided to adopt in this study.

The MENA offers a puzzling concept coined by the World Bank in their 2016 report titled "gender and development in the Middle East and North Africa: women in the public sphere": the 'Gender Paradox'. Thus, while positive developments were achieved in areas related to women's wellbeing such as fertility, education and life expectancy, very little improvement was recorded in terms of women's economic participation and political empowerment. In fact, constructed gendered roles and cultural ideologies are major parts of the constraints women face in the MENA region (Jamali, 2005) along with the discriminatory behavior and the structured corporate inequalities and institutional discrimination that will be delved into in the analysis section.

3. Harassment

The mainstreaming of the concept of harassment in the workplace stems from the realization of the intricate dynamics at play. Research has shown the negative impact of harassment on the quality of work, on the team environment and on the personal wellbeing of the employees. In this study, harassment is defined as the abuse of power and status within the system of powers, rather than being restricted to unwelcomed sexual invitations. Also, harassment is not only restricted to the physical aspect but includes verbal, emotional and psychological aspects.

Including the latter aspects in the discussion is crucial in identifying the different layers of gender power dynamics and their impact on women, men and the public institution.

On another note, the International Labor Organization (ILO) is preparing a convention tackling the pressing issue of violence and harassment for women and men in the world of work scheduled for the month of June 2019. According to recent research mainly conducted by the ILO and Care International, violence and harassment are both intertwined with the prevalence of gender inequality in society, and a key obstacle to women's economic empowerment. The impact on economic growth has been also highlighted. Exploring the definition given to harassment by women working in the public sector helps in mirroring the perception of this concept in society and provides an understanding of the multi-layered fields of improvement.

03- Literature Review & Study's Framework

04
WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT
A BRIEF CONTEXTUALIZATION

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Before laying out the results of our study, it seems important to introduce the current context of women and employment in Lebanon and to set out the historical evolution of the public sector in Lebanon in general, and more specifically the role of women in the public administration. It seems important to mention at this point that the lack of data and quantitative studies on women employment in the public sector has been a major obstacle during this study. Indeed, one of the major findings of this study may have been that there is little quantitative data pertaining to women's employment in general and a complete absence of quantitative data regarding women's employment in the public sector, which raises the need to fill this gap urgently.

1. A historical overview

During the decolonization process, the construction of previously colonized countries in the MENA region followed the Keynesian approach to the role of the state resulting in the creation of a large public sector. Employment opportunities in public administration were progressively opening up for women. Additionally, migratory trends in labor surplus countries, like Lebanon and Egypt, to oil-rich countries mainly the Gulf countries, resulted in a shortage in the labor markets of sending countries, which in turn, allowed a larger space for a feminized labor in general, and more specifically in the public sector (Moghadam, 2003).

However, the central role played by the State in tailoring economic development in the region did not apply in the case of Lebanon in the 50s, 60s and 70s. Lebanon was an exception in terms of participation rates in the private sector compared to other countries in the MENA region. It hosted a traditionally important private sector that is larger than the public sector.

After the end of the Lebanese civil war in the early 90s, employment in the public sector boomed following the decision made by sectarian political parties to use this sector as a platform for asserting their power over their respective audiences. Nonetheless, the Lebanese public administration offered many opportunities for well-educated women in teaching, health, social work and welfare – keeping in mind that Lebanon hosts the highest share of highly educated women in the MENA region (Moghadam, 2005).

2. Structure of the Lebanese public sector

According to a study conducted by Information International published in 2017, the public sector in Lebanon included more than 300 thousand employees in 2017, which represents a share of around 25% of the total workforce. Almost 120 thousand are employed in the military and security forces, 40 thousand in the education sector, 25 thousand in ministries and public administrations, and 115 thousand in public institutions and municipalities. However, given the fact that these figures were issued in only one report that was not officially adopted by the government, their veracity is in doubt.

Civil servants working in the public sector, excluding military and security forces, are represented under five main categories or grades, grade one being the highest (Director general) and grade five being the lowest. Each grade has 22 steps, and each civil servant climbs automatically one grade every two years, if nothing major occurs professionally such as fraud or malpractice. Moving to higher grades starting grade four can only be done through an exam administered by the Civil Servants Board.

The average age of central government employees in 2012 was as follows:

Grades	Average in years
Grade 1	44.38
Grade 2	51.87
Grade 3	45.77
Grade 4	49.72
Grade 5	53.34

Conversely, the lowest average age is represented in the highest grade and the highest average age pertains to the lowest ranking employees, which seems to suggest a certain lack of mobility in the public service.

3. Major trends in Female employment

The following review is based on the latest available data which pertains to female employment in general and includes both the private and public sectors.

Activity rate in Lebanon per gender, 1970-2014
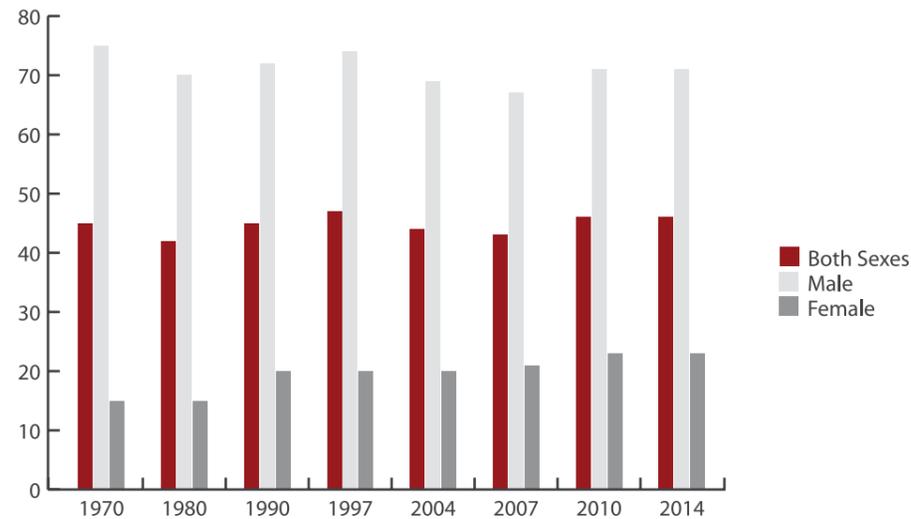
Source: Central Administration for Statistics, 2011

Based on primary data from the Central Administration for Statistics (CAS), the evolution of the activity rate between 1970 and 2014 has shown a gender discrepancy whereby the male activity rate remained high with an average of 73% and the female activity rate remained low slightly increasing from 15% to 23%. In fact, female participation has remained relatively low despite major improvement in education and fertility rates.

Activity rates by age and gender, 2009
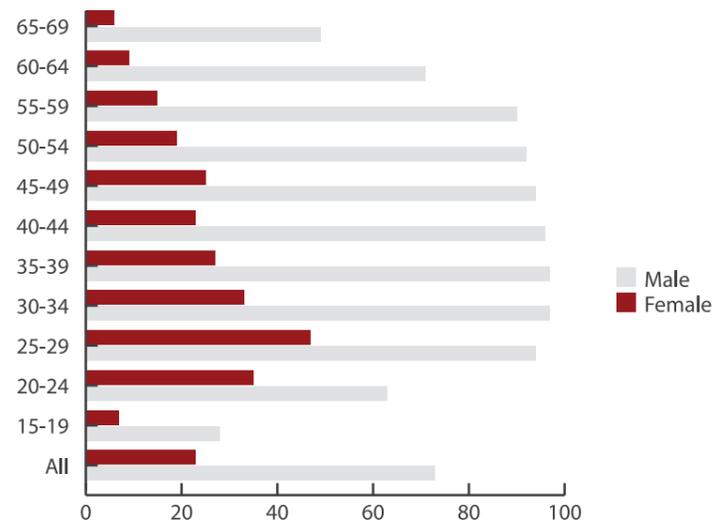
Source: CAS, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2009

The female activity rate in the 25-29 age range is the highest and attains 47%, dropping to 27% for the 35-39 age range. The latter is explained by the fact that most women get married in the 25-29 age category, which influences their choices once they start having children and start carrying the responsibility of their upbringing. It raises the question of the impact of culture and tradition on women's careers and the perception of working women as to their situation in such a context. It also sheds the light on the availability and affordability of child care facilities that are part of the process of providing women with mechanisms of support in their familial and professional lives. This trend partly explains why working women are younger, on average, than working men: 52% of working women were under 35 compared to 38% for working males.

Distribution of employed according to occupation and gender, 2009

Source: CAS, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2009

Although women are less present in employment in Lebanon, the percentage of women occupying professional positions such as doctors, teachers or engineers, is higher than that of men, 26% vs. 8%. Additionally, in 2011, 79% of working women were employees compared to 55% for males. The latter also implies that only 15% of women are business-owners compared to 42% of working males. However, the educational attainment of working women is higher than that of working men: 43% of working women held university degrees compared to only 20% for working males. Conversely, irrespective of the education level, the unemployment rate was higher in 2011 for women than men.

Regarding employment in the public sector, according to an article written by Rola Rizk Azour in 2013 in the Assadissa journal published by *Institut Des Finances* Basil Fuleihan, female employees in the public sector represented, almost 70% of civil servants in Lebanon in 2012, excluding the military and teachers. However, this share does not seem to be maintained in senior management positions.

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4. Recent updates

In July 2018, the salary scale was re-evaluated and re-adjusted adapting it to the relatively expensive living standards in Lebanon. The adjustment happened after many months of negotiation, strikes and conflict between the governmental bodies and the labor unions. The new salary scale translated into an increase in public administration wages. Working hours also were adjusted as follows: closure on Saturdays accompanied by an increase of the weekday work hours by an hour and a half i.e. from 8 am until 3.30 pm. This information is going to be valuable for the next section, since it mostly affects working mothers.

04- Women and employment: a brief contextualization

05
FINDINGS
AND ANALYSIS

The diversity of backgrounds is a characteristic of the public sector, whether ministries, security forces or independent public institutions. It encompasses the different religions, sects, cultures and classes, and provides a platform for interaction amongst them – or at least, that is how the majority of the public servants interviewed perceive the work environment they are evolving in.

"I come from a remote village in North Lebanon. I was living in a homogeneous environment that lacked diversity but felt safe. It wasn't until I started working in the public sector that I met people who were from a different religion and a different upbringing. It allowed me to have an open mindedness I believe I didn't have".

Another common belief revolves around the negative perception that Lebanese citizens have of the public administration and public servants.
"Corrupt", "free-riders", "unproductive" and "lazy" are a few words the participants used to describe how society perceives them. Most of them were disappointed by such a judgment that they deemed unfair to the efforts they put into their work.

"You know what, the sterile political system we have in this country allows for such assumptions to exist. It has catered for clientelist and sectarian policies of employment in the public sector, omitting in many cases the appraisal of skills and competencies that are aligned with the tasks. There is only 20% to 30% of people who actually work in this sector and who actually consider themselves as public servants – and I am being generous in my estimation. The others are there for show".

However, all participants working in the security forces have repeatedly highlighted the respect they have for their respective institutions, and the respect they are shown in their social environments and society.

In this section, we explore the main narratives regarding the work environment, the barriers to promotion, the impact of gender roles and stereotypes, harassment and the obstacles that women might face in the private sector. When deemed pertinent, the differentiation between ministries and security forces and amongst the different grades/ranks is highlighted.

1. Satisfaction and Promotion

'Take-home' points
1- **Gender plays a secondary role in career advancement**
2- **Predominance of Wasta and political affiliation**
3- **Lack of motivation and frustration from performing the same job for a long period of time, especially for women in grade 3**

In the ministries and independent public institutions

Although the levels of satisfaction vary amongst the participants, we have identified a main trend in their narratives: the public sector, in its current structure and hierarchy, can be limiting to the ambitions of the individuals working in it, both women and men. The lack of motivation and frustration from performing the same job and tasks for a large number of years, sometimes over 20 years is a major setback for many of the participants. This finding is mostly relevant to women who found themselves stuck in the same grade for many years, a situation that is most common in the third grade. This shows how the public sector's current structure limits, if not depletes, their ambition.

"I am not satisfied for not being able to implement something I believe in and the lack of political decision making. The lack of opportunities for promotion and remaining in the same position for years also take a toll on your motivation and drive".

Interestingly, those who feel content and somewhat satisfied are in a management position and they admit having the right contacts, connections and networks along with the right requirements and skills to fill the position. In such a context, personal effort and hard work were also highlighted as important for career advancement and satisfaction.

"I entered the public sector by being appointed in a senior position by the Minister himself, who believed that I was the best fit for the position. I was aware of my skills and competencies and I also knew I had what it takes to run the team. Throughout my career, I proved myself and maintained my networks and connections. I can say that I am satisfied with my career path so far".

According to the participants, career advancement is mainly related to political affiliations, the sectarian division of the public administration and Wasta. Many women agreed that gender has no or very little impact on the promotion process.

"The public administration is a key component in maintaining the country's fragile stability but political interventions are ruining it. Sectarianism and political interventions hinder the improvement of the public sector. I sat for the grade 3 exams at the civil service council and I was among the top 5. I was not appointed because I was not backed by any political connection. I filed a complaint at the Consultative Council. I won the case and was appointed Head of Unit. I am still waiting for a politician to come tell me you will get promoted because you are competent and you have the skills. Maybe I will wait forever".

However, although women are very present in the public sector, the high management positions do not reflect a proportional representation of the female public labor force. In fact, among those interviewed, a few were filling the role of gender focal points in their respective institutions. They work closely with the National Commission of Lebanese Women (NCLW) and have undergone workshops and capacity building regarding gender-based discrimination and gender mainstreaming in the public sector. Their point of view is highly nuanced when it comes to the role gender plays in promotion and career advancement. In fact, the gender focal points we have interviewed argue that, historically and traditionally, men dominate networking circles, political connections and representation. Thus, women do not possess the same networking opportunities necessary for promotion to decision-making positions.

"Gender plays a role but comes second in career advancement. Wasta and political connections come first. However, Wasta is mostly available to men, because structurally, they are more present in politics and thus have more exposure and connections which allow them to be extensively in charge of decision-making".

The case of security forces

The presence of women in the security forces mainly in the Internal Security Forces (ISF), General Security and Lebanese army is relatively recent compared to ministries and related public institutions, which renders them historically male-dominated institutions. Additionally, the hierarchy in such institutions is more demanding and stricter, whereby the rules and internal laws must be respected. When rules are broken, the impacts are detrimental to the careers of the personnel working in security forces institutions. Thus, when analyzing the work environment and promotion process in them, it seemed pertinent to differentiate them from ministries and independent public institutions. Promotion happens, more or less, organically and through a time-sensitive framework in the security forces institutions. The barriers to promotion that women face mostly stem from the fact that they are new in these institutions, and therefore are less present in senior levels.

2. Work environment and attitudes

Men continue to massively dominate the policy making positions in most modern state institutions. Gendered divisions of labor persist in public sector employment, as do organizational arrangements which tend to marginalize women's interests in relation to those of men'. More specifically in Lebanon, the attitudes of public servants tend to be differentiated along the lines of gender. "Strict" or "harsh" are words used to describe the attitude of women managers in the public sector. "Jealous" or "envious" can also be used to describe the relationship among female peers or among female managers/ subordinates. However, other stereotypical adjectives were used to describe the male-to-male relationships at work. For example, "competitive", "selfish" or "arrogant" were words highlighted by some of the participants.

A few interviewed women argued that women are possibly less corrupt and are thus fought by other colleagues and political decision-makers, especially when it comes to their behaviors, looks and attitudes. This can discourage them from always having to fight the existing system.

"Women are harder to corrupt which can also be perceived as a barrier for promotion".

It seems that the general perception of the participants falls under the 'prove yourself' gender-neutral moto, emphasizing the importance of individual effort. The majority of the women who were interviewed consider that gender has no impact on the attitudes, the assigned tasks or the managerial assessment. They argue that the management's trust level in their work has to do with the performance of the individual rather than with gender-discrimination.

"It all boils down to the personal effort pulled by the public servants. When I first became director, I wanted to change the view citizens have of public servants - I created job descriptions for each position and I started building a structure. Also, we included volunteers from universities who can come and experience work in our public administration. This helped create many links and partnerships".

The stereotypical views of gender roles, relations and attitudes are to be taken into account when conducting a study such as this. Many of the participants argued that women tend to be extra vigilant in the way they act because they are targeted by stereotypical comments or even rumors that feed into the societal negative bias towards women. The impacts of such rumors can be detrimental to women's professional wellbeing and quality of work.

"There were always rumors about me, about my looks and attire and about my friendship with my male colleagues. People like to throw their own insecurities on others and invent stories. I was an 'easy' prey and the rumors were mostly started by men, oddly enough. I am an outgoing and free woman; I don't mind what people say about me but I must say that it did affect me psychologically at some point".

The case of the security forces

There is one important nuance to highlight for the security forces when it comes to the findings discussed in this section. Women only recently started to enroll in these institutions and had to argue for gender-based nuances in the infrastructure, logistics and internal labor laws such as toilets for women, maternity leaves, overnight spaces exclusive for women, etc.

"When I first started working at the end of the 90s, there were no logistics and the infrastructure was not ready to host the newly recruited female labor force, especially for lower ranking grades. We had to do everything from scratch and organize the workplace, and the management gave us full support in our endeavors".

The environment in the security forces institutions was challenging on many levels but the biggest challenge, according to the participants, was the attitude of male colleagues at the beginning. In fact, since these institutions host a large pallet of social backgrounds, cultures, and religions, the situation can be a bit tricky for women when it comes to the perception of their male colleagues regarding their work, their position and their presence in a male-dominated environment. Change is progressively taking place but it is not always an easy process.

"As a high-ranked officer, I had to be firm, harsh and fight for my place. I also had to prove myself and establish my authority over the male subordinates who sometimes were challenging my orders because they were not accepting of my authority as a woman".

The power of the uniform was considered as an important aspect in the respect they receive from fellow citizens, thus increasing their perceived self-esteem and devotion to the institution they belong to.

3. Gender, family, society and career

For many of the participants, balancing work life and family life seems to be the single most important obstacle to their career aspirations and the fulfillment of their role as mothers. Gender stereotypes influence two perceptions: the judgement over women's professional capacities by both men and women and women's capacity and working women's own self-image (expectations vs. reality). A study conducted by the ILO (Metle, 2002) suggests that successful women in leadership positions have endured negative attitudes, cognitive distortions and a lack of sympathy from their surroundings. They attained high positions within a hostile environment.

"I had a friend who gave her life to her career and work. She put her family life on the side. She said: "stop worrying about your son and your family, you are in a management position now". I said to her: "if they asked me to choose, I prefer to be a mother than have a successful career".

The tone that was used when voicing the latter reflected some judgmental tendencies, which confirmed, partly, the hostile environment suggested by the above-mentioned study. However, participants in high-level positions have showcased their pride in the work they have accomplished and in the fact that they managed to have families and raise their children, although not under the mainstream and stereotypical views of children's upbringing.

"I am a hard worker. I never commit to the working hours only and I am proud of my career path and of my children. I was challenged, people judged me. But the most important thing, is that I owned my life."

Moreover, the internalization of constructed cultural norms and roles by women themselves, is reflected in the choice of education, marriage and career paths. It also results in the guilt-feeling many of the participants experience since they believe they are falling short on their role as mothers.

"Since the change in the working hours, I feel that my work has taken from the time I spend with my children. My own self-perception has been negatively impacted and I feel like I am under much more pressure in both my work and family environments".

The participants value their role as mothers and caregivers, and most of them believe they should still bear primary responsibility for children's upbringing and socialization but they should not be penalized for their career aspirations. What was also highlighted is the fact that working mothers deal with the low to absent load of responsibilities taken up by their husbands. They feel like they have two jobs, without the tangible change in the attitude of working fathers, given the power they hold in the current dynamics.

"I want to have a career and to be present in my household which, in my situation, means that work never ends for me. I still perform the major responsibilities in the household and I have ambitions at the professional level. It is tiring and draining. This is the major issue".

4. Harassment

During each interview, the concept of harassment this study refers to, as mentioned in the literature review section, was defined to the participants. It was mentioned that harassment refers to the abuse of power dynamics or status, whether verbally, physically, psychologically and emotionally. The public sector mirrors, in many ways, the Lebanese society, its perception of the role of women in society and its conception of gender-based discrimination and harassment. As one of the participants highlighted:

"Our society is unjust and gender-biased. The public administration is nothing but a reflection of the society we are evolving in, thus, changing our public institutions cannot happen alone. There needs to be a parallel work on the mentality in the society and a gradual deconstruction of gender stereotypes."

Harassment exists in the public sector and in the private sector, as it exists in Lebanese society. However, participants believe that women are more protected in the public sector. When discussing the issue of harassment in the workplace, many participants replied in an automatic way, stating that harassment is not an issue in their institution.

Additionally, we have noticed in many cases, the lack of understanding of the meaning of harassment and the definition of inappropriate behavior. "Compliments", some said. Others voiced their concern about verbal, psychological and physical harassment.

"I have experienced verbal and psychological harassment by a colleague a few years back. He had made inappropriate remarks about my body, attire and never missed an opportunity to physically approach me. I talked to my director, who was shocked by such allegations and defended his male colleague. I was blamed for what I had endured. I felt alone and unsupported".

This is where the importance of defining harassment comes in. Harassment is at the center of the abuse of power within a gendered system of powers. It is not about accepting compliments or not, it is about understanding the power dynamics present in society generally, and more specifically in public administration. Being blamed for a male colleague's inappropriate behavior is a direct consequence of wrongfully defining harassment at the workplace.
However, women are also part of these power dynamics – most of them reinforce and reproduce them, by placing the major responsibility on women's behavior and actions. The majority of the participants placed the blame on women who accept unsolicited behaviors by their male colleagues and prefer not to face them or defend themselves. The key issue in the latter is the way "accepting" is defined.

"Women must also be blamed. When acting inappropriately the male colleague wants to test her and the limits (or lack of) she will put up against him. Some women don't confront and defend themselves. The colleague would then tell everyone that she is easy and the rumors start to spread".

The lack of effective complaint mechanisms that empower women when experiencing harassment and the obvious lack of accountability for those who abuse their power and make inappropriate gestures towards women working in the same institution is crucial in explaining the persistence of such behaviors and their normalization. Putting too much pressure on women, without developing mechanisms within the organizations and on the political level to support them while they are dealing with harassment, can only harm a healthy evolution in the workplace.

"I knew a female colleague who was verbally harassed and touched inappropriately, but couldn't do anything because she was on a contractual base, so she was scared to lose her job. Facing and confronting might have meant losing her position. How can she be judged? What do people know about her financial situation and familial issues?"

The case of the security forces

Many of the women interviewed in the security forces, and more specifically in the Lebanese army, emphasized the strict regulations issued by the army's leadership and management regarding the different aspects of harassment in the institution. Given the punishment policy that is in place, male colleagues are less inclined to act inappropriately, as it will affect their grade promotion *(which happens automatically based on seniority).*

"A few years ago, a soldier's wife asked for a meeting with his superior and complained about the violence she was subjected to by her husband. The complaint was addressed with extreme seriousness and the soldier was detained for a period of time, which in turn, affected his promotion".

5. Perceptions of the private sector

'Take-home' points
1- **Although the private sector has its perks, almost all participants would prefer to remain in the public sector**

The reasons for greater opportunities in the public sector and the tendency for female employment in public administration include the following: work stability, flexible working hours and statutory rights to leave (*maternity, part-time, vacation, etc.*), limited pressure on long working hours and unpredictable schedules, health coverage and retirement, and a somewhat acceptable work/life balance.

As part of the interview process, we have asked the participants to compare employment in the public sector and in the private sector.
There is a general tendency towards highly valuing their current situation compared to what could have been their situation in the private sector.
The main themes that were highlighted throughout the primary research process are as follows:

1- Lack of exposure when compared to the public sector. Mostly according to Heads of Units, the public sector provides the space for meeting counterparts from different countries, attending workshops and capacity building, and being involved in esteemed social networks, which is not the case in the private sector
2- Long working hours and lack of stability and of retirement security
3- Shorter maternity leaves and less flexibility for working mothers, leading to higher pressure on personal and familial lives. Most of the women interviewed found that the public sector can be more suitable for their fulfillment of their roles as mothers (which is important for them)
4- Higher risk of harassment
5- Lack of equal pay

06 RECOMMENDA-TIONS AND POTENTIAL FURTHER STEPS

Although the recommendations proposed by the participants and those that our research team have highlighted overlap on many occasions, it seemed important to differentiate between the two in this section, thus, confirming our initial approach in providing a space for these women's narratives and thoughts.

1. From the participants' perspective

The following points represent the perception of the different women we have interviewed.

At the organizational level

1. Creating kindergarten, after-school hours daycare/nursery in order to relieve women of some part of their caregiving responsibilities, especially those limiting their working time, and to allow them to advance smoothly in their careers (state subsidies)
2. Providing more flexible working hours for mothers of small children
3. Introducing a time-sensitive quota system, especially for managerial positions that vouches for equal opportunities in managerial and decision- making positions
4. Differentiating between women and men in the institution where overnights are possible and providing women with a safe ride back home when it is the case

On motivation

1. Introducing technology use, training and language courses for public servants, which can help in maintaining their motivation
2. Providing trainings and workshops for lower grades as well as performance-based bonuses
3. Setting-up a ladder/job rotation mechanism to keep both motivation and learning curve high
4. Proposing a 360-degree evaluation system and proper career management/development

On Accountability

1. Developing a mechanism that encourages accountability and transparency and that benefits the advancement of public servants who are honest
2. Building a competency and skills-based system thus limiting the role of political affiliations and connections

On Gender awareness

1. Introducing strategic planning for each institution, incorporating a gender-sensitive approach
2. Working on education and awareness, at schools and in the households, enabling a change in the common mentality of the Lebanese society
3. Specifying a budget for gender-related workshops and awareness sessions for women working in the public sector

2. From the perspective of the research team

Having introduced the main recommendations proposed by the participants, we will delve into providing a more structured framework of potential future interventions and actions that might respond to the situation we have outlined in this study. Some of the recommendations are aimed at the Lebanese government while others could be implemented by gender-oriented institutions such as the LLWB.

Recommendations for the Lebanese government:

1. Develop performance evaluation mechanisms to monitor productivity and quality of work
2. Work towards a merit-based senior management that has a holistic vision of the future of each organization
3. Vouch for an increased gender balance in all institutions, which can be initiated in the recruitment process and appointing system

Recommendations for the LLWB:

1. Design training modules and workshops aimed at raising awareness regarding the definition of gender dynamics and the impacts that the latter has on women's employment and daily professional experience
2. Create pressure groups (in coordination with like-minded institutions) that work on pushing the gender agenda with members of parliament and influential stakeholders
3. Lobby the parliament for the passage of a Civil Service Gender Equity Law that calls among other things for the introduction of gender audits that allow monitoring the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the public sector by allocating this role to one or a group of focal points in each institution
4. Lobby pioneer private sector companies to create pilot projects that provide support structures that enable mothers to work (including paid maternity leave of adequate length, quality childcare for working mothers, and provisions for elderly care
5. Launch a media campaign that portrays women not solely as daughters, mothers or wives but also as workers, citizens, and leaders
6. Procure funding for quantitative research on female employment in the public sector in order to remedy the lack of data, which is a major obstacle to setting roadmaps and action plans aiming at improving working women's situation in the public administration

In addition to the six recommendations above, LLWB can specifically address the harassment issue which turned out to be a real concern as a result of this study.

1. Lobby for the introduction of awareness workshops targeting both male and female public servants along with a mandatory introductory session on gender dynamics and harassment in the workplace at the civil service council for all newly recruited public servants
2. Push for designing a clear and accessible complaint system that does not go through direct management but through a gender focal point with a focus on preserving anonymity.
3. Work towards providing social assistance and psychological support for women who experience harassment

07
THOUGHTS FROM THE FIELD

The idea behind this last section is to showcase the impression of the research team when conducting the fieldwork which, in turn, validates the urgency of certain proposed recommendations. Thus, outlining a few stories encountered during the primary research might give a better understanding of the context in which this project is encrypted. It is important to mention at this point that these stories and thoughts from the field stem from the positionality of the researchers and their own experiences throughout the process. Although the next few lines are told in an anecdotal and storytelling style, they partly portray a reality that seems important to grasp when implementing such a study.

Society

I was heading to one of the public institutions. The traffic jam was intolerable and I decided to park in the first parking lot I found. As I entered the space reserved for car parking, the concierge stops me and asks where I am heading and how long I will stay at the meeting. I tell him that I have a visit with the department responsible of domestic violence and violence against women. With a smile on his face, he replies:

"I want to ask you a question and I hope you can answer with all honesty. Darling, who do you think is responsible for such violence?
What do you think drives a man towards using violence against his wife?".

As I was aware of where the discussion was heading, I tried to mitigate the risk and reply that society and education were the main reasons behind such violent attitudes. Another smile is drawn on his face, and he confidently says:

"Women. Women are behind the use of violence by men. If they knew how to deal with them, if only they understood that all a man needs is to be taken care of, none of that would happen."

The discussion continued for a short while, but I was convinced that it was not my battle. At least not for now.

This incident shows to what extent the Lebanese society is entrenched with patriarchal power dynamics. It also shows the importance of working on awareness regarding gender-based discrimination, gender inequality, gender stereotyping and violence, catered towards both men and women. What is obvious is that 'gender' – defined by a set of gendered power dynamics that govern society - is the common denominator in the equation.

Psychological violence

In one of the institutions, the environment was mostly male-dominated; very few women were part of the labor force and those who were had only recently joined. The interview was conducted in a semi-open cubicle with little privacy. During the interview, I tried to keep the tone low in order to be able to conduct the interview as smoothly as possible and without interference.

At some stage, one of the participant's male colleagues - who seemed higher in hierarchy but still a low-ranking officer – entered our cubicle and started making jokes.

After a few jokes, he implied that women in the institution are more than happy and that they have all their rights, and even more consideration than men. He continues with the fact that the participant is as powerful as ten or fifteen men in the institution. Then I decided to tell him that our time is limited and that we need to continue the interview. He stayed in the cubicle and started answering the questions I was asking the participant.

At some point, I respectfully stopped him and asked him to give us some privacy because this is what the research process requires. He insisted on staying and kept answering the questions, not leaving a space for the interviewee to engage. She was smiling and acquiescing to what he was saying. I looked at him and semi-jokingly told him that I felt he had a lot to say, and that the next study I will perform will be about men in the public sector so he can have a space to speak. He laughed, invited me for coffee and left the cubicle.

In order not to use controversial words like 'mansplaining' or 'psychological violence', this incident portrays the hidden layers of gender dynamics in society, and more specifically in public administration. The participant did not perceive her colleague's attitude as an intrusion into her narrative, but described it as a normal and funny behavior.
The male colleague did not realize that his attitude was intrusive. Such attitudes are allowed because of the lack of awareness regarding the above-mentioned hidden layers and the normalization of gendered attitudes.

Stereotypes

While waiting for the elevator at one of the selected public institutions, a male employee stood by me. The elevator was stuck at the 4th floor for a long while. He started complaining. The elevator then comes down to the ground floor, two employees come out of it: a male and a female. Once we enter the elevator, my waiting companion tells me:

> *"See, she kept the door open to finish rambling with other women, maybe she was checking what dish they cooked this morning..."*

Gender stereotypes have important impacts on both women and men. In our case, it impacts women by confining them to certain roles and attitudes and nourishes the condescending behavior society can have towards working women.

Common misconceptions

At the end of one of the interviews, and after having established a somewhat trustful relation with the participant, I asked about the number of domestic violence incidents and their progression in the past few years. The woman I was interviewing replies:

> *"I often tell my male colleagues that the cases of domestic violence we encounter in our work, are not the real ones. In fact, what we see is the tip of the iceberg and I wouldn't consider it domestic violence. It is sad, because such cases hurt real violence cases and reinforce our perception regarding the abuse of domestic violence laws by women".*

I told the participant that I am interested in knowing what are the criteria based on which a case is considered 'real' domestic violence or not. She added:

> *"I mean don't get me wrong, I am not condoning any aspect of physical violence. It is just that most of the cases we deal with are in regard to extremely minor violent behaviors, such as a slap on the face. It takes from time allocated for the real cases that we should be focusing on. In my opinion, domestic violence means a woman has been subjected to physical abuse or violence over and over again and for years. She would have survived the situation."*

This is a clear representation of misconception and misunderstanding of major issues in Lebanese society. In fact, gender-based violence is only equated with extreme physical violence, which disregards the layers of verbal or psychological or financial or less-extreme physical violence. Also, many women are reproducing and reinforcing existing power dynamics and stereotypes, which implies that awareness should cover men and women.

It showcases the importance of raising such points and working on them within long-term sustainable strategies instead of punctual ones. Nonetheless, it is important to mention here the improvement and progress that took place in the past decade on the issue of domestic violence, security forces and accountability.