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# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN IRAQ AND THE KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ (KR-I):

## PATTERNS, CAUSES, AWARENESS AND POLICY RESPONSES

## NATIONAL STUDY

October 2025

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## NATIONAL STUDY

Lead Researcher: Dr. Ilham Makki

October 2025

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The Regional Observatory on Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) is an independent mechanism to follow up on laws and policies related to combating VAWG and to support the implementation of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Ministerial Declarations on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society. The Observatory is hosted by EuroMed Feminist Initiative (EFI) in Amman.

EuroMed Feminist Initiative (EFI) is a policy platform that provides expertise in the field of equality between women and men and advocates for women's rights as inseparable from democracy building and citizenship, for political solutions to all conflicts and for the right of peoples to self-determination.

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# ACRONYMS

| | |
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| CEDAW | Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women |
| CSO | Civil Society Organisation |
| CSTF | Cross-Sector Task Force |
| DCVAW | General Directorate for Combating Violence Against Women and the Family |
| DV | Domestic Violence |
| FGM | Female Genital Mutilation |
| ILO | International Labour Organization |
| ISIS | Islamic State of Iraq and Syria |
| KII | Key Informant Interviews |
| KR-I | Kurdistan Region of Iraq |
| KRG | Kurdistan Regional Government |
| MENA | Middle East and North Africa |
| NAP | National Action Plan |
| HR | Human Rights |
| PSL | Personal Status Law |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNAMI | United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq |
| UNSCR | United Nations Security Council Resolution |
| VAWG | Violence Against Women and Girls |

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*We also wish to thank the grassroots organisations, data collectors and facilitators, whose work was crucial in gathering the data.*

*This work was enriched with the diversity of experiences, backgrounds and professional fields of the interviewees, as well as the cultural diversity of the team of researchers and interviewers.*

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

VAWG in Iraq represents a deeply entrenched structural challenge that significantly undermines women's fundamental rights and curtails their active participation in public life. It manifests in a spectrum of forms, including physical, psychological and sexual violence, across various contexts—private, public and digital. Despite Iraq's commitment to international frameworks aimed at combating such violence, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), there remains a discrepancy in national laws and policies. This deficiency stems from entrenched discriminatory social norms and ineffectual institutional responses. Both national and international data reveal alarming rates of VAWG, with an upward trend in reported cases over recent years and substantial evidence indicating widespread underreporting. Furthermore, analyses point to critical gaps in the available support infrastructure for survivors, including deficiencies in shelter provisions and limited access to psychosocial services, including in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I) despite the existing legislation on domestic violence (DV).

This research seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the patterns and prevalence of VAWG, assess the effectiveness of current policy frameworks and identify protection gaps. It aims to present evidence-based recommendations to enhance the efforts of both governmental and civil society actors in fortifying protections for women and girls in Iraq, including the KR-I.

For this purpose, a survey conducted with women in Iraq and women in the KR-I involved 1,216 respondents. The survey aimed to capture diverse contexts, providing a nuanced view of VAWG across Iraq and the KR-I, exploring various forms of violence, women's awareness of services and their help-seeking behaviours. Thirty-six key informant interviews (KIIs)—22 in Federal Iraq and 14 in the KR-I—were conducted with governmental representatives, lawmakers, civil society, field experts and service providers, who shared valuable insights on institutional gaps, legal frameworks and the effectiveness of protection mechanisms.

Most participants (89.2%) considered VAWG to be either common or very common. They identified various forms of VAWG: physical (18.6%), sexual (15.4%), verbal (14%), psychological (13.2%), forced marriage (11.9%), early marriage (10%), economic exclusion (8.4%) and cyber violence (8%).

The main sources of information about VAWG are friends and relatives as well as media, followed by civil society and government. However, awareness about services and legal procedures was generally low, particularly in rural areas. Only a third of respondents knew about a hotline to report violence and almost half of them were unaware of any government institutions addressing this violence.

Knowledge of legal procedures and shelters was higher in urban areas than in rural ones. However, overall, less than 20% confirmed the existence of government or civil society shelters for survivors, and awareness of psychological support services was similarly limited, particularly in rural areas, underlining the need to enhance awareness and address the widespread and multifaceted nature of VAWG.

The research also reveals persistent traditional beliefs among a segment of women that normalise or justify certain forms of violence, notably with 18.5% justifying physical violence

against the wife or harassment based on women's clothing or behaviour, and a significant minority still considering it acceptable in cases of neglecting their children, arguing with their husband or refusing sexual relations. More than half of the women agreed that men should have guardianship over their families, and a notable portion supported the idea that boys should control their sisters' behaviour.

Awareness of women's legal rights remains low, with a large majority recognising that women do not enjoy equal rights under the law, notably in financial matters during marriage and after divorce, while also agreeing that women often stay in abusive situations due to a lack of financial means.

Many women also reported, especially in rural areas, limited freedom of movement and barriers to accessing essential services—police, healthcare, legal aid and, above all, shelters. Furthermore, a majority (63.2%) reported an increase in all forms of VAWG due to the armed conflict. Awareness of government or civil society campaigns remains widely limited. These findings highlight the deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and systemic gaps that contribute to the persistence of VAWG and the urgent need for comprehensive awareness, legal reform and service accessibility, especially in rural areas.

In terms of personal experiences, half of the respondents reported witnessing incidents of VAWG in the past six months. The most commonly observed forms of violence included physical assault, psychological abuse, exclusion from services or inheritance, forced marriage and conflict-related sexual harassment. It should be noted that deep-rooted barriers such as fear of retaliation, stigma and lack of trust in the system prevent many women from reporting abuse.

Many women continue to experience control, verbal and physical abuse within their households. Physical and sexual violence remain widely underreported. Among respondents, 8.2% experienced death threats, and only a very small minority filed complaints, reflecting deep systemic gaps in protection and justice for survivors.

This research highlights that VAWG is a pervasive and enduring issue across various regions and contexts and underscores significant shortcomings in the implementation and enforcement of existing legal frameworks, policies and intervention strategies that hamper women's and girls' access to crucial protection and support services. Furthermore, the research also highlights the intricate connection between overt physical violence and the more insidious forms of structural violence, manifested through the social, legal and political systems.

Efforts to address VAWG in Iraq and the KR-I require a comprehensive, multi-sectoral response that combines legal reform, stronger institutions and adequate financing. Removing discriminatory legal provisions against women and enacting a specific law to combat VAWG are central to ensuring protection and support for women survivors. These measures must be reinforced by expanding shelters across both Iraq and the KR-I, strengthening referral systems and building capacity within the health, justice and security sectors.

# PART ONE

## I. INTRODUCTION

While VAWG is a global phenomenon and has been recognised by the United Nations (UN) as "a violation of the rights and fundamental freedoms of women" and "a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women" (UN, 1993), it continues to persist across all regions, cultures and socio-economic groups.

VAWG in Iraq represents a significant systemic challenge that undermines women's rights and citizenship. This violence manifests in multiple forms, including physical, psychological and sexual abuse, occurring across various contexts—domestically within the family, socially in public spaces and institutions, and digitally through online harassment. The situation intensified dramatically during the period of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) territorial control in 2014, which saw a resurgence of sexual slavery to appalling levels, particularly affecting Yazidi women.

The root causes of such violence are deeply entrenched with Iraq's protracted history of conflict and instability, alongside persistent socio-cultural norms and significant structural barriers within political, legal and economic frameworks. VAWG cannot be disentangled from broader structural violence, as legal frameworks, official policies and societal practices inherently support and perpetuate inequality and discrimination.

Women in Iraq face significant inequality, which surpasses that experienced by women in many other countries, both regionally and globally. According to the 2023-2024 Women, Peace and Security Index—an important tool for measuring women's status and tracking progress towards equity—Iraq occupies the 168th position out of 177 countries, placing it among the ten lowest-ranked nations. (GIWPS, 2023). Furthermore, Iraq holds the 145th position out of 195 nations in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2021 Inequality Index, which evaluates disparities between women and men across three critical dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and economic participation. This ranking situates Iraq among the lowest in the region, contrasting notably with Jordan (118th), Iran (115th) and Lebanon (108th). In comparison, Saudi Arabia ranks significantly higher at 59th, while the United Arab Emirates is positioned at 11th with a score of 0.049, underscoring a substantial gap for Iraq relative to its neighbours (ILO, 2022).

In the KR-I, legislative provisions aimed at mitigating VAWG were adopted, such as the 2011 law on combating DV. KR-I officials disclosed that at least 30 women were reported to have been killed in 2023, an apparent decrease from 44 in 2022. However, CSOs representatives assert that the actual figures are likely underreported, and the implementation of the law is still lagging.

VAWG stands out as one of the most pervasive human rights (HR) violations in Iraq, a distressing reality that profoundly affects communities and society as a whole. Even as societal awareness continues to grow regarding the necessity of confronting this grave issue, countless women remain trapped in the shadows, enduring numerous forms of violence that inflict physical, emotional and psychological scars. This poignant phenomenon not only diminishes the well-being of the women themselves but also reverberates through their families, perpetuating cycles of fear and social oppression.

# II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

## Violence against women and girls

The 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women comprehensively defines violence against women as "any act of violence against women that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." This category of violence includes as well culturally rooted harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM), along with sexual assault and harassment in occupational and public settings. The terminology of "violence against women and girls" underscores the distinct nature of these abuses, emphasising that they are perpetrated against women and girls of all ages due to their sex.

The discourse on VAWG has evolved across various academic fields, including sociology, psychology and public health. Interpretations range from individual and relational analyses to broader social examinations that identify the underlying causes. Feminist scholarship critiques patriarchal structures that reinforce traditional roles for women and men, highlighting how these roles normalise and perpetuate VAWG (Montesant, 2015).

## Discrimination against women

CEDAW systematically monitors compliance by States parties with the provisions of the Convention. Central to this monitoring is the conceptual linkage between "discrimination," as articulated in Article 1 of the Convention, and "violence against women." The definition of discrimination encompasses any distinction, exclusion or restriction based on sex that undermines the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of women's rights on an equal footing with men in all spheres of life, regardless of marital status. Discrimination manifests through both intentional and indirect means, resulting in women's rights being impeded due to a failure to acknowledge disparities or through legislative omissions—such as inadequate legal frameworks, the absence of policies on equality between women and men and a lack of enforcement of existing laws.

The Convention addresses both de jure and de facto discrimination in laws, policies and practices. CEDAW General Recommendation No. 19 links violence against women to discrimination, stating it hinders the equal realisation of rights and freedoms for both men and women.

## Structural violence and cultural violence

Structural violence is defined as the harm and suffering perpetuated by social systems and institutions that obstruct individuals' ability to fulfil their basic needs, while simultaneously facilitating unequal access to resources and power. This concept, articulated by Johan Galtung in 1969, posits that violence transcends the narrow confines of direct and observable physical harm perpetrated by one entity against another. Instead, Galtung characterises it as "the avoidable obstruction of basic human needs," emphasising the underlying structural and institutional inequalities embedded within societal frameworks. The framework of structural violence underscores the systemic and enduring disparities experienced by different social groups concerning their rights, resource allocation and control, highlighting a continuum of inequality that persists beyond overt acts of aggression (Galtung, 1969). For example, there are disparities in access to resources and wealth between men and women in all societies. Most

scholars recognise that these inequalities do not stem from inherent or voluntary differences but are instead perpetuated by entrenched structural mechanisms, be they political, legal, social, cultural or economic, that sustain and reproduce these inequities across generations (DuNann Winter, 1999).

A nuanced understanding of patriarchal structural violence is essential for dissecting the interplay of social, cultural, economic and political frameworks that either perpetuate or tacitly endorse physical, sexual and psychological forms of violence against women. Johan Galtung, in his seminal work *Violence, Peace, and Peace Studies,* elucidates the distinction between personal and structural violence. He asserts: "When one husband beats his wife, that is a clear case of personal violence; but when a million husbands keep a million wives in ignorance, that is structural violence" (Sinha, 2017). This perspective underscores the pervasive, systemic nature of violence, highlighting how societal norms and institutions can uphold mechanisms of oppression that go beyond individual acts of aggression.

The concept of cultural violence offers a critical perspective on VAWG by illuminating how entrenched cultural norms and ideologies justify such violence. Cultural violence encompasses aspects of culture—like religion, ideology, language and art—that legitimise direct and structural violence. In VAWG, this manifests through patriarchal norms that regard women as inferior, justify control over their bodies and tolerate practices like domestic abuse, "honour" killings and child marriage. These cultural justifications obscure the brutality of these acts and render them socially acceptable, hindering efforts to combat VAWG (Galtung, 1990).

# III. METHODOLOGY

The prevalence of VAWG in Iraq, including the KR-I, is a complex issue influenced by a range of interrelated social, cultural, political and economic factors. To effectively analyse this phenomenon, it is essential to implement a comprehensive research methodology tailored to the intricate dynamics of the Iraqi context.

This research constitutes a significant effort to address the critical knowledge deficit regarding the level and forms of VAWG in Iraq and the KR-I. It seeks to:

- Examine the prevalence, patterns and modalities of this violence. This includes an analysis of physical, sexual and psychological violence, with an emphasis on how these forms interact with and are compounded by structural violence.

- Delve into both overt instances of violence and the underlying systemic barriers that sustain it. This includes an analysis of prevailing societal norms, gaps within the legal framework and institutional responses.

- Assess the availability of services, policies and legislation designed to prevent, protect and combat VAWG.

- Provide evidence-based findings that can serve as a foundational resource and incentive for government entities and decision-makers to formulate informed policies and targeted interventions to combat VAWG. Additionally, it aims to support the advocacy efforts of civil society and women's civil society organisations (CSOs) to foster the development of these necessary policies and interventions within the region.

In this regard, the research employs a multi-method approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative analyses, complemented by legal and policy assessments, as well as a thorough literature review of national and international reports. This approach emphasises field experiences and perspectives of women and girls from diverse regions of Iraq and the KR-I, encompassing urban, rural and post-conflict areas. By employing this methodology, the research aims to provide an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of their lived reality.

The research is framed by a feminist approach that focuses on acknowledging power dynamics and the lived experiences of women, including women from marginalised groups. This approach ensures that the research is inclusive and intersectional, considering factors such as sex, ethnicity, colour, class, nationality, religion and disability. It prioritises ethical practices, reflexivity and a critique of objectivity by acknowledging the researcher's positionality and the contextual nature of knowledge production.

The feminist approach also emphasises collaboration, reciprocity and empowerment by actively involving participants in the research process and amplifying their voices. It favours action-oriented and non-linear methods, such as qualitative tools and open-ended questions, to promote social justice, challenge power structures and produce meaningful, transformative outcomes (Hesse-Biber, 2011).

The research was conducted through the following phases:

### Desk review

A thorough review of relevant literature on VAWG in Iraq was conducted. This included national and international reports, pertinent legislation, previous studies and data from government institutions and international organisations, such as reports from the Ministry of Interior of both Federal Iraq and the KR-I, the Ministry of Planning in Iraq, UN Women, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and various women's CSOs.

### Survey via Kobo Toolbox

For the quantitative phase, a survey was conducted in six governorates: four governorates in Federal Iraq and two governorates in the KR-I. Each governorate possesses distinct attributes and contextual nuances, reflecting the country's immense socio-cultural and geographical diversity: Baghdad, Iraq's capital, is the political hub with key institutions, banks, private sector companies and embassies. Najaf, home to the highest Shiite authority, is significant for its religious and political influence. Basra is the economic capital, holding over 70% of Iraq's oil reserves. Anbar, the largest province, predominantly Sunni, has been a conflict zone since 2003. Erbil is the capital of the KR-I, enjoying stability and cultural diversity, while Sulaymaniyah, the second largest city in the KR-I, fosters political activism.

A total of 1,216 women were surveyed from Iraq and KR-I: 190 in Erbil, 217 in Sulaymaniyah, 72 in Anbar, 267 in Basra, 135 in Najaf and 335 in Baghdad. The sample size for each governorate was carefully considered to ensure proportional representation. The overall sample size was calculated using a standard statistical method commonly applied to populations of 100,000 or more, thereby ensuring methodological validity. The survey was conducted in both urban and rural areas, with 80% of questionnaires administered in cities and 20% in rural areas.

The research questionnaire covered topics related to types of violence (physical, sexual, psychological, economic, etc.), locations where violence occurs (home, street, workplace, institutions, etc.), women's awareness of available services and the agencies they turn to in cases

of violence. It included closed questions, multiple choice questions, and open-ended ones. The first section included general information (such as age group, education, place of residence and nationality), followed by a set of multiple-choice questions designed to assess women's awareness, opinions, attitudes and experiences of VAWG. The last section included open-ended questions.

The questionnaires were administered by a field team of 13 women experienced in collecting data in complex and sensitive environments and two team leaders from Federal Iraq and the KR-I. The data collectors received two online trainings prior to the field work. The first training covered communication skills, data collection skills, ethics and behaviours to ensure a safe and comfortable environment for women respondents. The second focused on technical training for the research questionnaire which was designed using KoBo Toolbox and a mobile application. The survey was conducted from 14 April to 6 May 2025.

### In-depth interviews (KIIs)

For the qualitative phase, in-depth interviews aimed to examine institutional challenges, identify gaps in governmental responses, assess protection mechanisms and gauge public perceptions of existing policies and legislation. A total of 22 interviews were conducted in Federal Iraq and 14 in the KR-I with key stakeholders, including parliamentarians, government officials, healthcare professionals, law enforcement representatives, policymakers, academics, media professionals, feminist activists, members of CSOs and legal experts. The interviews were conducted in adherence to data collection protocols, procedures for completing and using informed consent forms and reporting and transcription procedures.

### Data analysis: tools and methods

Data triangulation was used to enhance the rigour and reliability of the findings. The objective was to bolster the validity of the findings through comparative analysis across various data sources, facilitating a more in-depth exploration of the social, legal, and economic dynamics impacting women and girls within the Iraqi milieu. Additionally, this method helped to highlight discrepancies between statutory provisions and their practical enforcement, thus allowing for the examination of structural and cultural determinants influencing the prevalence of violence, discrimination, and disparities in opportunities.

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were entered into Kobo Toolbox software upon being received from the field and were analysed using descriptive statistical tools (Microsoft Excel) to assess variations across governorates in Iraq and the KR-I. To ensure the quality of the data entry process, checks were built into the design of the data-entry screens. The data entry was validated by the research team, who conducted several reviews for quality-control purposes.

Qualitative analysis was performed based on the interview transcripts and engagement with relevant literature. Qualitative data from the interviews were analysed using thematic content analysis to identify recurring patterns and common experiences, all within the framework of a feminist perspective.

### Ethical considerations

Due to the sensitivity of the subject, confidentiality and privacy were maintained throughout data collection, and informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring the safety of the respondents and the research team, and ensuring that their physical, psychological and social well-being were not put at risk during the process. The study ensured that all individuals

participating in the survey were aware of the objectives and content and that the use of the information they provided was based on their explicit consent.

The participants in the KIIs were assured of the confidentiality of the data collection process before each interview. To maintain the integrity of the data, sessions were audio-recorded if participants did not object; otherwise, only written notes were taken.

The research team abided by the standard privacy regulations, which mainly include:

- The need for an individual's clear consent to the processing of his or her personal data.
- Easier access for the data subject to his or her personal data.
- The right to rectification, to erasure and "to be forgotten."
- The right to object, including to the use of personal data for the purposes of "profiling".

# IV. MAIN CHALLENGES

Given the complexity of the topic, more time was essential to secure participant access and to ensure a diverse sample. Additionally, the writing and analysis phase demanded substantial time for the thorough organisation and categorisation of both qualitative and quantitative data. To mitigate these challenges, the research team implemented a collaborative approach by distributing tasks effectively, adhering to precise work schedules, and prioritising key aspects pertinent to the research questions.

As VAWG is influenced by social and cultural factors, there was hesitation among some participants in disclosing their experiences. Concerns about social stigma and retaliation highlighted the need for strong confidentiality measures, including the omission of identifiers in data collection. Building trust and clarifying the research-focused nature of the study were key to participant engagement. To address this sensitivity, open-ended questions were used, crafted in neutral language, with participants informed of their right to skip uncomfortable questions.

Some participants in the KIIs, particularly from security agencies, presented biased perspectives. To mitigate bias, triangulation was employed across various sources, including officials, academics, civil society and women interviewees. Confidentiality was maintained through an ethical protocol that encoded data and ensured its use was restricted to research purposes.

Linguistic diversity in Arabic and Kurdish dialects sometimes slowed down comprehension. To ensure accurate communication, data collectors and field assistants from varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds were employed, facilitating proper contextualisation of concepts according to local norms.

While the study collected age and location data, limited resources constrained deeper disaggregation (e.g., by disability, displacement status or ethnicity), making it difficult to fully capture intersectional vulnerabilities.

# V. GENERAL CONTEXT AND VAWG IN IRAQ AND THE KR-I

The ongoing VAWG in Federal Iraq and the KR-I cannot be separated from the prevailing political environment, characterised by recurrent political unrest. The historical context of Iraq has been marked by significant violence and political instability. Under the Ba'ath regime, severe HR violations occurred, including torture and sexual assault in detention, often used as coercive tactics. DV and "honour" killings were prevalent, with legal frameworks that diminished penalties for offenders, indicating the regime's complicity in these acts.

After the 2003 invasion, security deteriorated, leading to a rise in VAWG in both private and public spheres. The decline of the rule of law, along with weakened law enforcement, resulted in an increase in violence perpetrated by various actors. This period also saw a rise in human trafficking and early marriages, further restricting women's rights to education and employment due to ongoing security threats. The rise of ISIS in 2014 marked a dark time for Yazidi women, who faced extensive sexual violence and slavery.

Ongoing political instability in Iraq has hindered the development of laws to protect HR and combat VAWG. The country lacks comprehensive legal protection for women and girls, and existing laws are poorly enforced. Reports from the UN indicate that conflict has weakened the commitment to equality between women and men, stalling key legislative measures like the proposed Anti-DV Law from 2015.

Historically, the Kurdish population in Iraq has endured considerable injustice and systematic persecution, arising from their status as an ethnic minority and the denial of their right to self-determination. The Anfal Campaign and the Halabja Massacre during the 1980s stand out as particularly brutal episodes, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of Kurds.

Following the 2003 collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime, the Kurdish political landscape became more stable as various parties aligned their goals, leading to the constitutional recognition of the Kurdistan Region as an autonomous region within Iraq.

While there have been some advancements in legal reforms in KR-I level since then, these efforts are often undermined by insufficient coordination and persistent socio-cultural norms, which in turn affect political will. This environment increases the risk of VAWG, limiting women's access to necessary protections and support services.

## 1- Forms and patterns of VAWG

The 2006/2007 Iraq Family Health Survey found that one in five Iraqi women had experienced physical violence within the family (Human Rights Watch, 2020). In 2016, the Ministry of Interior documented 8,552 DV cases, while community police recorded 10,701 cases that year. Approximately 50% of married women in Iraq have experienced violence from their husbands, with 46% of currently married women reporting some form of abuse. Among women aged 15 to 49, 21% have suffered physical violence by their husbands, while 33% have endured psychological or emotional abuse. Alarmingly, 46% of girls aged 10 to 14 also reported experiencing violence from a family member, highlighting the widespread nature of domestic and familial violence affecting women and girls across age groups (UNFPA, 2019).

*At approximately 5:45 AM, I received a distressing call from my son-in-law, informing me that my daughter Dina, who was born in 2001, was in critical condition following an incident of electrocution and that her prognosis was dire. My wife and I immediately proceeded to the residence of my son-in-law's family, where Dina and her husband resided in a designated room. Upon arrival, we encountered law enforcement personnel stationed outside the house. One of the officers, upon recognising me, conveyed the grim news: "Your daughter is deceased." In the wake of this shocking revelation, I sought clarification regarding the circumstances surrounding her death. Prior to the incident, Dina had been in contact with her sisters at approximately 1:00 AM, merely three hours before her husband's call. There remains a significant gap in understanding the specific sequence of events that led to this tragic outcome. Her body, however, showed clear signs of torture: severe burns and beatings, a fractured skull, indications of attempted mutilation, and her hands and feet were bound with ropes. Dina had repeatedly complained of mistreatment and continuous physical violence by her husband and members of his family.*

*Two days before the murder, Dina had experienced DV perpetrated by her husband's family, which forced her to leave their residence and seek safety with us. Despite this, I consistently supported her potential reintegration into her marital home, primarily for the sake of her children. She is the mother of an eight-month-old son and a three-year-old daughter (Al-Iraqiya, 2025).*

Many cases of violence go unreported to the Family Protection Directorate due to societal norms and fear of repercussions. Abused women often seek help from CSOs. For instance, an CSO in Anbar received 10 to 15 cases per month, while one in Babil saw about 15 cases, but only 12 reached the courts. In Diwaniyah, only 3 out of 35 reported cases in 2021 led to court proceedings (UNAMI, 2024). The Iraqi Ministry of Interior reported that in 2020, incidents of husbands physically assaulting their wives accounted for the largest share of domestic violence cases, reaching a troubling 57% (Iraqi Ministry of Interior, 2022).

DV in Iraq has surged due to armed conflicts, with over 33,000 recorded cases in 2022. Women and girls endure high levels of physical, psychological and sexual abuse, including partner-related murders (Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights, 2024).

In the KR-I, according to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) website, the General Directorate for Combating Violence Against Women and the Family (DCVAW) at the Ministry of Interior reports that VAWG is a significant issue. In 2022, 15,897 cases of violence were recorded in Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Karmian. The Directorate received 10,305 calls to the 911 hotline, resulting in approximately 42,000 individuals benefiting from their services (KRG, 2023).

In 2020, the DCVAW recorded 125 sexual assault reports, 67 self-immolation cases, 80 burn victims and 25 women killed, alongside 10,370 other complaints. Cases classified as suicides rose to 45 in 2021, according to regional government statistics (Seed Foundation, 2021).

The Third National Voluntary Report on the 2025 Sustainable Development Goals revealed that in 2024, Iraq recorded 5,290 cases of physical assaults against women and girls, the highest level compared to other forms of violence in 2024. According to the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, a total of 793 sexual violence cases were reported between 2019 and 2024. Many incidents, however, remain unreported due to associated stigma (The Third National Voluntary Report, 2025). In the KR-I, there was a 125% increase in VAWG in 2021, suggesting that actual numbers may be significantly higher than official reports (UNICEF, 2022).

The 2021 Integrated Survey of Women's Social and Health Conditions in Iraq showed that many women experience violence. Specifically, 29.2% reported general violence by husbands, 22% faced economic violence and 5.3% experienced physical violence. Only 1.8% acknowledged sexual violence, while aggression from other family members also contributed to the issue (I-WISH-II, 2021). Around one million women in Iraq experience violence, with 26% reporting DV from their husbands (IOM, 2023).

Recent Arab Barometer data show that 43% of Iraqi women and 36% of men reported a significant rise in VAWG between 2023 and 2024 (Roche, 2025).

In the KR-I, despite the 2011 Law on Combating DV, implementation is still to be reinforced. Officials reported at least 30 women killed in 2023, down from 44 in 2022, but CSOs consulted by Amnesty International suggest the actual numbers are likely underreported. Amnesty International pointed out major issues in the temporary and permanent shelters in the KR-I, such as poor infrastructure, overcrowding and limited resources. These shortcomings impede support for survivors, which hinders their reintegration and self-sufficiency, especially without family backing (Amnesty International, 2024).

The prevalence of sexual VAWG is significantly underreported due to fear of social stigma, lack of accountability and threats of retaliation, including "honour" killings. This issue is particularly severe in conservative or tribal regions where law enforcement is less effective (UNFPA, 2018). Testimonies from survivors in Iraq reveal that sexual violence and harassment are common in state institutions, leading to a lack of trust in security agencies and difficulties for victims seeking justice (Iraqi Observatory for Human Rights, 2022).

Early marriage remains a pervasive issue in Iraq, with rates surpassing 35% in certain governorates. This phenomenon is closely associated with educational attainment; only 6.8% of women married early had completed secondary education, and 33% had no formal education (Kapita, 2022). A 2015 study spanning nine Iraqi governorates, including the KR-I, revealed that 24% of girls were married before the age of 18, with 22% before the age of 14. Notably, 33.9% of these unions were formalised outside judicial scrutiny, through oral or written contracts sanctioned by religious leaders. Reports from the Supreme Judicial Council indicated that approximately 4,092 divorces were recorded among girls under the age of 15 during 2020 and 2021 (KirkukNow, 2022).

In Basra, 11 women were coerced into *fasliya* marriages, serving as compensation in clan disputes (Government of Iraq, 2019). FGM is widespread in the KR-I, with a study finding that 46% of girls in rural areas had undergone the procedure (PubMed Central, 2019).

## 2- Discrimination against women and its impact on their political, economic and social conditions

Structural violence against women in both Federal Iraq and the KR-I is evident through systemic barriers in politics, work and education, where discriminatory laws and patriarchal norms limit access to opportunities (Institute for International Law and Human Rights, 2010). Women face unequal hiring practices, wage gaps and exclusion from decision-making roles, while girls suffer high dropout rates due to early marriage, poverty and insecurity. Marginalised groups, such as women with disabilities and rural women, face further discrimination (ILO, 2022). This ongoing structural violence deepens women's economic and social dependence and normalises overt physical violence, such as domestic abuse and "honour"-related crimes, creating an interconnected system of oppression against women.

## Exclusion of women from political participation and decision-making

Iraqi women are demonstrating remarkable resilience in their pursuit of political participation, despite significant barriers. The 2021 elections saw an increase in women's representation from 25% to 29%, with 57 women securing parliamentary seats, surpassing the constitutional quota. However, challenges remain, including security threats, violence, discrimination and limited access to resources. While women's representation in political parties ranges from 25% to 55%, it is often limited to internal committees focused on mobilising female voters, indicating a reduction in their influence in formal decision-making roles (Arab Reform Initiative, 2023).

Within the current government, women hold only three out of 23 ministerial positions (Finance, Migration and Displacement, and Communications), representing 13% of the total. The judiciary reflects similarly low figures, with only 115 female judges among 1,602 total judges, representing only 7%. In 2018, the public sector employment rate for women was approximately 12.2%, significantly lower than the 87.7% rate for men. In 2015, only 42 women held director-general positions, in stark contrast to 413 men, representing a mere 10% of the total (Ministry of Planning, Central Statistical Agency, 2018).

In the KR-I, women hold only three senior government roles, compared to 20 held by men. This imbalance is also seen in the judiciary, where male judges vastly outnumber female ones (Seed Foundation, 2021). Following the October 2024 KR-I Parliament elections, the number of female parliamentarians decreased from 34 to 30 due to the Federal Court's reduction of legislative seats from 111 to 100 (Saeed, 2025).

## Weak status of women in the labour force

In Iraq, the labour force participation rate for women is alarmingly low at 10.6%, compared to 68% for men aged 15 and older. The *Iraq Labour Force Survey* shows that men make up 88.5% of the employed labour force, while women only account for 11.5%, placing Iraq 155$^{th}$ out of 156 countries in labour participation disparity. There is also a significant urban-rural divide, with employed women at 8.1% in rural areas and 11.6% in urban areas. The ILO reports that women earn 18.4% less per hour than men, with only 12.6% of women participating in economic activities versus 72.7% of men. Unemployment rates reveal this gap further, with women facing 31% unemployment compared to 10.9% for men (ILO, 2021). A recent UNDP report indicates that women's labour force participation increased to 11.6% in 2023. However, this figure remains critically low, highlighting ongoing disparities between women and men in workforce engagement (UNDP, 2023).

A significant majority of employed women (70.5%) work in the public sector, compared to only 33.7% of men, largely due to better legal protections and social security benefits. The Strategy for Reducing Inequality in the Labour Market reveals that only 8.7% of women have access to pensions and social security benefits for every 100 men in these systems (ILO, 2022).

In the KR-I in 2021, the male labour force participation rate stood at 73.5%, markedly exceeding the female rate of 16.5%. Additionally, the female unemployment rate was recorded at 29.6%, more than double the male rate of 13.6% (ILO, 2021). According to the Youth Perspectives in the KR-I 2023 survey, the unemployment rate among young people aged 15-29 was 13.6%. However, there is a significant gap in participation rates in the labour market between young women (16.1%) and young men (61.5%) (Research Center, 2023).

In rural settings, women undertake extensive labour beyond traditional housework and childcare. Women in these areas are more likely to engage in unpaid agricultural work on

family-owned farms—activities often regarded as extensions of male-supervised family economic activity. This dynamic constrains women's access to land ownership and financial resources, with only 6.8% of farms operated by women (Kapita, 2022).

Women with disabilities in Iraq face double discrimination due to their sex and disability, which restricts their participation in public life. In contrast, men with disabilities have better access to employment and education. Law No. 38 of 2013 mandates that 5% of public sector jobs and 3% of private sector jobs be reserved for individuals with disabilities, but enforcement is weak, leaving many, especially women, unemployed. Currently, 21.4% of young women with disabilities live below the poverty line, compared to 18.3% of their non-disabled male peers (High Commission for Human Rights, 2015).

### Disparity between women and men in access to education

The 2024 Iraqi census reveals a national illiteracy rate of 15.31% among individuals aged ten and over, which rises slightly to 16.23% in the KR-I. This underscores the persistent challenges in literacy across the country.

Enrolment statistics indicate that 51.5% of males participate in primary and secondary education, compared to 48.5% of females, highlighting a persistent yet narrowing disparity in educational access (KNN, 2024).

In the KR-I, a higher percentage of males (58.7%) had an education level below a high school diploma, compared to 48.9% of females. Conversely, more females earned a high school diploma than males (Research Center, 2023).

According to the UNDP's 2019 Inequality Index, Iraq ranks 146th out of 162 countries, with only 39.5% of women attaining secondary education, significantly lower than the 49.3% average in other Arab nations.

Social norms have a profound influence on the educational outcomes of girls, particularly in remote and rural areas. A considerable number of girls complete only primary education, and the barriers they face in progressing to secondary education are substantial, with as many as 92% not advancing beyond primary schooling (ILO, 2022). The illiteracy rate among rural women stands at a staggering 27.3%, with only 1.8% attaining higher educational qualifications (World Bank, 2017). Contributing factors to this phenomenon include inadequate and unsafe transportation options, the threat of violence and a shortage of educational institutions in isolated areas. Consequently, families frequently hesitate to send their daughters to distant schools.

## 3- Status of women in national legislation

The legal framework surrounding VAWG in Iraq has undergone significant changes over the years, influenced by both domestic and international advocacy for women's rights and protection. The Iraqi legal system is anchored by its constitution, national statutes and international obligations designed to protect women from various forms of violence.

This section compares the legal frameworks in Iraq's Federal Government and the KR-I, focusing on laws and policies relevant to combating VAWG. This analysis is based on the 2024 Regional Index and highlights similarities and differences in terms of international obligations, national laws, legal protection and services provided to survivors.

## The Iraqi Constitution

The 2005 Iraqi Constitution forms the basis of the country's legal framework and enshrines fundamental rights, with specific references to equality between women and men. Article 14 prohibits discrimination based on sex, race, religion or social status, while Article 29 affirms the State's responsibility to protect citizens from violence and to safeguard motherhood. Article 30 further guarantees social and health security, particularly for women and children, and Article 49 reserves at least 25% of parliamentary seats for women.

Despite these provisions, the Constitution does not prioritise international conventions over national law. Article 2 prevents the enactment of laws that contradict Islamic principles, democratic values or constitutional rights, and Article 41 permits personal status matters to be governed by religious or sect-based laws. This has raised concerns about consistency with equality guarantees under Article 14 and contributes to legal fragmentation. The 2025 amendment to the Personal Status Law (No. 188 of 1959) illustrates this tension by reinforcing sectarian-based personal status regulations rather than advancing consistent protections for women.

## Penal Code (111) of 1969

The Iraqi Penal Code's definitions of crimes against women and girls, including rape, slavery, forced marriage and torture, are outdated, inadequate and not in line with UN-agreed-upon definitions. This reflects a fundamental weakness in addressing VAWG, as the lack of precise definitions fails to deter perpetrators or provide protection and justice for victims/survivors.

The Penal Code contains several provisions that reflect systemic discrimination against women and reinforce harmful practices. Article 41, under the section "Exercise of Rights," stipulates that certain acts are not considered crimes if they are carried out in the exercise of rights established by law. Specifically, paragraph (A/41) permits a husband to "discipline" his wife and authorises parents, teachers and guardians to discipline children within limits established by Sharia, the law or custom. This provision not only legitimises VAWG but also depicts women as lacking autonomy, thereby reinforcing patriarchal authority. It also endorses corporal punishment for both women and children, embedding structural violence within the legal framework.

Equally concerning is the failure to criminalise marital rape, which leaves women unprotected within the private sphere of marriage. In addition, Article 409 allows significantly reduced sentences—no more than three years' imprisonment—for so-called "honour" crimes, whereby a man who finds his wife or a female relative in an act of extramarital sex ("adultery") and kills her can benefit from legal leniency. Article 417 criminalises abortion in all circumstances, including cases of rape, while Articles 377 and 394 make extramarital sexual relations criminal. Provisions addressing sexual assault, namely Articles 396 and 397, lack a clear definition of "non-consent," leaving survivors vulnerable to inadequate protection. Articles 400–402 on "indecent acts" use vague terms and strict evidence requirements, such as the need for witnesses, which hinder effective prosecution of sexual harassment.

In the KR-I, Law No. 3 of 2015 amended Article 409 of the Penal Code. Previously, this law allowed for reduced sentences for men who killed their wives or female relatives caught in "adultery."

The Penal Code does not explicitly criminalise marital rape. However, the Anti-DV Law No. 8 of 2011 in the KR-I recognises forced marital intercourse as a form of DV, alongside other abuses such as verbal and psychological coercion. Abortion remains prohibited under Article 417 of the Penal Code, including for women that have been subjected to rape. Nevertheless, the KR-I's

Patients' Rights and Duties Law allows abortion if the woman's life is in serious danger, provided there is the consent of both the woman and her husband, and approval from a medical committee. In addition, Article 394 of the Penal Code criminalises extramarital sexual relations, perpetuating discriminatory controls over women's bodies and sexual autonomy.

## Personal Status Laws

The Personal Status Law in Iraq still contains several provisions that perpetuate discrimination against women and girls. It permits marriage from the age of 15, with the approval of both a guardian and a judge, yet marriages under the age of 15 often occur informally and are later ratified by the courts. While the law prohibits forced marriage, it fails to define what constitutes coercion—such as threats, intimidation or consent obtained under duress—leaving girls forced to such unions with little protection.

Several provisions reinforce patriarchal authority within marriage and family life. Article 25 establishes the principle that a wife must obey her husband, while polygamy is permitted only if the wife consents. Fathers remain the sole legal guardians of their children, and women inherit a smaller share than men. Divorce law is also unequal: men retain the right to divorce unilaterally without judicial oversight, whereas women's options are severely restricted to a few types of divorce obtainable only through court proceedings. Collectively, these legal provisions entrench inequality between women and men and limit women's autonomy in marriage, family relations and economic rights.

The Personal Status Law in the KR-I was amended by Law No. 15 of 2008. However, it does not yet guarantee full equality between women and men in matters of marriage and divorce. Although the amendment formally prohibits polygamy, it retains exceptions that continue to permit the practice under certain legal conditions, thereby undermining women's rights within family relations.

Guardianship remains largely vested in fathers, although Article 5 of the amendment introduced a limited provision allowing mothers to assume guardianship, but only in specific circumstances. Inheritance laws continue to discriminate against women by granting them a smaller share than men, and divorce provisions mirror those of Federal Iraq, where men maintain unilateral rights to divorce without judicial intervention, while women are restricted to limited forms of divorce that require court approval. These provisions collectively perpetuate inequality and hinder the achievement of substantive justice for women and girls in the KR-I.

## The Labour Law

The Labour Law No. 37 of 2015 includes both advances and shortcomings for working women. Article 10 is a positive step, as it prohibits sexual harassment in employment, training and recruitment. However, other provisions reinforce inequality and stereotypes between women and men: Article 87 grants maternity leave only to women without offering paternity leave, while Articles 85–86 restrict women from night work and strenuous jobs without clear scientific justification. These measures, though framed as protective, limit women's equal participation in the labour market.

In the KR-I, the 1987 Iraqi Labour Law still applies, as the 2015 Labour Law has not been adopted yet in the region. The 1987 Iraqi Labour Law applied in the KR-I, provides some protections for women workers but remains limited in scope. Article 4 of Chapter I prohibits discrimination in hiring and grants maternity leave, including daily nursing breaks, while also restricting women from undertaking work deemed harmful during pregnancy. The law further allows women with

children under six to take up to three days of unpaid leave for childcare and, with employer consent, up to one year of unpaid maternity leave. However, it excludes women employed in family businesses under male relatives' supervision, thereby institutionalising unequal treatment and reinforcing traditional social roles for women and men.

### Laws that protect women from domestic violence

There is no specific legislation dedicated to addressing VAWG in Iraq. Instead, incidents of violence are managed under the Penal Code No. 111 of 1969, which serves as the legal framework for handling such cases.

In the KR-I, the Anti-DV Law No. 8 of 2011 was enacted. The law explicitly criminalises FGM. Moreover, under Article 2/1(13), forced marital intercourse is recognised as a form of DV.

### Other laws that protect women and girls from violence

Other laws include the Yazidi Female Survivors' Law; No. 8 of 2021. The law provides material and moral compensation for survivors, with a focus on women survivors of sexual violence. However, the law faces significant challenges in its implementation. There is also the Anti-Human Trafficking Law No. 28 of 2012. Although the law represents a significant step forward in combating trafficking, there are legal and institutional gaps that impact the rights of women and girls.

In the KR-I, the Iraqi Anti-Human Trafficking Law No. 28 of 2012 is also in force. In addition, Law No. 6 of 2008 on the Prevention of Misuse of Communications Equipment addresses technology-assisted VAWG, including behaviours such as sexual assault via photo sharing, cyberstalking, harassment and unauthorised sharing of personal information.

### Religious Law (Mudawwana)

On 21 January 2025, the Iraqi parliament adopted an amendment to the Personal Status Law No. 188 of 1959, granting Iraqi citizens the option to apply an Islamic jurisprudence framework in regulating personal status matters. This amendment faced strong opposition and widespread criticism from diverse stakeholders, including HR organisations, academic institutions, media outlets and civil society actors.

Subsequently, on 27 August 2025, the Iraqi parliament approved the Code of Sharia Provisions based on Ja'fari Islamic Jurisprudence (Mudawwana) without comprehensive review or substantive debate of its extensive content, which comprises more than 300 articles. Importantly, this code was issued by the Scientific Council of the Shiite Endowment Diwan, which lacks constitutional legislative authority. This development constitutes a direct violation of the Iraqi Constitution, which explicitly assigns legislative powers to the parliament.

The Code of Sharia Provisions based on Ja'fari Islamic Jurisprudence introduces regulations that directly contradict the Iraqi Constitution and weaken equality between women and men. It grants husbands unilateral authority over family matters, making women's rights to education, work and public participation conditional on male consent. The Code also legalises child marriage by permitting the marriage of girls from the age of nine and transfers custody from mothers once children reach seven years of age. Unlike the Personal Status Law No. 188 of 1959, it omits the principle of "the best interests of the child," thereby institutionalising discriminatory practices against women and children.

## Iraq's position on international treaties and agreements

It is important to note that under Iraq's legal framework, international treaties ratified by the Federal Government extend to, and are enforced within, the KR-I. These include:

- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), signed by Iraq in 1969 and ratified in 1971.
- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965), signed and ratified by Iraq in 1969, with a reservation to Article 22, which requires arbitration by the International Court of Justice (i.e. Iraq does not recognise the Court's jurisdiction).
- The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984), acceded to by Iraq in 2011.
- The CEDAW (1979), ratified by Iraq in 1986 with reservations to certain articles, as articles 2, 3 and 16, which undermine guarantees of equality and allow cultural justifications for national discrimination.
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), signed by Iraq in 1994 but not ratified. Its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict was signed in 2008 but not ratified.
- The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (2006), acceded to by Iraq in 2010.
- The four Geneva Conventions, ratified by Iraq in 1956, and Additional Protocol I, ratified in 2010. Iraq has not ratified Additional Protocol II.
- The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), acceded to by Iraq in 1959.
- UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions (1820/2008, 1888/2009, 1960/2010, 2016/2013, 2122/2013, 2242/2015), as well as Resolution 2379 establishing an international commission of inquiry to investigate and document the crimes of ISIS.

## National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security

Iraq adopted its first National Action Plan (NAP) for UNSCR 1325 in 2014, covering the period from 2014 to 2018, and became the first country in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to do so. It was developed by a Cross-Sector Task Force (CSTF) comprised of members from both the Federal Government and the KRG, along with representatives from civil society, the security sector and experts. It continued to evolve its structure and work towards the implementation, follow-up, monitoring and evaluation of the NAP, including amid the challenging context of financial crises and rising terrorist violence. As a result, the number of CSTF members increased from 12 ministries and institutions in 2014 to 23 by December 2017, consisting of 15 from the Federal Government of Iraq and 8 from the KR-I (CSTF, 2019).

The CSTF also prepared the first report on the implementation of the NAP, which identified gaps and provided recommendations for the improvement of the second NAP. At the end of 2020, the Government of Iraq launched its second NAP together with a Joint Communiqué for 2021-

2024, to prevent and address sexual violence in conflict. The NAP was based on the principles of equality and the protection of women's fundamental rights, in line with relevant international conventions, UN resolutions and national strategies adopted by both the Federal Government and the KR-I.

The first NAP pioneered the linkage between existing legal discrimination and the absence of a specific law in Federal Iraq to combat VAWG, identifying these as key barriers for women's enjoyment of their fundamental rights. However, implementation failed to address the structural causes of discrimination and violence faced by women, or to effectively link peace measures with equality between women and men at the institutional level within state-building, as highlighted in the recommendations for the second NAP. The implementation of the second NAP has had little or no tangible impact, largely due to slow government performance, weak processes, insufficient funding, unclear results and overlapping activities.

According to a UN evaluation report, despite the collaborative efforts among various stakeholders, the sustainability of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Iraq has faced significant challenges. Activities have tended to cease once funding ends. The programme's impact is also limited, as it has focused primarily on training and capacity building rather than on sustainable solutions (UN, 2023).

## Policies and strategies to reduce discrimination and VAWG

Iraq has adopted a variety of policies and strategic frameworks aimed at combating discrimination and VAWG, as well as promoting women's empowerment. These initiatives include targeted measures specifically addressing women's issues, while others contain provisions relating to the status of women across multiple sectors, including the economy, education and healthcare. They include:

- The Iraqi National Strategy for Women (2023-2030), which aims to enhance the role of women and their participation in society and national development.
- The Updated National Strategy to Combat Violence Against Women and Girls (2018-2030), which works to reduce VAWG and promote equality between women and men.
- The Strategy for Reducing Inequality in the Labour Market (2024).
- The National Family Planning Strategy (2021-2025), which aims to improve health services for women and increase attention to maternal and child healthcare.
- The National Plans for Implementing Security Council Resolution 1325 (INAPs).
- The Women's Economic Empowerment Plan (2021-2022).
- The Updated Iraq Poverty Reduction Strategy (2026-2030).
- The National Education and Learning Strategy (2023-2031).
- The National Strategy for Early Childhood Development in Iraq (2022-2031).
- Iraq's Vision in the 2030 Sustainable Development Plan.
- The National Strategy for the Reconstruction of Liberated Areas.

- The National Development Plan (2018-2022).
- The Strategy for Developing the Private Sector.
- The National Strategy for Rural Development.

Despite the existence of these strategies, an evaluation of the National Development Plan (2018-2022) highlights significant shortcomings in the effective implementation of strategies to address women's issues in Iraq, specifically, the National Strategy for Combating Violence against Women (2013-2017), the National Strategy for the Advancement of Iraqi Women (2014-2018), and the Rural Women's Strategy, were not implemented.

The policies and strategic frameworks in the KR-I include:

- Women in Conflict Areas: Kurdish Women and Their Role in Confronting Terrorism.
- The National Strategy to Combat Violence Against Women in the KR-I (2017-2027).
- The National Strategy to Develop the Status of Women in the KR-I (2016-2026).
- The Strategy for the Advancement of the Status of Women in the KR-I.
- Priorities for Implementing the NAP and Emergency Plan for UNSCR 1325 (2016).
- The Behavioural Change Plan to Eliminate Female Genital Mutilation in the KR-I.
- The Behavioural Change Plan to Reduce Child Marriage in the KR-I.
- The Bylaws of the Supreme Committee to Combat VAWG and the Family (KRG Supreme Council for Women and Development, 2025)



# PART TWO

## MAIN FINDINGS ON VAWG IN IRAQ AND KR-I:
### A Combined Analysis of Quantitative Survey Results and Qualitative In-Depth KIIs

This section provides an in-depth analysis of the empirical data collected through a mixed-methods approach. The quantitative component involves a large-scale survey designed to capture the perspectives of women across diverse societal segments, while the qualitative aspect consists of in-depth interviews with key experts and decision-makers within the Federal Government of Iraq and the KR-I. This methodological choice aims to present a holistic understanding of knowledge and awareness levels regarding VAWG, as well as the trends and practices surrounding it.

The findings are structured around the primary themes relevant to the research issues articulated in the questionnaire. Key areas of focus include prevalent forms of violence, underlying causal factors, societal attitudes towards violence—ranging from acceptance to condemnation—and the efficacy of institutions tasked with addressing these issues. Only selected diagrams are included in this part to present key findings; therefore, the numbers of the diagrams are not sequential. However, all diagrams are provided in the annex for reference. The quantitative data are further substantiated by analytical insights derived from the qualitative interviews, which provide contextual interpretations that clarify the socio-political and cultural dynamics shaping the landscape of VAWG.

## I. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Regarding demographic information, the percentage of illiterate women in rural areas was 16.3% among survey participants, compared to 1.65% in urban areas. Furthermore, the level of educational attainment (holding a bachelor's degree) in rural areas was lower, at approximately 7%, compared to 46% in urban areas. The educational level of the survey participants was divided into 8.5% with primary education, 17.7% with secondary education, 10.9% with a diploma, 8.9% with intermediate education, 38.4% with a bachelor's degree, 6.5% with postgraduate studies and 4.6% with illiterate status. Two respondents declined to answer. However, a 20% representation of surveyed women from rural areas is considered acceptable, given that the rural population in Iraq constitutes 29.3%, according to the latest census (2024).

Regarding nationality, Iraqi women accounted for 1,163 questionnaires, representing 95.6% of the sample, compared to 53 respondents of various nationalities, including Egyptian, Iranian, Syrian and Sudanese. The age group between 26 and 40 was the largest in the survey, comprising 47.8% of the respondents, followed by those aged 18 to 25 years (24.8%), 41 to 60 years (22.6%) and those over 60 (4.9%). The marital status of the respondents was 7.4% widowed, 37.8% single, 48% married and 6.3% divorced. Six respondents declined to answer.

Regarding the nature of the relationship between respondents and the workforce, only 20% of the respondents worked in the private sector, 24.4% were employed in government jobs, 28.5% are housewives, 16.7% were currently unemployed, 3.2% were self-employed, 2.7% received social care from the State, 2.1% were retired and 2.4% declined to answer.

# II. AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF VAWG

Knowledge is a pivotal element in effectively addressing VAWG, as it directly influences both individual and collective responses to this pervasive issue. Understanding shapes community perceptions of VAWG, informs behaviour and attitudes toward victims and perpetrators, and strengthens the willingness to engage in preventive and protective measures.

This part of the analysis delves into the community's comprehension of VAWG, scrutinising the sources of information that inform their awareness. It also investigates individuals' understanding of their responsibilities for protection at both personal and societal levels, focusing on their capacity to identify various forms of violence and appropriate responses when confronted with such situations.

Furthermore, this analysis evaluates community awareness regarding existing legal frameworks for protection, the availability of support services and mechanisms for reporting VAWG incidents. Familiarity with these legal and institutional resources is essential for empowering individuals to take constructive action against violence and to mitigate its consequences. Through a thorough assessment of these cognitive dimensions, the analysis seeks to uncover knowledge gaps that may impede prevention efforts or diminish the efficacy of responses to VAWG. It also identifies opportunities to enhance community awareness and engagement with data and resources related to VAWG, ultimately contributing to the establishment of a supportive and secure environment for all members of society.

## 1- Levels of awareness and knowledge of VAWG

In the context of in-depth KIIs, participants expanded the traditional definition of VAWG beyond merely direct and overt physical, sexual or psychological harm. A majority adopted a comprehensive framework that includes various insidious acts such as threats, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty. This definition underscores that VAWG is fundamentally linked to systemic inequality between women and men and to power imbalances, framing such violence as a HR violation and a manifestation of discrimination against women.

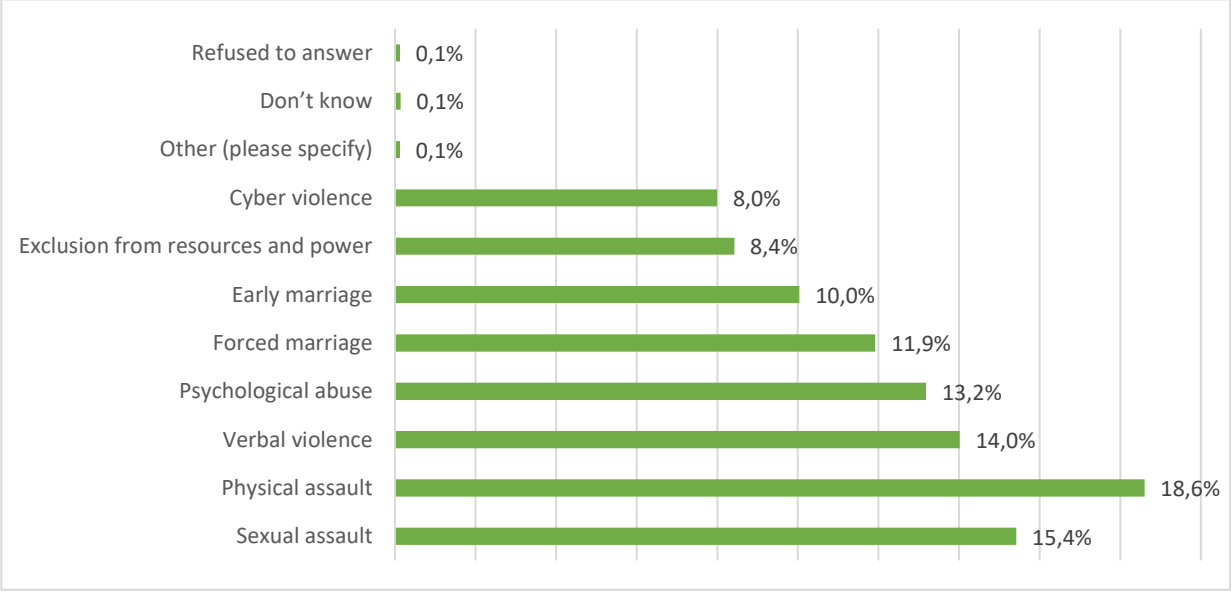
> *"The first thing that comes to mind is the imbalance in social relations and the vulnerability of women and girls, along with the discrimination they face in a society that prioritises males in terms of opportunities and rights. Additionally, the mechanisms for protecting women and girls are often weak. This discrimination against women and girls serves as one of the main pillars of violence against them, as it grants perpetrators social, legal and political power to commit acts of violence, which they may view as 'inevitable.' Consequently, this situation deprives women and girls, who are the victims, of all forms of protection.* (Civil society expert and consultant for international organisations in Baghdad)"

Meanwhile, the survey findings indicate that the predominant understanding of violence among respondents is primarily focused on physical violence, which accounts for 18.6% of the responses—the highest proportion recorded. This highlights physical violence as the most recognisable and overt manifestation of VAWG. Conversely, other forms of violence, particularly those associated with structural inequalities, are conspicuously underrepresented, with only 8.4% of respondents recognising deprivation of resources and power as a form of violence.

The emphasis on physical violence can be attributed to its tangible nature, which leaves clear and immediate evidence, facilitating recognition and reporting. In contrast, more insidious forms of violence—such as legal discrimination, inequities in labour market opportunities and barriers to accessing essential resources and services—are often normalised. Dominant cultural patterns regarding the role and place of women in family and society lead people to perceive these inequalities as ordinary social conditions rather than as forms of institutional violence.

In contexts where women experience systemic marginalisation within social and political frameworks, the survey results reveal a notable trend. A significant 15.4% of respondents associated the definition of VAWG primarily with sexual violence, placing it just behind physical violence. This finding is particularly salient given the inherent challenges in reporting and identifying cases of sexual violence, similar to the challenges faced by those experiencing physical violence. The high response rate observed in this research may be attributed to the methodology employed, specifically a feminist research approach that prioritizes trust-building and centres women respondents' experiences. Furthermore, this may reflect a heightened awareness among women regarding the risks associated with sexual violence and the importance of reporting such incidents.

Diagram 8
2.1 What does violence against women and girls mean to you?




The findings from the survey reveal a significant evolution in the understanding of VAWG in Iraq. Traditionally, the concept of VAWG has been narrowly defined as being limited to physical abuse. However, a noteworthy 14% of respondents recognised verbal violence as a form of assault that undermines a woman's character and dignity and may serve as a precursor to more severe forms of violence.

Similarly, psychological violence was acknowledged by 13.2% of participants as a significant concern.

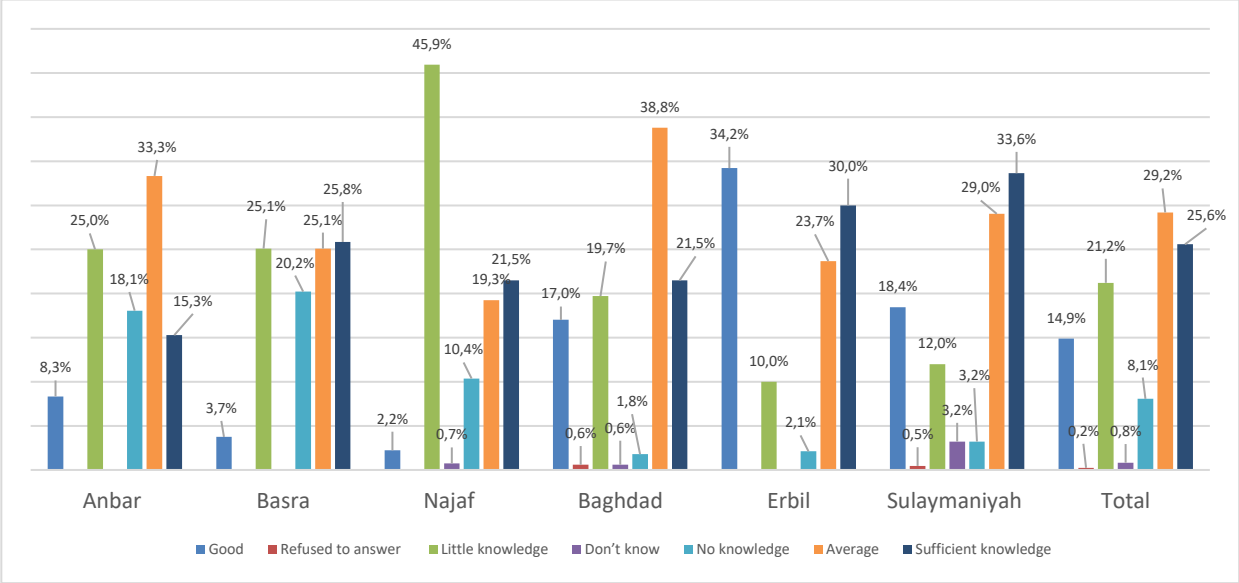
Additionally, harmful social practices such as forced marriage (11.9%) and early marriage (10%) were identified as manifestations of discrimination and VAWG.

These insights underscore an increased awareness among women regarding the multifaceted nature of violence and its relationship to wider HR violations, constraints on freedoms and limitations in accessing resources.

Moreover, 8% of respondents cited a rise in cyber violence directed at women, linked to increased access to the internet—particularly among younger demographics—which has contributed to heightened awareness of violence in its various forms.

Diagram 11

2.4 In your opinion, what is your level of knowledge about VAWG?




Regarding the question related to the level of knowledge of VAWG, 14.9% classified their knowledge as "good," while 25.6% considered it "sufficient," reflecting a positive but insufficient majority. Notably, 29.2% reported "average knowledge," suggesting that while many women possess some understanding, it may not be comprehensive. Meanwhile, 21.2% reported no knowledge at all, raising critical concerns about the effectiveness of both formal and informal entities in improving public knowledge of VAWG, as well as the protection mechanisms and services available to survivors.

Survey findings illustrate significant disparities in Iraq and the KR-I, highlighting variations in cultural, social, and educational contexts. Conversely, Najaf exhibited the highest incidence of "limited knowledge" responses at 45.9%, followed by Basra at 25.1% and Anbar at 20.0%. Although the survey reported a high prevalence of violence in Najaf (79.3%), the findings suggest potential underreporting of incidents or a tendency to frame VAWG as a familial or disciplinary matter.

This trend may stem from the conservative socio-religious landscape of Najaf, where cultural norms could discourage the acknowledgment of such violence.

The findings suggest that women —particularly in Najaf—may be largely unaware of protective legislation or the avenues available for reporting violence, highlighting a critical deficit in access to information. This gap can be attributed to a lack of effective supportive institutions or

pervasive mistrust of existing resources. The same interpretation extends to Basra and Anbar, underscoring that while women may experience violence, they often lack the conceptual frameworks and legal knowledge necessary to analyse or confront it. Thus, a pronounced divide persists between recognising violence and understanding its nature, as well as the responses available.

Both Erbil and Sulaymaniyah demonstrate a higher level of awareness than the national average, with more than 64% in Erbil and over 52% in Sulaymaniyah reporting "good" or "sufficient" knowledge. This can be attributed to several factors, including higher levels of education and greater social and media openness in the KR-I, as well as the active role of CSOs working on VAWG. These efforts have been supported by local laws and regulations in the region that limit VAWG, thereby increasing awareness of rights and available legal protection mechanisms.

## 2- Prevalence of VAWG

Qualitative data indicate that VAWG is pervasive in Iraqi society. In-depth interviews with respondents revealed that, despite the establishment of legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms aimed at protecting women in the KR-I—such as shelters, hotlines and specialised courts—the incidence of violence remains alarmingly high. This disparity underscores a significant divide between policy formulation and its practical execution in addressing women's safety and rights.

> *"In recent years, the number of murders of women has increased dramatically, despite the existence of laws. This is due to the lack of effective implementation and enforcement of existing laws. Many cases go unreported, especially murders, which are often justified as suicides, even though they are not. The perpetrators are acquitted, or their sentences are reduced on this pretext.* (Human rights activist, the KR-I)"

VAWG affects all women, including women's rights activists. In-depth interviews confirmed that women's organisations are currently facing a surge in violence and societal stigma. To be identified as a member of a feminist group often leads to direct stigmatisation, framing it as an affront rather than a valid identity. Such organisations are frequently accused of fostering animosity and encouraging girls to assert their rights—perceived as a direct challenge to the prevailing social order. Consequently, these groups face tangible threats and encounter systemic obstacles in their operations, including administrative harassment and arbitrary regulatory practices.

Digital harassment campaigns, characterised by coordinated troll activity and organised digital brigades, exacerbate the situation by distorting the public image of both women and feminist activists, regardless of their formal affiliation. Expressing an opinion on social media can lead to targeted and systematic attacks. Ironically, many of those orchestrating these campaigns present themselves as clerics upholding Islamic law, despite their actions contradicting its core tenets, which emphasise the preservation of human dignity and the prevention of defamation—especially towards women. Even when individuals err, Islamic teachings stress confidentiality and mitigation rather than public shaming or derogation.

While women's rights activists may have a safe space to share the violence they face, most women in society lack such spaces.

Nevertheless, a significant portion of survey respondents (54.2%) recognised the prevalence of VAWG, with Anbar reporting the highest incidence at 72.2%. This trend can be largely attributed

to prolonged armed conflict in the region, from 2003 through the emergence of ISIS in 2014, which contributed to elevated rates of violence across multiple forms, particularly impacting women and girls. Awareness campaigns launched by both international and local organisations—especially after displaced families returned to their communities—have also increased recognition of the issue.

Additionally, 35% of respondents indicated that violence is very common, with Najaf exhibiting the highest rate at 79.3%. This finding correlates with age and educational attainment, as the sample predominantly comprised young, educated women. This demographic shift has fostered greater awareness of DV and women's rights across all governorates. The high percentage of acknowledgment can also be attributed to a sense of safety, within the framework of this study, in voicing concerns about violence.

Conversely, 8.1% of respondents categorised VAWG as uncommon, with Basra presenting the highest percentage of "uncommon" perspectives at 19.9%. This disparity can be explained by the insecurity faced by women in these areas, where tribal power is stronger than that of state institutions. This imbalance hampers their ability to express opinions openly. Moreover, the inadequate availability of legal and psychological support for survivors further discourages reporting, leading to a skewed perception that violence is less prevalent than it truly is.

In the KR-I, most respondents perceive violence against women and girls as a widespread issue. In Erbil, 48.4% considered it "common" and 43.7% "very common," indicating a strong acknowledgment of the problem. Similarly, in Sulaymaniyah, 62.2% viewed it as "common" and 25.8% as "very common." These findings reflect a high level of awareness of VAWG across both Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, likely influenced by greater social openness, active civil society engagement and local legislation addressing VAWG.

## 3- Sources of information on violence and awareness of legal procedures

An analysis of the primary sources of information regarding VAWG reveals that a significant portion of survey respondents (39.3%) primarily relied on informal social networks, such as relatives and friends, for information. In contrast, only 10.5% cited government sources, indicating a notable lack of trust in official channels and suggesting the limited prioritisation of VAWG within the Iraqi government's policy framework. This disparity points to a weakness in the official reporting and awareness systems, resulting in the proliferation of inaccurate or incomplete information concerning available protection mechanisms and services.

Notably, CSOs are recognised as a source of information by 12% of respondents, surpassing the governmental percentage, albeit marginally. Considering the geographic and demographic diversity of Iraqi society, coupled with the limited capacity of CSOs to reach all areas—particularly rural regions—this statistic underscores the significant yet localised impact such organisations have on segments of the population. These organisations primarily serve women who have accessed protection services or participated in training.

Traditional media emerged as another critical source of information, with 35.7% of respondents acknowledging their role. This finding affirms the influence of traditional media in disseminating cultural norms, raising awareness and actively shaping public discourse on issues such as VAWG. It is noteworthy that various satellite channels, including official ones, have begun to cover discussions surrounding this issue, thereby supporting initiatives and activities spearheaded by local and international CSOs, such as the 16 Days of Activism campaign. Among the respondents, 15% identified social media as their source of information, reflecting its growing relevance in the context of awareness-raising.

The quantitative survey findings reveal a troubling statistic: only 12.3% of respondents self-assessed their awareness of legal procedures for reporting violence as "good." This indicates that less than one-eighth of women possess adequate awareness of the mechanisms in place for reporting such incidents, raising significant concerns about awareness and access to justice in cases of violence. This suggests inadequate access to legal information and highlights the shortcomings of current awareness campaigns. When aggregating the percentages of respondents with "limited awareness" (21.5%) and "average awareness" (24.2%), the total rises to 45.8%. This indicates that nearly half of the women surveyed possess only partial awareness of legal procedures, reflecting a foundational yet insufficient base for developing effective educational and training initiatives aimed at empowering women to safeguard themselves.

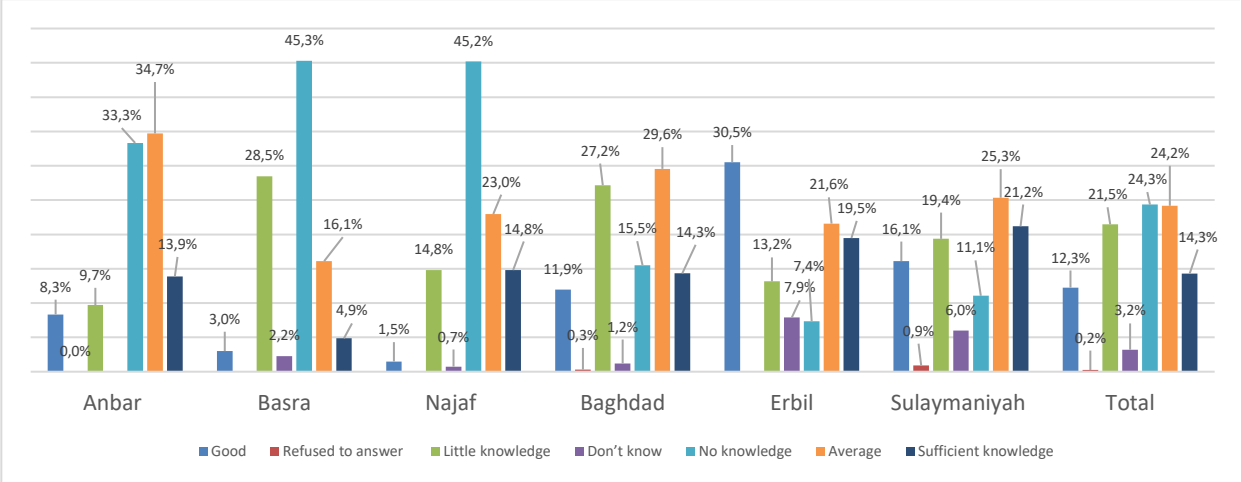
Conversely, the alarming finding that 24.3% of respondents reported having "no awareness" of legal procedures underscores the failure of relevant policies or institutions to effectively engage with this critical social issue. While the percentage of respondents indicating "sufficient awareness" (14.3%) is slightly higher than those classified as having "good awareness" (12.3%), it remains critically low given the requirements for meaningful engagement with legal procedures.

The analysis of the geographic dimensions of awareness surrounding legal procedures for reporting VAWG indicates that Erbil demonstrates the highest levels of awareness. Specifically, responses classified as "good awareness" constituted 30.5% of the total, while those deemed "sufficient awareness" accounted for 19.5%. When combined, these percentages indicate a 50% awareness rate, which is markedly higher than that observed in Federal Iraq.

In contrast, Basra and Najaf reported the highest prevalence of "don't know" responses, at 45.3% and 45.2%, respectively. Anbar followed closely with 33.3%, while Baghdad exhibited a significant lack of awareness, with 15.5% of respondents indicating limited awareness regarding legal procedures for reporting violence.

Diagram 12

2.5 What is your level of awareness of legal procedures for reporting VAWG?




The low awareness rates in Iraq appear to stem from the ineffectiveness of existing legal frameworks and a pervasive lack of trust in governmental institutions. This scenario is exacerbated by ongoing security and political challenges that influence local priorities and

highlight the absence of sustainable legal education initiatives in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

In a notable contrast, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah demonstrate the lowest levels of uncertainty regarding legal awareness, with only 7.4% and 11.1% of respondents indicating “don't know” respectively. This trend reflects a more favourable environment for discussing issues related to violence and rights, which can be attributed to robust local civil society engagement and the effective impact of government and media campaigns.

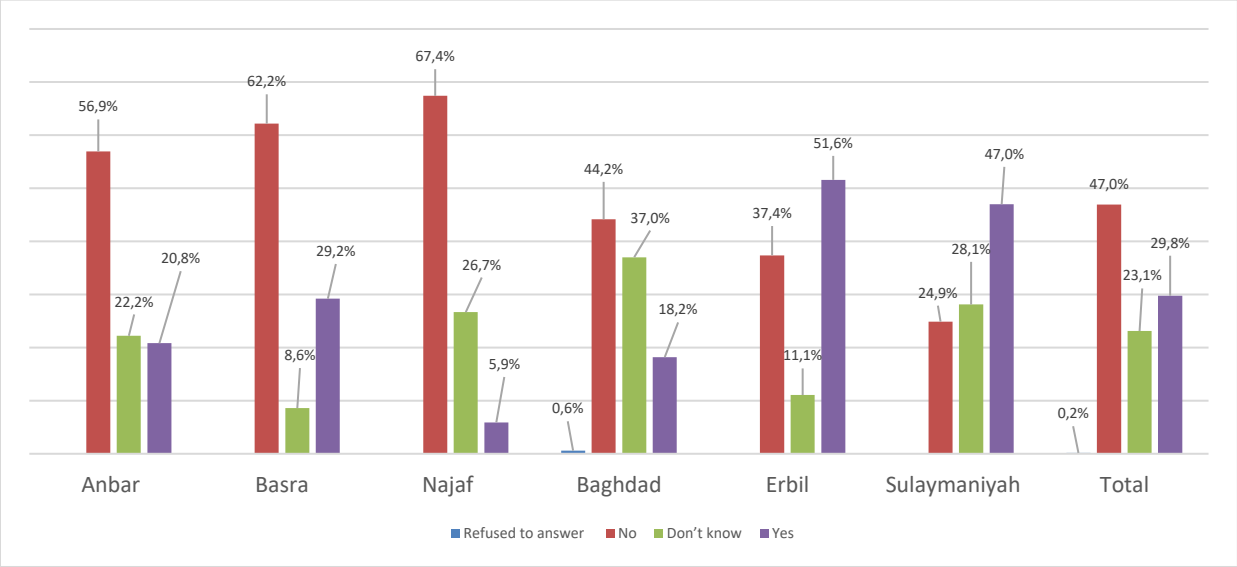
An examination of the urban-rural divide reveals significant disparities in women’s legal awareness. While 14.4% of urban women reported “good awareness” of legal procedures, just 3.6% of those from rural areas answered the same. This discrepancy suggests structural inequalities in access to legal resources, institutions and media outlets. Women in rural contexts often confront multiple obstacles, including inadequate legal infrastructure and a scarcity of awareness programmes, which limit their options and perpetuate restrictive societal norms.

The gap becomes further pronounced in the “I don't know” responses: 17.45% in urban settings compared to a staggering 51.6% in rural ones. This data highlights that over half of rural women are entirely uninformed about legal procedures, reinforcing the concept of “geographical inequality” in access to rights.

Further findings reveal that 47% of survey respondents were unaware of local governmental institutions addressing VAWG, with Najaf reporting the highest level of unawareness at 67.4%, followed by Basra at 62.2%. These figures indicate considerable deficiencies in awareness-raising efforts and institutional communication with local communities, particularly in marginalised or remote areas.

Diagram 13

2.6 Are you aware of government institutions addressing VAWG in your area?



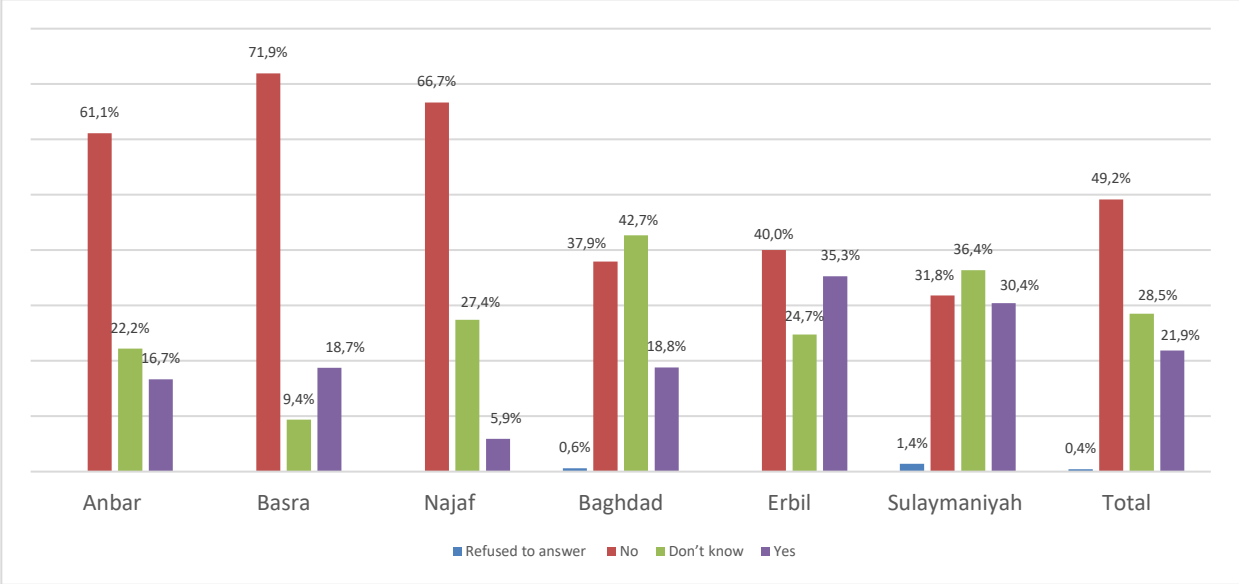

Additionally, the 23.1% of respondents who answered “I don’t know” reflects a significant portion of the population that may be hesitant or lacking clear information. This suggests either a deficit in trust towards these institutions or a lack of direct engagement, leading to uncertainty. The “yes” responses, while accounting for 29.8%, reveal only modest awareness of the existence of specialised institutions, which is insufficient given the critical nature of the issue.

Awareness levels were notably higher in urban areas (34.4%) compared to rural regions (11.3%), while the "don't know" responses in rural locales stood at 69.5%, in stark contrast to 41.2% in urban environments. This significant disparity points once more to inequalities in information access and available services, with urban women having better access to media and support organisations than their rural counterparts, who grapple with inadequate infrastructure, prevailing social customs and geographic barriers to information.

The survey data also highlighted significant disparities in awareness regarding the presence of CSOs dedicated to addressing VAWG. This lack of awareness appears to be influenced by geographical and socio-economic factors that affect access to information, networks and support services. Notably, 49.2% of respondents indicated they were unaware of organisations focused on this issue, with only 21.9% acknowledging their existence. Such figures point to inadequate information campaigns, ineffective media outreach and insufficient educational initiatives, particularly in regions where these organisations have a minimal physical presence.

Diagram 14

2.7 Are you aware of civil society organisations addressing VAWG in your area?




In Basra, a major economic hub, the unawareness rate reached 71.9%, the highest recorded. This can be attributed to several interrelated factors: the limited outreach capabilities of CSOs amidst a backdrop of centralised local authority, security challenges, fragile state institutions and tribal control. As a result, civil society efforts tend to prioritise service delivery or environmental initiatives, often sidelining issues related to VAWG and HR.

Conversely, Erbil exhibited a more favourable awareness landscape, with a "yes" response rate of 35.3%, surpassing Baghdad's 18.8%. This discrepancy may reflect a more conducive environment for civil society within the KR-I, supported by effectively functioning institutions and the implementation of legal frameworks such as the Anti-DV Law. Additionally, the engagement of civil society in Erbil with international organisations fosters a collaborative atmosphere, enhancing information campaigns and outreach efforts directed towards women.

In the qualitative phase, one legal expert and activist from the KR-I stated:

> *"The statistics on cases of violence in the KR-I seem high. This is largely due to the efforts of organisations that advocate for women's rights, such as women's organisations, DV support groups and HR organisations. In our organisation, when we ask women with a long history of violence why they are reporting it now, they often respond, 'I only just learned that there are organisations that provide services and protection against violence.' Previously, many women were unaware of the existence of organisations or institutions that defended their rights until they sought help and advocated for themselves. There are times when concerns about rising violence in Kurdistan arise, and both the public and experts question the reasons for this, especially considering the existence of laws, programmes and procedures. The underlying reason is that women have become more aware of violence and the resources available to them".*

The answers in the quantitative survey reveal clear disparities in awareness between rural and urban areas. In urban locations, 43.7% of women reported being unaware, contrasted with 70.7% in rural areas, highlighting the concentration of civil society presence and work in urban centres. This trend was consistently corroborated by insights gathered from all interviews with professionals and specialists in the field in the KR-I and Federal Iraq.

## 4- Protection, legal mechanisms and institutional response

Most interviewees in the qualitative phase emphasised the weak response of the Federal Government in providing services to women survivors:

> *"Women rarely turn to government agencies for protection against violence for several reasons. First, these agencies often respond inadequately to cases of violence. Additionally, stigma surrounding these issues, a lack of accessible hotlines and many women's unfamiliarity with their existence hinder access to support. Alarmingly, some women subjected to violence do not even have mobile phones to reach out for help. Economic vulnerability and poverty further exacerbate the situation, making it difficult for women to find transportation to police stations. Moreover, there is a significant shortage of shelters for women facing violence, particularly for those with children. Many abused women fear losing their children, which forces them to tolerate their circumstances instead of seeking help.* (Civil society expert and consultant for international organisations, Baghdad)"

Almost all interviewees underscored the prevailing issues of inadequate cooperation and communication among the various agencies tasked with empowering and protecting women and girls from violence.

A former ministerial actor and expert on women's issues from Baghdad noted:

> "*While numerous agencies are dedicated to women's affairs, the primary concern lies in the lack of coordination among them, which often gives the impression that these entities are working at cross purposes. Presently, there exists a multitude of agencies, including a national department, the Women's Affairs Department within the Presidency of the Republic and the Supreme Council associated with the Prime Minister's Office. Each operates independently, without effective collaboration, resulting in a fragmented working environment. This disjointed approach contributes significantly to the*

*deterioration of the women's affairs framework, as there are no cohesive national mechanisms."*

The insufficient referral system among the agencies responsible for protecting women from violence is further illustrated by the low percentage of survey respondents who were aware of the existence of a hotline for reporting cases of VAWG in Iraq. Specifically, only 33.7% affirmed their awareness, revealing a clear gap in community knowledge. This lack of awareness may stem from several factors, including ineffective media campaigns, limited targeted outreach to specific population groups and the failure to incorporate information about the hotline into educational, health and service programmes aimed at women.

The "no" response rate was 26.4%, indicating that a quarter of respondents acknowledged their unfamiliarity with this service. This finding suggests a pressing need for targeted communication interventions to enhance awareness among women, as highlighting a lack of knowledge can serve as a foundational point for educational initiatives. Notably, the "don't know" response rate, which stood at 39.5%, represented the highest percentage among responses. This reflects confusion or uncertainty among women regarding the availability of the hotline, suggesting deficiencies in official communication strategies and potentially a lack of confidence in the efficacy of such resources.

Urban areas exhibited relatively more favourable results; approximately 38.4% of women indicated awareness of the hotline, which is higher than the general average. This improved awareness can be attributed to better media infrastructure, greater internet access, more active CSOs and targeted media campaigns prevalent in urban settings. Nevertheless, the percentage of respondents answering "no" was below a quarter of the sample (20.21%). While this is lower than the national average, the high "don't know" rate of 40.8% indicates that segments of the urban population remain underserved by awareness initiatives. This highlights the necessity for comprehensive approaches targeting marginalised neighbourhoods and women with limited education. In rural areas, about half of the respondents (50.8%) indicated that they were unaware of available services, illustrating a significant gap in awareness and outreach efforts tailored to these communities.

The data also reveal a significant disparity between urban and rural areas regarding women's awareness of legal procedures for reporting harassment. In urban areas, 35.5% of women reported awareness, while 30.8% were unaware and 33.3% were uncertain. In contrast, only 15.4% of rural women were aware, with 61.3% stating they were not, and 23.1% being uncertain. These figures indicate greater access to information in urban areas, likely due to better exposure to education and legal resources, while rural areas show a critical gap in awareness.

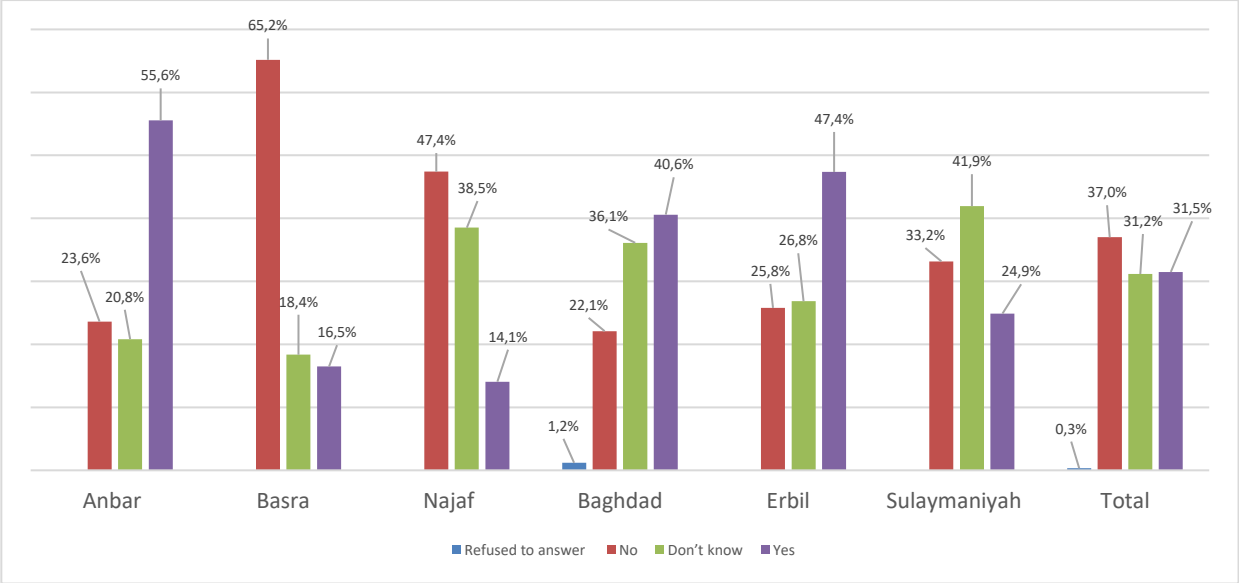
Furthermore, the data indicate that overall awareness among women regarding legal procedures for reporting harassment is low, with only 31.5% providing affirmative responses. A larger portion (37%) reported having no awareness of these procedures, while 31.2% expressed uncertainty. Regionally, Anbar (55.6%) and Erbil (47.4%) show the highest proportions of women aware of legal procedures, whereas Basra (65.2%) and Najaf (47.4%) recorded the highest proportions of women reporting a lack of awareness. Additionally, Sulaymaniyah and Baghdad displayed significant levels of uncertainty, at 41.9% and 36.1%, respectively. This uncertainty may reflect confusion or insufficient legal outreach. The issue does not appear to be a taboo but is more likely related to gaps in knowledge, accessibility and institutional trust. This lack of awareness and clarity undermines women's ability to report violations, seek justice and benefit from legal protections, especially given that their security is not always ensured in the places where they file complaints.

The findings from in-depth interviews revealed instances of sexual blackmail and exploitation experienced by women seeking administrative services within certain security institutions. Multiple participants reported that women, regardless of their age, frequently encounter abuse of power by officials. These officials take advantage of bureaucratic procedures to demand favours or inappropriate offers in exchange for processing applications.

These testimonies point to systemic vulnerabilities and the absence of accountability mechanisms within certain public institutions, underscoring the urgent need for stronger oversight, complaint systems and safeguards that are sensitive to the needs of women, to protect them and help them access essential government services.

Diagram 16

2.9 Are you aware of legal procedures for reporting harassment incidents?




The in-depth interviews revealed a troubling trend regarding women's ability to report incidents of violence across diverse demographics. Despite increased awareness of violence and the existence of legal frameworks, many women still encounter significant barriers to reporting. A women's rights activist from the KR-I articulated this sentiment:

> *"I see myself as a victim. I don't feel safe reporting the violence I experience due to customs and traditions, and because there are no safe places or shelters that can provide the necessary protection. Even the existing shelters fail to protect women from murder or retaliation. This is why survivors often feel unsafe. Despite having a national action plan to implement Resolution 1325, discrimination and violence against women persist in plain sight."*

In-depth interviews with some institutional representatives acknowledged that there is still a gap between the existence of a referral system on VAWG and its practical implementation due to poor communication among the involved parties. Community police officers are also often overwhelmed by the high number of cases they manage. Furthermore, there are no temporary shelters for women seeking protection. As one official noted, *"This situation can have significant psychological consequences for them."*

The following testimony from a women's rights activist in Iraq highlights the deep frustrations surrounding the implementation of international frameworks on Women, Peace and Security. Her reflections point to a recurring pattern in which resolutions—such as UNSCR 1325—are selectively promoted for visibility and funding, while others are neglected or superficially addressed. This criticism underscores a gap between formal commitments and actual outcomes, where resources are invested without meaningful change on the ground. The activist's words reveal how the lack of clarity, inclusivity and genuine engagement with women in peacebuilding processes has rendered these initiatives ineffective, leaving many to perceive them as symbolic rather than transformative:

> *"I am dissatisfied with Resolution 1325 because it has left me confused about what has happened and what is currently happening. The government and organisations invested effort and money, yet the results were zero. Resources are being allocated to 1325, but I question the seriousness in involving women in peacebuilding. They used a specific case to enhance their image, but it resulted in no real impact. Even the public presentation was rigid and unclear. Why focus solely on 1325 and ignore other resolutions?"*

## 5- Availability of safe shelters for women survivors of violence

DV is a pervasive issue in Iraq, with one official from Baghdad noting that a significant challenge for law enforcement is the absence of designated safe shelters for survivors.

> *"Women and girls are consistently subjected to* DV*, a reality we encounter daily. Contributing to the increasing prevalence of this issue is the lack of legal frameworks addressing it. Most* DV *cases reported to us culminate in reconciliation, with women returning to potentially hazardous family situations due to the unavailability of secure housing options. Additionally, societal stigma often prevents families from accepting women who have utilised shelters for protection."*

In the KR-I, according to the interviewees, there is a pressing need to develop safe shelters that adequately meet the needs of women survivors. One respondent from civil society noted,

> *"Even when a woman enters a shelter, it is not easy. She must first obtain permission from a judge, which only happens automatically in cases of urgent need. The challenges do not end with entry; the shelters themselves often lack the resources necessary to provide comprehensive care. These* [centres] *typically do not offer psychological, social or legal support services, nor are there effective rehabilitation programmes in place. As a result, women find themselves in situations that resemble confinement rather than true protection or empowerment, potentially worsening their crises while they remain there. In Iraq, there is still no clear legal definition of what constitutes a "shelter" or how these facilities should operate. Although some* [centres] *were established by international organisations like UNFPA, and the buildings were equipped for their intended purposes, they have often been repurposed. In some instances, these shelters have even been converted into detention centres for women, as occurred in Baghdad*."

Another expert from the KR-I stated:

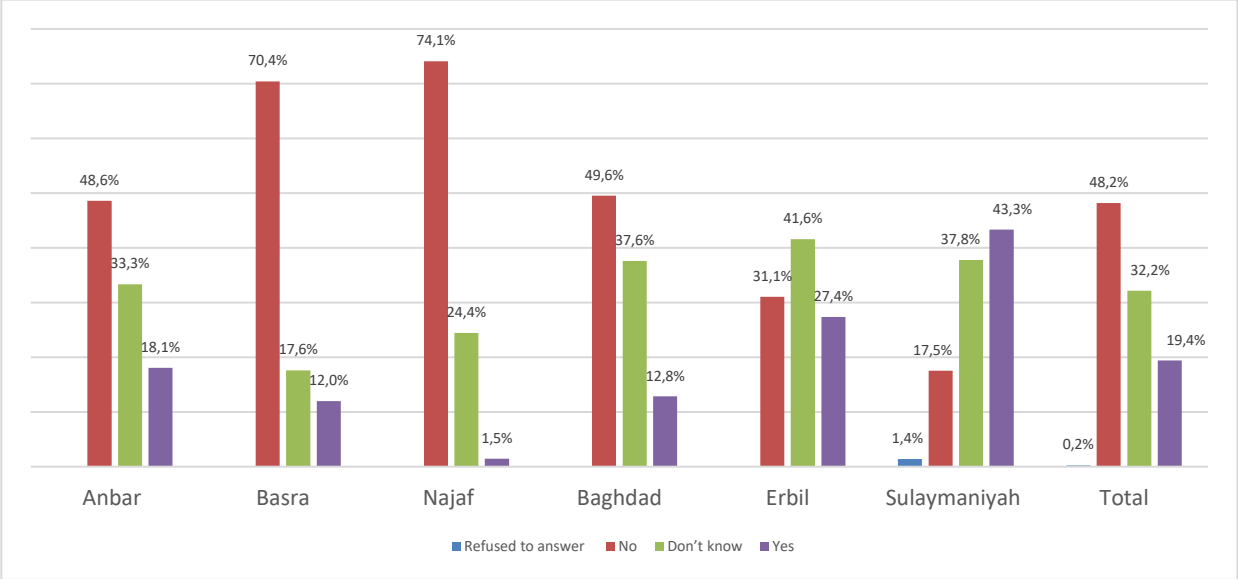
*"In my opinion, the government bears the greatest responsibility and must provide real, safe shelters for survivors. The existing shelters are not secure enough, as the perpetrator can reach the victim at any moment."*

The challenge of providing safe shelters has presented a significant obstacle to the approval of the Anti-DV Law in Federal Iraq. Advocacy campaigns by CSOs have played a crucial role in highlighting this issue through discussions with the government and parliament, as well as through the media. While these campaigns were unable to persuade the government to establish safe shelters for abused women, they successfully raised awareness about the necessity of such facilities. As a result, 19.4% of survey participants believed that shelters existed, or considered "unofficial" shelters run by some CSOs to be official or governmental shelters.

The percentage of women who responded to the survey indicating that the government provides safe shelters varied by region. Specifically, in Anbar, 18.1% of respondents believed this; in Baghdad, the percentage was 12.8%; in Basra, it was 12%; and the lowest rate, at 1.5%, was found in Najaf. These disparities highlight significant gaps in information and indicate a lack of effective awareness campaigns by regional governments and civil society, as evidenced by 48.2% of women asserting that the government does not provide shelters. This figure reflects a general awareness of the inadequate institutional infrastructure for protecting women survivors in Federal Iraq, particularly pronounced in Najaf (74.1%) and Basra (70.4%).

Diagram 17

2.10 Does the government provide shelters for women survivors of violence?




In Baghdad, 49.6% responded negatively, with a similar percentage in Anbar (48.6%). Additionally, 32.2% of respondents indicated uncertainty, stemming from a lack of trust in official institutions, which ultimately discourages proactive inquiries about available services.

In the in-depth interviews, one participant critically observed that governmental planning and follow-up regarding VAWG remain insufficient, especially amidst challenging cultural and security environments. As an example, in Anbar Governorate, an initiative to establish a safe haven in the Heet district—away from urban centres like Fallujah—failed to attract community engagement, primarily due to the facility's lack of easy access to essential services, protection

and support systems. The establishment of effective shelters necessitates genuine community awareness and an understanding of their importance.

In the KR-I, awareness of available safe shelters for women varies notably between Sulaymaniyah and Erbil. In Sulaymaniyah, 43.3% of respondents acknowledged the existence of genuine shelters, reflecting greater public awareness and possibly stronger collaboration between CSOs and local authorities. In contrast, only 27.4% of women in Erbil recognised the presence of such shelters, suggesting a significant gap in outreach and communication efforts. This disparity points to uneven dissemination of information and limitations in awareness campaigns.

When questioned about the role of CSOs in providing shelters, 46.7% of survey respondents answered negatively, indicating a prevailing scepticism about the availability of such resources. Only 11.8% affirmed their existence, reflecting limited awareness based on discussions about the establishment of protective shelters by various organisations. The "I don't know" category accounted for 41.3%, indicating that a majority of respondents remain uninformed about shelters or services available for women survivors of violence. Basra reported the highest "no" response rate (77.9%) and a 22.1% "I don't know" rate, attributed to the complete lack of services, as per respondents' accounts.

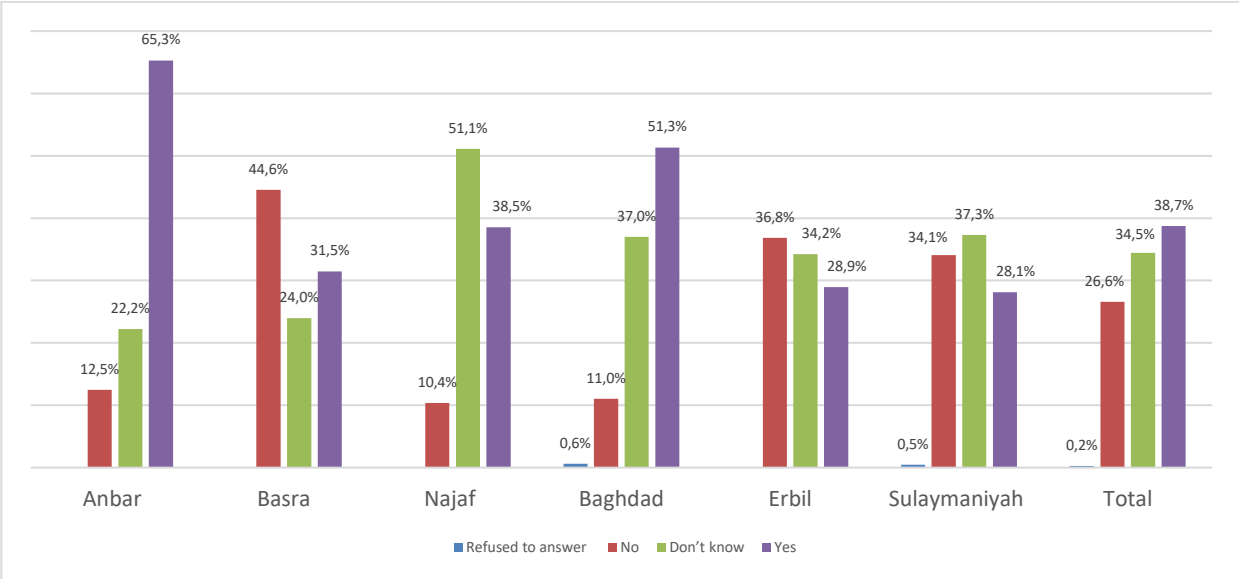
In Baghdad, the responses indicated a "no" rate of 31.3% contrasted with a "yes" rate of 19.4%, which is the second-highest affirmative response after Anbar (41.7%). This discrepancy may arise from a higher concentration of active women's centres and civil society initiatives in the capital, alongside comparatively greater international support. However, the elevated "I don't know" response rate of 48.7% demonstrates that these services remain largely invisible to the affected population.

A pronounced rural-urban divide was evident in the responses of female participants. In rural areas, 63% answered "no," with affirmative responses (8.9%) and "don't know" (28%) following behind. Among urban respondents, 42.5% answered "no," with "yes" at 12.4% and "don't know" at 44.6%. Initiatives spearheaded by international and local organisations are perceived to have a more significant impact compared to governmental efforts. Overall, findings revealed that 38.7% of surveyed respondents recognised CSOs as providers of psychological or logistical support services, compared to 26.6% who noted their absence. Another 34.5% reported uncertainty regarding such services. These statistics reflect notable disparities in awareness of service availability. Despite commendable initiatives by CSOs to raise awareness, these efforts are insufficient to address the widespread issue of VAWG, primarily due to the limited resources available to these organisations.

The analysis reveals that Anbar governorate leads with the highest affirmative response rate regarding awareness of CSOs' support services, at 65.3%. This high percentage underscores heightened awareness likely stemming from the governorate's experience with extensive armed conflicts and their resultant repercussions. Following liberation, a myriad of international organisations engaged in reconstruction efforts, collaborating closely with local entities. This included not only infrastructure rehabilitation, but also psychological support and various services targeted at residents, particularly women, which significantly bolstered confidence in the operational effectiveness of these organisations during this transitional phase.

Diagram 20

2.13 Do civil society organisations provide services like psychological or logistical support?




In contrast, Baghdad's affirmative response rate was 51.3%. This relatively high figure can be attributed to the concentration of numerous CSOs in the capital, which facilitates greater accessibility to diverse services and reflects a higher public awareness due to the urban demographic's complexity and the infusion of international and national resources.

On the other hand, the affirmative response rates regarding civil society services directed toward women survivors of violence in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah were markedly lower, at 28.9% and 28.1%, respectively. These figures highlight a concerning gap in service awareness despite the presence of multiple international organisations in the region. The primary explanation for these low rates may be that many organisations focus their efforts on displaced populations or refugees, with limited engagement at the wider community level.

Moreover, the significant "don't know" responses—34.2% in Erbil and 37.3% in Sulaymaniyah—indicate a notable lack of awareness and information regarding available services. One interviewee during the KIIs articulated that government provisions for shelters and protective services remain notably deficient, pointing to a broader absence of political will to foster collaborative initiatives with civil society aimed at safeguarding women from violence.

According to one expert from civil society, the government's provision of shelters and protection services is not only weak, but there is also a lack of political will to adopt collaborative initiatives with CSOs that address the issue of protecting women from violence:

> *"In the context of civil society, a pressing challenge is the absence of continuity in initiatives. Ideally, the accomplishments of these organisations should transition to governmental or quasi-governmental entities to guarantee their sustainability; however, this mechanism is notably lacking. For instance, when an organisation establishes a listening and reception centre for survivors of abuse and develops a comprehensive service map along with a referral system, the viability of such projects is often limited to a brief duration—ranging from a few months to a year or slightly beyond. Once funding expires or is depleted, the*

*operational capacity to maintain the centre often diminishes, inherently tying the initiative to reliance on volunteers, which does not ensure ongoing service delivery. This situation is emblematic of a broader trend within civil society organisations, which grapple with project sustainability due to inadequate financial resources and insufficient ongoing support. Additionally, partnerships with government entities tend to be tenuous and frequently centred around financial incentives rather than a commitment to enhancing service quality. Ideally, governmental bodies should assume responsibility for overseeing and financing these vital projects and initiatives."*

One governmental expert disclosed that religious shrines are initiating programmes to establish shelters for "homeless" females or those with criminal records whose families have disavowed them. The absence of official government-sanctioned safe havens has compelled law enforcement and community police to utilise these shrines as temporary housing for women experiencing DV who have lodged formal complaints. This situation underscores the pressing need for the development of specialised shelters for survivors, while also highlighting the deficiencies in the existing protection services offered by governmental agencies:

*"For me, and what I face daily, the most critical issue we need to work on is resolving the problem of shelters. We indeed have Dar al-Warith, which has contributed significantly to solving the problem, primarily since it is affiliated with a religious institution, and society generally trusts religious institutions. Women survivors of DV are lumped in with women convicted of criminal offences. This exposes us to a significant problem: the behaviour of those convicted varies based on the length of their prison sentence and the nature of the crime they committed. This could either expose women survivors of violence to the risk of exploitation or criminality, or it could cause a bad reputation for Dar al-Warith, and we would lose an essential shelter for victims of violence."*



# III. BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES CONCERNING VAWG

Attitudes toward VAWG are significantly influenced by entrenched social norms, cultural beliefs, perceptions of risk and established traditional roles. These factors are pivotal in shaping both individual and collective understandings of VAWG, determining the levels of societal acceptance or rejection and influencing potential interventions. In the specific contexts of the target areas, the ramifications of these attitudes manifest in distinct patterns of societal behaviour and responses to instances of VAWG.

Prevailing social norms play a critical role in defining what constitutes "acceptable" behaviour, which in turn influences both men's and women's perceptions of the risks associated with violence. These attitudes may either provide justification for acts of violence or serve to condemn them, thereby shaping the broader societal discourse surrounding VAWG.

This segment of the research delves into the analysis of these normative frameworks and beliefs, elucidating their relationship with power dynamics. It assesses risk perceptions experienced by women and men across various contexts and examines the societal mechanisms that either legitimise VAWG or foster a climate of rejection towards it. Furthermore, this analysis explores how prevailing societal attitudes impact individuals' decisions to seek support and utilise available services for survivors. It identifies significant barriers that hinder access to these services, as well as factors that could empower individuals to transcend the cycle of violence and pursue necessary protections and assistance within their community environment.

## 1- Women's attitudes toward violence and its justifications

Most in-depth interviews revealed that various factors shape attitudes toward VAWG, contributing to its continuation. Women often recognise the existence of this violence; however, its normalisation by structural institutions helps reproduce and perpetuate it. This insight was corroborated by an academic from Baghdad:

> *"During my teaching at the university, I noticed that many female students justified light beatings by their husbands if the wife was 'neglectful,' whether in childcare or housework. This does not mean that they support violence; rather, it reflects a social normalisation of violence as an acceptable 'discipline' tool within custom, even though the law still protects this right for men!"*

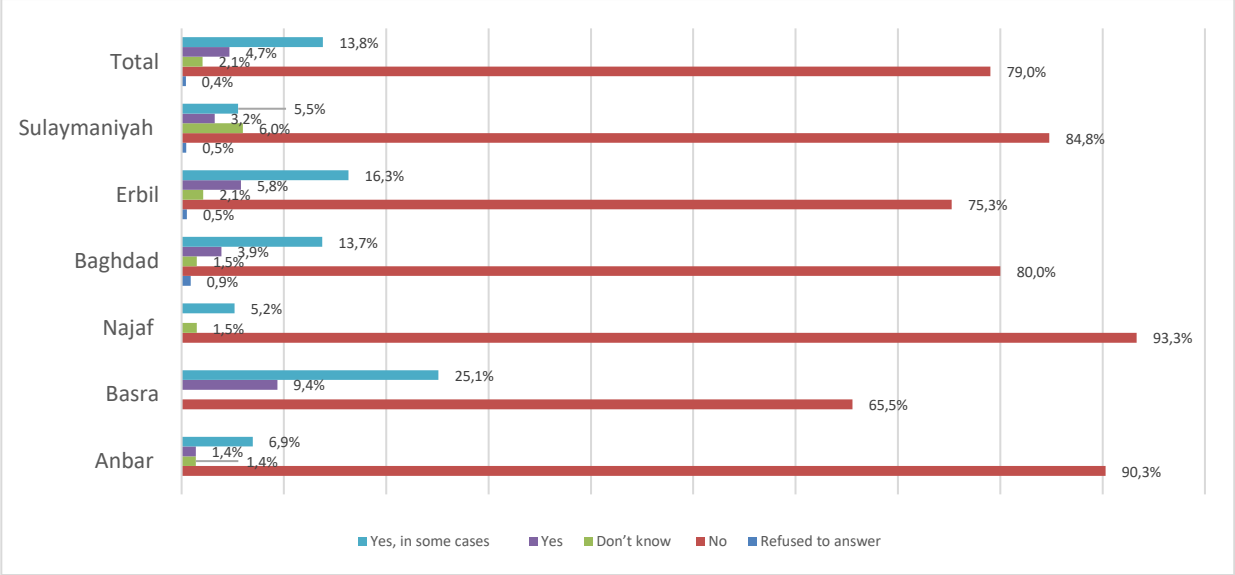
The quantitative survey results reveal a significant trend among respondents, with a substantial majority (79%) firmly rejecting justifications for DV in instances of child neglect. The highest rejection rates were observed in Najaf (93.3%) and Anbar (90.3%), reflecting a commendable awareness of women's rights and a growing repudiation of any form of justification for DV, even in traditionally perceived "justifiable" scenarios. Nevertheless, a concerning 13.8% of respondents accepted physical violence against the wife as permissible "in some cases" related to child neglect, with 4.7% endorsing it unconditionally. This indicates an enduring cultural backdrop that normalises VAWG, closely intertwined with traditional roles that position women as the primary caregivers.

In the KR-I, in both Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, the majority of respondents rejected the idea that a husband is justified in hitting his wife for neglecting children. In Sulaymaniyah, 84.8% of women disagreed with this notion, showing a strong rejection of violence and a relatively high

awareness of women's rights. In Erbil, 75.3% also rejected such behaviour, though a higher proportion (16.3%) believed it could be acceptable "in some cases," and 5.8% agreed outright. This comparison suggests that while opposition to domestic violence is dominant in both governorates, attitudes in Erbil remain somewhat more tolerant of conditional violence, reflecting the persistence of traditional norms and social justifications for certain forms of abuse.

Diagram 21

3.1.1 According to you, is it acceptable for the husband to hit his wife in the following cases: If she neglects the children




Notably, there is a marked variation in attitudes across Iraq. For instance, in Basra Governorate, 9.4% of women found physical violence against the wife acceptable due to child neglect—exceeding the national average of 4.7%. Furthermore, the subset accepting this as permissible "in some cases" surged to 25.1%, starkly higher than the national average of 13.8%. Such disparities can be attributed to more rigid cultural and social norms in Basra, which reinforce stereotypical expectations and perpetuate the notion of violence as a disciplinary method for perceived neglect. Additionally, economic hardship, unemployment and precarious living conditions exacerbate psychological and social pressures, diminishing women's capacity to reject violent practices. The relative scarcity of legal and HR awareness initiatives in certain regions contributes to the persistence of these justifications.

When examining attitudes towards spousal conflicts, an overwhelming majority (83.9%) oppose the use of physical violence by husbands during arguments. This indicates a notable increase in the recognition of women's rights and the rejection of violence as a mechanism for resolving marital disputes. However, the 10.2% who condone physical violence "in some cases" reveal entrenched patriarchal norms, suggesting that some women perceive vocal disagreement as a transgression of accepted boundaries that justifies disciplinary actions. The existence of 4.4% who endorse physical violence during arguments, while very limited, underscores persistent beliefs supporting male dominance through violence.

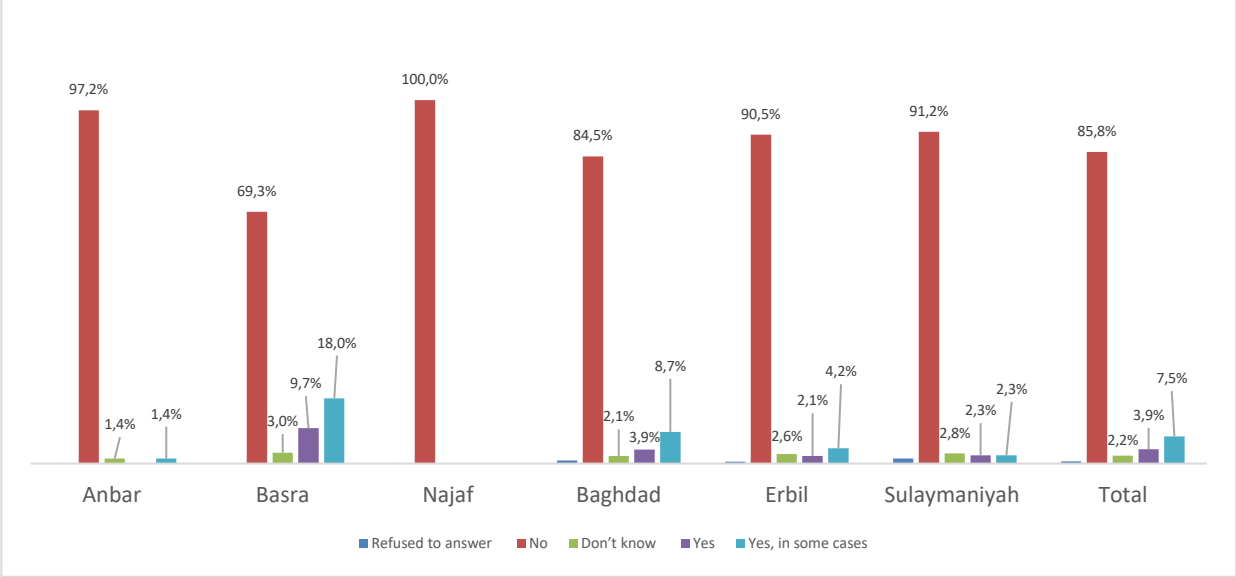
In relation to sexual autonomy, responses about whether a husband may physically assault his wife for refusing intimacy showed an overwhelming rejection of such violence (85.8% no), alongside 3.9% affirming "yes," 7.5% approving in "some cases" and 2.2% uncertain. These data reflect an increasing consciousness regarding women's rights to bodily autonomy within

marriage. However, the minority who accept physical violence for refusal underscore the structural challenges in understanding consent, indicating that some societal segments still regard intimacy as a male prerogative, which may rationalise violence when faced with refusal. These findings suggest a lack of awareness among certain women regarding the classification of sexual coercion as a form of violence, thus perpetuating harmful behavioural patterns.

The overwhelming majority of respondents in the KR-I, in both Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, rejected the idea that a husband is justified in hitting his wife if she refuses sex. In Sulaymaniyah, 91.2% of participants disagreed with this behaviour, while in Erbil, a similarly high rate of 90.5% expressed rejection. Only a small fraction—2.1% in Erbil and 2.3% in Sulaymaniyah—considered it acceptable, with a few respondents indicating it might be justified "in some cases." These findings reflect a strong societal condemnation of marital violence and coercion in both governorates, suggesting growing awareness of women's bodily autonomy and rights within the KR-I.

Diagram 23

3.1.3 According to you, is it acceptable for the husband to hit his wife in the following cases: If she refuses sex.




A consistent 69.3% of the respondents rejected the notion of absolving harassers based on a woman's attire or behaviour, with 33.2% disagreeing and 36.1% strongly disagreeing. This reflects a positive trend in recognising that harassment is an act of aggression driven by power dynamics, rather than a valid response to appearance or conduct. Najaf exhibited the highest rate of strong rejection (57.8%), followed by Baghdad (39.1%) and Anbar (36%). This shift in perception is likely bolstered by the efforts of CSOs and social media initiatives aimed at raising awareness about women's rights and dismantling victim-blaming narratives, contributing to a broader HR discourse within society.

The increasing recognition of harassment as an exercise in power and control, rather than a normative response to an individual's appearance or conduct, reflects a significant shift in societal understanding. CSOs and social media platforms have been instrumental in advocating for women's rights and challenging the pervasive culture of victim-blaming, thereby contributing to the emergence of a HR framework within public discourse. Notably, survey data

reveal that 11.3% of respondents agreed, while 4.4% strongly agreed, with the notion that cultural attitudes still persist that hold women accountable for harassment. This indicates entrenched remnants of a patriarchal framework that rationalises sexual violence by attributing it to notions of "provocation" or "inappropriate behaviour." Such findings underscore the urgent need for continued advocacy and education to dismantle these harmful cultural narratives.

In the KR-I, most respondents rejected the notion that harassment should go unpunished based on women's clothing or behaviour. In Sulaymaniyah, 41.0% disagreed and 39.2% strongly disagreed, showing a clear and firm stance against justifying harassment under any circumstance. In Erbil, while opposition remained high (55.3% disagreed and 15.3% strongly disagreed), a relatively larger proportion—14.7% agreed and 4.2% strongly agreed—believed harassment might not always warrant punishment. These findings indicate that, although awareness and rejection of victim-blaming are strong in both governorates, Erbil exhibits slightly higher tolerance toward conditional justifications for harassment.

## 2- VAWG and stereotypes of traditional family roles

In the quantitative survey, participants were queried about the concept of male guardianship over wives and families. A significant majority, 58.2%, expressed agreement with this notion (36.3% agreed, 21.9% strongly agreed). This prevailing support underscores the entrenched patriarchal system and traditional social values within the cultural framework, reflective of "structural violence" as articulated in legal and institutional discourse. In contexts like Iraq, numerous laws continue to endorse women's subordination to men in personal status issues, thereby reinforcing societal acceptance of this structure and perpetuating stereotypes that position men as the "heads of the household" and primary decision-makers.

Moreover, the persistence of these discourses in the Iraqi context is exacerbated by women's limited access to economic, educational and political resources, which impedes their capacity to challenge these traditional models and diminishes collective resistance against them. Conversely, the 19.9% of respondents who expressed disagreement with male guardianship (14.5% disagreed, 5.4% strongly disagreed) signals a notable segment of women engaging in critical analysis of these structures, indicating a gradual shift in consciousness. This shift has been influenced predominantly by heightened awareness of HR and equality between women and men, particularly among younger demographics exposed to social media and international narratives, coupled with awareness campaigns led by both local and global organisations.

At the governorate level, Basra exhibited the highest endorsement of male guardianship at 85.8%, with a comparatively low opposition rate of 7.9%. This pattern illustrates the deep-seated influence of tribal and clan traditions within southern Iraqi society, alongside a prevailing conservative trend reinforced by religious and social rhetoric, underpinned by formal laws and policies. Sulaymaniyah also showed considerable support at 61.7%, with opposition at only 16.1%. Notably, despite being part of the KR-I—recognised for its vibrant feminist movements—the high level of endorsement reflects an ongoing tension between progressive justice-oriented perspectives and traditional heritage. The neutral response rate of 20.3% in this context implies a cautious social transition or a reluctance to articulate positions openly due to cultural sensitivities.

On a related issue, a majority of respondents (55.9%) rejected the notion of holding boys accountable for their sisters' actions, even when they are younger. This perspective marks a potential shift towards the principle of individual accountability, which posits that each person, irrespective of sex, is responsible for their own behaviour. This resistance may also reflect an emerging recognition of the necessity to dismantle traditional stereotypes that ascribe the roles

of “guardians” or “protectors” to male family members, roles that can be both burdensome and inequitable.

On the other hand, the 26.8% who agreed with the concept of male responsibility for female behaviour signifies the lingering presence of conventional cultural beliefs that reinforce stereotypical roles within the family dynamic. The expectation that boys, purely by virtue of their sex, should undertake the responsibility of “disciplining” their sisters, even when they are younger, is rooted in deeply entrenched notions concerning male authority in familial contexts. The neutral response category, comprising 16.1% of participants, indicates a degree of ambivalence or uncertainty in forming a decisive stance on this issue, likely influenced by the intersection of traditional values and contemporary constructs of individual accountability. Additionally, this may reflect variations in awareness levels concerning the implications of the question, particularly among participants from diverse age or educational backgrounds.

## 3- The role of the media in combating VAWG

In various in-depth interviews, the consensus regarding the role of the media as a critical tool in mitigating VAWG was prominent. The media serve as a powerful vehicle for enhancing community awareness, challenging entrenched stereotypes concerning traditional roles and amplifying the reporting of violations faced by women. By delivering balanced coverage, implementing awareness-raising initiatives and orchestrating strategic media campaigns, the media can play an essential role in dismantling the prevalent culture of silence surrounding these issues. An interviewee aptly noted, *“Media and education are integral instruments in combatting* VAWG. *The omnipresence of media in households positions it as a pivotal driver for raising awareness through diverse formats such as reports, short films and awareness campaigns that detail the manifestations and repercussions of violence.”*

However, when the media become politicised or serve narrowly defined political or cultural objectives, they risk distorting the discourse surrounding VAWG. Such practices can perpetuate patriarchal narratives that not only justify violence but also shift blame onto the victims. The ramifications extend beyond merely hindering protective and preventative measures; they also erode trust in institutions and undermine the efficacy of feminist and HR advocacy. An interviewee from Baghdad articulated this concern by stating, *“The media are politicised and stereotypical, lacking in educational or constructive content. Those genuinely seeking to eliminate violence are thwarted by a media landscape that reproduces harmful stereotypes and distorts women’s images, focusing instead on portrayals of female weakness and error.”*

Survey results highlight a critical perception gap between media outputs related to VAWG and the awareness needs of women themselves. Only 18% of respondents expressed confidence that the media provide sufficient coverage of VAWG, signalling a significant shortfall in systematic media engagement with these issues. Media responses are often reactive, surfacing only in the wake of high-profile incidents rather than as part of a comprehensive awareness strategy. When present, coverage tends to be shallow and lacks the necessary sensitivity towards women’s HR and the complex roots of violence.

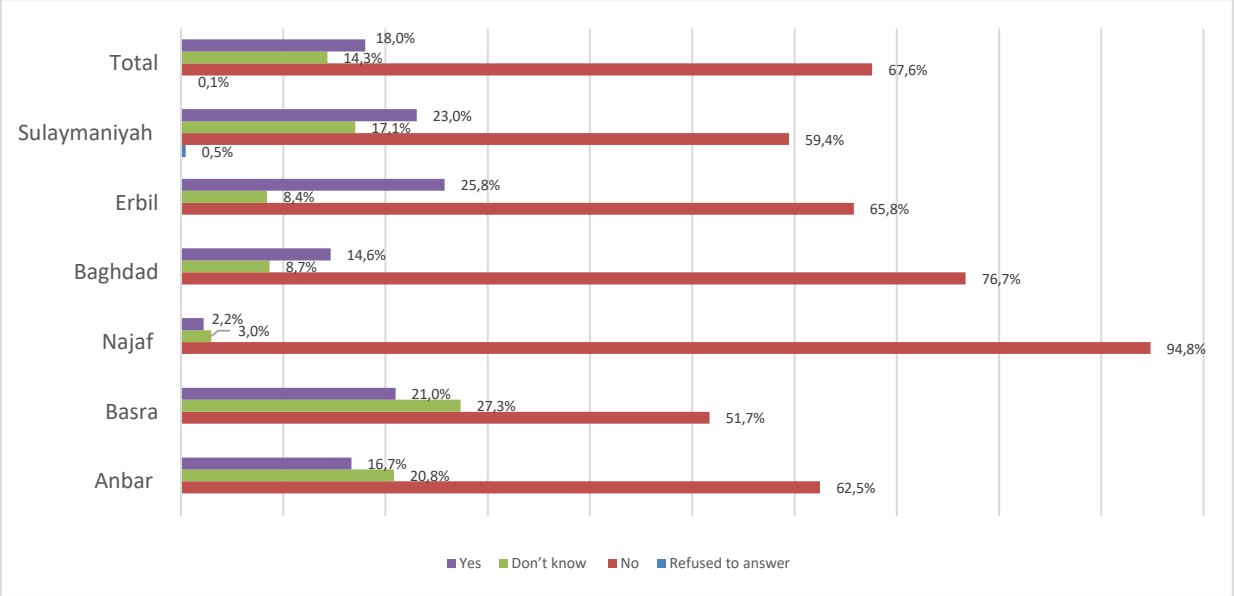
These figures underscore the systemic marginalisation of women’s issues within media frameworks and even among alternative media platforms (such as satellite channels), which often prioritise political and economic narratives over VAWG.

In contexts where specific political factions wield considerable power and financial resources, the media function as a mechanism for reinforcing authoritarian patriarchal discourse. This not only downplays issues of VAWG but may also implicitly justify them, while simultaneously

stifling independent media outlets and restricting freedom of expression regarding women's rights, particularly in relation to violence.

Diagram 27

3.5 In your opinion, is information about VAWG adequately represented in the media?




A notable 14.3% of respondents expressed uncertainty regarding the role of the media in addressing these concerns, which is indicative of a lack of media literacy and an unclear understanding of their intended responsibilities. Basra exhibited the highest level of uncertainty at 27.3%, followed closely by Anbar at 20.8%.

In the KR-I, the majority of respondents perceived that the media's reporting on VAWG is insufficient. In Erbil, 65.8% answered "no" to questions about adequate representation, while 25.8% said "yes" and 8.4% were unsure. In Sulaymaniyah, 59.4% responded "no," 23.0% felt the coverage was sufficient, and 17.1% were uncertain. These results indicate a perceived gap in effective media representation, highlighting the need for improved awareness campaigns and media responsibility to elevate women's issues and rights.

Interviews further revealed that politicised media not only marginalise women's issues but are also strategically weaponised against women's rights activists. Systematic campaigns are often launched to distort, intimidate and undermine the societal and political credibility of these advocates. Such campaigns may devolve into personal attacks that combine hate speech, threats of violence, malicious rumours and the tactical exposure of private information to tarnish reputations. These initiatives are sometimes orchestrated by organised entities, including some conservative groups, who perceive women's rights activism as a direct challenge to traditional societal structures or their vested interests.

During one KII, a woman journalist from Baghdad highlighted key issues regarding media representation and its impact on women:

> *"The media frequently prioritises content that generates trends or maximises viewership, often at the cost of accurately depicting women and disseminating truthful information. This is evidenced by the portrayal of violence against*

*women and reports of police brutality, leading to a pervasive counter-narrative that is difficult to challenge. When women articulate criticisms or discuss sex-specific issues, they frequently encounter backlash and efforts to undermine their perspectives, often perpetuated by individuals with significant social standing and influence. These figures frequently enjoy a form of electronic immunity, bolstered by online supporters who engage in aggressive defence of their views."*

## 4- The role of legislative frameworks and implementation measures in mitigating VAWG

*Current legislative efforts do not effectively address the root causes of violence. If they did, we would not be witnessing its widespread prevalence today. These laws tackle issues on a superficial level rather than delving into the fundamental problems.* (Member of Parliament, Baghdad)

The legislative framework is pivotal in mitigating VAWG, as it establishes a foundation for legal protections against various forms of violence, including domestic abuse, sexual harassment, rape and forced marriage. The introduction of explicit laws preventing and criminalising these acts is essential for recognising women's rights and preserving their dignity, along with their physical and psychological integrity. Interviews conducted with stakeholders reveal a consensus on the necessity of not only enacting but also fairly implementing these laws as a fundamental component of effective intervention. One interviewee, a woman lawyer from Baghdad, stated:

*"I believe that the law is one of the main causes of violence against women, because if the law itself is not supportive of women, they will not be able to enjoy their rights, even if they come from a family with means. This is deep-rooted institutional violence, and society itself is built on the idea of restricting women. Therefore, the recent amendment to the Personal Status Law, which dates back to 1959, was a great injustice to women and a setback in terms of children's rights and human dignity. It is unfortunate that we are now witnessing cases in which ex-husbands, who divorced their wives five or ten years ago, are again exploiting this amendment and using it against women*."

A woman activist and lawyer from the KR-I highlighted that although a DV law has been enacted in the region, which protects all family members up to the fourth degree of kinship—allowing women and girls to file complaints against relatives—the law struggles with effective implementation.

*"Our primary issue is the lack of legal awareness among women. Many don't realize that they have the right to file a complaint if they experience violence. While the law is intended to protect everyone, factors such as ignorance, misunderstandings, and the personal beliefs of law enforcement can obstruct its enforcement. Often, complaints are resolved through mutual agreement, but this doesn't guarantee that the violence against the victim will cease."*

A significant number of women responding to the survey (69.6%) reported that existing legal frameworks and protective measures are inadequate, indicating a pervasive lack of confidence in the efficacy of these legal mechanisms. This is largely attributable to the insufficient legal

provisions protecting women, and the absence of a comprehensive law addressing VAWG. Despite persistent advocacy from CSOs, a specific DV law has yet to be enacted at the federal level, leaving survivors without essential legal protections and accessible judicial recourse. The failure to legislate against VAWG also hampers the establishment of support structures such as shelters, psychological services and pro bono legal assistance, thereby exacerbating the vulnerability of women subjected to violence.

In Federal Iraq, the majority of respondents believe that existing laws and procedures are insufficient to protect women from violence. The perception of inadequacy was particularly strong in Najaf (91.1%), followed by Baghdad (71.6%), Anbar (70.8%) and Basra (65.9%). These findings reflect a widespread lack of confidence in the effectiveness of legal protections, with many respondents either unaware of relevant laws or sceptical about their enforcement.

In the KR-I, the perceptions of the legislative framework were more varied but remained largely critical, possibly reflecting the existence of a specific law on domestic violence. In Sulaymaniyah, 53.0% said the laws are insufficient, and 15.7% believed they are sufficient, while 30.4% were uncertain. Similarly, in Erbil, 74.2% viewed current laws as inadequate, but 15.3% acknowledged their sufficiency. Overall, while awareness of legal frameworks appears stronger in the KR-I, both governorates share ongoing concerns about enforcement and accessibility of protection mechanisms for women.

Corruption, partisan interests, and institutional paralysis obstruct the creation of meaningful laws, especially those related to DV. The lack of safe shelters for survivors underscores a broader absence of political will. A legal expert from Baghdad highlighted the structural and political challenges hindering legislative reform on VAWG in Iraq:

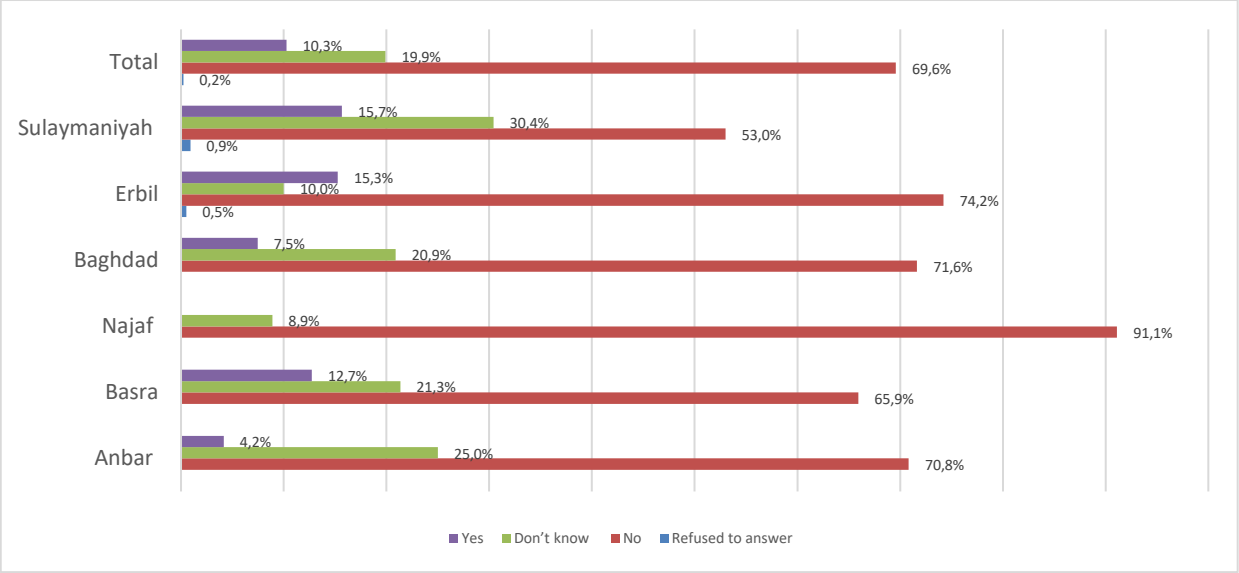
> *"The absence of legislation addressing DV is linked to widespread corruption within the government at all levels. One of the main reasons for the lack of such legislation is the issue of providing safe shelters for survivors. This requires allocating financial resources for their establishment, which offers no immediate benefit or interest to decision-makers. Consequently, they focus on social protection issues, as these can help them gain electoral support!"*

Despite efforts from civil society and legal experts to review and propose progressive legislation, progress remains stalled due to fears of political chaos. The debates around amendments to the Personal Status Law 188 further illustrate how women's rights are caught in ideological conflicts, often exploited for partisan gain over true justice for women.

A legal expert from Baghdad shared that significant efforts are underway to review and evaluate existing legislation, particularly laws containing discriminatory provisions against women. This review process included looking at legal frameworks from other countries and drafting alternative, non-punitive measures to replace punitive penalties where suitable. Unfortunately, due to the current political deadlock and instability within Parliament, these legislative proposals have yet to be put forward. There are concerns that they may be misinterpreted or blocked in the current climate. The legal expert also pointed out the ongoing debate surrounding the amendment of Personal Status Law No. 188. They stressed that the current law is sufficient, arguing that calls for its amendment are often driven by hidden agendas aimed at creating division confusion rather than promoting genuine reform.

Diagram 28

3.6 Are the laws and procedures to protect women from violence sufficient in Iraq?




Moreover, even where legal provisions exist, weak enforcement mechanisms, systemic corruption and the lack of expertise among law enforcement and judicial entities severely undermine their implementation. The absence of deterrent legislation continues to perpetuate tribal and conservative socio-cultural norms, framing DV as a "private issue" and obstructing women's access to justice. The minority (10.3%) of the survey respondents who expressed affirmative views regarding the effectiveness of the Anti-DV Law highlight a misconception that existing legal protections adequately address women's needs, without acknowledging the substantive gaps and deficiencies in legislative frameworks.

Additionally, the 19.9% of respondents who were unsure about the legal landscape regarding women's rights reflect a critical knowledge gap stemming from the lack of enduring national legal education initiatives, particularly in rural and marginalised communities.

The historical marginalisation of women within legal systems has contributed to an environment where many women perceive the law as irrelevant to their lived experiences, leading to apathy and significant ignorance of its provisions. An accountability concern raised in interviews points to a troubling reliance among judges and government officials in Iraq on conservative cultural and social perspectives when executing their duties. Instead of employing the law impartially, societal norms are often reflected in the handling of women's issues, restricting rights and perpetuating stereotypes. This is particularly evident in personal status and DV cases, where judicial considerations often prioritise "family reconciliation" over justice for victims. Similarly, in labour and inheritance disputes, interpretations influenced by customary practices frequently overshadow legal texts, reinforcing patriarchal structures within State institutions and undermining the law's capacity to uphold HR and promote equality between women and men.

An interviewee from Federal Iraq noted that while Iraqi legislation is ostensibly aligned with international obligations, such as those outlined in CEDAW, significant implementation challenges persist. Specifically, the prevailing male-centric mentality hampers adherence to these laws, with judicial outcomes often subject to individual judges' interpretations. In matters such as the marriage of minors, it is the discretion of the judge that determines the permissibility of a union. Should the judge rule that a marriage is permissible—provided the girl

asserts her readiness and parental consent is given—the marriage can be formalised without further delay.

In the KR-I, survey data corroborate these insights, revealing that 74.2% of respondents in Erbil and 53.0% in Sulaymaniyah answered negatively to certain queries regarding legal protections, highlighting notable gaps in implementation and suggesting deficiencies within the relevant judicial and law enforcement agencies. In Federal Iraq, the results from Najaf are particularly stark, with a staggering 91.1% expressing distrust in the legal protection system, reflecting the influence of conservative religious and cultural frameworks that obstruct effective law enforcement, especially concerning DV cases.

While government initiatives in Federal Iraq and the KR-I are commendable in principle, respondents indicate that they fall short of adequately addressing the severity of the issue. Bureaucratic obstacles pose substantial barriers, consuming valuable time and resources, while trust in governmental bodies is alarmingly low. In one instance reported from the KR-I, a civil servant admitted to intentionally obstructing the complaint process for women seeking redress against abusive spouses by prolonging administrative procedures, thereby discouraging them from pursuing their grievances. This behaviour underscores a significant lack of understanding among personnel in family protection and community policing roles, who often prioritise assumptions over facts, potentially exacerbating the risks faced by vulnerable women.

Some interviewees in the KIIs from Federal Iraq viewed recent amendments to the Personal Status Code No. 188 of 1959 as a significant regression for women's and girls' rights in Iraq: A civil society expert and consultant for international organisations in Baghdad noted:

> *"Violence against women is likely to increase following the recent amendment to the Personal Status Law. This amendment will contribute to the subjugation of women and girls by allowing social and religious practices that permit the marriage of minors, depriving divorced women of custody of their children, and cutting off alimony, which is a crucial economic support for many young divorcees. Additionally, it will strip women of the ability to make personal decisions without male authorisation. The new law is also poised to deepen sectarian divides, particularly affecting mixed marriages and their families, which could disrupt societal harmony. The Sharia Code relies on varied interpretations and explanations of the Quran and Hadith by different clerics, making it inconsistent and subjective. This variability places women at greater risk of domestic abuse and violence. Ultimately, this amended law or Sharia Code opens the door to early and forced marriages, as well as honour crimes, leaving girls without the means to defend themselves."*

## 5- Equality between women and men in public and private spheres

Recent social development indicators highlight a notable cultural evolution concerning women's rights within family dynamics. Particularly in urban and educated communities, there is an observable shift in attitudes toward women's roles in decision-making processes, support for girls' education and encouragement for women to engage in the workforce. Traditional norms that historically confined women to domestic caregiving roles are gradually diminishing, giving way to more egalitarian perspectives that emphasise shared responsibilities and support women's personal ambitions.

An interviewee in the qualitative phase in Baghdad illustrated this change:

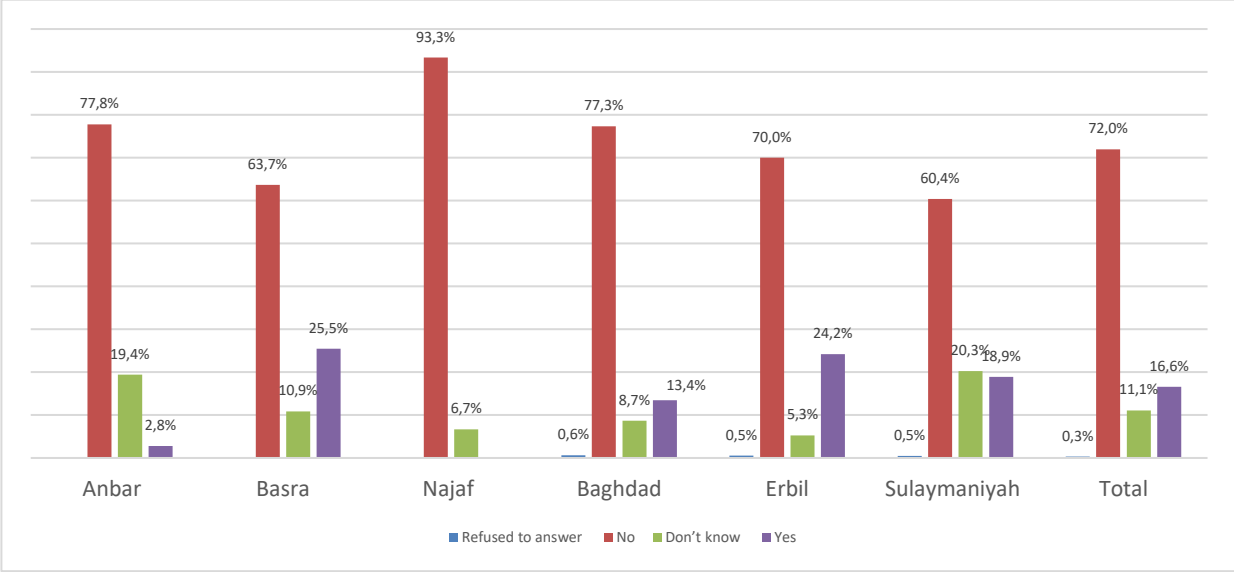
*"Discrimination in rights constitutes a form of violence, but there has been marked progress in societal customs regarding women. Coming from a conservative family, my father, as the authoritative figure, was unchallengeable. My elder sisters had limited educational experiences, yet their daughters pursued university degrees with substantial support for additional tutoring. This reflects an evolving societal perspective. Initially, my older brother opposed my marriage to my current wife due to her academic achievements, labelling educated women as heretics and those working outside the home as impure. However, upon realising the importance of education for his daughter, he ultimately supported her pursuit of a legal career and her employment in a government role."*

Despite these recent positive shifts in societal attitudes and increasing acceptance of women's rights to education, employment and civic engagement, the legal framework continues to perpetuate sex discrimination. The tension between advancing social discourse and stagnant legislative frameworks contributes to the ongoing cycles of violence and impunity. Existing laws are riddled with gaps that weaken protections for women across familial, workplace and public spheres.

The survey results in Iraq and the KR-I reveal a significant disconnect between the legal recognition of women's rights and public perceptions of equality: 72.0% of respondents expressed a belief that women's rights are not legally recognised on par with men's rights. In contrast, only 16.6% affirmed legal equality, while 11.1% were uncertain. This scepticism stems from persistent discriminatory gaps within Iraqi legislation, despite constitutional mandates, such as Article 14, that espouse equality. The selective enforcement of legal provisions, particularly those relating to personal status and labour, is often influenced by conservative cultural norms.

Diagram 29

3.7 Do you believe women's rights and equal participation in all aspects of life are legally recognised on the same basis as men's rights?



In Baghdad, where State institutions are most concentrated, a substantial 77.3% of respondents opposed the notion that women's rights are legally recognised on par with men's rights, in stark contrast to just 13.4% who affirmed it. This reflects a pronounced social schism, largely influenced by the dichotomy between conservative and urban contexts, compounded by the daily adversities women confront, including violence, discrimination and inadequate access to justice. Such challenges reinforce perceptions of inequitable application of the law.

Basra reported the highest level of support for legal recognition of women's rights at 25.5%, albeit with 63.7% of respondents expressing scepticism. This trend may be indicative of a growing awareness facilitated by an increasing HR movement advocating for women's fundamental rights to education and employment.

Despite the KR-I being characterized by relatively progressive legislation in favour of women's rights, there is also a disconnect between legal frameworks and public awareness or enforcement. In Sulaymaniyah, survey results revealed that 60.4% of respondents answered "no," while 18.9% affirmed "yes" and 20.3% were uncertain, representing the highest level of ambiguity.

Erbil recorded a rejection rate of 70% alongside a support rate of 24.2%. This reflects an inconsistency between the existence of advanced laws and the prevailing societal scepticism about their effectiveness, potentially arising from a generalised distrust in institutional integrity or perceived irrelevance of such laws to daily life.

One interviewee from the KR-I shared a personal experience regarding the gap between the laws and their actual implementation, noting that some judges in KR-I often adhere to religious interpretations that do not support the concept of equality between women and men. As a result, they tend to apply these interpretations instead of the amended laws that promote equality and fairness.

> *"I informed a judge that a woman's voice should count as legal testimony. He dismissed this, arguing he engaged with Sharia law rather than legal statutes, maintaining that a woman's testimony lacked validity. Despite legislative amendments permitting women's testimony, some judges adhere to antiquated beliefs, conflating religious and legal interpretations, which signifies a failure to execute the law due to entrenched personal convictions."*

Furthermore, a significant 70.6% of respondents to the survey asserted that women lack financial parity with men in marriage and divorce under current legal frameworks, while only 16.7% affirmed equality, leaving 12.1% uncertain. This high rate of uncertainty reflects a pervasive lack of clarity regarding legal rights within these domains.

Disparities across governorates of Federal Iraq are pronounced, closely tied to the varied religious, social and cultural contexts. Najaf exhibited the highest rate of respondents rejecting legal recognition of women's rights at 89.6%, with a mere 1.5% affirming equality—an outcome attributable to the substantial influence of religious authority and conventional jurisprudence on perceptions of women's rights. Anbar also displayed a high rejection rate at 77.8%, with only 5.6% affirming equality, and a notable 16.7% of respondents expressing uncertainty, indicating the residual impact of tribal customs and significant legal illiteracy.

In Baghdad, 12.2% of respondents affirmed the legal recognition of women's rights, juxtaposed against 67.5% who rejected it and 18.8% who expressed uncertainty, revealing the intricate interplay of cultural, religious and legal factors within the capital.

In contrast, the KR-I showed comparatively higher affirmation rates, with Erbil at 27.4% (against a 68.9% rejection rate) and Sulaymaniyah at 13.4% (with a 65.4% rejection rate), despite elevated uncertainty in Sulaymaniyah (20.3%). These findings illustrate the influence of legal reforms and a relatively open civic environment, while simultaneously exposing gaps in knowledge regarding the existing legal framework.

Basra, following Erbil, recorded a rate of 28.1% affirming legal recognition, despite 68.2% rejecting it, potentially influenced by economic liberalisation and exposure to HR norms through the operations of firms within the oil sector.

## 6- The impact of economic status on the perpetuation of VAWG

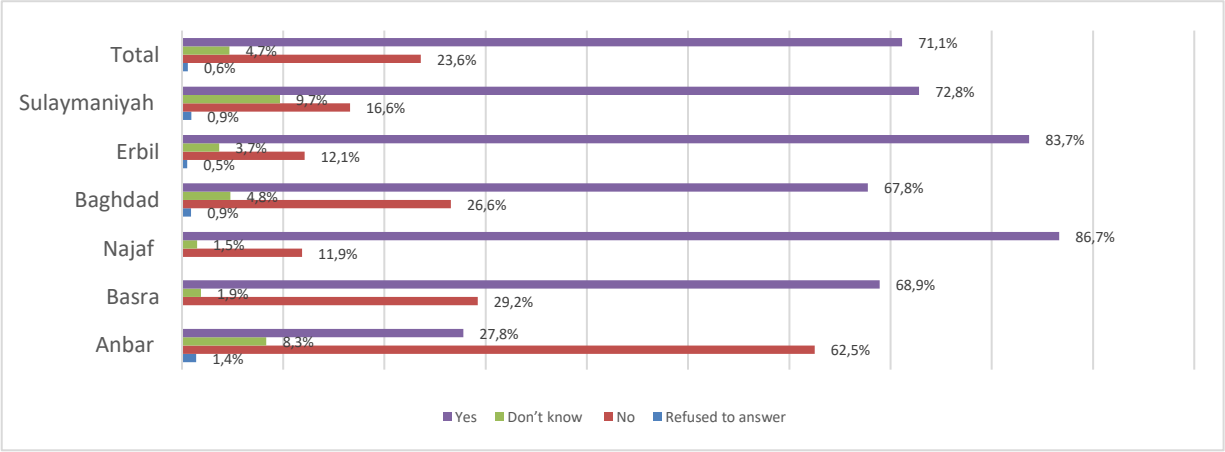
Research indicates that women's economic empowerment is a crucial factor in mitigating VAWG. Financially independent women are more likely to leave abusive relationships, assert their rights and seek support. Policies that enhance women's labour market participation, economic leadership and access to social safety nets not only advance economic justice but also reduce violence against women.

This is substantiated by a notable agreement rate (71.1%) among survey participants who indicated that economic constraints often compel women to remain with their abusers. The prevailing discourse reflects a societal acknowledgment of the integral role that economic factors play in perpetuating women's involvement in violent relationships, particularly within contexts characterised by inadequate social policies or deficient social protections that render many women financially reliant on their partners or families.

In Iraq and the KR-I, where women's employment rates stand at only 10.4%, high female unemployment exacerbates feelings of economic vulnerability, thereby reinforcing dependence on males. Even among working women, the persistent wage gap between men and women complicates the quest for financial autonomy and fosters conditions that inhibit their ability to separate from abusive domestic environments. The scarcity of institutional support services, including shelters, cash assistance and pro bono legal aid, further entrenches the perception that remaining in an abusive setting is the most viable option. Leaving an abusive relationship is frequently perceived as an additional risk factor for women, especially when familial responsibilities, such as child-rearing, are involved.

Diagram 31

3.9 Do you believe women subjected to violence by their husbands or families stay with them due to a lack of financial resources?



The survey indicated that 23.6% of respondents contended that a lack of financial resources is not the principal reason women remain in abusive relationships. This dissent may stem from alternative influences, such as entrenched social norms, familial obligations, the desire to uphold family honour or concerns regarding the welfare of children. These factors may lead some individuals to view violence as a containable issue within familial bounds, especially in conservative or patriarchal societies, irrespective of economic conditions.

In the KR-I, the survey results demonstrate a stark variation in perspectives. In Erbil, a high "yes" response rate of 83.7% aligns with Sulaymaniyah's 72.8%, indicating acute awareness of the link between women's economic dependence and DV. This likely correlates with the disparity in employment prospects for women and the insufficient social security measures for survivors of DV in these areas.

Conversely, Anbar presents an anomaly, with only 27.8% "yes" responses compared to 62.5% "no." These rates highlight the complexities of social environments shaped by deeply held religious beliefs or traditional tribal customs in which women live. They also reflect women's resilience and ability to survive in abusive situations. However, it is crucial to address the challenges women face in achieving economic independence, particularly considering the structural issues outlined in the theoretical framework.

In contrast, Basra demonstrates a significantly aligned perspective, with 68.9% of respondents attributing women's reluctance to leave abusive partners primarily to economic constraints. This perception signals a widespread acknowledgment of the interplay between economic deprivation and violence, exacerbated by high unemployment rates among women and an absence of welfare institutions dedicated to their support, particularly within the context of Basra's challenging economic landscape, despite its status as Iraq's economic hub due to its oil wealth.

## 7- Discrimination against women and the right to freedom of movement

The survey data indicate a concerning trend regarding women's rights to mobility in public spaces, with 51.3% of participants expressing the belief that women do not possess the same rights as men in this regard. This perception is largely attributed to the deteriorating security conditions stemming from the protracted armed conflicts that have afflicted Iraq. Many public areas remain perilous for all individuals, particularly women. Among urban populations, respondents perceived that women have less freedom to move in the public space. In Baghdad, for example, only 36.7% believed that women have same rights as men in this regard.

Additionally, deep-rooted conservative cultural norms continue to impose strict limitations on women's mobility, often intertwining it with notions of "honour" and "male guardianship." Despite this, 44.6% of respondents agreed with women's right to movement, signalling a nascent yet notable shift in societal attitudes, especially among urban youth and educated demographics. However, this support still falls short of the threshold necessary to achieve true equality between women and men.

Geographically, responses exhibit substantial variation across Iraq. For instance, Najaf, characterised by its religious milieu that permits women to engage in external religious practices, recorded a relatively higher affirmative response rate of 55.6%. In stark contrast, Anbar reported an alarming 80.6% of participants rejecting women's right to movement. This disparity highlights the enduring influence of conflict in perpetuating traditional stereotypes, particularly

in contexts of instability driven by tribal and militaristic social frameworks, which serve to further constrict women's freedoms in public life.

In the KR-I, over half of the respondents affirmed that women have the right to move freely in public spaces, reflecting relatively progressive attitudes toward women's mobility. In Erbil, 54.2% agreed with this right, compared to 43.2% who disagreed, while in Sulaymaniyah, 54.4% agreed and 39.2% disagreed. These results indicate a positive perception of women's freedom of movement in both governorates, with Sulaymaniyah showing slightly stronger acceptance, suggesting broader social openness and support for equality in public life within the KR-I

## 8- Access to police services for women experiencing violence

Numerous interviews with experts have highlighted significant concerns regarding the safety and efficacy of police stations as venues for abused women seeking refuge or reporting incidents of violence. One interviewee, an activist and media personality from Baghdad, articulated a pervasive sentiment, stating:

> *"Women do not report violence at police stations. It is perceived as the most unsafe environment for all Iraqis, fundamentally rejected by the community. For instance, a recent case involved a young woman from Najaf who, after being raped, faced severe blackmail upon seeking help at the police station,* [*and was*] *subsequently allegedly assaulted by the station's director. This grim reality exemplifies a broader pattern. Despite repeated advocacy to the National Women's Bureau for the direct adjudication of cases in court—bypassing the police due to their documented failure—these requests have been denied*."

Data reflect that 71.4% of participants stated that it is difficult for women to access police services. The perception of difficulty was strongest in Anbar (97.2%), Najaf (93.3%) and Baghdad (77.0%). Conversely, only 17.2% of respondents considered access to be easy, while 11.3% were uncertain and a mere 0.2% declined to answer. This widespread perception suggests systemic institutional and societal barriers that inhibit women from engaging with law enforcement. Contributing factors may include a profound distrust in police capabilities, fear of social stigma and issues concerning the handling of cases, particularly those related to VAWG.

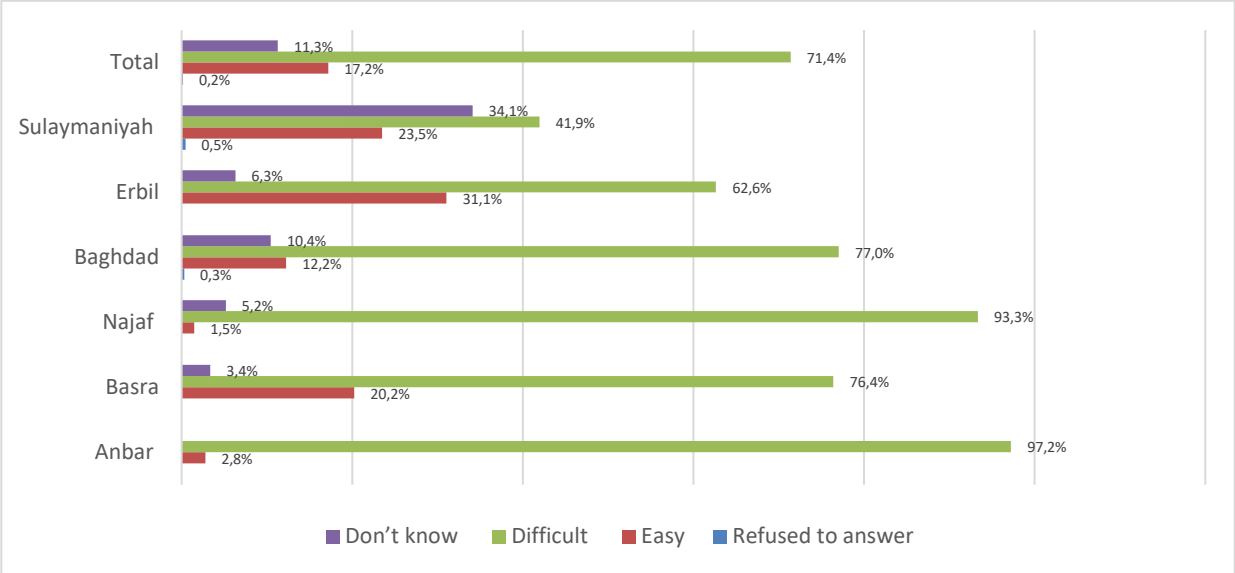
Women in the KR-I continue to face notable challenges in accessing police services, though the extent of difficulty differs between the two governorates. In Erbil, 62.6% of participants stated that it is difficult for women to seek assistance from the police, while 31.1% considered it easy, reflecting ongoing barriers despite some degree of access. In Sulaymaniyah, perceptions were more varied—41.9% reported difficulty, 23.5% said it was easy and 34.1% were uncertain, suggesting limited engagement with or awareness of these services. Overall, the findings reveal persistent institutional and social obstacles that restrict women's ability to access law enforcement, with slightly more favourable perceptions observed in Sulaymaniyah.

A substantial number of women in both Iraq and the KR-I express a lack of confidence in protective institutions, underscored by the absence of an operational safety and protection system. Once a complaint is filed, women often realise they may be compelled to return to the same violent environment, potentially facing intensified repercussions such as secondary violence, threats, eviction or divorce, and enduring psychological and physical trauma. Additionally, the notion of privacy is largely non-existent; women frequently report that the act of filing a complaint leads to public exposure within their communities, diminishing their sense of security. This breach of confidentiality often causes women to hesitate, perceiving the

reporting process more as an exacerbation of their risk rather than a pathway to protection. Many ask, "*And then what*?", expressing a desire for safe havens devoid of the threat of personal loss.

Diagram 33

3.11.1 Is it difficult or easy for women to utilise the following services in the community? Police




In urban contexts in both Iraq and the KR-I, 68.2% of respondents stated that access to police services is difficult, while 19.7% reported it as easy and 11.7% were uncertain. Although the proportion citing difficulty remains high, it is comparatively lower than in rural regions. This discrepancy may be attributed to better infrastructural development in urban areas, including a higher number of accessible police stations and easier access to transportation.

In contrast, 83.7% of rural respondents stated that women's access to police services is difficult; only 6.9% reported it as easy, while 9.3% were uncertain. These statistics reveal a troubling disparity in justice provision and service access between urban and rural populations. The remoteness of villages and inadequate police presence pose profound logistical challenges, necessitating both time and financial resources for women seeking assistance. Cultural and social constraints further complicate the ability of women to lodge complaints, particularly against family members or clan affiliates. Moreover, the under-representation of women within police forces fosters an environment that discourages women from reporting sensitive issues, perpetuating a cycle of silence and vulnerability.

In the qualitative phase, a legal expert from the KR-I highlighted the significant difficulties women encounter in remote areas. This is true even with the existence of numerous family protection units throughout the region:

> *"Although there are institutions and efforts to raise awareness about these issues, many areas lack the necessary offices. In the* KR-I*, for example, there are 28 offices spread across four governorates and four administrations; however, some locations do not have any offices at all. In such cases, women may turn to the police station, which handles both general and family-related complaints. Unfortunately, many incidents remain unreported or unrecorded, which means*

*they do not contribute to official statistics. Numerous women do not feel empowered to file complaints or assert their rights, leading to further underreporting. There are instances where the police attempt to mediate disputes instead of formally recording complaints. They might take a pledge from the offender not to commit violence again and then allow the individuals to leave without any record of the incident, leaving those cases out of the statistics entirely."*

## 9- Access to suitable healthcare interventions for abused women

Overall, Iraq faces significant challenges in the health sector. Decades of neglect have led to deteriorating infrastructure and a shortage of medical personnel. Although the financial cost for Iraqi citizens to access health services is low, the quality of these services is poor. As private health services are prohibitively expensive, low-income individuals and families often rely on government health centres and hospitals. This situation affects abused women and the type of health services they are able to access.

The survey results reveal significant variation in women's experiences of accessing health services, reflecting the structural and social challenges they face. The question asked of the women surveyed focused on gathering insights from women regarding their experiences in accessing health services, specifically whether they found it difficult or easy to obtain these services. Overall, of the surveyed women, 34% reported that accessing healthcare is difficult, while 58.5% stated it is easy. Additionally, 7.1% indicated that it was not easy and 0.4% declined to answer.

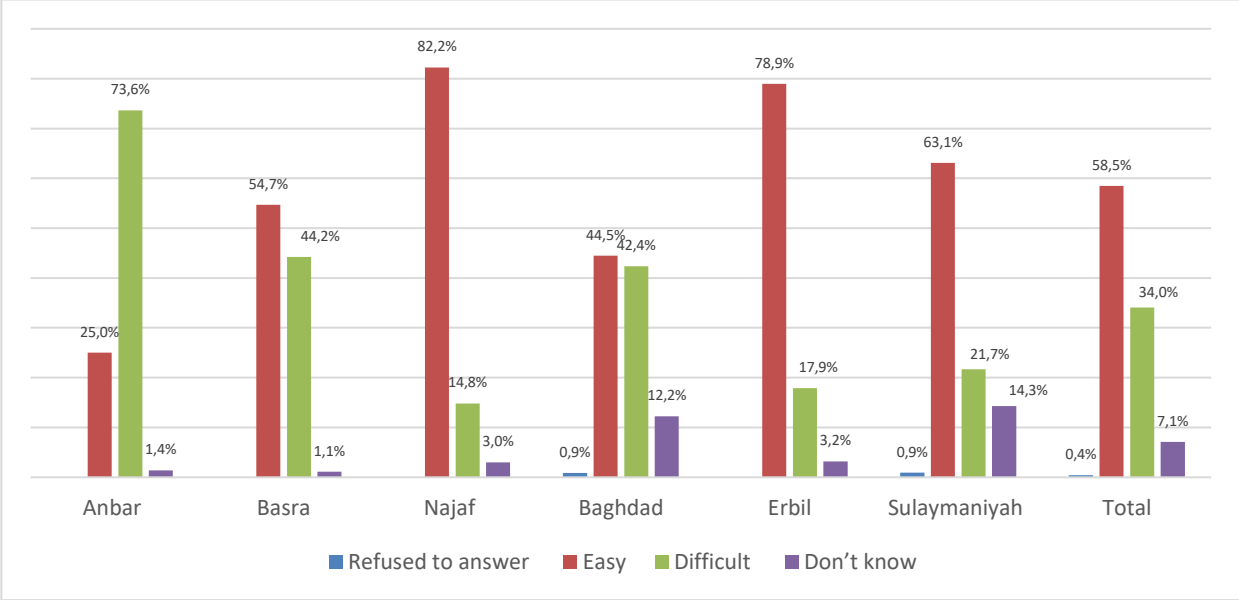
Most respondents in the KR-I indicated that women find it relatively easy to access healthcare services, though notable gaps remain. In Erbil, 78.9% said it is easy for women to use healthcare services, while only 17.9% reported difficulties—showing one of the most favourable results. In Sulaymaniyah, 63.1% found access easy, 21.7% found it difficult, and 14.3% were uncertain, suggesting that while access is generally good, awareness or consistency in service delivery could be improved.

In contrast, other governorates in Iraq face greater challenges, with high percentages of women reporting difficulty—73.6% in Anbar, 44.2% in Basra and 42.4% in Baghdad—reflecting disparities in healthcare accessibility between the KR-I and Federal Iraq.

These percentages highlight the diverse experiences individuals have with the health system, indicating that a majority of the population (over half) finds access to healthcare relatively easy, which is a positive sign of service availability. However, a significant portion—nearly one-third of the respondents—reported that access is difficult, suggesting that there are structural or logistical challenges to reaching healthcare facilities. These barriers may stem from factors such as cost, geographical distance, quality of service or overcrowding in medical centres.

Diagram 34

3.11.2 Is it difficult or easy for women to utilise the following services in the community? Health Care?




It is noteworthy that only 19.7% of respondents in urban areas found access to healthcare to be "easy," which is significantly lower than the national average for Federal Iraq and the KR-I. Nearly two-thirds (68.2%) reported that access is "difficult," raising concerns about the quality and availability of health services in cities, particularly given their high population density. This may also reflect the higher expectations urban residents have for the quality and timeliness of healthcare responses, resulting in a more critical assessment compared with those in rural areas.

In rural areas in Iraq and the KR-I, only 6.9% of respondents indicated that access to healthcare is easy, while a significant 83.7% reported that it is difficult. These figures underscore a severe crisis in healthcare access in rural regions. This issue can be attributed to a lack of health infrastructure, including a scarcity of health centres and their distance from residential areas, as well as insufficient medical staff and specialised services. Additionally, women in rural areas face challenges related to transportation, often due to poor road conditions or high transportation costs.

Qualitative data offer insights beyond merely assessing whether women find it difficult or easy to access health services. It highlights the institutional shortcomings of the health sector in delivering adequate medical and health support to women who have experienced abuse. Institutional shortcomings can manifest in several ways, including neglect, discrimination, breaches of confidentiality, inadequate attention to the specific needs of women and men and bureaucratic barriers that delay timely medical interventions. In many situations, women who experience violence face additional challenges within healthcare settings. These include judgmental attitudes from medical personnel, a lack of specialised services such as sexual assault forensic examinations, and procedural requirements that cause unnecessary delays. Such institutional shortcomings not only worsen the physical and psychological harm that survivors endure but also discourage them from seeking the necessary care, thereby perpetuating cycles of vulnerability and marginalisation.

In-depth interviews with health sector workers revealed that the Ministry of Health in Federal Iraq has established programmes to support women in health centres and hospitals. Notable

among these are the Women's Empowerment Department and the Psychological Support Department, which aim to provide assistance to women, particularly those who have experienced abuse. However, interviewees indicated that existing procedures hinder them from reporting cases of VAWG, even when signs of abuse are visible. One healthcare worker, a male nurse, explained:

> *"When abused women come to the emergency department seeking health services, the law does not permit us to encourage them to file a complaint against their abuser or to report the case to the police. Typically, the doctor documents all visible signs of violence on the woman's body—for instance, bruises under the eyes, fractures or injuries from beatings. We refer to these as 'observations,' and they serve as a record that the abused woman can use if she chooses to file a complaint. At this point, the role of the health staff with the abused woman effectively ends."*

In addition, cases of VAWG are treated like any other medical condition, without follow-up or the provision of any protection mechanisms. This was highlighted by one of the female employees in the emergency department of a hospital in Najaf:

> *"The treatment of abused women who come to health centres is limited to advising them to file a complaint and change the way they treat their abuser. I witnessed a case in front of me two months ago, where a woman came in with clear signs of beatings and bruises spread all over her body. An employee advised her to file a complaint against her abusive husband, but the woman refused because she was afraid of him. The employee took her mobile number, bandaged the wounds and the woman returned home. Frankly, this always happens, as abused women are treated routinely. The violence is treated like any normal illness, such as a headache, stomach pain or back pain, with no attention given to their unique circumstances!"*

During interviews with healthcare professionals, it was revealed that VAWG in the health sector is not merely the result of individual or collective actions but is also entrenched within institutional practices. Some interviewees indicated instances of violence or discrimination within health facilities themselves, which increases women's frustration and limits the effectiveness of the services provided. The interviewed male nurse, highlighted the treatment of women in delivery rooms, drawing attention to the neglect, humiliation and medical violence they endure during a critical and vulnerable period—childbirth:

> *"Without exaggeration, this violence against pregnant women occurs daily in delivery rooms! Delivery rooms are often overcrowded, depriving women of their privacy. There is a light curtain separating the beds, and ventilation inside the room is poor, resulting in high temperatures that make the atmosphere stifling and unhealthy. The medical staff treat women in labour roughly and with neglect, and their reaction to the woman's suffering during childbirth is insults and attempts to silence her forcefully if she tries to scream! There is excessive use of caesarean sections outside of recommendations and regulations, alongside practices such as manual abdominal compression to hasten labour. Very rarely is the pregnant woman's consent obtained for medical procedures undertaken by the doctor or nurse, such as the use of amniotic membrane rupture, which they perform without medical justification, posing a risk that threatens the life of the mother and child and causes deaths and near-death situations. Consequently, many women experience lasting physical and psychological issues post-partum as a result of these practices!"*

One of the interviewees, a female doctor in the health sector in Baghdad, provided a professional testimony based on her extensive experience working with a CSO focused on health sector projects in Iraq. Her insights reflect the organisation's efforts to support women and address challenges in the provision of essential healthcare services, particularly in contexts related to VAWG. She shed light on the systemic barriers, service gaps and institutional challenges that affect women's access to healthcare:

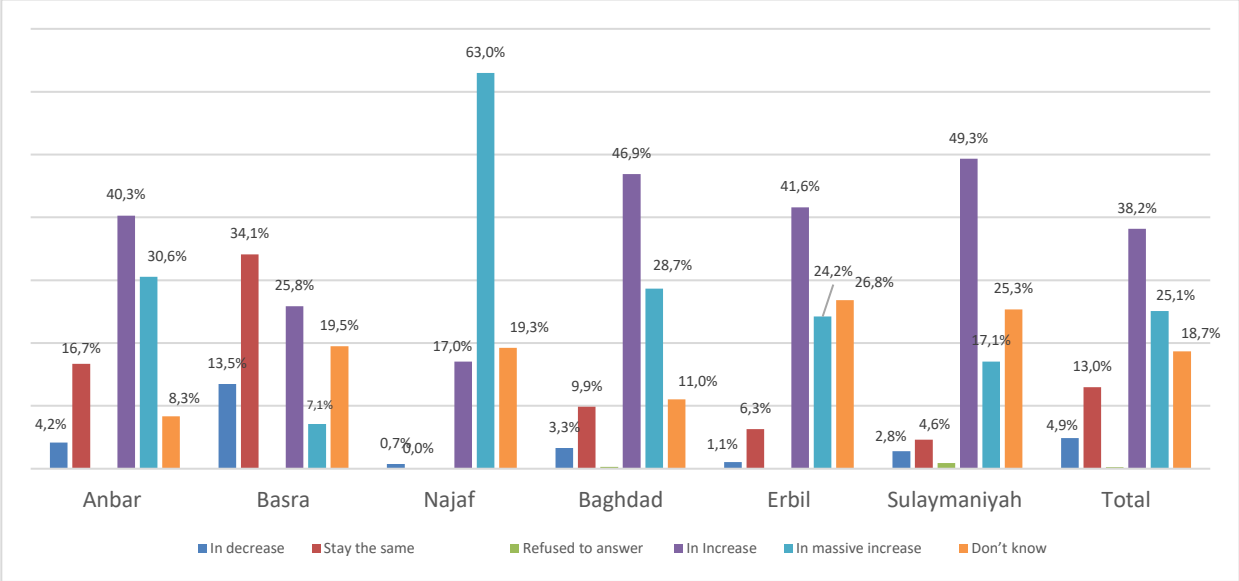
> *"The organisation I work for undertook a large project aimed at supporting women and providing them with essential health services. Our efforts were focused on health centres located in Nineveh, Kirkuk and Anbar, where we trained medical personnel to handle cases of violence against women. Despite some positive developments, significant gaps remain in the range of health services available to women. For instance, there is a significant deficiency in the availability of Sexual Assault Forensic Exams. Currently, these services are extremely limited and are only offered at Al-Yarmouk Hospital and the Medical City Hospital in the Bab Al-Muadham area of Baghdad. Even now, they are primarily available only at the Medical City. Furthermore, access to a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam requires a judicial order, which poses an institutional barrier that discourages women from other governorates who have experienced sexual assault from seeking this examination. Many women face additional challenges, including fear of the perpetrator, societal pressure and a lack of a robust referral system within health institutions and other institutions that address violence against women and girls. These obstacles create a significant hurdle for victims, preventing them from obtaining the necessary healthcare and support."*

## 10- Armed conflicts and their impact on VAWG in Iraq

The testimonies gathered from various stakeholders illustrate the profound influence of armed conflicts and the ongoing history of systematic violence in Iraq on the escalation of VAWG. The persistent state of warfare and insecurity has critically undermined State institutions and weakened the rule of law, thereby fostering an environment where violations against women occur without accountability. This militarisation of society and the normalisation of violence as a conflict resolution strategy have entrenched patterns of male dominance, facilitating a rise in various forms of VAWG, such as domestic abuse, sexual extortion and a marked increase in forced and early marriages—predominantly in contexts of displacement and societal disruption.

The conflicts have also solidified patriarchal norms and tribal traditions that perpetuate inequality between women and men and limit women's access to justice and protection. A substantial majority of survey respondents (38.2% reporting an increase and 25.1% a massive increase) perceive armed conflict as a factor exacerbating VAWG. This underscores a widespread acknowledgment that armed conflict contributes significantly to the prevalence of VAWG. The collapse of institutional frameworks during this period has resulted in weakened legal and protective systems, fostering an environment of impunity for perpetrators and further eroding justice mechanisms.

Diagram 37
3.12 Has armed conflict in Iraq increased VAWG?




Additionally, socio-economic factors such as heightened levels of poverty, unemployment and displacement exacerbated by conflict have rendered women increasingly vulnerable to violence, exploitation and harassment. The disruptions caused by wars and displacement have also contributed to a reconfiguration of traditional familial and societal roles, which can further incite intra-family conflicts and identity crises among men, often manifesting as DV. Notably, 13% of respondents stated that the levels of violence remained unchanged, suggesting a cohort who perceive the conflict as amplifying pre-existing conditions of systemic violence rather than radically altering the context. Limited awareness of the evolving landscape of violence, especially in certain governorates or rural areas that have not directly experienced armed conflict, may account for this perspective.

In the KR-I, responses from Erbil showed that 65.8% of participants reported that the conflict had increased VAWG, a perception attributed to its proximity to active conflict zones such as Mosul and Sinjar, along with the influx of displaced populations, which has intensified social and economic pressures—reflected in higher reported rates of VAWG.

In Najaf, this perception peaked at 80%—the highest reported rate of respondents who stated that armed conflict has significantly increased VAWG. The governorate's experience as a refuge for many displaced persons during the ISIS conflict has exacerbated pressure on local services and infrastructure. Additionally, the conservative societal fabric may contribute to the heightened incidence of violence during crises, compounded by political and sectarian dynamics.

Responses from Baghdad corroborated this trend, with 28.7% of respondents stating that armed conflict has increased VAWG to a significant degree, and a further 46.9% reporting some increase—culminating in a total of 75.6%. Baghdad's long-standing exposure to conflict and instability has weakened the protective systems in place, leaving women increasingly insecure and allowing violence to occur with little accountability. Additionally, the militarisation of society, along with a decline in institutional support, has significantly increased the risk of VAWG. Limited access to justice has made violence feel normalised, reinforcing the belief that conflict only worsens VAWG.

## 11- Prevalent forms of VAWG

In addressing the multifaceted issue of VAWG, a significant contributor highlighted that DV stands as the most widespread form, necessitating targeted interventions. A female Member of Parliament from Iraq articulated:

> *"DV transcends social strata, educational attainments and generational cohorts; it afflicts women, children and men alike. Therefore, it must not be relegated to a private or individual concern but recognised as a public health crisis demanding a concerted societal and governmental response."*

This perspective emphasises the nuanced nature of DV, which is intricately woven into intimate familial relationships, distinguishing it from more conventional societal and political issues and necessitating specific, sensitive and sustained interventions.

Survey data revealed varied forms of VAWG, exposing systemic inadequacies within societal and legal frameworks that fail to provide sufficient protection. Notably, physical assault was the most frequently reported form of violence (18.5%), correlating with ongoing conflicts and societal instability that exacerbate familial violence. This finding reflects ineffective enforcement of existing laws and the absence of relevant legislation designed to deter domestic abuse, leading to the troubling normalisation of physical violence as an "acceptable" disciplinary approach in various cultural contexts, particularly within familial and marital relationships.

Psychological abuse, reported by 15.5% of respondents, was associated with pervasive emotional manipulation techniques, such as humiliation, intimidation and threats, which create environments of control. The inherent challenges in legally substantiating psychological violence contribute to its underreporting and lack of accountability. Furthermore, public unawareness regarding the various forms of psychological abuse often leads to its normalisation, particularly during crises like war, pandemics or mass displacement.

Additionally, traditional harmful cultural practices, including early marriage (13.3%) and forced marriage (12.1%), were also reported. These practices are deeply rooted in the absence of robust legal and social protections for girls, often exacerbated in economically strained contexts where families may view early marriage as a viable strategy to alleviate financial burdens. It is important to note that early marriage also persists in economically stable families due to entrenched societal norms. The inadequate enforcement of laws prohibiting forced marriage and establishing a minimum age for marriage perpetuates these cultural practices, particularly in rural or underserved regions. Deficiencies in educational infrastructure and limited opportunities for girls further entrench this cycle, rendering marriage an ostensibly favourable option.

Finally, verbal violence, reported by 11.6% of respondents, is frequently encountered in day-to-day interactions yet remains critically underemphasised despite its significant long-term psychological repercussions. The lack of legal ramifications for verbal abuse, especially within domestic settings or workplaces, underscores a broader cultural milieu that continues to undermine the legal frameworks intended to prohibit such forms of abuse. Addressing these multifarious dimensions of VAWG is essential for developing comprehensive strategies that foster societal change and enhance protective legal mechanisms.

The increasing engagement of women in the public sphere and their use of social media have encountered considerable resistance from entrenched formal and informal power structures. Social and religious frameworks are increasingly perceived as barriers to women's self-expression, thereby infringing on their rights to freedom of expression. Notably, 10.4% of

respondents reported that women face restrictions in voicing their political and social opinions. This is particularly evident in the escalating limitations imposed on women HR defenders and activists, who are inadequately protected by law and therefore remain highly susceptible to threats and acts of violence.

While the reported incidence of sexual violence is relatively low at 9.4%, compared to physical or psychological violence, its gravity necessitates urgent consideration. Sexual violence remains the least reported category due to pervasive societal stigma, inadequate protective mechanisms and insufficient legal frameworks that fail to criminalise its various manifestations effectively. Certain legal provisions perpetuate a culture of impunity and, in some instances, even position the victim as the perpetrator. One respondent underscored the prevalence of sexual violence, particularly in cases of incest, which are widespread yet significantly underreported.

Moreover, the recognition of women's exclusion from financial resources and decision-making power—reported by 9.3% of respondents—is framed as a form of economic violence. This structural violence reinforces male dominance over family and societal resources, perpetuating the deprivation of women's rights to inheritance and financial decision-making authority. The ongoing lack of economic policies that address women's conditions, coupled with inadequate social protection programmes to combat economic discrimination, further entrenches these disparities daily.

## 12- Impact of campaigns against VAWG in Iraq and KR-I

An alarming 59.9% of women surveyed reported that they were not aware of campaigns initiated by governmental bodies and CSOs in Iraq aimed at addressing VAWG. This statistic highlights a significant information access gap regarding anti-violence initiatives. In Baghdad, Basra, Najaf and Anbar, awareness of campaigns aimed at supporting women facing violence remains notably low. In Baghdad, 51.6% of respondents reported that they had not heard of any such initiatives, while 15.8% indicated some level of awareness—this being the highest figure among the four governorates in Iraq, suggesting slightly better outreach efforts in the capital. In stark contrast, the levels of unawareness were significantly higher in Basra (70.8%), Najaf (65.9%) and Anbar (65.3%), where recognition of campaigns was minimal, at just 12.7%, 5.2% and 1.4% respectively. These findings highlight a lack of visibility and effectiveness in awareness initiatives across southern and western Iraq.

In the KR-I, both Erbil and Sulaymaniyah recorded 65.3% unawareness. Low awareness levels in the KR-I may arise from the fact that most campaigns are often short-term and focused primarily on urban areas. These initiatives tend to concentrate on specific events or social media, rather than fostering ongoing community engagement, which limits their visibility beyond major cities. Additionally, the lack of coordinated efforts between government agencies and CSOs has weakened the consistency and longevity of outreach initiatives. The absence of large-scale, government-led media strategies aimed at diverse audiences—particularly in rural locales and among non-digital populations—has likely played a role in the limited public awareness, despite the region's relatively vibrant civil society sector.

The design of these campaigns in Federal Iraq often fails to consider the geographical and cultural diversity inherent in its society. Particularly in rural and marginalised areas, this oversight hampers their effectiveness in reaching women who require support. Many campaigns are characterised by temporal limitations and restricted funding, lacking an overarching national framework that would ensure sustained impact. Furthermore, in a country

with significant variations in internet and media access, reliance on platforms such as websites and social media may be inappropriate in certain regions, overshadowing the potential of traditional media channels such as radio and local television.

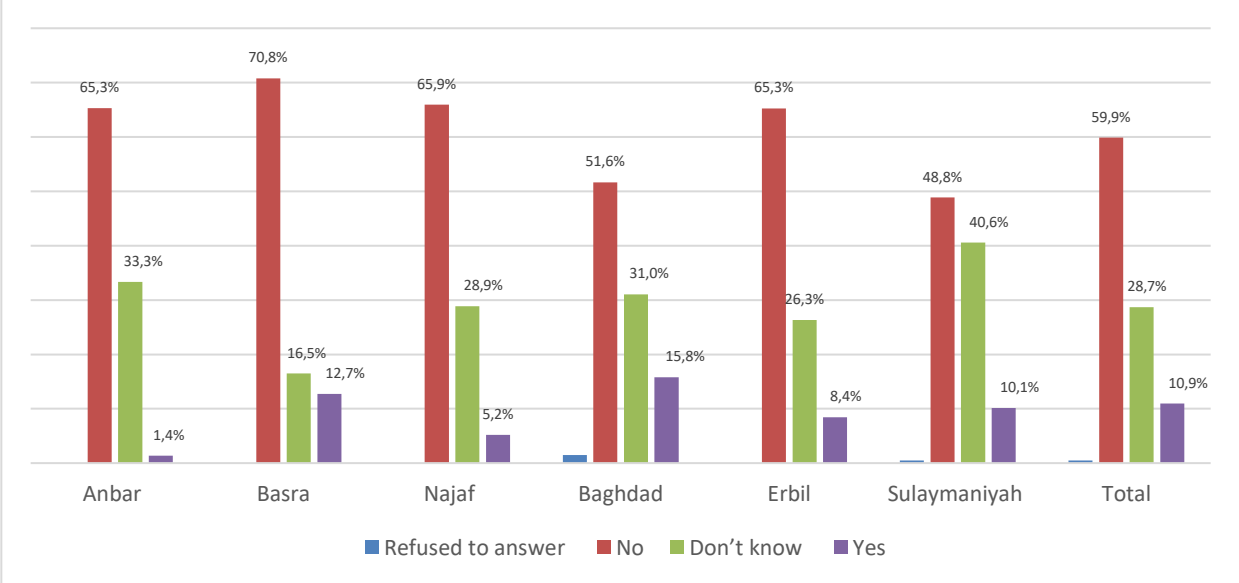
The stigma surrounding VAWG further complicates engagement; many women may choose to remain silent about their knowledge of such initiatives due to fear of social reprisal. As articulated by one interviewed civil society activist: "*The initiatives spearheaded by organisations advocating for women's rights are sometimes met with derision and contempt from various societal factions, including some clerics who disparage the mission of these organisations*."

The percentage of women who reported awareness of campaigns stood at a modest 10.9%, underscoring the limited reach and effectiveness of these initiatives compared to the vast number of women facing violence or concerned about related issues. Awareness appears to correlate with educational attainment and geographic factors, with urban women in cities like Baghdad and Erbil more likely to be informed than those in rural settings. Additionally, when women receive or access services that address VAWG, this leads to increased awareness of campaigns.

A significant proportion (28.7%) of respondents indicated "I don't know," reflecting a nebulous awareness among women who lack precise information or hesitate to articulate their views. This uncertainty may stem from a failure to recognise the distinction between various campaigns or a lack of understanding regarding their relevance to protective efforts. Additionally, scepticism about the impact of campaigns among organisers may lead to disinterest or disengagement. Notably, only 18 women acknowledged awareness of the 16 Days of Activism campaign, while 40 mentioned awareness sessions and public educational campaigns.

Diagram 39

3.14 In the past year, have you heard of any campaigns by the government or civil institutions in Iraq supporting women facing violence?



# IV. PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF VAWG

The practices relating to VAWG are shaped by a complex interplay of social and cultural factors that illuminate community responses to these issues. These practices serve as critical indicators for understanding the dynamics of VAWG within Iraqi society and the KR-I, where various patterns of violence intersect with structural, cultural and economic variables.

This section aims to analyse the prevalence of such violence, highlighting the most pervasive forms, including physical, psychological, sexual and economic violence. It also examines the underlying mechanisms that perpetuate this violence, including entrenched cultural legacies, prevailing social norms, insufficient legal protections and ineffective justice and enforcement systems.

## 1- The extent of VAWG

While Section 11 presented a broad mapping of multiple forms of VAWG, the following results focus on the most frequently reported direct experiences of violence. The data reveal that VAWG remains highly prevalent across Iraq and the KR-I, with 55.7% of respondents nationwide reporting that they had witnessed incidents of violence within the past six months.

The highest levels of reported exposure were recorded in Najaf (68.1%) and Baghdad (67.8%), suggesting that violence is widely visible and normalised in densely populated and socially conservative areas where institutional protection is often weak. By contrast, Basra (46.1%) and Anbar (34.7%) reported comparatively lower rates, though these may reflect underreporting or reluctance to acknowledge violence publicly rather than an actual decrease in incidents.

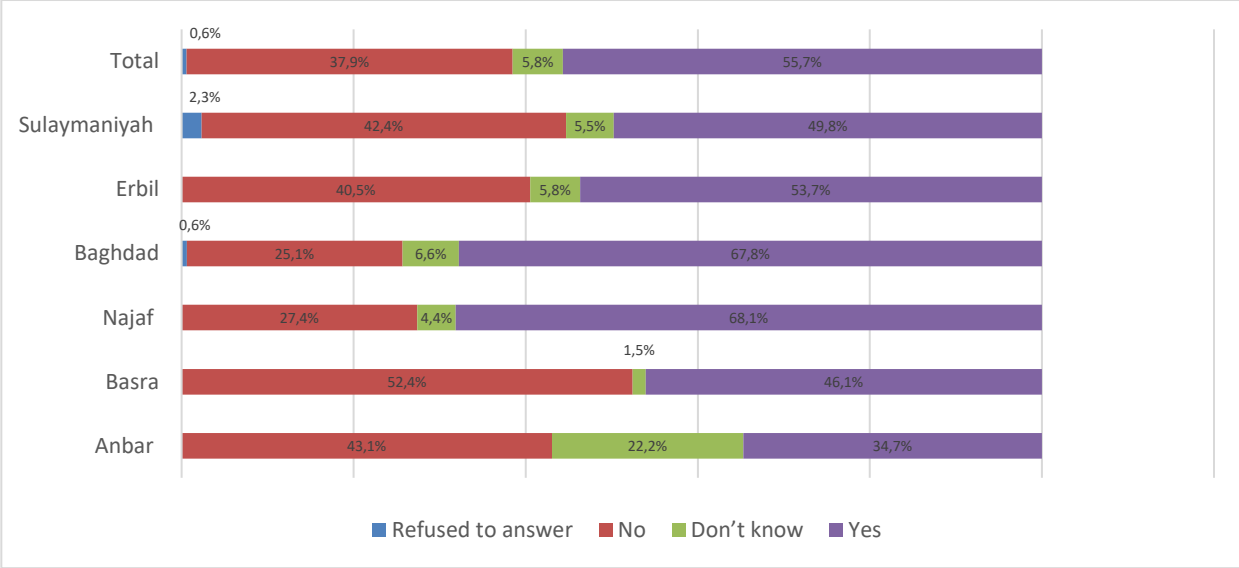
In KR-I, significant rates were also recorded – Erbil (53.7%) and Sulaymaniyah (49.8%), indicating that the issue persists even in areas with acceptable legal frameworks and active civil society engagement.

Overall, the findings highlight that the extent of VAWG in Iraq remains alarmingly high, with widespread exposure across both federal and regional contexts, underscoring the urgent need for effective prevention, protection and accountability mechanisms.

A legal expert from the KR-I indicated during an interview that VAWG appears to be increasing. However, this is partly attributed to enhanced documentation of incidents and a rise in women's awareness of their rights.

> *"For instance, while 11,000 cases of violence were recorded last year in the KR-I, the numbers for 2024 have risen to between 20,000 and 50,000 cases. This increase is primarily due to the proliferation of awareness initiatives and the development of organisational support structures. Women now have access to resources, such as the 24-hour hotline (119), which facilitates reporting and provides legal, psychological and social assistance. This hotline is operational on major telecommunications networks and available in both Kurdish and Arabic."*

Diagram 40
4.1 In the past six months, have you witnessed VAWG?




Structural violence was reported by 15.8% of respondents, manifesting in the form of exclusion from education, healthcare and inheritance. This exclusion is closely linked to discriminatory laws and social customs, particularly in rural or conflict-affected regions, which inhibit women's access to fundamental rights.

Additionally, forced marriage was reported at 10.7%, reflecting the enduring influence of traditional norms that compel early marriages for girls, often as a means to resolve conflicts or alleviate economic strain, and is further exacerbated by the lack of effective legal protections.

The incidence of conflict-related sexual harassment was reported by 9.7%, suggesting that sexual violence is strategically employed as a tool during armed conflict. However, this figure may underrepresent the true prevalence due to the significant social stigma surrounding these experiences and the fear associated with reporting.

These findings illustrate a complex interplay among varied forms of VAWG, highlighting the connections between individual experiences, structural inequities and conflict-driven violence. Importantly, low response rates do not necessarily equate to a diminished prevalence of these issues but may instead signify a culture of silence and fear of stigma, exacerbated by inadequate legal frameworks and insufficient institutional support.

## 2- Reporting violence: barriers and challenges

*We urgently need legal protection for women, not only as victims of violence in society but also within institutions, including both the public and private sectors. Even women working in the Ministry of Interior can face danger, and this has already occurred. Victims' guardians have threatened many female community police officers, forcing them to leave their positions and transfer to other departments, such as the media.* (Governmental official, Baghdad)

All interviews in both Federal Iraq and the KR-I consistently highlighted a significant discrepancy between officially reported statistics on VAWG and the reality of the situation. This underreporting is attributed to several factors, including inadequate reporting mechanisms, social stigma, a pervasive lack of trust in institutions and the absence of a cohesive data collection system. These issues significantly understate the true prevalence of violence, which in turn undermines the development of effective policies aimed at protecting women.

One interviewee, a lawyer from Baghdad, expressed scepticism regarding the effectiveness of the existing hotline services:

> *"I don't believe that the hotline is truly effective. This is the service that they always boast about, alongside various other initiatives, but as a genuinely impactful service, it simply does not exist. For example, the UN established a platform called the Iraqi Women's Platform and handed it over to the government. This platform was intended to encompass everything related to women, including laws and statistics—a very large and integrated project. However, what happened after its initiation? The government was unable to manage it effectively because they lack qualified personnel. As a result, the platform remains inactive, as if they are waiting for someone to come and engage with it, despite it being handed over to the National Women's Department, which is supposed to oversee it."*

Consequently, the platform has remained inactive, highlighting the institutional capacity gaps within the National Women's Department.

Another interviewee, a male academic from the KR-I, highlighted the challenges in capturing the true scope of VAWG, including issues of underreporting and misclassification, as well as the role of informal channels in revealing hidden cases and supporting survivors:

> *"The data suggest that a significant portion—approximately 60%—of violence against women cases remains unreported, either through victim silence or institutional oversight. In instances where violence reaches homicide levels, cases are often misclassified as suicides or "honour" killings, which holds victims accountable rather than aggressors, further obscuring the true figures. Social media has emerged as a tool for uncovering hidden cases within domestic spheres and has played a crucial role in raising awareness, encouraging victims to assert their rights and mitigating the risks posed by prolonged silence in violent situations. Accurate data, therefore, often comes from informal channels or local network engagements rather than official sources."*

The insights gathered from in-depth-Interviews indicate that numerous women who have experienced abuse encounter a variety of compounded obstacles when attempting to access support and protection services. The survey findings not only validate this observation but also enhance our understanding of the specific nature and complexity of these challenges. Survey data showed that 64.6% of women who experienced violence reported seeking help, reflecting a moderate rise in awareness concerning the importance of seeking support. However, barriers remain entrenched due to social, cultural and institutional factors that inhibit some women from accessing assistance. A further 23.8% reported not seeking help, underscoring obstacles such as fear of social stigma and retaliation, a lack of confidence in governmental institutions, inadequate resources—particularly in rural areas—and the influence of patriarchal norms that constrains women's autonomy. In addition, 11.1% of respondents answered "I don't know," reflecting a significant information gap and cultural silence surrounding the issue.

Geographically, Basra recorded the highest rate of help-seeking behaviour at 80.5%, possibly indicative of effective awareness campaigns or relatively accessible support services compared with other regions. When in need of assistance, women subjected to violence predominantly turn to relatives (58.5%), suggesting a cultural preference for internal family resolutions, often driven by concerns of social scandal and distrust in official bodies. Conversely, engagement with the police (10.2%), legal courts (12.2%) and private centres (9.3%) remains low, highlighting challenges regarding the effectiveness and accessibility of these institutions, alongside negative societal views surrounding women who seek assistance outside the family unit. The hotline service (911) was used by only 2.7% of respondents, pointing to insufficient outreach or limited perceived effectiveness of this support mechanism.

The findings from the survey aligned with insights gathered from in-depth interviews, underscoring that for many women and girls in Iraq and the KR-I, the act of reporting violence is fraught with difficulty and risk. The data indicate significant levels of ambivalence and trepidation among women contemplating the initiation of formal complaints, pointing to pervasive structural, psychological and sociocultural impediments that hinder their pursuit of assistance. A particularly salient factor contributing to this hesitance is the fear of potential repercussions post-reporting, which can manifest as continued DV, exploitation or threats to personal privacy. This was confirmed by the insights of experts. One interviewee, a member of the current parliament in Baghdad, stated:

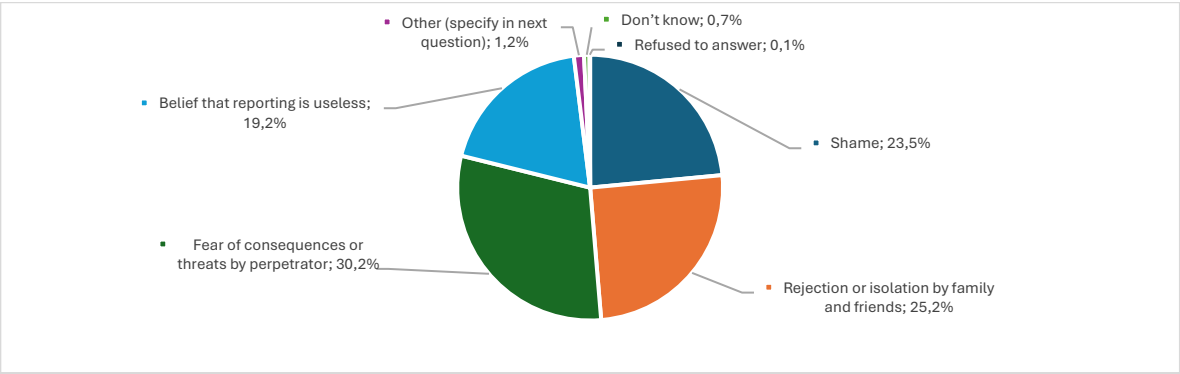
> *"Women often feel unsafe after filing complaints because doing so can lead to violent reactions from their families. In some cases, this fear is justified, as women may face severe consequences, including fatal violence, exploitation by certain individuals or the unauthorised release of their personal information."*

Notably, 30.2% of surveyed women reported apprehension regarding retaliatory actions or threats from perpetrators, underscoring the inefficacy of institutional protection frameworks and the prevailing impunity surrounding offenders. This further highlights the inadequacy of official response mechanisms and perpetuates a climate of fear that deters reporting.

Concurrently, 25.2% of women reported concerns about social isolation and rejection from their support networks, reflecting the persistent stigma associated with victimhood in certain cultural contexts. There remains an entrenched perception that violence constitutes a "private" matter, particularly when the abuser is a family member. Additionally, 23% of participants reported feelings of shame, highlighting a culturally ingrained dimension associated with concepts of honour and reputation, where the victim bears the brunt of societal blame for their victimisation.

Diagram 44

4.5 From your experience, what barriers prevent women from reporting violence?



Moreover, 19.2% of women reported perceiving the reporting process as ineffective, indicative of a broader erosion of confidence in the judiciary and protective services due to prior negative interactions or pervasive societal scepticism regarding the efficacy of complaints.

A civil society expert and consultant for international organisations in Baghdad corroborated these findings during a KII, revealing a troubling deficit in the documentation of violence cases affecting women and girls:

> *"The country suffers from a significant shortage of statistical processes; the Ministry of Planning still relies on outdated methods for collecting and documenting statistics. Despite ongoing support from UN agencies, such as the Population Fund and UN Women, the Ministry has not made these statistics accessible to specialists studying violence against women. As a result, obtaining accurate data on VAWG becomes an arduous and often fruitless endeavour."*

## 3- Women's personal experiences with violence in public and private spheres

An analysis of women's experiences in the public sphere reveals that 72% of respondents reported not having been subjected to insults in public settings, such as streets or on public transportation, over the past year. While this figure can be viewed positively as an indicator of a relative decline in public violence, it may also reflect a normalisation of such behaviours, or ambiguity surrounding what constitutes an insult. By contrast, 10.6% of women reported having been insulted once, and 13.1% reported multiple incidents. These statistics highlight the persistence of verbal violence in public spaces, particularly in metropolitan areas like Baghdad, which recorded the highest frequency of repeated insults (24.2%), followed by a 13.1% rate for single incidents. This phenomenon may be attributed to factors such as population density, public transport usage and significant female participation in public life.

In contrast, Anbar Governorate displayed a high percentage (88.9%) of respondents who reported no incidents of insult, potentially reflecting the conservative societal norms that discourage women's vocalisation, a cultural tendency to maintain secrecy around such issues or a perception that certain verbal aggressions do not warrant mention as insults. Notably, the percentages of "I don't know" (2.8%) and "declined to answer" (1.6%) suggest a hesitance to engage with the topic, possibly due to the sensitive nature of these issues or a lack of awareness that such acts qualify as violence or violations of dignity.

In the KR-I, both in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, the data reveal contrasting experiences of public-space insults. In Erbil, most respondents (77.4%) reported never experiencing insults, while 7.9% reported it several times and 11.1% reported being insulted once, indicating relatively lower exposure to public insults. In contrast, Sulaymaniyah showed a higher prevalence of such experiences: only 57.6% said they had never been insulted, while 21.2% reported being insulted several times, and 11.5% once. This suggests that women in Sulaymaniyah experience public insults more frequently, possibly because of greater mobility, greater visibility in public spaces or a higher willingness to report such incidents.

An interviewee, an activist and women's rights advocate from Iraq, shared her personal experience after posting about harassment against women on a social media platform. She was unaware of the level of verbal abuse she would encounter as a result of her post. The onslaught of threats and explicit insults that followed caused her significant psychological distress, leading her to withdraw from public discussions on this important issue, despite her training and

experience in advocacy and social media. Her experience raises fundamental questions about the environment in which women live and the psychological impact of such violence, especially for those who feel unable to confront it.

The findings also indicate that a significant majority of respondents (91.1%) reported not experiencing any attempts at sexual coercion in the past year. Meanwhile, 2.1% reported experiencing such attempts once, 2.1% several times, 1.2% answered "I don't know" and 2.7% declined to answer. In Anbar and Basra, denial rates were very high (97.2% and 95%, respectively), reflecting strong social taboos and fear of repercussions in conservative or conflict-affected contexts. Baghdad (89.9%) and Najaf (92.6%) reported slightly lower denial rates than other governorates, suggesting slightly higher acknowledgement of such incidents; however, these remain limited, indicating that sexual violence is still largely invisible in public reporting and community dialogue.

While this may superficially suggest a decrease in sexual violence incidents, deeper analysis is warranted, considering the cultural and social dynamics surrounding VAWG. Factors such as social stigma, inadequate protective measures, fear of retaliation and a lack of trust in official institutions likely contribute to this "silence," suggesting that many cases remain unreported.

In the KR-I, Erbil (89.5%) and Sulaymaniyah (90.8%) show slightly lower "never" rates than the national average, and marginally higher rates of reported incidents (3.7% in Erbil; 2.3% in Sulaymaniyah). This could indicate greater awareness and slightly higher willingness to disclose, possibly linked to stronger civil society engagement and discourse around VAWG on KR-I level.

Conversely, 2.4% of women reported being subjected to attempts at sexual coercion "once," and 2.2% experienced it "several times." These seemingly low figures are concerning, as they indicate that a subset of women faces systematic or repeated violence, pointing to failures in protective systems and preventive interventions. Basra Governorate recorded the highest percentage of women reporting "never" (95.1%), while Baghdad had the highest rates of both "once" and "several times" (3.6% each). This discrepancy may reflect greater exposure in the capital due to its population density and diverse lifestyles, as well as a relative increase in awareness and willingness to disclose experiences of violence compared to other regions.

In both Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, the reported incidence of sexual violence or coercion over the past 12 months remains relatively low but concerning, given the sensitivity and underreporting surrounding such cases. In Erbil, 93.7% of respondents said they had never experienced forced or attempted sexual acts, while 2.6% reported experiencing it once and 1.6% several times. In Sulaymaniyah, 87.6% reported no experience, with 1.8% each indicating it occurred once or several times, and a higher 6.9% chose not to answer, possibly reflecting discomfort or fear of disclosure.

## 4- Domination and control as invisible forms of violence and discrimination

In terms of familial control dynamics, the survey reveals significant variations regarding control mechanisms exercised over women. Direct forms of control include restrictions on social interactions, while indirect forms involve dismissive attitudes towards women's opinions. Notably, 73.4% of participants reported never being restricted from socialising by their husbands or family members, suggesting a degree of familial openness and progressive social relations, potentially influenced by heightened awareness of women's rights, education and media exposure. Nevertheless, 16.8% of women indicated experiencing social restrictions

"several times," illustrating the enduring patterns of male dominance, particularly in traditional contexts where social norms purportedly uphold family honour and discipline.

This disparity is particularly pronounced across governorates in Iraq, with Anbar showing the highest "never" response rate (94.4%), possibly due to conflict and displacement reshaping family dynamics or social biases affecting disclosure. In contrast, Basra recorded the highest percentage of "several times" responses (30.7%), indicative of entrenched tribal influences and traditional frameworks that curtail women's social freedoms.

In Erbil, 80.5% of women reported that their family or husband never prevented them from meeting friends or relatives, higher than the national average of 73.4%. However, 10.5% experienced this several times and 6.8% once, indicating that nearly one in six women faced restrictions on social interaction—a sign of ongoing patriarchal oversight that limits women's autonomy in the KR-I. In Sulaymaniyah, 82% reported no restrictions, with 6% stating it occurred several times and another 6% refusing to answer, highlighting social sensitivities around family control. This small but significant share of women facing isolation underscores persistent domestic power imbalances, even in more progressive contexts.

Regarding the acknowledgment of women's opinions, survey results indicate that 55% of participants had not experienced rejection or ridicule of their views, while 31.1% indicated that such behaviours occurred "sometimes," and 10.1% reported they occurred "always." This finding points to the prevalence of symbolic violence within domestic spheres, which overshadows physical and material violence. The implications are significant; they expose a systemic issue concerning women's exclusion from familial decision-making processes and reflect persistent cultural norms that marginalise their voices, adversely impacting their self-esteem and societal engagement.

Remarkably, the percentages of "I don't know" (1.5%) and "declined to answer" (2.3%), while limited, suggest a dual narrative of either insufficient awareness regarding symbolic violence or apprehension about disclosing practices that are normalised within prevailing social contexts.

During an in-depth interview, a female journalist from Baghdad discussed the challenges she faces in her work, particularly when conducting investigations into violence against women in conservative areas like Basra.

> *"I noticed in my investigations that women are often reluctant to speak out because the control they experience is not considered violence by societal norms. First, it's not easy to interview a woman who her husband has abused. If she does speak out, there is precise control over all her decisions. Most women lose their options and control over their lives, or even the ability to end the violence."*

## 5- Access to and control of economic resources

The quantitative part of the research reveals enduring patterns of discrimination and exclusion tied to cultural perceptions of traditional roles within families and society, particularly in areas of decision-making and control over financial resources. Approximately 45.1% of women reported experiencing varying degrees of exclusion from family decision-making processes; of these, 31% reported being excluded sometimes, while 14.1% reported being excluded always. This reflects the prevailing patriarchal structures within families and a weak adherence to principles of partnership in domestic management.

Despite a majority (51.6%) stating they are not subjected to exclusion, this significant minority underscores enduring structural and cultural barriers to women's empowerment in familial contexts. Furthermore, the findings highlight disparities in women's control over financial expenditures and income, with 37.8% of participants reporting experiences of financial exclusion—23.8% sometimes and 14% always.

These data point to limited economic autonomy for women, exacerbated by low labour market participation and financial dependency on male counterparts or family members. Such dynamics exemplify a form of economic violence that is typically indirect and challenging to quantify.

Concerning financial coercion or pressure, 19.1% of women reported personal experience of such dynamics—7.2% once and 11.8% several times. These figures are particularly concerning, as they demonstrate the use of financial resources as a mechanism for control, violating women's dignity and their rights to financial independence. The 2.1% of women who declined to respond, alongside the 2.4% who answered, "I don't know," may reflect fear or reluctance to disclose these experiences, emphasising the necessity of creating safe environments for women to seek support and report such issues.

In the KR-I, Erbil (80.5%) and Sulaymaniyah (79.7%), a large majority of women reported never facing financial threats or restrictions, indicating comparatively higher levels of women's financial independence and a more supportive social environment. In Sulaymaniyah, 7.8% of respondents chose not to answer, which is the highest rate observed. This suggests social hesitation or stigma surrounding the disclosure of financial issues within families.

In Anbar (90.3%), the rate of women reporting no financial control is the highest, suggesting that such behaviours are either genuinely rare or that women are less likely to identify or admit financial manipulation as abuse, possibly due to cultural norms that normalise male financial authority.

In Basra (78.3%) and Baghdad (76.4%), results are closer to the national average, with around 12% reporting repeated financial pressure, highlighting ongoing economic dependency and control mechanisms within households.

The most concerning findings come from Najaf, where only 55.6% said they had never been financially threatened, and a significant 37.8% reported facing such abuse several times. This suggests that in more conservative environments, economic coercion is a persistent form of control used to reinforce male authority.

## 6- Domestic violence against women in family settings

The data from the survey reveal considerable variations in verbal and emotional abuse within families across Iraq and the KR-I during the past 12 months, reflecting differing cultural, social and economic dynamics.

In Erbil, 82.1% of respondents reported never being insulted or abused—the highest rate—suggesting comparatively stronger social awareness and support systems that discourage such behaviour. Only 6.8% reported repeated incidents, indicating relatively lower tolerance for domestic verbal abuse. Similarly, Sulaymaniyah showed a positive trend, with 75.6% of women denying experiences of verbal or emotional abuse. However, its 7.8% "declined to answer" rate—the highest among all regions—suggests some reluctance to disclose family conflicts, possibly due to stigma or social sensitivity surrounding domestic issues.

In contrast, Najaf and Baghdad reported the highest levels of repeated abuse, at 31.9% and 20.3%, respectively, reflecting more entrenched patriarchal norms and weaker family protection mechanisms. Basra followed with 14.6% reporting repeated incidents, while Anbar recorded somewhat lower but still concerning levels (5.6% repeated, 15.3% once).

The overview for Iraq and the KR-I reveals that a significant majority of women (70.9%) reported no experience of abuse, while 15.3% had experienced it several times and 9.8% had faced it once. However, psychological and verbal violence persist as widespread issues, especially in the southern and central regions. In these areas, cultural conservatism and economic stress appear to reinforce male dominance and emotional control within families.

The findings indicate that 84.1% of women reported not having faced any form of physical violence from family members. Among those who did, 5.3% reported being slapped or physically assaulted once, and 6.5% reported experiencing it multiple times, alongside a 1.6% "I don't know" response rate and a 2.5% non-response rate. Although the majority reported no physical violence, around 12% of women indicated experiencing direct violence—a troubling indicator that calls for institutional and legal intervention. The non-response rates also highlight psychological, social and cultural barriers that inhibit the disclosure of violent experiences, including fear of privacy breaches or potential harm from revealing them.

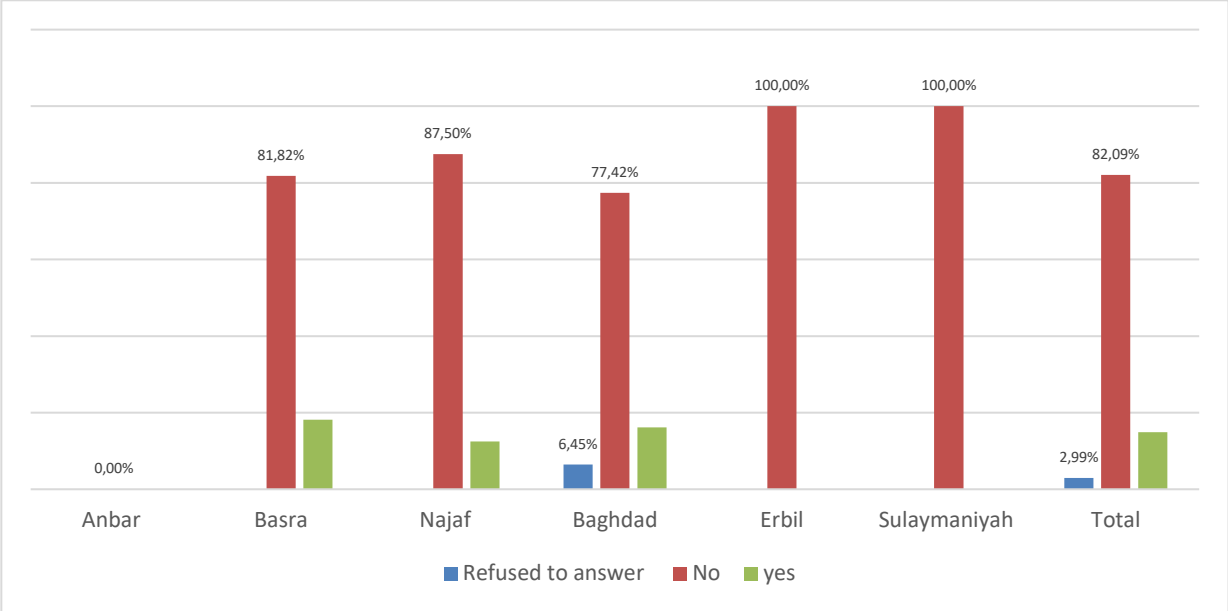
In the KR-I, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah reported lower levels of physical abuse compared with the national average. In Erbil, 90% of respondents said they had never experienced physical violence, while 7.4% reported being abused once and 2.1% multiple times. This suggests that, although less common, physical violence remains a concern, possibly due to lingering patriarchal attitudes. In Sulaymaniyah, 86.6% denied experiencing abuse, but 6.5% refused to answer, indicating social sensitivity. A small percentage (2.3%) reported repeated violence, reflecting that cultural norms still hinder open discussions about domestic violence.

In contrast, Federal Iraq reflects higher exposure to physical violence. Najaf and Baghdad both reported 9.6% repeated physical abuse, with additional one-time incidents reaching 7.4% and 3.9%, respectively, indicating a worrying persistence of physical discipline within families. Basra followed closely (9% repeated, 8.2% once), pointing to entrenched patriarchal control and economic stress as contributing factors. Anbar, however, recorded the lowest levels of reported physical abuse (1.4% repeated or once), which may reflect underreporting due to conservative cultural restrictions rather than a genuine absence of violence.

The data also show that 91.7% of women reported not having received death threats from their husbands or family members. However, 2.9% reported encountering such threats once, and 2.6% reported multiple incidents, while 1.1% indicated uncertainty and 1.7% declined to answer. Although these percentages are lower than those for other forms of violence, the existence of death threats at rates exceeding 5% remains a deeply concerning indicator of the persistence of VAWG. Moreover, only 14.9% of women reported pursuing formal complaints following violent incidents, with a staggering 82% refraining from seeking recourse. This significant gap reflects both fragile legal and social protection systems and a lack of confidence in institutional responses.

Variations were noted between Federal Iraq and the KR-I, and across different governorates. Anbar (98.6%) and Erbil (98.4%) recorded the highest rates of non-exposure, likely indicative of either genuine differences in experiences or reluctance to disclose. Conversely, Baghdad recorded the highest rate of reported threats (11.1%), followed by Basra (8.3%), Sulaymaniyah (6%) and Najaf at (5.9%). These figures may be linked to various economic and social pressures as well as women's increasing awareness of their rights and willingness to report such threats.

Diagram 56
4.17 If it happened, after this incident, did you lodge a complaint?




Qualitative data corroborate these findings, with description of the conditions of some women within the family sphere as extremely challenging, with many facing various forms of direct physical and psychological violence.

*We handle dozens of cases every month of women who have been subjected to physical and psychological violence by husbands or family members, but fear of stigma or losing their children prevents many from filing official complaints.*

*This is especially true with attempts to amend Article 57 of the Personal Status Law, which would strip mothers of their right to custody!*

*The law still grants men broad parental authority and treats women as minors within their homes. (Female lawyer and women's rights activist from Baghdad)*

## 7- Open-ended responses in the questionnaire

This part presents an analysis of open-ended responses from the questionnaire. The frequencies indicate the number of responses to the four open-ended questions.

The aim of including open-ended response option was to allow respondents to freely express their experiences, feelings and the contexts of violence they had encountered. This approach helps to reveal patterns, motives and forms of violence that may not be evident in the quantitative data. Such questions broaden the scope of analysis and offer a deeper understanding of the social, cultural and legal barriers women face when reporting violence or seeking support.

### 1- Analysis of the Causes of VAWG

#### 1. Customs and Traditions (201 frequencies)

The high frequency of this response illustrates a growing societal awareness of the role that cultural and social structures play in perpetuating VAWG. Customs and traditions often dictate sex roles in patriarchal societies, granting men superior power over women and legitimising violence as a means of social control within families and communities. This supports what researchers such as Pierre Bourdieu have pointed out in their theory of symbolic violence: cultural practices can legitimise male dominance.

#### 2. Psychological Causes, Masculinity and Dominance (189 frequencies):

The frequency of these responses demonstrates a common recognition of the relationship between notions of hegemonic masculinity and tendencies toward control and violence. These answers reflect a growing awareness that violence arises not only from external circumstances but also from internal motivations rooted in values of male superiority and authority cultivated during upbringing.

#### 3. Lack of Awareness and Ignorance (158 frequencies):

A significant number of participants believe that the absence of legal knowledge and understanding of women's rights contributes significantly to the continuation of violence. This aligns with feminist literature, which emphasises that raising awareness is crucial in combating violence, particularly in environments lacking comprehensive education and HR information.

#### 4. Family, Education and Society (155 frequencies)

Participants connect socialisation in the family and schooling to the entrenchment of discriminatory and violent values against women. This perspective reflects a deep feminist understanding that violence is not merely an individual behaviour but is perpetuated through social institutions.

#### 5. Economic Factors (82 frequencies)

Despite the important role of economic factors in understanding violence, their lower ranking indicates a lack of awareness regarding the relationship between economic dependence and violence. This highlights the need to enhance awareness of women's access to and participation

in the economic sphere as a proactive measure to reduce violence, a concept supported by recent studies on VAWG.

### 6. Less Mentioned Causes (such as lack of laws, wars and drugs):

The low frequency of these responses may be due to women's limited legal awareness, the normalisation of the absence of legal and institutional protections or the perception of these causes as "external" factors that they cannot directly control.

## 2- Women's Responses to Violence

### 1. Reporting and Filing Complaints (463 frequencies)

This high frequency demonstrates a growing recognition of the importance of using legal and official channels. It suggests an evolution in the reporting culture, possibly resulting from awareness campaigns or media coverage of cases of violence.

### 2. Silence and Patience (171 frequencies)

These responses reflect the persistence of a traditional culture that requires women to endure and "sacrifice," indicating a normalisation of violence. Some women may perceive silence as the only means of survival due to fear of social stigma and a lack of community or institutional support. This aligns with Johan Galtung's concept of "silent violence," which addresses forms of structural violence.

### 3. Participation in Campaigns (145 frequencies)

This indicates an evolution in women's awareness of their role as agents of change and their capacity to influence society. However, this participation remains underreported, highlighting the need to strengthen collective action and feminist mobilisation.

### 4. Self-Defence, Requesting Separation and "Don't Know" (low responses)

The low frequency of these responses illustrates a significant gap in awareness of rights and alternative solutions, underscoring the importance of legal and psychological empowerment for women.

## 3- The Impact of Armed Conflict on VAWG

### 1. The Link Between Conflict and Increased Violence (308 frequencies)

The results indicate that women recognise that wars worsen the fragility of security and legal systems, creating a fertile environment for HR violations, especially in societies where protections are absent.

### 2. Increased Sexual and Physical Violence (137 frequencies), Poverty and Unemployment (83 frequencies), Child Marriage (48 frequencies)

These findings reflect a deep understanding of the multifaceted impact of armed conflict, which aligns with UN reports on VAWG in conflict zones.

### 3. Deprivation of Education (41 frequencies), "I Don't Know" (38 frequencies)

These figures suggest weak educational and legal infrastructures, as well as limited access to information, particularly in areas directly affected by conflict.

## 4- Proposed Measures to Improve Protection from Violence

### 1. Improving Laws and Protection Measures (399 frequencies)

The high frequency of this response indicates a strong awareness of the importance of a solid legal framework in deterring violence and providing protection. This may also reflect the influence of civil society and feminist advocacy campaigns.

### 2. Awareness and Advocacy (236 frequencies), Shelter Provision (157 frequencies)

These responses demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of protective measures, which include education, psychosocial and community support, as well as the provision of shelters as immediate solutions in crisis situations.

### 3. Improving Education (63 frequencies), Economic Empowerment (25 frequencies)

The low frequency of concepts related to economic empowerment suggests that women may have a limited understanding of the link between financial independence and the ability to avoid violence. This highlights the need for awareness programmes and economic initiatives specifically targeting women to strengthen this understanding.



# PART THREE

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO REDUCE VAWG IN IRAQ AND KR-I

The findings of this study illustrate that the phenomenon of VAWG remains a deep-rooted structural challenge intertwined with social, cultural, legal and economic factors, which requires a comprehensive approach to policymaking that addresses both the root causes of this violence and strengthens mechanisms for prevention, protection and empowerment.

The following recommendations aim to support policymakers, governmental institutions and CSOs toward more inclusive responses that uphold the dignity of women and girls and ensure their right to live free from violence and discrimination across Iraq and KR-I.

### GOVERNMENT OF IRAQ

➔ Reactivate the National Strategy to Combat VAWG (2018-2030)

Conduct a comprehensive review of the strategy's priorities and refine implementation frameworks. This includes ensuring the allocation of adequate financial and human resources, as well as enhancing inter-agency coordination among relevant sectors to achieve strategic objectives focused on women's protection and the reduction of violence.

➔ Allocate Independent and Sustainable Budgets

Emphasise the necessity of explicit and consistent financial allocations within the national budget to sustain and expand protection programmes. This should include the establishment of shelters, the training of specialised personnel, and the provision of psychosocial and legal support services for survivors.

➔ Develop Protection Infrastructure for Women Survivors

Establish shelters across all governorates while modernising and rehabilitating existing facilities. The aim is to provide a secure environment and a comprehensive range of services for women survivors, with a particular focus on mental health care and legal assistance.

➔ Activate the National Referral System for Women Survivors of DV

Implement and update the multi-sectoral national referral system to ensure an integrated and effective response to DV. This should facilitate safe pathways for women and girls seeking assistance, enabling access to protection, support and care services.

➔ Adopt and promote survivor-centred approached and principles in policy making regarding combating VAWG

Include survivor-centred approach and principles in any government policies, frameworks and training curricula on VAWG.

## MINISTRIES – FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF IRAQ

### ➔ Ministry of Health

Establish a standardised national medical protocol for the early identification and management of VAWG, including the creation of specialised medical units in hospitals and the implementation of survivor-centred training programmes for healthcare providers. By ensuring that healthcare providers are trained in survivor-centred practices, the Ministry can enhance the quality of care provided to survivors of violence and ensure that medical services are delivered in a manner that respects and supports their rights and needs.

### ➔ Ministry of Interior

- Expand the Family and Child Protection Department to cover all governorates and increase the number of trained personnel on survivor-centred approach to effectively address cases of domestic violence. Special emphasis on training for female police officers who have direct contact with survivors, will ensure their rights and dignity are fully respected and prioritized.
- Develop a comprehensive referral system to facilitate effective inter-agency coordination and include staff training. By optimizing coordination, the Ministry can ensure enhanced access survivors to integrated health, legal and social support services.
- Create a secure electronic database to document and monitor cases of violence, as well as safeguard survivors' confidentiality to support their reporting of violence incidents.

### ➔ Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs

Establish safe shelters for women who have experienced violence, in collaboration with CSOs, to ensure that these facilities are managed by qualified female staff. Through coordination with the Ministry of Interior, and other relevant actors, the Ministry can guarantee the efficient provision of necessary protection services.

### ➔ Ministry of Justice

Activate the specialised courts for DV cases and increase their availability nationwide to improve access to justice. By providing targeted training for judges and judicial staff on survivor-centred approach, the Ministry can ensure that the rights and dignity of the survivors are fully respected.

### ➔ Ministry of Education

Incorporate HR education, equality between men and women and anti-violence principles into school curricula. By launching awareness campaigns, the Ministry can promote a culture of respect and non-violence among students across all educational levels.

### ➔ Ministry of Planning

Utilize the existing reporting mechanisms and strategic planning functions to mainstream VAWG into Iraq's national development agenda and support evidence-based interventions. By integrating VAWG into planning, human development, economic, and SDG reporting, the Ministry can coordinate cross-sectoral responses and strengthen both prevention and protection efforts.

## IRAQ NATIONAL PARLIAMENT

### ➔ Enact a comprehensive law to combat VAWG

Accelerate the drafting and adoption of a comprehensive law on combating VAWG that includes all its forms and provides a definition of VAWG according to the UN, sets out protection and accountability mechanisms, and provides for collaboration among all concerned parties: relevant ministries, police, courts, social services, health-care providers and civil society. This law must include clear provisions regarding the issuance of immediate protection orders and ensuring their effective enforcement.

### ➔ Amend the Penal Code

Repeal any legal provisions that either condone or mitigate VAWG, including those that justify "honour" crimes or allow perpetrators to evade punishment by marrying the victim. Such amendments must align with Iraq's international legal obligations.

### ➔ Enhance Parliamentary Oversight

Strengthen the legislative body's role in monitoring governmental adherence to initiatives aimed at protecting women and girls from violence. This includes conducting periodic hearings with CSOs and subject-matter experts to foster transparency and accountability, as well as evaluating the effectiveness of enacted measures.



## KURDISTAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

### ➔ National Strategy to Combat Violence Against Women in the KR-I (2017-2027).

Allocate resources and support the implementation of the National Strategy to Combat Violence Against Women in the KR-I (2017-2027) that addresses the interconnected aspects of prevention, protection, accountability and empowerment of women and girls, and provides for coordination among a diverse range of stakeholders.

### ➔ Expand Protection Services

Increase the number of shelters across all governorates and provide regular specialised training for staff on survivor-centred approach to ensure the provision of high-quality care and support for survivors.

### ➔ Adopt and promote survivor-centred approached and principles in policy making regarding combating VAWG

Include survivor-centred approach and principles in any government policies, frameworks and training curricula on VAWG.

### ➔ Ensure Budget Allocations for Implementation

Allocate adequate financial resources to support the implementation of strategies and programmes designed to combat VAWG, ensuring their sustainability.

## MINISTRIES - KURDISTAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

### ➔ Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

Enhance support services, linking survivors´ needs to social protection programs and economic empowerment initiatives. This will strengthen the network of shelters and improve the quality of support services. By strengthening operational partnerships with other stakeholders and securing funding, the Ministry can ensure the long-term sustainability of these services.

### ➔ Ministry of Interior

- Expand the number of safe shelters and provide regular training for personnel on survivor-centred approach to ensure that the rights and dignity of the survivors are prioritized. Special emphasis on training for female police officers who have direct contact with survivors, will further guarantee survivors´ protection and well-being.

- Develop a comprehensive referral system to facilitate effective inter-agency coordination and include staff training. By optimizing coordination, the Ministry can ensure survivors an enhanced access to integrated health, legal and social support services.

- Create a secure electronic database to document and monitor cases of violence, safeguarding survivors' confidentiality to support women in reporting of violence incidents.

### ➔ Ministry of Health

Enhance health service delivery for survivors of violence by integrating specialised psychological support within health facilities and training for healthcare personnel on survivor-centred approach. This will enable the Ministry to respond to such cases with discretion and respect.

### ➔ Ministry of Education

Revise and enhance educational curricula to embed principles of equality between men and women and non-violence. By launching awareness campaigns aimed at preventing violence in schools., the Ministry can foster a culture of human rights within their institutions.

## KR-I PARLIAMENT

### ➔ Review Law No. (8) of 2011

Undertake a comprehensive review of the Anti-DV Law to expand its scope so that it encompasses all women and all forms of VAWG in both private and public spheres.

### ➔ Revise Existing Legislation

Systematically evaluate and repeal any discriminatory provisions within current laws and introduce strict and deterrent penalties for perpetrators of violent crimes, ensuring compliance with international HR standards.



### ➔ Enhance Community Awareness

Develop and implement targeted awareness-raising initiatives and strategic media campaigns—particularly in rural and conservative areas—aimed at transforming entrenched cultural norms and behaviours that perpetuate or justify VAWG.

### ➔ Establish Local Protection Networks

Facilitate training programmes for women within communities, enabling them to act as accessible and trusted points of contact for survivors of VAWG. This initiative should strengthen their capacity to provide initial support and improve referral mechanisms to appropriate authorities.

### ➔ Systematic Documentation of Violations and Shadow Reporting

Implement rigorous monitoring and documentation processes for incidents of VAWG. Produce shadow reports that assess existing policies, legislative frameworks and operational practices, thereby supporting national policies and advocacy efforts.

### ➔ Provide Comprehensive Support Services for Survivors

Develop and deliver a comprehensive set of integrated services tailored to the needs of survivors, that include legal assistance, psychological counselling and economic empowerment initiatives



### ➔ Invest in Long-term Preventive and Developmental Programmes

Allocate sustainable funding for both governmental and civil society initiatives and programs for combating VAWG.

### ➔ Enhance Institutional Capacity-Building

Implement regular capacity building programs to ensure that relevant institutions play an effective role in combating VAWG.

### ➔ Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks

Ensure the continued provision of reliable data to support the evaluation of VAWG-related interventions, thereby enabling the formulation of evidence-based policies and enhancement of governmental responses.

### ➔ Promote Community Change Initiatives

Fund and implement programmes designed to transform community behaviours associated with VAWG. Engage local stakeholders—including opinion leaders, religious figures and educational institutions—to foster a cultural shift toward equality, respect and non-violence.



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# ANNEX 2 DIAGRAMS

## Section I: Demographic Information

Diagram 1: Distribution of Respondents by Governorate

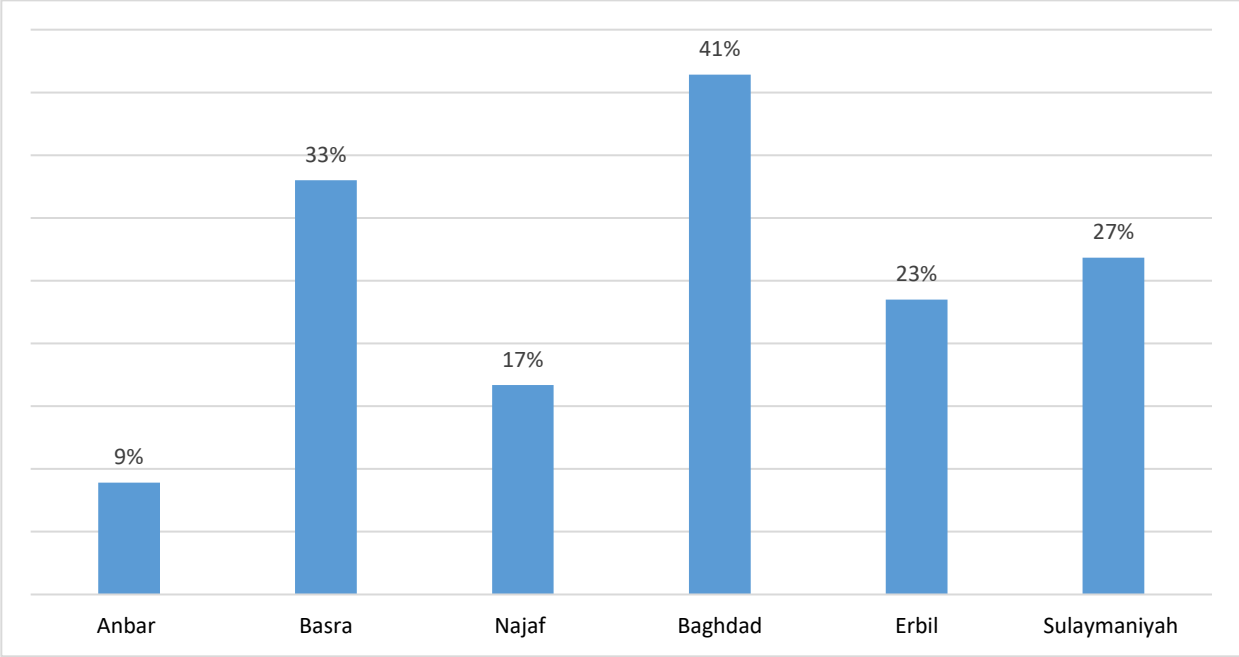



Diagram 2: Distribution of Respondents by Nature of the Area

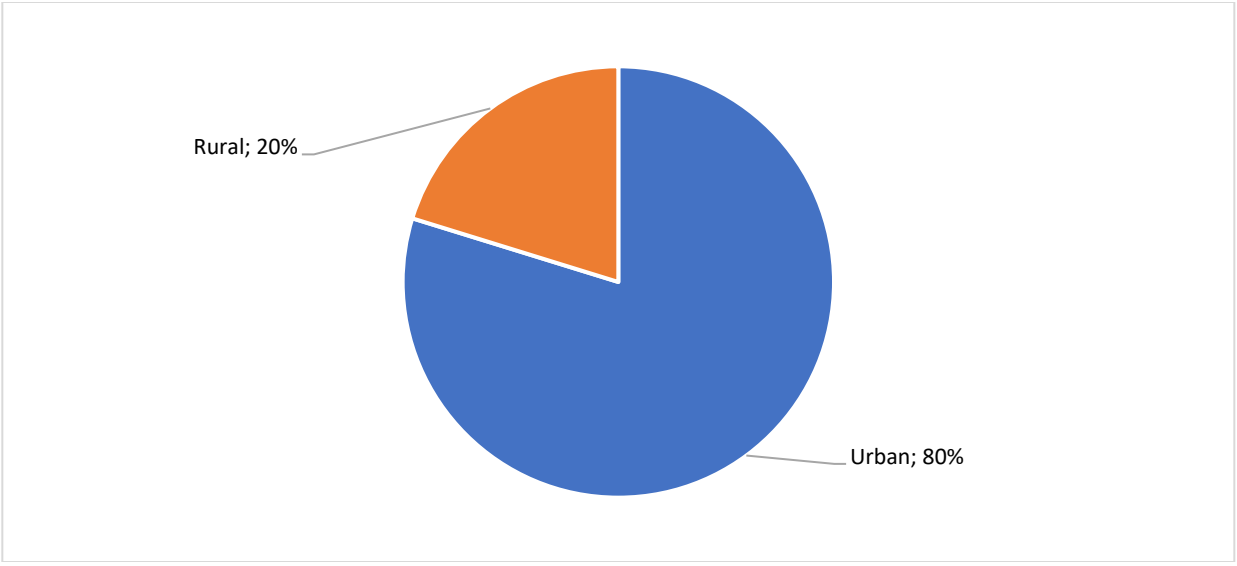

Rural; 20%
Urban; 80%

Diagram 3: Distribution of Respondents by Nationality

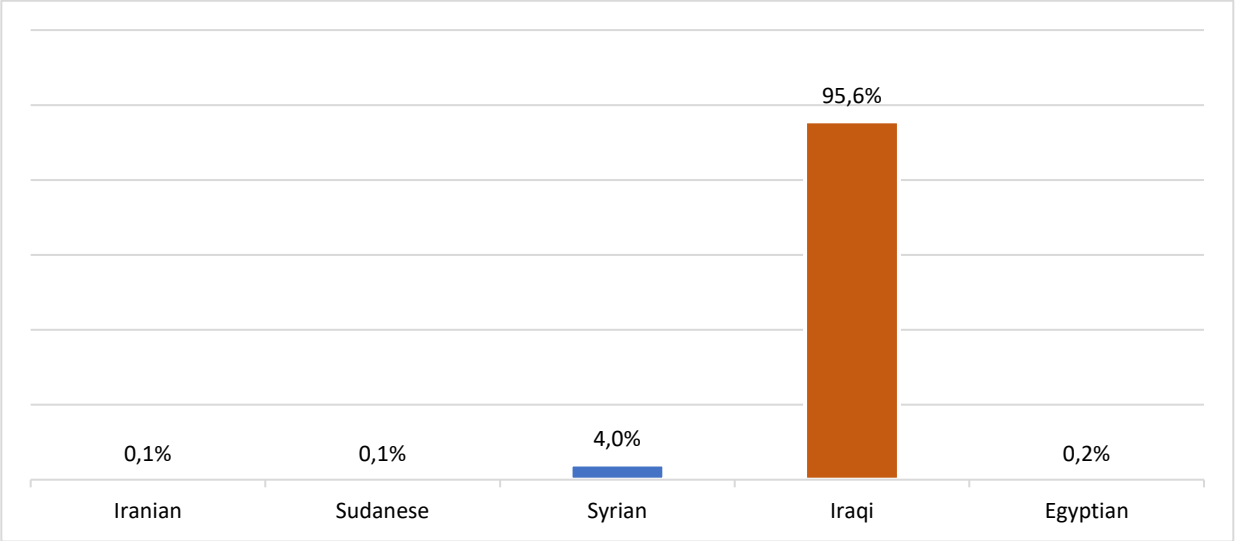



Diagram 4: Distribution of Participants by Age Group

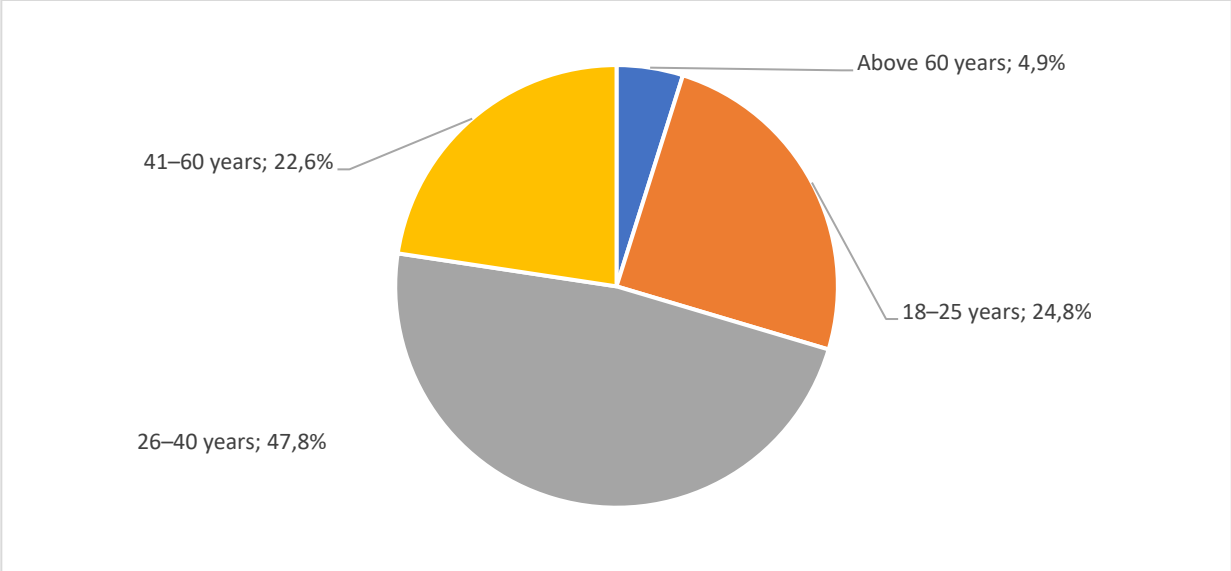


Diagram 5: Distribution of Participants by Education Level

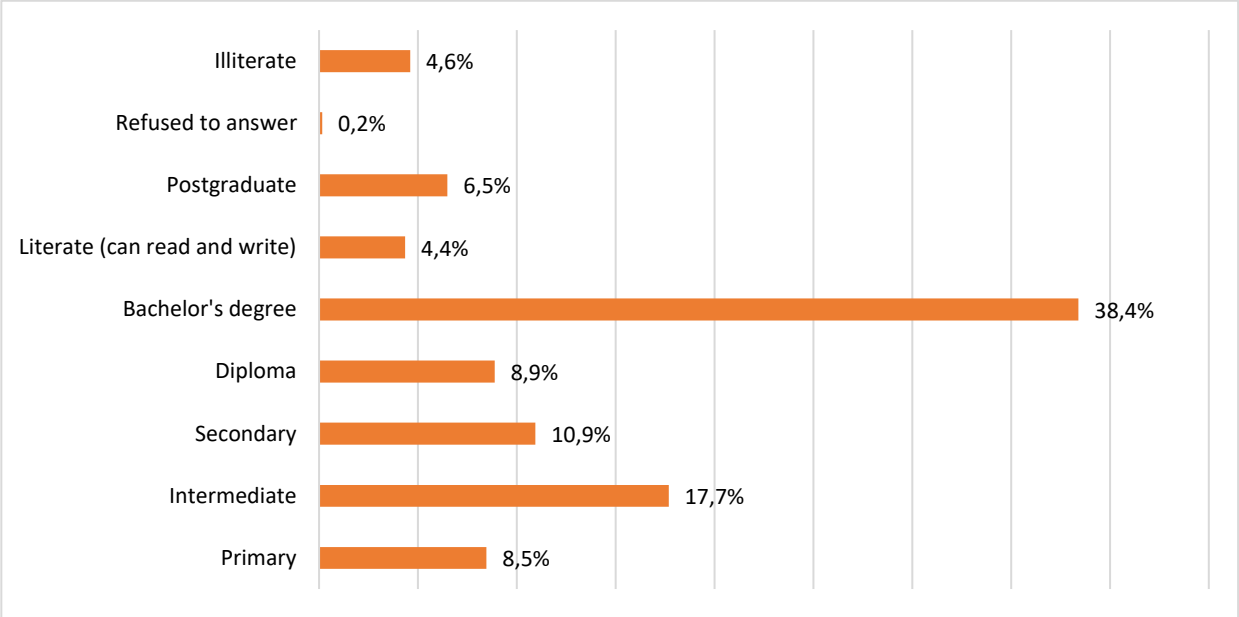



Diagram 6: Distribution of Participants by Marital Status

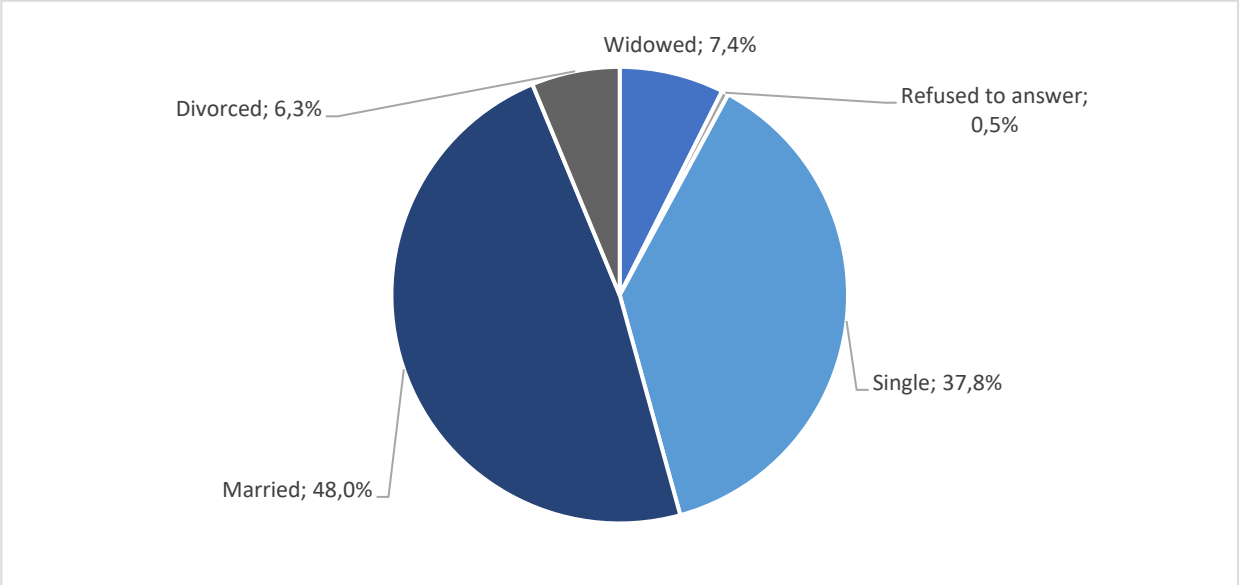
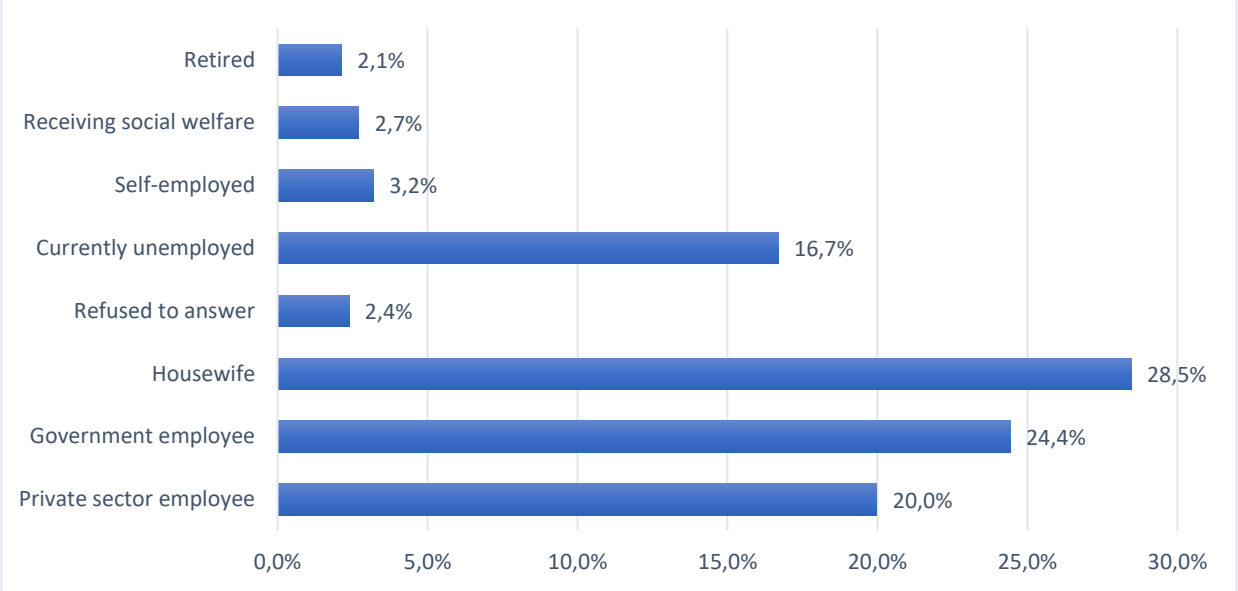


Diagram 7: Distribution of Respondents by Relationship to the Workforce




## Section II Awareness about VAWG

Diagram 8

2.1 What does violence against women and girls mean to you?

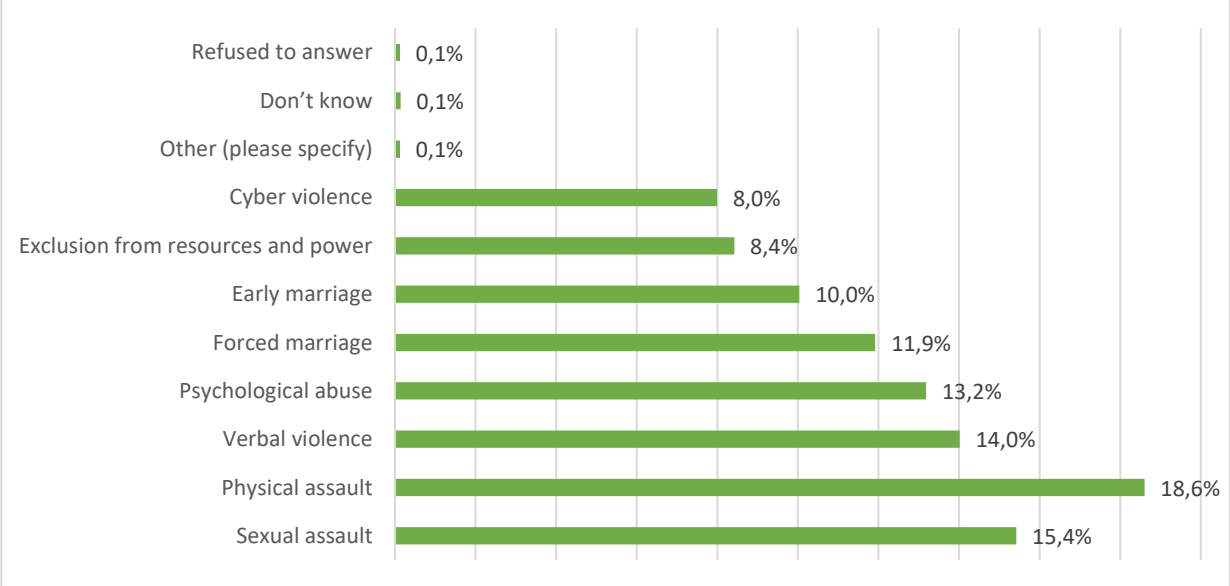


Diagram 9
2.2 In your opinion, how prevalent is VAWG in your community?

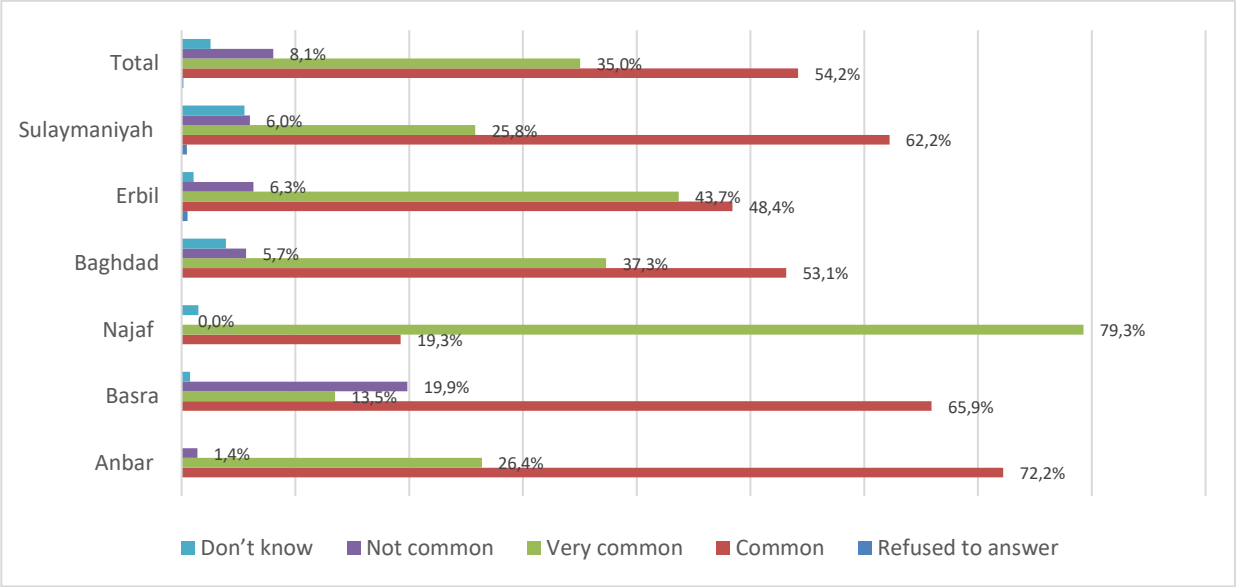



Diagram 10
2.3 What are your main sources of information about VAWG?

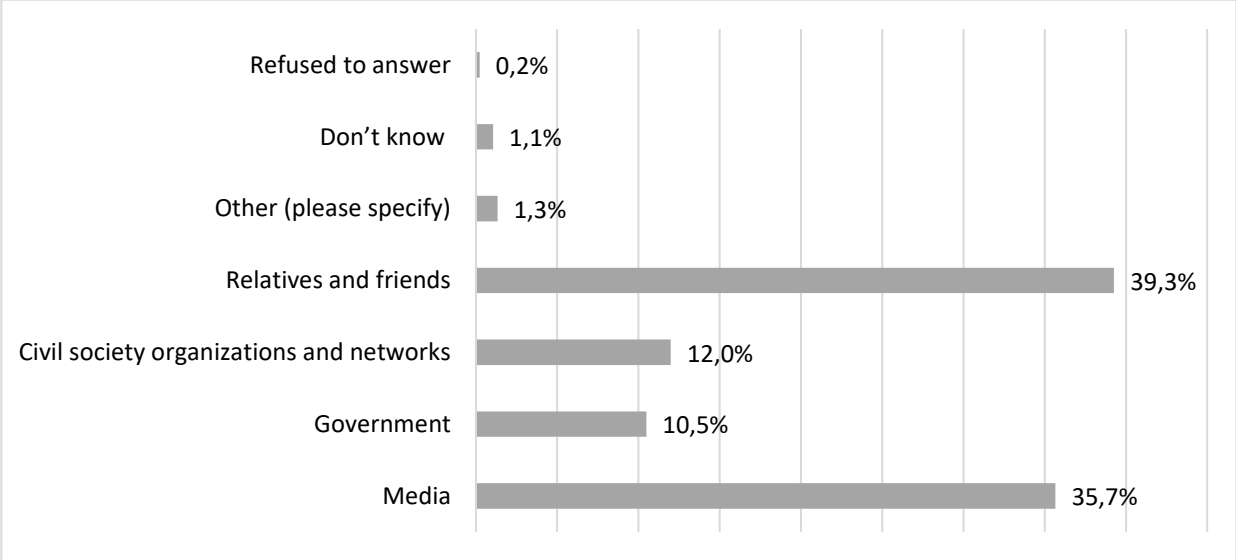


Diagram 11
2.4 In your opinion, what is your level of knowledge about VAWG?

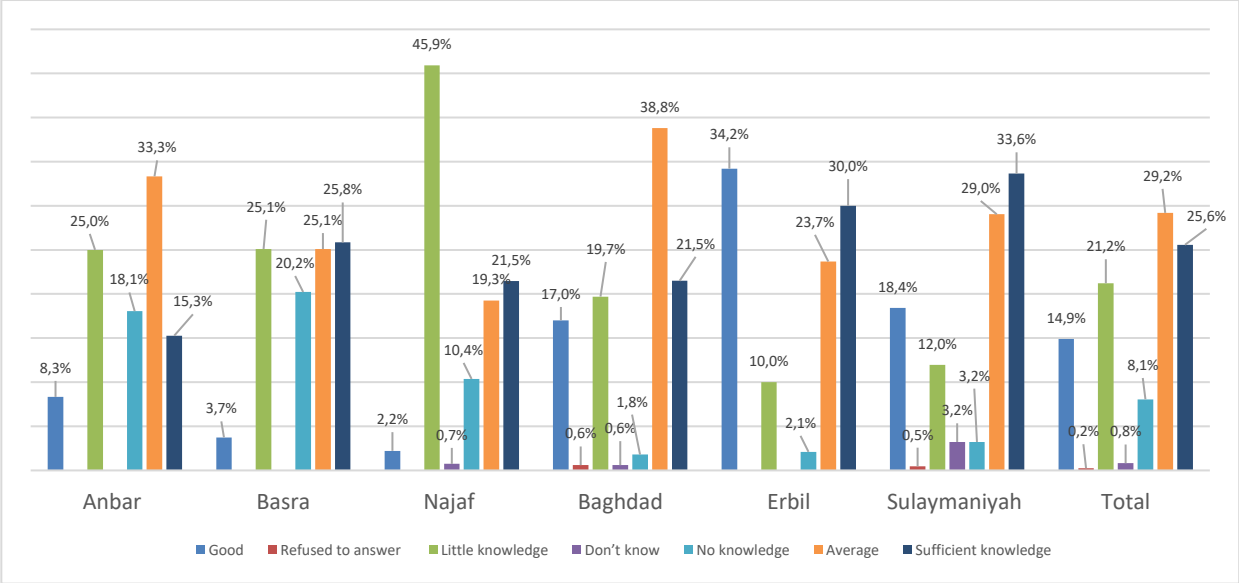



Diagram 12
2.5 What is your level of awareness of legal procedures for reporting VAWG?

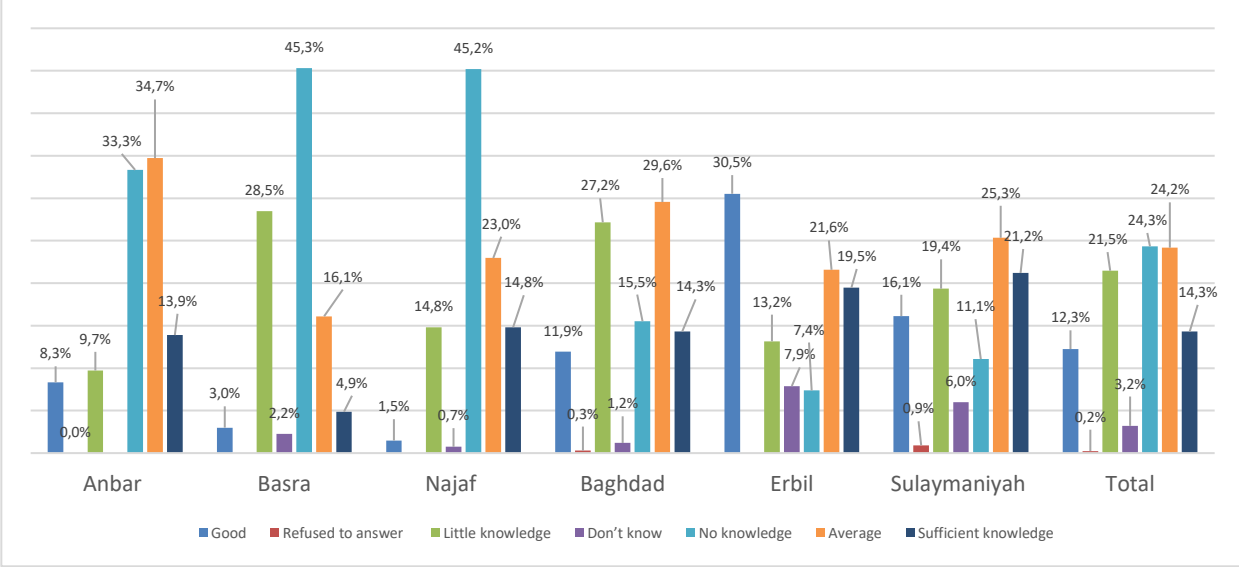


Diagram 13
2.6 Are you aware of government institutions addressing VAWG in your area?

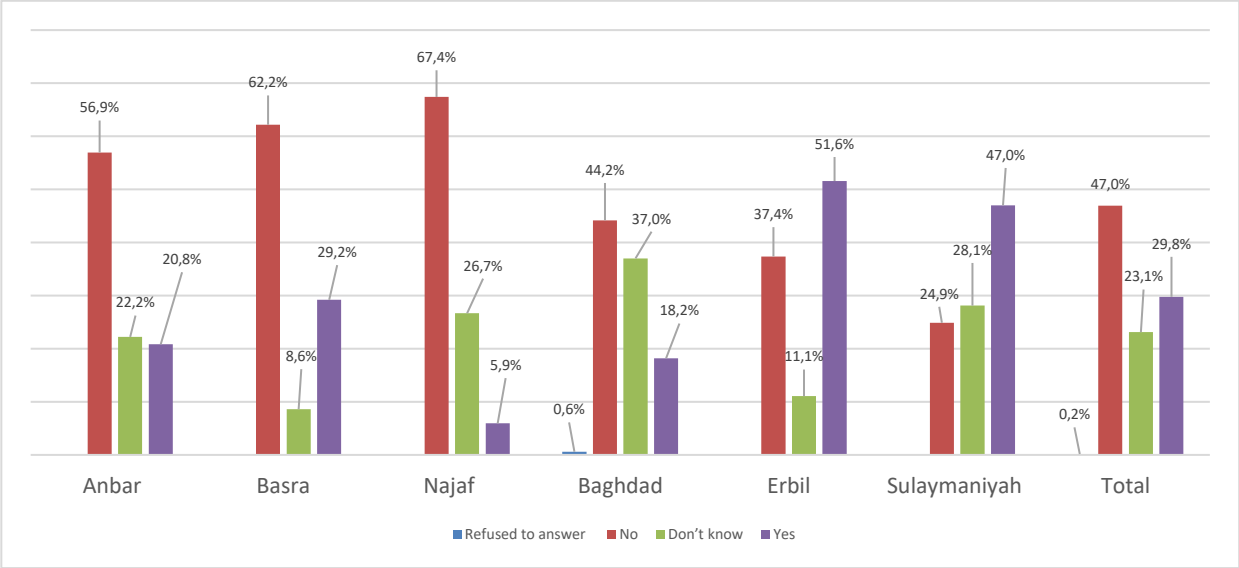



Diagram 14
2.7 Are you aware of civil society organisations addressing VAWG in your area?

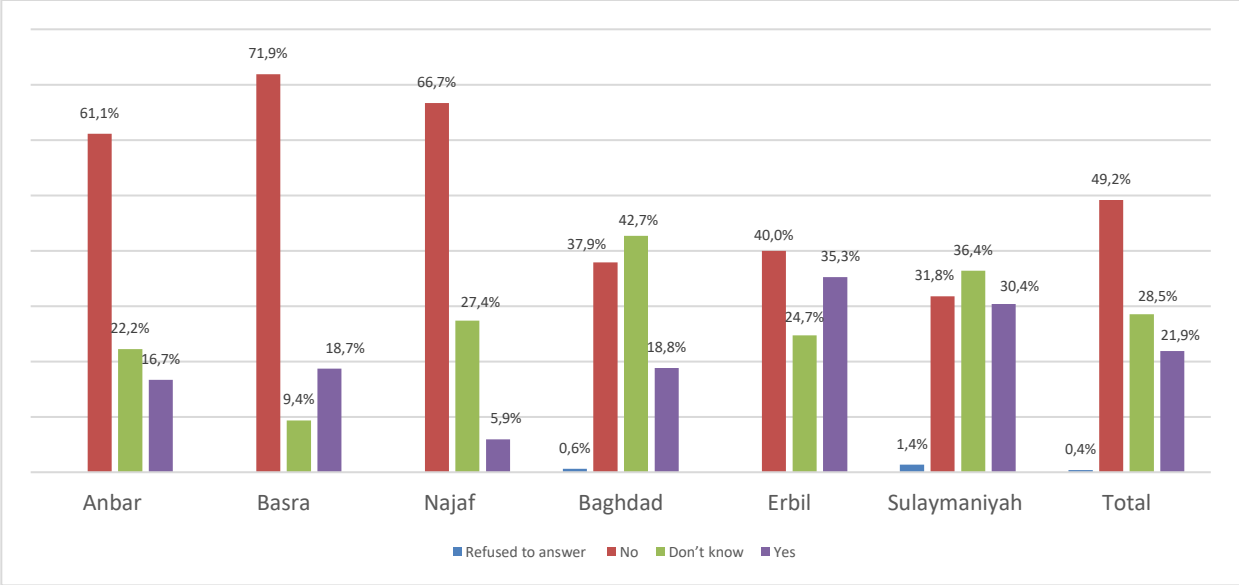


Diagram 15
2.8 Is there a specific hotline for reporting VAWG in Iraq?

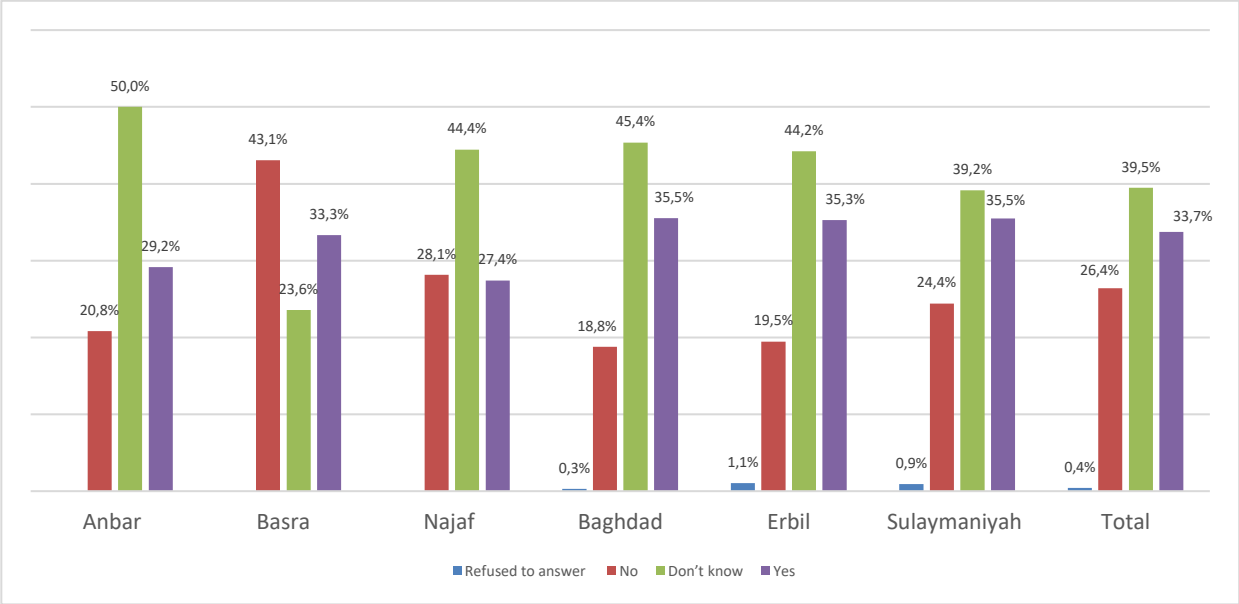



Diagram 16
2.9 Are you aware of legal procedures for reporting harassment incidents?

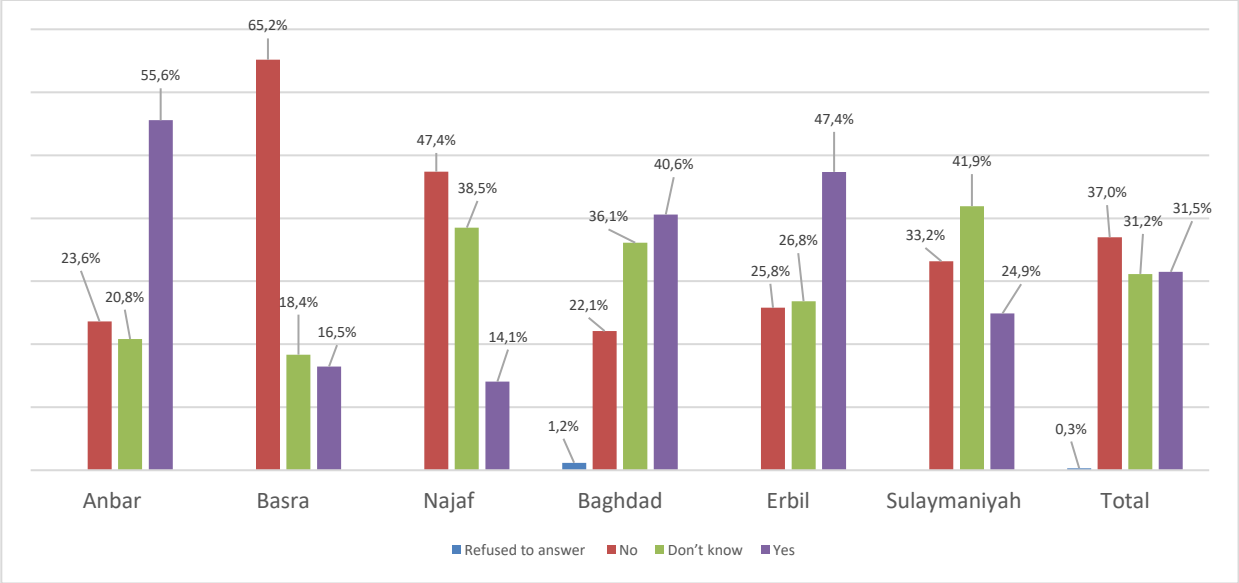


Diagram 17:
2.10 Does the government provide shelters for women survivors of violence?

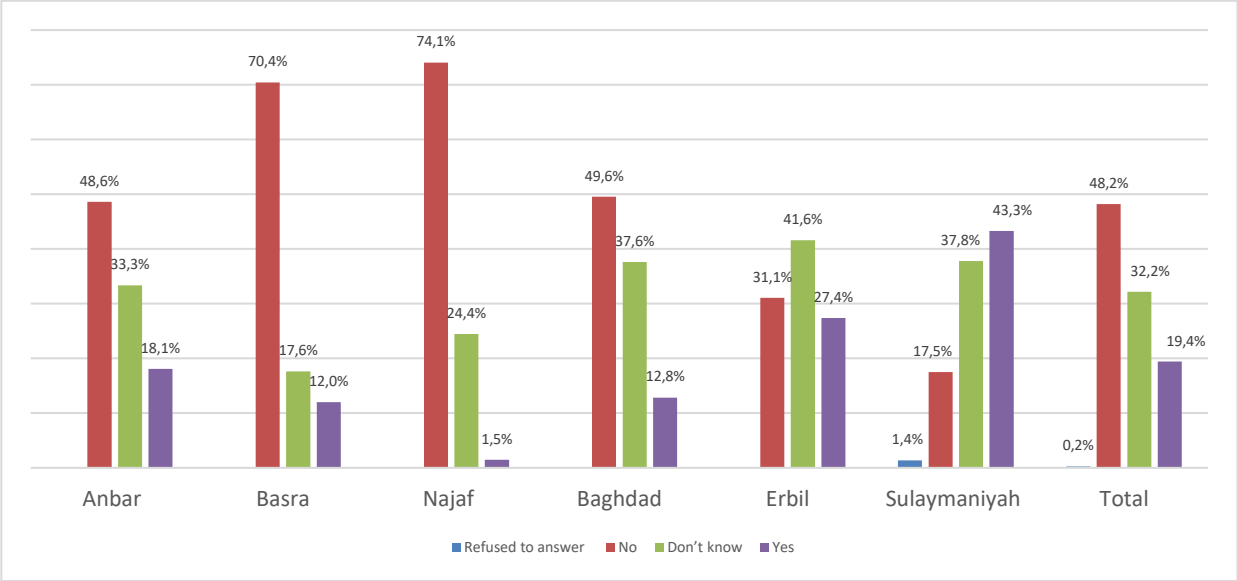



Diagram 18
2.11 (If Yes) Are these shelters known and accessible to survivors?

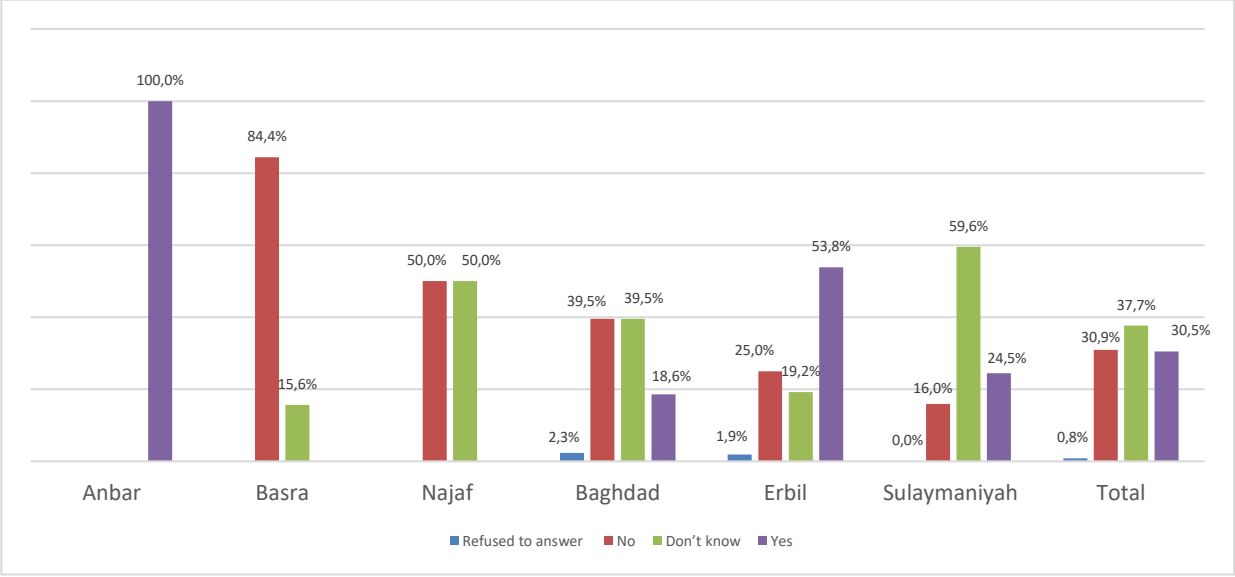


Diagram 19

2.12 Do civil society organisations provide shelters for women and girls who are survivors of violence?

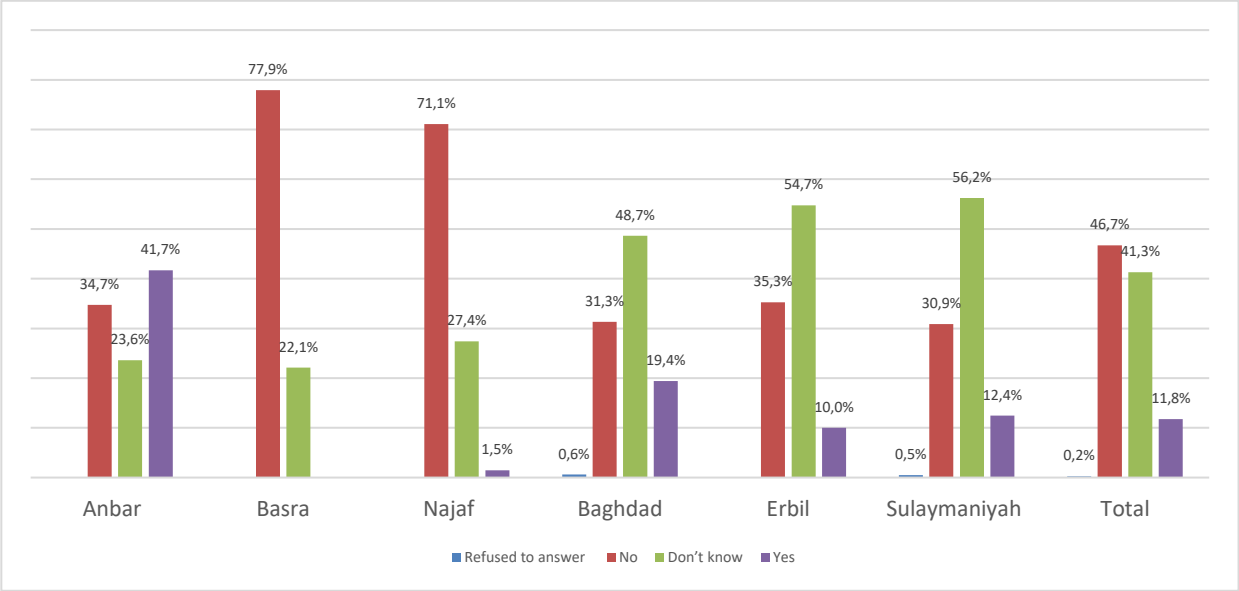
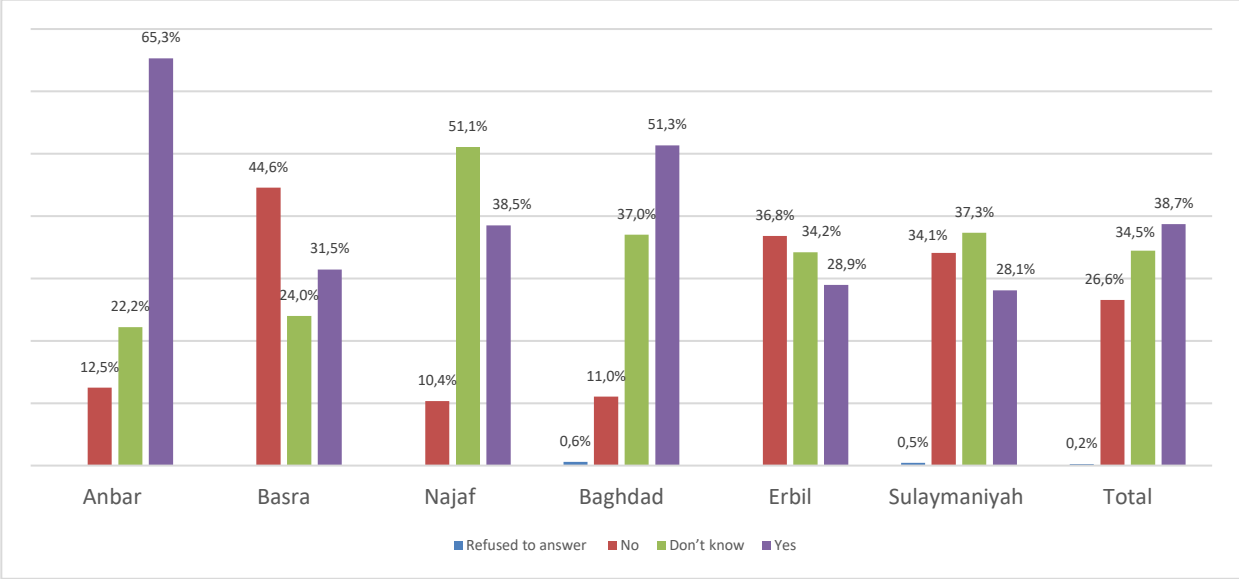



Diagram 20

2.13 Do civil society organisations provide services like psychological or logistical support?



## Section III Beliefs and opinion

Diagram 21

3.1.1 According to you, is it acceptable for the husband to hit his wife in the following cases: If she neglects the children.

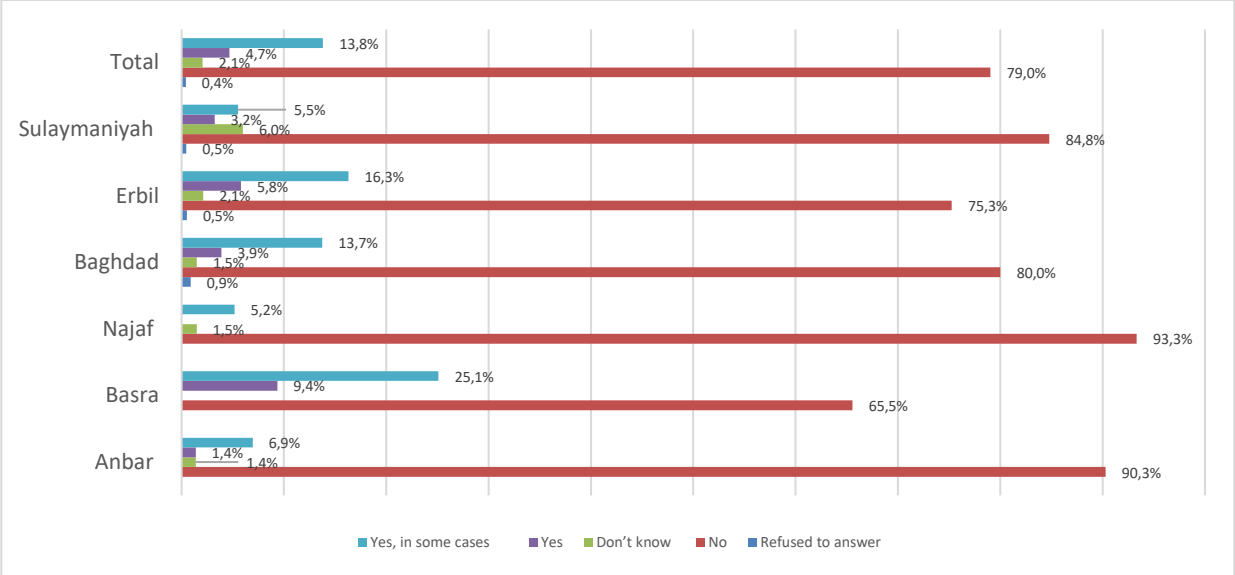



Diagram 22

3.1.2 According to you, is it acceptable for the husband to hit his wife in the following cases: If argues with him.

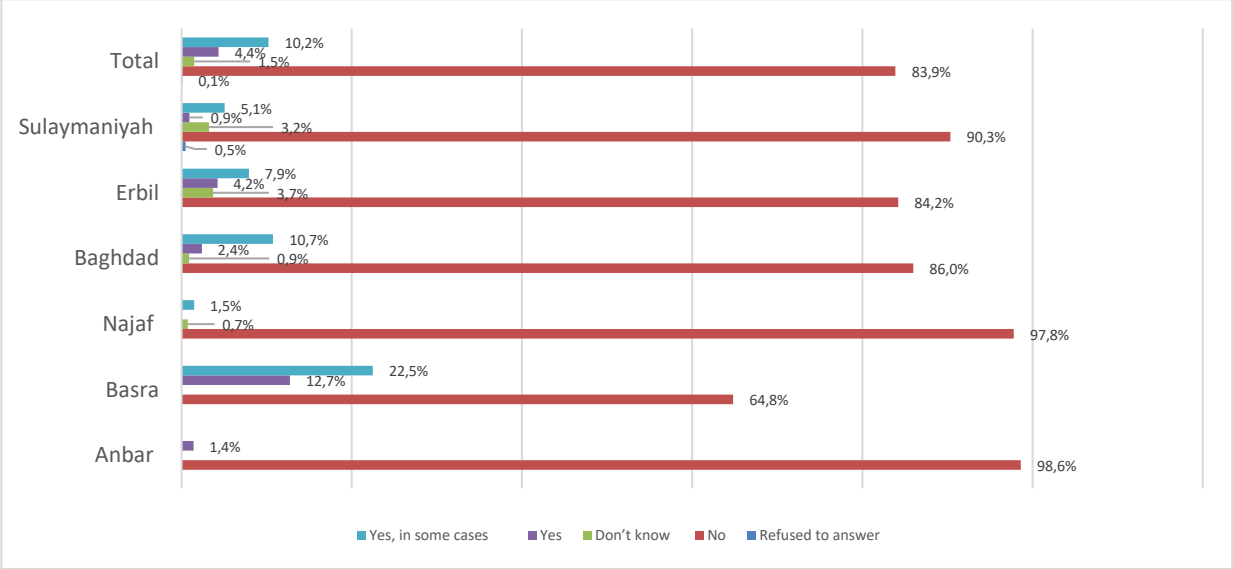


Diagram 23

3.1.3 According to you, is it acceptable for the husband to hit his wife in the following cases: If she refuses sex.

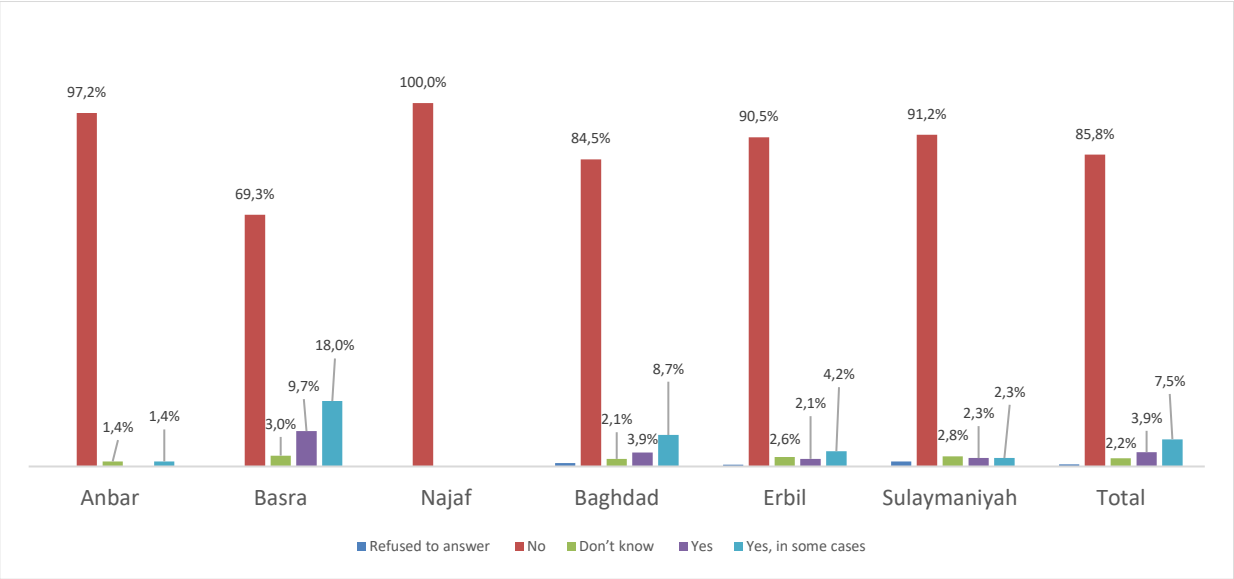



Diagram 24

3.2 Harassment should not be punished in some cases depending on women's clothing and behaviour.

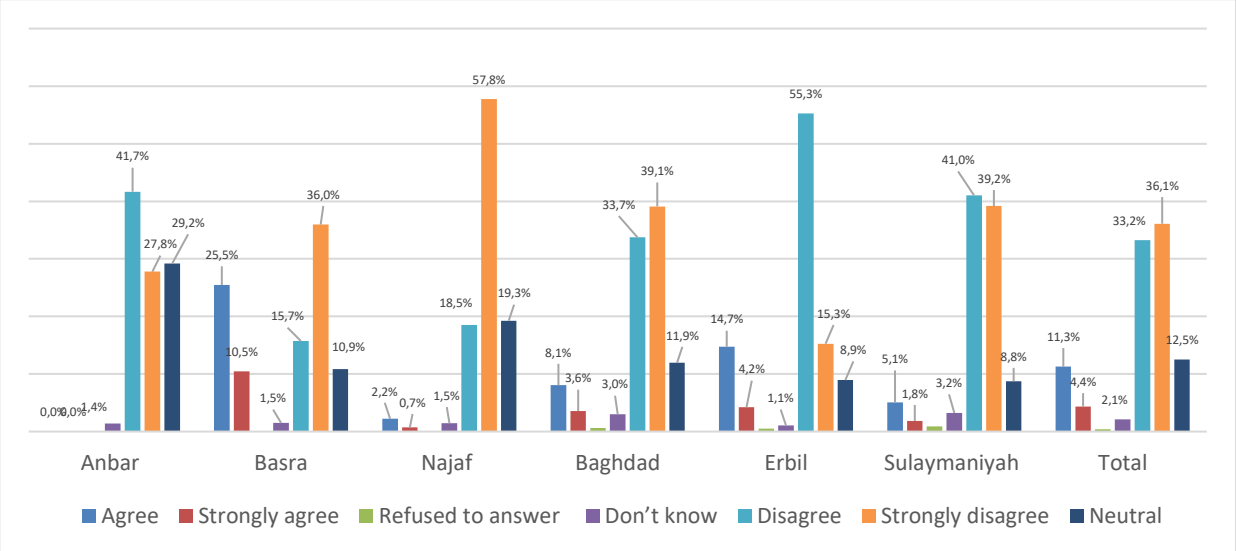


Diagram 25
3.3 Men should have guardianship over their wives and families.

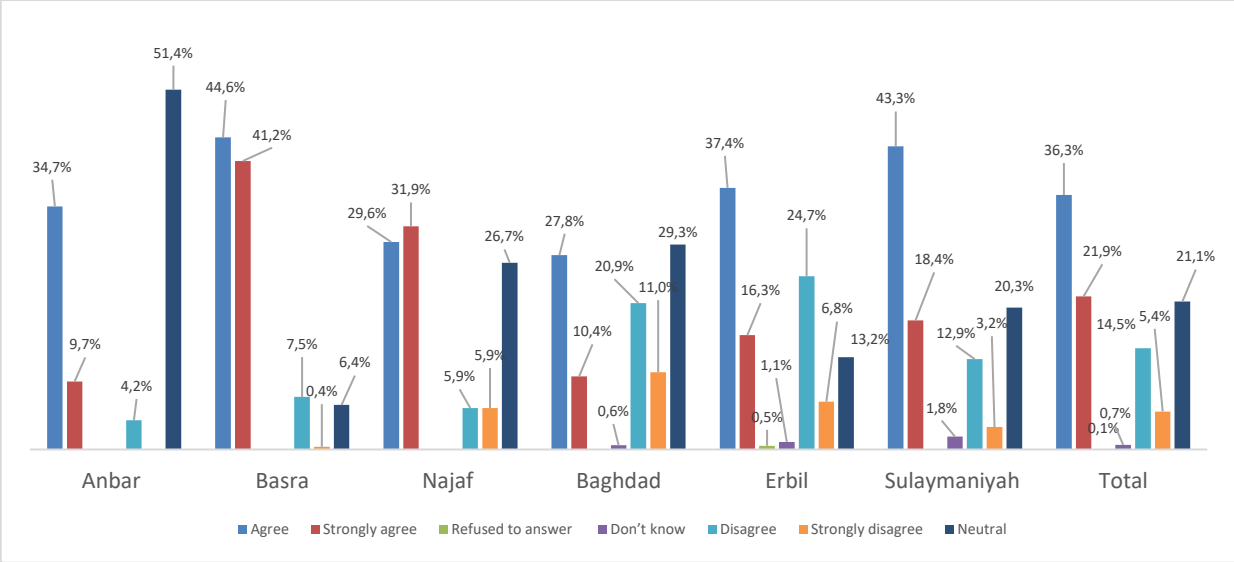



Diagram 26
3.4 Boys should be responsible for their sisters' behaviour, even if they are younger.

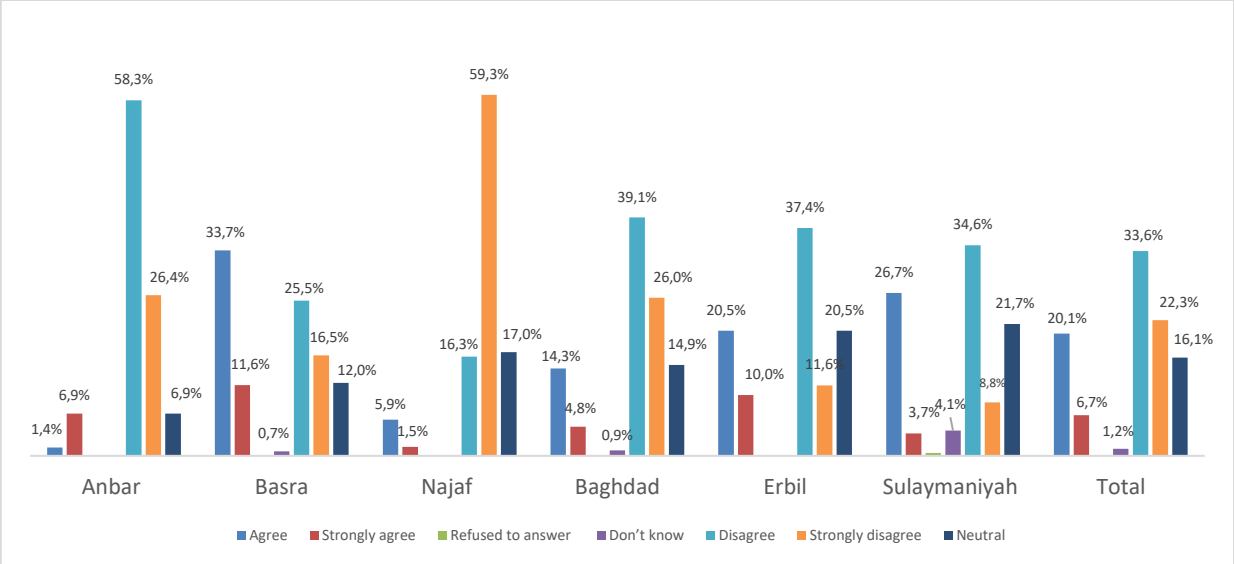


Diagram 27

3.5 In your opinion, is information about VAWG adequately represented in the media?

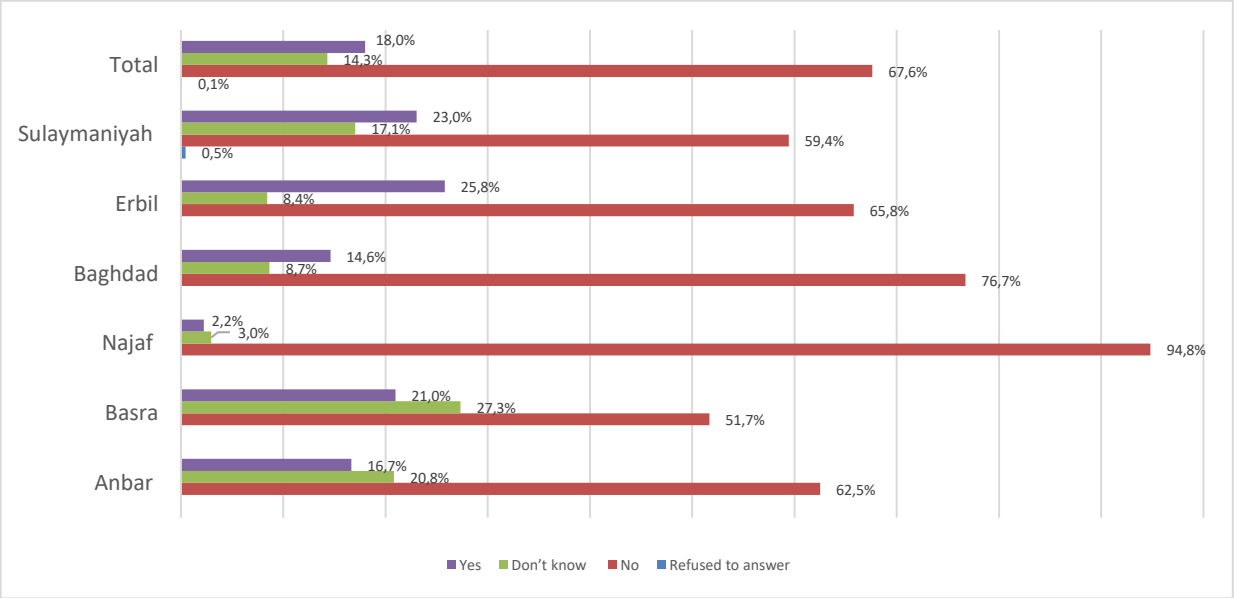



Diagram 28

3.6 Are the laws and procedures to protect women from violence sufficient in Iraq?

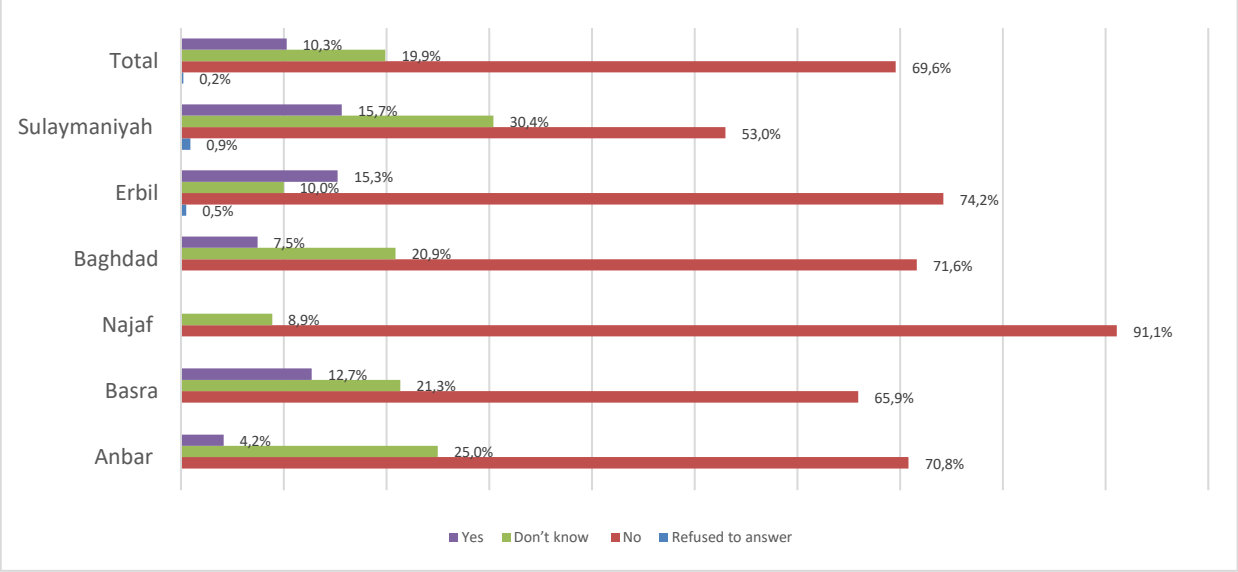


Diagram 29

3.7 Do you believe women's rights and equal participation in all aspects of life are legally recognised on the same basis as men's rights?

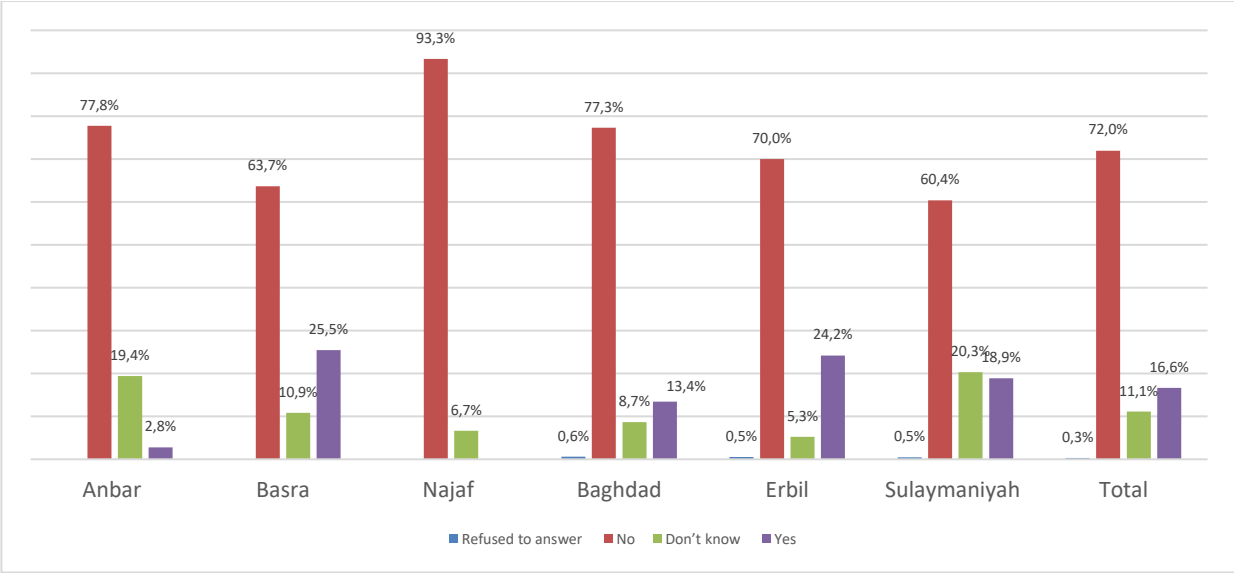



Diagram 30

3.8 Do you believe women have the same financial rights as men in marriage or after divorce under the law?

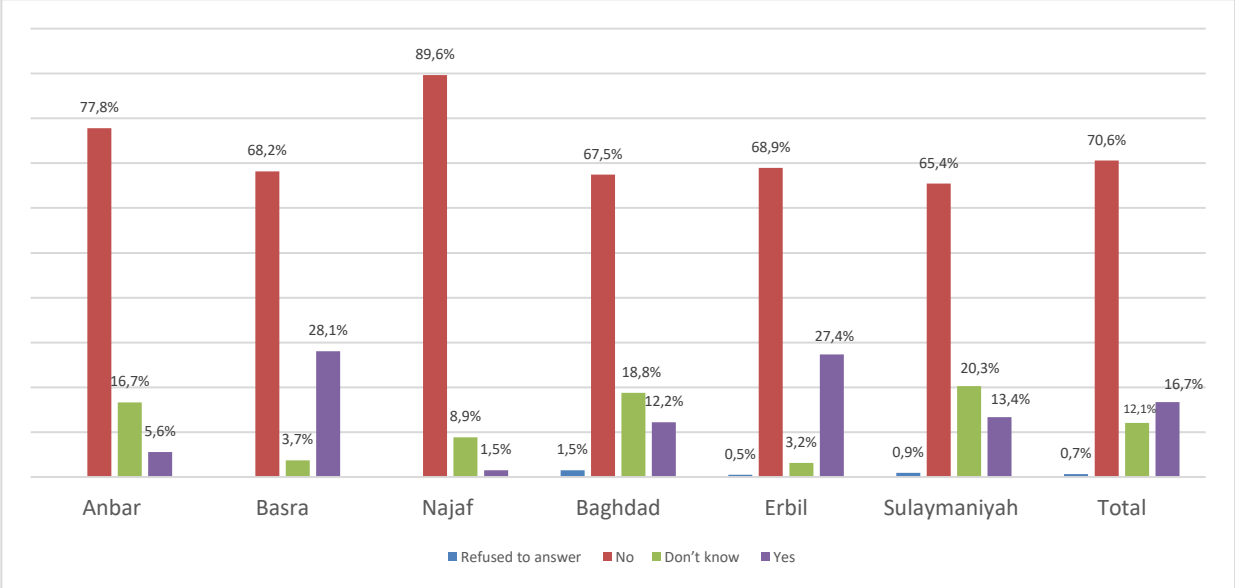


Diagram 31

3.9 Do you believe women subjected to violence by their husbands or families stay with them due to a lack of financial resources?

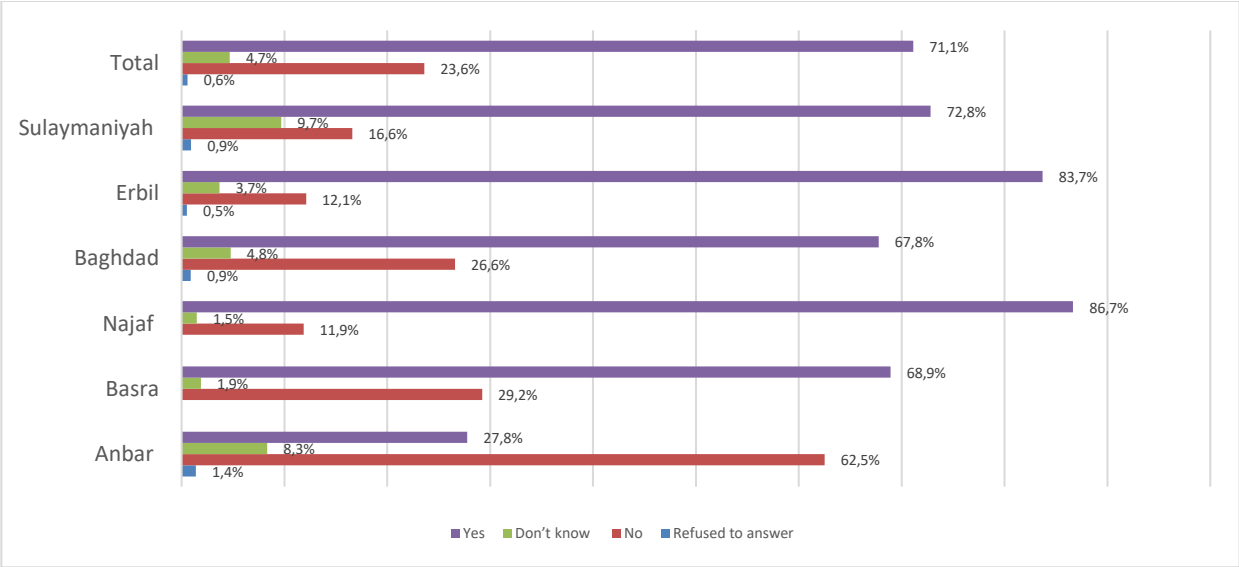



Diagram 32

3.10 Do you believe women have the right to move in public spaces in the same way as men?

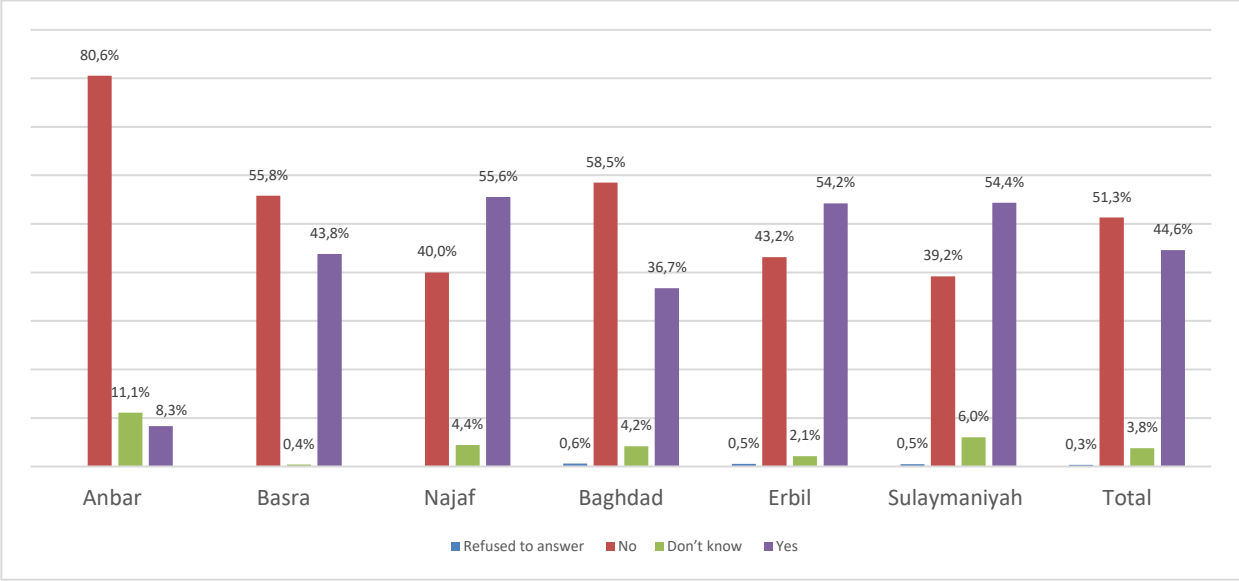


Diagram 33

3.11.1 Is it difficult or easy for women to utilise the following services in the community? Police.

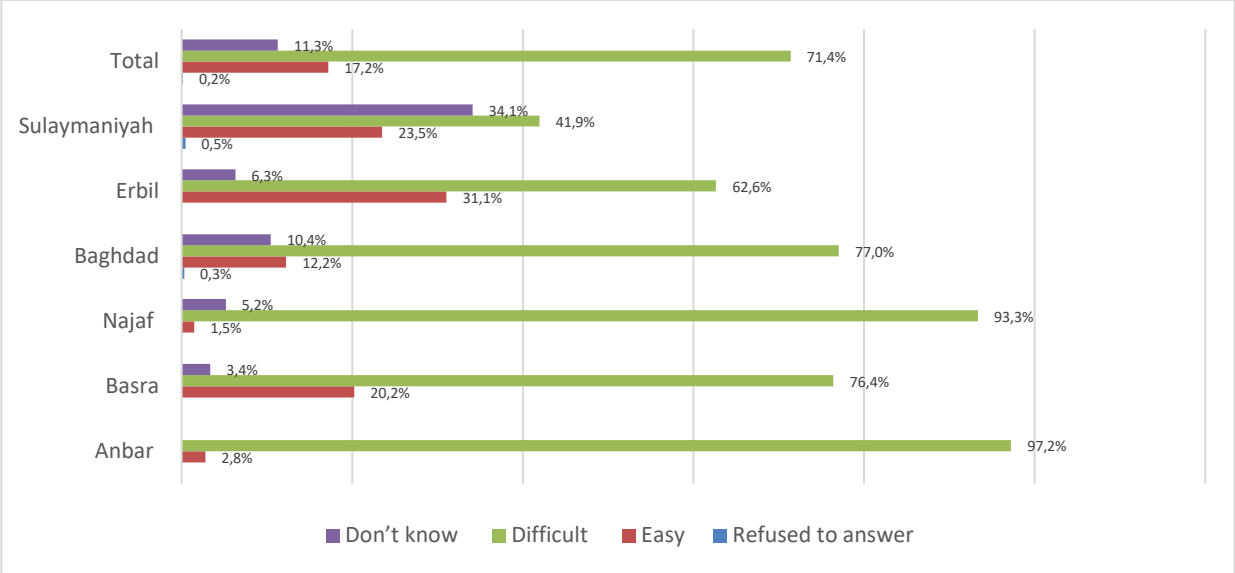



Diagram 34

3.11.2 Is it difficult or easy for women to utilise the following services in the community? Health Care.

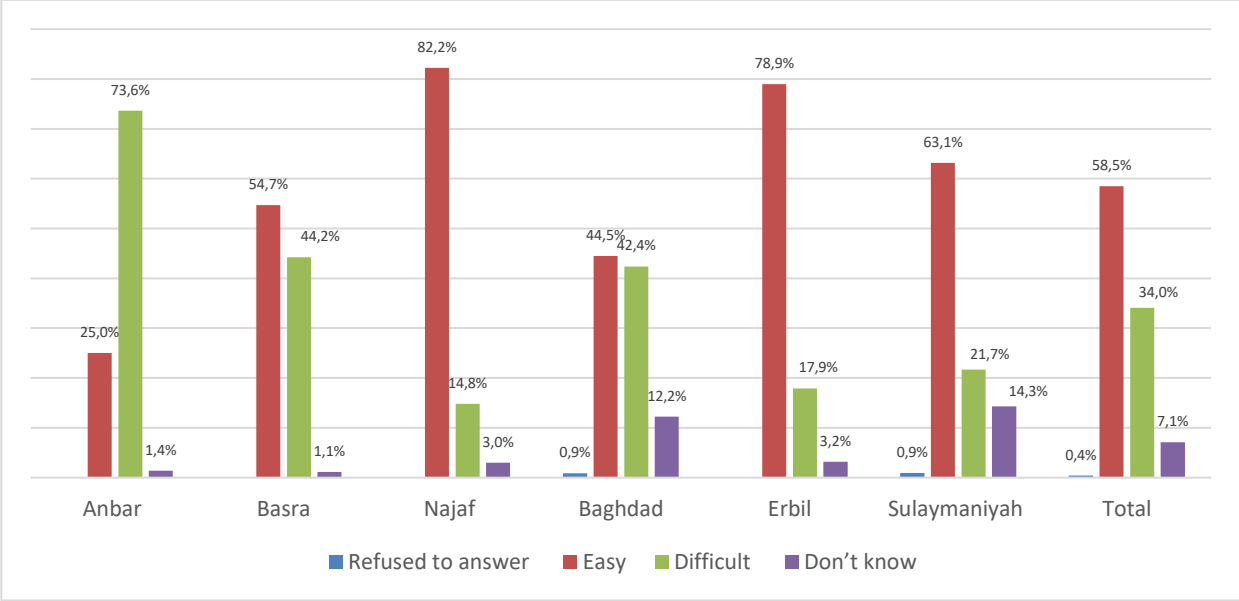


Diagram 35

3.11.3 Is it difficult or easy for women to utilise the following services in the community? Legal aid.

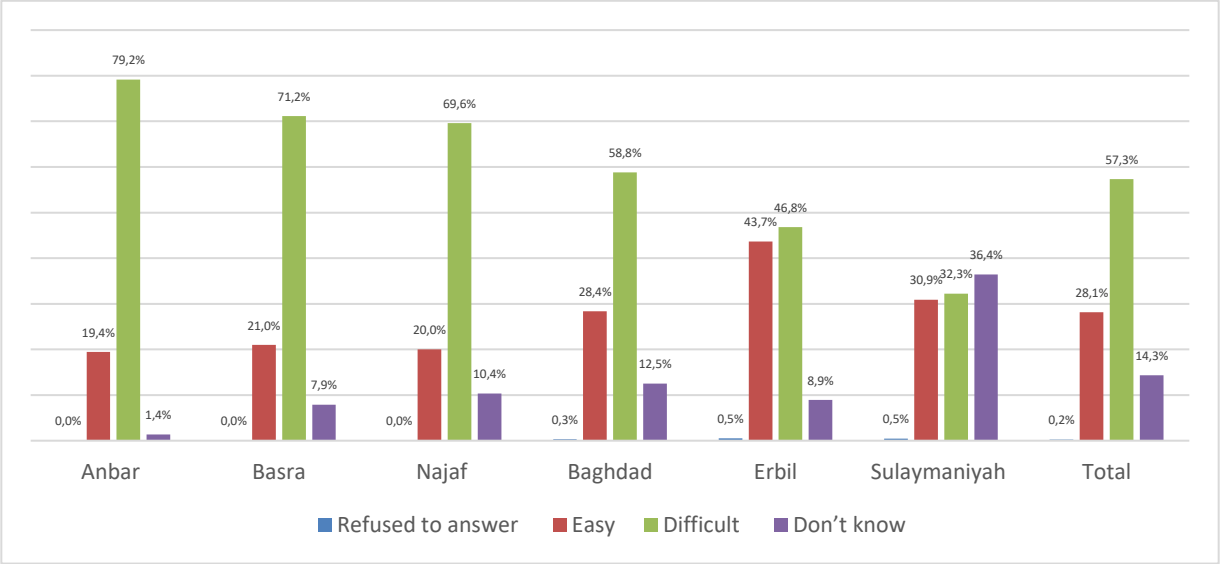



Diagram 36

3.11.4 Is it difficult or easy for women to utilise the following services in the community? Protection /assistance.

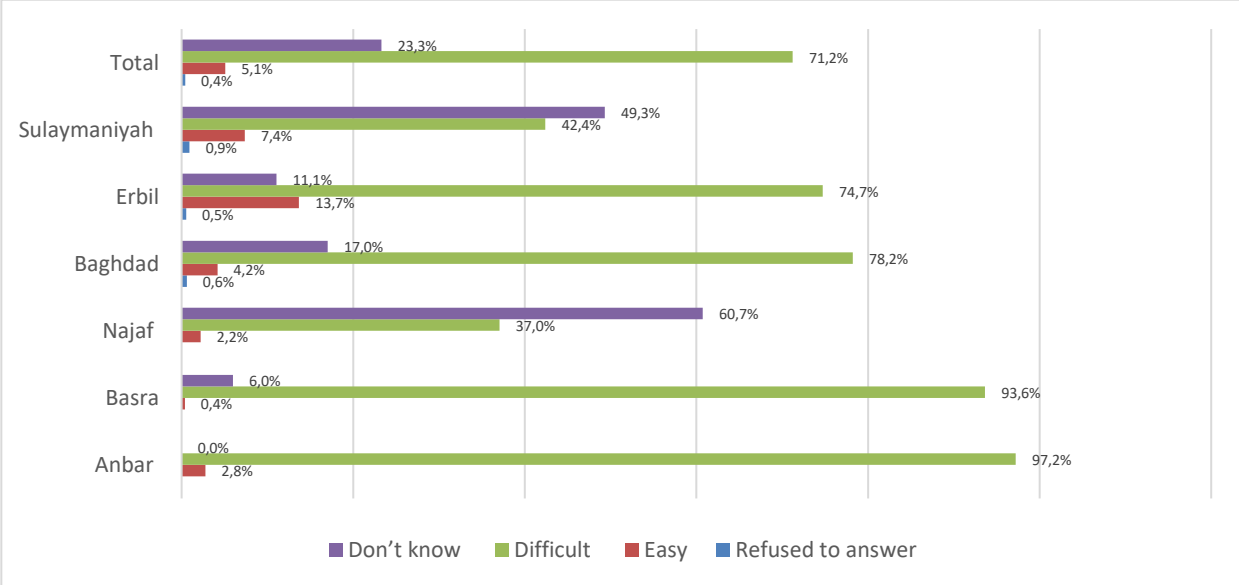


Diagram 37
3.12 Has armed conflict in Iraq increased VAWG?

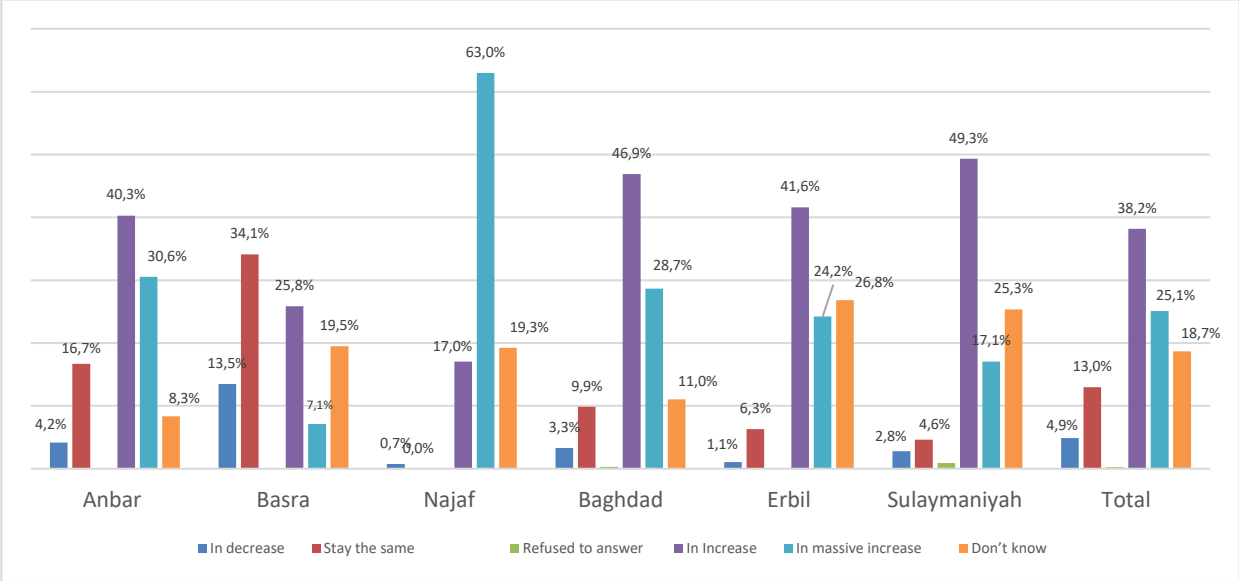



Diagram 38
3.13 Which types of violence against women and girls have notably increased due to armed conflict?

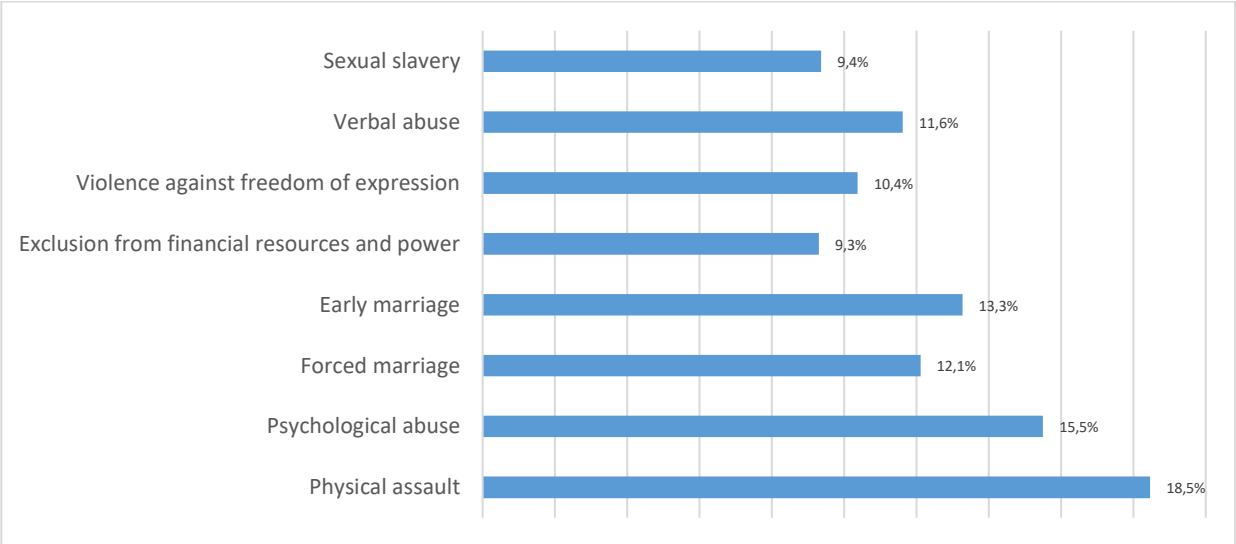
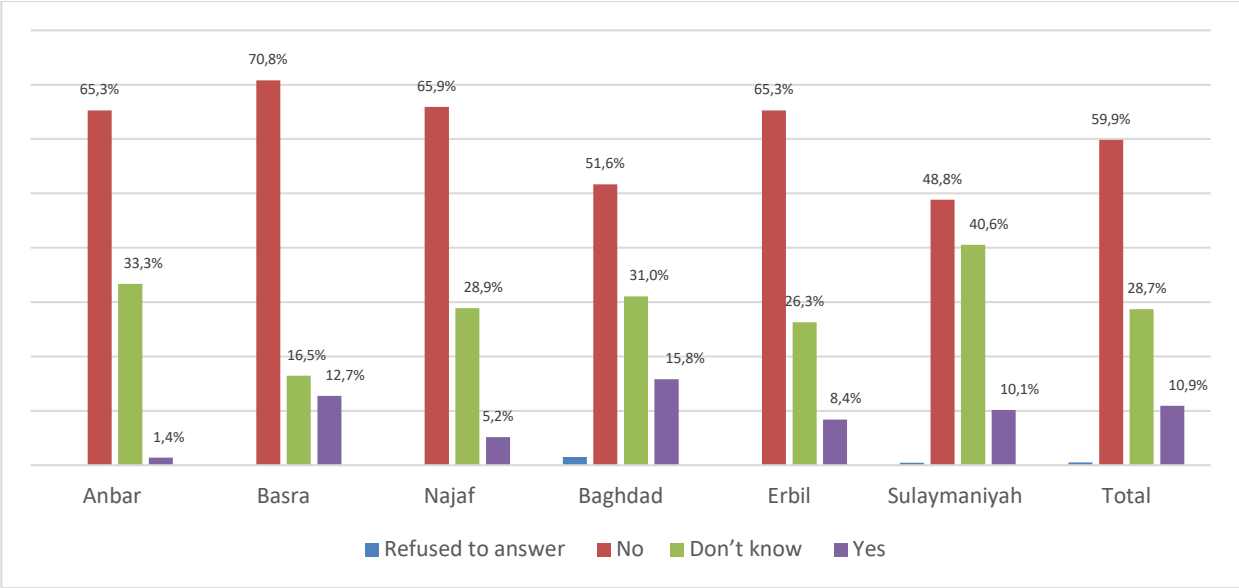


Diagram 39

3.14 In the past year, have you heard of any campaigns by the government or civil institutions in Iraq supporting women facing violence?



## Section IV: Personal experience of VAWG

Diagram 40
4.1 In the past six months, have you witnessed VAWG?

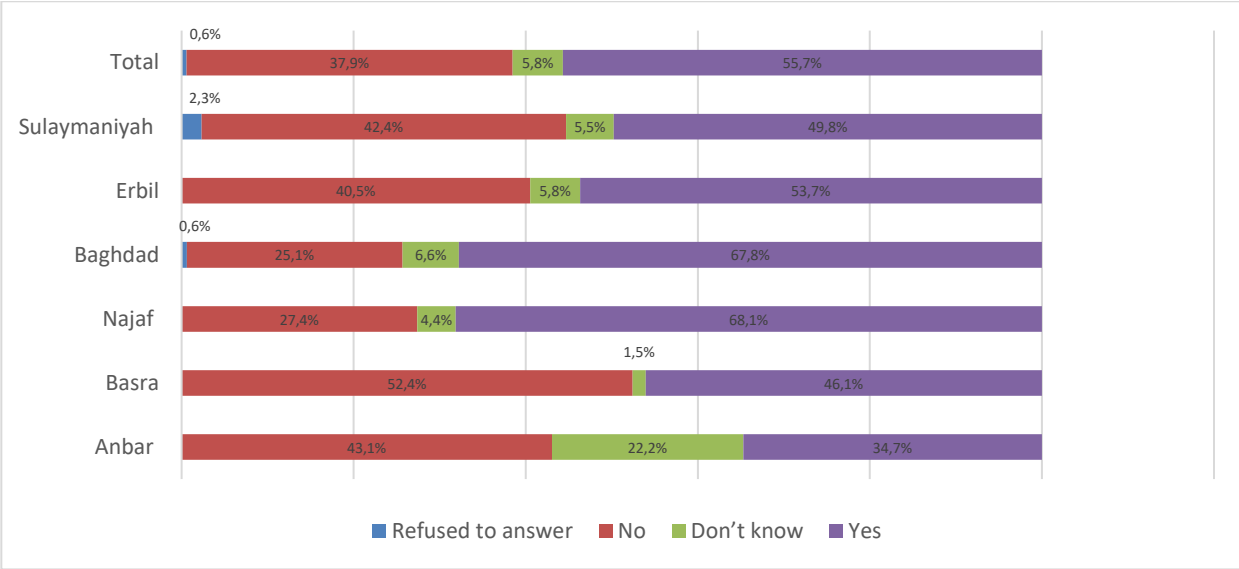



Diagram 41
4.2 If yes, what type of violence did you witness?

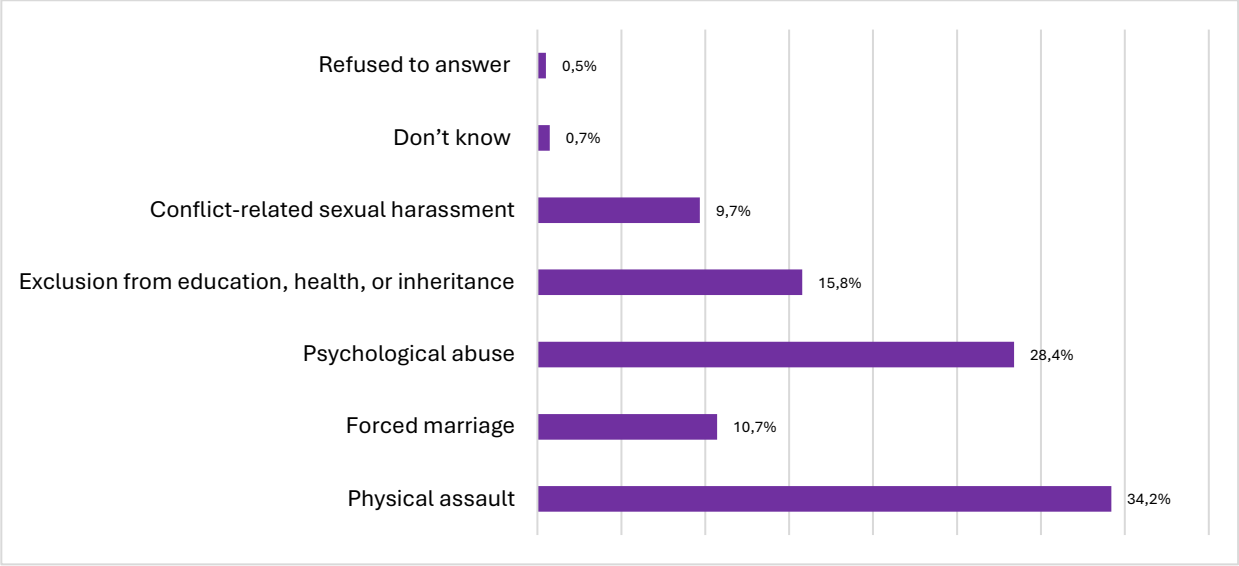


Diagram 42
4.3 Do women who experience violence seek help?

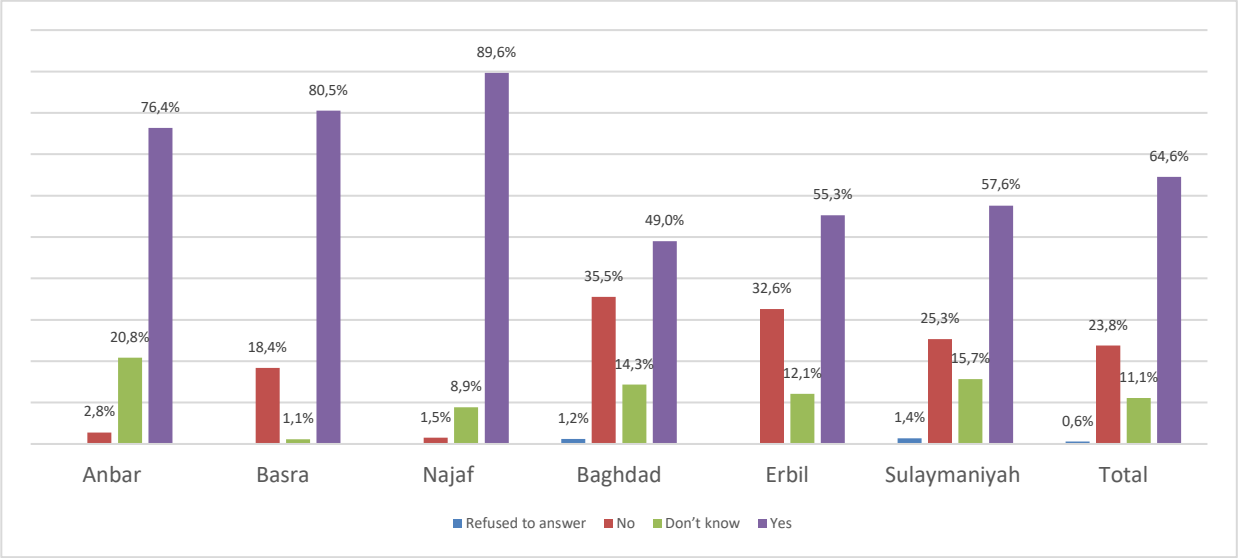



Diagram 43
4.4 If yes, from your experience, what kind of help do survivors of VAWG seek first?

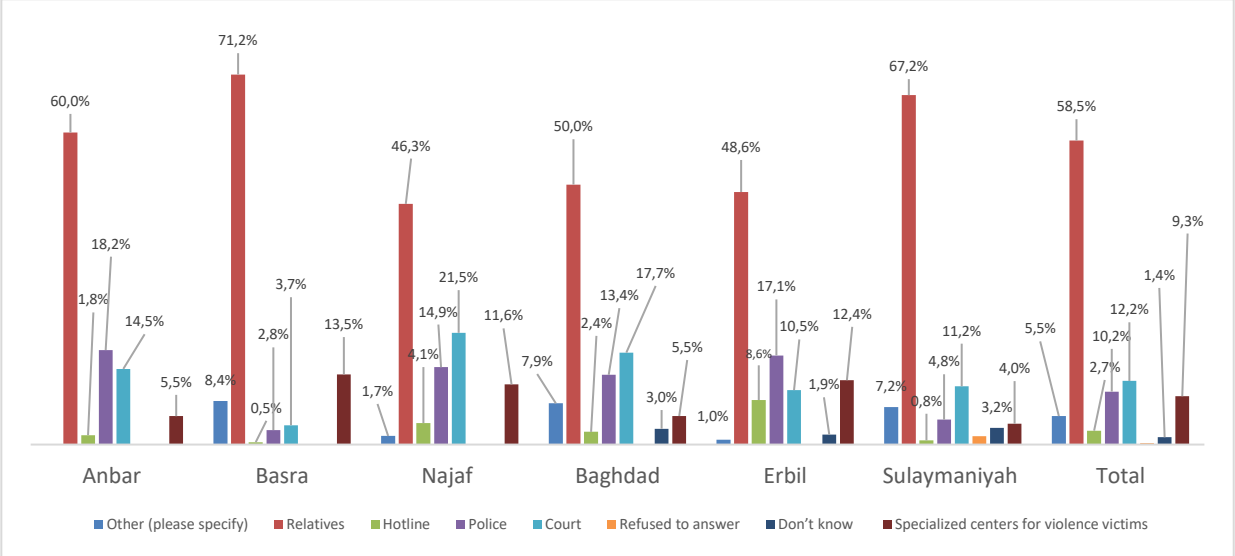


Diagram 44
4.5 From your experience, what barriers prevent women from reporting violence?

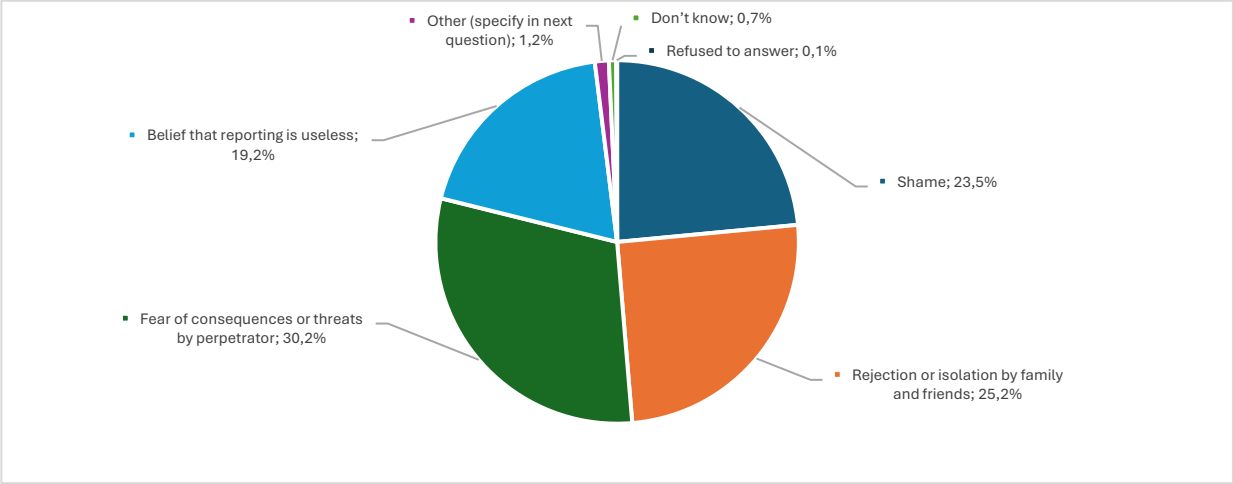



Diagram 45
4.6 During the past 12 months, have you been insulted in the street, on public transport, or in other public spaces?

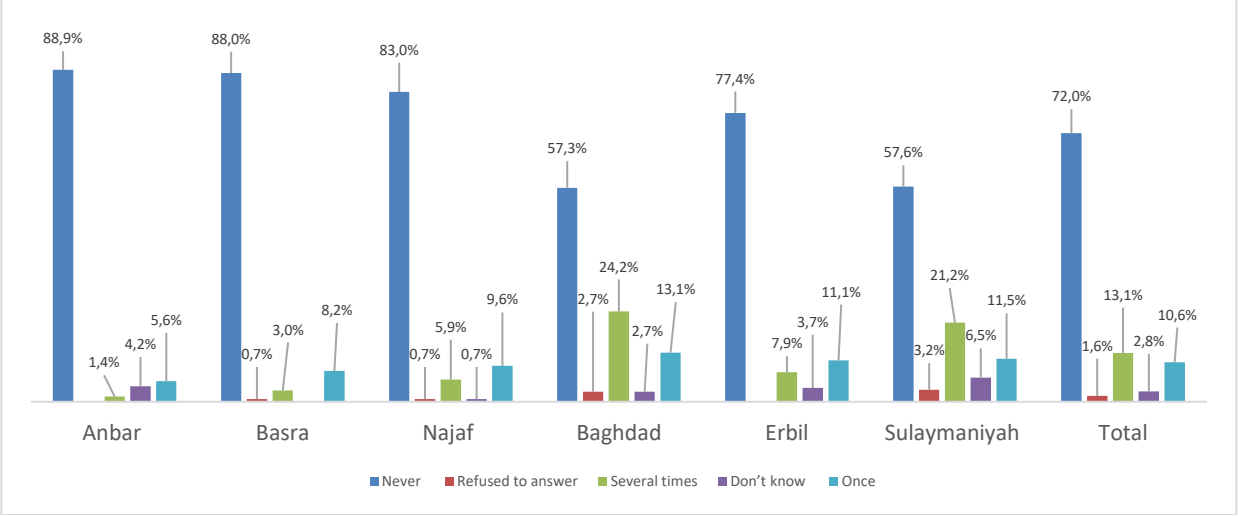


Diagram 46

4.7 During the past 12 months, did anyone attempt or force you to undergo or perform any sexual contact/acts against your will?

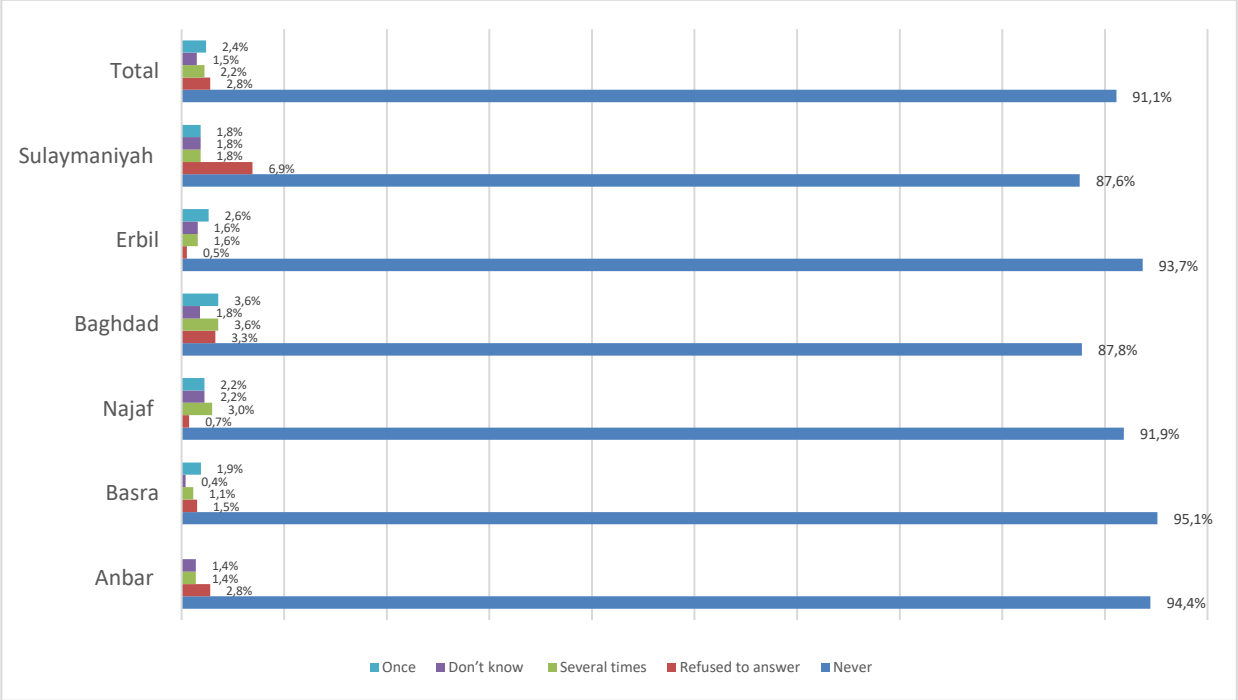



Diagram 47

4.8 During the past 12 months, did anyone try or manage to have sexual intercourse with you against your will?

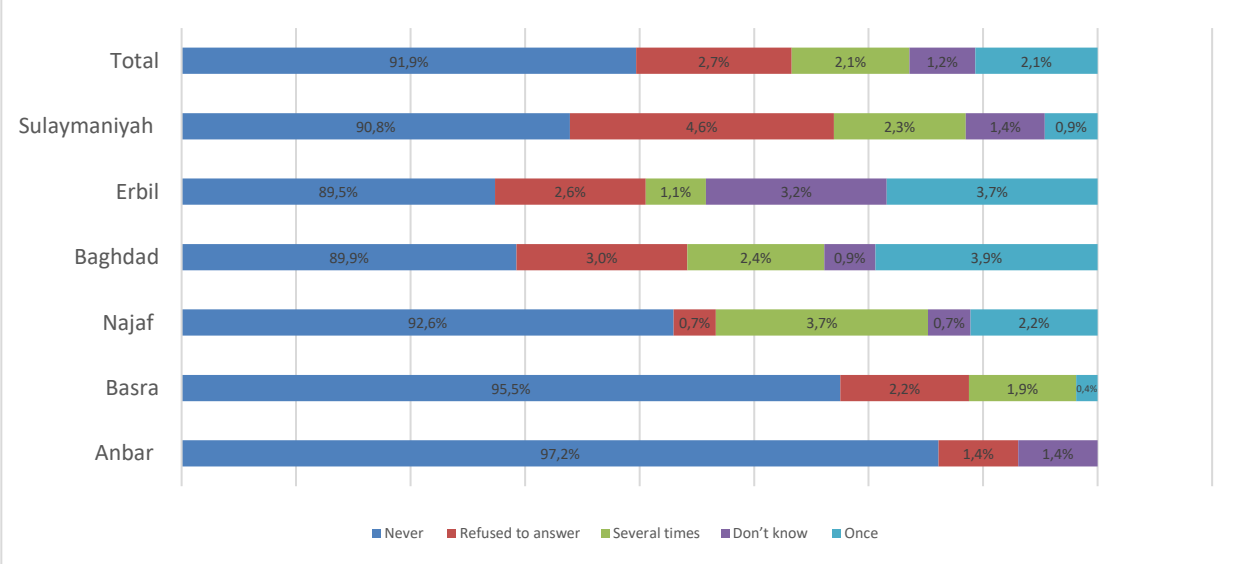


Diagram 48

4.9 During the past 12 months, have your husband/family members prevented you from meeting or talking to friends or family members?

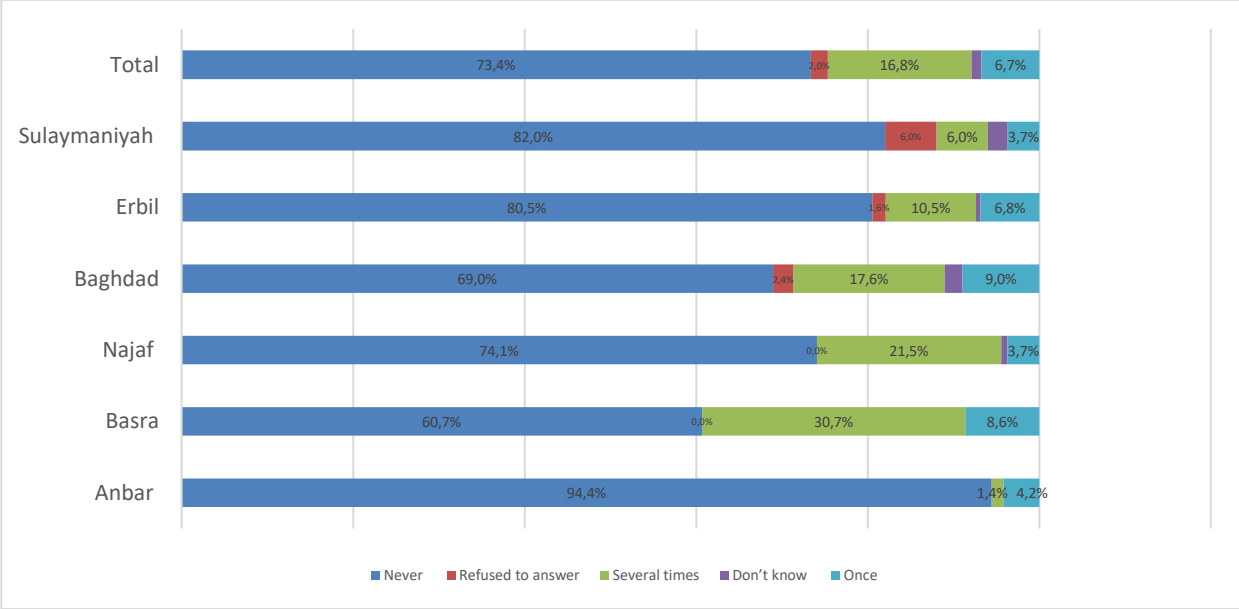



Diagram 49

4.10 During the past 12 months, did your husband/spouse or family members refuse to take your opinions into consideration, ridicule them, or attempt to tell you what you should think?

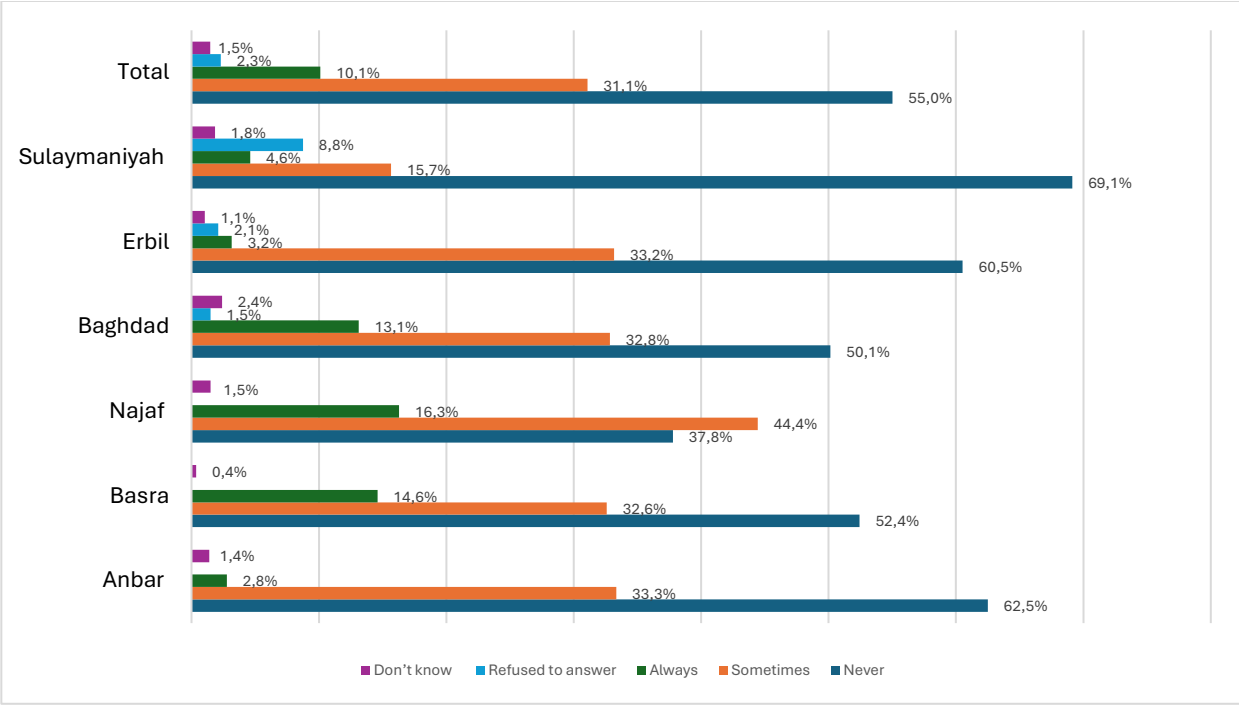


Diagram 50
4.11 Do you experience exclusion from decision-making within the household?

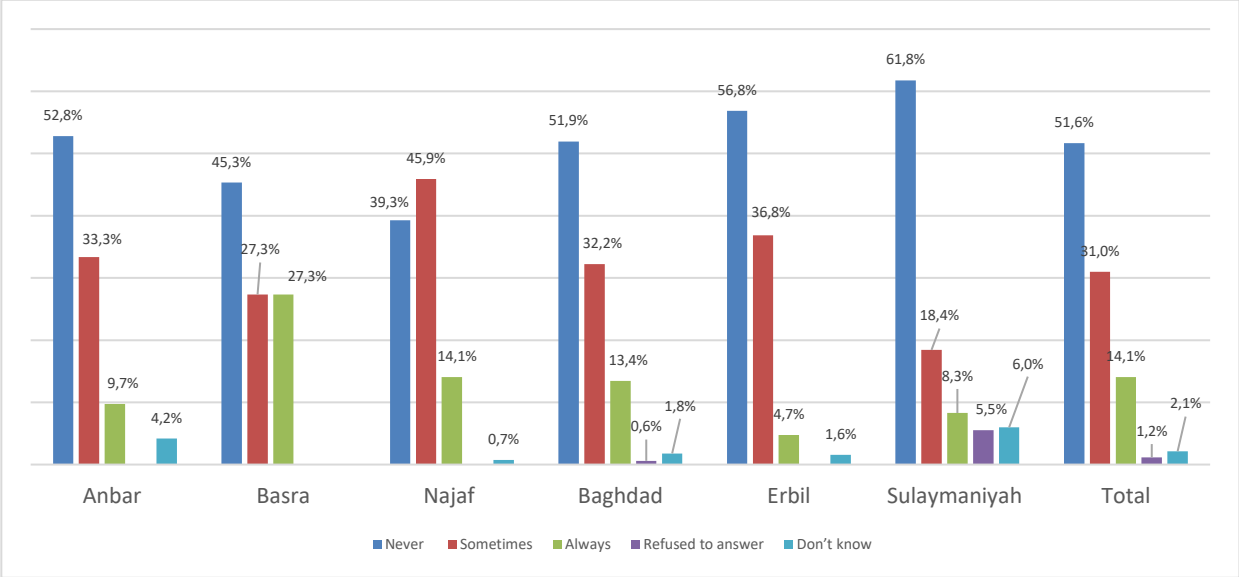



Diagram 51
4.12 Do you experience exclusion from control over expenses or income?

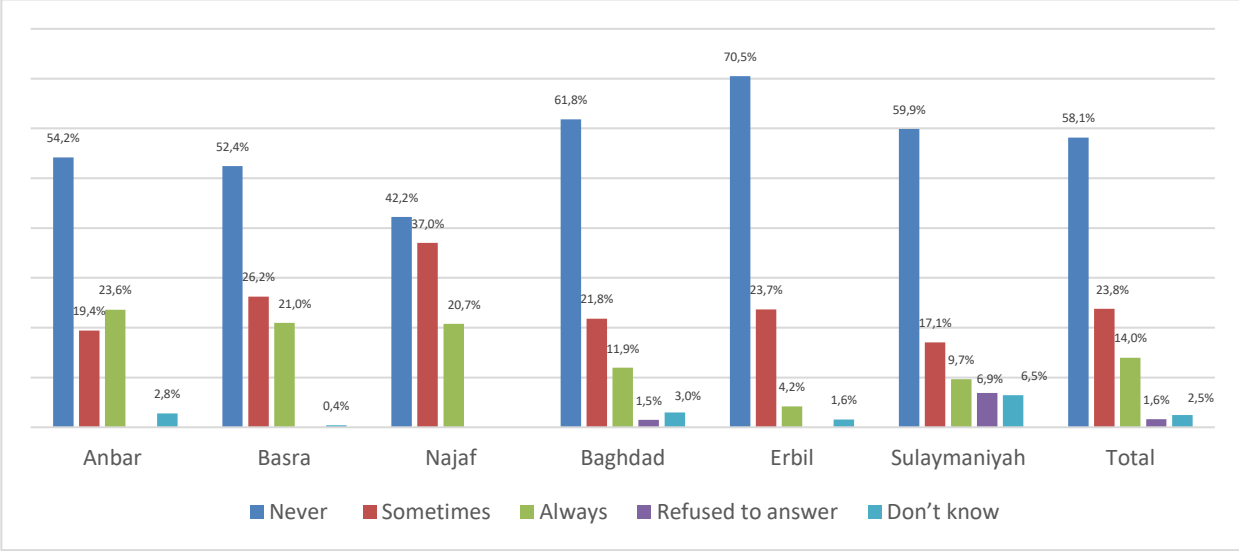


Diagram 52

4.13 During the past 12 months, did your husband/spouse or family members threaten or pressure you financially?

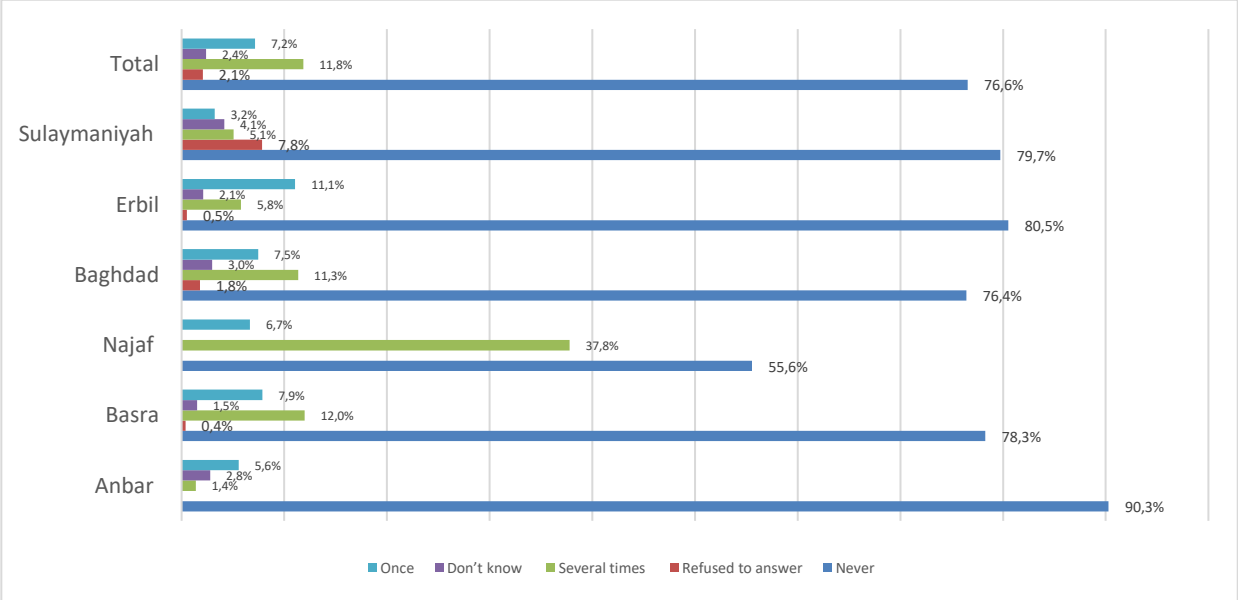



Diagram 53

4.14 During the past 12 months, did your husband/spouse or family members insult you or abuse you?

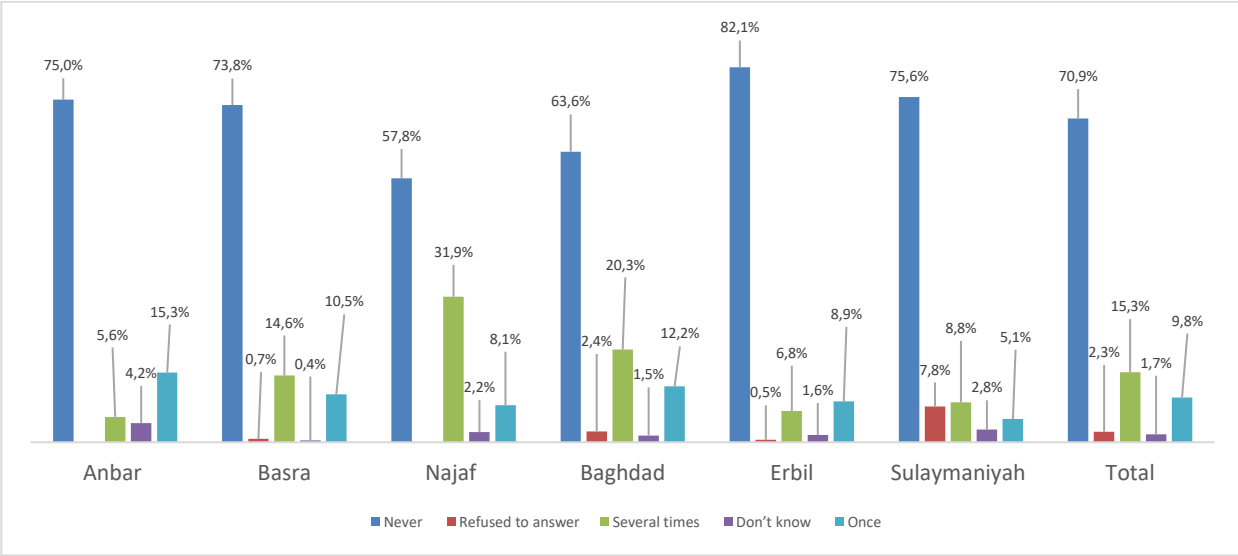


Diagram 54

4.15 During the past 12 months, did your husband/family members slap you or inflict other physical abuse on you?

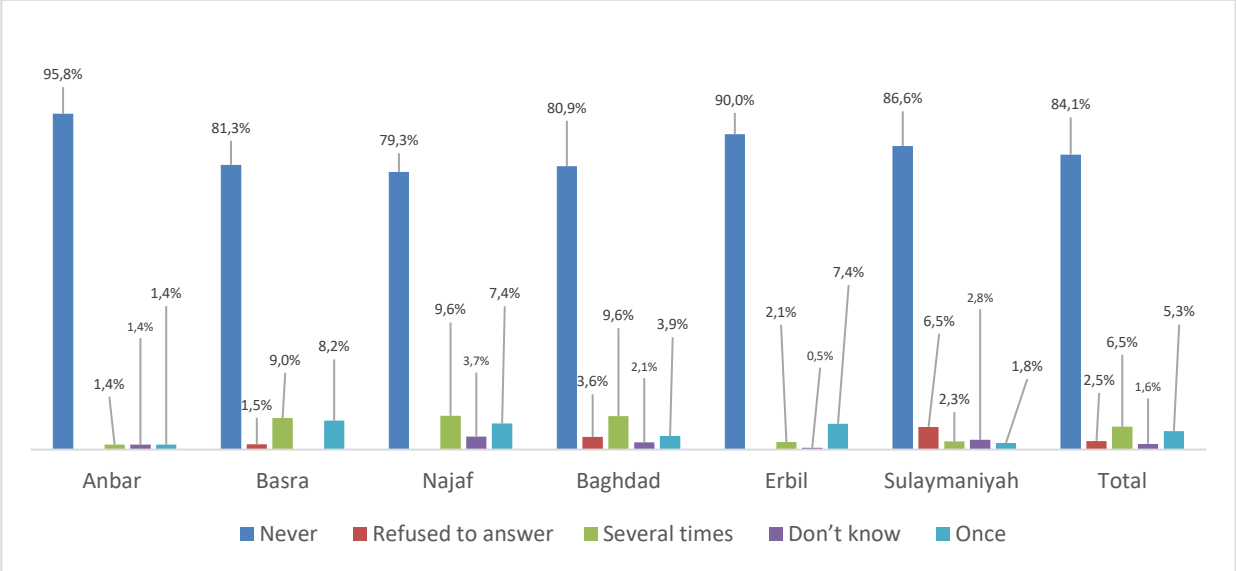



Diagram 55

4.16 During the past 12 months, did your husband/spouse or family members utter death threats against you?

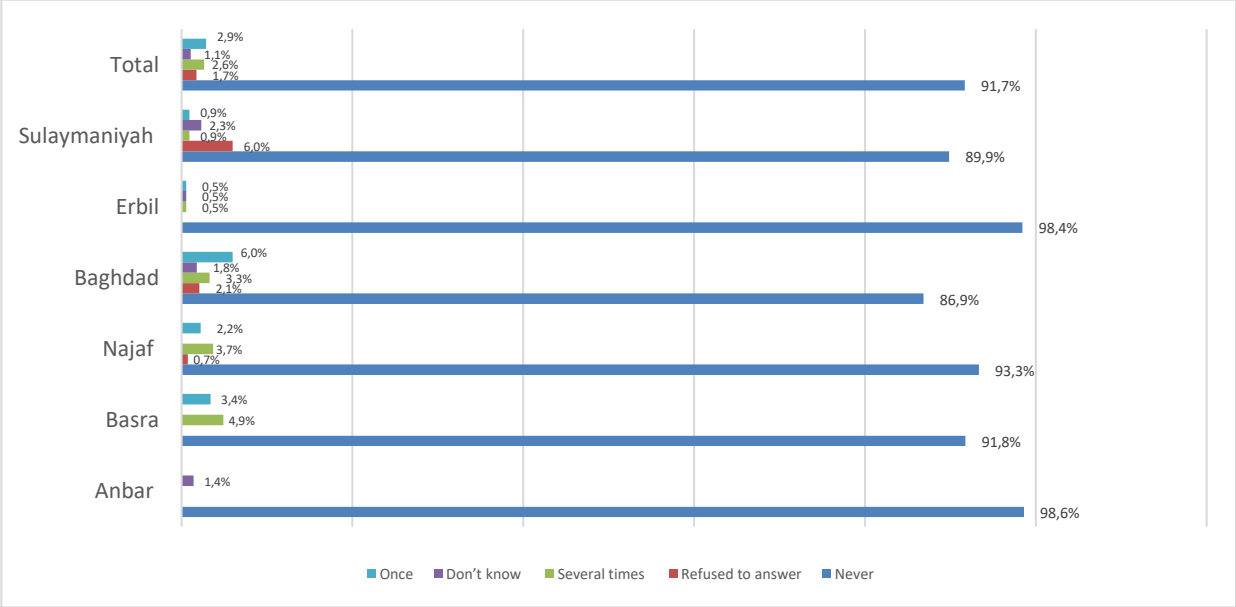
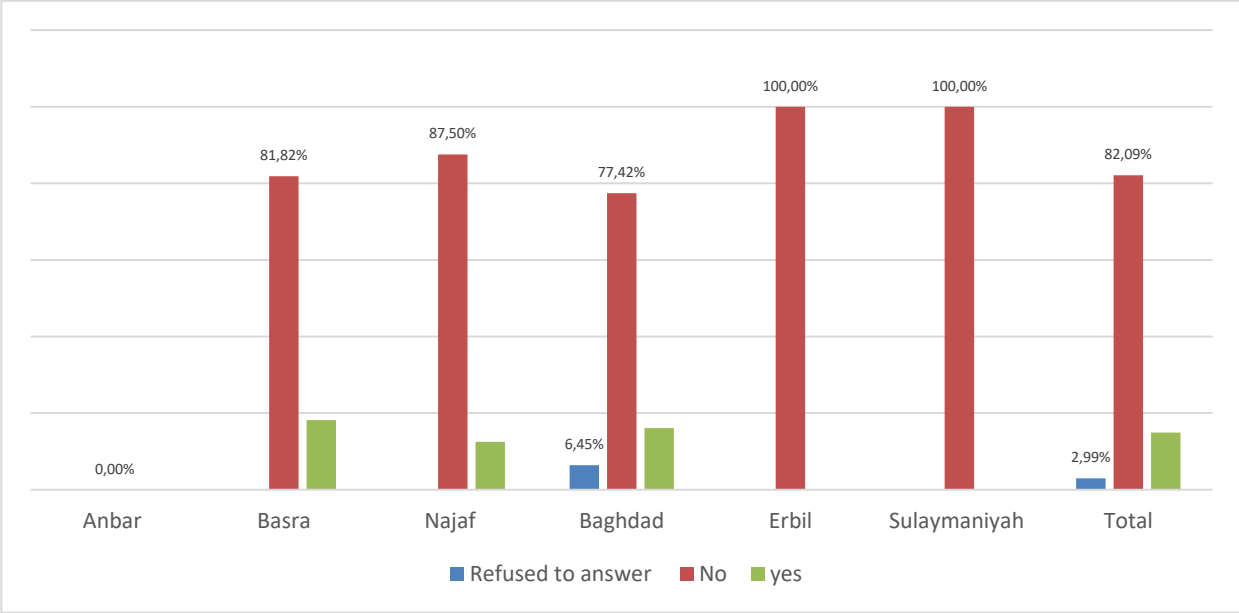


Diagram 56
4.17 If it happened, after this incident, did you lodge a complaint?



# ANNEX 3 DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

## 1. KII GRID WITH PROFESSIONALS AND EXPERTS ON VAWG IN IRAQ AND KR-I

The purpose of this study is to assess the prevalence, drivers and manifestations of VAWG, to identify legal, institutional and service gaps and provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers to formulate informed policies and targeted interventions to combat VAWG, and to civil society and international partners to foster the development of these policies and interventions.

Duration of the interview is about 1 hour to 1 hour and a half. Thank you for your participation in this study. This interview will be confidential. Only the general results will be published. However, if you agree we would be happy to mention your name as a contributor to this work.

1. What comes to your mind when we talk about violence VAWG?

   R: *(if not already done)* How would you define it in a few words?
   (*if not mentioned before)* Is discrimination a form of VAWG for you?

2. What do you think are the main causes of VAWG?

3. What are the most common expressions/forms of VAWG in Iraq? And what is their main cause?

4. Do you think domestic violence is, and must remain, a private issue?

   R: Do you have an idea of the scale of this kind of violence in Iraq?
   *(Only if they have not answered this in one way or another before)*

5. What about the changes that have occurred in relation to VAWG in recent years?

   R: (*If needed*) Is this violence increasing or decreasing, in your opinion?
   R: What about government action regarding this issue?
   R: What do you think are the most important of these actions? *(If no answer, no problem)*

6. Do the figures and statistics released by governmental institutions reflect the extent of VAWG in Iraq, according to you?
   R: (*If not)* What are the main reasons?

7. Do you believe that women feel safe to report violence against them?

   R: What can be improved then?

8. In your opinion, to what extent are national laws and public policies on the elimination of VAWG in line with international obligations?

   R: *(If they are not)* What are the main obstacles?

9. Do you think that UN Resolutions, in particular UNSCR 1325, are a useful and supportive framework for political decision-making in the area of combating VAWG and discrimination against women and girls?

   R: Are the national action plans for UNSCR 1325 contributing to reducing VAWG?

10. Do you know about government services provided to women and girls survivors of VAWG? What do you think about them?

    R: *(If needed)* What kind of institutional or governmental changes would you suggest to better protect women and girls from violence?

11. Are there any challenges in providing adequate support to survivors, and if so, how can these challenges be addressed?

    R: (*If not)* What is needed most? (*If silent*) In terms of resources? In terms of policies? In terms of capacities?

12. *(If the interviewee is a CSO or institution representative)* Do you think your organisation has sufficient human and financial resources to deal efficiently with VAWG?

    R: (*If needed)* Do these human resources have, according to you, the knowledge and skills required for the implementation of the NAP for UNSCR 1325?

13. *(If the interviewee is a CSO or institution representative)* To what extent does your organisation/institution/ministry adopt procedures or policies on women's rights and combating discrimination against women in the workplace?

    R*: (If needed)* Can you elaborate/explain/clarify or give some examples?

14. To what extent have existing policies and laws been implemented and enforced, and how effectively do they provide protection and support for survivors of VAWG?

15. How do the policies and laws address the root causes of VAWG, and what measurable impact have they had on reducing incidents of VAWG over the past five years?

16. What impact will the new Jurisprudential Code "Mudawwana" law have on the rights of women and girls? Could it potentially lead to an increase in violence against them?

17. According to you, is there any coordination between government institutions, and between government and civil society, to address VAWG?

    R*: (If yes)* Can you tell us more about it?

*(If no)* Are there any prospects?

**18.** Do the media and education have a role to play (in principle) in reducing VAWG?

R: *(If yes)* Do, they fulfil this role?

**19.** Do the government and your organisation have any monitoring or evaluation mechanisms in place to assess the effectiveness of the programmes and services related to combating VAWG?

**20.** I would like to ask you a final question: What kind of violence should be most urgently addressed in Iraq, and what form of discrimination should be addressed as a priority?

*Is there anything that you would like to add?*
*Thanks a lot for this interview.*
*We will, of course, keep you informed of the results of this study.*

## 2. Survey questionnaire: Combating VAWG in Iraq and the KR-I – 2025

The Regional Observatory on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is undertaking a survey in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The objective of the survey is to assess the level of awareness among women of the laws and services provided for survivors of VAWG, and explore their personal perceptions and experiences related to VAWG.

All information provided by you will be kept confidential and will be used only for the purpose of this study. Your participation in this questionnaire is very important, as it aims to contribute to improving the situation of women and girls in the country.

**Please provide your informed consent in order to continue with the survey questions.**

☐ *Yes.* ☐ *No*

***Date:*** _

---

### Section I: Demographic Information

1. **Governorate:**
   Erbil
   Anbar
   Basra
   Sulaymaniyah
   Najaf
   Baghdad
2. **Nature of the area:**
   Urban
   Rural
3. **Respondent's Nationality:**
   Iraqi
   Iranian
   Sudanese
   Syrian
   Egyptian
   Others

4. Age **Groups:**
   18–25 years
   26–40 years
   41–60 years
   Above 60 years
5. **Education Level:**
   Primary
   Intermediate
   Secondary
   Diploma

Bachelor's degree
Literate (can read and write)
Postgraduate
Refused to answer
Illiterate

6. Marital Status:
   Widowed
   Refused to answer
   Single
   Married
   Divorced
7. Relationship to the Workforce:
   Private sector employee
   Government employee
   Housewife
   Refused to answer
   Currently unemployed
   Self-employed
   Receiving social welfare
   Retired

---

## Section II Awareness about VAWG:

(Multiple Choice)
2.1 What does violence against women and girls mean to you?
Sexual assault
Physical assault
Verbal violence
Psychological abuse
Forced marriage
Early marriage
Exclusion from resources and power
Cyber violence
Other (please specify)
Don't know
Refused to answer

If "Other," please specify here:

2.2 In your opinion, how prevalent is VAWG in your community?
Refused to answer
Common
Very common
Not common
Don't know

(Multiple Choice)
2.3 What are your main sources of information about VAWG?
Media
Government

Civil society organisations and networks
Relatives and friends
Other (please specify)
Don't know
Refused to answer

If "Other," please specify here:

2.4 In your opinion, what is your level of knowledge about VAWG?
Good
Refused to answer
Little knowledge
Don't know
No knowledge
Average
Sufficient knowledge

2.5 What is your level of awareness of legal procedures for reporting VAWG?

▫ Good (sufficient knowledge) ▫. Moderate ▫. Little knowledge. ▫. I have no knowledge

2.6 Are you aware of government institutions addressing VAWG in your area?
Yes
No
Don't know
Refused to answer

2.7 Are you aware of civil society organisations addressing VAWG in your area?
Yes
No
Don't know
Refused to answer

2.8 Is there a specific hotline for reporting VAWG in Iraq?
Yes
No
Don't know
Refused to answer

2.9 Are you aware of legal procedures for reporting harassment incidents?
Yes
No
Don't know
Refused to answer

2.10 Does the government provide shelters for women and girls survivors of violence?
Yes
No
Don't know
Refused to answer

2.11 (If Yes) Are these shelters known and accessible to survivors?
Yes
No
Don't know
Refused to answer

2.12 Do civil society organisations provide shelters for women and girls survivors of violence?
Yes
No
Don't know
Refused to answer

2.13 Do civil society organisations provide services like psychological or logistical support?
Yes
No
Don't know
Refused to answer

---

## Section III Beliefs and opinion

3.1 According to you, is it acceptable for the husband to hit his wife in the following cases:

- If she neglects the children
  ▫ Yes ▫Yes, in some cases ▫ No ▫Don't know. ▫ Refused to answer
- If she argues with him:
  ▫ Yes ▫Yes, in some cases ▫ No ▫Don't know. ▫ Refused to answer
- If she refuses sex:
  ▫ Yes ▫Yes, in some cases ▫ No ▫Don't know. ▫ Refused to answer

3.2 Harassment should not be punished in some cases depending on women's clothing and behaviour.
Strongly agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly disagree
Don't know
Refused to answer

3.3 Men should have guardianship over their wives and families.
Strongly agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly disagree
Don't know
Refused to answer

3.4 Boys should be responsible for their sisters' behaviour, even if they are younger.
Strongly agree

Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly disagree
Don't know
Refused to answer

Opinion towards law and services for combating VAWG:

3.5 In your opinion, is information about VAWG adequately represented in the media?
Yes
No
Don't know
Refused to answer

3.6 Are the laws and procedures to protect women from violence sufficient in Iraq?
Yes
No
Don't know
Refused to answer

3.7 Do you believe women's rights and equal participation in all aspects of life are legally recognised on the same basis as men's rights?
Yes
No
Don't know
Refused to answer

3.8 Do you believe women have the same financial rights as men in marriage or after divorce under the law?
Yes
No
Don't know
Refused to answer

3.9 Do you believe women subjected to violence by their husbands or families stay with them due to a lack of financial resources?
Yes
No
Don't know
Refused to answer

3.10 Do you believe women have the right to move in public spaces in the same way as men?
Yes
No
Don't know
Refused to answer

3.11 Is it difficult or easy for women to utilise the following services in the community? Please check.

- Police ▫. Difficult ▫. Easy ▫. Do not know ▫ Refused to answer

- **Health Care** ▫. Difficult ▫. Easy ▫. Do not know ▫ Refused to answer
- **Legal aid** ▫. Difficult ▫. Easy ▫. Do not know ▫ Refused to answer
- **Protection /assistance** ▫ Difficult ▫. Easy ▫. Do not know ▫ Refused to answer

3.12 Has armed conflict in Iraq increased VAWG?
In massive increase
In increase
Stayed the same
In decrease
Don't know
Refused to answer

3.13 Which types of violence against women and girls have notably increased due to armed conflict?
Physical assault
Psychological abuse
Forced marriage
Early marriage
Exclusion from financial resources and power
Violence against freedom of expression
Verbal abuse
Sexual slavery

3.14 In the past year, have you heard of any campaigns by the government or civil institutions in Iraq supporting women facing violence?
Yes
No
Don't know
Refused to answer

3.20 Please specify the campaigns mentioned in the previous question:

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## Section IV: Personal Experience of VAWG

4.1 In the past six months, have you witnessed VAWG?
Yes
No
Don't know
Refused to answer

4.2 If yes, what type of violence did you witness? (Multiple choice)
Physical assault
Forced marriage
Psychological abuse
Exclusion from education, health, or inheritance
Conflict-related sexual harassment
Don't know
Refused to answer

4.3 Do women who experience violence seek help?

Yes
No
Don't know
Refused to answer

4.4 If yes, from your experience, what kind of help do survivors of VAWG seek first?
Relatives
Hotline
Police
Court
Specialised centres for violence survivors
Other (please specify)
Don't know
Refused to answer

If "Other" in the previous question, please specify briefly:

4.5 From your experience, what barriers prevent women from reporting violence?
Shame
Rejection or isolation by family and friends
Fear of consequences or threats by perpetrator
Belief that reporting is useless
Other (specify in next question)
Don't know
Refused to answer

If "Other," please specify briefly:

4.6 During the past 12 months, have you been insulted in the street, on public transport, or in other public spaces?

▫ Never ▫ Refused to answer ▫ Several times ▫ Don't Know ▫ Once

4.7 During the past 12 months, did anyone attempt or force you to undergo or perform any sexual contact/acts against your will?

▫ Never ▫ Refused to answer ▫ Several times ▫ Don't Know ▫ Once

4.8 During the past 12 months, did anyone try or manage to have sexual intercourse with you against your will?

▫ Never ▫ Refused to answer ▫ Several times ▫ Don't Know ▫ Once

4.9 During the past 12 months, have your husband/family members prevented you from meeting or talking to friends or family members?

▫ Never ▫ Refused to answer ▫ Several times ▫ Don't Know ▫ Once

4.10 During the past 12 months, did your husband/spouse or family members refuse to take your opinions into consideration, ridicule them, or attempt to tell you what you should think?

▫ Never ▫ Refused to answer ▫ Several times ▫ Don't Know ▫ Once

4.11 Do you experience exclusion from decision-making within the household?

▫ Never ▫ Refused to answer ▫ Several times ▫ Don't Know ▫ Once

4.12 Do you experience exclusion from control over expenses or income?

▫ Never ▫ Refused to answer ▫ Several times ▫ Don't Know ▫ Once

4. 13 During the past 12 months, did your husband/spouse or family members threaten or pressure you financially?

▫ Never ▫ Refused to answer ▫ Several times ▫ Don't Know ▫ Once

4.14 During the past 12 months, did your husband/spouse or family members insult you or abuse you?

▫ Never ▫ Refused to answer ▫ Several times ▫ Don't Know ▫ Once

4. 15 During the past 12 months, did your husband/family members slap you or inflict other physical abuse on you?

▫ Never ▫ Refused to answer ▫ Several times ▫ Don't Know ▫ Once

4.16. During the past 12 months, did your husband/spouse or family members utter death threats against you?

▫ Never ▫ Refused to answer ▫ Several times ▫ Don't Know ▫ Once

4.17. If it happened, after this incident, did you lodge a complaint?
▫ *Yes* ▫ *No* ▫ *Refused to answer*

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## Section V: Open Questions (Optional):

5.1. In your view, can you mention the main or root causes of VAWG?

5.2 In your opinion, what is the best response that women should have towards VAWG?

5.3 What is the impact of armed conflict in Iraq on VAWG?

5.4 What is the main measure that should be taken to improve the protection of women from VAWG in Iraq?


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جمهورية العراق

EuroMed Feminist Initiative
المبادرة النسوية الأورومتوسطية
Initiative Féministe EuroMed

Regional Observatory on VAWG