



LEHIGH
UNIVERSITY

Library &
Technology
Services

The Preserve: Lehigh Library Digital Collections

Gender-based violence in Morocco

Citation

Mixsell, Sarah A. *Gender-Based Violence in Morocco*. 14 Oct. 2024, <https://preserve.lehigh.edu/lehigh-scholarship/undergraduate-publications/perspectives-business-economics/perspectives-59-9>.

Find more at <https://preserve.lehigh.edu/>

This document is brought to you for free and open access by Lehigh Preserve. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of Lehigh Preserve. For more information, please contact preserve@lehigh.edu.

Gender-based violence in Morocco

Sarah A. Mixsell

Gender-based violence is pervasive in Morocco, particularly affecting women ages 15 to 74, and is perpetuated by Morocco's legal framework and societal norms despite efforts from international human rights organizations and local NGOs. This article examines its prevalence, emphasizing domestic violence and intimate partner violence. It proposes comprehensive solutions, including legal reforms, survivor protection, and educational initiatives to empower future generations. Prioritizing respect, equality, and empowerment can lead to a Moroccan society free from gender-based violence.

Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive issue in Morocco as it is in many other Middle East and North Africa countries. Domestic violence (DV) and intimate partner violence (IPV) are the most commonly experienced forms of GBV by Moroccan women and girls, especially women between the ages of 15 and 74. In fact, as of 2022, 57.1% of all Moroccan women ages 15 to 74 had experienced physical, psychological, sexual, or economic violence in the previous 12 months (Haut-Commissariat au Plan, 2022). Furthermore, as of 2023, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development data indicate that Morocco is among the top ten countries with the highest rates of violence against women (VAW) (OECD, 2023). The issue of VAW in Morocco is not a recent development; for decades, there have been published statistics documenting the prevalence of VAW in the country, contributing to an elevated awareness of this phenomenon. Despite the critiques and counsel from prominent organizations like Human Rights Watch, the UN, and the local Moroccan NGO Mobilising for Rights Associates, the Moroccan government has yet to enact comprehensive legislation or establish effective social programs capable of addressing and sustainably preventing the persistent issue of GBV in the country.

DV accounts for approximately 52% of all reported cases of VAW in Morocco, with 46% of the reported cases listing the victim's husband or previous intimate partner as the abuser (Mobilising for Rights Associates, 2022). These statistics demonstrate just how inadequate current laws are, as marital rape is still not criminalized within the existing Penal Code. The sanction for those convicted of rape is 5 to 10 years in prison; the sentence is doubled if the vic-

tim is a minor (US Department of State, 2022). The efficacy of these sanctions has been limited, particularly because over 50% of GBV cases globally are unreported due to the victims' reluctance or inability to report incidents of violence and abuse (Palermo et al., 2014).

Throughout its history, Morocco has been a patriarchal society, meaning women are often unable to exercise the same agency as men and depend on their male counterparts for stability (Bouhout, 2020). This is especially true in rural communities, where poverty rates are high and female education remains extremely low (World Bank, n.d.). Factors such as education level, family income, age, and rural versus urban setting affect vulnerability to GBV (Kisa et al., 2021). Despite strong evidence of widespread GBV and vocal advocacy by high-profile international organizations, so far there have been no significant preventative systems put in place for women in more vulnerable Moroccan communities. Instead, there are only organizations focused on victim support following incidences of abuse; even then, these organizations do not have the capacity or sufficient support from the Moroccan legal system to be able to provide sustained care for victims. In these ways, Morocco consistently falls short in effectively combating GBV.

There are numerous global and local NGOs dedicated to eradicating GBV and supporting victims in Morocco and in the Middle East and North Africa region more broadly. However, a core challenge lies in the Moroccan government's failure to make the essential commitment required to prioritize legislation. Additionally, there is far more to be done outside the legislative realm. Social norms and religious beliefs hinder many Moroccans from being able to make

any kind of meaningful change concerning domestic and IPV.

Global definitions and statistics

The European Commission defines GBV as “violence directed against a person because of that person’s gender, or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately” (European Commission, n.d.). Often, the terms *gender-based violence* and *violence against women* are used interchangeably because GBV is more frequently committed by men against women. However, it is important to acknowledge that violence against boys and men is also a form of GBV. Therefore, VAW is not the same as GBV; rather, VAW is a type of GBV (World Bank, n.d.).

Sexual, physical, and psychological violence are often referred to by the UN and the World Health Organization (WHO, 2024) as the primary forms of GBV. As of September 2023, UN Women estimated that, globally, “736 million women—almost one in three—have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both at least once in their life (30 per cent of women aged 15 and older).” Of these 736 million, approximately 640 million have experienced violence at the hands of an intimate partner, such as a husband or male partner (UN Women, 2023). The WHO defines IPV as “behavior by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviors” (WHO, 2013). IPV often is used synonymously with DV, although they differ in terms of the types of relationships recognized. DV is violence of any kind perpetrated by any member of one’s family or domestic situation, such as a spouse, parent, sibling, uncle/aunt, or cousin, whereas IPV is specifically between individuals in a romantic or sexual relationship (Women Against Abuse, n.d.). IPV and DV are similar in that they often occur behind closed doors and between individuals who have a physically or emotionally close relationship. Global statistics reveal a concerning prevalence of IPV, even among young women ages 15 to 19. On average, one in four (24%) young women ages 15 to 19 experiences sexual and/or physical violence from an intimate partner as do 16% of women ages 15 to 24 (UN Women, 2023). These statistics underscore the pervasiveness of this issue, revealing its widespread impact within Morocco and on an international scale.

Although GBV affects women in both developed and underdeveloped countries, the accuracy of data

and the imperative to address the issue are significantly impeded by an overall deficiency in reporting and data collection. Between 2005 and 2014, fewer than half of the countries worldwide (89 countries) collected data on VAW. Fortunately, there has been a significant improvement in this regard. In 2021, the number of countries collecting survey data on VAW had nearly doubled, reaching 161 (WHO, 2024). However, underreporting remains a major challenge for those working to systematically combat GBV, partly due to the insufficient representation of women in crucial institutions, such as police forces, pivotal in aiding victims of violence. The issue’s persistence, however, primarily stems from a glaring deficit in reporting. In a majority of countries, fewer than 40% of women who have encountered violence actively sought any form of assistance, and among those, only 10% sought help from police or health services (United Nations, Statistics Division..., 2015). Unfortunately, underreporting, especially in instances of DV and IPV, is the norm in many countries because of the widespread societal acceptability of VAW.

Furthermore, many women do not report abuse of any kind because of the belief, based on common misinterpretations of the Quran, that it is justified (Bouhout, 2020). In fact, analysts suggest that depending on cultural contexts, some men and women believe that wife beating is necessary to a certain extent (United Nations, Statistics Division..., 2015). Through her research on gender-based DV in Morocco, Moroccan scholar Nouhaila Bouhout (2020) recognizes this belief that violence is necessary and justified as rooted in the view that women are men’s property. This disparity between cases of IPV and DV and active reports of abuse is alarming, underscoring the critical need for comprehensive efforts to bridge this gap and protect victims. Ideally, improving the accuracy of statistics and definitions can build wider understanding and greater dissemination and visibility of GBV as a global crisis. In doing so, the adoption of effective preventive measures, especially in countries like Morocco that have historically struggled with the implementation of legislative measures and social efforts to combat VAW, could be more easily achieved.

International context for change

With VAW, and discrimination against women more broadly, persisting as a global issue, numerous international dialogues have emerged to explore effective solutions and recommendations for improvement. Many countries, including Morocco, grapple with

issues of VAW and DV/IPV. Consequently, international bodies like the UN have stepped in to delineate strategies to combat and prevent GBV. Strategies include educating the next generation of leaders about the pervasive nature of this problem and age-appropriate training on safe sexuality, consent, bodily autonomy, and accountability (UN Women, 2023). Additionally, the implementation of holistic services for survivors of violence will help where prevention efforts fall short. These recommended strategies, if implemented appropriately, not only will better serve Moroccan women but also may inspire more change in the country's cultural and religious norms.

In 1979, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), often referred to as the international bill of rights for women (UN Women, 2003). Over the ensuing decades, the CEDAW has met frequently and adopted several General Recommendations on ways to improve the situation of women worldwide. In 1992, General Recommendation No. 19 came into effect, clearly outlining GBV as “a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men” (United Nations, CEDAW, 1992). This recommendation was a huge step toward progress. It defined GBV as a threat to women's rights and gender equity as a whole. Twenty-five years later, General Recommendation No. 35 was introduced in 2017 as an update to the original Recommendation No. 19. No. 35 provides a more comprehensive understanding of VAW and explicitly calls for a shift away from social norms and practices that support GBV, emphasizing “the need for approaches that promote and respect women's autonomy and decision-making in all spheres of life.” Moreover, No. 35 expands the original definition of violence to include violations of sexual and reproductive health and calls for the removal of laws that “condone or facilitate violence” (United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner..., 2017). The primary aim of General Recommendations like No. 19 and No. 35 is to facilitate the implementation of international obligations, particularly the imperative to explicitly define all forms of violence within legal frameworks. This in turn serves to establish the necessary precedents for prosecuting perpetrators of VAW—and ultimately eliminate it.

Roots of gender-based violence in Morocco

Both Bouhout (2020) and Kisa et al. (2021), in discussing women's rights and DV in Morocco, note

that patriarchal values are deeply ingrained in Moroccan society and have been for centuries. These values place a heavy burden on women as they are expected to conform to a society that privileges men. In masculine societies like Morocco, women are automatically subordinated, confined to roles of cooperation due to cultural norms and religious constraints (Kisa et al., 2021). This culture justifies the forced submission of women through violence, at the same time hindering their ability or willingness to report abuse or violence. An outspoken advocate of women's rights, specifically Arab and Muslim women's rights, award-winning documentary filmmaker Soukaina Alaoui El Hassani has seen firsthand the impact that discriminatory legislation and harmful ideologies have on women and girls in Morocco. This can be seen in her film, *Children of Sin*, which depicts extreme challenges faced by unwed mothers in Morocco. In a conversation, the Moroccan activist stated that the cycle of abuse in the lives of many Moroccan women can lead to generational trauma, solidifying VAW as a norm. Additionally, Alaoui El Hassani noted that typically, if a young woman's mother has survived violence, she may have put up with it in order to provide the best life for her children; their lives could change drastically without the support and security of a financially stable household with both parents (S. Alaoui El Hassani, personal communication, October 6, 2023). The underreporting of DV or IPV in Morocco can be attributed to cultural, social, religious, or familial lenses that discourage Moroccan women from reporting such cases to the police. These ingrained beliefs create barriers to seeking legal intervention and contribute to the generational perpetuation of silence surrounding DV (Bouhout, 2020). Mothers passing on trauma to their daughters reinforces the belief that such experiences are simply a part of life. Moreover, the underreporting of DV and IPV hinders the accurate representation of their prevalence, diminishing their perceived urgency as critical human rights violations. By concealing the true extent of the issue, the severity of the problem may be downplayed, impeding the mobilization of resources, awareness campaigns, and policy initiatives needed to combat this violation of human rights.

The same conservative patriarchal values that allow a cycle of domestic abuse to continue are also responsible for the social and political marginalization of organizations working to prevent VAW. Over the past two decades, women's rights NGOs in Morocco have been actively amplifying awareness about

gender inequity, shedding light on issues of VAW, with a particular focus on addressing sexual violence against girls and combating child marriage. Unfortunately, Morocco has historically lacked the necessary infrastructure to adequately support and sustain, through funding mechanisms such as grants, organizations dedicated to advocating for women's rights and assisting survivors of GBV. Without government backing and access to financial resources, initiatives aimed at empowering women and combating women's rights violations struggle to find footing in Morocco. Their survival hinges on explicit support from the government, highlighting the imperative for robust infrastructure and funding to enable these vital social programs. Outside of funding, implementing necessary infrastructure could include the construction of facilities where women and girls can meet to receive educational, social, and public health services. As of now, there appears to be a disconnect between the Moroccan government and the NGOs and community service organizations with ambitions to better the situation of Moroccan women (Hanafi & Alaoui, 2014). Along with the government's unwillingness to support social programs for women, "conservative and pervasive patriarchal gender attitudes significantly affect women's status" (Kisa et al., 2021). Advocating for government support for educating and empowering women and for the enforcement of stringent regulations against perpetrators of violence is crucial. In parallel, the support of civil society is equally important; the societal attitudes of Moroccans must shift in order to foster progressive transformation.

As complex as this issue may be, it seems as though a primary solution to the issue of DV in Morocco would be a major transformation in cultural attitudes about women. While by Western standards, the current status of women in Morocco might appear to reflect traditional values, it is important to recognize the diversity of opinions within the society. As an expert on marginalized women in Morocco, Alaoui El Hassani emphasized that many Moroccan women may not perceive an issue with their situation, as they have been taught since birth that their purpose is to accommodate men (S. Alaoui El Hassani, personal communication, October 6, 2023). However, attitudes toward gender roles in Morocco are multifaceted, with individuals challenging traditional norms and actively striving for a more diverse and inclusive understanding of women's roles and rights. Today, the fight for women's rights manifests in various forms, such

as increased representation of women in higher education, pursuit of financial independence, and more women assuming leadership roles (Borgen Project, 2020). Nonetheless, the journey is ongoing. Much of this challenge stems from the persistence of culturally ingrained patriarchal values, which inhibit achieving true liberation from discrimination, oppression, and violence. For many Moroccan women, especially older generations, servitude is integral to the way they value themselves and their purpose in life (S. Alaoui El Hassani, personal communication, October 6, 2023). The meaning of this varies by case; however, traditional Islamic values fundamental to many Moroccans certainly impact their views on what is acceptable in marriage and family. For example, the 34th verse of Chapter 4 of the Quran states:

Men are the protectors and maintainers (*qaw-wāmūn*) of women, because Allah has given (*faḍḍala*) the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore[,] the righteous women (*ṣāliḥāt*) are devoutly obedient (*qānitāt*), and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct (*nushūz*), admonish them (first), (next) refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly) (*wa-ḍribūhunna*)....

Many believers have interpreted this verse as religious justification for the subordination of women to men and for DV (Chaudhry, 2013).

Gender and Islamic studies scholar Ayesha Chaudhry (2013) argues that despite the appearance of limited agency, especially within a religious context, these women do possess it; however, the systemic cultural bias they face forces them to seek alternative ways to exercise their autonomy. Contrary to how it may seem, women do have the ability to make choices, such as whom they marry. Nevertheless, women may emphasize financial stability over factors, such as attraction and compatible core values, which then gives men financial authority over their wives and perpetuates gender power imbalances. Where women face limited economic opportunities and freedom, financial stability emerges as a critical factor influencing the underreporting of DV. Only 22.7% of Moroccan women are formally employed (Statista, 2023), suggesting that most Moroccan women financially rely on men. Women often hesitate to report incidents of DV in fear of jeopardizing their economic security should they oppose the wishes of their spouse or male relatives. Recognizing financial vulnerability as a significant

contributor underscores the need for targeted strategies addressing both economic empowerment and barriers to reporting of DV.

Current laws applicable to gender-based violence

In the past decade, the Moroccan government has made a commitment to implementing laws and regulations to combat discrimination against women, more specifically VAW. In 2006, the UN successfully placed the issue on the Moroccan government's radar via a study that highlighted the negative impact GBV has on women's social, political, and economic empowerment (Hanafi & Alaoui, 2014). Since then, clear progress has been made, but a great deal of work is still to be done to eliminate VAW in Morocco altogether. One of the main prevention efforts Morocco has taken thus far is introducing new laws, such as Law 103.13 on combating VAW, in 2018, which clearly outlines consequences for perpetrators of GBV and protects victims of violence, as outlined by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner..., 2022). Additionally, police units for women victims of violence have been restructured at all of Morocco's main police stations in the past five years. These units are vital as they provide women a safe space to report incidences of abuse along with temporary housing for them and their children, if their situation requires leaving home (UN Women, 2021).

In the past 20 years, the global conversation surrounding GBV has undergone a profound transformation, catalyzed by feminist movements, increased awareness through media and education, and the advocacy of international organizations. This shift empowered over 125 countries to enact laws directly targeting DV (Gertholtz, 2016). The laws vary in intensity and impact, with sanctions for perpetrators of DV depending on factors such as location, cultural values, and religion. However, challenges persist, particularly in countries like Morocco, where, despite the implementation of Law 103.13, which sanctions perpetrators of sexual harassment in the workplace and certain cases of DV, including rapists (excluding marital rape), underreporting of abuse remains rampant (Borgen Project, 2020). While Law 103.13 marks progress, it does little to lessen underreporting instances of abuse. Moreover, the existing Penal Code also falls short in preventing violence and lacks the provisions to adequately address all forms of GBV. This deficiency is exemplified by the failure to define marital rape as a crime, undermining efforts to protect and support survivors. Morocco has made

minimal legislative efforts aside from implementing a Penal Code reform, which itself fails to adequately protect women against the dangers of DV—the term itself is not even defined in the Code.

The current laws targeting GBV prevention do not account for cultural norms within the highly patriarchal communities of Morocco. Nor do they sufficiently delineate what effective preventive measures should entail. Instead, the laws are narrowly focused on what happens to victims and perpetrators after the damage has already been done. This can be seen in Law 103.13, which was enacted as a way to combat GBV yet mentions no preventative measures. It would appear the law's main goal is to recognize VAW as a form of discrimination. According to anti-poverty advocacy nonprofit, the Borgen Project (2020), Law 103.13 prohibits certain violent behaviors against partners and empowers authorities to intervene in domestic situations if needed. It enables abused women to press charges against their abusive partners or family members. However, it neither provides financial assistance to victims or survivors of violence nor funds shelters for those seeking refuge from abusive environments. The law mandates that police must assist abused women. Despite this mandate, the police did not follow through with recording victims' statements and, in some cases, made them return to their abusive partners. In the Borgen Project's view, Law 103.13 failed in creating a system that holds authorities accountable for their duties to protect victims of violence. To ensure the end of VAW in Morocco, lawmakers must recognize that laws with general language and loose sanctions are insufficient, especially in a nation with entrenched patriarchal values. In addition to the introduction of stricter legislation, a broader discussion needs to be had about women's systemic injustice in Morocco and how GBV persists as a result.

Comprehensive sexual education for Morocco

In a 2016 letter of conveyance of findings to the Government of Morocco, Liesl Gertholtz, the director of the Women's Rights Division of Human Rights Watch, laid out her organization's observations regarding the Moroccan government's stated commitment to gender equality and freedom from violence as well as recommendations for how they could continue to improve their legal reform processes to adequately address DV specifically. Her letter called for accelerated legal reform and the inclusion of civil society participation in these efforts. The inclusion of civil society in legal reform and the shift in

attitudes surrounding DV will be vital to the success of such ambitions. The overarching statement by Gertholtz was that Morocco has an obligation to enact legislation that combats VAW according to international human rights treaties, such as the UN CEDAW (Gertholtz, 2016). Drawing on the UN *Handbook for Legislation on Violence against Women*, Human Rights Watch outlines essential elements for legislation concerning DV in Morocco: definition of scope and application of DV crimes and prevention measures in the form of education, awareness raising, research, and the proper training of authorities. Additional elements include strict law enforcement and public prosecution responsibilities, which would manifest in the adoption of “pro-arrest” and “pro-prosecution” policies when there is probable cause that DV has taken place. Further improvements include protection of those most vulnerable and the justice system’s responsibility to proceed with trials in a fair and timely manner together with training judges and prosecutors properly. Lastly, it is imperative Morocco offer other services, such as prompt access to shelter, health services, and legal advice (Gertholtz, 2016). Although Morocco did implement Law 103.13 in 2018, there remain significant gaps in the country’s legal framework concerning VAW, especially DV. To address these shortcomings, Morocco must consider criminalizing marital rape, strengthening support services for survivors, and implementing prevention programs. Such legislation should hold abusers accountable, allocate resources and relief to victims, and establish institutional mandates for organizations actively empowering victims and working to prevent GBV at its roots (United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner..., 2017). By doing so, Morocco not only can uphold human rights but also promote gender equality and create safer communities for all. As highlighted by Gertholtz, the international community has outlined several ways in which Morocco can transform the status of VAW; however, it is up to Moroccan lawmakers to make use of such recommendations to create a safer environment for Moroccan women.

While global recommendations like No. 19 and No. 35 highlight necessary improvements to the legal frameworks addressing VAW, alternative approaches, such as comprehensive sexual education (CSE) for young Moroccans, offer promising complementary avenues for change. Evidence from other regions demonstrates the effectiveness of CSE programs in reducing instances of GBV. For instance, youth-led initiatives, called Y-PEER, targeting youth in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, are ensuring CSE for all,

and these initiatives seem to be flourishing (Rollston et al., 2020). In 2006, Dr. Aleksandar Bodiroza, who managed the Y-PEER program for the UN Population Fund, estimated that roughly two million young people each year are positively impacted by the program. Bodiroza attributes the success of Y-PEER to its ability to take “activities and techniques that have been developed at the community level and bring them up to scale, using both the Internet and linkages with the mass media” (United Nations Population Fund, 2006). Similarly, countries in the Middle East and North Africa region are also seeing success in implementing CSE programs. Tunisia, for example, is the only country in the region to enforce CSE in schools. Similarly, Egypt’s Love Matters program provides substantive information about relationships, sex, and love (Rollston et al., 2020).

In stark contrast, Moroccan schools adhere to an abstinence-only approach to sexual education, which aligns with the principles of Islam, the predominant religion in the country (Benharrouse, 2020). However, this approach fails to provide meaningful insights into human sexuality, intimacy, and love. Its sole focus is on teaching young people to not engage in sex until marriage, an unrealistic expectation for many. Furthermore, research indicates that abstinence-centric education perpetuates feelings of shame and fear, common among victims of violence, and poses risks to students’ psychological, emotional, and physical health (Lanctot, 2022).

Moroccan students themselves express a strong desire for sexual education programs in schools, with 61.1% supporting their incorporation into high school curricula (Arbaoui, 2016). Internationally, sexual education is recognized as a fundamental right, established in conventions dating back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and CEDAW in 1979 (Anti-Discrimination Centre, 2019). This recognition highlights the importance of introducing CSE in secondary schools, aligning with the broader notion of education as a human right and acknowledging the critical role of education in promoting health and well-being.

In addition to school-based programs, there is a need for publicly funded extracurricular initiatives, such as community-based sexuality education classes targeting girls and young women. These programs, although reaching fewer individuals, are often more effective in reaching the most vulnerable populations, including girls who may not attend school (United Nations Population Fund, 2014). By empowering young people with knowledge and skills, such initiatives aim to reduce vulnerabilities to GBV and equip

individuals with the tools to protect themselves from abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, and unintended pregnancies (Sabah et al., 2010).

CSE provides practical skills for self-protection and beyond that can reshape attitudes toward GBV. Curricula that include discussions on gender and power have been shown to be five times more effective in preventing sexuality-based health issues, demonstrating the transformative potential of CSE (UNESCO, 2023). By teaching young people to identify and reject violence against women and children, CSE aims to shift societal norms and attitudes, particularly among young women and girls who may be at greater risk of experiencing violence in intimate relationships.

Promoting a transformative shift in cultural norms requires a bottom-up approach, focusing on educating younger generations. Comprehensive education on sex and sexuality empowers young individuals to recognize and assert their agency while encouraging respectful behavior and treatment toward partners. Although change may be gradual, this kind of teaching will ultimately lead to a departure from patriarchal values, promising long-term benefits in reducing vulnerabilities to GBV, particularly in cases of DV and IPV.

Conclusion

The pervasive issue of GBV in Morocco demands urgent attention and comprehensive solutions. Despite efforts made by global and local NGOs, and a few substantial efforts made by the Moroccan government, the roots of GBV are deeply embedded in patriarchal values, cultural norms, and societal attitudes that perpetuate VAW. The current legal framework in Morocco, while making strides with initiatives like Law 103.13 and specialized police units, falls short in addressing the cultural norms and societal attitudes that contribute to the underreporting of DV. Moreover, Morocco's global position behind many other major countries with respect to issues of VAW underscores the need for a transformative shift in cultural values toward women, challenging entrenched norms and beliefs.

Recommendations for improvement involve reforming Morocco's legal framework to ensure a deliberate approach to trying and prosecuting gender-based violent criminals, while also prioritizing the protection and support of GBV survivors. Additionally, there is a need to prioritize the introduction of CSE in schools and the promotion of free, easily accessible extracurricular programs for girls and young women. Such initiatives aim to empower the younger generation with knowledge and skills,

fostering a mindset that rejects the justification of any form of GBV. The success of these initiatives hinges not only on legal reforms but also on the active involvement of civil society and a concerted effort to change societal attitudes and harmful cultural beliefs. Morocco-specific reform recommendations, including those outlined by Human Rights Watch, should be prioritized and implemented to align with international human rights treaties.

Overall, eradicating GBV in Morocco requires a multifaceted approach entailing cultural shifts manifested through legal reforms and educational initiatives. The nation must commit to prioritizing the elimination of VAW, aligning with international standards and obligations outlined in conventions like the CEDAW. By fostering a culture of respect, equality, and empowerment, Morocco can pave the way for a society free from GBV, ensuring the safety and well-being of all its citizens, regardless of gender.

References

- Anti-Discrimination Centre. (2019, June 11). *Sexual education - question of morality or a human right?*
- Arbaoui, L. (2016, March 15). *61.1% of Moroccan students in favor of sex education in high schools*. Morocco World News.
- Benharrouse, R. (2020). Towards sexual education: Moroccan youth's perception between globality and Islam. *Journal of Contemporary Studies of the Global South, 1*, 26–38. doi:10.46652/pacha.v1i3.34
- Borgen Project. (2020). *The status of women's rights in Morocco*.
- Bouhout, N. (2020, December 1). *Morocco's legal system and its influences on women's rights: A case study on gender-based domestic violence*. Central European University.
- Chaudhry, A. S. (2013). *Domestic violence and the Islamic tradition*. Oxford University Press.
- European Commission. (n.d.). *What is gender-based violence?*
- Gertholtz, L. (2016, February 15). *Letter from Human Rights Watch to the government of Morocco on domestic violence law reforms*. Human Rights Watch.
- Hanafi, L., & Alaoui, S. (2014, February 5). *Beyond the law: Protecting Morocco's women*. Al Jazeera.
- Haut-Commissariat au Plan. (2022). *La femme Marocaine en chiffres*. Royaume du Maroc.
- Kisa, S., Gungor, R., & Kisa, A. (2021). Domestic violence against women in North African and Middle Eastern countries: A scoping review. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse, 24*, 549–575. doi.org/10.1177/15248380211036070
- Lancot, O. S. (2022). Title IX & disparate impact: The harmful effects of abstinence-centric education. *William & Mary Journal of Race, Gender, & Social Justice, 28*, 765–790.

- Mobilising for Rights Associates. (2022). *How discriminatory national legislation contributes to women's poverty in Morocco*.
- OECD. (2023). *Gender inequality: Violence against women*.
- Palermo, T., Bleck, J., & Peterman, A. (2014). Tip of the iceberg: Reporting and gender-based violence in developing countries. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 179, 602–612. doi:10.1093/aje/kwt295
- Rollston, R., Wilkinson, E., Abouelzam, R., Mladenov, P., Horanieh, N., & Jabbarpour, Y. (2020). Comprehensive sexuality education to address gender-based violence. *The Lancet*, 396, 148–150. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(20)31477-X
- Sabah, S., Boujemaa, A., Salah-Eddine, K., Abboudi Taoufik, E. L., & Dominique, B. (2010). Sexuality education: Analysis of Moroccan teachers' and future teachers' conceptions. *US-China Education Review*, 7, 28–36.
- Statista. (2023, April 26). *Female employment rate in Morocco from 2012 to 2020*.
- UN Women. (2003, June 30–July 25). *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (29th session)*.
- UN Women. (1992). *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: General Recommendation No. 19 (11th session)*.
- UN Women. (2021, November). *Police units for women victims of violence in Morocco prioritize survivors' needs*.
- UN Women. (2023, December 7). *Take action: 10 ways you can help end violence against women*.
- UNESCO. (2023, November 16). *Comprehensive sexuality education: For healthy, informed and empowered learners*.
- United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2017). *General recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19 (1992)*.
- United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2022, June 22). *Experts of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women praise Morocco for legislation prohibiting discrimination, ask about high maternal mortality and female illiteracy rates in rural areas*.
- United Nations Population Fund. (2006, May 26). *Y-PEER: Empowering young people to empower each other*.
- United Nations Population Fund. (2014). *UNFPA operational guidance for comprehensive sexuality education: A focus on human rights and gender*.
- United Nations, Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2015). *The world's women 2015: Trends and statistics*. doi:10.18356/9789210573719
- US Department of State. (2022). *2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Morocco*.
- Women Against Abuse. (n.d.). *The language we use*.
- World Bank. (n.d.). *Poverty in Morocco: Challenges and opportunities*.
- World Bank. (2024). *Violence against women & girls – Resource guide*.
- World Health Organization. (2013). *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: Prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-sexual partner violence*.
- World Health Organization. (2024, March 25). *Violence against women*.



SARAH A. MIXSELL earned her B.A. in sociology and anthropology and in women, gender, and sexuality studies with high honors in 2024. At Lehigh University, Sarah was an engaged leader within her sorority, Kappa Alpha Theta, serving as chapter president in 2023. Sarah also demonstrated a passionate commitment to activism. She dedicated herself to raising awareness about the epidemic of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls in the United States and Canada through two internships at Lehigh, at the Center for Gender Equity and at the Pride Center. In fall 2025, Sarah will begin studies for a master of education.