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Research Article

Domestic and Social Violence against Women during the Egyptian Uprising

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Abstract

This study discusses how social and domestic violence against women increased during the period of political violence represented by the Egyptian Uprising of the 25th of January 2011. In this paper, the term political violence had been defined as any use of force practiced by governmental or anti-governmental groups to achieve political goals. Many scholars use the terms political violence and political instability interchangeably while the latter refers to a situation when a government had been toppled which was found to be strongly affiliated with political violence. Political violence includes uprisings and political transition of authority. Social violence is associated with sexual harassment, social norms and gender roles. Domestic violence refers to any physical harm among family members against women and domestic practices like early marriage and female circumcision. The article discusses first how the three types of violence interact and affect one another. The study in turn researches the increase of domestic violence rate against women in reaction to the political conflict resulting from the Egyptian Uprising of January 25th, 2011 through conducting interviews with abused women to investigate how the Egyptian Uprising had affected them socially and domestically. The study concludes that political violence had a direct impact on social and domestic violence against women.

Keywords: Violence, Women, Gender, Domestic, Uprising

1. Introduction

The issue of violence against women (VAW) had been recognized a long time ago and has been lately recognized in terms of its negative impact on women as it violates women's rights, limits their participation socially and politically, and damages their health and well-being. Women's rights like any other human rights proclaimed in the universal declaration of human right (1948) including freedom of conscience (Article 18), expression and association (Articles 19 & 20), freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention (Article 9), freedom from torture (Article 5), the right to a fair trial (Article 11), freedom from extra judicial killings and freedom of movement and residence (Article 13). However, a lot of recent research studies confirm the prevalence of many aspects of violence that women increasingly encounter (Panwar, 2011).

Some endeavors have been made globally to deal with this issue. For example, the world Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993 started to consider the rights of women and girls as being an essential part of universal human rights (UNICEF, 2000). Moreover, the United Nations General Assembly in December 1993 have adopted the declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. This declaration is considered the first international human rights instrument which deals only with violence against women. In 1994, the Commission on Human Rights have appointed the first UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women to analyze and document

violence against women, and hold the governments accountable for violations against women. The past five years have witnessed remarkable development in policy initiatives aimed at 'eliminating' violence against women and children in Europe such as articles 23 and 24 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (European Commission Report, 2015).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Political Violence (PV)

Political violence is violence aimed at achieving political targets. It can be directed from the regime against citizens which is called official violence or from citizens to the regime which is called unofficial violence. Scholars are polarized about the legitimacy of political violence; some think of violence as being legal if it aims at achieving objectives stated in constitution and law; while others think that political violence cannot be justified by any means (Tawfik, 1992). Regimes practicing violence against a particular category or community justify violence as a means for maintaining security, discipline and law while citizens or groups of people practicing violence against the regime justify violence as protecting themselves from the regime violence, defending human rights and freedoms, and expressing their demands.

During political violence, marginalized communities become the first victims to suffer and female bodies become a tool of repression and force practices in addition to being a spot for political resistance (Mekhemar, 2013), which makes women more vulnerable to domestic violence at the time of political conflict. According to the Gun Theory (Neiburg, 1969), political conflict increases the availability of using weapons in homes with less control and increases the potential use or threat to use weapons against women. Privately owned weapons have been identified by scholars as being a major risk factor in practicing domestic violence against women. According to the National Council for women 28% and 30% of married women have experienced intimate partner violence in 2009 (Somach & AbouZeid, 2009) and 2013 (The National Council for Women, 2013). One of the themes of political instability is that during political transition of changing regimes, the spread and use of weapons become more intense either out of self-defense or protecting properties. Along with unavailability with security forces, there would be a higher possibility of using those weapons domestically against women. Based on a UNICEF report (2000), one of the major risks linked to social and domestic violence is the availability of weapons.

Excessive consumption of alcohol and drugs also is considered a major element that triggers violent behavior of males towards women and children (UNICEF, 2000). During the political violence affiliated with political instability, the police decision of domestic arrest is determined by many variables. The demographic characteristics of victims and suspects such as gender and race have been included in many studies on policing domestic violence (Robinson, & Chandek, 2000).

Legally, domestic violence against women is fueled by discriminative laws against women, and lack of law enforcement (AbulKomsan, 2009). In the Egyptian context, the criminal law does not equalize between man and woman and passes gender-based verdicts such as the cases of marital cheating (articles: 273 - 276) and judicial sentence (articles: 274 – 277). The law excuses a husband who kills his wife upon catching her adultery while condemning a wife in the same position (Article 237).   Moreover, the law is subject to personal bias by judges or other officials (AbulKomsan, 2009). For instance, a judge has the option of penalty reduction under his discretion on the basis that *"family is above the law"*. Article 209 in the Personal Status law allows a man to practice some degree of violence against wife and children for discipline which is why this article is used as a legal outlet for violence charges. The laws of the Personal Status are also in favor of men and based on a wife's obedience to her husband and constrain a wife's movement or travel through requesting the husband's consent (Mahrosa Center, 2007).

2.2 Social Violence (SV)

Social norms and cultural can also foster violence against women; for example the stigma of being

single or divorced, the stigma of reporting abusers to the police, the passiveness of the public towards interference in violence incidents, the general support for male figures, and the lack of support from family and friends all can play a role. Violence against women is exacerbated by lack of awareness of the women exposed to it and not knowing it is their right to be free from violence. A woman's dependence on marriage, however, is rooted in broader systems of gender stratification (Kalmuss & Straus, 1982). Social norms about gender roles consider a husband's beating of a wife as normal and socially acceptable; compared to women who never faced domestic violence, those who did had 74% higher rates of justifying spousal violence. Demographic variation also counts as women who grew up in rural areas had 37% higher rates than those from urban areas of justifying violent behavior of their spouses (Kalmuss & Straus, 1982). Many scholars in European countries and the USA attributed violence against women to inequalities of power between men and women, rigid gender roles, cultural norms that support a man's right to inflict violence on female members in the family and weak sanctions against such behavior (Population Reference Bureau, 2010).

Social learning theorists have argued that behavior is learned by modeling that of others (Bandura, 1977). Thus, women's acceptance of violence in marriage, may be tracked to witnessing violence between parents or experiencing violence in childhood (Yount & Carrera, 2006). Therefore, women's exposure to corporal punishment or any forms of violence in childhood, may teach them when they grow up to view experiences of domestic violence in marriage life as normal (Anderson & Kras, 2007). The possible link between women's status and empowerment, and domestic violence has been noted considerably, for many studies have found that the more women have access to control over resources or membership in credit programs or group-based savings (Schuler & Hashemi & Rilly & Akhter, 1996), the less likely they are to experience domestic violence (Jejeebhoy & Cook, 1997). On the other hand, counter studies have found that women's empowerment can be intimidating to male and, in turn, it may increase the risk of domestic violence (Hindin, & Adair, 2002). One of the findings of previous studies is that the intergenerational transmission of violence (Kalmuss, 1984), through the witnessing of violence between parents as a child is considered a major indicator for future domestic violence (Weisz, 2000).

2.3 Domestic Violence (DV)

A study was conducted to find out whether the general rating of DV risk according to survivors, could be a strong predictor for severe DV, a statistical approach using many risk factors was enacted (Weisz, 2000). Straus (1996) have enlisted numerous factors associated with domestic violence based on the analysis of the 1985 National Family Violence Survey (Straus, 1996). Straus argued that life-threatening risk was identified if three or more acts of violence had occurred in the past year and there were 3 or more out of 18 measures including police involvement, drug abuse, extreme male dominance, abuse of a child, violence outside the family, and frequent verbal aggression. According to the Egyptian context and the research interest, the researcher will refer to the political involvement element as being the political variable that influences domestic violence based on the assumption that husbands knowing that policemen are occupied with major security issues during political transition periods, may use this chance to practice violence domestically with no fear of arrest.

Saunders (1995) revised studies regarding risk indicators for domestic violence. Three risk indicators for severe violence were significantly found to be general aggression inside and outside family, alcohol abuse, and abuse by parents. These indicators for severe violence are not necessarily considered predictors of homicide. They stem basically from violence occurring during the relationship, whereas predictors of homicide tend usually to occur within separation. Some indicators derived from Saunders' review were included in this study with reference to the Egyptian context such as drug abuse, violence inside and outside the family, and abuse by parents.

Both Straus and Saunders have used severe violence as a variable resulting from serious implications for victims. Consequently, there is a high possibility that severe violence according to the authors may cause injury or death, as threats to kill with a knife or gun are usually attached to injury or death.

3. Violence against Women since the 25th of January Uprising

Women participation in the 25th January Uprising was basically led by national rights because the majority of citizens were oppressed by the regime although females had the largest portion of violence by the regime at that time. The uprising was initiated by many female activists such as Esraa Abdel Fattah who was detained in the 15th of January 2010 and was released due to public opinion pressure. Another female activist was Gamila Ismail who was a media reporter and political activist. Also, a young political activist called Samira Ibrahim from Upper Egypt started her political activity in high school by taking part in the Sohag strikes on the 19th of January to demonstrate against violations of policemen. Many other female activists stirred the beginning of the Uprising and it was female activist who were most exposed to official political violence by the state.

After the first eighteen days of the Uprising, the square no longer was solely occupied by the actual demonstrators who had initiated the uprising because other elements started to fill it and sexually harass girls and women to humiliate them. A well-known case is that of the journalist Lara Logan who was harassed in the square during covering the Tahrir events. These vagrants were not the only sexual abusers in the square, the state of political instability fostered political violence even directed from soldiers and police officials towards women. On March 9th, 2011, eighteen female demonstrators were arrested by the army soldiers in Tahrir Square, taken to the Egyptian Museum to be assaulted, humiliated and tortured; seven of them including Samira Ibrahim were subjected to virginity tests by the army physician soldiers (Mekhemar, 2013). Many demonstrations were organized by women and girls to protest against the state's shameful acts and soldiers' harassment of girls.

Despite women's equal participation with men in Tahrir Square, women were excluded afterwards from key positions that requires decision-making during the political transition. The lack of women representation in the constitutional committee, with only one woman in the interim cabinet in Egypt, has raised doubts that women are being deliberately step-sided and stripped of their rights (Amar, 2011). This exclusion of women is considered the beginning of gender discrimination that the 25th of January Uprising was meant to overcome. Plus, women were most exposed to violence politically and socially under the presidency of the Morsi regime where they encountered sexual harassment in streets and physical assault in peaceful demonstrations by police forces and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). Institutionally, the situation was exacerbated by religious leaders appearing on religious media channels and approving violence against women who participate in demonstrations, stating that sexual harassment is caused by the provocative clothes of females, declaring the right of husband to beat his wife if she does not respond to peaceful means, legitimating early marriage for girls and approving medical campaigns for Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in the countryside.

4. Status of Women During Al Sisi Regime

Politically, with the end of the Morsi rule and beginning of the rule of President Al Sisi, the state became relatively stable politically and violence against women started to be reduced in terms of raising the marriage age to eighteen, including women in the judicial branch and many important positions in the state, amending legislation concerning sexual harassment, increased availability of units to fight violence against women in police stations, and activating the female police role in security provision. Plus, the current Egyptian constitution of 2014 has given woman the right of political participation and equalized her with man in all political and vocational aspects including the fields of justice, security, politics and military.   However, women are still excluded from some positions such as security and military due to cultural considerations and social norms. It was not until July 2015 that female judges were appointed in the judicial authority.

Socially, Egypt is a patriarchal society characterized by relations of power and authority of males over females and women's subordination is first experienced within the family. Traditionally, men are expected to have most of the decision-making authority and women are assumed to have relatively little autonomy (Fargues, 1995). Social tolerance induces women to tolerate violence as studies shows that 60% of abused women regard beating as a normal part of marriage (Campbell &

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Becker, 2006). Further, those wives who view beating as a normal part of marriage usually excuse the perpetrator and blame themselves assuming that they deserved beating because of their disobedience to their husbands or any provoking behavior. In public also, there is a common dilemma that if people view a husband beating his wife in the street, they would refrain from interfering and justify their stand by saying "*that's his wife and it is a family issue…. Let him punish her, she must have done something shameful*" and even women witnessing the incident would share the same comments and support the husband. Similarly, if a wife resorts to the police to report her husband's violence, she would hardly be supported and usually be advised to solve their family problems away from the police (Yount, 2009).

Domestically, a study conducted by the National Council for Women in 2009, 28% of women were exposed to physical violence at home while the same study conducted in 2013 showed that 33% of women were exposed to domestic violence (Somach & AbouZeid, 2009). Most of women exposed to violence in the family respond with silence and sometimes they fear exposure to further violence if they tell someone to interfere. Silence of abused women explains the under-reporting of VAW. The majority of survivors from physical abuse, have never approached a specialized center or agency for rehabilitation or help. Fear of social stigma prevents women from seeking help, except for physically abused women who are more likely to seek support than women dealing with other types of violence (Greenan, 2004). Women seeking help are usually referred to support agencies through personal contacts such as friends, families, and neighbors rather than more formal channels like health services, legal advice, or shelters. They were also found to be reluctant to involve formal authorities including the police, local leaders, or religious leaders (Greenan, 2004).

5. Methodology and Discussion

The study is based on abused women sharing their experiences during the Egyptian Uprising to find out how it affected their social and domestic lives. Interviews had been conducted in Cairo for being the center point of political confrontation. Hence, interviews were conducted with abused women from Cairo as being the capital city of Egypt. Ten abused women were interviewed provided that they were married during the Egyptian Uprising. Interviewees were selected in coordination with the Ministry of Social Solidarity from associations affiliated with the ministry whose mission is promoting women's rights providing rehabilitation services for abused women.

Social and domestic lives of women in Cairo were interactively affected as reported by interviewees by the increasing rates of street sexual harassment in reaction to the unavailability of security forces and the break of fear barrier by street violence perpetrators. The spread of sexual harassment has placed extra pressure on women to change their dressing code by wearing less revealing clothes and more covering garments. One of the participants stated "*I used to have frequent fights with my husband as he started to intervene in the way I wear and the times I get out and back home more than ever before the Uprising because he thought he was protecting me from potential harassment by adding these restrictions*". On the other hand, other women considered the Uprising as an opportunity for them to demand for a change, more freedom and personal space, so they objected to domestic abuses they used to accept earlier such as imposing decisions on them. For instance, a women said "*my husband used to take my salary and decide on aspects on expenses at home but after the Uprising, I realized that I am able to change and claim my rights at home and this was encountered by my husband's further violence against me*".

On political fronts, other women had to face violence for merely convicting political views that were different from their partners'. For instance a woman said "*My husband is a supporter of Muslim Brotherhood whereas I am not, he used to dictate to me who should I vote for during elections and what I should vote during referendums or else he threats with divorcing me*". Another participant shared her experience with direct exposure to violence by her addict husband as follows:"* my husband was addict to drugs and became more addict after the Uprising as drugs became more available and less expensive due to unavailability of security agents*". The same women added that her husband used to keep a sword for self-defense against thugs attacks during the Uprising, he hit her on head once with the sword during a fight while he was on drugs.

On economic level, some participants argued that the deteriorated economy of the state had

caused their partners to lose jobs in many sectors. Husbands who lost their jobs or had to earn less money because of the Uprising's impact on job market, had to seek their wives' possessions and salaries. One of the participants said "*my husband was working in the field of tourism and after he lost his job, he started asking me to sell my jewelry to give him money…after I ran out of money, he wanted my family to give us money or I should take my kids and live with my family until he finds a job*". Eventually, she had to leave him with her kids till she found work and supported financially her family.

6. Conclusion

Accordingly, it can be inferred that the state of political instability emerging after the 25th of January Uprising has caused political violence practiced against citizens in general and against women in particular. This political violence has stirred social violence against women in the form of sexual harassment against female demonstrators by different communities and eventually has been internalized by institutions through which public figures and religious leaders have encouraged males to use violence against their women in order to control them, prevent their participation in demonstrations, and make them obedient to their husbands or any male figures in family. Political violence has stimulated also domestic violence through the absence of policemen to deal seriously with domestic violence cases in addition to the availability of weapons at homes for self-defense against thugs, and the spread of drugs in homes along with the absence of security forces. Consequently, the cycle of political violence was enlarged to include social violence against women and eventually was transmitted to the household and family in the form of domestic violence. In short, domestic and social violence against women are so interactive and need to be examined with regard to the political surroundings that dominates the society and its ingrained gender culture. The state should take preventive measures to ensure the safety of women domestically and socially by implementing new policies, amending current laws, and enforcing gender equality codes within the state institutions.

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