

Women Survivors of Violence: Where to Go?

Problems Facing Shelters for Women in Egypt and Gaps in Responses to Needs of Women Survivors of Violence

Introduction

The questions pertaining to Violence against Women in its various forms and how it could be addressed are a priority on the agenda of the Feminist movement on the local, regional and international levels. Combating violence does not merely mean eliminating the phenomenon. It also, and above all, means creating genuine mechanisms to address incidents of Violence against Women. Such mechanisms should follow from a comprehensive vision which integrates a gender perspective and provides basic services to Women Survivors of Violence. Accordingly, a major question weighs on the minds of Feminists engaging in different organizations, movements and initiatives: How could we better respond to the needs of Women Survivors of Violence? There are several ways to respond comprehensively to the needs of Women Survivors and provide them with essential services, including medical help, legal assistance and psychological support. Among the most important responses to the needs of Women subjected to Violence is to provide shelters¹ to house Women Survivors of domestic or sexual violence. This is, first, to protect them against recurrent violence, by keeping them away from family, spouse, or other assailants; and second, to help them reintegrate into society, whether through economic empowerment, psychological support or legal assistance.

Based on our belief in the importance of the existence of shelters to protect and empower Women Survivors of Violence, Nazra for Feminist Studies presents this study on shelters in Egypt. The Study covers both the shelters directly managed by the Government (Ministry of Social Solidarity - MoSS) and those affiliated with civil society organizations (which are also subject to the supervision of the MoSS). The objective of the study is, first, to document the status of shelters in Egypt, and the extent of their readiness and eligibility to receive Women Survivors of violence. Second, the study provides recommendations as to how to improve the services provided by shelters to Women subjected to Violence. Moreover, this study was conducted in light of the implementation of the National Strategy for Combating Violence against Women (NSVAW), launched by the National Council for Women (NCW) on 7 May 2015. NSVAW addressed, under the 3rd heading, the subject of shelters, and claimed "providing adequate shelters for Women subjected to Violence" as one of its objectives. As NSVAW addresses increasing the number of shelters in the country, it is necessary to

¹ The term Shelters is variably translated into Arabic as Substitute Homes or Hosting House. The term used in the Arabic version of this paper literally translate as "Safe Homes". In the English language, however, the term will always be rendered as Shelters.

document and evaluate the extent of preparedness of already existing shelters to receive and empower Women Survivors,so that discussions regarding increasing the number of shelters can be realistic and meaningful.

Significance of the Feminist Perspective

The way the concept of shelters is dealt with varies according to the perspective adopted, and how violence is perceived. As a group of Feminists,we believe that Violence against Women is a manifestation of the patriarchal structure and culture which create unequal power relations between men and women, and subjugate women in many ways, including physical and sexual violence. Violence against women cannot be viewed as separate from patriarchal reasoning, the perception that women are inferior, and discrimination against women by all other means. As such, we do not consider Violence against Women as an individual or exceptional act,but rather as a cruder extension of other forms of patriarchal oppression. We consider shelters to be a tool to empower and support women as they survive the experience of violence to become Women Survivors, capable of resuming their lives in the manner they choose, without falling prey to a constant sense of stigma or self blame. From the same standpoint,shelters are not a stand-alone service, but should be part of a more comprehensive mechanism that aims to respond to the needs of Women Survivors of Violence on all levels. Shelters are also not a place to pursue reconciliation between two parties.From our viewpoint,Violence against Women is a crime, even though many of its forms are not criminalized by law.A Woman Survivor who seeks a shelter is a survivor of a violent crime, not an angry woman who left home after a fight with her husband or family. We believe that the role of the shelter is to provide protection and rehabilitation to the survivor,rather than assume the role of the guardian who determines how she should react to the violence to which she was exposed or takes decisions on her behalf.All too often, shelter administrators would organize reconciliation meetings between Women Survivors and perpetrators of violence, in cases where violence had taken place in the private sphere. In contrast, we do not stand at the same distance from both sides.We are on the side of the survivor. We consider the role of shelters to consist in empowering survivors to make decisions which suits them, whether to become independent or to go back.

Women's issues are issues of public interest. Violence against Women, as is the case with any other crime, concerns society as a whole. Required responses and remedies should involve all actors, both from the State and civil society.Therefore, development of the services provided to Women Survivors, including shelters, should be a priority for the Egyptian Government, especially in light of the implementation of NSVAW.

Research Methodology

The study relied mainly on personal interviews. The interviewees included individuals from civil society organizations (CSOs) which have in place a system for referral to shelters, and have a long history in dealing with them, including Al Nadeem Center for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence (Al Nadeem Center), Nazra for Feminist Studies (Nazra), and the Women and Development Foundation (WDF); international organizations which have worked towards developing shelters in Egypt, such as UN WOMEN; CSOs with experience in managing shelters, such as the Association for the Development and Enhancement of Women (ADEW), the Center for Egyptian Women Legal Assistance (CEWLA), and Banati Association. The study team also interviewed some of the managers of shelters or of shelter-managing associations, as well as Women Survivors of Violence who sought refuge in shelters. Additionally, visits were conducted in some shelters in Egypt. The study also made use of the experience and websites of shelters around the world, MoSS website, and several reports on the subject.

Nazra tried to conduct visits in all shelters in Egypt, however, this was not possible as it required the official approval of MoSS. We formally contacted MoSS, but regrettably, we did not receive such approval. This was one of the biggest obstacles facing the drafting of this paper, as, instead of visiting all shelters, we mostly had to rely on secondary sources.

1- About Shelters Worldwide

There is a great number of shelters around the world. Some are operated by Government organs, others by civil society, and some are jointly managed. Generally, shelters aim, as mentioned previously, to protect women from violence, empower them to reintegrate into society, and help them plan their own future as they wish. "We have been working with Women subjected to Violence and encouraging them to file reports. Then we faced a problem: when these women followed our advice, and filed complaints and reports against the assailants from their families, and even left the family or husband's house because of violence, they could not find a safe place to go to. At that point, we realized the importance of having shelters, to the extent that we started to believe that it is useless to encourage Women Survivors to leave their homes, or face their assailants, unless we are able to provide a safe place for them," says Bandana Rana², founder of the Global Network of Women's Shelters (GNWS). Thus, lack of shelters for women significantly impacts the ability to combat violence against women, as it constrains women's ability to act against the

² Bandana Rana is also founder of the Saathi, a leading NGO in the field of combating Violence against Women in Nepal, which has been a pioneer of women's shelters in that country.

violence they face. Fearing that if they left their homes and their assailants, they would not find a place to go or someone to provide support, some of them are forced to stay.

Most shelters define Violence against Women according to international standards, primarily based on the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women of 1993³, which provided a comprehensive definition of Violence against Women, including physical, sexual or psychological harm suffered by women based on their gender. International definitions of violence, agreed upon by many Shelters for Women in different parts of the world, include but are not limited to physical violence, such as beating, using weapons or sharp objects, and confinement and deprivation of freedom; sexual violence of varying degrees; verbal violence (insults, threats, etc.); and psychological violence. These acts of violence could be perpetrated by the family, husband, or society (in streets and public places), as well as by, or with the consent of, the State. Some shelters adopt broader and more detailed definitions which may include, for example, prohibition from work or limitation of freedom of movement by husband or family; generally misogynistic or degrading statements about women; and sense of rejection⁴.

It is generally accepted in many countries worldwide that there are three different types of shelters: Emergency shelters, short-term shelters, and long-term shelters⁵. Emergency shelters are supposed to provide fast and direct services, as well as temporary protection for a period of no more than three days. Short-term shelters, on the other hand, can house women for a period of up to one year in most cases, during which they work towards rehabilitating women to help them either live independently or make the decision to go back home after a specific period. In some cases, Women Survivors are referred by an emergency shelter to a short-term shelter. Long-term shelters allow women to stay for a longer period, and are mainly for serious cases which require a longer period of psychological or medical treatment⁶.

It is often necessary to establish shelters in remote places which are difficult to reach, in order to keep survivors safe by denying access to families and offenders. Shelters follow different policies and methods to advertise their existence. It is often difficult, and subject to various considerations, to strike the right balance between facilitating access by Women

⁴ See, for example, the definition adopted by one shelter in the United States:
<http://mission-services.com/need-help/do-you-need-a-safe-place-to-stay/?gclid=CJztioyPscsCFbYK0wodhU0Irw>.
which also matches the definitions of other shelters worldwide, for example in Denmark:
<http://www.danner.dk/help-counseling/facts-violence/numbers-on-violence/enquiries-residents-womens-shelter-denmark/?lang=en>

⁵ Personal Interview with Mozn Hassan, Founder and Executive Director of Nazra.

⁶ Ibid.

Survivors through awareness that a shelter exists, and maintaining confidentiality to protect that shelter against possible attacks by families. For example, some shelters prefer not to announce their location, and consider it sufficient to have an official website and a hotline⁷ or rely on referrals by other organizations. Similarly, the operating organization may announce its office address, which first receives Women Survivors then refers them to the shelter, without announcing its location⁸. In some cases, the address of the shelter is announced, and its place is known. This depends on the degree to which the shelter is protected, either by the police, people in the neighborhood, or private security hired by the shelter. Some shelters allow refugee women or women who do not have the nationality of the country in which the shelter is located, while others do not. Some shelters, for example in Denmark, offer specialized services to ethnic and religious minorities.

According to GNWS, the role of shelters is not only to provide a temporary place for housing women. Shelters must be places which empower women economically, psychologically and legally to ensure that they are able to make the right decision, whether to live independently or to go back home, and whether to take legal action. There are several advanced and inspiring experiences in developing shelters for women, even in countries where violence against women is culturally tolerated or where the State fails to consider the security and safety of women a priority. For example, Uma Shah, Director of Saathi⁹, the only independent shelter in Nepal whose founders established GNWS, recounts the difficulties they faced when they established the shelter, and the strong resistance put up by society and the State, who considered the shelter to be a place for women to fall into moral corruption. However, the shelter has now become quite developed, and receives support from the State (albeit limited). Upon arrival at the Saathi Shelter (which is open 24 hours a day), the psychological, medical and physical condition of the survivor is assessed. Accordingly, legal, psychological or medical assistance is provided, as the case may be. During the period of stay in the shelter, women are trained to acquire different skills, with a view to their economic empowerment. The shelter may also provide a financial contribution if the survivor wishes to establish her own business, and may also help her find a job. The shelter also contributes to the survivor's rent for the first two months after the survivor leaves the shelter to live independently. Additionally, the shelter provides educational services to Women subjected to Violence, and contributes to the education of their children for two years after leaving the shelter, if need arises. Shah also believes that

⁷ Some shelters do not consider hotlines to be safe.

⁸ For example, ADEW follows that policy. Personal Interview with Ms. Rasha Raslan, Media Officer and Training Manager, ADEW.

⁹ Email interview with Ms. Uma Shah, Director of Saathi.

shelters should work on developing Feminist awareness among Women subjected to Violence, or at least, educate them on the gender perspective. This is the policy followed by the Saathi shelter, which provides trainings on gender, Violence against Women, and trafficking in Women Survivors. After ascertaining that a woman's condition allows her to leave the shelter, there is a follow-up system for the period of one year, during which the survivor sometimes visits the shelter.

In some countries where the State may have taken larger strides towards the empowerment of women and combating violence against women, there is a national organization for women's shelters. In Denmark, for example, that organization connects 41 shelters for coordination and exchange of experience and information. The role of the Danish national organization also includes training shelter staff, and organizing campaigns and training sessions to improve the level of services provided in shelters. It also publishes studies and statistics regarding Women subjected to Violence and Violence against Women in Denmark. Further, the Danish shelter organization assumes the role of organizing awareness campaigns regarding Violence against Women, and networking with local, regional and international organizations to stress the importance of establishing and developing Shelters for Women all over the world. On the international level, there is the Global Network of Women's Shelters (GNWS), established in 2009, which brings together a large number of member organizations and associations operating in more than 44 countries around the world. The Network organizes a regular World Conference (approximately every two and a half years) to exchange experiences and create synergies among shelter development efforts.

2. About Shelters in Egypt

The first women's shelters in Egypt were established in 2003, pursuant to two Ministerial Decrees issued in 2000¹⁰, according to which MoSS (at the time called the Ministry of Social Affairs) established seven shelters for women. The number of shelters increased later. According to MoSS website, there are now 9 shelters under MoSS, distributed as follows: Cairo (1), Giza (1), Qalyubia (1), Alexandria (2), Mansoura (1), Beni Sueif (1), Fayoum (1), and Menia (1). Yet, it turned out that there is only one active shelter in Alexandria, as the other is no longer operating. There is also one shelter which is independent from MoSS, operated by ADEW in a location that is kept confidential for the protection of women

¹⁰ Personal Interview with Dr. Magda Adly, Director of Al Nadeem Center.

survivors. Accordingly, there are effectively 9 shelters in Egypt, whether operated by MoSS or by civil society organizations. Concerning shelters affiliated with the MoSS, they are primarily government undertakings reporting to, and funded by, MoSS.

MoSS may put a civil society organization in charge of operating a shelter, while keeping administrative oversight. With the exception of the shelters located in Beni Sueif and Qalyubia governorates, which are operated directly by the government, the management of other shelters is assigned to civil society organizations. These shelters, however, remain under MoSS oversight and are totally funded by MoSS. As for civil society shelters (of which there is only ADEW shelter for adult women¹¹), they are primarily an independent undertaking of, and totally funded by, the founding organization. However, the founding organization has to obtain a permit from MoSS to establish the shelter, and the shelter is subject to periodic MoSS oversight. Addresses of shelters (except for the ADEW shelter) are published on MoSS website, and there is also a MoSS hotline¹². Supposedly, there is a hotline for the shelters, but it is not active, and women are referred to shelters by the NCW Complaints Office hotline, NGOs working with Women subjected to Violence, or, in some cases, hospitals, where shelters have established good networks and relationships in their vicinity, as is the case with the one in Giza¹³. It should also be noted that CEWLA was not able to obtain a permit to reopen its shelter, which operated for three years until 2011, and has closed its doors since then. CEWLA filed a suit against MoSS to be able to reopen the shelter, which offered psychological and legal support to Women subjected to Violence and victims of human trafficking, whether Egyptians or non-Egyptians¹⁴.

Shelters vary in terms of capacity, but they usually range from 12 to 20 beds¹⁵. For example, the Giza shelter can accommodate 17-20 Women Survivors, whereas the ADEW shelter can host 20. According to a 2009 report, the total capacity of all shelters was 214 beds. Considering that today there is one more active shelter, it can be estimated that the capacity of all existing shelters is around 225-235 Women Survivors. Concerning shelter rules, MoSS shelter provide 3 months of accommodation which can be extended for another 3 months. It is also possible to extend for a third term of 3 months, bringing the maximum period allowed to 9 months, though extension requires MoSS approval. In most

¹¹ Banati Association manages the Haram City shelter, as well as a shelter for homeless children in Imbaba. The Imbaba shelter is primarily for minor Girls subjected to Violence - Personal Interview with Dr. Hanaa Abu El Ghar, Director of Banati Association.

¹² Hotline number 19468.

¹³ Personal Interview with Mr. Mohamed Rashed, Director of the Integrated Services Association, entrusted with managing the Giza shelter.

¹⁴ Personal Interview with Ms. Iman Mohamed, Social worker and officer in charge of the Shelter for Violence and Human Trafficking Victims at CEWLA.

¹⁵ Personal Interview with Ms. Sherine Aly, Violence Against Women Programme, UN WOMEN.

cases, women leave shelters after the specified period. However, there are some exceptions for certain cases, depending on the flexibility and understanding of the shelter staff. It is allowed to bring children along, up to 12 years old for boys, and with no age limit for girls. The survivor is also allowed to go out during the day, whether or not she is a working woman. However, non-working women are required to obtain a permit to go out, and have to be back at a specified time. Living in the shelter is free of charge if the woman does not have an income. If she is a working woman, she contributes 25% of her income.

In general, most shelters are in an acceptable physical condition in terms of cleanliness and space. Most consist of two or three rooms with several beds, a kitchen and a bathroom. Some shelters have areas for kids (in Alexandria for example), particularly if the shelter is part of the premises of an association that offers other services (such as day care). Yet there are differences in the condition of the buildings. For example, the Menya shelter is in an old rundown building, and lacks basic standards of cleanliness and comfort. The Mansoura shelter is also one of the poorest¹⁶. The ADEW shelter, on the other hand, has more space, and as such, provides better living standards. For example, the shelter is divided into several flats, and every two Women Survivors live in a shared flat, with a private room for each, which provides better standards of privacy.

In some instances, MoSS has collaborated with civil society to improve the conditions of shelters. In 2006, all staff members of MoSS (Ministry of Social Affairs at the time) shelters and Women Units, received training, in collaboration with Al Nadeem Center, aimed at educating staff regarding the gender perspective, the different forms of violence, and ways to address violence. Several questions and suggestions were presented by shelter staff. The MoSS Deputy Minister in charge of the project attended at the end of the last day, and proposals were presented regarding amendment of the proposed written shelter regulations. This training had a significant impact, as it resulted in important amendments, such as allowing women to bring their children, which was not allowed before 2006, which was severely unfair to mothers. Regarding the objectives of the project, the clause on "protecting women against moral corruption" was omitted. Despite the fact that these verbal amendments were included in the introduction and objectives of the project on the MoSS website, the final written regulations including these amendments are yet to be adopted¹⁷. Recently, UN WOMEN, in cooperation with MoSS, organized a training for shelter staff which consisted of three workshops in November 2015¹⁸. The first workshop aimed to

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Personal Interview with Dr. Magda Adly, Director of Al Nadeem Center.

¹⁸ Personal Interview with Ms. Sherine Aly, Violence Against Women Program, UN WOMEN.

introduce shelter workers to the definitions and various forms of violence. The second workshop was concerned with the status of women in Egyptian law. The third workshop focused on how to deal with Women Survivors and promote psychological rehabilitation and legal and economic empowerment. The project also included conducting visits to all shelters, and currently, a Handbook based on the outcomes of the project is being prepared; a copy of which to be placed at all shelters in the country. The shelter development project is still ongoing during this current year.

Most of the women living in shelters are victims of sexual or physical violence by family or husband, with the levels of violence ranging from severe beating to third degree burns to the face or body, broken bones, wounds caused by sharp objects such as knives and switchblades, and recurrent incest rape.

Shelter staff do not usually consider marital rape as a form of violence, and women rarely go to shelters due to marital rape in the first place¹⁹. Violence could sometimes reach the level of torture by electric shocks at the hands of the husband or family (father, mother, or siblings)²⁰.

For women and girls to be admitted into shelters, they have to meet the following conditions, as published on the MoSS website:

- having been subjected to violence;
- being of Egyptian nationality or married to an Egyptian under an official marriage contract, or a divorcée of an Egyptian and still within her *Edda* period;
- payment of the fees specified by the Oversight Committee, based on a social background study; and
- meeting the conditions of legal capacity (both physical and mental).

The availability of shelters in Egypt is a positive thing in itself. This is especially the case as there used to be strong resistance to having shelters in place in the beginning of their establishment, even inside MoSS, on the grounds that they encourage women to engage in moral corruption²¹ or to leave their homes. Despite the inherent positive impact of having shelters in place, there are several problems regarding their management, objectives, how

¹⁹ Personal Interview with Dr. Magda Adly, Director of Al Nadeem Center.

²⁰ http://www.moss.gov.eg/misa/ar-eg/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%AF%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9/%D8%AE%D8%AF%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A3%D8%A9.aspx?udt_486_param_detail=37

²¹ Personal Interview with Dr. Magda Adly, Director of Al Nadeem Center - Personal Interview with Mr. Mohamed Rashed, Director of the Integrated Services Association, entrusted with managing the Giza shelter.

they treat women, and the lack of experience of their staff. These problems will be addressed in detail below.

3. Some of the Problems of Shelters in Egypt

Shelters have several limitations which prevent them from fulfilling their role in empowering Women Survivors of Violence. In general, the project itself, as well as its managers and implementers, lack the Feminist perspective, which negatively impacts how Women Survivors are treated and how the role of shelters is perceived. On the other hand, there are several problems pertaining to the working mechanisms and capabilities of MoSS itself. A detailed description of the most prominent problems related to shelters in Egypt is presented below.

- Number and Geographic Distribution:

The limited number and geographic distribution of available shelters is problematic, as there are entire regions with no shelters at all. According to a study published by USAID in 2009 - at a time when the number of shelters was 8 rather than 9 - the existing 214 beds make up 1 bed per 380,000 persons. According to international studies, the rate should be 1 bed per 7,500 citizens, which means that Egypt, at the time, needed 10,000 beds more than what is already available²². With the population increase since then, only two new shelters were established, and one was closed down, which means that the number of available shelters is still relatively very low. As for geographic distribution, while there are three safe houses in Greater Cairo (Cairo - Giza - Qaliubiya), and two in the Delta Region (Alexandria and Mansoura) and two in northern Upper Egypt (Beni Sueif and Fayoum) - which is good and necessary, there is not a single women's shelter in the Canal region (Ismailia - Suez - Port Said) nor in southern Upper Egypt. The small number and unfair geographic distribution of shelters constitute a real problem for women who want to reach shelters. They have to travel long distances, which may be difficult due to the medical and physical condition of the Woman subjected to Violence. Moreover, in some cases, traveling is financially difficult for women who have no source of income.

However, the larger problem in practice is that shelters, while few in number and badly distributed geographically, are not occupied to capacity, and some are even almost empty. This is due to several reasons. First, most women do not know that such shelters

²² NCW and USAID. Egypt Violence Against Women Study: Overview of Services on Violence against Women. April 2009.
http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnadq891.pdf

exist. Hotlines are inexistent or inactive, and shelters do not have websites. Certainly, this could be for security reasons. However, there is no well-functioning and active referral network connecting shelters with civil society organizations working with Women subjected to Violence. Moreover, many organizations and associations that are active in the field do not know of the existence of these shelters. Needless to say, the patriarchal culture, which considers having women leave their homes as moral corruption or undermining of family life, plays a key role in fostering the reluctance of many women to seek refuge in these shelters, fearing social stigmatization or loss of custody of their children if they seek divorce; or hoping for reconciliation with the husband. Another factor which also contributes to the limited utilization of existing shelters is arbitrary constraints to admission of Women subjected to Violence in some cases. For example, in the Alexandria shelter, no women are admitted after 3 p.m. and a woman survivor must wait for management to convene to decide whether to admit or reject "the case"²³. In some other cases, women are not admitted because there are no apparent signs of beating or physical harm, therefore considering their reasons for seeking shelter not to constitute violence²⁴.

- Definition of Violence / Woman Subjected to Violence

There is no specific definition of violence in the written regulations, accordingly, shelter staff follow their own definitions, based on their own perceptions and the views of the management of each association. For example, the Giza shelter adopts a broader definition of violence that encompasses verbal violence. "Certainly, if a woman is being insulted and called names by her husband, and she does not want to stay, it is considered a form of violence", says Manal Abdel Latif, the Giza Shelter Manager²⁵. The shelter also accepts women who were exposed to sexual harassment or assault in the public sphere or in the streets and are afraid to go back home. However, there are other shelters that do not recognize violence except if physical harm is quite apparent and has left marks on the woman's body or face. Even following the narrow and deficient definition of violence as physical or sexual only, sometimes the signs of abuse are not clear, or disappear after a period of time. Accordingly, some shelters do not consider that the woman has been subjected to violence, which inflicts severe injustice on the Woman Survivor, not only because she is not admitted, or will not have a place to stay, but also due to her feelings that her grievance is not heard and her suffering is underestimated. Nadia²⁶, a Woman

²³ Personal Interview with Ms. Aida Nour El Din, Director of the Women and Development Association in Alexandria.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Personal Interview with Ms. Manal Abdel Latif, Manager of the Giza shelter.

²⁶ The real name of the survivor was changed for reasons of confidentiality.

Survivor of Violence, recounts the harsh treatment she received at her husbands' hands, and how he used to beat her and kick her out of the house. She went to her mother's house, yet the latter did not accept the idea that Nadia has left her husband's house, kicked her out as well, and threw all her personal belongings in the street. There were no signs of beating on Nadia's body or face, and as soon as she arrived at the shelter, the admission officer told her "this is not violence. You have to arrive with a bruised head or be brought by an ambulance. But this is not violence". Accordingly, Nadia was not admitted to the shelter, and is currently looking for a job and a place to live independently.

Thus, the lack of a definition of the concept of violence, or lack of agreement thereon, opens the door in many cases to severe arbitrariness in dealing with Women Survivors, or having their stories discredited because they do not have physical evidence to prove they have been subjected to beating or sexual assault. Additionally, shelters only receive Egyptian Women subjected to Violence, and do not admit refugees or non-Egyptian women, even if they were exposed to violence in Egypt (except if the survivor is married to an Egyptian, or divorced from one and is still in her *Edda* period).

- Absence of the Notion of "Empowerment":

Most shelters operate as places for residence only, without programs for economic empowerment, or regular psychological support programs. In most cases, budgets are not sufficient to provide lawyers, and as a result, not all shelters are capable of providing the legal support Women Survivors need²⁷. Economic empowerment activities, if any, are largely informal and random, varying according to the association involved and available resources. There is, however, no clear, systematic approach in that regard²⁸. For example, the Giza Shelter is located near an industrial zone, and it is easy to help Women Survivors find jobs in surrounding factories. Therefore, it is often the case that Women Survivors living in the shelter are able to find nearby employment and save money before leaving the shelter²⁹. This was also the case in other places, where a sewing machine is available in the shelter, and can be used to teach Women Survivors sewing. However, in most cases, there is no clear, planned program for economic empowerment. Moreover, economic empowerment is mostly limited to traditional and stereotypical activities like knitting and sewing. The only shelter that has in place a program and a methodology for economic empowerment is the ADEW shelter.

²⁷ Personal Interview with Dr. Magda Adly, Director of Al Nadeem Center.

²⁸ Personal Interview with Ms. Mozn Hassan, Founder and Executive Director of Nazra.

²⁹ Personal Interview with Mr. Mohamed Rashed, Director of the Integrated Services Association, entrusted with managing the Giza shelter.

Furthermore, and except for the ADEW shelter, psychological support sessions are not held regularly, and sometimes not held at all if no psychologist is available. In many cases, the survivor recounts her story to a non-specialized individual such as the manager or attendant of the shelter, or has to repeat it more than once, which is both burdensome and a violation of privacy. The absence of the concept of empowerment is an important factor in understanding the role of shelters, and how their staff view them. If shelters are not places of empowerment first and foremost, their role is reduced to being temporary housing facilities, and as such, would lose a large part of their intrinsic value in supporting Women subjected to Violence towards their reintegration into society, and contributing to their transformation from victims to Women Survivors. Accordingly, the absence of a gender perspective in the design of the shelter project itself, and in the awareness of shelters staff and their management, reduces the role of shelters to that of a charity activity, and negatively impacts their effectiveness. As such, it can be said that the only shelter that cares greatly for the concept of empowerment is the ADEW shelter, due to the fact that ADEW is first and foremost a civil society organization concerned with women's issues, and addressing Violence against Women from a Feminist perspective.

- Lack of Resources and Poor Work Conditions

Among the factors that negatively affect the performance of shelters are the problems related to limited resources and funding. For example, there is no sufficient funding to provide educational services to Women Survivors, or send them to receive educational courses outside the shelter. The amount of cash aid provided by MoSS varies from one shelter to the other, but as an example, the Giza Shelter receives an annual allocation of 26,000 - 28,000 Egyptian Pounds for procurement, and a similar amount for staff salaries. According to Mr. Mohamed Rashed, director of the association entrusted with managing the Giza shelter, this amount is not enough at all to cover the needs of the shelter³⁰. Ms. Manal Abdel Latif, the shelter manager, said that this amount is supposedly enough to pay for electricity and water, as well as procure food and clothing for each survivor. She also said that the total cost per survivor cannot be less than 500 Egyptian Pounds. Accordingly, the aid provided by MoSS is not sufficient at all to cover the needs of the shelter and the Women Survivors. This greatly impacts shelters, failing to allow for them to develop in terms of focusing on new activities, educating the Women Survivors, or working to provide yous and recreational activities for accompanying children. Second, the lack of resources prevents the shelter from operating at full capacity, and this has become more pressing recently as MoSS aid (which is not enough to begin with) has been coming

³⁰ Personal Interview with Ms. Manal Abdel Latif, Giza Shelter Manager

late, due to a change in the financial monitoring system of MoSS. Initially, aid funds used to be sent to Social Solidarity Directorates in the various governorates, and financial monitoring was conducted on the Directorate level. This system has recently changed and all financial monitoring is now being conducted on the central level, and all funds affiliated with the Directorates have been moved to MoSS itself³¹. Therefore, aid is now arriving quite late. For example, the annual aid for the Giza Shelter is now overdue since mid last year. The salaries of the administrative staff are also late. This forces the association managing the shelter to cover these expenses, which should be covered by MoSS.

Needless to say, poor funding results in a very low salary level, especially considering the difficult work conditions³². The salary of the Shelter Manager ranges between 320 and 400 Egyptian Pounds, and the salary of the social worker is around 220 Egyptian Pounds³³. "Salaries are low, and the social workers who would agree to these are not worth their salt," says Ms. Manal Abdel Latif. Low salaries also cause many staff members to quit their jobs to seek others, which is the case in the Giza Shelter. "The social worker left because of the money, and the psychologist only comes in when asked"³⁴. Thus, the delay in paying out the aid, and the departure of many staff members, makes the shelter unfit to receive new cases, and has almost stopped taking in new cases as of the beginning of this year. This is particularly regretful due to the fact that the Giza Shelter is one of the most active shelters, with a solid understanding of the concept of women's shelters³⁵.

The problem of funding may have escalated recently, but it is not a new issue. Rather, it has accompanied the shelter project since its inception. The problem also lies in the difficult work conditions, from a psychological as well as a logistical perspective, particularly when it comes to staff members seconded from MoSS and transferred from their home cities to work in shelters. In the training held in 2006, many shelter staff members recounted the problems they face, including being seconded to work far from their home cities and from the capital, often in remote areas that are hard to reach, and as a result, their working hours have increased without any increase in their pay³⁶. Of course, this takes its toll on shelter workers. As one worker in Beni Sueif puts it: "Do not ask me to sympathize with the girls while I am already under the weather"³⁷. The poor working conditions also lead to issues of

³¹ Personal Interview with Mr. Mohamed Rashed, Director of the Integrated Services Association, entrusted with managing the Giza shelter.

³² Personal Interview with Dr. Magda Adly, Director of Al Nadeem Center.

³³ Personal Interview with Ms. Manal Abdel Latif, Manager of the Giza shelter.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Personal Interview with Dr. Magda Adly, Director of Al Nadeem Center.

³⁶ Personal Interview with Dr. Magda Adly, Director of Al Nadeem Center.

³⁷ Ibid.

sustainability, as the work team changes constantly and most workers stay in the job for only a few months. This poses a real challenge in places like shelters, where the continuity of the work team for a sufficient period is very important as it allows them to fully grasp the role the shelter plays, and gain experience in how to deal with Women subjected to Violence, their families, and their problems. Certainly, low salaries and poor working conditions are among the most important causes of lack of sustainability of staff. However, the psychological burden of working at a shelter is also an important factor, especially that in most cases, there no specialized person (a psychologist or social worker) available to hear the stories of the Women Survivors. This is also done randomly by any member of staff in the shelter, and at any time.

As a matter of fact, providing humane and comfortable working conditions, as well as fair salaries, for shelter workers is very important, particularly for a job as hard as rehabilitating and empowering Women subjected to Violence. Maintaining the security and psychological well-being of the workers themselves is also an important consideration. It is difficult for female workers in the shelter to play an effective role in empowering Women Survivors of Violence if they themselves feel unempowered, and exposed to forms of oppression and injustice, including the financial and moral oppression related to their work in the shelter.

- Training and Qualifying Shelter Workers

The issue of training shelter workers to understand their roles and the role of shelters is closely linked to the problems of funding and working conditions. In most cases, shelter workers lack a gender perspective and the required sensibility to respond to the needs of Women Survivors of Violence. Ultimately, shelter workers are part of society, and are themselves exposed to patriarchal oppression, and in many cases, are assimilated into the patriarchal culture. If shelter workers are not Feminists or believers in a gender perspective, there will be no possibility of changing some of the patriarchal concepts they hold except by going through training programs and courses which enable them to properly play their role. The patriarchal culture would in fact lead to unfair practices against Women Survivors, and not always due to formal regulations. In the early years of shelters in Egypt, it was a recurrent practice to subject Women Survivors to virginity tests³⁸. Although regulations do not require such virginity tests, they require the completion of some medical papers, and in some cases, members of staff have interpreted that to include virginity tests in order to verify the "good conduct of the girl". Virginity tests are now much less frequently encountered. Shelter workers no longer insist on conducting them. "I was asked to conduct

³⁸ Personal Interview with Mozn Hassan, Founder and Executive Director of Nazra - Personal Interview with Dr. Magda Adly, Director of Al Nadeem Center.

a virginity test only once after the Revolution, maybe in 2012 or late 2011. I refused, and that was that".³⁹ Yet, there is still much intransigence and suspicion when it comes to admitting unmarried girls. The conduct of Women Survivors in general is often questioned, especially if the Woman Survivor was not referred by a trusted civil society organization. In some cases, members of staff will be harsh in dealing with Women Survivors who wish to seek divorce, and may reprimand them for leaving home or wanting divorce. Moreover, homosexual women also face unfair treatment, and are sometimes kicked out of the shelter. For example, in one occasion, a survivor told the social worker that she is homosexual, and the social worker told the supervisor, who decided to kick the survivor out of the shelter⁴⁰. These practices show lack of a gender perspective, and application of personal values and morals to judge Women Survivors. Suspicions may also surround Women Survivors whose "conduct is questioned by members of staff", either because such members of staff are suspicious of the very idea of shelters, or of women who would dare leave their family or marital homes, or seek divorce or independence. This culture is also clearly manifested in intransigence towards admitting some cases. "All the cases we referred to the Alexandria shelter were not admitted", says Ms. Aida Nour El Din, Director of the Women and Development Association⁴¹. A multiplicity of reasons was provided, including the complexity of regulations, and lack of regulations specific to emergency cases, and the fact that the shelter closes its doors at 3 p.m., and insists on waiting for its management to convene before admitting a new case. Moreover, the workers in that shelter have a limited understanding of the concept of violence. They would also make admission of married Women Survivors conditional on summoning the husband for an attempt of reconciliation, where admission would be denied if the Woman Survivor refuses to involve her husband⁴².

The lack of emergency admissions means that a Woman Survivor may have to travel at night or fail to find a place to spend the night, which would put her at risk. This culture is reinforced by having people who are unqualified or apathetic to the gender perspective in shelter management. For example, in 2009, the person in charge of the Cairo Shelter, was the Head of the Morals Prosecution Office, the shelter was completely empty as a result of the intransigence and questioning Women Survivors faced. The Fayoum shelter manager used to refuse women who sought divorce. In Minya, for another example, members staff failed to realize that the shelter was established for Women subjected to Violence, and the place was more of a home for the elderly. This changed with time.

³⁹ Personal Interview with Dr. Magda Adly, Director of Al Nadeem Center.

⁴⁰ Personal Interview with Mozn Hassan, Founder and Executive Director of Nazra.

⁴¹ Personal Interview with Ms. Aida Nour El Din, Director of the Women and Development Association.

⁴² Ibid.

On the other hand, Lack of experience and training can sometimes lead to problems, even in good faith and involving members of staff who want to help. There is an assumption in dealing with Women Survivors that shelter workers should be impartial, and that the best outcome would be reconciliation and going back home. The measure of success for many shelters is that Women Survivors are united with their families or husbands, because from the outset, violence is not being addressed as a crime. Rather, it is approached as if it is just a dispute than can be resolved through reconciliation. It is often the case that this is done in good faith, and out of a real desire to solve the problem. However, in many cases, it leads to bigger problems. In some cases, going back to marital or family homes exposed some Women Survivors to life-threatening risks, and indeed cost others their lives. In other cases, going back home meant going back to violence, and eventually going back to the shelter. Sometimes, violence is in more brutal forms that could reach the level of torture by applying electric shocks to private parts. In one case, upon return home to her family, a survivor was locked up in a room for 9 months, without being allowed to shower or change her clothes. She was further exposed to torture by electric shocks, which eventually led to her death. In other cases, the place of residence known to the shelter staff was changed, and no one was able to contact the survivor again. Thus, lack of experience and limited practice can sometimes lead to fatal mistakes. Hence, MoSS must exert a real effort in training shelter staff, capitalizing on the expertise of civil society organizations which work with Women Survivors or have experience in operating shelters.

- Lack of a System for Follow-Up

There is no follow-up system to monitor Women Survivors after they leave shelters. Ideally, the survivor should be monitored for a period of time after leaving the shelter, to ensure her psychological and physical integrity. In some cases, follow-up is carried out informally, due to good relations between staff members and the Women Survivors. However, this type of follow-up is not systematic, without clear objectives or specific time frames. Moreover, it follows no uniform methodology, and is not applied to all survivors or in all shelters.

- Lack of Relations with Relevant Institutions and Agencies

Among the most important factors in the success of shelters in performing their roles is having good relations with relevant State institutions and agencies, and with civil society organizations, at least in their immediate vicinity. With regard to State or Government institutions, relations must at least exist with the police station responsible for the area where the shelter is located, the nearest hospital, and the Department of Forensics (Ministry of Justice). First, the relationship with the police station is very important in providing protection for Women Survivors. Sometimes, families get to learn where the survivor is

hiding, and may attempt to storm the shelter. Therefore, strong ties between the shelter and the police station are a must. Additionally, the relationship with the police station is important if the paperwork of the survivor is not complete, which facilitates completion of paperwork and criminal record check. Additionally, relations with surrounding hospitals are important for referrals for medical reports as well as quick or urgent checks. Relations with the Forensics Department will be important in cases where the survivor decides to press charges, and the need arises for a forensics report evidencing injuries.

4. Recommendations

Against this backdrop, we present below some recommendations to improve the conditions of shelters and ensure they play a more effective role.

I. Urgent/Short-Term Recommendations

1- Amendments to Shelter Regulations:

I. With regard to Article 2 of Title I, which defines the objectives of the project:

- Removal of the second objective on protecting women from moral corruption (not on the website, but part of the written regulations);
- Adding a clear clause on empowering Women subjected to Violence among the objectives, rather than merely using terms such as "awareness-raising" or "development".

II. Adding an Article that provides a complete definition of Violence against Women, pursuant to international concepts, particularly the definition of the Declaration of the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1993, including physical, sexual, verbal and psychological violence.

III. With regard to Article 3 of Title III, concerning the conditions of admission to shelters:

Amendment of the first and second conditions which stipulate that: the woman (1) has to be a resident of the same Governorate; (2) must have no first degree relatives in the Governorate where the shelter is located. The Article should only give priority to women from the same Governorate if the house is operating at full capacity, or if a shelter is available in the Governorate in which the woman resides.

IV. Concerning Title IV, which establishes the administrative structure of shelters:

- Adding a psychologist to the structure;
- Changing the part concerned with the role of the social worker, from "studying the cases of the shelter residents to attempt to solve problems by amicable

reconciliation" to "studying the cases of the shelter residents and engaging them to solve problems in the manner they find appropriate".

2- Networking with Civil Society Organizations and Relevant Institutions

I. Networking with civil society and NGOs which receive Women Survivors. It is possible to take stock of all organizations that work with Women subjected to Violence, and provide them with a list of shelter phone numbers and addresses. Relations should be especially strong between a shelter and the NGOs in the immediate vicinity, to provide for an active system of referral. Moreover, relations should be strengthened with NGOs with a view to leverage their help in organizing regular training for shelter staff.

II. Establishing a network in each Governorate comprising the shelter, the neighboring police station, the local MoSS unit for combating Violence against Women, the Human Rights Department, the Forensics Department, civil society organizations, the NCW complaints office, and nearby hospitals, particularly the hospitals that have received a Ministry of Health training on how to deal with Women Survivors of gender-based violence. The purpose of such network is, first, to provide for an active system of referral to shelters by more than one body, including NCW, civil society organizations and hospitals, as well as referral by shelters to hospitals or the Forensics Departments, and cooperation among these bodies. The relationship with the police station can be leveraged for other purposes, including protection or completion of necessary documentation, such as in the cases when the woman decides to accept reconciliation, and an undertaking to non-repetition of violent treatment may need to be signed⁴³. Additionally, this network allows for a sort of mutual oversight among the various actors who provide services to Women Survivors of Violence.

III. The ADEW shelter trains and establishes good relations with the residents of its neighborhood, with a view to protecting Women Survivors and mitigating the risk of attacks against the shelter or the Women Survivors as they frequent the neighborhood. This strategy can be possibly applied as a good practice in Government-operated shelters as well on the long term, particularly in shelter located in residential areas.

3- Development of a Program and System for the Empowerment of Women Survivors

- Development of an integrated program for economic, psychological and legal empowerment of Women subjected to Violence which applies to all shelters (with

⁴³ Some shelters try to get such undertakings signed by the family or husband to the management of the shelter, which can be done formally at the police station rather than informally with the association only.

room for differences, depending on the condition and needs of the particular survivor). Expertise from civil society shelters in Egypt, such as the ADEW shelter or CEWLA's before it was closed; as well as from Arab countries with advanced experience in managing shelters, such as Morocco, or with emerging independent endeavors, such as Tunisia, can be leveraged to that effect.

GNWS publications should also be utilized. It is also possible to enlist Women Survivors who have left shelters but have maintained contact to develop this program.

- Involving Women Survivors in making decisions which they deem appropriate and deciding their own fate.
 - Involving Women Survivors in any training program for shelter workers to flag the violations, if any, that Women Survivors face in shelters, and address such abuses or violations during training.
- 4- Increasing the Number of Shelters, concurrently with Improving Conditions of Existing Ones
- Priority must be given to improving conditions in existing shelters and enhancing their efficiency levels. Concurrently, new shelters should be established in the medium term in regions where no shelters exist, prioritizing the Canal and southern Upper Egypt regions (both lacking shelters).
- 5- Balancing Considerations of Protection and Access to Shelters
- Activation and advertisement of the Department of Women Affairs hotline, and using it for referral to shelters⁴⁴.
 - Removal of detailed addresses of shelters on MoSS website, indicating only the Governorate, the referral system, and the hotline.
 - Protecting shelters with proper fencing.
- 6- Promoting Shelters in Media Campaign:
- Upon the establishment and operationalization of shelters, MoSS should launch a campaign to combat Violence against Women, and increase awareness of the services provided by MoSS, including shelters, without making their addresses publicly available.

⁴⁴ Personal Interview with Dr. Magda Adly, Director of Al Nadeem Center.

7- Creating a System for Transfer of Experience among Women Survivors

- A system should be developed to allow Women Survivors to become supervisors in shelters, which would empower them personally, and help others go through the empowerment process. Additionally, as Egypt does not have long-term shelters, and Women Survivors may need a place to stay for a period beyond that allowed by the regulations, such system could be a temporary solution to this problem. The survivor should be allowed to choose whether to take such option, also taking into consideration her psychological state.
- This is already taking place on informal basis in some shelters, such as the Giza shelter. It could be applied elsewhere in a more regulated and systematic manner. In this regard, it is possible to capitalize on the experience of Banati Association, which implements this system in the shelters it operates⁴⁵.

8- Improving Work Conditions

- Improving working conditions of shelter staff, in terms of better regulation of working hours, providing safe and comfortable means of transportation, and limiting secondment of MoSS female staff members to workers who live in the same Government as that where the respective shelter is located.
- Working towards restructuring wages.
- Improving staff sustainability for several years.

9- Terms of Reference for Shelter Workers

- Providing for well-defined terms of reference, where so that a survivor will only recount her story to the social worker or psychologist, for confidentiality purposes.

10- NCW Oversight

- Allowing NCW members to visit the shelters, by amending NCW regulations and competencies, and providing for joint oversight by NCW and MoSS.

11- Allowing Civil Society to Operate Shelters

- Putting an end to intransigence with respect to allowing civil society organizations to establish shelters if they meet the stipulated requirements, especially that MoSS will not be able to establish a sufficient number of shelters nationwide, considering that there is already a problem in funding existing shelters.

⁴⁵ Personal Interview with Dr. Hanaa Abu El Ghar, Director of Banati Association

- It is important to have shelters which are independent from the State, both operationally and administratively, especially if such shelters are operated by Feminist organizations. It is also important to keep an independent eye on the performance of relevant State agencies in terms of responding to the needs of Women Survivors of Violence.

II. Long-Term Recommendations

- 1- Establishing of emergency and long-term shelters
- 2- Increasing the number and geographic distribution of shelters, initially on the national level to have one shelter in each Governorate, and then on the Governorate level to have shelters in various cities
- 3- Development of a national network linking all existing shelters with a view to exchanging experience

III. Legislative Amendments:

Legislative amendments concerning sexual violence and violent crimes against women in both the private and the public spheres are closely linked to the role of shelters, even if indirectly. Criminalizing sexual violence and violence against women in the private sphere contributes to perceiving Women subjected to Violence as Women Survivors of a "violent crime" punishable by law, and considering the assailant, even if he is the husband or father, as a criminal who should be legally punished based on the severity of the violence committed. Consequently, this may encourage Women Survivors to seek protection in shelters, if the law is on their side, and may contribute on the long term to changing the prevalent culture among shelter workers, which considers reconciliation to be the only and ideal solution in most cases. Additionally, amending and implementing laws will sometimes help survivors overcome their trauma, if the offender receives the appropriate punishment. Total impunity often creates a severe sense of disappointment for the survivor, and makes legal assistance or empowerment, if the victim wishes to press charges against the offender, less effective. For example, one survivor pressed charges against her husband who stabbed her nine times with a switchblade. He was sentenced to only six months in prison, on the grounds that he was "disciplining his wife"⁴⁶.

Accordingly, pressure must continue for the enactment of legislation to criminalize and clearly list the forms of domestic violence. The Penal Code should be amended "to allow

⁴⁶ Personal Interview with Ms. Aida Nour El Din, Director of the Women and Development Association.

for the consolidation of provisions relating to crimes of sexual violence under one Title. Amendments should include providing for specific definitions for sexual crimes, and protection of witnesses and whistleblowers in such cases" ⁴⁷

Conclusion

The availability of shelters in Egypt is an essential pillar in combating Violence against Women. Shelters are indispensable. The needs of Women Survivors cannot be comprehensively addressed where they do not exist or where they do not undertake their role actively and effectively. Today, shelters in Egypt leave much to be desired in order to become really effective, including broader geographic distribution, regular training for staff, and development of a program for the empowerment of Women Survivors. Moreover, the key question is: Does MoSS, as well as other State institutions, consider the availability of shelters to be a priority for investment, both in terms of financial resources and effort? Is combating Violence against Women part of their mandates and priorities? If this is indeed the case, attention must be given to improving, developing and increasing the number of existing shelters by all possible means, particularly in the next five years in conjunction with the implementation of NSVAW. The agreed conclusions of the 60th session of the Commission on the Status of Women of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, which are binding for member states, provide for: "gender-responsive budgeting and tracking across all sectors of public expenditure, to address gaps in resourcing for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls". Accordingly, pursuant to international conventions and instruments which are binding for Egypt, Egypt must start allocating an appropriate and adequate budget for the services provided to women and girls, including shelters.

Shelters alone will not empower Women Survivors. They are only one part of a more comprehensive vision to combat Violence against Women which includes several other services and involves different Ministries and Institutions of the State. This requires genuine political will on part of the State and its national machineries which is translated into serious policies. It also requires an independent Feminist movement which applies constant pressure to combat Violence against Women, and to ensure that services for Women Survivors of Violence are being provided and developed.

⁴⁷Demands of Women among Priorities on the Parliament's Legislative Agenda". 9 January 2016. <http://nazra.org/node/443>.