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Gendered Security
Gender-based Violence and Women’s Access to State and Non-state Security Provision in al-Dhali’
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Yemen Polling Center
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The Yemen Polling Center

The Yemen Polling Center (YPC) is an independent organization providing social science research services. YPC was established in 2004 as the first polling center in Yemen and received registration certificate no. 147 from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor in December 2005.

YPC designs and implements services to fulfill the research needs of and to inform national and international institutions, non-profit organizations, corporations and government agencies. It conducts public opinion surveys, focus groups, interviews, demographic studies and market research employing quantitative and qualitative methods for development projects, international organizations and foundations, publications, business groups and financial institutions.

YPC has repeatedly proved its quality research capabilities and consistency. In 2010 it won Gallup’s World Poll Partnership and Best Partner in the Middle East and North Africa Awards. This was followed in 2013 by Gallup’s Most Valued Partner Award and in 2014 by the Gallup Award for Consistency.

As a member of the World Association for Public Opinion Research and the American Association for Public Opinion Research, YPC is committed to excellence in social science. Since its inception, YPC has conducted dozens of research projects on issues ranging from satellite television and radio consumption to attitudes toward human rights and women’s rights to political reform, corruption, public health and other governance-related studies.

YPC’s dedicated and experienced team cooperates with dozens of experts, consultants and university professors in Yemen and abroad. Its personnel and technical resources allow the center to conduct surveys of varying sizes in Yemen while adhering to international standards for data quality. It has surveyed nearly 170,000 Yemeni citizens in face-to-face interviews. Yemen is a religious and conservative society, so male-female interactions are limited. YPC is able to interview women respondents because approximately half of its interviewers are female.

YPC has carried out numerous internationally funded projects and has cooperated with various national and international organizations, including the European External Action Service, the United Nations Development Programme, the United States Agency for International Development, the U.S. National Democratic Institute, the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy, London-based ORB International, the World Bank and the Yemeni Ministry of Local Administration.
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About This Report

This report is part of a series published in the framework of Rebuilding Peace and Security, a project funded by the European Union’s Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace (ICSP) and implemented by the YPC between 2016 and 2019. The project builds on the premise that security in Yemen is provided and spoilt by a diverse range of actors.\(^1\) Measures to address security concerns therefore cannot be standardized, but need to be adapted to local and regional challenges. At times, they need to integrate the role of non-state security actors into a wider, state-owned framework of security provision. A broad set of actors (state and non-state security actors, civil society, media, neighborhood initiatives, women and youth) need to be considered when seeking to build stability and security locally.

The report series concentrates on different regions in Yemen to shed light on local security providers, local state and non-state structures, the cooperation between security providers, and challenges to security provision. This particular report focuses on the governorate of al-Dhali` and explores the gendered nature of security provision in a volatile political context. The report draws on different data sources.\(^2\) The quantitative data was collected as part of a nationwide representative survey by YPC in 2012, 2017 and 2019. The sample of the nationwide (except Sa’da and Socotra) survey was 4000 respondents. Half of the respondents were women and the other half men.\(^3\) This report used only data collected in al-Dhali`.

In February 2018, YPC conducted two focus group discussions in al-Dhali` with civil society organizations and youth activists to explore sentiments about the governorate’s security. The focus groups were composed of 15 members: three women and 12 men. Another layer of data

\(^1\) Soudias and Transfeld, Mapping Popular Perception; Heinze and Albukari, Opportunities for SSR in Yemen.

\(^2\) Due to the volatile political and security situation in Yemen, and the high risk involved in data collection, especially on security institutions, YPC adopts measures to ensure staff safety and mitigate risk. As a seasoned data collection agency, YPC has refined safety measures and protocols related to field research in Yemen. These risk management measures directly impact research methodologies.

\(^3\) Interviewees were selected on the basis of a simple random sample from among 44,339 primary sampling units, i.e. villages in rural areas and neighborhoods in cities. Ten interviews of five women and five men were conducted in each unit. The sample reflects the rural/urban population distribution, with 68 percent of the interviews conducted in rural areas, half of them with females, half of them with males. All the surveys were conducted face-to-face, and all interviewers were from the area they canvassed to guarantee that they could speak and understand local dialects. Female interviewers questioned female respondents. The nationwide survey conducted in 2012 had a sample of 1990; in 2017 the survey had a sample of 4,000 (excluding Sa’da and Socotra), and the sample of the 2019 survey was 3980 (excluding Sa’da, Socotra and al-Mahra), with the sample in al-Dhali` numbering 100 (MoE 9.8).
was collected between November 2018 and April 2019, through key-informant interviews with residents in urban and rural areas, military and police officers, state security officials, sheikhs, aqils, members of armed groups, and journalists. Finally, we collected data through observation of security incidents and the responses of security providers between April and May 2019. We closed gaps drawing on the knowledge of the YPC’s fieldwork director, as well as the field researchers in al-Dhali`. 
Main Findings

- Security providers in Yemen do not consider the special security needs of women; women often do not have access to formal security providers, and are vulnerable to exploitation and misconduct. YPC research in al-Dhali’ shows that security entities, both formal and informal, do not feel responsible for women’s security, which puts women at higher risk for gender-based violence.

- While police remain an important security actor in urban areas, their position is weakened by the presence of the Security Belt forces. Meanwhile, informal actors, primarily sheikhs, provide security in rural areas. The aqil, an informal security provider that is prevalent in other regions of Yemen, does not have a significant role in security provision in al Dhali’, neither in urban nor rural contexts.

- Research results indicate that women in al-Dhali’ live in an environment in which they are at high risk for gender-based violence. YPC survey results also reveal that security perceptions are shaped by gender roles.

- Local attitudes toward gender and sex contribute to a denial of sexual violence within society. This puts more stress on social cohesion as gender-based violence is increasing and there are few mechanisms to address it. From the perspective of the community, addressing the existence of sexual violence could upend customary leadership that communities rely on in the absence of state institutions.

- Data collected by the YPC in al-Dhali’ reveals that men are more likely to have contact with police than women. There are no family units in police stations to deal with domestic and sexual violence. Police officers interviewed by YPC stated that they receive very few domestic violence cases because such issues most often are resolved within families.

- Both genders explained that they can access sheikhs and Security Belt forces when it comes to conflict resolution. Women in particular (both urban and rural) find it easier to access informal security providers, like sheikhs, rather than police. Informal actors open their houses to everyone within their community; female members of a sheikh’s family are known and can serve as a point of contact for women with security concerns.
Introduction

Security providers in Yemen do not consider the special security needs of women. In addition, women often do not have access to formal security providers and are vulnerable to exploitation and misconduct. YPC research in al-Dhali’ shows that security entities, both formal and informal, do not feel responsible for the security of women, putting women at higher risk for gender-based violence (GBV). According to Yemeni social norms, husbands and fathers are responsible for women’s security. These patriarchal social norms are reflected in legal texts and therefore determine the security mechanisms women can access. It is considered culturally shameful for women to contact police directly, which leaves families and secondary informal actors, such as aqils or sheikhs, as the only socially acceptable options where women can seek assistance.

Due to these norms, police do not see themselves as responsible for women’s security. Police, as well as informal security providers, often hold patronizing attitudes toward women, and do not take women’s safety concerns seriously. Issues such as domestic or sexual violence are considered private matters that bring shame on families if discussed outside of the private sphere. Although men have access to formal and informal security providers, and could facilitate this access for women, they prefer to resolve women’s security concerns within the family. Per the law, domestic violence is not considered a felony. Law enforcement, as well as society at large, often blames sexual violence on women. Women fear reporting such cases due to social stigmatization and the risk of being treated as criminals rather than victims. This jeopardizes social cohesion in al-Dhali’. It forces women to suffer in silence, while the consequences of GBV affect women’s social, political and economic participation in the community, as well as their access to education and the integrity of the family unit.

In assessing the security concerns of the population, this paper highlights the gendered nature of security provision in al-Dhali’ governorate. Al-Dhali’ can serve as an interesting case study for gendered security. It is a governorate that receives relatively little academic attention, but is a prime example of the institutional and social changes that are unfolding in southwestern Yemen. Since the breakdown of the formal transition process in 2014,4 the violent takeover of Yemen’s capital Sanaa by Ansarallah (Houthis) and the Saudi-led military intervention in March 2015, the Yemeni state has fragmented. Al-Dhali’ remains nominally under the control of the internationally recognized government (IRG) but came de facto under the influence of the Southern Transitional Council (STC), which was established in 2017 as a representative for parts of the southern movement. This report sheds light on security provision from a gender

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4 After a 10-month uprising against his regime, former President Ali Abdullah Saleh agreed to sign the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) agreement in Riyadh on November 2011 and hand over authority to his vice president, Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi, to oversee the political transition process.
Deteriorating Livelihoods put Women at Risk

The number of GBV cases is increasing in Yemen with three million women and girls at risk of GBV. This is a result of war, lack of institutionalized rule of law and deep-rooted gender inequality. New pressures on men put women at greater risk of GBV, especially in their homes. While new sources of insecurity outside of the home augment pre-existing risks.

In a 2016 UNICEF survey conducted in six governorates, 72 percent of female respondents said that they were married before the age of 18; this is an increase of 22 percent from the time before the war. Child marriage, domestic violence and other forms of GBV are not acknowledged by the community. Actual figures of GBV could be much higher than recorded cases as it is difficult to quantify the extent and frequency of GBV in a conservative country like Yemen where victims tend not to report attacks out of fear of stigmatization or honor killing. What is certain is that the current war has given rise to factors that lead to an increase of GBV, such as displacement and women’s loss of their traditional guardians due to death, injury or abandonment.

Furthermore, increased economic pressure on men adds an additional layer of vulnerability, exposing women to GBV. YPC surveys conducted in 2017 and 2019 point to an economic environment in which women are indeed at a higher risk for GBV. Although violence has

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escalated recently in northern al-Dhali’, residents are mostly concerned with the indirect consequences of the war, namely the poor economic situation and living conditions. Families’ overall wellbeing has deteriorated dramatically in al-Dhali’ between 2012 and 2017, with slight improvements between 2017 and 2019. According to the 2019 YPC survey, 61 percent of al-Dhali’ residents have received aid since the beginning of the war and June 2019. This falls in line with research from the World Health Organization, which estimated in 2018 that roughly half of Yemen’s population was in acute need of humanitarian assistance. In al-Dhali’ in 2019, 66 percent of men and 40 percent of women said that access to food was worsening compared to one year ago. Forty-two percent of families in al-Dhali’ lost their income because of the war.

Despite slight improvements in overall wellbeing between 2017 and 2019, according to YPC data, al-Dhali’ residents remained pessimistic in 2019, stating that the situation in the governorate was worsening on all accounts. Men, who are the traditional breadwinners in Yemeni society, suffer more economic pressure than women. They now find themselves without the means necessary to support their families, resulting in feelings of insufficiency and depression. Men in urban areas of al-Dhali’ especially feel the impact of the deteriorating economy: in 2017, 80 percent said that poverty and living conditions were their main concern. The economy and job availability, access to food and water, human and women’s rights, security, public services and the political situation were all rated more negatively by men than by women in 2019. Kawab al-Wadei, a Yemeni mental health worker, summarizes the kind of pressure men in Yemen feel, as well as its relationship with GBV, in an article for al-Madaniya magazine:

What the war has done is to create a disequilibrium: a violent psychological trauma accompanied by feelings of impotence, injustice, frustration and despair when confronted by daily demands that are impossible to fulfill. Things that were easily sourced before the war, he is now unable to provide, all of which is exacerbated by a woman constantly reminding him of his impotence, his weakness and his lack of resourcefulness—constantly prodding him to look for work, to do whatever he can to keep his children from starvation.

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9 YPC representative survey implemented in 2019. See note 3.
11 YPC representative survey implemented in 2019. See note 3.
12 YPC interview with woman in Qatabah district, al-Dhali’, 10 November 2018.
A Care International report on gender roles and conflict in Yemen documented the relationship between shifting gender roles and GBV. Accordingly, the economic pressure men feel, along with their feelings of insufficiency and having to perform traditional women’s work while confined to their homes, increases domestic conflict.\(^{14}\) In an interview with YPC, the head of the Appeals Prosecution in al-Mukalla in Hadhramawt confirmed that GBV has increased recently due to the economic and psychological pressures that were exacerbated by the ongoing conflict.\(^{15}\)

Although the survey results show that women in al-Dhali’ feel less economic pressure than men, women are still affected by the deterioration of the economy. Nearly half of respondents said that they or a member of their family lost their job. With fathers and husbands losing their salaries, the role of women has changed as women are often forced to contribute to their families’ income by looking for employment outside the home. According to YPC surveys, between 2017 and 2019, the percentage of women working in Yemen increased from 3 to 6 percent. For many Yemeni families, it was unheard of before the war that women should work. Today, 21 percent of Yemeni households are run by women below the age of 18 nationwide.\(^{16}\) Women who head households are vulnerable to GBV as they are taking up a position that was traditionally held by men. Women have to overcome cultural barriers to gain access to necessary aid and services, which also means they are more likely to experience GBV.\(^ {17}\) These women may need to enter male spaces and negotiate with men they are not related to or do not know. Men may view this as unacceptable, which puts women who take on men's roles at higher risk of GBV than women who do not face these new challenges. Furthermore, working women rank sexual violence as one of their main concerns given their interaction with strangers outside the home.\(^ {18}\) Nationwide, the number of working women has increased.\(^ {19}\)


\(^{15}\) YPC interview with the head of the Appeals Prosecution in al-Mukalla, 26 February 2020.


\(^{18}\) YPC interview with a working woman from Qatabah district, al-Dhali’, 10 November 2018.

\(^{19}\) YPC data shows that the number of women participating in the workforce increased from 5 to 6.4 percent between 2012 and 2019. Also see Al-Ammar, Fawziah, and Hannah Patchett. The Repercussions of War on Women in the Yemeni Workforce. Rethinking Yemen’s Economy, Policy Briefs. August 2019. https://www.devchampions.org/publications/policy-brief/The_Repercussions_of_War_on_Women_in_the_Yemeni_Workforce?fbclid=IwAR3fsj9lsSJCluDvvs0XH5bklpMCbkRf5T9jid7pJTeKw0YdVWvVPLv4Dww#: _ftnref27 (accessed February 3, 2020).
Gender-Based Violence in al-Dhali` Remains Unacknowledged

GBV received little acknowledgment in the interviews YPC conducted with residents of al-Dhali`, as well as with members of the security sector. One al-Dhali` man whom YPC interviewed did acknowledge the prevalence of GBV, however. He connected the issue with displacement and the absence of the rule of law. He understood its root causes to be the prolonged conflict and the deterioration of the economy, which have led to profound distress within households.\(^{20}\) He was an anomaly. More commonly, YPC researchers faced violent threats when addressing issues of gender and sex in field interviews due to cultural conservatism. This demonstrated that GBV is still not properly acknowledged within society. Addressing the prevalence of sexual violence carries the risk of further stressing already worn social fabric.

The lack of acknowledgement of GBV is related to certain societal ideas regarding gender and shame. While men are responsible for protecting women in their households, the woman’s role is restricted to being the household caretaker, while representing the family’s honor publicly. From this second aspect derives the idea that men are responsible for female behavior in regard to familial honor. As Mohammed Baobaid argues in his study on Masculinity and Gender in Yemen, “Male violence against women in Yemen is understood in terms of male obligation to protect family honor.”\(^{21}\) Anything related to a woman’s body is directly linked with the honor of the family. As a consequence, great shame is associated with GBV for women, which is why they find it difficult to speak about it outside the confines of their homes. YPC found this to especially be the case in rural areas, where illiteracy rates are high and women’s awareness of their rights is low.\(^{22}\) Men, on the other hand, may brag about violence they employed against their female relatives as a demonstration of their masculinity. The customs and social norms of the country differentiate clearly between men and women. Men are not worried about repercussions when exerting violence in their homes; they are confident that they will not be blamed for their crimes.\(^{23}\) In addition, article 40 of Yemeni family law states that a wife must obey her husband and is not

\(^{20}\) YPC interview with a man from Hagar, al-Dhali`, 11 November 2018.
\(^{22}\) YPC interview with a female lawyer, al-Mukalla, 24 February 2020.
\(^ {23}\) YPC interview with the head of the Appeals Prosecution in al-Mukalla, 26 February 2020; although the Yemeni constitution guarantees that men and women are equal, the personal status law clearly differentiates between men and women.
allowed to leave the marital home without his permission. Thus, the law works in favor of the husband.

Often, women who do speak out about their experiences with GBV are blamed for the violence rather than seen as victims. The idea holds that women brought GBV upon themselves because, for example, they may have ventured outside their homes. In fact, law enforcement often uses article 273 of the criminal code to deem women responsible for the violence they have experienced. Article 273 criminalizes “any act that violates public discipline or public decency, including nudity or exposing oneself.” This article is also to be understood in the context of a society where women embody the honor of their families. Any act considered immoral by society or law enforcement, even if perpetrated by a man, is viewed as the fault of the woman as it brings dishonor to the family. These social and legal norms make women more susceptible to GBV, especially in times of war when the rule of law is already at its weakest and factors that increase GBV are on the rise. It is not surprising that men do not acknowledge GBV given this social context.

That said, the majority of women deny the existence of GBV, as demonstrated by research conducted by YPC in al-Dhali`. Moreover, what classifies as GBV is not clearly defined in Yemen and certain types of harassment may not be viewed as serious enough to be reported as GBV. The vast majority of al-Dhali` residents, male and female, did not mention GBV as a security concern. Only a few women interviewed in 2018 told YPC that they had heard about cases of GBV. While some of these women named sexual violence as one of their security concerns, they denied noticing the increase in GBV during the current conflict.

Gendered Access to Formal Security Provision

The majority of women lack access to formal security providers. This leaves informal mechanisms, but mostly families themselves, as the only options for reporting cases of GBV. Meanwhile, security provision and community level policing remain weak as the war in Yemen drags on. A man interviewed by YPC in al-Dhali` in 2018 described the police as “armed thugs” and “a threat

25 YPC online interview with Mrs. Sawsan Al Refai a Yemeni researcher and gender specialist in Ottawa, 10 March 2020.
26 YPC interview with women in urban and rural areas of al-Dhali` governorate, al-Dhali`, 8-11 November 2018.
to security in the governorate". Between 2017 and 2019, police were also marginalized by the increasing prominence of southern resistance forces and the Security Belt. Gender inequality and the urban-rural divide are pronounced in Yemen, and women in general have difficulty accessing security providers. This is even more so the case for women in rural areas where gender inequality is greater and there is less access to security providers. A neighborhood authority, the so-called aqil, told YPC that he had noticed an increase in domestic violence due to war and difficult living conditions, and that security providers, informal and formal, generally overlook GBV.

Men and women have different viewpoints on who provides security in the city of al-Dhali’. In 2017, 100 percent of men in al-Dhali’ city said that the police first respond to security incidents and 100 percent would inform the police first if they had a problem. That changed in 2019, when 80 percent of men said that southern resistance forces and the Security Belt were the first to respond to security incidents; only 20 percent of the men named the police. For urban women, a reverse trend is observable. Between 2017 and 2019, the percentage of women in al-Dhali’ city who said that the police were the first to respond increased from 40 to 60 percent. In 2019, 40 percent of women named the southern resistance forces and the Security Belt as being the first to respond to security incidents.

There is a clear difference in al-Dhali’ city as to how men and women view security provision, with men in 2019 seeing the Security Belt and southern forces as dominant, while women see the police as dominant. To which actor someone reports their own security concerns is also determined by gender. Although al-Dhali’ city men find southern resistance forces and the Security Belt to be dominant security providers, the majority (60 percent) would still go to the police to report a problem or security incident. The majority of women, in contrast, would reach out to the southern resistance forces or Security Belt.

Police do not play a significant role in al-Dhali’s rural areas. In 2017, 82 percent of rural men and women said there were no police stations in their respective areas. Roughly half of respondents who said there was a police station in their area said it was functioning. In 2019, one third of men in al-Dhali’s rural areas said it was the community that provided security and another third mentioned southern resistance and Security Belt forces. Twenty-two percent of the men in rural

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27 YPC interview with a man from al-Dhali’, 11 November 2018.
28 YPC interview with an aqil from al-Dhali’, 11 November 2018.
29 YPC representative survey implemented in 2017. See note 3.
30 YPC representative survey implemented in 2019. See note 3.
31 YPC representative survey implemented in 2019. See note 3.
32 YPC representative survey implemented in 2017. See note 3.
areas mentioned the police and 9 percent mentioned sheikhs. With regard to women in the rural areas, nearly 40 percent said it was the community that provided security; the same amount of women mentioned the southern resistance forces and Security Belt. Only 13 percent of rural women said the police provided security.\footnote{YPC representative survey implemented in 2019. See note 3.}

The data clearly reveals that men are more likely to have contact with police than women. In 2019, 34 percent of men in comparison with 4 percent of women in al-Dhalî‘ claimed to have visited a police station in the last two years to report a crime or resolve a problem.\footnote{YPC representative survey implemented in 2019. See note 3.} Social traditions stigmatize women who enter police stations. One of the interviewed urban women stated, “Yes, I can enter the police station, and the police officers are cooperative with women, but as women we do not like to do so because it is shameful for women to go into police stations.”

One of the many reasons why women tend not to report GBV is that they are worried that they will be held responsible for the act, rather than viewed as the victim. Given that police stations in al-Dhalî‘ are male-dominated and do not have specialized family units, this is a real concern. The YPC survey in 2019 found that 100 percent of female and male respondents from rural and urban contexts in al-Dhalî‘ stated that there were no female officers at police stations.\footnote{YPC representative survey implemented in 2019. See note 3.} Given that GBV cases are often treated on the basis of article 273 of the criminal code, which criminalizes immoral conduct without providing a detailed definition, the fate of a woman reporting GBV to police is put in the hands of often uneducated policemen and their personal interpretations of morality. In a study carried out by YPC in May 2018, 182 police station personnel from 10 governorates including al-Dhalî‘ were interviewed to ascertain their definition of “moral misconduct.” Their definitions varied from adultery to family disputes, from women disobeying their husbands to thievery.\footnote{Marie Heinze, \textit{Criminal Histories, Arrest and Prison Experiences of Women and Girls in Yemen}, YPC Policy Report, Yemen Polling Center, May 2018. \url{http://www.yemenpolling.org/advocacy/upfiles/YPCPublications_Policy-Report-Criminal-Histories-Arrest-and-prison-Experiences-of-Women-and-Girls-in-Yemen---May-2018.pdf} (accessed February 3, 2020).} Another factor that prevents women from reporting incidents to the police is the absence of legal procedures that could ensure a victim’s protection after filing reports. Often perpetrators are merely asked to sign a guarantee of non-repetition, while victims are forced to return to the home in which the abuse occurred. This explains the preference of silence over action.

Two police officers interviewed by YPC admitted that they handle women’s issues differently than men’s issues. They said that they deal with women’s issues as quickly as possible because
the procedures are typically labor intensive otherwise, and women are supposedly not able to wait given their impatience. Aqils, community authorities who serve as connections to police stations, stated in interviews with YPC that all formal security institutions respond to women’s issues and deal with them as quickly as possible because there is compassion toward such cases. Key figures are involved to resolve the issue as discreetly and quickly as possible. However, this leads security figures to discriminate against women as they hastily deal with women’s security issues on the pretext of compassion. Security providers thus play off of the supposed emotional nature of women, rather than acknowledge the unique needs of women within the security sector. The procedure described by the police officers for GBV cases raises concerns about the extent to which women and their special security needs are taken seriously or even understood by police officers. Furthermore, police officers may not only be working from a place of insincerity with regard to GBV cases, but also may blame women for immorality due to the patriarchal norms in society. In a highly gender segregated environment, the absence of female police officers renders police stations unsafe for women. In this context, it is not surprising that women sometimes reinforce patriarchal structures; they do not want to interact with unfamiliar men at police stations and they see it as the responsibility of male members of the household to address police. A woman interviewed by YPC in an urban area of al-Dhali’ stressed that it is men’s responsibility to protect women and reach out to security providers in their place, whether formal or informal, and that men should maintain the safety of their female relatives.37 As a result, women’s needs or opinions are rarely voiced in the security sector.

Regardless, police officers interviewed by YPC stated that they receive very few GBV cases because most of these cases are resolved within the family.38 Many of the male and female respondents from urban and rural contexts did not rank police stations as the first place they would go if seeking help in a GBV case.39 The weakness of the formal security system makes it difficult for residents to trust police to handle such cases. They tend to deal with GBV privately.40

**Women’s Access to Informal Security Actors**

The role of non-state security providers has grown increasingly important in al-Dhali’. Weak state representation and barely-functioning law enforcement has paved the way for community-based security mechanisms to thrive. The role of informal actors is most prominent in rural areas, and

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37 YPC interview with a woman from al-Shuaib, al-Dhali’, 8 November 2018.
38 YPC interview with police officer from al-Dhali’, 11 November 2018.
39 YPC interviews with women and men from al-Dhali’, 8-11 November 2018.
40 YPC interviews with women and men from al-Dhali’, 8-11 November 2018.
due to their informal and traditional nature, women access them easier. In rural and urban areas, both men and women attribute security provision mostly to the community, followed by southern resistance forces and the Security Belt.\textsuperscript{41} While the aqil are an important informal security provider in other regions of Yemen, they do not play a significant role in al-Dhali` due to their roots in more northern tribal traditions. With regard to informal security actors, the Security Belt holds an increasingly important position in al-Dhali`. Some interviewees attributed the improvement of security to the Security Belt forces, as they curb what the interviewees referred to as “unknown armed militias, groups or terrorists.”\textsuperscript{42}

Urban and rural women find it easier to access informal security providers, such as sheikhs, when compared to the police.\textsuperscript{43} In many cases, seeking help from a tribe's sheikh is the safest option for women because of the respect for tribal cultural within society. Informal actors open their homes to everyone who is part of the community; female members of a sheikh’s family are known to the female members of the community and can serve as a point of contact for women with security concerns.

Respondents indicated that family, sheikhs and, to a limited extent, police respond to women’s security issues.\textsuperscript{44} On the other hand, when asked about who responds to men’s security issues, families are not an option. Rather, men’s issues are the responsibility of sheikhs and police.\textsuperscript{45} A sheikh in al-Dhali` told YPC that men’s cases are dealt with seriously and decisively, whereas women’s cases are dealt with by families.\textsuperscript{46} This indicates the extent to which women’s security issues are handled in a private manner, behind closed doors. Also, just because women have access to informal security providers does not guarantee that their security concerns will receive proper treatment. Informal actors are not legally bound by national law or international conventions, but rather by tradition and tribal law, which reflects the values of the patriarchy. Violence toward women continues to be relegated to the private realm, while men's security concerns are more likely to be dealt with publicly.

\textsuperscript{41} YPC interview with a woman from al-Shuaib, al-Dhali`, 8 November 2018.
\textsuperscript{42} YPC interviews with resident men in al-Wahj village and al-Dhali` city, al-Dhali`, November 2018.
\textsuperscript{43} YPC interviews with women conducted in al-Dhali`, November 2018.
\textsuperscript{44} YPC interviews with women and men from al-Dhali`, 8-11 November 2018.
\textsuperscript{45} YPC interviews with men and women conducted in al-Dhali`, November 2018.
\textsuperscript{46} YPC interview with a sheikh in al-Dhali`, November 2018.
Conclusion

The increase of GBV in al-Dhali’ puts stress on social cohesion; with GBV on the rise, and few mechanisms to address it, women carry a heavy load. Many reasons have led to an increase of GBV: the poor economy and job availability, decline of human and women’s rights, lack of security and public services, and the overall political crisis. The current situation has created a disequilibrium. The detrimental effects of not being able to speak out about GBV and seek help from security providers put a psychological strain on women, which then impacts their children, especially if they are witness to the violence that is occurring. Furthermore, GBV negatively impacts women’s ability to participate in their communities as they may fear violence and know that perpetrators lack accountability.

From a woman’s point of view, not speaking out about GBV is her safest choice. If women do seek help, they have few options other than informal security providers. Patriarchal state-enforced law does not ensure that women will be dealt with justly by police. Formal security providers, like police, hold patriarchal views regarding gender roles, which is in line with how the majority of the population approaches gender. This puts women at greater risk when they report GBV at police stations. Women often find that police, rather than supporting them, work against them. Formal security institutions are an unsafe place for women to seek help.

While informal security providers can offer immediate help, they often also worsen the issue depending on the type of violence reported and how it impacts a family’s honor. Especially in cases of sexual violence, informal security providers — just like their formal counterparts — blame women. The actual problem remains unacknowledged.

From the perspective of the community, addressing the prevalence of GBV could put at risk the mechanisms that communities rely on in the absence of functioning state institutions, namely tribal and religious traditions. Admitting the existence of sexual harassment and rape would mean acknowledging that social norms — in contradiction to what they are supposed to achieve — do not protect members of the community from various forms of violence. Especially at times when state-enacted rule of law has disappeared, the community's belief that these norms are functioning in their favor is important. These customs are what communities fall back on to resolve conflicts and hold together society.

Real improvements for women who are victims of GBV require collective efforts from Yemeni state institutions, civil society and members of the community, including informal security providers. Civil society has a responsibility to take the lead on this — since it may be the only entity capable of doing so — and urge current state institutions to establish family divisions at
police stations. These divisions must be well-trained and capable of responding to, as well as prioritizing, women’s security needs, while also understanding the sensitivity surrounding GBV.

At the same time, it is vital that women understand their rights and have access to legal services. Starting from the grassroots, there needs to be more societal awareness of gender equality that guarantees women safe access to security providers. Civil society can step in to raise awareness among women and key community leaders. In the absence of effective state institutions, informal actors are crucial in resolving the communities’ conflicts. They also are a promising alternative because they do not entail long bureaucratic processes and involve limited costs. Yet these informal security providers must also act in favor of equality. They must understand that women need extra support to access security provision. Thus, civil society should train informal actors on women’s rights, as well as in legislation, to create awareness about how Yemeni laws, and the patriarchal interpretation of those laws, lead to women’s limited access to security and justice. The goal should be to introduce discourse on gender equality into informal and formal security structures. Another goal should be to criminalize all forms of GBV; laws enforced by state institutions that guarantee women’s safety and security. Finally, the international community must press more seriously for the improvement of the status of women in Yemen. Women must be able to participate more freely in politics and the economy.
Bibliography


