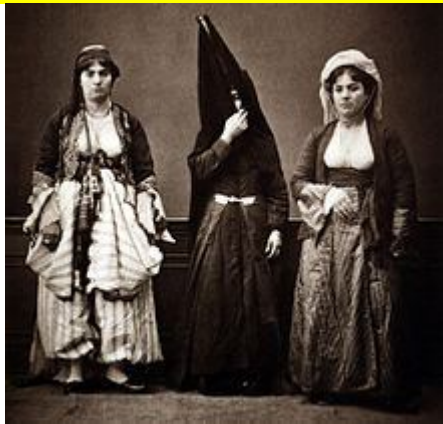


# Women in Lebanon



Women of Mount Lebanon in the late 1800s



## ***The History Of The Rights & Common Struggles for Lebanese Women***

Due to the large number of officially recognized religions in [Lebanon](#), Lebanese family matters are governed by at least 15 personal statute codes. **Lebanese women** have legal protection that varies depending on their religion. Marriageable age can be as young as 12.5, polygamy is allowed if the male of the family is Muslim, parental authority belongs to the patriarch of the house and legal guardian of all children, and female children receive less inheritance than a male child would. Children born to a Lebanese woman and a man from another country will not have their children granted Lebanese nationality.

Local and regional [NGOs](#) have helped to increase awareness of violence against women in Lebanon. Government policies regarding this are poor however, and attempts to improve this area have been met with resistance. Lebanon's laws do not recognize the concept of spousal rape, and attempt to add this to law have been attacked by Lebanese clerics.

The family in [Lebanon](#), as elsewhere in the [Middle East](#) region, assigns different roles to family members on the basis of gender. The superior status of men in society and within the narrow confines of the nuclear family transcends the barriers of sect or ethnicity. Lebanese family structure is patriarchal. The centrality of the father figure stems from the role of the family as an economic unit, in which the father is the property owner and producer on whom the rest of the family depend. This notion prevails even in rural regions of Lebanon where women participate in peasant work. The roles of women have traditionally been restricted to

those of mother and home-maker. However, since the 1970s Arab societies have allowed women to play a more active role socially and in the work force, basically as a result of the manpower shortage caused by heavy migration of men to [Persian Gulf](#) countries. In Lebanon the percentage of women in the labour force has increased.

Notwithstanding the persistence of traditional attitudes regarding the role of women, Lebanese women enjoy equal [civil rights](#) and attend institutions of higher education in large numbers (for example, women constituted 41 percent of the student body at the [American University of Beirut](#) in 1983). Although women in Lebanon have their own organizations, most exist as subordinate branches of the political parties.

## ***Political Representation of Women in Lebanon***

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### **Women's Suffrage**

Women in Lebanon gained suffrage in 1952, only five years after men did (in the year 1947). Men did not receive the right to vote until four years after Lebanon was freed from the [French Mandate](#). The Lebanese constitution—specifically Article 7, proclaimed that "All Lebanese are equal under the law, enjoying equally civil and political rights, and performing duties and public responsibility without any discrimination among them." This however did not protect against gender discrimination and thus women were not equally protected. Women were refused the right to vote by early Lebanese government until they organized and began petitioning for equal rights. In 1952 the Women's Political Rights Agreement came about and guaranteed that women would be able to vote. Women gained the right to vote but with a limitation, they had to have an elementary education. Women had to have documents that could prove that they had received at least an elementary level education. This limitation was lifted five years later in 1957 without much discourse or a fight.

### **Women in Politics**

Women gained the right to vote halfway into the 20th century, thirty years after American women suffragists gained the right in the United States. Though the women of Lebanon garnered their right to vote fairly early on, there is still a huge lack of them in Lebanon's political sphere. The political field in Lebanon, like most of the rest of the world, is male dominated. That is not to say there are no women actors in Lebanon, they are just few and far between.

As of 2009 there had only been seventeen women to serve on [parliament](#) since [suffrage](#). That number is rather dismal but paints the perfect picture of what the outlook of women in parliament is. The lack of women in politics is chalked up to the political exclusivity that is bred in Lebanon, constricting societal norms and [gender roles](#). The political arena in the country is

mostly made of a small number of [elite](#) families that have been in power since the 1950s and 1960s and the beginning of suffrage. There is an extreme lack of women in elected and appointed political positions. To combat the low rate of women's participation in politics and government, the Lebanese Women's Council (LWC) planned a conference in 1998. Along with other women's NGOs, the LWC proposed a quota system to the government to ensure women's equal representation in elections. NGOs or non-governmental organizations have been created in response to the lack of women's political representation. The government did not take heed to any of their suggestions.

According to Dr. Zeina Zaatari "Many women's [NGOs](#) have prioritized their missions toward the economic and social needs of women in rural areas and women with little access to resources. These organizations work toward achieving women's rights on the ground. A large number of women's organizations also focus on lobbying and aim to research and publish their findings on women to influence policy makers and the judicial system. The Lebanese Women's Council (LWC), established in the 1950s, serves as an umbrella entity for more than 140 organization

## **Political representation**

One of the very important characteristics of Lebanese politics is the excess of political parties competing for power and control. There are eighteen political parties in total in the country, but seven currently dominate the sphere. These political parties are almost all men dominated, and the women that do head these parties are often only there because they are a part of one of the political families and have been put in place for power often because of a sudden death or lack of men left to run in the family. Men control the leadership of the country, often silencing the women's voices.

The Lebanese constitution is a French system, which promotes equality between "all" citizens. However, in Lebanon the governmental power of the country is separated by the religious factions based on the size of each of their populations. These figures are extremely outdated and are based on a census of the country that was taken in the year 1943. Lebanon formally identifies that there are eighteen religious acknowledgements of Muslim and Christian denominations in the country.

"The major political parties thus include Hezbollah and Amal( Shi'a); Future Movement, led by the son of the assassinated former Prime Minister Rafik el Hariri (Sunni); Phalange Party and the Lebanese Forces ( Maronite Christians); Progressive Socialist Party (Druze); and the Free Patriotic Movement which in theory has members from all confessions, but remains predominantly Christian." These religious based parties often discriminate against women and refuse to include them, especially Shi'a and Sunni.

As of 2009 according to Don Duncan of Le Monde Diplomatique (English edition), "With only 3.1% of seats now occupied by women, Lebanon is at the bottom of the table of parliamentary representation of women in the Middle East, down with conservative Gulf states like [Oman](#) (none), [Yemen](#) (0.3%) and [Bahrain](#) (2.7%) (2). whereas neighbouring [Syria](#) has 12.4%, [Tunisia](#) has 22.8% and Iraq has a 25% quota for women."

## *Gender Roles*

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### **Marriage/Parental**

Women's rights has become fairly progressive over the centuries in [Lebanon](#) compared to other [Middle Eastern countries](#) as Islamic Law ([Sharia Law](#)) is not used to implement laws ( however different sects may uphold some traditions within their community). For example, Article 7 of the constitution of Lebanon asserts that all citizens should have equal rights and duties regardless of gender. They also have Article 8 of the [constitution of Lebanon](#) that individual liberty will be guaranteed and protected by law; however Lebanese women still face [gender discrimination](#). Though some laws are put into place in respect to women and their rights, officials are not frequent with enforcing specifically, [gender equality](#). Not to mention there are still some discrimination laws and penal codes that have been put into place and these laws remain because Lebanon is based upon patriarchal social norms and majority of the men in Lebanon acquire the high positioned jobs within society. Because patriarchal [social norms](#) are enforced, women find the laws set to protect their women rights as ineffective and more restrictive than men in Lebanon, granted urban Lebanese women have more opportunities than rural Lebanese movement but both women alike still face restrictions on their actions. Though Lebanese women have the right to attend school, get a job in society, etc. the expected norm is for them to still be subordinate, submissive, and make time for the home. Some discriminatory acts that women face as Lebanese women that heavily restrict their movement are rules on divorce and parental custody. Because it is still common in Lebanese culture (where many are Muslim) that woman shall submit to their husband, many salient rights are given to the husband/father first before the mother.

### **Motherhood & Raising Children**

Parenting was an important [political](#) act for some Lebanese in the aftermath of the [First World War](#). This resulted in the reflection of critical transformations in [French-Lebanese](#) relations but also contributed significantly to the process of the state formation. Literature situating children in any historical context in Lebanon is also liable to frame childhood in highly static terms and to underestimate its significance in a matrix of other social, cultural, political, and economic forces. Those identified as such were variously understood as infants, children, youth, adolescents, boys, or girls, mostly on account of the social and gender roles they played, rather than any other set of factors, but also sometimes

by age, biology, and even class. One of the most conflicted domains, however, in which definitions of the child were called into question was the law. Also, for Islamic jurists, the age at which a woman received her first menses was important for several reasons. Not only did it signal her entry into adulthood biologically, but it also meant that her responsibilities as a Muslim increased significantly.

### **Procedures for Children**

According to one treatise on the five schools of [Islamic law](#), "There is consensus among the schools that menses and pregnancy are the proofs of female adulthood. "The strictures of acceptable behaviour pertaining to a woman's [menstrual cycle](#) were not simple, and her ability to comply with them, especially to follow the proper schedule for ritual washing , meant that she could handle "adult" tasks. It was at this point, too, that she would typically begin to fast for the entire length of the day during the [holy month of Ramadan](#), like an adult. However, "all the schools concur that any discharge that occurs before a girl reaches the age of nine years cannot possibly be menstrual; it is due to disease or injury." So, while nine was a technical minimum of legal adulthood for females, menstruation that early was unexpected. Fourteen or fifteen, for boys and girls, was a much more likely age at which to expect the onset of puberty.

### **Education**

Education was on the colonial agenda from beginning to end and was awarded special attention on account of its perceived ability to effect the greatest change in the greatest number of Lebanese. It was also something that missionaries and colonial administrators believed they could collaborate on together, as they imagined a similar citizen-figure into which Lebanese children were to be crafted by the West. Young people were marked out by foreign missionaries for their potential to transform not just the next generation of Lebanese but also the present generation of parents, especially mothers.

### **Marriage: Women vs. Men**

Women and men are looked at differently based on their [gender](#) in Lebanon and the stipulations and norms are different for both. The penal codes in Lebanon specifically in marriage tend to be in favour of the man. Article 562 works in the favour of men for violence ( kill/ abuses or injures) against his spouse or even female relative as it reduces the sentencing of man. This code reduces the sentence if the man can prove that the woman engaged in illegal sexual intercourse. Furthermore, if the male spouse is an adulterer before accused his adulterous act is questioned on whether it was done in the marital home or the adulterous relationship become public; however, the woman if accused of adulterous acts anywhere anytime no matter the circumstance is automatically convicted. Moreover, if

convicted the sentencing time is less for a male than female ( male: one month to one year; female: three months to three years).

## ***Single Mothers in Lebanon***

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Mothers were described to be very alone in the process once, they embarked on motherhood. The average thought of Lebanon woman, after she finds the news that she is carrying a child is, "My life stopped and my world was crushed when I found out that I was pregnant. ... The whole world was against me. No partner by my side to support me, no family to acknowledge me after I had brought shame to our family's name, as they say.

A woman by the name of Samar, made it very clear just how misunderstood she was and felt when it came to motherhood. A young man that she considered her friend, lured her into trusting him and then he raped her and left the country for work. He would not return any of the calls she made to reach out to him. This first reach in this situation in Lebanon is for the parents to make the young man marry their daughter. The second attempt was too convince the women to have an abortion.

### **Common Struggles for Lebanon Women**

There are so many stories regarding single mothers in in [Lebanon](#), but they all have one thing in common: None of them really chose this path, unlike women in more liberal countries, where single [motherhood](#) is now a choice and a path women can take without being rejected by society. However, things are different in [Lebanon](#). Every single mother has already lived a horrible tragedy before getting to the birth phase and raising her child alone. Stories of rape, [sexual assault](#), incest, partners leaving and many other tragedies mean that single mothers are rejected socially and economically for something that is often not even their fault. There were single mother issues in Lebanon, which was also viewed as [taboo](#). It was so bad that society's organizations would at all cost disregard providing any form of assistance in the area to avoid being seen as helpers of women who became pregnant without being married. There are few organizations for single mothers to turn to, and centers supported by official bodies to help them organize their affairs have yet to be established. The Maryam and Martha Organization, one of the few associations helping these women, has been receiving single mothers for many years, providing them with the support they need.

### **Hospital practices in maternity wards in Lebanon**

Eight out of thirty-nine hospitals in Lebanon had well established prenatal care classes, however only three actually enrolled all women in these classes. There were other forms of providing, such as information at a low, only having four hospitals giving written information regarding care during the labour as well as delivery. Six healthcare providers reported that

inquiring women about their preferences. Furthermore, few gave women any opportunity for procedures such as shaving, enema or fetal monitoring application. Lastly, it was seen that all places had strict mobility for women in the delivery process, including eight who tied their arms and legs.

### **Recommendations**

There is a necessity to advance the work examining the health effects of maternity care, and the attempts made to enhance the healthcare providers policies and traditions practices. Where-best-practice is not in place. There has to be an intervention that takes place soon in Lebanon.

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## ***Economy: Women***

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### **History**

[Civil war](#) and the [Israel War on Lebanon](#) has affected Lebanon's economy tremendously. Since 2008 their economy has grown about 8 percent but not significantly enough as they are still a country highly in debt from war. Women in correlation with the economy have been able to participate since the 1970s but they are still underrepresented in the labor force and are the first to be negatively impacted when the economy fails. Currently in Lebanon, Article 215 of their Law of Contracts and Obligations allow men and women the same right to own and administer property. Married women can even own and manage their property separately regardless of their religious affiliation. Although given the same rights there are still inequitable repercussions that negatively affect the women more than men. For example, if a woman's husband declare bankruptcy then there are restrictions that are put on the women's property but not the man's. Furthermore, there is some legal wording that makes it harder for women to stand completely independently economically because women's property, if married are considered purchases by the man's money and technically considered an asset of the man's unless proven otherwise. Here you see women though given equal opportunity to acquire property, still not completely equal to man as there is legal wording that gives women a harder time to be seen as an individual human being instead of a subordinate or an asset/accessory to her husband.

### **Work Force**

Women have the right to work in Lebanon. Though given the right more men are still seen in the work force than women. More women especially those between the age 36 to 55 tend to stay in the home and tend to their family and children duties, playing into the social norms of women's role in Lebanon's [patriarchal society](#). Although men are relatively represented more in the work force, women still work. Women are more likely to take on part-time jobs if they do work as they have to tend to their household duties as well. Article 29 of Lebanon's



Employment Act was amended to increase [maternity leave](#); however, Lebanon does not meet the standard given by the ILO convention 103 granting women no less than 12 weeks. Not to mention Lebanon does not offer services to help with childcare making it hard for women to indulge themselves completely in the work force and [paternity leave](#) is not offered at all. Common jobs for women who do work are generally in the service area or do specialists work .

Women's salaries compared to their male counterpart is drastically different. Men tend to make more than women causing a vast [gender wage gap](#). Three times as many men as women make more than 1101 dollars per month while three times as many women as men earn less than 300 dollars a month. Although, women and men who work in the government/public sector make similar [wages](#), women in the [private sector](#) do not and 86 percent of most workers in Lebanon work in the private sector and 80 percent of the women in the private sector make 700 or below (see figure 9 and 10 by Institute of Women's Policy research for wage gap). There is also a big gap between pay based on a woman's age. The younger the woman the more likely she is to be paid less ( 2 out of every 3 young women earn 500 dollars or less) as increase in pay comes with years of experience.

## Women's Movements in Lebanon

### *Women's Rights and Violence against Women*

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**Women in the Government:** In order to understand the true importance of the [women's movement](#) in [Lebanon](#), it is important to first understand the government and social norms prevalent with in the [Middle East](#). The government of Lebanon operates on a parliamentary scale which includes representatives of each recognized religious organizations in addition to one [prime minister](#) which determines the laws that regulate the country. This Parliament is composed entirely of people who openly practice [patriarchal religion](#). **Lebanese women** won the right to vote in 1952. However, since that victory, only seventeen women have served in the [Lebanese parliament](#). Not only do each of these religions have their own place in Parliament, they also have their own courts and codes of conduct. While Lebanon is often seen as a very liberal country, arguably the most liberal country within the Middle East, the systematic oppression of women is still prevalent. Currently, women are able to: marry freely while understanding that divorce may bring about a great deal of socioeconomic hardships, vote as long as they are able to prove that they have obtained an elementary education, have jobs as long as those jobs do not encroach on their domestic obligations, and walk around in public without having to wear [Hijabs](#). Unfortunately, even with all of those superficial rights, women are still subjected to unwanted advances and [social discrimination](#). Constitutionally, Lebanese women and men are regarded as equals; however, they are not



free from laws and publicly accepted socialized behaviors which encourage male intervention of those rights in the name of honor or family preservation.

**Women in Lebanon:** Lebanon is guided by 15 or more religious codes and courts including [Shi'a](#), [Sunni](#), [Maronite Christians](#), and [Druze](#) parties, which all "compete to preserve narrow sectarian interests, not those of a unified Lebanon". Coincidentally, all of which encourage the oppression women. Founded in 1973, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World was created by the [Lebanese American University](#). While the IWSAW aims to educate Middle Eastern women, they have also been at the forefront of many women's movements. They contribute greatly to the women's movement by virtue of their research and publications. For example: after conducting research to determine how many contemporary Lebanese women in professional positions are widely known to the public, IWSAW designed a project, entitled Who is She. This is a database which provides the public with "easy access to bibliographical information on a large number of contemporary women in one of the following categories: opinion leaders, senior managers, politicians, professionals, artists, researchers, and experts within a wide range of subjects". Women who are engaged in political organizations often acquire social stigmas. For example, many women within the Palestine resistance movement live in Lebanese camps. These women "have political meetings at night and often sleep away from home. Many have been called prostitutes for doing so. But they have stood fast saying that their country comes before family". Most of these women are educated and trained to fight yet are still subject to discrimination and [sexualization](#) in post war Lebanon. Women in Lebanon, as is the sentiment for most Middle Eastern countries, are regarded as the symbol of the nation, not always as an active member. As most contemporary Lebanese women are not known for their contributions outside of the world of scholars, many Women's Movements go undocumented and are brushed under the rug by the patriarchal government.

**Legal Contributions of Women:** Between 2006 and 2008, many Lebanese people protested in opposition of the Prime Minister, [Fouad Siniora](#). Since the Prime Minister and parliament are the individuals approving laws, such protests were important especially for women. At the forefront of these protests were major women's organizations ([NGOs](#)). One feminist NGO which tackled exploitation and violence on women was Kafa. Kafa, which was founded in 2005, along with many other women's organizations, aims to diminish social, legal, and economic forms of patriarchy in order to stop violence against women and children. They proposed a law, which was drafted in 2009, that was to stop domestic violence against women, including marital rape. This NGO group wrote letters to the Cabinet of Ministers which later stated that they would vie for legal reform and protect women against family violence. After much lobbying and protesting, people within these NGOs succeeded in pushing the draft law to the parliament where it sat in arrest. Over time, while it was stuck at

Parliament, this law was amended continuously due to objections of religious conservatives. The biggest disagreement regarding this law was one of the most prevalent issues for women: marital rape. Suggestions to amend the law included removal of the segment outlining [marital rape](#) as a crime. Although passing that law may lead to the decrease of many violent situations within the household, its proposed amendment will defeat the purpose of the law. Some women's activists would argue that the myriad of amendments within this law makes the law detrimental to the advancement of women in Lebanon. Because there are so many differences with in each of the religious courts, domestic violence is handled in a different way depending on which region a woman is involved with. It is frowned upon for a woman to ever initiate a divorce, in mostly all of the religious sectors of the parliament. In some courts, a woman asking for a divorce must obtain a substantial amount of evidence regarding her husband's indiscretion. Likewise, if a man were seeking a divorce, in many courts he could obtain that divorce with very little evidence, and in the name of honour or family preservation. For example if a woman who was a victim of spousal rape were to attempt to get a divorce from her husband, that effort would be dismissed in many courts by the socially accepted idea, which is supported by Judge Sheik Ahmad Al-Kurdi of the Sunni religious court, that such indictment "could lead to the imprisonment of the man, where in reality he is exercising the least of his marital rights."<sup>[4]</sup> This implies that the man, by virtue of being her husband, is therefore in full compliance with the laws and codes of conduct of Lebanon. In addition, a woman who goes to her family for support in filing for a divorce may be met with both opposition to her decision, and shame surrounding it. Such socially accepted beliefs actively contribute to the [marginalization](#) of women's voices in Lebanon.

**Marginalization of Women:** Since many socially accepted beliefs stem from religious practices, a myriad of patriarchal and oppressive practices have been incorporated not only into the homes of Lebanese people, but the [Lebanese government](#) which aims for the protection of the family unit, not for the protection of women. It is a religious and socially accepted belief that women are subordinate to men although the law states differently. While rewiring entire religions, which are based on that very concept, to regard women as equals is an impractical goal, changing the legal system is a step in the right direction towards claiming women's rights and securing protection of women as well as men. Changing laws to be less conservative, within a country, often lead to a more liberal future generation.

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