

CREID INTERSECTIONS SERIES Religious Inequalities and Gender

Problems and Challenges Facing Shabak Women and its Impact on Their Daily Lives

Syria Mahmoud Ahmad Al-Qaddo

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Syria Mahmoud Ahmad Al-Qaddo

Summary

This research explores the most significant challenges facing Shabak women in Iraq and their connection to temporal, spatial and societal relations. This research addresses gaps in the literature related to the suffering and persecution of Shabak women throughout history due to the customs and traditions of the clan and religious community in Nineveh (an ancient Assyrian city that today makes up the eastern half of Mosul). These challenges were identified through focus group discussions (FGDs), including participatory ranking exercises, with Shabak women and men across Nineveh.

Shabak woman experience daily difficulties, including harassment and marginalisation, largely due to not having a voice in broader society, nor in central or local governance. The experiences of Shabak women are magnified through the intersecting inequalities of being women and belonging to an ethnic and religious minority. Many are also part of a minority within a minority, as 75 per cent of the Shabak are from the Shia sect but live in governmental administrations where most residents are Sunni (Office of International Religious Freedom 2019). As a result, a Shabak woman's suffering is multiplied.

Prior to 2003 the Shabak did not openly practice their Shia faith under the oppressive regime of Saddam Hussein, and so they were not targeted. From 2004, there was more freedom within Iraq to express their religion. However, this came at a high price: from 2004 to 2014, 1,613 Shabak people were killed in the direct targeting of places of worship and the planting of explosives in houses by groups such as Al Qaeda and later Daesh (Human Rights Watch 2014). After Daesh took control of Mosul and the Nineveh Plains, major massacres took place in Shabak villages. No accurate reports have been issued so far, but the number of victims is estimated to be in the hundreds (Mamouri 2014).

Since Daesh's attack, 248 Shabak people remain missing. When Daesh kidnapped Yazidi girls and women, they also kidnapped Shabak girls. However, this issue is not always acknowledged or spoken openly about in the community because of the shame attached to the violations carried out against women and girls by Daesh.

This research reveals the problems experienced by Shabak women and outlines proposed solutions identified by the Shabak community in Nineveh.

Key words: Shabak, Iraq, women, religious minority, marginality, gender discrimination, participatory research.

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To those who stayed up through the night for my sake, for my comfort and for drawing a smile on my lips, to those who, if I lived forever, would not fulfil their rights, to whom my Lord commanded me to obey them without disobeying Him, to the reason for my success and happiness in this world, my thanks and gratitude to my children and their wives who stood with me and supported me, thanks and praise to my brothers and sisters for standing by my side. Whoever does not thank people does not thank God, my sincerest thanks and gratitude to the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), and to Professor Mariz Tadros and Dr Sofya Shahab, you deserve all thanks and praise. Without you, we would not have conducted the research, and without your efforts and communication, the research would not have been accomplished.

Recent studies, research and social and historical statistics have proven that women in the Middle East in general, and minority women in Iraq in particular, are subjected to challenges, persecution and the denial of rights in all fields, where the issue of problems and challenges facing Shabak women is a vital and important topic in our present time while the research and reports that deal with this topic are very few if not rare. Therefore, raising such a topic is of great scientific importance to human rights and international bodies, as well as to minority and women's rights organisations and those interested in this field.

1 Introduction

1.1 The origin of the Shabak

While there are different sayings and opinions about the origins of the Shabak, there is a lack of in-depth research from outside the Shabak community. For example, Anastas Al-Karmali identified the Shabak people as ethnically Kurds (Moosa 1988) and many Western sources cite 1502 as the year that Shabaki people arrived in Iraq (Minority Rights Group International 2017). However, Shabaks themselves, having researched their own history, have come to two theories.

The first identifies the Shabak people as coming from the Persian East, having lived since ancient times in this region after being displaced a thousand years before the birth of Christ (peace be upon him) from the northern Caspian Sea region. Historians differ on the exact location, after a large group of white people inhabited that region and

dispersed into two groups, one of which headed west and spread in Europe and the other which headed to the east. These were the Indo-Iranian peoples, and they divided again into two parts, one of them descended into northern India and the other into the Aryan plateau. The latter became the Baluch, Kurds, Persians, Shabaks, Tajiks and Uzbeks, and they distributed themselves over the neighbouring regions. The early Shabaks inhabited the Nineveh area (van Zoonen and Wirya 2017).

The second theory is that Shabaks are descendants of the Medes, who seized Nineveh after the battle of 'Bkhuda Da' (meaning God's gift), and ended the Assyrian state in cooperation with the Sumerians. In this instance, Shabaks are believed to have either descended from the Zagros tribes or from the remnants of the Medes or the Median army that overthrew Nineveh in 612 BC (Botani 2007).

Regardless of these differing opinions, many agree that the Shabak share origins with the Kakai, Faili, Hawarman and Zaza minorities. Various Arabic writers have said that the name 'Shabak' comes from the intertwining of peoples, citing that local people "see the very name 'Shabak', which they derive from Arabic 'shabaka': 'to intertwine', as an indication that the Shabak are composed of many different tribes" (Vinogradov 1974, cited in Leezenberg 1994: 6).

However, it may also be the case that the name of various religious and ethnic groups simply changed over time. The most important aspect of the Shabak name is the acknowledgement of its ancestry, and the acceptance and inclusion of other nationalities who were experiencing displacement, be they Arabs, Kurds or Yazidis. This confirms their antiquity. Consequently, these various sects live with the Shabak in their villages, intermarrying, having children together and becoming Shabak.

The Shabak live in an area of land that extends from the Khazar River in the east to Tal Kaif district in the west, and from Sheikhan district in the north to the city of Mosul in the south, forming a separating belt between the Arab Mosul and the Kurdistan region of Iraq. All the Shabak villages are located in a flat area that represents the Nineveh Plain. It is known historically that the Shabak lands included the left coast, which represented the historical city of Nineveh. The Shabak live in the district of Hamdaniya, Nimrud sub-district, Bartella sub-district, Bashiqa sub-district, Tal Kaif district, and in 70 villages and complexes. In addition to this, there is a Shabak presence inside the city centre of Mosul, on the left side of the city of Mosul, and in the following neighbourhoods: Nineveh East, North Garage, Hob Tamim, Aden, Al-Jaza'ir, Al-Zohour, Al-Qadisiyah, Al-Arbajiyah, Al-Bakr, Al-Masarif, Al-Nabi Yunis, Al-Qudos, Al-Karama, Al-Methath, Al-Wahda, Sumer, and Al-Samah. The number of Shabak in Iraq is currently

estimated to range from 350,000 to 400,000 people (Office of International Religious Freedom 2019). A full list of Shabak villages can be found in Annexe 1.

1.2 Religious beliefs

The Shabak have known no religion other than Islam since it spread in the lands of Mosul. Their villages reflect the extent of the Shabak's commitment to Islam; all villages have a mosque, or a hussainiya, in which the five pillars of Islam (shahada, prayer, Zakat, fasting, hajj) are held and religious occasions, such as births and holidays are celebrated. The hall is used for the establishment of mourning gatherings, whether public or when a member of the village dies.

The Shabak religious doctrine has often been distorted. For example, the Shia community in south Iraq does not recognise the Shabak as Shia as they have some different traditions. However, the Shabaks are Muslims who believe in God as their Lord, in Muhammad as a Prophet, in the Qur'an as a book, and in the Kaaba as a qiblah. The majority of them follow the Ja'fari Twelver school of thought.¹ The rest are Sunni sects, and some of them were influenced by the various Sufi sects, including the Bektashi Order (Al-Dulaimi 2016: 10).

1.3 Language

The descendants of the Shabak people speak the Shabaki language, which belongs to the Indo-Iranian Aryan language group. It is an independent language and not a dialect of other languages. It is characterised by its own distinct vocabulary and style of pronunciation. Nevertheless, it contains vocabulary shared with other languages, such as Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Hindi and Kurdish (Leezenberg 2020: 50-76). This may be due to exposure to colonisation, as well as the rapprochement in religious beliefs, mixing with neighbours and trade.

1.4 Violations

The Shabak have been robbed of their rights to freedom, security and to live in peace since 2004 by Al Qaeda and Daesh. They have been the victims of horrendous crimes, including the killing of individuals and groups through targeting in the streets and alleys of Mosul, in their places of work, or while travelling to the city. Their safe houses have

¹ A school of thought within Shia Islam based on the belief that the Prophet Ali (Prophet Muhammad's successor) had twelve Imams who would be his successors (Gaitanos, 2020).

been attacked and explosives have been planted in front of Shabak houses or under cars.

Unfortunately, in areas such as Hamdaniya and Bartella, some believe that the displacement of Shabak people is part of an effort to forcibly change the demographics of areas of Iraq that have been historically non-Muslim majorities. Consequently, Shabaki people also experience discrimination from Christians, not just from the Muslim majority. This was reflected in some of the accounts given in the FGDs, although it is important to acknowledge that Christians themselves are also a persecuted minority within Iraq.

1.5 The situation of women in the Shabak community

Shabak society in the Nineveh Plain is tribal, religious, and fairly 'closed'. The role of women is very weak and limited to the home, i.e., to marital duties, taking care of children and doing housework. It is a patriarchal society that gives priority to men in all fields, such as in the access to job opportunities and positions in the public and private sectors, participation in political processes, and even inheritance division.

This constitutes an abuse of Shabak women's rights in Nineveh. As such the challenges facing women are much greater than the challenges facing men. Shabak women suffer more than some of their neighbours, as they are both women suffering within a patriarchal society, and a member of a minority suffering within a society fragmented by religious and ethnic marginalisation and discrimination. After 2003 and the entry of ISIS terrorist gangs into the area, the mosaic of ethnic and religious groups who live in Nineveh turned towards citizenship and the homeland, as they were under threat. This caused a rift in society and weakened bonds of trust.

The situation of Shabak women is currently much better than it was before, thanks to cultural and educational development, and increasing awareness and desire to keep pace with developments taking place in neighbouring communities. In addition to this, the displacement of the Shabak minority in 2014, and their residence in the northern and southern governorates, and the capital Baghdad, challenged some of their customs and traditions, as these governorates are increasingly culturally developed in comparison to the villages in which the Shabak traditionally live.

The years of displacement demonstrated positive cultural, social and scientific practices to Shabak women. Today Shabak women go to school, university and cultural seminars as well as participating in political processes. However, this development has not been consistent or comprehensive for all Shabak women in all areas of the country.

Unfortunately, many in the Shabak community believe that these developments have negative aspects. They are critical of changes to women's clothing, their frequenting of major stores, their reluctance to work for comfort, and their use of social media sites, which men within the Shabak community believe affect society negatively.

Being a Shabak woman negatively affects academic and professional choices, as there are many jobs and professions that women cannot practice in the Nineveh Plain because of the negative social outlook and the tribal customs and traditions of the Shabak community. These include the legal profession and nursing, because these professions involve mixing with men. Consequently, Shabak women cannot apply to study in the colleges and fields they desire, work in some areas of self-employment, such as commerce, or in the private sector.

2 Research aims and methodology

The aim of this research is to shed light on the daily experiences of Shabak women and their families. This research paper reveals the extent of injustice practiced against Shabak women and the extent of marginalisation they suffer from Shabak men, other components of society, particularly the majority religion, and from successive government regimes. This research also provides recommendations of practical and realistic mechanisms to address Shabak women's problems, alongside providing analysis of some of the roots of key challenges faced.

This research aims to improve the reality of Shabak women's day-to-day lives in the Nineveh Plain, to defend their stolen rights, and to increase their role in Iraqi society and the Shabak community in all professional, social, cultural, economic and political fields, similar to women of other nationalities.

Consequently, the main question guiding this research is, **"What are the challenges that Shabak women are facing that affect their daily life routines, and what are the effects of these challenges on these women?"**

The sub-questions discussed with participants in the focus groups are listed in Annexe 2.

2.1 Research methodology

The research was conducted through four focus group discussions (FGDs) with 48 men and women, aged 18-70 years. Participants came from different areas of the Nineveh Plain, from the district of Al-Hamdaniya and its affiliated villages, Bartella district and its affiliated villages, Bashiqa district and its affiliated villages, and the Shabaki villages

affiliated to Tal Kaif district. The selection of participants took into consideration sectarian, cultural and urban diversity.

Participatory ranking, conducted during the FGDs, was used to gather the opinions of all participants and to understand the prioritisation of issues. Sensitive matters that affect the feelings of the participants were uncovered as part of this process. A set of problems and challenges were raised by the women, and then priorities were arranged according to the number of votes obtained for each challenge or problem using participatory ranking. Gathering women's opinions and obtaining case studies and real stories was integral to this research, since these women's voices are rarely heard by society. Through the combined sessions, we also heard potential strategies that could address the challenges facing Shabaki woman in Iraq.

2.2 Research importance

This research is important from a scientific and historical point of view in a context where research about the experiences of the Shabak community, and particularly Shabak women, is lacking. This research sheds light on women in a closed society with an emphasis on diagnosing the problems facing Shabak women that impede the realisation of their rights, their exercise of freedom and their full participation in work, social and political life. The findings of this work are of importance to the fields of international human rights and women's rights.

2.3 Research process and methods

The research was conducted in the Nineveh region in November 2021 through FGDs with Shabak women and men. This aimed to uncover the challenges and problems facing women and the impact on their daily lives from the perspectives of both Shabak women and men, since they are a minority and live in a community of different religions, nationalities and sects.

Two FGDs were carried out with 26 Shabak women from different cultural and sectarian backgrounds. This included educated women, those unable to complete a formal education, housewives, employees, students, graduates and civil society activists aged between 18-70 years. In order to capture a range of experiences, these women came from different areas of the villages and the centres of districts and sub-districts in the Nineveh Plain. They were divided into two FGDs by age. The first FGD was run with women aged 18-35, and the second with women aged 36-70.

Additionally, two FGDs were carried out with 22 Shabak men from different cultural and sectarian backgrounds, including employees, earners, civil activists, students and graduates, aged 18-70 years. They also came from different areas of villages and district and sub-district centres in the Nineveh Plain. Similarly to the women, the men were divided into two FGDs by age. The first FGD was run with men aged 18-35, and the second with men aged 36-70.

The method of asking questions of the participants and then using participatory ranking was chosen to prioritise the voices of the participants themselves, particularly Shabak women. The participatory ranking was used to better understand the significance of each of the issues to the women and the impact of each challenge on their lives.

For the participatory ranking, participants named the main challenges they face and these were collected on a flip chart. Each participant then wrote down their rankings on a sheet of paper according to their perspective. These were then collected, and each challenge marked for how many times it was mentioned.

2.4 Limitations, strengths and challenges of the research

Many of the restrictions experienced in this study were related to time pressures. The limited time for the FGDs meant participants weren't able to generate solutions to all of the challenges identified, such as participation in political decision-making and economic empowerment, and they felt they didn't have long enough to speak in-depth about the many challenges they suffer. Additionally, time was a challenge to the researcher and author because of other commitments and responsibilities.

However, the biggest obstacle this research faced is that the Shabak society is introverted and shy. Many Shabak people refused to talk about topics of suicide and rape, and some of them were afraid of their parents and relatives. Others felt shy due to the customs, traditions and expectations of women's behaviour inherited and preserved by the Shabak family. This can prevent freedom of speech and expression of opinion. The other obstacle is that there are no sources, research or books written in this field, and even if found, they do not contain the voices of Shabak people, especially not Shabak women. This is one of the factors which makes this research so unique.

3 Findings

During the FGDs, education was identified as the most significant issue facing Shabak women. Part of the difference between the Shabak and other communities is their geographic locations in villages. Schools have only begun to be built in these locations in the past two decades. Where schools in the region are still fairly new there is a problem convincing communities to send their daughters to school, as this is not a part of their traditional customs. For high school level education this becomes even more of a challenge as Shabak youth must travel to receive education. As the Shabak community is somewhat closed, they tend to prevent girls from travelling.

Other issues identified include the customs and traditions that are seen as integral to the Shabak identity. For example, divorce is almost forbidden, and as a result a Shabak woman may not be divorced but will instead be sent back to her parents' house. However, as she is still technically married she is not able to marry again and has no rights. Also, some professions are closed to Shabaki women, for example Shabak women are forbidden from being actors or singers.

While there have been many challenges that have occurred due to the displacement of the Shabak community by Daesh, some positive changes have come as a result of having to integrate into other communities. This mingling with more open-minded society has meant women have been able to take on different types of jobs, and work with new organisations. This has included giving women the opportunity to participate in seminars and workshops held by local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

3.1 Participatory ranking

Table 1: The challenges facing Shabak women from the point of view of men and women aged 18-70

N	Challenges facing Shabak women from the point of view of women and men aged 18-70	Participatory ranking and prioritisation according to the number of votes for each challenge from the point of view of women and men aged 18-70	The number of votes for each challenge or threat
1	Harassment	Education	40
2	Early marriage	Jobs opportunities	21
3	Jobs opportunities	Health	21

4	Education	Early marriage	19
5	Customs and traditions	Customs and traditions	17
6	Freedom (travelling, choosing a spouse)	Inheritance	17
7	Domestic violence	Discrimination	13
8	Community environment	Freedom (travelling, choosing a spouse)	9
9	Political participation	Domestic violence	7
10	Marriage in exchange for leaving work	Harassment	7
11	Inheritance	Claiming her rights (not allowing Shabak women to resort to the judiciary and file complaints)	5
12	Health	Divorce	4
13	Divorce	Community environment	4
14	Discrimination	Political participation	3
15	Claiming her rights (not allowing Shabak women to resort to the judiciary and file complaints)	Marriage in exchange for leaving work	2

Source: Author's own.

The second column shows the priority order of the problems and challenges identified when only the votes for the most important issue are taken into consideration. The third column accounts for the whole participatory ranking process, which has placed the problems and challenges into an order based on all the votes received, which includes voting for an issue as a second, third, fourth priority, etc. The fourth and final column shows how many overall votes an issue received when the whole participatory ranking process is considered.

Table 2: The challenges facing Shabak women from the point of view of women aged 18-70

N	Participatory classification and prioritisation according to the number of votes for each challenge - women aged 18-35		Participatory classification and prioritisation according to the number of votes for each challenge - women aged 36-70		Overall	
1	Education	11	Education	12	Education	23
2	Inheritance	10	Health	12	Health	14
3	Work	8	Early marriage	5	Inheritance	13
4	Harassment	7	Inheritance	3	Work	8
5	Customs and traditions	7	Women's Rights	3	Customs and traditions	8
6	Community environment	4	Distinguishing sects	2	Early marriage	7
7	Lack of freedom to choose a spouse and education (freedom to make decisions)	3	Divorce	2	Harassment	7
8	Political Participation	3	Social care	2	Community environment	4
9	Family violence	2	Customs and traditions	1	Women's rights	3

10	Early marriage	2	Widows' rights	1	Lack of freedom to choose a spouse and education (freedom to make decisions)	3
11		2	Marginalisation	1	Political participation	3
12	Marriage in exchange for leaving work	2			Distinguishing sects	2
13	Travel	1			Divorce	2
					Social care	2
					Family violence	2
					Marriage in exchange for leaving work	2
					Travel	1
					Widows' rights	1
					Marginalisation	1

Source: Author's own.

As shown in the table, there is a difference in the prioritisation of challenges between women aged 18-35 and women aged 36-70. However, there are also clear similarities. Many of the older women were prevented from completing formal education by their families and the Shabak community when they were younger, whereas many of the women in the younger age group have had some access to education. Despite this difference, both groups rated education as the most significant issue facing them.

Inheritance was ranked more highly by the younger women. This is likely because they are more familiar with Islamic laws and Sharia, due to their increased education, so they know that they should have a right to inheritance but are denied this by the customs

and traditions within Shabak society. Another challenge that was ranked highly by the younger women and not by the older group is harassment. The reason for this is that young women are more likely to be harassed as a result of mixing with society and leaving the house to go to university, work, the market or any other place. As for the women who are older, they only go out briefly for shopping, and generally this is with their husbands. This decreases the likelihood of them being harassed.

Table 3: The challenges facing Shabak women from the point of view of men aged 18-70

N	Participatory classification and prioritisation according to the number of votes for each challenge facing Shabak women - men aged 18-35		Participatory classification and prioritisation according to the number of votes for each challenge facing Shabak women - men aged 36-70		Overall	
1	Education	10	Customs and traditions	7	Education	17
2	Discrimination	8	Education	7	Early marriage	12
3	Early marriage	6	Early marriage	6	Discrimination	11
4	Employment opportunities	6	Freedom	6	Employment opportunities	10
5	Health	5	Domestic violence	5	Customs and traditions	9
6	Inheritance	3	Employment Opportunities	4	Health	7
7	Customs and traditions	2	Discrimination	3	Freedom	6

8	Divorce	2	Health	2	Domestic violence	5
9	Claiming their rights (not allowing women from the Shabak to resort to the judiciary and file complaints)		Inheritance	1	Inheritance	4
10			Intolerance in religious discourse		Divorce	2

Source: Author's own.

Interestingly, despite the likelihood that the older men act as the gatekeepers of customs and traditions within the Shabak community, as is often the case with older generations, it was the men in the older FGD that ranked customs and traditions as the most significant issue facing Shabak women, alongside education. It is perhaps the case that the younger men are under the impression that customs and traditions no longer affect Shabak women, which does not match the view of younger Shabak women themselves, who ranked customs and traditions among the top five challenges they face.

As shown in the above tables, the women and men generated different lists of threats and challenges during the participatory ranking. For example, the men identified early marriage as the second most significant problem facing Shabak women, whereas Shabak women themselves placed it only in sixth place. It's worth noting, firstly, that early marriage was much less significant for younger women than older women, as the younger women tended to have stayed in education until adulthood, therefore delaying marriage, whereas the older women had relevant experiences of it. However, for the men, it was their belief that early marriage positively correlated to the significant increase in divorce within the Shabak community that led them to rate it so highly. Health also featured much higher in the ranking for women than it did for men. This may be because many of the health challenges that the women described were related to their experiences in the maternity halls of hospitals, and with reproductive health. Therefore, the men in their community may not be as familiar with these challenges.

Nevertheless, despite the differences, education was ranked as the most significant issue facing Shabak women by both the men and the women in the FGDs.

3.2 Analysis

The following sections outline what participants in the FGDs had to say about each of the issues identified as being priority problems, threats and challenges facing Shabak women. This includes how these issues are experienced differently, and often more severely, by Shabak women than by Shabak men and Iraqi women from the majority.

3.2.1 Education

Education was identified by both men and women in the FGDs as the most significant threat facing Shabak women overall. In the FGDs, we found that 40 participants, from a total of 48 (23 women (eleven aged 18-35 and 12 aged 36-70) and 17 men (ten aged 18-35 and seven aged 36-70)), said that the biggest challenge that the Shabak woman suffers is related to education. The participants revealed the following reasons for this lack of access to education:

- Too few Shabak middle and secondary schools nearby, meaning Shabak girls have to mix with students of other religions;
- A lack of financial means to send Shabak girls to school;
- The discrimination that Shabak girls face at school.

3.2.2 Customs

From childhood, Shabak girls hear from their mothers that they must learn housework and marry at an early age, and that a successful woman is one who can do all the housework while not talking about the importance of education for her life. It is said that the nature of these inherited customs and traditions and their transmission to future generations is the responsibility of men. However, in reality, women are equally responsible for transmitting these customs that have been built and learned over many generations.

For example, a 35-year-old housewife from Bartella sub-district, Khazna TabeH village, explained:

I did not complete primary school, because of living in the village, and customs and traditions at that time ruled everyone.

Another of the women, a 37-year-old housewife from the district of Bartella, Ansar Complex, agreed:

The customs and traditions of Shabak family say that the girl's completion of education is a shame for her and her family. It is forbidden for her to leave the house alone...she goes to the market, but she does not go to school for education, and this is all as a result of customs and the ignorance of the family.

This woman continued by explaining that this happens just as much in families where the parents are educated:

There is no condition for the family to be educated or not. There are families where the father is educated, but he prevents his daughter from going to school.

Another of the women, a 53-year-old civil society activist from Bartella sub-district, Bashpita village, explained where these customs and traditions originated from:

It becomes clear to us that the Shabak society has fanatical customs and traditions, and this society is fighting the completion of Shabak women study, and this is the result of accumulations of old ideas and habits of ancient clans.

Consequently, parents are the obstacle to girls completing their education because of ignorance, an unfamiliarity with education and a lack of awareness of its importance. They have the view that as the girl is not responsible for providing a living, completing studies and education is not as important to them as the livelihood rests with the husband only. There is a view that parents do not care about education in general, and this is a dangerous indicator.

However, some of the participants felt that family was not the issue, and it was wider Shabak and Iraqi society that limited girls with these customs and traditions. For example, one of the women, a 24-year-old activist from Bartella district, explained that:

From my point of view, society is the one that restricts the Shabak girl to her behaviour or the field of her study, with evidence that the period of migration to the northern and southern governorates when ISIS was occupying Nineveh Governorate. The Shabak society mixed with the rest of the societies, which helped to raise awareness for them and make the girl act more freely, and this evidence shows that the obstacle is society, not the family.

When asked to expand on this, her reasoning was that if the obstacle was the family, the family would prevent its women and girls from working in organisations and

participating in awareness sessions during displacement. While there is a fear of girls working in organisations or participating in educational courses and workshops, the reason for this fear is community gossip, which would severely affect girls' reputations.

Time is another obstacle to the education of Shabak women, as Shabak women devote most of their time to household chores. For example, one woman, a 26-year-old teacher from the Bartella district, mentioned:

During my teaching the female students, I hear from them that they help their mothers with household matters, and there is not enough time left for them to study and then [they]leave school.

Likewise, a 53-year-old female participant, a civil society activist, from the district of Bartella, the village of Bashpita, said:

When I reached a certain age, my family forced me to leave education, but because of my love for education, I developed myself and reached what I am now.

One of the men, a 30-year-old employee from the Bashiqa district, also had experience to share on this topic:

I am currently a school principal. For 19 years I was the principal of a girls' school, meaning girls have a desire to complete education, and there are even competitions between girls. There are girls who graduate to become doctors, but parents are the hardest barrier to their completion of studies.

If a young Shabak woman is able to gain an education, the most prominent problem facing her comes after finishing high school and selecting the department that she will study in university. She is only allowed to study in colleges for teaching and medicine, as these are the only ones allowed for young women by parents and Shabak society.

The 30-year-old male employee expanded on this from his perspective:

What prevents the Shabak woman from learning and does not give her the opportunity to complete the study is the customs and traditions, but currently more than 50 per cent or 60 per cent there is a demand and encouragement for education. Another reason is the lack of schools in the villages and countryside in the Nineveh Plain, which are few, and they did not have them. Currently, every village has a primary school for girls, but it needs support and encouragement.

3.2.3 Lack of accessible schools

The 30-year-old man continued by recognising the role a lack of accessible secondary schools plays in Shabak girls' ability to continue education beyond primary level.

In the district centres and cities, we see female teachers and female employees, and this we do not see in the villages, because of the lack of secondary schools in the villages and the dependence of four or five villages on one secondary school for girls.

One woman, a 36-year-old teacher from Hamdaniya, stated:

In the past, the Shabak girl used to complete her studies with difficulty due to the small number of schools and their distance from the village, in addition to the harsh view of the Shabak community for girls who complete their education. This also applies to Iraqi girls who live in remote villages.

This opinion was supported by another of the participants, a 46-year-old male graduate from Bashiqa village in Bazwaya. He explained that:

Education did not exist in the region because of the lack of schools or the distance of schools from the place of residence of the Shabak students, as they face difficulties in going to school.

Likewise, one of the men, a 32-year-old employee from Bartella district, Al-Akhaa neighbourhood, said the same thing.

We have a shortage of Shabak women in educational institutions. It should be noted that the availability of schools has a role in the education of Shabak women and their completion of studies. Before 2003 there were no middle and secondary schools for girls in most Shabak villages, which led them to force their daughters who completed primary school to leave school for fear of mixing with boys in intermediate and secondary schools. However, now and after the availability of middle and secondary schools in some villages, i.e., after the year 2003, we see that the Shabak women complete their studies in all stages.

3.2.4 Mixing with those from other religions

Not having accessible schools leads to Shabak girls and boys having to attend schools with members of other religions. One of the women, a 35-year-old housewife from the district of Bartella, Khazna Tabeh village, explained she was not allowed to complete her

studies when she was a girl because her school contained students from the majority religion.

Currently, I do not have girls, but I did not complete my education because of my family. I only completed the third stage of primary school and finished. I cannot read and write because of my family, and the reason behind this is that the school is mixed, boys and girls (Arabs and Shabak). Because the school was mixed, my parents prevented me from completing my education, and now I cannot teach my children because I am illiterate.

This issue of mixed schools ties into the customs and traditions that restrict Shabak girls. One woman, a 35-year-old housewife from Bartella sub-district, Khazna TabeH village mentioned:

The school is close but mixed, that is why I completed the study only to fifth primary stage, then I left education.

One of the men, a 21-year-old from Nimrud, Omarkan village, felt that while the desire for Shabak girls to not mix with those from other religions has eased over time, young Shabak women are still restricted by customs and traditions as they get older.

Over the passage of previous generations until now, it was not allowed for the Shabak girl to go to middle and high school because it was mixed and now they even allow their daughters to complete college, but they do not allow her to complete graduate studies or master's studies, because when she reaches the age of 20 or 23, she must get married, because in their eyes she has become old.

3.2.5 Discrimination within schools

The desire within the Shabak community for Shabak girls not to mix with students from other religions is linked to the discrimination that Shabak students face from these other students when studying at these mixed schools.

For example, one of the women, a 26-year-old teacher and activist from Bartella, stated that discrimination had increased in recent years and there is a clear rift between those of different components within schools.

Sitting in the classroom is in the form of groups of Christians separately and Muslims on one side, and the school administration is trying several times to solve this problem but cannot.

There is also the issue of the different clothing worn by the different religions. A 25-year-old female student from Bartella, Ali Rash village, described how some non-Shabak teachers ask Shabak girls to remove their veil [hijab] when they're at school.

However, one of the men, a 30-year-old photographer from Bartella sub-district, Taiba Complex, was critical of the Shabak schools in the Nineveh Plain because they force the students to wear a hijab. He stated:

I have a female student from my relatives and she is a student in a school in Bartella and she does not wear the hijab, but she was forced by the Shabak school director to wear the hijab, so I saw that this behaviour is an interference and an end to the freedom of that girl.

This is another obstacle that stands in the way of Shabak women's education, although this obstacle was not mentioned by any of the participants because the Shabak community is of a religious nature. This suggests that in this way Shabak women's rights as women are seen as less important by their community than their religious identity.

3.2.6 Lack of financial means

Lastly, through a questionnaire conducted with one of the women, a 26-year-old master's student from Bartella district, it was found that most families mentioned their economic status as one of the problems that families face that stops girls completing their education.

3.2.7 Consequences of a lack of education

Participants were clear that there are significant consequences for Shabak girls, and the wider Shabak community, if girls are not able to access a full education. For example, one of the men, a 31-year-old teacher from Bartella sub-district, Bashpita village, mentioned how education eliminates early marriage.

I believe that if the Shabak woman completes education, we will eliminate early marriage, and this is common, because if she continues the study, she will not think about marriage.

This ties back to customs and traditions, as it becomes clear that Shabak society prefers that the girl does not complete studies in order for the girl to marry at an early age, so she doesn't miss the opportunity to marry. This is in addition to family pressure for early marriage, especially the marriage of a cousin to a cousin.

A second consequence of Shabak women and girls not completing education is that Shabak women do not work in any government institutions or departments, whether educational, health, or in other sectors. This has an impact on Shabak society because the lack of women in decision-making positions marginalises Shabak society more broadly. This opinion is supported by one of the male participants, the 30-year-old school principal from Bashiqa district:

Let's look in the Nineveh Plain, are there Shabak women employed? Yes, there are, but in a small number, and if there were Shabak women in schools, they would have played a role in educating the remaining women in order to complete their education.

A 31-year-old civil activist from Hamdaniya, Qara Shore village, also mentioned the need for female Shabak employees in healthcare.

In the health sector there are a few numbers of female employees and Shabak doctors in hospitals and health centres, and this is a problem in itself.

The Shabak women's abandonment of education negatively affects their children as well, as they cannot teach their children or guide them on how to study and do homework. The same 31-year-old confirmed this from his experience.

I am a teacher in a school and I have students whose academic level is low. When I ask them why they do not study at home and prepare for homework, they say that their mother is illiterate and cannot read and does not teach them. This means that the woman, by leaving her study, does not only destroy herself, but also destroys her children's academic future.

It is worth mentioning that the Shabak who live in city and district centres encourage their daughters and women to complete their studies and do not mind hiring them in the public sector, unlike Shabaks who live in villages, where we see a low percentage of employment and education among women.

3.2.8 Job opportunities

Work is a protection for women, as it guarantees many women who do not have an income to support them to help secure their daily food and a living for themselves and their children. It also protects them from being forced into forms of work they don't want to undertake. Therefore, work is necessary to protect women, and it is a right protected by law and the constitution for every Iraqi citizen, whether male or female. It is not Iraqi law but Iraqi society that prevents women from working.

This is especially the case in the Nineveh Plain, where working women are seen in a negative light. This includes customs and traditions within the Shabak community that forbid Shabak women from working to prevent them from mixing with men. This limits women's options to working on small projects inside the home, where previously, most of the work inside the house of raising animals, harvesting and agriculture was on the shoulders of both women and men together. This means that sometimes women end up doing more to secure the family's livelihood - carrying out all household tasks and working from within the home - even though they are more dependent on men as the only one who can go outside the home.

Participants in the FGDs had a great deal to share about the challenges facing Shabak women and Shabak society's view of women working outside the home. For example, one of the women, a 24-year-old activist from Bartella district, explained that:

Society's view has changed towards the Shabak women who works in the government sector, while working in civil society organisations or companies is rejected, and women who work in this field are criticised by Shabak society.

This means the chance of her getting married is reduced or absent, because the negative attitude of society regarding women's work in companies or the private sector and organisations makes them think that women will be subjected to harassment and extortion.

Another woman, a 36-year-old teacher from Bartella district, agreed.

Honestly, in the past there was a harsh view from society towards women working in civil society organisations, and I was afraid to mention that I work in a civil society organisation to my relatives and neighbours in the village and to the Shabak community. But nowadays the view differs a little and there is more freedom to practice working with civil society organisations.

The 24-year-old activist continued by explaining the impact of only Shabak men being able to work.

The lifestyle is very difficult because the woman works inside the house and the man works outside the house, so both of them feel bored because it is a repetitive routine on a daily basis. In addition, the Shabak woman is always behind the scenes despite her efforts and work, and also the Shabak women suffer from defamation and abuse when they work in a field that is not accepted by Shabak society, such as civil society organisations and the private sector. While

men are allowed to work in all government sectors, the private sector and civil society organisations. This is a distinction between the sexes, men and women, gender-based discrimination.

In fact, one of the women, a 24-year-old activist from Yartala district, raised how:

Some young men from the Shabak component force women to leave work after marriage under the pretext of caring for the home and children, and the main reason is backwardness and ignorance.

Conversely, another of the women, a 37-year-old teacher from Bashiqa/Kogali sub-district, explained how her husband was supportive of her working, but Shabak society wasn't.

My husband does not mind if I work, but society forbids a woman to take her freedom, for example, to help her husband.

Another woman, a 25-year-old activist from Ali Rash village, agreed that the problem is Shabak society in general.

From my point of view, Shabak society prevents women from working, especially in the private sector and civil society organisations.

A 25-year-old female graduate and activist from Bartella sub-district, Ali Rash, went into more detail about why Shabak society views organisations in this way.

From the Shabak society's point of view, employees' rooms in government departments contain surveillance cameras and no one can harass them, while cameras are not available within civil society organisations which contributes to protecting women from harassment and thus protecting their reputation.

This perception of organisations is widely accepted in the Shabak community. One of the young women, a 21-year-old university student from Bartella sub-district, explained how:

My family refuses to let me go to civil society organisations, despite their acceptance of going to university.

Another of the women, a 27-year-old activist from Bartella sub-district, Tai complex, expanded on this.

There are several points on the work of girls in civil society organisations: First, they [the Shabak community] consider that the organisations are linked to international intelligence. Second, they consider organisations' work to change

customs and traditions. Third, the organisations force the employee to sign the safety paper, and thus he/she is forced to conduct a behaviour that prevents any person from attacking the other, which some Shabak people believe would prevent them from responding if they were harassed.

Unfortunately, the customs and traditions that restrict women and girls from working also make Shabak girls fear the working world, as explained by one of the young women, a 25-year-old student from Bartella sub-district, Ali Rash village.

Sometimes, because of raising the girl according to the customs and traditions, this causes her to have fear of work.

Additionally, a 24-year-old woman explained that:

If a woman fails during work or is exposed to a certain situation, then dealing with her is harsher from the side of her family and society compared to men. Because the woman is the weakest link in Shabak society, and her failure or exposure to harassment confirms that she is the reason.

In this way, Shabak society is waiting for her to fail in the workplace to 'prove' that she shouldn't be there. Aside from these customs and traditions, the lack of job opportunities, unemployment of their husbands, the failure of their husbands to find work, or the lack of daily income also affects the lives of Shabak women. For example, one of the women, a 37-year-old housewife from Bartella sub-district, Al-Ansar Complex stated:

It will increase family problems and the husband will live in a state of grumbling with the increase in the violence that the woman will face if she asks for anything from the husband.

It is worth noting that Shabak society prevents Shabak women from working in the private sector, because the private sector lacks oversight and it may facilitate assault on women by the employer or some co-workers. This is the prevailing opinion in Shabak society. We may see a small percentage of Shabak women working in the public sector, unlike the private sector, which does not include any Shabak women, and this is due to many reasons, the most important of which is fear of harassment, customs, traditions and the extremist religious discourse towards women working in the private sector. This phenomenon is not seen in societies such as Christians, Yazidis and Kurds.

For example, the women explained that if there was a job opportunity in a mall they would not be allowed to work there. The reason is that society is ruthless and there

would be a lot of talk about women in the region as if they had committed a crime, due in part to Shabak society's inferior view of women. The other reason is the perception that any woman working in the mall, private companies or civil society organisations will be subject to harassment.

Many of the women had experiences to share that reflected this reality. For example, one woman, a 43-year-old housewife from Bartella sub-district, Qalaria al-Muwaffaqa, mentioned how:

I had a job opportunity in the mall, but I did not go because of the family and the distance.

Another woman, who was 53 years old and a civil society activist from Bartella sub-district, Bashpita village, agreed, sharing a similar experience.

It is according to the work location. If the location is a small market or mall at most they will refuse because of the view of society and the region.

For another of the women, a 42-year-old housewife from Bartella sub-district, Al-Muwfaqiya village, her husband was a direct barrier:

My husband does not allow me to work in those places.

Whereas for a 53-year-old civil society activist from Bartella sub-district, Bashpita village, being a widow compounded the restrictions.

For me, I can make my daughter work anywhere, but being a widow and I have no support except for the Lord of the Worlds, perhaps being a widow will bring her talk and increase the chances of harassment on her.

However, there was also another opinion among the participants about why Shabak women do not work in the malls. One of the men, a 31-year-old activist, from Hamdaniya, Qara Shore village, explained that this is linked to the way women are expected to dress.

The owners of the malls require a kind of dress and semi-naked clothing for women working in those malls, in order to bring customers and shoppers to the mall...The Shabak woman is a veiled woman and she is conservative in terms of dress and clothing, and therefore she is not desirable to work in malls, shops, and luxury shops.

There are few Shabak women in the public sector. For example, one of the men, a 38-year-old graduate from Bartella sub-district, Manaret Shabak village indicated:

I would prefer as for the work of Shabak women in our time now the situation is different in a way. It is simple, as we have Shabak employees, but in a very small range, but it is not found in organisations and private companies, but the difficulties they face are harassment in the workplace. This will be an obstacle to her, and she will quit her job one hundred per cent.

Another of the men, a 24-year-old lecturer from Bashiqa district, agreed.

I work as a teacher in a school located in one of the Shabak villages, and on one occasion the school needed a service employee, so we asked in the village and we searched a lot for a service employee, but we did not find one, and this indicates the fight against Shabak women working even in the public sector.

Some participants believe that there is another challenge to Shabak women's work, which is the lack of encouragement by the parents. For example, one of the men, a 31-year-old activist from Hamdaniya, Qara Shore village, said women are limited by:

The lack of encouragement from the side of the family and society caused by customs and traditions that do not allow or encourage the Shabak woman to open a private project, and this is due to two important reasons, namely the lack of trust and the lack of encouragement by the parents.

Lastly, there are phrases that have become a kind of custom in the Shabak society, such as it is 'shameful for women to work'. This is perhaps the most prevalent phrase among men and families of women who forbid women from working. A 33-year-old male civil society activist from Bartella district, Al-Muwfaqiya village, said that:

More than 75 per cent of those who believe in the statement that see women's work as shameful, and the word shame has been linked to the Shabak community, have become a social norm in the Shabak.

In seeing women's work outside the home as shameful, the Shabak community do not realise the importance of work in protecting women. It prevents her involvement in illegal ways of making a living, especially for women who are widows or who do not have a livelihood source or any alternative forms of income. For example, one of the men, a 37-year-old employee from Tel Kaif District, explained that:

Work is one of the most important things that must be focused on, work is an essential thing for women and it is a protection for her. We can find radical solutions about the deviation of women, and this is because they do not work, and if they were working, they would not engage in this dark path. Perhaps the

husband of that woman is stingy with her and her children's needs, especially if she has separated from him. In this case, work is a way to save her from need.

Overall, while appearing to be supportive of Shabak women working, there was a trend in the men's focus group of needing to give enough space and support for Shabak women to work, but only in the government sector or in the home. However, these jobs are hard to come by and are competitive. Most men prevent women from working in the private sector due to the threat of harassment and conflict with Shabak customs and traditions, as explored above.

3.2.9 Health

The participants identified discrimination in treatment during visits to hospitals and health centres in the Nineveh Plain or within the city of Mosul as the most significant barrier facing Shabak women and their access to healthcare. This is where Shabak women receive a great deal of abuse, including racist behaviour, and lack of attention from hospital staff in Hamdaniya and Mosul.

For example, one of the women, a 43-year-old housewife from Bartella sub-district, Qalaria al-Muwaffaqia, explained:

Because we are Shabak, we are treated with contempt and considered second-class citizens when we go to the Hamdaniya hospital, especially in the maternity hall, Shabak women are treated very badly.

Shabak women not only suffer in their initial interactions with staff when arriving at hospital, they also experience discrimination in treatment. For example, one of the women, a 34-year-old housewife from Bartella sub-district, Al-Ikhaa neighbourhood, shared her experience of giving birth.

Within the Kurdistan Region, there is also discrimination in treatment, as I had a birth in 2015 from three o'clock in the morning, where I had labour and it continued until eight o'clock in the morning. I gave birth and I needed stitches but they didn't complete it and they left me for about an hour until they completed their work, but with the Kurdish citizens they treat them well.

This was also confirmed by one of the men, a 54-year-old employee from Hamdaniya.

Recently we noticed racial discrimination in the health sector, especially in Al-Hamdaniya Hospital, especially in maternity halls, for example, the Shabak woman

is in a critical condition and goes to give birth, but they do not accept her in the hospital, so they have to take her to Mosul hospitals.

In addition to the persecution and ill-treatment of Shabak women, there is an even bigger challenge due to the beliefs of some non-Shabak doctors and staff, who prevent Shabak women from giving birth in Al-Hamdaniya hospitals for fear that they will be issued with birth certificates from Al-Hamdaniya, which is considered to be a demographic change. One of the women, a 34-year-old housewife from Bartella sub-district, Al-Ikhaa neighbourhood, shared her brother's wife's experience.

[My brother's wife] wanted to give birth to her child in Al-Hamdaniya Hospital, because they cannot go to Mosul because of the control of ISIS over it. The staff and doctors of Al-Hamdaniya Hospital did not allow my brother's wife to give birth at first, but they allowed her to give birth later after we told them that we will file a complaint against them.

The examples and experiences above highlight the religious and racial discrimination that Shabak women face while trying to access healthcare, however there is also gender discrimination, specifically from their own community. In the villages, the Shabak community do not allow their wives and young daughters to be treated except in hospitals whose staff and doctors are women, and in some cases they are only taken to a local treatment centre. This means being seen by a local woman who may not have a degree or a graduate of one of the medical specialties.

One of the men, a 37-year-old employee from Tel Kaif District, explained how this is again an issue of customs and traditions.

Like the previous topics that we talked about, it is the result of backwardness, meaning when a woman wants to be treated, she is forced to be treated in a hospital where there are female doctors, and in the case of hospitals that have male staff, she cannot be treated because of the traditions and religious thought in society. In some cases, even if there are female doctors in the hospital, her family prevents her from receiving treatment in that hospital and allows her to be treated only with a local treatment, and certainly that local treatment is of a low scientific level.

This shows that this phenomenon is due to underdevelopment, lack of health awareness and the low level of knowledge among individuals.

3.2.10 Underage/early marriage

Early marriage is a phenomenon across all of Iraq, and the Shabak community are not exempt. The Nineveh province has the second highest rate of early marriages in the country, according to the Iraqi Planning Ministry, who cite that three out of ten of the marriage documents the country's courts are sent to process are from girls under the age of 18 (Sattar 2021). One of the young women explained that:

The Iraqi law encourages the marriage of minors, and the contract is made for a girl aged 14, as soon as a statement of susceptibility to marriage is brought from the hospitals. This is where the girl's body is examined for the purpose of demonstrating the health and ability of her body to marry. As for girls who are 12 or 13 years old, their marriage is done by religious men, and after reaching the age that the law allows them to marry, the court's marriage is held.

Another of the young women explained how:

There is a wrong understanding of religious teachings on the pretext that the Islamic religion encourages early marriage and that the Prophet married a nine year old girl, and this is wrong information.

In addition to a particular interpretation of marriage within Islam, the participants identified the custom of viewing girls of a certain age as women who have exceeded marriageable age. They cited this as one of the main reasons for early marriage within the Shabak community. A 15-year-old girl is seen to be beyond marriageable age, which results in Shabak society forcing the girl to marry early. An example was given by a 43-year-old woman:

In the event that the girl reaches the age of 15 and above, if she does not marry, society looks at her as a spinster, so parents are often forced to marry off their daughters at an early age. One of my relatives is currently 13 years old and has four children, and this is because she got married at an early age.

Another of the women, a 54-year-old, confirmed this, by stating how:

In the past, before the girl reached the age of 15 years, the parents married the girl in the belief that the girl's place was with the husband.

However, another of the participants, a young woman, shared another reason for early marriage that differed from the rest.

Frankly, the marriage of minors sometimes is for reasons other than the ones I mentioned, for example, the poor living situation or wars and immigration.

There is also the legal perspective of early marriage to consider. From a legal point of view, the amended Law on Personal Affairs No. 188/1959 puts the age of marriage at 18, however there is a clause that allows for 'urgent' marriages with parental permission that can happen from age 15 (Girls Not Brides 2017). The Iraqi legislator in the Personal Status Law in Article Ten, Paragraph Five, set and impose a fine or imprisonment penalty on every marriage that takes place outside the court.² While the Iraqi legislator is obliged to impose a penalty on the marriage of a minor outside the court, or tighten the penalty for marriage outside the court if one of the spouses is a minor as a means to eliminate early marriage, in reality, this isn't implemented effectively.

Participants also discussed the consequences of early marriage. The same young woman identified the following as consequences of early marriage:

Divorce, raising children in a bad way and the family is fragile.

The participants, particularly the young women, also mentioned the mother's health being threatened and the mother losing her right to childhood.

3.2.11 Traditions

As is already clear throughout this report, customs and traditions are among the main challenges facing Shabak women, as they prevent them from obtaining many of their rights, as well as being the main cause of other challenges mentioned. Customs and traditions affect women in all aspects, such as education, health, receiving treatment, early marriage, work, inheritance, domestic violence, discrimination, and many of the problems that women face daily. For example, customs and traditions prevent Shabak women from driving a car, as explained by one of the women, a 43-year-old housewife from the Bartella village of Al-Muwfaqiya. Many believe that these customs and traditions are difficult to change because they have become accustomed to them. This was the opinion of one of the men, a 31-year-old teacher from Bartella village of Bashpenta, who believes the solution to be in educating the community.

² The text for this is as follows: he shall be punished with imprisonment for a period of not less than six months and not exceeding a year or a fine of not less than three hundred dinars and not more than One thousand dinars for every man to contract a marriage outside the court, and the penalty is imprisonment for a period of no less than three years and not more than five years if he concludes another marriage outside the court with the establishment of the marriage.

There are some families, by virtue of customs and traditions, who grieve when they have a baby girl. There is also another negative custom that prevails in the Shabak society, which is forcing the girl to marry her cousin, even if there is a difference between them in the level of education and age. This was confirmed by a 30-year-old man, an employee from Bashiqa.

A girl must marry her cousin, whether she accepts it or not, and this is the opinion of the Shabak society.

However, one of the men, a 37-year-old employee from Tel Kaif district, had a different opinion and called for the preservation of customs and traditions. He stated:

When we talk about customs and traditions, we must not speak in an offensive manner and always in the form of criticism and in the form of a correct attack. We want to change the current rotten and backward reality, but at the same time, let us look at the bright side of customs and traditions. We, as a people, as a nation, and are proud of our customs and traditions. We are a peaceful society. We have customs and traditions that forbid aggression against others, as well as protecting the intruder...The neighbourhood may also be respected, as they are a peaceful and educated people despite war and persecution. I mean, in 2021, we suffer from a lack of water. We do not have roads and schools, and we are the most oppressed nation in Iraq. When we talk about backward customs and traditions, we have this as a result of persecution and this is from successive governments. A backward society will be born, and this will be reflected on women, even as the form of women in society is distorted, as they have no right to be political or to speak.

This view demonstrates how the rights of women and the desire for the preservation of customs and traditions can sometimes stand in contrast to each other, leading to women's rights being undermined so as not to lose group identity. This can especially be the case when that identity is marginalised by wider society, as it is with the Shabak. However, the views of this 37-year-old were not shared by all the men. Another man, who was 34 years old and a student from Bashiqa sub-district, Bazwaya village, stated that he disagreed with the above:

Because there are no positive customs and traditions against women because all of them are negative, and therefore it is necessary to rely on civil laws more from customs and traditions, because we are in 2021, customs and traditions must end once and for all.

In general, all of the women and men in the FGDs wanted both an end to negative customs and traditions and a resurrection of positive customs and traditions that had been lost after the ISIS invasion. This conversation demonstrates the difficulty facing the Shabak people when it comes to balancing the preservation of customs and traditions that many feel are essential to the Shabak identity with the acknowledgement that these customs and traditions are often negative to women.

3.2.12 Inheritance

Inheritance is a basic right for women. Sharia law gives this to women and therefore, rights are secured for both boys and girls. However, Shabak society in general forbids women from inheriting and this is passed on through the generations. If women demand their right to inheritance, they can be seen as rebelling against their family, perhaps leading to lifelong estrangements. Faced with such harsh consequences they can disavow their inheritance entitlements. For example, one of the young women, a 25-year-old university student from the village of Ali Rash in the district of Bartella, explained how:

They [the family] see this money for the family and the daughter's husband is a stranger.

Therefore, on behalf of the family, women are not entitled to inherit as her husband would benefit also.

A 25-year-old student and activist from Bartella sub-district linked this back to the belief that women should have no responsibility for finances within the family.

Sometimes the Shabak woman is deprived of the inheritance on the pretext that she is not responsible for the expenses in the family, and the husband is responsible for all of this.

This is another area where customs and traditions hold influence, alongside the tradition of leaving the inheritance to the brother, as outlined by a 36-year-old female teacher from Al-Hamdaniya.

Part of the customs and traditions in which the girl grows up is to leave the inheritance to the brother.

Another woman, a 35-year-old housewife from Bartella sub-district, expanded on this from a woman's perspective.

Some women do not take the inheritance from her family on the pretext that if she encounters problems with her husband, she can return to the family, or in case her husband dies.

This was supported by a 26-year-old female Masters student from Bartella sub-district.

Sometimes the reason is from the woman herself, so we notice that the mother raises the girl and advises her that she does not take her inheritance from her brothers.

This is an example of the role Shabak women themselves play in upholding customs and traditions. This Masters student went on to say that Shabak women:

Need some women who demand their rights so that other women can learn and take an action.

Nevertheless, some women do try to circumvent these traditions. Another of the young women, a 25-year-old university student from Bartella, Ali Rash village, stated that:

The mother leaves her jewellery to her daughters after she dies, and sometimes the daughter is deprived of that.

An example of a Shabak women being denied inheritance was shared by one of the women, a 35-year-old housewife from Bartella sub-district, Ali Rash village. She shared that:

Not long ago I asked my older brother for my share of my father's inheritance. My brother got angry and refused at first, but I pressured him because my financial situation was critical, so they gave me a little per cent that does not fit with my real share of the inheritance, yet they did not talk to me.

This demonstrates how a Shabak woman asking for her inheritance can cause family rifts, despite it being her right, and this was not something the Shabak women wanted to be seen as responsible for.

Traditions and customs in Shabak society play a major role in depriving women of inheritance and this is the result of backwardness, but often a husband may ask his wife to ask her brothers for her right to inherit, though the husband himself would not accept giving his sister her share of the inheritance. This was shared by one of the women, a 42-year-old housewife from the village of Manara Shabak in the district of Bartella. She explained that:

This thing is generally found in the Shabak community, except for a few Shabak who distribute the inheritance fairly and according to Islamic law.

This was also discussed by one of the men, a 24-year-old civil society activist from Omar Qabji village in Bashiqa sub-district.

This happened between us in the village, relatives of the uncle and the father died and they have heirs, daughters and sons. The girls are married and they are promised children and their financial condition is weak. They asked for the inheritance from the brothers, but those who asked for the inheritance were beaten. There was violence and even the mother was going to get a divorce because her family insisted that they give the inheritance to their sister. They reached the stage of divorce and assault.

Ultimately, one of the men, a 38-year-old graduate from Manaret Shabak village, Bartella sub-district, thanked the organisations who hold awareness sessions on women's rights as they've helped him, and other men, to see how they weren't applying the word of God the way they thought they were when it came to inheritance.

We have in Islam the full rights of women and in the Sharia as well. However, [we realised] we do not give women rights in terms of inheritance because customs, traditions and the weakness of a person's religious comprehension [misinterpreting what Islam says about women's right to inheritance]. We thank the organisations that hold awareness sessions for the Shabak community. We men and women need these courses to benefit more.

3.2.13 Discrimination

Discrimination is another dilemma that the Shabak woman faces in her daily life which prevents her from obtaining her legitimate rights. Discrimination has many faces, as demonstrated by the range of examples given by the participants in the FGDs. In general, Shabak women are always at a disadvantage because, as outlined by one of the men, a 31-year-old activist from Qara Shore village, Hamdaniya:

Always the Shabak family gives more importance to the male than the female. Their focus on the male to the detriment of the female will cause the factors of oppression outside the home, and encourage the factors of discrimination within the family.

Another of the men, a 37-year-old employee from Tel Kaif District, believes that discrimination has many aspects.

Discrimination is a big and broad topic because discrimination has many aspects in the field of work, rights, inheritance and political positions, but we must talk about this issue briefly, and we, as Shabak in the Nineveh Plain, do not have any political position or Governmental positions for Shabak women in the state. Also, on the issue of inheritance, we see that the woman is deprived of the inheritance. This discrimination is not considered religious discrimination because originally Islamic law gave women the right to inherit.

This is a helpful reminder of the fact that while the Shabak community in general faces much discrimination, Shabak women face an additional layer of gendered discrimination.

Participants discussed how discrimination is present in all workplaces and public services. One of the men, a 36-year-old teacher from Bartella sub-district, Al-Naseem neighbourhood, highlighted how:

Even in the field of jobs and job opportunities, there is discrimination between men and women in the Shabak society. The priority for jobs is for men, as the majority of jobs are given to men.

Another of the men, a 54-year-old employee from Hamdaniya, agreed with him.

It is family discrimination and also [Shabak] societal discrimination. We see that there is no Shabak female staff in many hospitals and departments, and this is due to the influence of society, customs, traditions and discrimination inside families that the male is allowed to complete the study, or the woman is not allowed to do so. So that she gets married at the age of (13, 14 and 15), so we do not see a Shabak woman employed at the age of (30, 40 and 50). But now the situation is better, as we see a lot of demand for study and employment by Shabak women, and the future will be better, Insha-Allah.

3.2.14 Freedom (travelling, choosing a spouse)

The deprivation of freedom is one of the biggest challenges facing Shabak women, restricting the freedom to travel, the freedom to choose a husband, the freedom to express opinions, the freedom to dress, and the freedom to drive a car. Participants in the FGDs identified many freedoms that Shabak women have been robbed of. For example, one of the men, a 34-year-old university student from Bashiqa, Bazwaya village, explained that:

In our society there is no freedom for a Shabak woman at all, especially the freedom to choose a husband, as she is forced into marriage, and also in most of the times the Shabak woman wants to complete her studies and is not allowed.

One of the women, a 34-year-old, echoed this by stating that:

Women do not have the freedom to draw her future plans, as the parents are the ones who draw her future according to their mood.

Another of the men, a 37-year-old employee from Tel Kaif District, reflected on when the issue of women's freedom had started.

Since the fall of the regime until now, we have been suffering from the problem of women's freedom, and the current government does not care about the problem of women's freedom, and its solutions are weak. Now it is better, and this is due to the cultural and liberation movements in Iraq, but we have to explain freedom in the positive sense of freedom and not the distorted meaning that some are trying to apply to our society. There is a bright side and a development in the field of freedom and the spread of a positive liberating thought, thanks to some humanitarian personalities and some organisations such as the Shabak Women Association, who have a very big role in conveying the beautiful image of the Shabak woman and the transfer of her suffering. But we must not forget that we are in Nineveh and Nineveh governorates have strict, conservative and strict, religious and tribal traditions.

Another of the men, a 54-year-old employee from Hamdaniya, also felt that the freedom Shabak women now have:

is much better than it was in the past, so that we see today many Shabak women in important positions in many departments and in good numbers in many departments.

He felt that since the fall of the regime, Shabak women's role has increased in parliament and political life, however he acknowledged that in elections:

She has no role because her husband pressures her to choose the candidate and she implements what her husband says and chooses the candidate he wants.

This point was supported by another man, a 46-year-old graduate from Bazwaya village, Bashiqa district.

In the elections they do not have freedom, but in choosing a profession there is some freedom.

The women in the FGDs didn't necessarily agree that the situation was better in terms of their freedom. For example, there are still some employment fields where you would not find Shabak women. One of the young women, a 21-year-old university student from Bartella, shared her friend's situation.

I have a friend, a talented actress who does not practice her talent because of the lack of parental support.

From this it becomes clear that depriving Shabak women of their freedom reaches the suppresses talents and skills. Likewise, another of the women, a 24-year-old activist and graduate from the district of Bartella, shared how she:

Had the desire to study engineering, but my family refused that because of customs and traditions, under the pretext that I am a girl and I cannot work in the streets, bridges and buildings.

The Shabak woman is restricted even in choosing the academic major she desires, and is not given the freedom to choose for herself. One of the women, a 25-year-old activist from the village of Manara Shabak, Bartella, revealed the extent of the problem.

Shabak society does not give the Shabak woman the freedom to move, and the parents refuse to allow her to work outside the governorate or the country in which they live.

3.2.15 Domestic violence

One of the problems that Iraqi society suffers from, including Shabak society, in varying degrees, is violence against women. It is rooted within the building of society and its cultural, social and legislative concepts that uphold stereotypes of men and women, including the idea that men are, and should be, dominant. This makes men degrade women, and women forfeit their rights, believing that this is acceptable. These beliefs encourage women to accept the many manifestations of violence practiced against them.

The customs and traditions, particularly social upbringing, in Shabak society still obscures domestic violence, which is considered to be a secret of the home. This problem was exacerbated by the economic and political conditions Iraqi society went through after 2003. The men in the Shabak society see that domestic violence is one of the challenges and problems that Shabak women face, even if this violence is practiced by them. Yet

there is a sub-section of men who see that the practice of violence is a characteristic of their masculinity. The women in the FGDs had a great deal to share about domestic violence, however, much of what they shared are personal stories that would make them identifiable, so it was decided to not share them in this paper to protect participants' anonymity.

One of the men, a 21-year-old student from Hay al-Salam. Bartella, shared an example of domestic violence within the Shabak community, highlighting how Shabak women are failed by state institutions, leaving them with no choice but to stay with their abusive husbands.

A time ago, there was a session with the Justice president of the Hamdaniya Court. He mentioned an example of a broken (violated) woman came to him. She jumped off the roof and tried to commit suicide because the man came home tired and asked for the TV remote control, and she did not respond to her husband and ignored him. The incident led to the separation between them, after that, the woman gave up her rights and all this violence was for nothing in light of the fact that she preserves her husband and her children, and this is the that women should have more protection in state institutions, especially in the courts. In general, women say that even if they file a complaint against him, the matter will reach divorce, and it may lead to murder and bloodshed, but in the end we always notice that it is the woman who tries to make the family cohesive in order that it keep her children.

However, another of the men, a 31-year-old teacher and activist from Bartella sub-district, Bashpita village, stated a different opinion.

What happened in our society, we were suffering from pressure and suddenly we had an openness to the world? We should not directly apply the law of another country to our country, it is difficult for Iraqi society, a tribal customary society. As for us, our Shabak society, we are a very cohesive society. I will give you an evidence, we have a Shabak man who marries only one woman and does not marry two. And domestic violence is low and in small percentage. We do not have one, for example, who is immoral and does not return home and is a drug user, so our society is a cohesive and clean society. What we need is a few updates and this role comes to women, but we don't want to lose hope that our society is hopeless.

Unfortunately, this opinion reveals an ignorance from some Shabak men about the reality Shabak women face when it comes to violence. For example, Shabak women face a severe violence called 'Al-Fassliya', which is the most horrific way the Shabak girl is violently abused. She is used as a *Fassliya* to resolve a conflict between two clans and becomes a victim of blood marriage. This involves providing one of the daughters of the aggressor clan to the victim or one of his relatives for marriage, under the title of "revenge", and this woman lives during this marriage mostly under psychological pressure and shunned by her husband and the husband's family.

The following account was told by one of the women in the FGDs in private. It took place in one of the villages belonging to the Bashiqa sub-district. The fact that it was shared in private is testament to its horrific nature, however it also shows how domestic violence within the Shabak community is surrounded by shame and secrecy, pushing women, especially victims, into an even more vulnerable situation.

*There was a young man who had an affair with a married woman and he met her secretly. As the days passed, her relationship with him was exposed by her brothers. The young man was severely beaten and he managed to escape from them. In order to resolve the conflict between the two families, the young man's sister was married off to one of the brothers of the married woman as a *Fassliya*, and a large sum of money was taken from them, as well as a modern car estimated at many millions. The virgin girl's early marriage took place, on the wedding night her husband had a sexual relations with her first, then his older brother and the other brother after them, and their sister's husband (the mistress) was the last one, meaning the girl was raped by four men on the same night and the next morning the girl was thrown in front of her father's house. The young man (the lover) was smuggled out of the city for fear of being killed, and his family left their home and work and moved to a faraway place. Despite all this, the rape of the girl did not receive support and justice from the government, but rather they cancelled all procedures without holding the rapists accountable. The girl's life was destroyed, and on the other hand, the mistress lived a decent life under the shadow of her rapist husband and brothers. The violence that the Shabak woman is exposed to if it is from the husband, father, brother or mother (beating, insulting) in addition to murder. If the abused woman, for example, has an affair or a love affair with a young man, and her case is revealed, where she is killed, and in the simplest way, to keep the shame away from the family, is by*

burning. Where the police station and the hospital are informed that she committed suicide by exploding a gas bottle or an oil heater.

3.2.16 Harassment

Harassment is considered one of the challenges faced by women in general, as well as Shabak women. Sexual harassment is any unwelcome sexual act by the other party, whether verbal or physical. Harassment also takes place via phone messages or social media. Sexual harassment can also escalate to blackmail, threats, and even rape.

It is worth noting that while harassment exists in all societies, this topic was only raised and discussed by the women in the 18-35 age category. The men did not discuss harassment at all. As with domestic violence, this indicates that there is a gap in Shabak men's knowledge of what Shabak women experience. It could also suggest that Shabak men view this harassment as an acceptable and unquestioned social norm, not realising the role they play in upholding this form of discrimination.

One of the women, a 26-year-old, argued that the reason for harassment is the lack of communication between men and women:

The reason for harassment is the isolation of men and women from each other within the Shabak community and the lack of knowledge of how to deal with each other, and this causes harassment.

Another participant, a young woman, had a slightly different view, claiming that the reason:

is the weak personality [shyness, meekness] of the Shabak woman. The harasser is sure of the weak personality of the woman, so he continues to harass.

The shyness and meekness that this participant refers to is often a result of the community telling Shabak women and girls that they should be timid, docile and submissive.

Participants also discussed the way that Shabak women and girls who are harassed are viewed by Shabak society. For example, another of the young women mentioned how:

The society's view for the harassed girl is worse than the harasser himself. In addition to this, there is electronic extortion that Shabak women are subjected to because of the lack of knowledge of how to protect themselves digitally and lack of knowledge of ways to file complaints. Honestly, the Shabak woman is ignorant

of teaching her daughter how to protect herself when she is subjected to harassment.

Another participant, also a young woman, agreed.

Sometimes the victim is afraid of informing the parents of the harassment because of the penalties that she may face from the parents, as if she is the reason.

Additionally, sometimes women subjected to harassment leave employment as a result.

Through the discussion, we found that Shabak women were unable to submit complaints to the courts in cases of harassment. For example, one of the women, a 26-year-old Masters student from Bartella sub-district, explained how:

Sometimes the victim is threatened in order to protect the harasser himself from complaints.

A solution to this challenge was suggested by one of the participants:

We need awareness from the community police so that girls know the necessary steps to protect themselves.

Another of the women, a 25-year-old teacher from Bartella sub-district, also felt that:

It is very necessary for girls to feel safe from the side of their parents so that they can refer to them in cases of harassment.

3.2.17 Claiming rights through the legal system

Shabak society sees women who file complaints as shameful and prevents them from doing so. In fact, they may disavow women for doing so, as one of the women, a 37-year-old, explained.

Societal customs and traditions do not allow me to file a complaint, and my husband does not accept divorce, does not return to me, nor justify between me and his second wife. Customs and traditions do not allow a divorced woman to live alone with her children, and my husband does not provide me with the expenses for my needs.

She also highlighted how:

Our clans do not allow us to file a complaint against the husband, and we do not have the right to do so because he is my cousin and this is the biggest problem that prevents me from filing a complaint.

3.2.18 Divorce

Shabak society views divorced women as easy prey or as having a bad reputation. This view is not directed at divorced men, but rather society blames women, even if the cause of the divorce is the man. Even the treatment of divorced women by their family is negative. They are often forbidden to leave the house, and if they go out it must be with one of their family members. If women have children, the law allows them custody, but if their family refuses to receive the children women must waive custody to their ex-husbands. Women are then married off to anyone who asks for them and given no choice in this regard. As a result of these norms the topic of divorce was uncomfortable for many of the women in the research project and they did not feel comfortable talking about it, even in a women-only discussion space. As a result, many of the views explored in this section are from men.

Before 2003, men in the Shabak community did not divorce their wives, and they remained in their family's home. One of the women, a 54-year-old, confirmed this:

I was abandoned by my husband five years ago and this problem affected my life because I am married and I do not have the right to receive social care. I asked to be divorced but I need a lawyer, and the lawyer asks for an amount of money that I don't have. I'm an orphan, no father and mother, and I currently live with my nephew. It does not work to solve the problem in a tribal way because my husband is not afraid. I filed a complaint and he needs to be notified, and since he lives in Baghdad and I am in Mosul and the notification must be delivered manually and I cannot go Baghdad to deliver the complaint.

Conversely, one of the men, a 37-year-old, had a different view, believing men to be in a worse position when it comes to divorce.

Currently, all rights belong to the woman. My brother divorced his wife and pays 100,000 alimonies and has one daughter. Of course, since he has a salary and according to the percentage of the husband's salary, they deduct alimony, whether it is her alimony or child support, but the application of the law depends on judges and lawyers. Every woman can take her rights, but she must know how to take them, but if the woman is ignorant of the law and does not know how to take her right, then this is the suffering.

Another of the men, a 31-year-old activist from Qara Shore village, Hamdaniya, disagreed that women can claim their rights if they want to divorce their husband. He explained how:

If the woman does [file for divorce], all her rights will fall. If the law gives full rights to women, such as European countries and now the Kurdistan region, even if the woman files a divorce case, the man must give her all her rights and this is a positive thing, but according to Iraqi law, the women, and all women in Iraq in general, should give up her rights in the event that she asks for separation, she only has the right to the dowry allocated to her. As the Shabak society uses traditional methods, i.e., clans, to solve problems between men and women before divorce proceedings bargaining takes place here, and in most cases, women are the weakest link. If a solution is not reached, the courts are resorted to and national laws are adhered to, which is the Personal Status Law.

It was generally agreed that women within Shabak society are treated negatively when it comes to divorce. For example, one of the men, a 24-year-old civil society activist from the Bashiqa district of the village of Omar Qabji, affirmed that:

Women in the Shabak society are somewhat ostracised and have a bad reputation because of divorce. And if she is always wronged, she is the weak party in the matter and the losing party, and she is broken-hearted and it [has an] impact on her psychological state.

Various reasons for divorce within Shabak society were discussed by the groups, with some men seeing Shabak women's behaviour as a contributing factor and others recognising that a marriage is less likely to last if women are not listened to when entering the marriage. For example, the 31-year-old activist recognised early and forced marriage as a problem, but also lack of economic freedom.

The reason for divorce is the marriage of cousins, forced marriage, early marriage, and also the economic situation that may affect the decisions of Shabak women, and also the misuse of social media.

In contrast, the 30-year-old photographer from Bartella, Taiba Complex, shared his view that:

The reason for the divorce is not taking the girl's opinion in a correct way, and if they ask her, they will ask her in the form of threat and compulsion to consent to

marriage and this leads to disagreement and lack of acceptance and thus leads to divorce and incorrect choices.

Nevertheless, customs and traditions were viewed by some as a positive preventer of divorce within the Shabak community. For example, one of the men, a 28-year-old earner from Bartella sub-district, Ansar Complex explained how he believed that:

The divorce rate is very low in Shabak society because of customs and traditions. It is a good thing. The society is built on customs and traditions, but our customs and traditions must develop more and more with the passage of time.

3.2.19 Community environment

Migration and mixing with other nationalities has an impact on the openness of Shabak society, which was previously closed. This forced mixing was a result of the control of ISIS terrorists on the Nineveh Plain and the forced displacement of many Shabak people to the northern governorates (Kurdistan region), the southern governorates and the capital Baghdad. Living alongside other communities has influenced Shabak society and shed light on how restrictive the Shabak community can be towards women and girls.

For example, one of the women, a 24-year-old activist from Bartella district, mentioned that:

From my point of view, society is the one that restricts the Shabak girl to her behaviour or the field of her studies, with evidence that the period of migration to the northern and southern governorates when ISIS was occupying Nineveh Governorate, the mixing of the Shabak society with the rest of society helped to raise awareness of them and made the girl act more freely, and this is evidence that the obstacle is the Shabak society not the family.

3.2.20 Political participation

Political participation was discussed in the FGD with the 18-35 age group. One of the women, a 31-year-old activist from Bartella, Ansar Complex, suggested customs and traditions prevented Shabak women from participating in political life, whether that be organising into parties or establishing women's organisations. They do not greatly participate in the electoral process in comparison with men or assume positions in state institutions.

3.2.21 Marriage in exchange for leaving work

Women aged 18-35 years suggested that men in the community tell employed women that if they want to get married they must leave work. For example, one of the women, a 53-year-old civil society activist from Bartella sub-district, Bashpita village, explained the challenge in the following way:

Most of what happens in marriage is that those who ask for marriage they want a graduate and an employee, and when they get married, they prevent her from working. Even if she is a student, she must leave her studies. [This happens because] some men do not accept that a woman has a better position in society than them, in addition to the harsh society's view of some jobs.

Another of the women, a 27-year-old activist from Bartella district, Taiba complex, articulated the problem as:

A Shabak man prefers an educated but not employed woman.

Although this has traditionally been the way in rural communities, in city centres the opposite phenomenon is being seen. Men are looking for employed women to help them because the cost of living in the city is higher, as people need to rent rather than living with family or building a house.

4 Priority needs for the community

Once the challenges and threats had been identified, participants in the FGDs shared and discussed ways to overcome them. Unfortunately, as outlined in the methodology section, women's voices were not as strong in the suggested solutions element of the work as the FGDs ran out of time. This is unsurprising given how many issues and challenges they identified and wished to discuss in detail. Therefore, there is space for future research that empowers Shabak women to generate solutions to the issues they face.

The provision of education: The lack of schools, especially schools for the advanced stages of education, is a major obstacle to Shabak women's realisation of their rights. This is the responsibility of government. Schools must be provided in villages near to communities because Shabak women are prevented from travelling to remote places. They should also hire professional female staff from the Shabak minority to make the environment more welcoming and culturally appropriate. For this to occur other

communities need to accept the Shabak and they must welcome them into their places of education. Shabak parents and families must also support their girls to finish their studies.

Job opportunities: The government is responsible for providing job opportunities for women, encouraging women to work in the private sector, and raising women's awareness of their legal rights in the Iraqi Labor Law No. 37/2015. The Shabak community should support women so that they can work and use their businesses. Seminars should be held for husbands and fathers so that they are educated on women's rights and employment. This kind of awareness raising can also be conducted on Al-Shabak Radio. Harassment at work must be tackled by the criminal justice system as should discrimination on the grounds of gender or membership of the Shabak community.

Health: Health centres and hospitals must be established in the villages of the Nineveh Plain, complete with all necessary equipment. Travelling to seek care is too expensive for some and can come with risks so this needs to be local. Female staff must be provided in hospitals within Shabak villages and they should practice non-discrimination.

Early marriage: The responsibility for ending early marriage falls first on the shoulders of the Iraqi legislator, as he has to legislate a legal article within the Iraqi Penal Code criminalising early marriage, or at least tighten the penalty for marriage outside the court if one of the spouses is a minor. Awareness needs to be raised among communities and families of the negative impacts of early marriage on women and on society. The clergy and mullahs also need to be educated not to sign the marriage contract to young girls and they should be punished if they do.

Harassment: Educational centres, courses and cultural seminars for men should be established to educate them about the danger of the phenomenon of harassment to society and the need to eliminate it.

Customs and traditions: Education is key to countering harmful culture and traditions and should be provided through governmental and non-governmental organisations.

Inheritance: The Shabak community needs to raise awareness, educate and eliminate negative ideas about inheritance that are contrary to Sharia and the law, and this task falls on the shoulders of religious leaders, as well as civil society organisations, through workshops and awareness seminars.

Discrimination: Discrimination is strongly linked to negative customs and traditions. Culture should be adapted to be more inclusive of the needs of women.

Freedom: Girls and women should be allowed to make choices over their education and employment. Non-governmental organisations can play a role in education.

Domestic violence: The law must protect women from violence and provide them with job opportunities, empowering them economically. The community must be educated about the negative impacts of violence.

Access to the legal system: The community must educate women on their rights under the law and support them in filing lawsuits.

Divorce: Shabak society needs to be educated about changing their negative view of divorced women and giving them their rights.

Community environment: Shabak society needs to direct the media to spread a culture of respect for women and recognition of their rights mentioned in the Holy Qur'an and guaranteed by the Iraqi constitution.

Political participation: The community must raise awareness of the important role women play in politics and they should be employed and present in decision-making roles.

Marriage in exchange for leaving work: Awareness must be raised in villages about the importance of women's work.

Addressing these challenges is in the hands of men and women, but since Iraq is an authoritarian, patriarchal society governed by outdated customs and traditions, men's understanding of these challenges will greatly contribute towards meeting the largest possible number of women's needs, which women consider their human and legal rights.

5 Conclusion

This research outlines realistic and easy-to-apply solutions because they do not conflict with the principles of the Shabak society and are in line with the current cultural development. They must, however, be supported by the concerned authorities and by human rights and humanitarian agencies.

This research conveys the voice of Shabak women, who have been robbed of their most basic rights and freedom throughout their history. We hope it will be a step towards providing hope and freedom. Women are considered half of society, and they are the

ones who give birth and raise the other half. They are the mothers who have a position and respected role in society. They give birth to leaders, heroes and righteous people. They are themselves literary, political and academic personalities in Iraq who have made important and great achievements for the country and have made their mark in history. Their importance cannot be erased.

6 Recommendations

1. Enhance and strengthen the Shabak woman's role in society through community awareness campaigns and seminars held on this topic.
2. The government and the legislative authority must legislate to combat violence against women, especially early marriage, and protect their right to work, study, and engage in civil and political activity. The government must also eliminate extremist discourses that persecute women and punish them legally and judicially.
3. Build schools for girls for all levels in the villages of the Nineveh Plain. This is because many families refuse to send their daughters to remote places or to the city due to tribal customs, and this is an obstacle for women to complete her study and education.
4. Raise awareness in Shabak society on women and girls' rights in order to eliminate many of the negative phenomena, customs and traditions that marginalise women, such as forcing them to give up their right to their inheritance, as well as preventing them from choosing professions and academic specialisations, destroying their desire and scientific ambition.
5. Iraqi law sets a minimum age for marriage at 18 years, and in the case of marital necessity, 15 years. This has difficult and exceptional conditions and the Iraqi legislator in the Personal Status Law in Article Ten, Paragraph Five, sets and imposes a fine or imprisonment penalty on every marriage that takes place outside the court.³ Shabaki society must follow this law to eliminate early marriage.

³ Exact text as follows: he shall be punished with imprisonment for a period of not less than six months and not exceeding a year or a fine of not less than three hundred dinars and not more than One thousand dinars for every man to contract a marriage outside the court, and the penalty is imprisonment for a period of no less than three years and not more than five years if he concludes another marriage outside the court with the establishment of the marriage.

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⁴ Publisher details not provided by author.

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Annexe 1: The names of the Shabak villages

No	The name of the district / sub-district	Name of the village/complex
1	Hamdaniya District	Keberly
2	Hamdaniya District	Badnah Al-kabira
3	Hamdaniya District	Badnah AL-saghira
4	Hamdaniya District	Towanja
5	Hamdaniya District	Qera Tiba Arab
6	Hamdaniya District	Zahra Khatun
7	Hamdaniya District	Muftiya
8	Hamdaniya District	Shaqli
9	Hamdaniya District	Shekh Ameer
10	Hamdaniya District	Tarjila
11	Nimrud sub-district	Qarqasha
12	Nimrud sub-district	Blawat
13	Nimrud sub-district	Qarshor
14	Nimrud sub-district	Omar Kan
15	Nimrud sub-district	Bastile Kabir
16	Nimrud sub-district	Kharabat Sulatn

17	Bartella sub-district	Bazrkrtan
18	Bartella sub-district	Basakhra
19	Bartella sub-district	Khazna Tebah
20	Bartella sub-district	Al-muwafaqia
21	Bartella sub-district	Tahrawah
22	Bartella sub-district	Bashpita
23	Bartella sub-district	Manarat Shabak
24	Bartella sub-district	Ali Rash
25	Bartella sub-district	Tabraq Ziyara Al-slfy
26	Bartella sub-district	Tabraq Ziyara Al-'aly
27	Bartella sub-district	Al-lak
28	Bartella sub-district	Geliokhan
29	Bartella sub-district	Shahrazad
30	Bartella sub-district	Khwetla
31	Bartella sub-district	Al-ansar Complex
32	Bartella sub-district	Al-hayat Complex
33	Bartella sub-district	Al-noor Complex
34	Bartella sub-district	Al-zahraa Complex
35	Bartella sub-district	Al-ghadir Complex

36	Bartella sub-district	Al-tiba Complex
37	Bartella sub-district	Al abas Complex
38	Bartella sub-district	Al Hussein Complex
39	Bartella sub-district	Al-sader Complex
40	Bartella sub-district	Al-karara Complex
41	Bashiqa district	Koklgi
42	Bashiqa district	Bazwaya
43	Bashiqa district	Toberzawa
44	Bashiqa district	Tis kharab
45	Bashiqa district	Angega
46	Bashiqa district	Darawish
47	Bashiqa district	Abu garbua'a
48	Bashiqa district	Gore Hgariban
49	Bashiqa district	Qara tiba Shabak
50	Bashiqa district	Awrtā Kharab
51	Bashiqa district	Kani Kowan
52	Bashiqa district	Shekh Shili
53	Bashiqa district	Kani Nu
54	Bashiqa district	Khorsibad

55	Bashiqa district	Smaqia
56	Bashiqa district	Telyara
57	Bashiqa district	Oamar Qapchi
58	Bashiqa district	Fadhlia
59	Bashiqa district	Yarima
60	Bashiqa district	Nawran
61	Bashiqa district	Gengi
62	Bashiqa district	Direch
63	Bashiqa district	Tershik Complex
64	Bashiqa district	Roshbiyan Village
65	Bashiqa district	Al-shahid Hameed Complex
66	Bashiqa district	Al-noor complex
67	Tel Kaif District	Al-sadah
68	Tel Kaif District	Baa'weza
69	Tel Kaif District	Ala'basia
70	Tel Kaif District	Tawila

Source: Author's own.

Annexe 2: FGD questions

The following are the specific questions asked to the men and women within the focus group discussions:

1. From your point of view and being one of the Shabak minority, what is your suffering in education and what is its impact on you and the future of your children? And in general, what is the negative impact of lack of education on Shabak women?
2. When the child reaches the age of six years, he is automatically registered in school, but the question is, are there Shabak families who prevent or do not enrol girls in school?
3. How easy is it for girls in your community to complete their education?
4. What is the reason behind the girl forcibly leaving her education by her parents? In this case, the girl does not go to the market. Is the family educated or not (father and mother)?
5. How has education affected your life, the family, women, and consequently society?
6. Are girls' opportunities for education the same as boys?
7. From your point of view, what is the reason behind the fact that the current generation is graduating and not educated?
8. Is all this pressure on women due to the view, customs and traditions of society or the family itself?
9. Are there forms of discrimination that you feel the children of your religious group are subjected to? (Explain which discriminatory practices affect your daughters the most).
10. What is discrimination or what is the image of this distinction and how does it happen?
11. It is known that the schools in the district centre of Bartella and Qaraqosh are mixed components (Christians, Shabaks and Turkmen). Is there any discrimination between students?

12. How does health affect the Shabak woman, and do you notice, through your presence in the Nineveh Plain, in Mosul, or in Bashiqa, is there some kind of discrimination between the Shabak woman and the rest of women in dealing with health care in all aspects, which includes health?
13. Do people in your community enjoy free or affordable health care for their financial capabilities?
14. Is there a difference between the availability of appropriate health care in your community, and the health care available to other communities that do not have a high representation of religious minorities? If there is a difference, please explain, how is the situation different? Please give examples of this.
15. Is there a difference between the quality of health care available to members of religious minorities, and the quality of the same services provided to communities in which the majority follow the majority religion? If there is a difference, please explain, how is the situation different? Please give examples of this.
16. Do women belonging to your community have the same access to education, treatment and services as women belonging to the majority religion?
17. What are the negative cases that have been observed regarding the issue of discrimination and oppression of women in society?
18. The problem of discrimination and marginalisation of women Shabak, how is it practiced and what are its consequences and solutions?
19. What are the negative customs and traditions that affect the Shabak of women in general in the Nineveh Plain?
20. Is all this pressure on women due to the look, customs and traditions of society or the family itself?
21. What is the Shabak society's view of women who work outside the home? It is known that in the past, the Shabak woman worked inside the house only, and she had all the responsibilities of raising children, household matters, raising animals, and even construction, and the man worked outside the house..... Nowadays, has this situation changed?
22. How does the lack of job opportunities affect the lives of Shabak women?
23. Why does society take a bad view of organisations and prevent women from working in organisations, what is the reason for that?

24. If you had the opportunity to work outside the home, would you work? Do you work inside a mall or market, if the opportunity presents itself?
25. What are the restrictions imposed on the Shabak woman and the impact of those on her in daily life?
26. Why don't we find Shabak women working in all different fields such as acting, journalism and music?
27. As for Sharia and the law, it gave women the right!?! But what is the reason for depriving the Shabak of women of the inheritance, and when they demand it, they treat them harshly? Some husbands separated from each other because the wife was forced to take the inheritance.
28. What is the reason for the harassment of Shabak women? What is the effect of this on women's Shabak?
29. Is the harassment you are exposed to only by the Shabak community or by the rest of the majority and minority communities of other religions?
30. Can the Shabak woman submit complaints to the courts in cases of harassment?
31. Where is early marriage prevalent at the present time? Does it exist in the Shabak society?? And what is the reason?
32. What is the reason for early marriage of Shabak girls?
33. What can the marriage of minors lead to and what effect does it have on the Shabak woman and on society?
34. What is the cause of divorce and what effect does it have on the Shabak woman?
35. What if the Shabak woman is asking for a divorce and the man does not want a divorce? If we reverse the picture, the man wants divorce and the woman does not want divorce?
36. What is the effect of intolerance in religious discourse on women?
37. What do you think about confronting religious extremists with direct discourse, and confronting them in the media as well as culturally?



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