Personal Security Study Project

Jordanian Women Discussing their Self-Concept of Security: Realms of Experiences and Bridges of Words

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This report may not be cited since it is in the process of being published as a research paper. Rula Quawas, the lead researcher of this project in Jordan, would like to acknowledge the generosity of the individuals involved in donating their time, experience and insights for this report, and for their willingness to share their experiences.

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Executive Summary

Human security is a term that has been used by the UN in their 1994 Human Development Report. The 1994 Human Development Report had advocated greater emphasis on people’s security as opposed to territorial security in the formulation of the concept of human security, as well as a shift from the provision of security through armaments, to security through human development. Since state-centric conceptions of security ignore the experiences of women and promote significant inequality, this study comes to highlight the security of Jordanian women from a human/feminist-centric approach. Feminists are sensitive to security differences based not only on gender but also on race, sexual orientation, ethnicity and class. Factors affecting women's personal security are socio-cultural pressures as well as inadequate economic opportunities in addition to discriminatory laws and norms.

This study is a record of the testimonials of Jordanian women's experiences and views on their own understanding of personal security and on their personal conceptualizations of family, love, and communities. It reveals or makes visible the power of external and internal barriers to their deep sense of personal security and to social change. It has been shown throughout the structured interviews and focus groups that the women's self-concept of security is multi-layered and capable
of fluid and creative agency. In more ways than one, this self-concept of security embodies the women's values and belief systems which are home-grown and contingent upon the social and cultural contexts that determine and further their evolving sense of security, which is not only a state of their beingness (an evolving state of mind, heart and soul) but also a state of their becomingness (part and parcel of their constructed identity). Without self-love, a good quality education, and realizing their power and rising to their full potential, Jordanian women will never ever be able to actualize their personal security. Personal security is owning who you are as a full-fledged human being and creating a space for yourself where you can self-cultivate and reach a state of transcendence.

**Background Information:**

**Key Facts:**

**Country:** Jordan

**Founded:** May 25, 1946

**Population:** 9.81 million (2016)
GDP: $37.52 billion USD (2015)

Area: 34,495 sq miles (89,341 km²)

King: Abdullah II of Jordan

Map:
**Context:**

Jordan is a constitutional monarchy based on the Constitution promulgated on 8 January 1952. It is ruled by King Abdullah II. Though Jordan maintains some principles of a parliamentary regime, the Constitution gives the King a high degree of legislative and executive authority. Key powers and decision-making abilities are ultimately vested in the king. The Chamber of Deputies may approve, reject, or amend legislation proposed by the cabinet, but it cannot enact laws without the assent of the Royally appointed Senate. King Abdullah II is empowered to dismiss parliament as well as the prime minister and cabinet. The king can delay parliamentary elections for up to two years and may rule by royal decree during periods in which parliament is not in session. Civil society groups have complained about a lack of inclusion in policymaking, particularly in deliberations over the amendments to the Press and Publications Law.

Jordan is a middle-income country, but is one of the smallest and poorest economies in the Middle East, with 14 percent of Jordanians living below the poverty line. Jordan was ranked 113 out of 189 economies in the World Bank’s 2016 *Doing Business* report, which noted obstacles in obtaining credit, protecting minority investors, enforcing contracts, and resolving insolvency. Despite that, Jordan is notably one of the better-performing countries in the region in terms of meeting global goals set by the International Conference on Population and Development and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with regards to life expectancy (73.4 years old).

Adult literacy in Jordan is one of the highest in the MENA region at 92.2 percent; the illiteracy rate among girls is 10.8 and for boys, 3.7 percent. Access to basic services and enrollment in education is 91 percent for primary education, with 49 percent for girls and 51 percent for boys. In higher education, the overall percentage is 31 percent, with females constituting 51.9 percent and males 49.1 percent. The fertility rate in Jordan has also declined from 6.7 births per woman in 1980 to 2.8 in 2010.

Even though the Arab region was ranked by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) as the second-lowest region in the world on the previously used HDI Gender Empowerment Measure, Jordanian citizens enjoy freedom of domestic movement and international travel under the law, though there have been reports of refugees being denied travel. Under a 2013 law, women are no longer required to obtain their husbands’ permission when applying for a passport.

Women enjoy equal political rights but face legal discrimination in matters involving inheritance, divorce, and child custody, which fall under the jurisdiction of Sharia (Islamic law) courts. In the 2013 elections, women represented 13 percent of all candidates.

Labor rights organizations have raised concerns about poor working conditions, forced labor, and sexual abuse in Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZ), where mostly female and foreign factory workers process goods for export. Jordan is a destination and transit country for human trafficking for forced labor and, to a lesser extent, for prostitution.
Jordan has been very responsive to international human rights obligations. In 2006, the government published five international agreements on human rights in the official gazette:

1. International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
2. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
3. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
4. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
5. Convention on the Rights of the Child

Jordan faces daunting challenges due to the regional instability, high unemployment, a dependency on grants and remittances from Gulf economies and USAID as well as continued pressure on natural resources.

Jordan continues to grapple with the economic, social, and security implications of the ongoing Syrian conflict. Public services and the national budget are under acute strain. With the help of the international community, additional refugee camps were established in Jordan to ease conditions in Zaatari, one of the largest camps in the world.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that there were close to 700,000 registered refugees in the country, in addition to hundreds of thousands of unregistered persons of concern. National security concerns remained prevalent over time, and the government continued implementing stronger policies against terrorism. Some 2,000 Jordanians have left to fight with such groups, particularly DAESH, the Islamic State (IS) and Al-Nusra Front.

**Methodology:**

This national report is based on a combination of literature review and on interviews with seven women as well as running two focus groups. All subjects have been assured that their interview is both confidential and private and their names or identifying details will not be exposed. All the notes are saved in encrypted files to ensure the safety and confidentiality of all respondents.

The literature review includes a revision and analysis of existing literature at the national level as well as reports of international organizations.

**Interviews:**

Interviews were convened in my office in the English Department at the University of Jordan. I interviewed seven women who hail from different social and cultural contexts so that I could explore diversities in women's cultural and personal beliefs, their values, their ideals, and their experiences.
In total, 7 women were interviewed between 2015-2016. Interviewees work at various levels in their communities and as individuals in different organizations. The interviewees’ backgrounds include a wide selection of professions such as NGO activists and leaders, politicians, academics, students, and business people. The purpose of the interviews is to enable an analysis of individual reflections on their own understanding of personal security and to assess their understanding and experience of it. All the interviews are transcribed with the interviewees’ consent. Many of the interviewees are remarkable in that they have created a process of dialogue about women's personal security and the challenges women meet on a daily basis to fight off any breaches of their own sense of personal security.

What's more, two focus groups were conducted in Amman/Jordan. The first focus group was conducted with 6 domestically abused women. These women range in age from 20 till 35. The focus group was held at the Jordanian Women's Union. The purpose of this focus group was to understand the point of view of abused women in relation to their own personal security and the challenges and pitfalls facing them in their lives.

The second focus group was conducted with 13 Jordanian women who belong to both the upper middle class and the upper class. They are educated women who have received their education abroad. Some of them are homemakers and the others are professional women and entrepreneurs. This focus group aimed to provide insights into women’s perceptions of personal security and whether there are any particular needs of women that should be met.

While three questions were asked in a standardized manner (What's your understanding of personal security? When did you most experience a deep sense of personal security? and when did you experience a breach of your own personal security? ), the respondent’s reactions and experiences were respected in the sense that respondents could also expand their answers to include personal experiences and reflections. This allowed for a more in-depth exploration concerning the respondents' relations to the issues of interest. Generally, this approach appears to have been successful. Most of the respondents were interested and enjoyed talking about their personal experiences in relation to what they perceived to be of importance in relation to their own conception of personal security and any breaches they might have encountered in their lives.

**Women in Jordan: A Beautiful Mosaic:**
Security is a multi-faceted construct that has been interpreted and re-interpreted as well as negotiated and re-negotiated by UN Bodies, by institutions and NGOs, and by scholars and researchers since 1994. It is a human construct designed to nurture a good life free of turmoil, pain, lack and want and to protect humans from all kinds of violence and all types of abuse. This human construct is universal affecting all peoples and their well being, growth and development.

As a human construct, the concept of security endures many interpretations, but it does not endorse any of them since it depends on diverse contexts, on different cultural scripts that are
handed down to people inter/generationally, and on the inextricability of the private and the 
public spheres. Its all-encompassing spheres and its fluidy constitution evoke all strands of 
discourses, such as the political, the economic, the religious, and the human. These discourses 
should not be judged each on its own merit. They are entwined or inter-threaded, forming a 
textured fabric that shows cohesiveness rather than separateness.

At the very end of the twentieth century, security in its different garbs gained momentum all over 
the corners of the globe, North and South, East and West. Security is not confined to one country 
or to one people; it is not connected with a certain age or a certain race or a certain class. It 
includes all people and all nations. Who wouldn’t like to live in a place that is secure on all 
counts, politically, economically and personally? Who wouldn’t like to feel safe and secure 
within every available space? Who wouldn’t like to live a dignified life that is directed by 
choices, an agentic voice that shatters all oppressive mandates?

Owing to extremism and its multiple forms, to conflicts, and to devastating wars on the national 
and international fronts, human security has been addressed by many states, NGOs, institutions, 
families, individuals, and the like. We tell our children when they leave the house to be safe. We 
also tell women to be safe wherever they go for their security is breached in private as well as in 
public spaces.

After 9/11, we even nodded our heads to being screened at airports and to being bombarded by 
cameras where our actions will be recorded and taped. Our emails were monitored and our phone 
conversations were policed at times in the name of building up a security network. Everything 
was done to ensure our safety and our security, and a few people only complained. For our sake, 
security measures, which invaded our privacy at times, were upheld as necessary for the 
continuation of our human race.

Human security is a term that has been used by the UN in their 1994 Human Development 
Report. The 1994 Human Development Report had advocated greater emphasis on people’s 
security as opposed to territorial security in the formulation of the concept of human security, as 
well as a shift from the provision of security through armaments, to security through human 
development. The Human Development Report had identified seven dimensions required for 
human security: economic security; food security; environmental security; personal security; 
community security; and political security.

Clearly, human security is a gendered topic that is well recognized in the UN and in most states 
of the world. In the MENA Region, a region that is characterized by wars and conflicts, human 
security is prioritized and millions of dollars are spent on making sure that people are secure in 
all domains, especially in the political and the economic ones. It is prioritized because of the 
ever-persistent conflicts that rule over the Arab region, conflicts that affect the wide population, 
especially women who always end up paying a high price.

Most of the countries in the Middle East are in a state of flux and upheaval. As a result of wars 
and conflicts, for example, the Iraqi people have fled their country and are dispersed in the
diaspora. Many Iraqis live right now in Jordan as refugees looking for all kinds of security. Another pressing example is the Syrians, who have flooded the nooks and crannies of Jordan, many of whom live in refugee camps trying to seek a secure life for themselves and for their families. The Iraqis and the Syrians are displaced because of the different breeches of security in their nations which are in shambles at the moment.

It should be noted that most of the studies I have located harp on women’s human security which, according to the researchers, fully engages with and responds to their political and economic securities. Religion also plays a paramount role in the discussion of women’s human security. The premise of most studies is that all strands of securities should be fused together so that a healthy society can be built upon the foundations of equality, equity, and parity.

Ostensibly, the confinement of patriarchal Arab societies is foregrounded in many studies, and the need for the implementations of laws and rules state-wide is emphasized. Interestingly enough, a woman’s choice and her agency are highlighted as essential and necessary not only for her betterment but also for the betterment of her society.

In her essay “Human Security for Women,” Khadija Haq rightly states that “we can never talk meaningfully about human security without discussing gender equality first. For human security is not a concern with weapons. It is a concern about human dignity. In the last analysis, it is a concern for people and their welfare. And no society can ever prosper half-liberated and half-chained. Women’s security is a pre-condition for human security.”

Most of the studies state that when human security is mapped out, it should take into account the violations against women and their status in the societies they live in. Since most Arab constitutions acknowledge women’s rights, women should be privy to or aware of their rights and they should report any breach of their security to the authorities. For instance, women should be included in peace talks and negotiations; they should not be considered as victims only. They are part and parcel of the communities they live in and their securities should be ensured. Many international treaties have shown the close connection between women’s empowerment and human security.

Some studies have pinpointed five focal points which are closely connected with women’s human security:

1. Violence against women and the female child.
2. A woman’s lack of resources and her inability to control them
3. A woman’s absence from decision-making posts.
4. A woman’s lack of exercise over her political rights.
5. A woman’s human security entails her biological or physical protection against ill health, abuse, female genital mutilation, or sexual harassment.
Laws should be enacted so that women can be granted their full-fledged rights which they are entitled to by the law. A woman should feel comfortable going to the police station and reporting any case of abuse against her. Women officers should be hired to document the cases of abuse against women’s well being. The stultifying patriarchal system women live under should be dismantled, and women’s rights should be considered as human rights.

Women should have control over their bodies and the choices they make in connection with them, such as their desire to be pregnant and the number of children they would like to have. Also, male police officers and judges have to change their stance toward women’s issues and be objective when they handle any case of violence against women.

A woman should also be economically secure. She should have a well paid job that will secure her financially. If not, she should be provided with social security from the government. In order to have a good job, a woman’s right to education should be granted. All in all, a woman should be able to make any choices she wants and her rights should be protected and guaranteed by her nation.

In the study conducted by Fatima Masoud Humeidi, the researcher says that women decide to don the hijab because it gives them a sense of personal security. Even though the hijab, as some claim, is mandated by Islam, many women think of it as a source of security. The hijab is thus acquiring a new dimension which is linked with human security. 80.3 of university students at Kerman University in Iran have spoken of their hijab not only as a means to get closer to Allah but also as a source of human security. For Muslim women, the hijab is not only their portable home, as indicated by Lila Abu Lughod, but it is the essence of their human security.

Saad al-Obaidi, in his “The Reality of Women’s Social and Psychological Security in Iraq,” mentions the interlocking factors of the political, economic, and human securities. For him, these are interdependent in the sense that one affects the others in building up secure boundaries for all citizens of Iraq. He describes the disintegrating situation in Iraq and how people are fleeing their home country because of the breaches of all kinds of securities. Of course, women always pay for the heinous crimes of others.

**Summary:**

Current definitions and conceptions of human security are too vague to be useful. Human security has been defined by political scientists, development scholars, sociologists and anthropologists, security scholars and public health administrators. Since state-centric conceptions of security ignore the experiences of women and promote significant inequality, this study comes to highlight the security of women from a human/feminist-centric approach. Feminists are sensitive to security differences based not only on gender but also on race, sexual orientation, ethnicity and class. Factors affecting women's personal security are socio-cultural pressures as well as inadequate economic opportunities in addition to discriminatory laws and norms.
Women are active agents in addressing their challenges and threats whether critical or pervasive. Their human security, which should not be studied in a vacuum, should be aligned with their political and economic securities which constitute a holistic approach to their well being. The states have obligations which are to ensure the security of their citizens. Securing borders is good. Stockpiling weapons is fine. But we should also improve the daily lives of women. What is paramount are the security of the population and the security within the population. Since women make up half the planet, their well-earned rights and their evolving empowerment should be acknowledged and acted upon now more than ever. The human security of women is as important as the security of nations and it should no longer stay at the margins. After all, human security and national security are mutually reinforcing concepts. We have to advocate a shift from the emphasis of security through armaments to security through human growth and development. Without self-love, a good quality education, and realizing their power and rising to their full potential, women will never ever be able to actualize their personal security. Personal security is owning who you are as a full-fledged human being and creating a space for yourself where you can self-cultivate and reach a state of transcendence. Through bargaining with patriarchy, as Deniz Kandiyoti has said, Arab women can strategize within a set of concrete constraints, maximize their security, and optimize their life options with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression.

**Key Issues of Self-Concept of Security:**

The study reveals or makes visible the power of external and internal barriers to women's deep sense of personal security and to social change. It has been shown throughout the interviews and focus groups that the women's self-concept of security is multi-layered and capable of fluid and creative agency. In more ways than one, this self-concept of security embodies the women's values and belief systems which are home-grown and contingent upon the social and cultural contexts that determine and further women's evolving sense of security, which is not only a state of their beingness (an evolving state of mind, heart and soul) but also a state of their becomingness (part and parcel of their constructed identity). Not a whisper of political thought invades the sanctity of the study. While volatile politics appears to be at the forefront of Jordanians, close reading of the data reveals that political contexts disappear in the face of women's selfhood and of their internal psychological struggles which impede their growth and well beingness.

**Values and Belief Systems:**

The soul data have yielded many results about the Jordanian women respondents' values and belief systems. Many of these values and belief systems are part of the implicit rules and opinions which Bourdieu calls the Doxa, a doxa which is gleaned from a process of socialization. The fear of challenging the social and cultural opinions and beliefs leads to an endorsement and an upholding of the status quo which is in its nature and makeup antagonistic to women's needs and desires. Women come to internalize the demeaning values of the patriarchal institution which are misogynistic and to perpetuate them through a continuous vicious cycle of oppression. Any attempt to dismantle these values makes women pay a heavy price for their transgressive acts.
The questions that we need to explore are: What is a woman's understanding of her own sense of security? What does she base her understanding upon? What is her process of learning and unlearning? How does she feel about her own security? Is security instilled in women by culture and society? Is it passed down from one generation to the other? Is it granted to women? If it is granted, what are the payoffs? The results and consequences? Is a woman's sense of security exercised freely and independently of men? Is it an island experience or is it a collectivist feeling that is interdependent on the ones in your surroundings? Is it a conformist feeling or non-conformist? Can a woman's sense of personal security be midwifed? Is it self-made? Is it self-defined or other-defined?


As a concept, does it evolve in its meanings? Is it static or dynamic? How and why?

**Religious Discourse:**

The common ground shared by all respondents, whether Muslims or Christians, is their strong belief in Allah, the Mighty Almighty. This belief is very strong and all of the women rely on Allah's blessings and grace. They believe that their personal security is bestowed upon them by God and it is protected by Him. Without spiritual security, there is no personal security at all. Allah is the father and shepherd. He is the stronghold, redeemer, friend, savior, guide and counselor. These are some of the 99 names in the Holy Quran which are evoked in our conversations.

Women's sense of personal security is grounded or anchored in Allah and in His will. In our conversation, Allah's name is evoked continuously. For instance, Allah will provide (ba'ti); He will protect me (yehmeeni); His will (inshaAllah) will be enacted no matter what; He is my shield and security (sanadi); His love for me is what counts at the very end of the day (my aaman and rahti); He is my strength and safety net; He is all and everything (kul ishi fi hayati). Allah is the author of destiny, so He will take care of me (kadari wa naseebi).

We can see that the religious discourse is very powerful. For all the women, their personal security lies in the hands of Allah, who knows what is best for them. The reliance on Allah for the women respondents is a source of security and safety. Without the full and warm presence of Allah, they feel that they are devoid of any security. They are empty and lifeless. Allah is the provider of their security.

For me, the woman's tying in their personal security with the religious discourse is very telling. It shows that they are using this highly-valued discourse as a way to escape from their oppressive situations. Since religion is their refuge and haven, they will never ever be able to negotiate the meanings of personal security in a serious fashion and understand their significant roles in their lives. They simply accept what happens since they have a blind trust in God, who will secure their safety according to His will.
Strangely enough, they avoid the saying which says that we should use our commonsense and then trust in God (i’kal wa tawakal).

**Family Discourse:**

The institution of family (immediate and extended, i.e. tribe) has come up in our conversation. All of the women respondents believe that their families, whether immediate or extended, lend to and bolster their sense of personal security. The family or the tribe is the prop or the support system. Many have said that they are indoctrinated at an early age to believe that they are nothing (useless and powerless) without their families. And this is very true. This is inculcated in us as children, part and parcel of the ready-made script that we receive from our parents and society. We feel that the family is the izweh, without whom we will lose not only our sense of security but also our sense of who we are (our identity) as Jordanians.

Unlike some Western countries which are based on individualism, we are a collective and communal society. Without our families, we think that we are a worthless bunch of individuals who sail through life with no compass. Part of a woman's identity and her sense of personal security are her belonging to a big family or tribe. Alienation or displacement robs a woman of her security and shames her. As one woman said, a woman becomes maskinah and lakitah. This is 'eib and haram. ('azaa'ha ahleha)

The women I have spoken with appendage their sense of security to their parents and family members, but what is interesting is that they awaken to the naked truth later on in life, the ugly truth that their families are not as supportive as they have thought and they are not the givers of security. They realize that the concept of security and protection is not a noble one for it is nothing more than oppressing women, disempowering them, and rendering them fragile and frail. To obtain her security from her family, a woman is told to be silent, accept things as they are, never complain, make do with what she is afforded even if it borders on abuse and oppression (*ma tifdahina, ikhrasi, ya eib el-shoom, naqisnah*), and never question her status or plight.

**Marriage Discourse:**

It has been illustrated by many women that marriage (having a husband and children, especially sons) is their security. That is why women make it a point to get married and start a family. Marriage is their sutra or security. An unmarried woman becomes 'anes, a spinster who is a burden on her parents and after their death on her whole family. Later on in life, she is treated as a doormat or a punching bag and her life becomes a chain of suffering and pain. As one woman has said, this is the worst kind of life a woman might have. She is *bayreh* or unwanted merchandise and her feeling of personal security is empty and cold. If she has the money, as someone has said, her life might be somewhat better, but ultimately she is never independent to lead her life any way that she wants and to secure her future away from the ones who make it a point to bring her down and
to chip away at who she is. She might be even slandered and her sense of security might be lost for good.

As illustrated by the women in their conversations, a woman is told that her family is her citadel of strength and security. She is tethered to her family and comes to follow their orders and dictates. Sometimes, a woman is coerced to marry at the age of 16. Early marriages abound in Jordan even though the rule says that a woman cannot get married unless she is 18 but many get married at a much earlier age. If a woman does not agree to marry when she is sixteen, the consequences are very high. Her life might be threatened and she might lose her livelihood.

One woman said that before she got married, she knew that her security depended on her family. In fact, she took this notion for granted and never challenged it. How could she challenge it, one woman asked? Her family, she surmised, were her safety net, creating a comfort zone for her and protecting her future. She knows that her comfort zone might be a prison but at least it is her space that provides her with protection from the eyes of intruders and violators. When a man knows that a woman is secure by her family, he will think twice before he approaches her. He is afraid of the consequences if he does not show any respect for her family. One woman said, "it is all a game and women get adept at playing this game." As long as you understand the rules of the game and you know how to play them very well, you will survive, one commented with a big smile on her face.

Before getting married, a woman's sense of personal security is keeping her hymen intact, which represents the honor of her family. After all, she is the custodian of the family's honor. Any breach of that will bring about her premature death. Her feeling of security is gleaned from her living a "decent" or halal life and not engaging in activities that might harm or blacken her reputation which is, as stated before, a reflection of the reputation of her family as a whole. She must obey her parents and do as required. Her security depends on her being the trustee of her family's honor. Their honor is hymenized. Their honor is owning her body and soul whereby she becomes a tenant, never an owner of her body and soul.

When a woman gets married, her personal security shifts from her family's to her husband's. She is now his and he is the one responsible for her. She has to submit to his multifarious needs or else her personal security will be jeopardized. As one respondent has said, "Of course, a woman lives her married life believing that she has to submit to her husband's demands since he is the one who nurtures her security." She has to make him happy on all counts because if she does not she feels that her security is lost.

A woman said that when she was divorced which is shaming for women, she gradually discovered that her security lies in her having a decent job and making good money. It was her gradual awakening which led to her freedom from the clutches of discrimination and inequality. Her security meant having the ability to make choices and to run her life in the way she sees fit. Her security meant her financial independence and feeling complete.
One woman narrated her story as a single mom who raised her daughter all alone. Being a single mom is very hard in Arab countries, she said. Her sense of security was robbed and at times it was raped. Not wearing the hijab has compounded matters for her, too. Candidly speaking, she said that an Arab woman finds it very hard to create a sense of security for herself without the support of her family. An Arab woman is always threatened by her surroundings and her trials and tribulations would chip away at her sense of security. As she said, she only feels secure when she is at home alone reading a book and her dog is sitting on the floor next to her. She, however, feels happy that her daughter is empowered and skilled enough to build up her sense of security. It is not easy but it is doable. Her daughter is a success story and now her grand-daughter is being raised to believe in who she is and to grow her wings no matter what the circumstances are. Having two model women, the growing child will surely blaze her pathway and forge her sense of security with no inhibitions on the way.

After leaving their abusive husbands, some women were able to shift the meaning of security and to relocate its meaning in themselves and in their agentic voices. They are now able, in spite of the antagonistic forces against them, to exercise their dormant power and to choose a kind of life that does not conform with the social norms and with the people's habits of minds and traditions. One woman said, take care of your own security and beef it up yourself. Don't rely on others to give it to you falsely. She said: "deeri balek 'ala halek kteer wa 'ala masriyatek." Security is self-reliance. It means feeling complete and full. You don't need anyone to complete you or to fulfill you. It is better to be fulfilled than being filled up with false guarantees. Security is your fullness rather than your lackness.

One woman told me that her need to provide security for her child inspired her to leave her husband and look for a decent job. Her husband used to hit her a lot and at one time she was hospitalized. She endured the insults and the pain for the sake of her children, but when her husband started to abuse their daughter, she decided that it was time to walk away from her marriage. Guaranteeing her daughter's security was at the top of her priority list. She left, found a job, and made some good money for her and for her child.

Another woman realized that when her husband sent her to her father's home following a big verbal fight, her father told her straight out that she is no longer his responsibility. Her father said that her personal security lies now with her husband. So for a woman security is passed down from father to husband and finally to son. Her security is always related to the men in her family. They are her guardians and protectors (al-wilayah wa el-kimawah) till her death.

A woman told me that in our culture a woman's security is measured and defined by men in her family, a security that accompanies her from the cradle to the grave. Since a woman's sense of security is always affiliated with her family, a woman feels the need to be close to her family even if she is abused at their own hands. A woman said that her sense of personal security is coupled with her disempowerment but she accepts this fact without any contestation. Living with abuse, no matter how horrifying it is, is much better than being alienated from everyone or ostracized by your close community. When you are ostracized by your close community or being thought of as a pariah, you lose
your sense of personal security and become cheap merchandize for all and sundry. People take advantage of you since you are not given any kind of protection and security from your family. You become a loose woman or a *sharmootah*, one woman said with bitterness.

Jordanian women uphold the patriarchs in their families because they are in the eyes of society the shield, the givers and protectors of their security without which they are shamed and stigmatized. One woman calls it double jeopardy. She is aware that it is better to stay in the frying pan than to jump into the fire. She knows full well that the security provided for her by her family is illusory and farcical but she says it is a good facade. In the society she lives in, it does not matter whether it is deceptive or real. What matters are the opinions of people who live in her community. Sadly, security can be a pretext or a cover up women live under. Women become complicit in their own victimization.

The manufactured concept of security is definitely a mockery. The sense of security that women have is broken or deceptive. Jordanian women know that it is a sham yet they cling on to it since it provides them with the illusion of security which is needed so that they can function in life and play their accepted roles without any sexual or mental harassment. Of course, this illusory security protects them from the vicious eyes of people surrounding them, but it also dis-empowers them tremendously. They stay within the peripheries of their families and never cross boundaries to discover their own strength and power. They stay within the family fold, a fold in which their wings are clipped daily. They never take responsibility of their own security. Their fear of breaking away from the fold cripples them and renders their lives hopeless and helpless.

By internalizing the fear of drifting away from their families and by relying on their social and cultural capital, the women feel stunted and dwarfed. With a spark in her eyes, one woman said that her sense of security is artificial and a sham. Yes, it is a lie but it helps her to hang in there and survive. In the long run, though, she has to fight and take responsibility for her own security. When a woman's security lies in the hands of others, she will be slowly depleted and her life becomes false, empty and cold. A woman should control her own security and be at the helm of her life. She should be the captain of her soul, as William Faulkner has once said.

A son is also good for a woman since he provides her with a sense of financial security. Having a son is very significant for Arab women. When a woman has a son, she is shown respect and she is secure since inheritance money stays in this case with the family. When a woman has daughters only, part of the inheritance goes to her brothers-in-law and their children. A woman told me that her son guarantees her financial security in the community she lives in. Her financial security is part and parcel of her personal security, for as she says a woman without money is like fish out of water. Dead. She is aware that that might not be true at a certain point in her life, but for now she is happy with what she is thinking. People in Jordan understand that having a son is power to the women and they do not mess up with this situation.
In one focus group, many women in their sixties and seventies have shown that their happy children who are adults and married lead to their feeling of personal security and happiness. They feel personally secure when their children, whether men or women, are happy with their own families and jobs. At their old age, these women's sense of personal security is related to the well beingness of their adult children. Strangely enough, the old mothers glean their security from the well beingness of their children. It seems that parents and children inter-depend on each other for their security, but this changes with the passing or elapse of time. When the children are small, they beget their sense of security from their parents and when the parents are old, they beget their sense of security from their children. This circle of inter-dependence, and, at times, of manipulation will continue to dominate or colonize the minds of Arab people. What we need is a gradual decolonization of mindsets which come to control and oppress the other. As Khalil Gibran has once said,

Your children are not your children.  
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.  
They come through you but not from you,  
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

**Independent Narratives:**

Some old women have said that their sense of personal security has diminished following the death of their husbands. One woman in her late seventies told me that she speaks with her dead husband before she goes to bed and reprimands him. She tells him how angry she is. She said that his death broke her back (*kasar thahri*). She is also angry with God and speaks with him at night. It is true that her husband did everything for her and made her feel secure during his life but now when he is gone she is crippled by fear and a feeling of inadequacy. She does not even know how to get around and how to pay her bills. She had her security for a long time, but she lost it all of a sudden when he died. She said that this should not have ever happened. Now, she is attempting to regain her sense of security without feeling lonely or alone. She is happy with the outcome. It has taken her a while to claim her security but she is in a good place now.

A husband's death is not the only thing that leads to a wife's loss of personal security. His sickness is also a threat to a woman's personal security. One old woman told me that she has sleepless nights and feels apprehensive. Her husband's sickness has clipped her wings and depleted her sense of empowerment. She does not feel secure and she is bitter about her situation. She said that she is suffering from a double loss: the slow loss of her husband and her loss of personal security.

It seems that a woman's sense of personal security is contingent upon family and children. A woman lives in the bubble of her own family. When she grows older and her husband and children are no longer in her life, she feels that the bubble has burst. With age comes a deteriorating sense of personal security. Security is fickle. When a woman's personal security is relational or dependent upon others, there comes a time when she will feel empty and all alone.
Being secure is never permanent, but, as one old woman has said, you have to find a vocation in your life that solidifies your sense of security with or without your loved ones. It is good to be surrounded by family members, but at the very end of the day, it is you yourself who is responsible for your own sense of growing security. Your anchor is your chiseled self. You are your own compass. You are your own security.

Adding to what has been said, another old woman said that accepting and loving yourself for who you are lends to your sense of personal security. She said that you have to connect with yourself which is foremost in her point of view. Build a bridge to your own power. Connecting with family and children are important but the most important thing is connecting with yourself. After all, this is what you have at the very end of the day. Your own selfhood and your own independence. You should have the confidence and the strength to build your own security independent of family and children. She relates a bitter story which has affected her life for a while. When she was denied her rightful inheritance, she decided right then that she will never ever be someone's appendage. She will rely on herself and be financially independent. Money is power, and her power is her determination to speak back and to stand on her two feet. She said, quoting Martin Luther King, people stand on your back because you let them.

Another woman in the same group said that a woman's security is connected with living in a secure nation. But for her, she continued to say, changing the discriminatory, misogynistic laws against women is of primary importance. A woman will not feel safe and secure unless our inherited culture of haram, halal, and eib is transformed. We should work on laws that ensure equality and justice for all human beings. A country that discriminates against her women is dead.

Civil rights and civil freedoms are significant. Women should feel secure knowing that their rights are protected by the rule of law. A young human rights activist said that being secure is a choice every woman should make. A woman chooses to be safe and secure when she is aware of her rights and is privy to her duties and obligations. A woman can only choose when she is cognizant of her surroundings and of her community. She must choose not to be sidelined. She must follow her dreams and aspirations since they will ultimately lead her to the path of her security. A woman without dreams will not only lose her sense of security but she will shrivel up like a raisin in the sun. She said that no one has the right to steal away or hijack your dreams. Your life depends on what you want to do yourself.

Speaking of dreams, another young woman who is doing her MA in feminist theory said that her personal security lies not in the societal and cultural roles she adopts and performs but in the realization of her dreams which will elevate her confidence and boost her sense of security. When a woman's desire is underestimated, her security is toppled over. What a great violation this is to a woman's life sanctity. This is an invasion of her life. A woman's security lies in her will and agency to be whoever she wants to be. Yes, she will be challenged but she has to stay her ground and move onward and upward.
Another young student told me that her security is the strong feeling she has that she can take care of herself without anyone's help. When her brother hit her ferociously and she was all blue and black, she knew full well that her father will be her shield when she tells him about the matter. Deep down she knew that her father will reprimand her brother and put him in his place. The surprise came when her father sided with his son against her. She felt being caught up in a whirlpool of misogyny and anger. It dawned upon her right then that one's security is not given to you. It must be made by you. In a loud voice, she said, "I am my own security (Ana Sanadi)."

She has been living her life ever since that moment making money, building up her confidence, taking good care of herself, going to the gym and learning how to be a she-fighter, and refusing to take crap from anyone.

Perhaps her father and brother took away her sense of security, but this has made her much stronger and more independent. She has come to know her points of strength and to work on her points of weaknesses. As Rumi has said, "The wound is the light where the light enters you." This young woman broke the mold she was supposed to fit in and un-wrote the script handed to her by her culture and society. Her claiming of her sense of security is a process of unlearning and relearning who she is as an Arab young woman. The road is not easy, but she is willing and ready to face the challenges and to write her own script. What an inspiration she is to other women her age. Her story shows that a woman's implosion might lead to her breakthrough, not her breakdown. Her success story shows that Arab women can re-envision their lives and write their lives in white ink.

The nugget of wisdom is that a woman's self-concept of security is a state of mind. It is a state of heart. It is how you perceive yourself. It is how you feel about who you are. It is about how you carry yourself every single day. It is about the spark that you have in your eyes. It is about how you seize every opportunity that crosses your path. It is about your resilience and your determination to shine through amidst the darkness. In a nutshell, it is about the I, the ME, and the Myself. Celebrate your I-ness, your Me-ness, and your Myself-ness and forge them with love and more love to your beingness and to your becomingness.

One woman who is the top of her class said that her personal security is simply her sense of privacy. Strangely enough, she said that she felt more secure in the public sphere than in the private one which is her home. In the public sphere, she had control over her own life and what she did. At home, her sense of security was threatened owing to her snoopy parents who watched her every move. She told me it was like Big Brother is watching me. She came to realize later that feeling secure is not about the physical space that is provided for you, whether private or public. Feeling secure is about one's intellectual power and agency.

She also said that a woman's sense of security should emanate from within the deep crevices of her mind and heart. It cannot be given to you on a silver platter. You create it and forge it with self-love. The fallacy is that people think that personal security is given to you. It is not given. You tailor it and make it and it keeps on evolving and growing.
The concept of personal security represents the part of self that knows, functions in and responds to our socio-cultural environment, with its power relations, institutions, rules, regulations and structures. This concept, which is fluid and capable of creative agency, should spring from conviction, not habit. It should envision its own dreams which never surrender freedom of mind and heart to security. Dream up a good life and sow good seeds so that you will have a good yield or harvest.

**Equivalents:**

Security as a weave has many threads which have a heterogeneity of meanings and significations. Here are the common meanings that have been inter-threaded from the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stability</th>
<th>Freedom</th>
<th>Safety</th>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Self-Confidence</th>
<th>Comfort</th>
<th>Money</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Honor</td>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Privacy</td>
<td>Spaces</td>
<td>Self-love</td>
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<td>Hymen</td>
<td>Virginity</td>
<td>Begetting a Son</td>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>Strength</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Rights</td>
<td>Belief</td>
<td>Self-Trust</td>
<td>No fear</td>
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<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>Job</td>
<td>Self-reliance</td>
<td>Being complete</td>
<td>Feeling fulfilled</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-control</td>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Self-definition</td>
<td>Self-expression</td>
<td>Envisioned dream</td>
<td>State of mind</td>
<td>State of heart</td>
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**Conclusion:**

My study project or research represents a vivid presentation of narratives and written voices that need to be heard and heeded. Clearly, I have not heard the stories of all the racial, socioeconomic, and other diversity in Jordanian society. Above all, I interviewed seven Jordanian women and met with 20 women in two focus groups. This number is adequate, but no
generalizations can be made from a small sample size—especially given the dangers that come from irresponsible research conducted on violence against women and their sense of personal security.

An interrogation into the matrix of powers and individuals dictating relationship norms and women's sense of personal security is missing in Jordan, which is understudied in the MENA region. Dearth of research is a big witness to this. This research “has not been done” in Jordan before. The wealth of existing research largely concerns itself with Egypt or other Middle Eastern countries, even treating these entire nations as homogenous regions, although the conflation of Jordan with these other countries is racist and reductive.

This report is a record of women's experiences and views on personal security, family, love, and communities. From these interviews and focus groups, I have learned about the diverse meanings of personal security for Jordanian women. Thoughts and experiences on this topic differ. All the respondents spoke on each question, and certain themes arose from pertinent questions about the forms of personal security they considered to be important in their lives. Throughout the interview process, I was very conscious of my different experiences interviewing and speaking with all of these women. Analyzing my soul data, I only present my respondents' truths here, truths that speak volumes to the power of patriarchy and inequalities. After all, the region of the Middle East was labelled by Caldwell as part of the “patriarchal belt,” in which the societies are characterized by a patriarchal system that privileges male dominance, the importance of blood ties and control over women’s behaviour, which conflates family honor with female virtue.