Introduction

Under the Partners for Justice project, Search for Common Ground (Search) and ABAAD-Resource Center for Gender Equality (ABAAD) are working together to address the root causes of violence against women and girls, and change the perceptions men, women, and children hold toward patriarchal definitions of masculinity. Though significant progress has been made toward gender equality in Lebanon, many members of the community – especially men and boys – still believe in a male superiority that reinforces systematic disenfranchisement. Private and public policing of women and girls by men and boys serving as “protectors” denies equality and preserves historical notions of power. This tradition, alongside sparse information regarding women’s rights, are the primary challenges faced by advocates working at both the local and national level.

Recently, Search and ABAAD hosted a successful training session for thirty youth leaders representing sixteen local organizations across Lebanon. Those leaders are now promoting equitable masculinity and violence prevention in their own communities. Eight youth leaders from Tripoli and Mount Lebanon have already led workshops for 55 youth (18 male, 37 female) from Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian and Pakistani backgrounds on these topics and are mobilizing their communities to better pursue just and gender-equal societies.

Background

Current political, economic, and health crises have been exacerbated by the COVID19- pandemic, meaning Lebanese and non-Lebanese residents are facing the most difficult period they have seen since the end of the civil war. Social isolation, drug abuse, suicide, and limited access to social services like healthcare and protection are common in vulnerable and marginalized groups such as youth, refugee women and children, migrant domestic workers, the LGBTIQ+ community, and the elderly. During 2020, women’s unemployment increased by 26 percent, compounding a 14 percent increase the previous year. Interpersonal relationships, both familial and social, are also deteriorating due to increases in domestic violence, cyber-violence, and sexual and gender based violence. Lebanon’s national police, the Internal Security Forces, tracked a 122 percent rise in domestic violence and a 102 percent rise in cyber-violence in 2020 alone.
Our Work
The Partners for Justice project brought sixteen local organizations together from across Lebanon to share their knowledge and experiences regarding gender equality and equitable masculinity with one another. Thirty youth leaders (ages 30–20) representing those organizations recently attended a gender equality and equitable/positive masculinity training hosted by Search and ABAAD. The training addressed sensitive topics such as gender, sexuality, equality, substance abuse, and violence.
Participants showed a significant increase in their understanding of gender role socialization and gender discrimination, and demonstrated knowledge of the ways violence is central to male socialization. Testing showed a 48 percent increase in participants’ capacity to independently raise awareness of gender equality, different forms of masculinity, and ways to prevent violence against women and girls. Participants’ improved facilitation skills empowered them to champion gender programs and inclusive collaboration within their home organizations and communities, and engage individuals from different cultural backgrounds and ages. By investing in the leadership skills and knowledge of local youth and by strengthening their social connections with one another, the Partners for Justice project has improved the resilience and sustainability of gender equality efforts in Lebanon.