SEARCH SHORT FILM FESTIVAL BREAKS STIGMA AND OPENS UP A SAFE SPACE FOR DIALOGUE AROUND GENDER AND SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (SGBV)

Current political, economic, and health crises have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic since the beginning of 2020, meaning Lebanese and non-Lebanese residents are facing the most difficult period they have seen since the end of the Lebanese Civil War (1990). Social isolation, drug abuse, suicide, and limited access to basic needs, educational and social services like healthcare and protection are common now, especially for vulnerable and marginalized groups such as youth, women, children, migrant domestic workers, the LGBTQ+ community, people with disabilities, and the elderly, including refugee elderlies.

Interpersonal relationships, both familial and social, are also deteriorating due to increases in domestic violence and SGBV. Consequently, Search for Common Ground (Search) and ABAAD-Resource Center for Gender Equality (ABAAD), have been joining efforts under the ‘Towards a Gender-Equitable Society’ project that is funded by UK Aid DIRECT to break gender stereotypes through media and improve access to quality SGBV prevention and response services in different communities across Lebanon in close partnership with existing national and governmental frameworks to ensure the reduction of SGBV in Lebanon by creating an enabling environment in which perceptions and social norms around gender and SGBV are shifted.

In celebration of the closing of the project, Search organized a short film festival to screen to the wider public the films that the youth champions have worked on under this project. The five gender-sensitive short films tackle various topics related to violence against women and girls (VAWG), SGBV and masculinities.

The festival took place on Friday, the 3rd of June, 2022 at KED Beirut and was attended by a wide range of artists, local and international organizations, and the wider community of Lebanese residents from different age groups and walks of life.

The 303 attendees reported belonging to various gender groups (gender fluid, non-binary, women, and men), while their ages ranged from 16 to 75 years old.

147 Women, 113 Men, 9 Other, 34 N/A

It is essential that these movies be screened all over Lebanon and in International film festivals as well! The messages that they convey are impactful and should be heavily shared.

- A woman attendee of the film festival

I think that the plot of the movie ‘Behind Closed Doors’ is very impactful. The film ‘Ilham’ is very powerful as well in spreading the message. These should be used as resources to spread awareness around SGBV in schools and training sessions.

- A woman attendee of the film festival

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1 https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2021.704678/full#B77
The Senior Program Manager (SPM) kicked off the festival by introducing the project and the different people involved. After the introduction, the five films were screened while people enjoyed popcorn and a cold beverage. After the break between the films, the SPM turned the audiences’ attention towards the 3 influencers attending the festival, Sandra Succar, the World Mixed Martial Arts champion, Elise Abou Raad, Lebanon and Asia gold and silver medalist in Powerlifting, and Khaled Kalash, a local home desserts chef. The three influencers were part of the “Beyond Stereo” campaign/mini-series. The SPM also gave them a token of appreciation and announced the launching of the “Sawa Khalina Nehki” (Let’s talk together) online campaign/mini-series. Check the videos on Search’s Instagram, Youtube, and Facebook accounts.

After screening the five films, the attendees had the chance to vote for their favorite film as well as to share their feedback through a survey. Moreover, a Q&A session was organized with the directors of the short films which allowed the audience to share their feedback and comments directly and to get more information about the films and their messages. The directors also received a chance to discuss their films as well as the messages they wanted to convey.

Conveying our message through films has allowed us to reach a group that we usually cannot easily reach in SGBV and VAWG training; that group includes parents, the elderly, and even local leaders.
- A woman director of one of the short films

Through this project, it became more relevant to me to focus on gender in my films and to realize that gender stereotypes and SGBV affects all people in society, men and women alike.
- Non-binary youth champion who participated in the project

I would really want to be part of such projects. I am a filmmaker who graduated recently, and I would love to work with you.
- A youth attendee of the film festival

This project gave us the opportunity as young filmmakers to write, direct and produce films that we would not have been able to do due to the economic challenges in the country. Moreover, we have created new networks of writers, directors, producers and other crew members from diverse backgrounds, and some of us are currently working on projects together.
- A woman youth champion who participated in the project

We, as a TV Channel, are very interested in promoting such good work to a wider audience. Our team would love to host you during one of our programmes to share about this impactful project. Mainstreaming gender in media has become very important, especially that media shapes in way or another the public opinion.
- A TV Channel attendee of the film festival

WINNER OF THE PEOPLE’S FAVORITE’ AWARD

88% believe that the films are able to create a shift in SGBV in Lebanese Communities

88% reported that such media products are relevant to breaking gender stereotypes and raising awareness about SGBV in Lebanon

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