

Evaluation Report of **“Training Advocates on Family Courts”**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Subsequent to acknowledgment of the contribution of the internal and external stakeholders as well as the beneficiaries, under Chapter I of the evaluation report an overview of the project “Training Advocates on Family Court Procedures” and its initial objective for training of volunteers to expedite the lengthy and over-burdening processes of filing of cases by women going through the courts was provided. Also, in line with the detailed terms of references (TORs) for the evaluation agreed upon by consensus between key partners together with the evaluation consultant, the threefold objectives of the evaluation exercise was detailed focusing on the assessment of the project in terms of **relevance** of design, **project efficiency**, and **effectiveness** - potential impact. In addition, under this chapter the selected participatory, learning-oriented, flexible and result-based approaches used under the evaluation, also reflecting the main processes of project implementation and performance were highlighted providing details on the methodology used combining quantitative and qualitative techniques of triangulation to cross-check the results through desk study; questionnaires and focussed group discussions sessions with internal, external stakeholders (i.e. senior authorities of the family courts) and a limited number of beneficiaries.

Along with aforementioned methods, the use of a series of workshops that were conducted with the facilitation of the evaluation consultant involving the main internal stakeholders inclusive of the volunteer family counsellors and those who were responsible for management/ implementation, administration, logistics and support staff together with representatives from UNFPA and the donor were highlighted under Chapter I. Also, reference is made to the other tool used namely structured interviews with ODVV management and key family court authorities with an emphasis on the futuristic outlook of the evaluation exercise that through participatory means facilitated reviewing of the project activities through assigning many tasks to small groups of key internal stakeholders in the course of the workshop as well as identifying the issues of the present situation and use the lessons learnt in finding the path for tackling constraints in the future. The external stakeholders also provided their views on lessons learnt and the future course of the project. In a sense, the evaluation contributed to self-assessment of project results while avoiding individual fault finding.

Using consensus building techniques, the evaluation enhanced teamwork amongst the partners and with the high commitments of all participants which were acknowledged and commended by all the steps initiated under the evaluation exercise, greater ownership of project results were achieved and confirmed by the feedbacks received. In effect, the main role of the evaluator was not one of ‘fault finding’, but to make the results more sustainable and practical, serving the dual function of an independent evaluation consultant who also served as the facilitator in the course of the evaluation processes. This proved highly effective since the initial apprehension of the participants was soon replaced with frank assessments and keen interest to build the basis for continuation of activities and by finding mechanisms to improve impact using lessons learnt.

The timing and the extension of the duration (up to end October 2007) of the evaluation exercise and its scope were also provided under Chapter I with the latter defined in line with answering four broad questions of “Where we were before the project started” reviewing the problem addressed and relevance of project design-(Chapter II); “What is the present situation/where is the project now”- Assessing the efficiency of the Project Performance (Chapter III), and “How the project got to where we are now”-examining the strategies and mechanisms that were used in the course of project design and operation (Chapter III); and finally “What to do to enhance and sustain results”- Summary Findings and conclusions on effectiveness of results and recommendations for follow up phase to enhance potential impact in the future (Chapter IV).

Chapter I also focused on the four main limitations of the evaluation exercises (i.e. lacking follow-up information on results and limited access to beneficiaries; inaccessibility of the non-judiciary external stakeholders; lack of quality ‘success’ indicators to measure effectiveness and impact at the planning, formulation, approval, implementation or assessment of the results; and validity of results/findings and conclusions as project specific and not as generalisation and inferences to the general public at large). Furthermore, as there were no follow-up mechanisms in place, it was mentioned that the quality of successes in project results could not be directly assessed. As a remedial measure, the indirect assessments of qualitative success were made through obtaining feedbacks on how success was defined by both internal and external stakeholders as well as relying on the responses of the family counsellors on actual, but selected cases they recollected as best practices specified in their responses to the questionnaires that has been annexed to the report (Annex VI). Also, through focussed group discussions with the beneficiaries, though very limited in number and

from the unsuccessful cases ensuring them on maintaining their anonymity as well as confidentiality, their views defined what could be considered as the qualitative success indicators to measure the achievement of results of services rendered and how project performance could be improved in the follow-up phases.

With the use of the problem analysis technique, Chapter II concentrated on answering the question “where we were before the project started” and its root causes and effects as it related to the beneficiaries targeted to assess relevance of project design. Among both the internal and external stakeholders, “Crisis within the institution of the family” was agreed by consensus as the main problem addressed by the project. The research study conducted under the project also confirmed this finding indicating that of the 92,490 cases in 2004, and 61,811 cases in 2005 processed by Family Court Complex (FCC) No.1 [project site], the majority were either related directly to divorce or they were claims for *mehreyeh*¹ which in the majority of cases ended up with divorce respectively.

In identifying the root causes and effects several socio-psychological, cultural and legal contextual factors were prioritised by the main internal stakeholders of the project and reflected under Chapter II. The primary cause from some six factors threatening the institution of family and directly impacting all the other causes emphasised by the internal and external stakeholders attending the evaluation workshop was “society was undergoing a stage of transition from traditional to modern” with all its socio-psychological, cultural and legal repercussions. The data gathered from the project further reconfirmed all the root causes identified by the participants as contributing factors to the crisis within the institution of the family. There were also references to the reasons why under the transitional stage traditional norms, values and societal practices are ineffective in addressing issues confronted by the modern Iranian families (i.e. those included under the project).

In assessing the relevance of project design, it was shown by the analysis of the available data in Chapter II that over 65% of project beneficiaries facing family problems were living with their own family and almost 7% with their relatives with an accumulative figure of over 72%. This was reflective of the magnitude of pressure placed on the wife or the wife’s family becoming more acute for those who also served as the main provider or source of income. The analysis confirmed that women of the lower strata who received services under the project were becoming severely vulnerable and increasingly pressured feeling and being unwanted by their own families and relatives since their families and relatives were poverty-stricken and not even in the position to financially sustain themselves. In a way, because of the heavy burden that is now placed on the family/relatives of the wife, having a daughter is more and more being considered as “headaches/inconveniences”. In short, with no socio-legal protection (i.e. pre-marital counselling), laws that are lagging behind societal practices, and inadequate support policies, plans and programmes as also identified under the research study, the institution of the family is undergoing a major crisis increasing social vulnerability at much younger age experienced by the beneficiaries under the project.

Inappropriate conditions in choosing a spouse was another important factor contributing to the crisis as was the case of the project's target group. From the examination of the data, there was a clear indication of the predominance of the traditional ways of meeting spouse which is still being practiced by the majority of women (about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the cases who received family counselling). There were also new trends towards changes as accumulatively over $\frac{1}{4}$ of the women met their husband without the knowledge of their families or as colleagues. However, either ways were inappropriate in choosing their spouse since irrespective of whether following the traditional path or choosing their own husband by themselves, they in fact encountered major family conflicts.

Unemployment and its negative impact was another major contributor to the present situation. Almost 90% of the project beneficiaries were housewives with little or no skills. As such, it was evident from the data that the second major cause identified by the participants in the evaluation exercise, namely “economic factors such as unemployment” also clearly contributed to high divorce rates calling for new supportive policies and laws to facilitate women taking a much more active productive role to enable them together with their husbands to maintain their families together. The finding of the root causes not only proved the project as justified and relevant, it clearly demonstrated the need to proactively involve and establish partnership to have the support of those ministries and organisations that are directly addressing issues related to employment and welfare (e.g. Ministry of labour and Social Welfare Organisation) as key implementing partners under any future initiatives in this area.

¹Under Islamic Law (*Sharia* – Jurisprudence), at the time that marriage is performed, an amount of money/gold or property is specified and reflected on the marriage certificate as *Mehreyeh*.

The effects of the crisis within the institution of the family were also identified under Chapter II with “high divorce rates” receiving the highest weight as the direct outcome of almost all the other effects considered critical. Other factors with the order of priority were: Feeling of insecurity by family members; greater socio-psychological and emotional problems and their repercussions on having a healthy society; increased domestic violence; and decreasing moral values with greater occurrence of polygamy/extra marital affairs.

In short, the reason for the main problem being addressed under the project, namely “crisis within the family institution” was mainly because of the society going through a transition period, with traditional values and norms that are no longer applicable and more or less outdated. Particularly due to the laws lagging behind societal practices as well as inappropriate supportive policies and programmes, there is a major gap as the extended family structure of the past is no longer desired or considered as workable solutions for the protection needed by young couples as fully demonstrated by the project beneficiaries. As a direct effect of this major crisis within the institution of the family, high divorce rate and the claims made by women for *mehreyeh* -- an indirect way of approaching divorce, even amongst those whose marriage was arranged under the traditional approaches by family relatives or their own choice alike were confirmed by the data gathered under the project and used by the evaluation. Professional family counselling which is presently a gap was identified as the only way out, therefore, to systematically replace the traditional male domineering ‘elderly advice.

Another major point addressed in Chapter II was the slowly changing reluctance to go to family counsellors as it is not yet fully recognised and accepted in the Iranian society causing the gap between what is needed and what is valued as the norm. Family counselling has not yet become fully institutionalised because of the prevalence of culturally-based sensitivities towards sharing information and seeking counselling from anyone outside the family” and the lack of trust as explained by family counsellors and confirmed by the beneficiaries. However, this reluctance is slowly changing and more and more women are beginning to seek ‘family counselling’ and professional help”. There is still a long way ahead, however. Particularly pre-marital counselling addressing both the practical and strategic needs of young couples prior to or in their early marriage still remains a major gap (44.4% of the project beneficiaries were in their 1st-5th year of marriage).

Overall, therefore, “the crisis in the institution of the family” and the problems faced particularly by women that were targeted by the project proved highly relevant and the concern mutually shared by the most senior authorities of the judiciary and policy makers alike. A direct result of this crisis is the present dilemma faced by women as clearly reflected in the findings of the comprehensive study conducted under this project (Shaditalab, 2007). Under the present situation women with crisis are left with no place to turn. This is particularly the case for the ones with little or no access to economic support -- poverty stricken women, not able to afford legal representation. For this purpose, the project was designed in a well targeted manner as the FCC No. 1 (re-established since 1997 due to so many family related cases) selected as project site was well-situated to serve women from the lower strata. However, these family courts, as the only alternative, still involve lengthy processes due to their high demand.

It is pointed out under Chapter II that as pointed out under the comprehensive study conducted under the project the courts remain over-crowded with corridors full of women, the majority of whom are confused, going from one room to the next. Also, the study indicated the prevalence of paradoxical norms predominant against going to such places. So, instead of being in fact a place to claim rights and as safe haven for justice, many women are forced by their relatives, friends and their husbands to drop their case even if it is a valid one. As such, therefore, still going to courts is considered as taboo and forbidden place by many people, irrespective of their family background and strata. In short, as confirmed by the beneficiaries, the traditional up-bringing practices that have still their reminiscence amongst most Iranian, going to such places or having any forms of encounters with courts, the police, or the institutions associated with the law or even for demanding one’s rights are greatly discouraged on the accounts that family-related issues are still considered as an ‘internal’ affair to be resolved ‘within the family’, similar to the reluctance to go to family counsellors.

The paradox remains, therefore, for many women of not having a place to go when encountering marital problems. Facing such a paradoxical situation, while in many instances women do in fact try to resolve their problems by themselves, they are not able to do so alone; hence, losing their self-confidence with the net impact of having fast growing numbers of depressed wives within the nucleus family structure. In a sense there is no longer an elderly person to look up to and based on the prevailing common biases, “still not so many family counsellors to trust”. They are left with the

only avenue to turn to at the time of need and amidst family feuds --that is the family courts. This is despite their commonly felt sense of apprehension and guilt.

Now when they do reach the courts they are delayed. One of the main reasons for the delay is the immensity of number of cases that have to be processed sometimes over 200 to 300 family-related claims per month by each judge. In addition, due to the variety of cases (14 general categories) that is being regularly handled by the judges, the over-worked judges is not able to review cases thoroughly with inadequate attention to more complex and long-lasting socio-psychological impacts on the families as a whole and women in particular. The mere fact that small children who are forced to accompany their mother, as she has no place to leave them while going through the courts, being scared and restless throughout the long ordeal and in many cases seeing their parents fighting each other, eventually becoming 'children of divorce', are detrimental for all, as clearly point out by Dr. Shaditalab in the report of the research study and the summary of project results accordingly. Thus, having selected family courts and its lengthy processes as the main entry point for project intervention is clearly justified and was an adequate decision that further confirms relevance of project's design.

Under Chapter III, project efficiency was evaluated in terms of management and implementation as well as reviewing selected aspects of financial and project administration together with cost efficiency considerations addressing "what is the present situation or where the project is now at the time of completion". Also, an overall review of how the project idea was formulated (i.e. initiated by the previous chief magistrate of the Family Court Complex No. 1 to gain the support of the academia in addressing the issues encountered and through using lessons learnt of the study visit to the British magistrates by the project director); and the change of approach and project objective based on the findings of the research study conducted, reorienting the project for a three month trial period using family counselling within the premise of FCC were covered under this chapter as well.

The soundness of the used strategies (e.g. flexibility; partnering that created the required synergy; excellent coherence in administration, logistic support and technical backstopping; teaming up the volunteers (particularly the MSc students with the more experienced serving as group leaders); establishing data bank for systematic quantitative analysis; and preparation of IEC materials were also reflected in Chapter III. In addition, Chapter III covers the constraints/obstacles of the methodologies used. The need for greater stakeholders' participation/consultation was one of the main constraints and the main reasons for this shortcoming (e.g. three times change of project management within the FCC, the sensitivity towards the project, etc.) highlighted. As elaborated by most of the internal and external stakeholders involved in the evaluation exercise, the capacities of the partners were not fully utilised and or sustained and those who could have potentially contributed to its sustainability were not efficiently and effectively involved in addressing substantive tasks. This shortcoming became evident in the course of the stakeholder matrix analysis identifying both the internal and external stakeholders and reviewing their roles and responsibilities from planning and formulation; management; implementation; monitoring and evaluation; to reporting for the various stages (e.g. to inform; obtain information from; to consult; become partners; and control and support) of the project presented in this chapter.

In reviewing "who did what?" it became clear that the substantive roles/tasks were undertaken by the project director (Chapter III). In fact, as the person who had the prime role and was proactively involved in almost all the tasks in the project, the director (Dr. Shaditalab) deserves to be commended for her outstanding performance. Concurrently, however, as the project was heavily reliant on her inputs, she became more or less indispensable to the project. This all out reliance on one person was more or less reflected in every aspect of the project. Due to shouldering the entire burden, others were not included or involved throughout project implementation.

Minimal inclusiveness of the judges who were initially involved during the course of the research study is an instance of such a hindrance. It seems that there was an attitudinal problem as the judges overall feeling about family counselling was to serve as social workers, wanting them to access their confidential files. This was not acceptable to the family counsellors as it would have meant their going against their professional ethics.

However, clearly there were no efficient mechanisms for the inclusion of the judges envisaged under the project subsequent the initial stage. This fundamental separation referred to under Chapter III seems to have contributed to the discontinuation of the project after the pilot phase impeding sustainability. In fact the judges could have been persuaded to support the family counselling initiative as they in fact were secondary beneficiaries of the project as they themselves would benefit by having their heavy workload reduced. In addition, even for those claimants where there was no

reconciliation and the cases had to be processed, as clearly shown by the results of the project, with women becoming aware and with clearer problems once receiving family counselling services, the judges would be in a much better position in declaring their verdict as the court hearings would be smoother and faster.

To establish rapport with the judges, for instance, as suggested by the external stakeholders interviewed addressing their needs would have facilitated their greater involvement. Through tailor-made and user-friendly training modules in the form of CDs, socio-psychological factors that contribute to the problems encountered by women could have been identified and presented to them. Providing them with sample case studies on the causes and effects of behavioural patterns of young couples could have been another source that would also help them analyse and research the cases in a much more effective manner. Such strategies to motivate the judges becoming proactively involved in supporting family counselling services, therefore, need to be addressed under future initiatives. These linkages would have increased project efficiency, coherence and impact, as pointed out both by the FCC authorities and the family counsellors alike.

The minimal involvement of other key potential partners and external stakeholders had also direct bearing on the post pilot phase of the project impeding project's direct sustainability. Due to the prevailing considerations and reciprocal sensitivities amongst partners when earmarking of Rs. 200,000,000 were made directly and contracted one of the family counselling firms that served voluntarily under the project for a three months period for the post pilot phase, the project authorities inclusive of Dr. Shaditalab or ODVV were bypassed and not involved or informed. An agreement was reached with FCC through the Welfare Organisation by the Centre for Women and Family Affairs (CWFA) and the firm selected with the condition to work in such a manner that not to associate with the pilot project, once contracted. In fact similar arrangements were also supported by CWFA for a unit to be established in the FCC No. 2 located in Vanak to provide family counselling to the women there with another firm that was not even affiliated to the project. While these instances and the recent arrangements to have family counselling within all FCCs are clear indication of the achievements of the project and in a sense proving its success, the fact that the project authorities (both the project director and ODVV) were completely bypassed is a major lesson learnt calling for remedial actions in the follow up phases finding mechanisms involving to the extent possible all the present and potential partners in the future schemes.

Better criteria for selection of volunteers; tailor-making and needs-based training; and systematic and participatory work programming were amongst the other implementation constraints also discussed under Chapter III. Other project efficiency considerations were issues related to monitoring that though undertaken by the project director and FCC authorities was not referred to in the project's Terms of Reference or the Concept Note. Also, there was no documentation of the proceedings of the monitoring review meetings held that could have been an excellent reference document for the project evaluation. It could have also serve as an excellent tool to keep both UNFPA and the donor informed and up to date as they were not permitted due to the prevailing sensitivities to get proactively involved in the monitoring process. A more high profile role by these key players considered essential to enhance project efficiency and is the lesson learnt for the future course.

Another issue was the way in which evaluation was considered as sporadic and not a process. This hindered project efficiency impacting effectiveness of sustainability of results. Also, the timing of the evaluation, particularly the second one was not efficiently planned (i.e. three months after project completion) as FCC management was changed and the required institutional memory and momentum of what was really achieved was more or less lost.

Similar to work programming, other issues covered under Chapter III were that administrative coordination and alternative communication mechanisms. Regarding reporting, reference was made to the two substantive reports prepared in a timely manner by Dr. Shaditalab as another indicator of project's efficiency. The reports of the project, therefore, though in Farsi (Persian), are excellent reference materials for the justification, formulation and implementation of the future projects in the area of family counselling and joint activities with the judiciary. These reports could be used as the working document by all those involved in family counselling. Once translated, the report on the study together with the evaluation report can serve as starting point in documenting achievements of project activities. Also, regarding timeliness, the project began and completed more or less as initially planned.

The issue of cost efficiency was also addressed under Chapter III. The fact that the family counsellors rendered their services on a voluntary basis with no fees charged was a plus in terms of cost efficiency and as a direct indication that costs were reduced substantially. Regarding budgeting

concerns as they impact cost efficiency, however, it seems that a closer examination of the fees charged for the various activities, particularly the preparation of the training modules and the amount budgeted for the provision of training were essential as they seemed over-estimated. Other cost efficiency issues such as awarding volunteers; apportionments of the budget as there are no standard figures to be used (i.e. over-estimation in parts such as the cost of the training module and the insufficient overhead funding for ODVV); and more or less timely releasing of funds were among the other areas covered under Chapter III as well.

In order to evaluate the project effectiveness and assess the potential impact answering the overall question of “What to do to enhance and sustain results”, Chapter IV presented the findings and conclusion through provision of self-explanatory outcomes of SWOT analysis undertaken by the internal stakeholders and as reflected in the completed questionnaires. Also, the qualitative review of success and the related satisfactory rating for the quantitative impact of project performance were provided under Chapter IV. Presentation of some best practices (attached as Annex VI) together with the quantitative rating on effectiveness of the project and achievements demonstrated and discussed under this chapter reconfirmed the satisfactory rating of the project results.

Chapter IV also cover the qualitative assessment of project success which called for satisfactory rating designated due to the following reasons: “Everyone being responsible for the tasks designated, took a stake, and committed to what the project expected of them.” “Doing the best they can; taking steps towards teamwork, enhancing ownership and greater commitment to achieve success (e.g. networking with different organisations, using small groups to distribute work by family counsellors, participatory evaluation exercise, etc.) along with awareness raising (e.g. regarding the crisis within the institution of the family) that created an enabling environment to undertake innovative approaches and preparing the cultural basis conducive to use family counselling to the extent possible during the course of project operation.”

In addition, “advocating with the authorities towards the need of taking stock of this major gap (i.e. family counselling at all levels namely, pre-marital, during marriage and post divorce); to enable young couple make better choices after marriage undergoing counselling [as was provided under the project] to cope with their problems; and to use their experience as lessons learnt were amongst the major factors contributing to project success. This is not, however, neglecting the project’s limitations and constraints as well as the challenges ahead. The mere fact of being able to run for the first time in the country such an innovative programme, particularly after its re-orientation, sensitising the judiciary to the need of family counselling services is an achievement that needs to be commended and reflected under Chapter IV. Particularly, the support extended to the project after the pilot phase by CWFA through the Social Welfare Organisation is an outstanding achievement, though undertaken directly and without consultation with the project authorities. With enhanced partnership and greater use of family counselling mechanisms a big plus in addressing the crisis of the institution of the family has been made by the project.

For the qualitative assessment covered under Chapter IV, reconfirming the project’s overall satisfactory performance rating, different areas addressed under the scheme were highlighted including: Abuse (maltreatment) as the main cause (30.3%)² for women claiming *mehreyeh* concluding that the project was successful in addressing a wide array of cases covered under the claim for *mehreyeh* leading to divorce and effectively rendered services to the project beneficiaries, while fully recognising the limitations (i.e. loss of records for some 100 cases that were not properly recorded) and constraints associated with not being able to follow-up the cases after the beneficiaries received 3-4 sessions of counselling.

For instance, from the total number of cases/families that benefited from the project, accumulatively at least 1/3 of the cases namely (20%) that received family counselling services reached reconciliation and have no further follow-up while the files are not yet completely withdrawn. Another 11% of cases as completely “resolved/file withdrawn”. This brought the total number of cases to 31% who through the successful services rendered by the family counsellors to couples (both the wife and the husband) were able to reconcile and settle their cases. Even for those who have still maintained their cases and submitted them to settlement by the courts, their processing of their claimants were facilitated by the family counsellors as confirmed by the project beneficiaries. This, therefore, is another confirmation, in quantitative terms, of project achieving its objective with

² Based on the information provided by the project director subsequent to the presentation of the report, with further refining of the data even greater number of cases (e.g. some 37 %) have in fact decided to continue their marriage and keep their families together.

success by expediting the court processes. Putting number against these percentages, of the 540 cases handled, family counselling was extended to women, their husband, and children bringing the total number of people who received services close to 1,300 ($540 \times 2 = 1,080$ men and women + at least 200 children = 1,280 persons). In an overall quantitative assessment of the project performance, therefore, for the duration of the pilot phase (three months period) and the fact that there were 25 volunteer family counsellors who rendered their services by providing 3-4 counselling sessions free of charge to some 540 families inclusive of women, men and children (i.e. approx. 1,300 persons), the project overall satisfactory rating of performance marked under the qualitative assessment is fully reconfirmed under Chapter IV.

Chapter IV also covers the recommendations along the lines of suggestions and proposals made by the internal and external stakeholders and limited number of project beneficiaries and with due consideration of the findings and conclusion of the evaluation exercise. These recommendations were phased (e.g. short, medium and longer terms) with specific tasks based on lessons learnt from previous networking schemes as well.

Under the longer term vision of the project and for its future course (5-10 years) using a holistic approach, formal and legal establishment of a multi-purpose network facility with branches serving the family courts with professional male and female family counsellors was proposed. Here, designing capacity development programme and training and applied research packages to strengthen and sustain linkages with the judges were also recommended while maintaining important and influential stakeholders' engagement and partnership. Systematic advocacy programme on greater use of family counselling with tailor-made and user-friendly messages targeting different groups was another longer term recommendation.

For the medium term (within 3-5 years), the network is proposed to be registered with the Ministry of Interior and Social Welfare Organisation and work in a transparent manner accountable to the partner members, beneficiaries and the public at large selecting activities realistically and needs based using a stepwise approach to avoid overarching and generate unrealistic expectations. Addressing the issue of sustainability of human resources (e.g. family counsellors) through compensation schemes for their services by charging small fees was also suggested while accounting for those unable to cover the cost to receive services free of charge. The network headquarter is proposed to be located in the vicinity of the FCCs (e.g. near FCC1 in south of Tehran) with adequate counselling and training facilities and telephone for re-establishment of national hotlines [*Sedayeh Moshaver*] as well as play area/waiting room for accompanying children to stay while their family members are being received by the counsellors. Eventually the network is expected to have branches for each FCC.

Within this medium term, the setting up of various specialised task forces by the network mandated to provide various types of counselling inclusive of pre-marital, post marriage and post divorce focusing on areas such as "needs and capacity assessment" of the clientele, ways to tackle "gender based violence", "vocational-technical (VOTEC) training", "harm reduction of substance abuse" with the support of DICs, Social Welfare Clinics, and NGOs involved in demand/harm reduction as well as gender-focused CSOs were recommended as well. Accompanied by twinning arrangements and use of mentoring schemes to have chain of access to related expertises and resources (both in terms of financial and human), while maintaining independent identity at national, regional and international levels are amongst the other suggestions made for the medium term.

For the short-term follow-up initiatives and to achieve the vision specified for the future multi-purpose network, it is recommended for ODVV to initiate preparatory interim arrangements on an informal basis together with key partners identified under the present project as the main internal stakeholders to follow up with FCC No. 1 authorities, the family counselling units supported by CWFA as well as the judges. Furthermore, based on lessons learnt from other networks, it is proposed that such an initiative is launched with small but proactive committed members who genuinely feel the need for such a network to avoid large drop-out rate using team building and effective stakeholder analysis matrix at the beginning with frequent updating to maintain its validity, relevance and applicability of the network.

The involvements of prime external stakeholders in addition to FCCs such as the Social Welfare Organisation and the Municipality as potential partners are proposed to be approached, but at a later date (e.g. to start small while maintaining a much broader and multi-sectoral vision) while maintaining partnership and establish new linkages with key internal and external stakeholders with due consideration to pre-marital counselling (e.g. advocate increasing of the duration of present mandatory pre-marital counselling from present two-weeks to at least one month and for services are

rendered at the pilot phase preferably at cultural centres affiliated to the municipality as a prerequisite preparatory activity for the establishment of the network).

Using the capacity development paradigm of the three inner-circle model is recommended ensuring network sustainability focusing on the “being” layer of the paradigm (e.g. identity, values, mission and vision) to be formulated through consensus and with the full participation of the small group of committed team members. Other layers of the paradigm such as “doing” (e.g. activities) and “relating” both with those who are supporting or against the network and linkages and expanded partnerships with donors, regional, international agencies, etc.) are recommended to be addressed only after a fully committed small team is in-place. With a win-win approach, once consensus reached on the mission and vision of the network and by systematic strategic planning, work programming, monitoring and evaluation specific roles and functions of each team member is proposed to be identified. Only then, establishment and sustaining linkage are proposed to be made with the family counselling units now operational within the FCCs, DICs, legal aids clinics, volunteer lawyers’ network, Conflict Resolution Centre affiliated to the Bar Association, and gender-focussed CSOs, income generating cooperatives/CBOs, and charities working at the grassroots.

Having efficient fund raising mechanisms in place along with effective and realistic financial and work programming and budgeting utilising multi-sectoral package inclusive of national and international donors and government agencies as appropriate and on the basis of systematic resource mobilisation schemes in a systematic manner using participatory means with professional facilitation techniques and through consensus building approaches on a regular six-monthly basis. Regular reviews of the performance of the network using both qualitative and quantitative success indicators for monitoring, evaluation and self assessments considered essential and hence proposed. In addition, to assess and enhance impact, up to date and routine follow-up mechanisms were suggested as well while maintaining anonymity and confidentiality in line with counsellors' code of conduct.

Conducting demand-driven short term courses and need-specific training programmes for various target groups (e.g. students, young couples, youth and parents) focusing on areas such as basic life skills, conflict resolution, empathy, and adolescence counselling as well as other training areas are proposed as well as and when required. In addition, as the training for the social workers initially intended under the project was not carried out and such training is considered essential, finding mechanisms to enhance their capacities is suggested. Using demand driven and user-friendly training modules to facilitate linkage with the judges and for their greater involvement to enhance work performance is another areas of training proposed. For the families and specifically women clienteles well-targeted video clips on ways to approach the courts, for example supplemented with easy to use and simple/short brochures that were also to be developed under the project is recommended as such information is still not easily accessible for most women clients.

Undertaking targeted, applied and practical research studies that are need-based to maintain the network function in line with prevailing conditions and with required flexibility to enhance effectiveness of the network is another area suggested to be initiated under the short term recommendations together with the development of a data bank, roster of potential sources and having help desk through website to enhance greater outreach.

As a part of the overall advocacy programme, summary results of the evaluation exercise along with the main points of the report to be presented to the Gender Theme Group under the chairpersonship of UNFPA and to be shared with other key stakeholders such as the related Commissions of the *Majlis*³ as well as the CWFA and the Judiciary as a whole were also amongst the recommendation proposed by the UNFP Representative at the meeting presenting the draft evaluation report to the project's prime stakeholders and agreed by consensus to be included in the final evaluation report. Such advocacy dialogue will facilitate greater linkages and lay the grounds for the longer-term linkages and partnership required to sustain project impact.

³ Parliament

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO THE EVALUATION

Overview of the Project

The original objective of the project “Training Advocates on Family Court Procedures” or *Hamyaran Dadgahe Khanevadeh* (collaborators of the family court) as it was entitled in Persian was “to train volunteers as social workers selected from university students (especially women’s studies group) and members of NGOs on court procedures including the know-how on completion of forms, filing of requests and complaints; and the various types of documentation, evidence and confessions required for such procedures”⁴. This was expected to expedite the lengthy and over-burdening processes of filing of cases by women going through the courts. As reflected in the terms of reference of the project, the activities were to be implemented in three stages (i.e. conducting of a research study, formulation of a module for training advocates to commence the pilot phase, and undertaking project evaluation).

In the course of conducting the research study (i.e. 1st stage), it became evident that women who referred to the family court went there because they did not know where else to turn. On the basis of this finding, the activities of the remaining stages of the project were changed to train 25 volunteers to counsel women instead. This also indirectly helped women to go through the courts more expeditiously as they were more knowledgeable about the steps that were to be taken.

Objectives, Focuses and Approaches of the Evaluation

The objectives of the evaluation were threefold: Assess the project in terms of **relevance** of design, **project efficiency**, and **effectiveness** - potential impact. For each of these objectives, the areas of focuses of the evaluation were specified in the form of questions to be addressed. A series targeted questions for each of the internal and external stakeholders as well as the project target groups/beneficiaries were devised accordingly (details attached as Annex I).

Methodology & Tools used for the Evaluation

In line with the detailed terms of references (TORs) agreed upon by consensus⁵ for the evaluation exercise and as specified in the Project Terms of Reference, participatory⁶, learning-oriented, flexible and result-based approaches were used while also reflecting the main processes of project implementation and performance. Using such approaches, the evaluation was privileged in involving the intended users of the results of the evaluation, namely the internal stakeholders such as the project director, Dr. Shaditalab, ODVV⁷, project staff from ODVV, UNFPA together with the donor⁸ as well as most of the volunteer family counsellors. The authorities of the Family Counselling Complex No. 1 were the only external stakeholder involved in the evaluation exercise. Furthermore, in spite of the original intention to proactively involve the target group/beneficiaries in the evaluation exercise, only seven of unsuccessful cases were accessible and participated.

The methodology of the evaluation was through combining quantitative and qualitative techniques used with triangulation to cross-check the results. These are detailed below:

- Desk study of all the related documentations both in English and Farsi (Persian) that were made available to the evaluator;

⁴ “Annex A. Training Advocates on Family Court Procedures – Project Terms of Reference”

⁵ Prior to the signing of the contract, UNFPA took the initiative to hold a meeting with the participation of the majority of key internal stakeholders to discuss the TORs for the evaluation exercise.

⁶ Page 2 of “Annex A. Training Advocates on Family Court Procedure – Project Terms of Reference”

⁷ ODVV=Organization for Defending Victims of Violence

⁸ British Embassy

- Questionnaires that were formulated for the evaluation and completed by the internal stakeholders and a small number of the beneficiaries available in line with the TORs (details Annex I);
- Focussed group discussions sessions that were held with different groups of internal stakeholders and one session with the beneficiaries;
- Workshops conducted with the internal stakeholders, inclusive of the volunteer family counsellors and those who were responsible for management/ implementation, administration, logistics and support staff as well as UNFPA and the donor; and
- Structured interviews with ODVV management and external stakeholders (details of the questions in Annex I).

While ample information was gathered using the above participatory techniques to undertake the qualitative analysis, there was no success criteria identified in the project proposal for measuring effects and potential impact of results either in the project proposal or during the course of project implementation. Of course, based on the information provided by the donor, the project was part of an umbrella project entitled “Judicial Cooperation” that has success indicators. However, even these indicators were merely process-oriented and defined in terms of successful completion of each strand of activity envisaged under the project. This issue was partially addressed during the evaluation exercise and information was obtained from both internal and external stakeholders on how they defined success.

For the quantitative analysis, there was no access to the data or files of the FCC as they were considered as official court documents and hence confidential. Fortunately, the summary report of project results prepared by Dr. Shaditalab, with the assistance of ODVV and the counsellors, had included detailed data on about 440⁹ out of the 540 cases of the project beneficiaries. For the remaining 100 cases there was no detailed background information available primarily due to unavailability of records subsequent closure of cases or not completing the questionnaires that were distributed to the project beneficiaries at the time they had received family counselling. These 100 cases, therefore, were not included under the quantitative analysis.

With a futuristic outlook and through participatory means, the activities outputs and to the extent possible the effects/impacts of the project were reviewed. This review was also participatory and was facilitated through assigning many tasks to small groups of key internal stakeholders in the course of the workshop identifying the issues of the present situation and use the lessons learnt in finding the path for tackling constraints in the future. The external stakeholders also provided their views on lessons learnt and the future course of the project as well. In a sense, the evaluation contributed to self-assessment of project results. Such a method avoided, to the extent possible, “individual fault finding”.

At the workshops, held for three consecutive days, the main problem addressed by the project was identified analysing its causes and effects by using the “problem tree analysis” tool. The main problem identified was also re-checked and confirmed during the course of the focussed group discussions (FGDs) and structured interviews in evaluating the relevance of project design. The “analysis of stakeholders’ matrix” was the tool used in mapping “who is who” and in identifying the roles under the different tasks undertaken for project operation. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis was instrumental in clarifying project results/ effects and potential impact. Based on these findings, the path to be undertaken for the future course was jointly identified and recommended accordingly (List of participants in the evaluation exercise attached as Annex II).

Using consensus building techniques, the evaluation enhanced teamwork amongst the partners and with the high commitments of all participants which were acknowledged and commended by all initial steps to greater ownership of evaluation results were taken. This

⁹The quantitative analysis was on the basis of information provided by the beneficiaries some of whom did not respond to all of the questions. Therefore, the total sample used ranged from 410-440.

was confirmed by the feedback and responses received. Being fully involved through structured interviews, the external stakeholders from the FCC authorities also reconfirmed their support for the project. Thus, the director of project, the administration and the staff of ODVV, the volunteer family counsellors, UNFPA and the donor as well as the FCC authorities together with a limited number of the beneficiaries available genuinely contributed to the evaluation and its outcomes.

The main role of the evaluator, therefore, was not one of ‘fault finding’, but to make the results more sustainable and practical, serving the dual function of an independent evaluation consultant who also served as the facilitator in the course of the evaluation exercise. This proved highly effective since the initial apprehension of the participants was soon replaced with frank assessments and keen interest to build the basis for continuation of activities and by finding mechanisms to improve impact highlighting on lessons learnt.

Timing and Scope of the Evaluation:

Based on the initial contract, the evaluation was supposed to be completed by end August 2007. However, due to unavailability of key internal stakeholders, namely the project director and five of the family counsellors (e.g. two leaders and three volunteers) who were on mission abroad together with the managing director of ODVV, the initial timing for the workshops were postponed. Also, the presence of the ODVV managing director was considered essential to arrange for the structured interviews with the FCC authorities and due to his busy schedule, these were only completed around mid-September. As a result, the contract was initially extended by one month up to end of September. The actual timing for drafting and finalisation of the report, however, had to be further rescheduled due to prior commitments of the evaluator during last weeks of September up to 3rd week of October.

The scope of the evaluation was defined in line with answering four broad questions:

- i) “Where we were before the project started”- Reviewing the problem addressed and relevance of project design. (Chapter II)
- ii) “What is the present situation/where is the project now”-Assessing the efficiency of the Project Performance (Chapter III)
- iii) “How the project got to where we are now”-examining the strategies and mechanisms that were used in the course of project design and operation (Chapter III).
- iv) “What to do to enhance and sustain results”-Summary Findings and conclusions on effectiveness of results and recommendations for follow up phase to enhance potential impact in the future (Chapter IV).

Limitation of Evaluation

There were primarily three main limitations. These were:

1. Lacking follow-up information on results and limited access to beneficiaries: While the Chief Magistrate¹⁰ who has taken up his position recently considers follow-up as the only way to assess project success and impact, during the course of project, the counterparts from the judiciary advised against it and instructed family counsellors not to make any contacts (e.g. exchange telephone numbers) or any forms of follow-up with their cases after completion of counselling. In effect, follow-up was considered as ‘intrusion in internal family affairs’. This impeded assessment of project effects and impact.
In addition, as there were no success indicators identified, in spite of all out effort by ODVV to get at least 10% of the direct beneficiaries, namely 50 persons, they were only able to get seven persons (6 women and 1 man) out of the total number (i.e. 540) project beneficiaries to come to the focussed group discussion session designed to assess success/impact of the project. Furthermore, as these were the unsuccessful

¹⁰ Mr. Cheraghian, Chief Magistrate

cases and were accessible only because they needed additional counselling support, they were not a representative sample and in fact biased. However, their inputs on what should be done to improve the counselling were instrumental and better than not having any feedback.

2. Inaccessibility of the non-judiciary external stakeholders: Except the authorities of the Family Court Complex (FCC) No. 1 (i.e. key authorities who are presently working there as well as two of the senior authorities who had supported the project and now working in different courts), interviews with the other key non-judiciary external stakeholders (e.g. Social Welfare Organisation, the Centre for Women and Family Affairs and the Municipality) could not be arranged by ODVV.

Fortunately, within the FCC No. 1, while the Chief Magistrate changed three times during the course of project implementation, interviews were arranged with the present and the previous magistrate who had been recently changed as well as a deputy chief who has been moved to Khozestan¹¹. Also two of the present deputies who were directly involved throughout project implementation proactively participated and provided valuable information both on the project and what should be done in the future.

3. Lack of quality 'success' indicators: While as per TORs of the evaluation, assessment of effectiveness and impact were to be made, there was no reference at the planning, formulation, approval, implementation or assessment of the results, to qualitative indicators to measure success of project performance. Therefore, with no follow-up mechanism in place, the quality of successes in project results could not be directly assessed.

As a remedial measure, the indirect assessments of qualitative success were made, to the extent possible, through obtaining feedback and relying on the responses of the family counsellors on actual, but selected cases they recollected and specified in their responses to the questionnaire. Also, through focussed group discussions with the of beneficiaries, though very limited in number and from the unsuccessful cases, they provided their views defining what could be considered as the qualitative success indicators to measure the achievement of results of services rendered and how project performance could be improved.

¹¹ Kozestan is the oil-rich province in south of Iran.

CHAPTER II: PROBLEM ADDRESSED AND RELEVANCE OF PROJECT DESIGN

Within the scope of the evaluation, chapter II concentrates on answering the question of “where we were before the project started” through identification and analysis of the main problem addressed elaborating on its root causes and effects as it relates to the beneficiaries targeted. Based on this “problem tree analysis”, the design of the project in terms of relevance in addressing the main problem and its prioritised root causes and effects as identified by the internal, external stakeholders and limited number of beneficiaries will be reviewed; while evaluating the clarity and adequacy of the activities undertaken¹².

Overview:

Quoting the Director-General of the Prevention of Social Vulnerability of the Social Welfare Organisation, an article in a daily newspaper published recently¹³ provided an alarming data that the divorce rates are fast growing. Based on latest figures, divorce rates are now far exceeding the rates of marriages. Namely, there are 12% more divorces than marriages per annum. Combined with the increased age of both women and men particularly among the more educated, the rates of marriages are also falling adding to the crisis as well with the average age of women getting married going up to 27.9 and for men to 29.7. “Based on recent findings, the divorce rates are much higher amongst young couples during the first five years of marriage”. The data gathered under the project also confirm this finding as more than half (52%) of the cases for divorce were within the first five years of marriage.

Main Problem Addressed by the Project:

“Crisis within the institution of the family”: In the course of “problem tree analysis” undertaken in the participatory evaluation workshops and in the course of discussions and key structured interviews, “crisis within the institution of the family” was agreed by consensus, among both the internal and external stakeholders, as the main problem addressed by the project. It was considered as the most relevant problem that deserved to be addressed as this is the critical cause for many of the social issues that are negatively impacting the lives of almost all Iranians. The research study conducted under the project also confirms this finding indicating that of the 92,490 cases in 2004 and 61,811 cases in 2005 processed by Family Court Complex No.1, the majority were either related directly to divorce or they were claims for *mehreyeh*¹⁴ which in the majority of cases ends with divorce respectively¹⁵.

Identifying causes and effects: With the ‘problem-tree’ analysis, the root causes and effects of the identified key problem -- “crisis within the institution of the family” was identified by the participants in the evaluation exercise. Several root causes within the socio-psychological, cultural and legal context were prioritised within the diagram. These were:

¹² It should be noted that while in the TORs of the evaluation there is a reference to evaluating the adequacy of the outputs produced, there were no reference to outputs in the project proposal or any subsequent reports. There is only reference to three stages of activities, inclusive of the research, training and pilot activities initially in advocacy and eventually on family counselling which are thoroughly evaluated.

¹³ Hamshahri, 19th Tir 1386 (10 July 2007) pp.5 & 27

¹⁴ Under Islamic Law (*Sharia* – Jurisprudence), at the time that marriage is performed, an amount of money/gold or property is specified and reflected on the marriage certificate as *Mehreyeh*. This is usually a substantive amount, which serves as a financial backing/support for the woman particularly in case of divorce. The *Mehreyeh* can be demanded at any time of the marriage as a right and has to be paid by the husband any time after issuance of the marriage contract/certificate inclusive and prior to divorce. However, as pointed out in the research conducted by Dr. Shaditalab under the project, “while by law and principles of *Sharia* it [*Mehreyeh*] is a right, the reality in the society is different thing. *Mehreyeh* is a right that a woman should not demand; the day that she says one word about it, it is the end of matrimony” (p. 86). Sometimes, women who have no other alternative due to maltreatment, forego their *Mehreyeh* just to get a divorce. In a sense, it is used to get the husband agree to the divorce. By law, however, if not forfeited and the husband refuses or is unable to pay the amount, upon the official claimant by the wife processed through the family courts, she has the power to make him pay or otherwise he would be sent to prison. High amounts of *Mehreyeh* (e.g. sometimes as much as 1,000 gold coins) become a major issue with great number of husbands going to prison as they were unable to pay. A recent bill calls for the amount to be reduced to “what the husband can realistically afford”.

¹⁵ Shaditalab, “Study of the *Hamyan Dadghahaye Khanevadeh* Project”, p.37.

- 1) The society under going a stage of transition from traditional to modern with all its socio-psychological, cultural and legal repercussions
- 2) Economic factors¹⁶ (e.g. unemployment, inflation, etc.)
- 3) Women awareness of their rights as impacted by male supremacy and gender discrimination
- 4) Outdated norms, values and particularly laws lagging behind societal practices
- 5) Inappropriate conditions in choosing a spouse (i.e. through arranged marriages with marrying a relative, and or through a member of the family introducing the candidate) not giving enough time for couples to get to know each other and socialise
- 6) Inadequate support policies, plans and programmes (e.g. support policies for women's welfare and employment)

Giving weight to the causal factors specified above, the one that received the highest or selected as the priority root cause was 'the society going through the stage of transition' from traditional to modern. It was agreed by consensus that this cause impacted all the other root causes identified as well. The main reason for this prioritisation was the fast pace of urbanisation and migration from villages and small communities to big mega urban cities, with more and more nucleus family structure replacing the traditional extended family.

As a consequence, strong family ties and connections of the old times are also withering away at a fast pace. The "advice" given by the elderly folks (i.e. grand fathers and grand mothers practiced under the traditional extended family structure) or as commonly known '*Rish Sefidhi*' [the white beard – referring to the elderly men] and '*Ghis Sefidi*' [the white hair of women – referring to the elder women of the family] within the patriarchy structure of the extended family system are no longer easily available as was the case in the past to intervene and serve as "word of wisdom" to rectify family feuds and stop divorces.

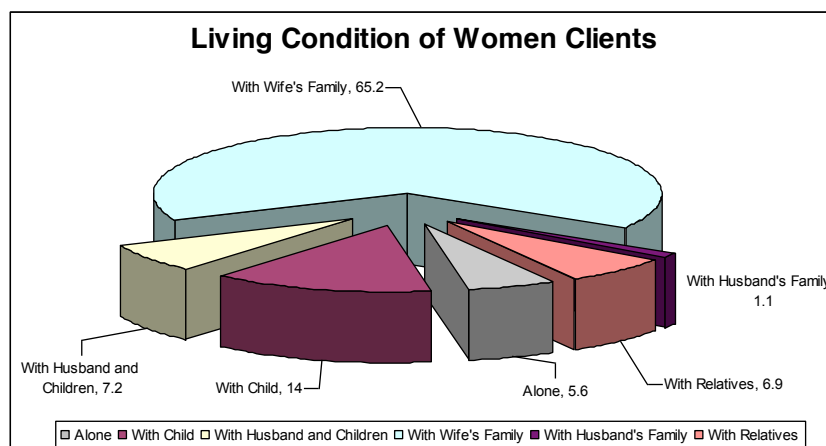
Outdated norms, values, and particularly laws lagging behind societal practices: Along the latter point, there were also references to the reasons why such traditional norms and values and societal practices are no longer applicable. The major reason given was that the elderly "advices", tended to preach "patience and endurance"¹⁷ as the prime virtue for women. This is no longer accepted by the new generation, particularly young women. While all the internal and external stakeholders agreed on the need for appropriate "family counselling" as the mechanism that should be in place, they also recognised that most of the traditional 'advices' were male-domineering and as a consequence are being refused slowly but surely in this era of transition.

Furthermore, the paternal type of protection that was practiced under the traditional extended family structure could no longer continue as the needs have changed and people in general and women particularly are becoming much more aware of their rights--the third main cause identified to be contributing to the crisis in the institution of the family. Concurrently, the paternal and male-domineering protection is replaced by caring usually practiced by the women's relatives who at times are forced to protect their daughters as the only way out. This was also reflected in the cases that were covered under the project (Chart 1 below) when the husband was unable to provide for his family. As reflected in this chart, over 65% of project beneficiaries facing family problems were living with their own family and an almost 7% with their relatives with an accumulative figure of over 72%.

Chart 1

¹⁶ Economic factors were identified as both causes and effects of the crisis within the institution of the family.

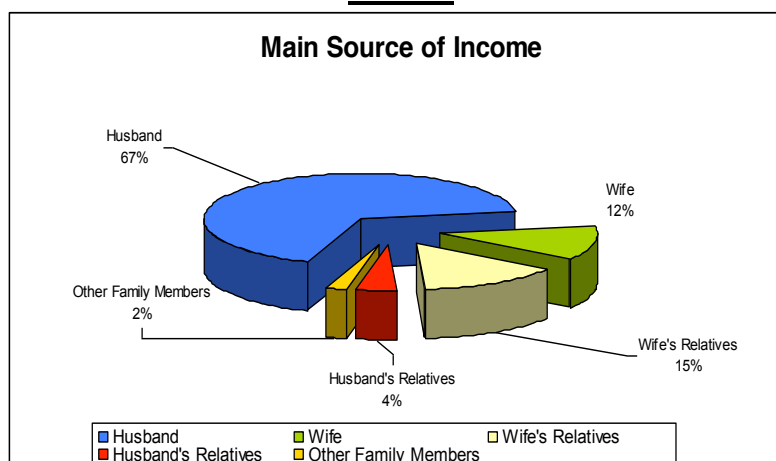
¹⁷ Most famous and common male domineering 'elderly' advice given at the time of marriage to brides was "Go with your white gown and return with your *kafan* (white cotton cloth used to wrap the dead for burial)".



The magnitude of pressure placed on the wife or the wife's family becomes even more acute if the percentages of those who serve as the main provider or source of income are also added to the above figures (please see Chart 2 on main source of income). This heavy burden on the family of the wife is illustrative of several points reconfirming the analysis of the main problem and its root causes and crisis at hand that are listed below:

- The extended family system of living with the husband's family is no longer practiced as only 1.1 percent of the women clients under the project lived with the family of their husband.
- 5.6% of the women were living alone and another 14% with children bringing the total to over 20%, an instance that was unheard of under the traditional family system. Another indication of the society undergoing transition with more or more nucleus family structure in place.
- In addition, the traditional stereotyped belief that "men are the sole breadwinner" is no longer the case as 12% of clientele indicated the sources of income by 'wife' and 15% or by 'the wife's relatives', bringing the total to 27%.

Chart 2



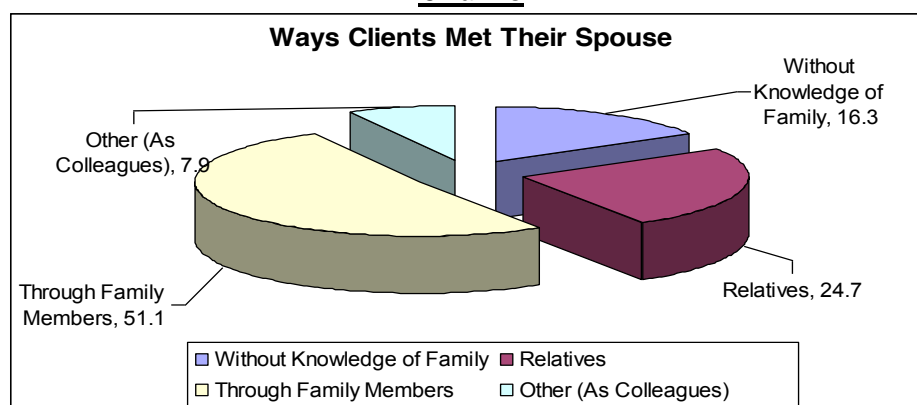
Premarital counselling the way out for women at risk: These women are at serious risk of becoming severely vulnerable as they feel increasingly pressured by feeling and being unwanted by their own families and relatives that they are forced to go back to as they themselves are poverty-thickened and not even in a position to financially sustain themselves put away their daughters. In the words of the Deputy Chief Magistrate Mr. Amirabadi, "Even if 95% of these families do in fact support their daughters what about the remaining 5%? We have to find a way to remedy the problem before it happens". As suggested by Mr. Amirabadi, "Pre-marital counselling is the only way out". Also, as reflected in the report of the results of the project¹⁸, because of the heavy burden that is now placed on the family/relatives of the wife, "while Iranians generally consider having a daughter as a

¹⁸ Dr. Shaditalab P. 17

blessing [*rahmat*], more and more are finding them as great headaches/inconveniences [*dardesar*]”. In short as fully illustrated in the above charts, with no socio-legal protection (i.e. pre-marital counselling), laws that are lagging behind societal practices, and inadequate support policies, plans and programmes (causes no. 4 and 6 identified above by the participants), the institution of the family is undergoing a major crisis.

Increased social vulnerability at much younger age: “Even if they find a way out by going to family courts and even getting a divorce, after their families are broken-up, for some of these women, there is no alternative but to get whatever they can to keep alive”, as was explained by the Deputy Chief Magistrate Mr. Amirabadi. “It becomes a matter of survival. While there are no official estimate available of the impediments caused by divorce and its role on increasing social vulnerability, due to economic despair, some women are reported to be forced to become ‘street girls’¹⁹ as their only means of subsistence. There are even some extreme instances of suicide among the more acute cases”. This was also confirmed by some of participants in the evaluation exercise who as volunteer counsellors, working with gender-focused NGOs, have themselves handled similar cases.

Chart 3



Inappropriate conditions in choosing a spouse: Another important cause identified was the predominance of traditional ways of choosing a spouse and not getting to know each other prior marriage. In his encounter with the clients, the Deputy Chief Magistrate Mr. Amirabadi said that the couples really do not know about their partners and what is expected of them when they enter marriage which is again an indication of the importance of pre-marital counselling. “A husband who is an extrovert is not likely to get along with an introvert wife”.

As reflected in the above chart, over 50% of women who were the beneficiaries of this project chose their spouse and met them through the means of traditional arranged marriages or similar to what has been practiced in the past. Another 25% married their relatives. However, again as the sign of the country going through a transition, some 16% met their spouse themselves and without the knowledge of their families. In fact, based on the report of the results of the project, almost the same percentage indicated that their families were even against their marriage.²⁰ Added to this figure, almost 8% met their spouse at the place of their work (as colleagues).

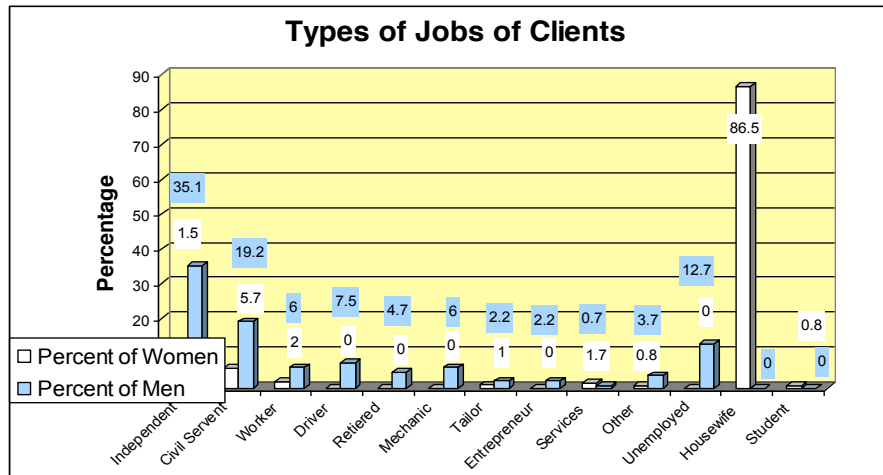
The data further reconfirmed the root causes identified by the participants as contributing factors to the crisis within the institution of the family highlighting:

- i) While the traditional ways of meeting spouse is still being practiced by the majority of women, there are also new trends towards changes as accumulatively over $\frac{1}{4}$ of the women met their husband without the knowledge of their families or as colleagues (cause No. 1: “being in the stage in transition”); and
- ii) Either ways were inappropriate in choosing their spouse since irrespective of whether following the traditional path or choosing their own husband by themselves, they in fact encountered major family conflicts (cause No. 5).

¹⁹The term sex workers or prostitution is not used by any of the officials and only “street girls” is used by inference instead.

²⁰ Dr. Shaditalab, “Results of *Hamyaran Dadgahe Khanevadeh* Project”, pp. 17-18.

Chart 4



Unemployment and its negative impact: While Chart 4 depicts that only 12.7% of the husbands were reported as unemployed, it should be noted that over 35% were listed as “independent” which is an overall term used for having short-term ad hoc jobs and sometimes a reflection of hidden unemployment. In comparing this figure to the data provided in Chart 2 reflecting the percentages of husbands who are main source of income in the family (67%), a different of some 20% between those who are claimed to be employed (about 87%) and those who are the main source of income for their families (67%) becomes apparent. Presumably, many of those husbands reported as having “independent” jobs were in fact unemployed or did not have secured jobs as many clearly were not able to support their families.

As such, based on the data gathered under the project, it becomes evident that the second major cause identified by the participants in the evaluation exercise, namely “economic factors such as unemployment” is also clearly a prime factor in high divorce rates. This in itself calls for new supportive policies and laws to facilitate women taking a much more active productive role to enable them together with their husbands to maintain their families together.

Furthermore, almost 90% of the project beneficiaries were housewives. Of course, this figure, similar to the cases of unemployment reported by men as “independent” also includes those who worked in what is considered as menial jobs and thus, not reported (e.g. working as servants). With over 35% of the husbands also reported as having “independent” jobs lacking the required skills²¹ and based on Chart 4 above, and over 12% of women serving as the main source of income for their families (Chart 2), the urgency in having greater supportive policies and programmes to empower young couples becomes apparent. Through employment generation and effecting engendered capacity development schemes enhancing their vocational and technical skills, both men and women would be in a much better position to tackle their problems of greater social vulnerability (e.g. poverty).

In summary and with reviewing the finding of the root causes, not only the present project is justified and its relevance confirmed, but it also clearly demonstrates the need to proactively involve and establish partnership to have the support of those ministries and organisations that are directly addressing issues related to employment and welfare (e.g. Ministry of labour and Social Welfare Organisation) as key implementing partners under any future initiatives in this area. This was also identified by the internal stakeholders as a priority cause mentioned earlier (e.g. inadequate support policies for women welfare and employment).

The effects of the crisis within the institution of the family: In assessing the effects of such root factors causing the crisis in the institution of the family, the following were prioritised by both internal and external stakeholders who participated in the evaluation exercise:

- High divorce rates;

²¹ Dr. Shaditalab, p. 16.

- Feeling of insecurity by family members (women, men and children);
- Greater socio-psychological and emotional problems for men, women and children and its repercussions on having a healthy society in all dimensions (e.g. depression among women, vulnerability of children, personality complexes for both men and women; and emotional insecurity for all) and more stress/anxiety and less sense of happiness;
- Increased domestic violence; and
- Decreasing moral values with greater occurrence of polygamy and having extra marital affairs.

From these direct consequences or effects listed above, divorce received the highest weight and in a sense as the direct outcome of almost all the other effects considered critical and contributing to the crisis in the institution of the family. The so called emerging ‘nucleus family relations’, therefore, that has been affected by weakened family ties and as the normal Iranian way of life is encountering complex challenges some of which are deep-rooted and are critically threatening the society as a whole.

In short, as was agreed by most of the stakeholders, the reason for the main problem being addressed under the project, although not specified in the project proposal, namely “crisis within the family institution” mainly because of the society going through a transition period, with traditional values and norms that are no longer applicable and more or less outdated. Particularly due to the laws lagging behind societal practices as well as inappropriate supportive policies and programmes, there is a major gap as the extended family structure of the past is no longer desired or considered as workable solutions for the protection needed by young couples. The main effect of this major problem is high divorce rates and the claims made by women for *mehreyeh* which is an indirect way of approaching divorce, even amongst those whose marriage was arranged under the traditional approaches by family relatives or their own choice alike (reflected in Chart 3). Professional family counselling which is presently a gap is the only way out, therefore, to systematically replace the traditional male domineering ‘elderly advice’.

Slowly changing reluctance to go to family counsellors: In spite the evident need to get counselling services, it is not yet fully recognised and accepted in the Iranian society causing the gap between what is needed and what is valued as the norm. As explained by one of the volunteer family counsellors: “Probably one of the main reasons for family counselling not becoming fully institutionalised is the prevalence of culturally-based sensitivities towards sharing information and seeking counselling from anyone outside the family”. Thus, many couples are still not going to counsellors for help. This was confirmed by the beneficiaries who gave the following reason for their reluctance: “There are still many people who refuse to seek family counselling due to lack of trust”. However, “The reluctance to discuss and raise family-related issues with ‘outsiders’, is slowly changing and more and more women are beginning to seek ‘family counselling’ and professional help”.

For instance, as the sign of changes of such misconceptions was how during the short time that the project was being implemented more and more claimants sought the advice of family counsellors willingly. One of the volunteers gave the example that while working at FCC, many people who were in the corridors seeing us helping women came to us and asked for help. Even the staff working in the courts would come and introduce their relatives needing family counselling.” With more positive results and close maintenance of confidentiality being practiced under the family counselling profession, younger couples and especially younger women are expected to becoming more willing to seek professional counselling.

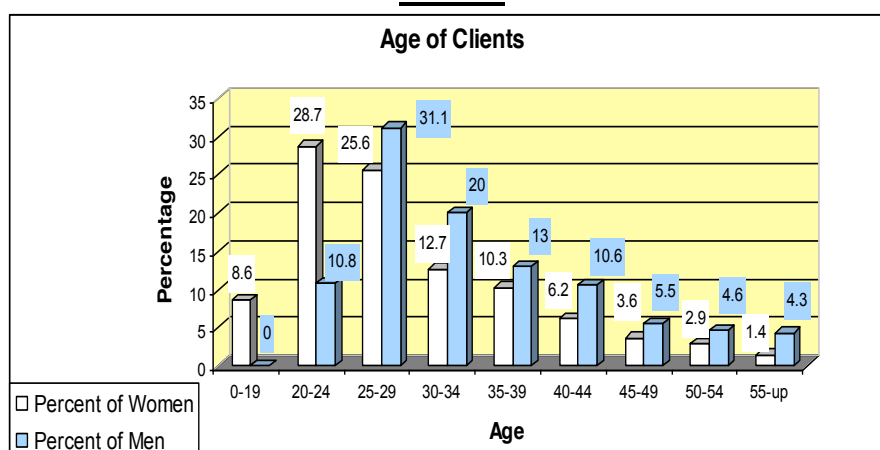
However, there is still a long way ahead. Particularly pre-marital counselling addressing both the practical and strategic needs of young couples and providing them with appropriate services still remains a major gap. “This is in spite of the very short duration pre-marital counselling (two-weeks training) that is even considered mandatory and as one of the prerequisites prior to getting a marriage certificate”, in the words of Deputy Magistrate.

Most notary publics consider even this mandatory counselling as a mere formality and in many instances ignore it by just confirming that the couple has undergone the training. In the meantime, therefore, due to lack of appropriate attention to family counselling, many ordinary family disputes that could be possibly resolved through proper counselling end up in family courts primarily by women (80% of the family courts clients are women).

Project remains highly relevant: Overall, “the crisis in the institution of the family” and the problems faced particularly by women that was addressed by the project therefore remains highly relevant. This is even mutually shared by the most senior authorities of the judiciary and policy makers alike. In fact, highest recognition is designated by the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran to maintenance and protection of the institution of the family that are also fully reflected in the national development plans.

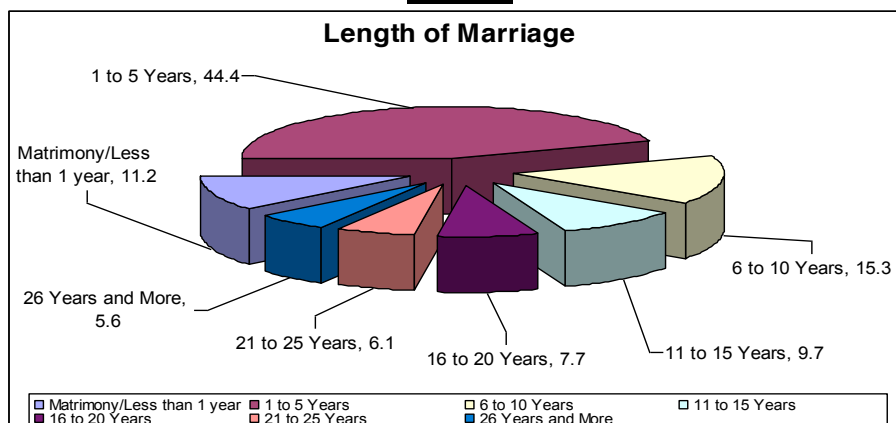
Present dilemma faced by women: Based on findings of the comprehensive study conducted under this project (Shaditalab, 2007), the majority of Iranian women who are affected most by the present family crisis, face a major dilemma under the present situation as they are left with no place to turn. This is particularly the case for the ones with little or no access to economic support -- poverty stricken women, not able to afford legal representation. For this purpose, the project was designed in a well targeted manner as the FCC No. 1 which was selected as project site located at the southern part of Tehran and well-placed to serve women from the lower strata. The situation of many of these women is alarming as they face an extreme vulnerable position and are left more or less helpless, not knowing what to do, who to consult or where to go and thus becoming desperate.

Chart 5



As mentioned in the article quoted earlier, confirmed by the volunteer family counsellors under the project, and clearly reflected in the above chart, the age groups of almost 60% of the women and over 40% of the men claiming for divorce were within the younger generation category (age groups of 20 – 30). This is alarming as both are in high risk vulnerability category (i.e. cases of run away women and young age among sex workers as well as fast growing high rate of addiction among young men).

Chart 6



The greatest victims of such high divorce rates, however, are women as there is no support mechanism for them during and after divorce as explained by the deputy chief magistrate. Charts no. 5 and 6 are clearly indicative of the fact that the greatest number of project beneficiaries were younger women and those who were married less than five years (44.4%). Charts 5 and 6 further prove the relevance in project design as the majority of the beneficiaries targeted under the project were in their younger age category and thus appropriately and correctly selected. An alarming finding as confirmed by the above figures (Chart 6) is that not only the majority of the cases (44.4%) were only married 1-5 years and almost 60% of women and over 40% of men within the age range of 20-30 that over 11% had only been legally entering matrimony (*aghd kardeh*)²² status less than a year and were not even yet officially living together.

Re-Establishing of Family Courts

Family courts as the only alternative, but with lengthy processes: In 1997 (1376), the experiences of the Iranian judicial system faced with so many family-related cases particularly during the last decade or so resulted in the necessity of revitalising and re-establishing the family courts²³. This was also partially due to the unsuitability of having mainly women claimants to go through regular courts that also handled different cases (e.g. criminal) concurrently processing family-related cases, as explained by the Chief Magistrate interviewed.

Paradoxical norms - Going to court still causing embarrassment: In passing, it is worth noting that in spite of the re-establishing of family courts due to their high demand, each being over-crowded with corridors full of women, and the majority of whom are confused, going from one room to the next as clearly seen and fully described in the comprehensive study conducted under the project, there are still paradoxical norms predominant against going to such places. So instead of being in fact a place to claim rights and as safe haven for justice, many are forced by their relatives, friends and their husbands to drop their case even if it is a valid one. Still going to courts is considered as taboo place by many people, irrespective of their family background and strata.

In the traditional up-bringing practices that have still their reminiscence amongst most Iranian, going to such places or having any forms of encounters with courts, the police, or the institutions associated with the law or even for demanding one's rights are greatly discouraged on the accounts that family-related issues are still considered as an 'internal' affair to be resolved 'within the family', similar to the reluctance to go to family counsellors. As was confirmed in the course of the focussed group discussions with the project beneficiaries and even the family counsellors themselves, going to such places (i.e. courts) are a cause for great embarrassment and shame because of involving 'outsiders' even if it is to get fully justified right to *Mehreyeh*, for example.

The paradox remains, therefore for many women of not having a place to go when encountering marital problems. Facing such a paradoxical situation, while in many instances women do in fact try to resolve their problems by themselves, they are not able to do so alone hence losing their self-confidence with the net impact of having fast growing numbers

²² In Iran the tradition of signing a matrimonial contract but not living together with the bride continuing to stay with her family and not having interpersonal relationship is still being commonly practiced. The couple stay more or less away from each other presumably for the groom to meet the prerequisites (e.g. getting a job, finding a place to live, etc.) specified by the bride's family.

²³ It is worthy to note that prior to the Islamic Revolution and in June 1966, the Family Protection Law was ratified. While it differed from its initial draft, the Law with its 24 articles aimed to officially secularise the registration of marriages and divorces (Articles 1-7) and some of the other articles of the Civil Code pertaining to the family. For instance, in the case of divorce, it was made mandatory to be settled through the family protection courts. Or in the case of custody (Article 9) it was left to parents to decide or with Article 13 leaving it to the courts to decide on the basis of the rights and interest of the children if they could not settle it themselves. Other articles addressed issues such as when it is appropriate for the courts to issue a decree for divorce without the presence of the husband and or wife (Article 11) and in the case of a man wanting to have a second wife, it was made mandatory for the husband to get a permit from his first wife (Article 14) and even if the permit was granted by the first wife, he had to prove that he is capable and financially able of being 'just' treating both equally. The other articles were regarding marriage and in line with the Civil Code. The Family Protection Law was abolished shortly after the Revolution.

of depressed wives within the nucleus family structure. In a sense there is no longer an elderly person to look up to and based on the prevailing common biases, “still not so many family counsellors to trust”. They are left with the only avenue to turn to at the time of need and amidst family feuds --that is the family courts. This is despite their commonly felt sense of apprehension and guilt.

Lengthy court processes: Now once getting there, the plight of these women is further hampered with over-lengthy court processes. Generally Iranians and particularly women are unaware of the legal steps that they have to take while in courts. They are mostly uninformed, confused, and in many cases ignorant, of how to make a claim and process their cases. This lack of knowledge usually creates a great deal of unnecessary complications both on the part of the claimant women and the judges, sometimes causing the court to review a single case several times and for the women claimant having to make repeated changes of their plaintiff going back and forth and as a consequence further delaying the processing of the cases unnecessarily.

In addition, there are other factors identified by the research study conducted under the project. One of the main reasons is the immensity of number of cases that have to be processed sometimes over 200 to 300 family-related claims per month by each judge. In addition, due to the variety of cases (14 general categories) that is being regularly handled by the judges as was mentioned by the judicial authorities and fully detailed in the comprehensive study undertaken under the project.

Over-worked judges not being able to review cases thoroughly: These impeding factors combined together is “for the courts not having adequate time to review and research each and every case thoroughly”, as mentioned by the Deputy Chief Magistrate. Particularly, there is inadequate attention to more complex and long-lasting socio-psychological impacts on the families as a whole and women in particular. The mere fact that small children who are forced to accompany their mother, as she has no place to leave them while going through, being scared and restless throughout the long ordeal and in many cases seeing their parents fighting each other, eventually becoming ‘children of divorce’, are detrimental for all as clearly point out by Dr. Shaditalab in the report of the research study and the summary of project results.

In summary, therefore, having selected family courts and its lengthy processes as the main entry point for project intervention is clearly justified and was an adequate decision that further confirms relevance of project’s design.

CHAPTER III: ASSESSMENT OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT, IMPLEMENTATION & COST EFFICIENCY

Project efficiency was evaluated in terms of management and implementation as well as reviewing selected aspects of financial and project administration together with cost efficiency considerations. The latter were assessed as regards to budgeting/costing of project activities, timely allocations of fund and delivery. Addressing “what is the present situation or where the project is now at the time of completion”, an overall review of how the project idea was formulated; the soundness of the used strategies inclusive of successes and constraints/obstacles of the methodologies were evaluated.

By using the analytical tool of stakeholder matrix, the roles and responsibilities of each of the partners relating to efficiency of undertaking of project operation tasks such as formulation; management; implementation; monitoring and evaluation; and reporting were assessed. The assessment also included whether systematic work programming, technical assistance and backstopping, as well as coordination mechanisms amongst various partners (i.e. UNFPA, donor, ODVV, project director, Family Court, etc.) were in place.

The Efficiency of the Project Idea

Finding suitable alternatives: In looking for alternative mechanisms, addressing the plight of women burdened by lengthy court processes and to mitigate the crisis shaking the institution of the family by fast growing divorce rates, the project idea was formulated by Dr. Jaleh Shaditalab, Associate Professor of Sociology of Tehran University and a prominent scholar on gender studies using lessons learnt of her study visit to the United Kingdom (U.K.). There, she took the initiative to review the British magistrates trying to identify the modalities and procedures used in facilitating women going through the court as well as identify ways to improve the present situation. There were two important findings. These were:

- The effective role of volunteers and non-governmental organisations in rendering support services of all types throughout the court process inclusive socio-legal counselling; and
- Involvement of family members (husband/wife & children) and rendering support to all members throughout the process and particularly post divorce.

Tailor-making of the best practice: Used as the main basis for the project idea, attempts were made to use the U.K. model while tailor-making it to the local needs and contextualising it to the cultural norms of I.R. of Iran as a new initiative to be piloted. A series of discussions and negotiations with the donor were made and while the overall project idea and scope was approved, there were obstacles in financing the project. To expedite channelling the funds from the donor, UNFPA agreed to serve as an intermediary. Concurrently in order to coordinate with the judiciary and make the required administrative and logistic administrative arrangements for timely project management and implementation, an agreement was signed between the donor through UNFPA with the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV), an influential and fully recognised organisation trusted by the Judiciary for its long years of proactive work particularly targeting vulnerable groups and victims of violence. Details of comparative advantages of ODVV reflected in Annex III.

Soon thereafter the approval by all parties, the UNFPA-assisted project IRN4G101 entitled “Evidence-based Advocacy for Legislation that Protects Against Gender-Based Violence - Training Advocates on Family Court Procedures” became operational.

Original Project Approach, Objective & Target Groups (Beneficiaries)

General advice by gender advocates to women to expedite court processes: The approach taken initially was to deal with the family issue and help women derive the required assistance from family courts, with the least cost for themselves and the judicial system. For

this purpose, the project objective was initially to be carried out through training of volunteers as social workers who were to provide information to women on the ways to be used to expedite going through court processes. University students (especially gender studies group) and volunteers from women-focused NGOs were to be selected as advocates.

FCC as the forerunner for the new initiative: These advocates were expected to help women who came to Family Court Complex (FCC) No. 1 that covers 13 districts. The prime reason for selecting FCC No. 1 twofold namely the full support extended to the project by the Chief Magistrate Mohajeri, and the fact that almost all the women who came to this court had no access to legal representations (e.g. a lawyer) because they could not afford them. Initially, the target groups or project beneficiaries were mainly those women who were filing court cases for divorce. Also, as mentioned earlier and based on the original project idea, the activities to be undertaken were three-stages including research, formulation of an appropriate training module and training, and a project evaluation²⁴.

Change of Approach & Project Objective

Provision of family counselling: The first stage of the project was to conduct a research study. Dr. Shaditalab and her research team used qualitative and up-to-date ethnographic methods and structured interview with the magistrate officials and the women/their families and schematically identified the prevailing situation/conditions, processes and challenges of FCC No.1. Based on the results of this comprehensive research study, it became evident that majority of women who referred to the family courts to file mainly for a divorce or to ask for their *Mehreyeh*, as mentioned under the previous chapters, went there because they had no other alternative to get a way out of their conflict. On the basis of this major research finding, the project director decided to change the original approach, scope and objective.

Support of prime partners: With the concurrences and the flexibility extended towards the change of approach, scope and objective of the project by the prime partners, namely UNFPA, the donor and ODVV, there was a major re-orientation of the project design. All along, ODVV, responsible for administration and logistics of the implementation of project provided full support and back-stopped the activities facilitating the new scoping re-oriented towards provision “family counselling”. Within this new scope, concurrently women claimants indirectly received the required assistance in processing their cases through the court since their problem became much clearer to them. Hence, the partnership established under the project was considered efficient in achieving the desired objective.

Greater efficiency: Under this fundamental reorientation of the project that was to be implemented under three-month trial period, therefore, the needs of the beneficiaries were more efficiently addressed enhancing effectiveness by complementing the initial intended advocacy with family counselling. For this purpose a “family counselling” unit within the premises of the Family Court Complex (FCC) No. 1 was established at no cost to the project was one of the indicators used in this evaluation contributing to project’s cost efficiency. The unit was set up under Conflict Resolution Council of FCC. If proved effective, mainly measured by quantitative successes (i.e. numbers of reconciliations, withdrawal of claimants and closure of cases), there was also an informal agreement with the Chief Magistrate of the FCC that with the success of the project, the same initiative would be extended to other family courts throughout the country subsequent to the pilot phase.

Target Groups (Beneficiaries):

Women with *mehreyeh* cases filing for divorce for the first time: The target group (beneficiaries) were also the same namely women coming to the Family Court Complex No. 1. But the selection was more focused aiming only to serve those who came to the court for the first time to claim their *mehreyeh*. Initially the FCC wanted to send selected cases of first-comers who had reached agreement with their husband to settle their case with divorce

²⁴ Information on the objective was mainly taken from “Annex A. Training Advocates on Family Court Procedures - the Project Terms of Reference”, the Concept Note, and the subsequent reports.

or as commonly categorised within the FCC as “agreed separation” cases. However, the project director disagreed insisting that there is no motivation for such women to need family counselling as they had already reached an agreement to have a divorce.

Furthermore, the justification given was that many of the *mehreyeh* claims are in fact divorce cases. This was also concluded by the research study, as often there are other underlying factors that contribute to making *mehreyeh* claims as detailed in the assessment of project’s effectiveness reflected in Chart 7 under chapter IV. So, with greater potential to resolve such cases once receiving proper counselling, there was an eventual agreement by the Chief Magistrate, to refer only the *mehreyeh* cases to the newly established family counselling unit under the pilot phase. In short, the project beneficiaries were women new comers to FCC with *mehreyeh* cases who were sent to the unit to receive family counselling.

Suitable and Sound Strategies

Flexibility was the key to success: A fundamental successful feature of the project was its adaptability and flexibility to match with the prevailing condition and align itself with the results gained from each of its stages, particularly the findings of the comprehensive research study conducted. It was in fact the flexibility in strategies that enabled expeditious changing of the project scope, approaches and objectives. If accompanied with systematic work programming, the multiplier effect is expected to be enhanced.

Partnering created the required synergy: Provision of financial resources by the donor and channelling it through UNFPA to ODVV as an influential organisation with close links to the judiciary was another suitable strategy used to expedite project operation. As highlighted by Dr. Shaditalab, while the initial project idea was approved for some two years, due to prevailing conditions at the time, it could not become operational. With the approval of the donor, the arrangement made and the partnership of UNFPA acting as an intermediary, and ODVV agreeing to administer the project created the synergy required. With greater involvement of other key stakeholders, as mentioned repeatedly by both internal and external partners of the project, it would have presumably created a much more lasting synergy that is one of the prerequisite to greater efficiency in project management and administration.

Excellent coherence and coordination: Based on the views of all partners, there was a consensus that the administrative coordination, logistic support and regular technical backstopping provided by ODVV deserve to be commended. The win-win approach together with full designation of authority to the project director and the volunteer family counsellors inclusive of the group leaders by ODVV managing director was recognized as a model practice. ODVV’s committed staff also facilitated enhancement of building and maintaining mutual respect and trust amongst the team members. In short, as working with multi-stakeholders is a rare experience in the country, the way this project was administered and coordinated by ODVV could be considered as a best practice. It was instrumental in achievement of the results and successes made.

Similarly, regarding administrative coordination, for instance, during the first few weeks of the project, there were many administrative coordination issues inclusive of the concerns relating to timing and other logistics matters such as timely referral of cases to the unit and who should do what and when, etc. For this purpose, ODVV quickly designated an administrative coordinator who was stationed full-time at FCC regularly providing the required backup and scheduling systematically and in a timely manner the referral sessions of each and every case for the volunteer family counsellors.

Teaming up the volunteers with the more experienced serving as group leaders: The project was privileged to have the services of professional family counsellors who had long years of practice in family counselling rendering services free of charge. They facilitated rectifying some of the issues encountered by the younger volunteers who lacked the required knowledge/experiences in family counselling. They were teamed up together.

The volunteer groups during the pilot phase worked on an honorary basis for five days (one group of five volunteers for each day) at the FCC to counsel women. For the majority of cases, the arrangement was one counsellor per claimant. However, in some critical cases, pairing with other more experienced team members or even inviting others (e.g. a legal advisor) to help with the case was the modality used. On an exceptional basis, there was even one or two who were referred to get outside help (e.g. psychiatric treatment or for addiction the husband was sent to DICs²⁵). In general though, outside referrals were not permissible by FCC as it was beyond the mandate of the court.

The formation of small groups of the volunteers with one professional and most senior/experienced of family counsellor to lead the team in each day served a multi-purpose function. First, it built self-confidence by working together and supporting each others performance. Second, the leader, as the most senior among the group was accountable to FCC while all were fully committed to maintain high performance. It should be noted that with no financial incentive, none of the volunteers selected dropped out. This was a major achievement and considered unprecedented. Above all, the approach was win-win and no one was the boss. Or as in the words of the managing director of ODVV, “in fact everyone was the boss”. They were stationed within the FCC and fully respected by all the authorities. FCC should also be commended for creating the enabling environment to the extent possible for making the counsellors feel ‘as one of their own’.

Thus, using such a modality by both the group leaders and the FCC authorities was instrumental for everyone having a strong sense of ownership towards the project. This feeling of mutual ownership was evident amongst most of the FCC authorities interviewed. The previous Chief Magistrate Mr. Mahajeri, and the Deputy Chief Magistrates Messrs. Khoramshahi, Asadi and Amirabadi referred to the project by using the term “our project” several times in the course of the structured interview. “Each had a stake and was genuinely committed to make the project work having mutual concerns”, as stated by ODVV managing director while also taking the tasks with the professional inputs (e.g. monitoring) required.

There was also another advantage in using such a mechanism. It enabled ODVV to maintain a closer partnership with some twenty organisations who volunteered to have their professional family counsellors’ work at no charge to the project. Mandated to help vulnerable women along with their families particularly the deprived, the project generated effective dialogue for future partnering and networking in the most efficient manner.

MSc students as key partners in future projects: Also, the volunteers considered initially less suitable to serve as family counsellors (e.g. the graduate students in gender studies lacking academic training in counselling) had a chance to get first hand knowledge combining theory with actual practice becoming able to work more effectively on gender-related concerns and at the outreach grassroots level. These committed volunteer graduate students, through appropriate coaching and mentoring schemes in place, could serve as the key partners in the family counselling related work in the future. In a sense, what was initially a challenge at the start of the pilot phase became an opportunity at its completion.

Established data bank for the systematic quantitative analysis: Initially the registration of the cases handled was recorded manually. With the fast increasing number of cases and the rotation of the groups of family counsellors every day and for each week, there were initial clerical complications in maintaining records as each file had to be returned to FCC once the work was completed. Hence, the manual recording of the data proved inefficient causing the initial loss of records of the 100 cases of women who had received family counselling services also partly due to restriction on maintaining copies of files as well as incomplete information on some of the records. The strategy to computerise the information gathered subsequently with establishing a user-friendly data bank at ODVV with access to various quantitative tabulations for the remaining 440 cases was instrumental and another sound strategy undertaken.

²⁵ DICs=Drop in Centres used for demand and harm reduction purposes

In fact, all the charts presented in this evaluation report are derived from the information contained in the computerised data bank²⁶. The data bank is also an excellent base for comparative analysis to be undertaken under the future initiatives. As the information gathered and fed in the data bank was collected by the family counsellors, it would have been very useful if the family counsellors would have also access to the data bank.

Needs-based IEC material: While preparation of IEC material for women was not included in the initial project Terms of Reference, the strategy to include them in the Concept Note was the right one as based on the review of the cases and courts records and the fact that available brochures are lengthy and very difficult to understand. It was agreed that subsequent to the preparation of the brochure, for ODVV to publish 20,000 issues on family laws in simple language after random pilot-testing among women who were to be asked to read it and provide their response by completing a questionnaire on its usefulness. While there is no report on the pilot-testing and their usefulness, the fact that the first series of the brochures published (15,000 issues) have been fully distributed and due to high demand, additional copies are being printed, indirectly suggest that they were found useful, both by the courts that received copies as well as the clientele.

Constraints/Obstacles in strategies/methodologies used:

The need for greater stakeholders participation/consultation: In discussing the reasons why the strategy of providing family counselling services was not chosen initially, both the internal and external stakeholders of the project emphasised on the fact that there were minimal participation and consultation with both internal and external stakeholders other than those considered essential or the prime partners (i.e. UNFPA, the donor and ODVV) in considering substantive issues related to the planning, formulation and design of the original project and other operation tasks undertaken thereafter. In fact, for example, many of the background information and decisions taken in the course of project operation were explained and or clarified for the first time to the family counsellors and ODVV, only in the course of the participatory evaluation exercise.

Subsequent to frank and open discussions expressing their views and comments inclusive of their reservations, there were much greater understanding and in a sense more feeling of ownership towards results achieved under the project. Though as the saying goes, “better late than never”, many of the implementation issues encountered, such as the complexities and misunderstanding created and caused in the course of the follow-up phase by one of the volunteer family counselling firms who was the leader of one of the groups without inviting and calling for the participation of other partners or even ODVV, as the administrative backbone of the initiative, may not have even possibly come up.

Of course, everyone appreciated the sensitivities and challenges encountered during the course of project implementation as well. For instance, three times of change of chief magistrate within the FCC No. 1 contributed in a major way and considered as the prime cause of lack of motivation to continue the project as initially promised after successful completion of the pilot project by those who had initially started it. However, as elaborated by most of the internal and external stakeholders involved in the evaluation exercise, the capacities of the partners were not fully utilised and those who could have potentially contributed to its sustainability were not efficiently and effectively involved.

Who were the stakeholders? In addressing the above constraint, the stakeholder matrix analysis tool was used in the evaluation workshop. The following internal and external stakeholders were identified:

Internal Stakeholders: Those that the project director Dr. Shaditalab had direct access and control included:

²⁶ The report prepared by the director on the results of the project also compiled the tabulations using this data bank.

Actual and fully utilised in the course of project implementation:

- ODVV Administration and logistics support personnel/ODVV staff members inclusive of *Raha* Counselling Clinic²⁷
- 25 volunteer family counsellors inclusive of the five designated group leaders

Potential but not utilised:

- Social Welfare Organisation²⁸
- Social Workers Clinics
- Other counselling firms (e.g. the Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers for legal matters, etc.)

External Stakeholders: Those that project director could potentially involve in the project but in effect is outside the project control:

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|--|
| • Chief & Deputies Magistrates | • Justice Ministry | • Ministry of Health & Medical Education |
| • CWFA ²⁹ | • Ministry of Welfare (Refah) | • Donors |
| • Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs | • Ministry of Education | • UNFPA* |
| • Policy makers & Government officials | • Islamic <i>Majlis</i> (Assembly) | • Narcotics Anonymous |
| • Social Welfare Organisation | • Legal Aids Clinics | • Relevant NGOs/CSOs |
| • Social Workers Clinics | • Bar Association | • Charities |
| • Private Counselling firms | • Media (TV, print & digital) | • Forensic Medicine |
| | • Municipalities | • Police |
| | • Universities | |

(*) UNFPA as the ‘intermediary’ between the donor and the project director was involved/consulted in all stages of the project and for all practical purposes UNFPA was considered as both prime internal and external stakeholder of the project. To a lesser extent, the donor was also amongst the limited number of prime stakeholders fully consulted. However, their roles were more of support as regards to financial aspects of the project. The involvement of UNFPA and the donor in monitoring and control was much less than desired (i.e. in spite of several times request made to make project site visits by UNFPA, for instance, they were declined claiming that due to the sensitivity of the FCC towards involvement of international agencies such visits are not permissible).

It is worth noting that when listing the internal and external stakeholders, the participants considered the exercise as most illuminating as they could not believe how many organisations/ministries, and people were directly involved or indirectly had a potential role to contribute/support the project. This was an achievement by itself for the future phases that from the initial level of project design and formulation, the inputs of various stakeholders as potential partners need to be sought and fully utilised.

Who did what? To further address project efficiency in reviewing the strategies and methodologies used and assessing the obstacles encountered in the course of the project operation, the analysis of stakeholders’ matrix was an instrumental tool, the results of which clearly identified ‘who did what’ under the project. This was made possible only through the proactive 100% participation by the volunteer family counsellors in the course of the evaluation exercise together with the project director whose presence and involvement in most of the sessions confirmed their commitment to the project performance as well.

²⁷ Particularly Ms. Aboutorabi as the support staff who also served as the administrative coordinator for the work at FCC, Ms. Aliyani who facilitated the logistic arrangements for timely contacting and involving all key partners as well as rendering support in tabulation and analysis of the data gathered, as well as Ms. Behnam as an experienced ODVV family counsellor who as a professional counsellor and Managing Director of *Raha* Clinic of ODVV serves as an relief/aids centre providing counselling and socio-psychological support to their clients inclusive of those who are victims of all types of violence (e.g. domestic violence).

²⁸ It is worthy to note that a new ministry addressing issues related to welfare has been set up for the past couple of years. But, for all practical purposes, the Social Welfare Organisation remain the main counterpart governmental agency for all welfare related issues.

²⁹ CWFA=Centre for Women & Family Affairs

As reflected in this matrix (attached as Annex IV), comparing each of the boxes with the list of both internal and external stakeholders listed by the participants prior to the analysis is an excellent measure of effectiveness and efficiency of management highlighting how well the inputs, competencies, capacities and overall resources of the various stakeholders were utilised. It can serve as a schematic base for the activities undertaken under the present project and what needs to be done in the future. Furthermore details of the stakeholders' roles and responsibilities or involvement for each of the projects operational tasks identified reflect the level of participation/ consultation processes, particularly regarding substantive tasks used under the project.

Project director undertaking all substantive tasks/roles: From the review of the analysis made, it can be appreciated that several internal and external stakeholders had a role and involved as listed under the initial two columns (e.g. to inform & obtain information from) under various operational tasks. However, for the more substantive roles, there were (e.g. consult, partner and control/support) much less numbers of stakeholders were tasked with any substantive role and responsibility (e.g. plan & formulate, manage, implement, monitor & evaluate, and report).

In fact, as the prime person who had the prime role and was proactively involved in almost all the tasks in the project appeared in almost all of the boxes, the name that appears is Dr. Shaditalab the project director. She deserves, of course, to be commended for her outstanding performance and her contribution as fully reflected under the SWOT³⁰ analysis as project strength (i.e. having a renowned scholar who had initiated the project with all the required competencies and experiences able to successfully run such an initiative). Concurrently, however, this was a potential weakness, as the project was heavily reliant on her inputs, thus she became more or less indispensable to the project.

This all out reliance on one person was more or less reflected in every aspect of the project. From the original design and formulation to major revising of the scope and project objective, to undertaking the responsibility for all the implementation and management work, from monitoring, mid-point evaluation and reporting of results, she was more or less single-handedly took all the responsibilities. As a consequence, and due to shouldering the entire burden, presumably, she had very little time left to brief and get others fully involved. Also, as clearly evident from this matrix, for all practical purposes, she had the prime role for management and implementation as they were treated as one and the same task. Implementation, of course, was separated from administration, and logistic support that were amongst the few responsibilities designated by her to other prime partner (i.e. ODVV).

Furthermore, as reflected in the matrix, many of the potential internal stakeholders and external stakeholders identified and listed by the participants in the evaluation exercise and who could have potentially contributed to the project, sharing and undertaking different tasks from formulation to reporting and having greater roles in all the categories specified in the matrix as project's operational tasks, were not efficiently involved. As a major lesson learnt of the project that only involved small number of internal stakeholders and very limited number of external stakeholders, considered as the project Achilles Heel, minimising transparency of decisions taken and consequently impacting accountability, greater contribution and inputs of other potential partners, particularly the non-judicial ones have to be effectively utilised.

This was also the main hindrance that negatively impacted particularly the post pilot phase of the project. It also became a main bottleneck in getting the support of some of the key partners like the Centre for Women and the Family Affairs (CWFA) and Social Welfare Organisation and even the Municipalities that could have greatly facilitate the sustainability for the follow-up phases of the project.

In fact, CWFA through the Social Welfare Organisation financially covered the cost for the post pilot phase earmarking Rls. 200,000,000 and directly contracted for a three months

³⁰ SWOT=Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

period one of the family counselling firms that served voluntarily under the project bypassing the project authorities and without involving or informing any of the key partners inclusive of the project director Dr. Shaditalab or ODVV. On the basis of an agreement reached with FCC, the firm was contracted to work at the same family counselling unit presumably due to the excellent project results. However, she was not to associate herself with the project once contracted.

In fact supported by CWFA, similar arrangements were also made for a unit to be established in the FCC No. 2 located in Vanak to provide family counselling to the women there with another firm that was not even affiliated to the project. While both these instances are clear indication of the achievements of the project and in a sense proving its success, the fact that the project authorities (both the project director and ODVV) were completely bypassed is a major lesson learnt calling for remedial actions in the follow up phases.

The managing director of the firm selected by CWFA who was one of the leaders of the small groups under the project informed the project director about her being approached by CWFA through the Social Welfare Organisation and her contractual agreement. However, this was done after the negotiation were more or less finalised. Exclusion and no prior notification by this volunteer family counsellor who was on the proactive members of the project team, was most unexpected. Furthermore, not using any of the other team members under her contract with CWFA/Social Welfare Organisation further complicated the situation creating resentments to say the least as she had no limitations on choosing her team members under her contract.

Revitalised spirit of teamwork and regenerating momentum: Fortunately, the participatory evaluation exercise that included the majority of active volunteers inclusive of the members from the contracted firm served a multi-purpose and many of the misunderstanding and resentments that were internalised were frankly and openly discussed. As a consequence, new momentum was generated and the spirit of teamwork once again revitalised with the required synergy to use this experience as lesson learnt for future joint activities. The evaluation also regenerating the momentum of the group gaining confidence to discuss management and implementation issues in a transparent manner, making every member of the group accountable for their performance in laying the foundation for their future partnering.

Better criteria for selection of volunteers: Maintaining the same volunteers could have potentially weakened project efficiency. Fortunately as mentioned earlier, this issue was properly tackled. However, it is worthy to note that in the selection of project internal stakeholders who were to serve as family counsellors, some were graduate students in gender studies (5 candidates) who were initially chosen to be used as advocates. The remaining 20 came from some 40 organisations that had responded to a call issued for this purpose by ODVV. Many of these volunteer candidates were either with degrees in counselling, psychology or sociology or with long years of first hand experience on working with women and children.

As rightly emphasised by the more experienced family counsellors as well as the previous Chief Magistrate of the FCC, it was unrealistic and inappropriate to expect graduate students of gender studies to undergo a three day intensive training and become ready to serve as family counsellors. Such selection, of course, would have been completely appropriate if subsequent undergoing a short-term intensive course on advocacy they were to serve as advocates in easing the court process as was originally planned under the project.

With the new approach, scope and objectives, as recognised by the majority of internal and external stakeholders, since family counselling is a profession that requires specialised expertise that is gained through proper training, the criteria for selection of volunteers should have been modified as well. Even the project director and some of the more experienced counsellors emphasised that due to the sensitivities of serving within the FCC, the ones who even had majored in family counselling needed to be selected from the list of 40

organisations, prioritising only those with long years of experience and preferably middle aged as such counsellors were more easily trusted by the beneficiaries than the younger ones. The more experience counsellors among the group confirmed that by just undergoing an intensive training programme offered, though very helpful as a refresher course, it was not feasible to expect that inexperienced volunteers without being trained in the field of counselling, to become family counsellors, though undoubtedly the selected volunteers had great motivation and commitment to serve and help women. In summary in order to enhance project efficiency and effectiveness in the future, the following criteria were proposed in the course of the evaluation workshop in full consultation with experienced family counsellors used under this project. These are listed below:

- Know herself/himself well and being fully aware of one's idiosyncrasies;
- Being aware on how to establish rapport with the beneficiaries and other project external and internal stakeholders (i.e. effective listening skills);
- Being aware of mentoring approaches as applied to counselling (e.g. instead of giving "advice (*nasehat*)" which is commonly provided by the more traditional counsellors, provide "council (*moshaverah*)" using win-win approach);
- Commitment to serve the project, preferably on a volunteer basis or at minimal charges;
- Willingness to be assessed and monitored by both beneficiaries and other stakeholders;
- Have systemic attitude and familiar with knowledge management;
- Be creative in using different skills and potentials of the clientele in addressing issues;
- Be innovative and up-to-date on family counselling approaches and techniques;
- Be sensitive to gender-based considerations; and
- Be aware of practical exercises and provide case studies to handle "conflict resolution cases" to the clienteles.

Tailor-making and needs-based training: While the training offered was unanimously considered by all the participants as necessary (100% rating given by the participants to the training offered at the end of the course) and with about 50% finding the materials prepared as very useful in their immediate ratings after the training workshop, in perspective, the training offered could have been better focused both in terms of content and methodology. This would have also enhanced efficiency in services rendered under the pilot phase. For example during the evaluation workshop, the responses of the participants to "how much they remembered the material and topics covered in the course of the workshop", confirmed that there was too much covered in too short of a period. With the exception of the topics presented by Dr. Kamkar, the family psychiatrist that at the time of the completion of the training workshop also had the highest rating because she covered well-targeted and applicable issues in her discussions; as well as the materials that provided information on family law, there was less than 1/3 sustainability of the what was offered under the course. Highlighting on some of the main topics covered under the three days intensive training, the trainees indicated that some of the sessions (i.e. on the sociology of the family) were too theoretically oriented. Based on the results of the assessment made at the end of the course, this was confirmed as well. As lessons learnt, possibly for future training programmes, such theoretical discussions could be replaced with more practical and more focused topics and issues that are most commonly faced by beneficiaries such as approaches that they could take to address 'maltreatment' or 'abuse', or applicable tools that are needed for 'conflict resolution'.

- Covering topics such as being ways to confront forced to *tamkeen*, were also recommended as a more focused and practical topic. In addition, greater use of case studies and facilitation techniques instead of lecturing which was the method used under the intensive training with more group exercises and role play was considered more appropriate for such a course. By experience, such participatory methods are much more effective with much longer lasting learning impact. This was also suggested in some feedbacks and responses provided to the evaluation questionnaire completed by almost all those who were trained.

More user-friendly training module: As a related issue, while based on the Terms of Reference of the project the training module was to be developed on the basis of the study focusing on “the basic rights, very simple version of the most important laws and details of court procedures”³¹, the intensive training was accompanied by a lengthy reference manual (approx. 400 pages) provided to each trainee. Though an excellent base for academicians and researchers, it could have been possibly shorted and more focused as initially planned. Making it needs-based for volunteers to refer to in undertaking their routine family counselling tasks would have made the manual more user-friendly. In addition, it would have been much more cost/time efficient.

In passing, among the positive features of the intensive training was the use of senior faculty members from universities, one of whom (Dr. Taleghani) has long years of first hand experience in family counselling. Being a person who initiated and established for the first time a nation-wide “Counsellor’s Hotline” (*sedaye moshaver*) in the country, while unfortunately, the hotline is no longer available, it is a possibility to consider revitalising such useful information dissemination tool using experienced family counsellors and volunteers who served under the project in future initiatives.

Lack of systematic and participatory work programming: There were no records of detailed work programming/ action planning, participatory or otherwise, developed in the course of project formulation or subsequent project approval and during the course of operation. There was only an overall general phasing (i.e. stages) of project activities. The activities to be undertaken under each stage were also not detailed in the project terms of reference or the project proposal (the Concept Note). The only place where the activities are more or less elaborated is in the first section of the comprehensive study report by the project director. In the study report, one stage was added to the initial three stages of the project. The four stages as included in the study are summarised below:

1 st stage) research (<i>pajouhesh</i>);	3 rd stage) conducting training workshop (<i>bargozari karghahe amoozeshi</i>);
2 nd stage) preparation of training material (<i>tahiyeh mavade amoozeshi</i>);	4 th stage) project evaluation (<i>arzyabi porojeh</i>) are included ³²

The assessment of the work programming and action planning gets further complicated when comparing “Annex A. Project Terms of Reference” and the “Concept Note”. For instance in Annex A the duration of the project is 10-12 months as compared to six months (1 February – 31 July 2007). In none of the documents or even the report of the study is there a reference to the pilot phase of the project.

The timing and work distribution in undertaking the activities of each of the stages identified presumably impromptu by the project director and only considered subsequent to the completion of previous stage. Such ad-hoc practices are advantages in maintaining the required flexibility necessary and in making the adjustment for the subsequent stages as was the case for project complete reorientation after the conducting of the research work referred to earlier. It, however, impede monitoring, evaluation and benchmarking that is required in maintaining project efficiency.

This stage-by-stage approach, at times, also hindered macro assessment of the progress made. In effect, based on the feedbacks and responses of some of the family counsellors and external stakeholders, the confusion in contractual arrangements with the counselling firms selected by CWFA and Social Welfare Organisation was partially due to such ad-hoc planning and programming.

Other Project Efficiency Considerations:

Monitoring, evaluation, coordination and reporting systems and mechanisms: While the importance of evaluation was fully recognised and considered as one out of the three stages

³¹“Annex A. Training Advocates on Family Court Procedures – Project Terms of Reference”

³² Pages 6-7 of Shaditalab, “Study of the *Hamyan Dadghahaye Khanevadeh* Project”

of the original project terms of reference³³, it was seen as sporadic (i.e. to be undertaken twice with the 1st one at mid-point and the 2nd one at the end of the first year of the project) which is the traditional approach to evaluation. Evaluation was not considered as a process. This hindered project efficiency and directly impacted effectiveness of sustainability of results. Participatory evaluation/joint self assessments, similar to monitoring is also a continuous process serving a dual function of regular evaluation of performance through complementary joint self-assessments. Also, the timing of the evaluation, particularly the second one was not efficiently planned (i.e. three months after project completion) as FCC management changed three times during the course of project implementation the required institutional memory and momentum of what was really achieved was more or less lost.

There were no references to the monitoring mechanisms in the Terms of Reference or the Concept Note. Fortunately, through the conscious efforts made by the project director who personally assessed the progress in by-weekly meetings and frequent visits to the project site (sometimes 2-3 times per week), together with the group leaders and family counsellors, the experiences were shared and routine operational and administrative issues were tackled at these joint sessions. Thus, the project was monitored efficiently. These meetings, as elaborated by the internal stakeholders were instrumental to make the required adjustments, enhance synergy and attain coherence required in undertaking the specified tasks based on lessons learnt.

Unfortunately, however, there is no documentation of the proceedings of these meetings that could have been an excellent reference document for the present evaluation. It could have also serve as an excellent tool to keep both UNFPA and the donor informed and up to date as they were not permitted to get proactively involved in the monitoring process. From the information available, they both maintained a low profile. A more high profile role by these key players was also essential to enhance project efficiency and is the lesson learnt for the future course.

There was also independent monitoring undertaken by FCC deputy directors. This was considered instrumental mechanism in enhancing efficiency in project performance. As explained by one of the deputy chief magistrates, “We closely monitored the work of the family counsellors”. Even prior to the start of the operation of the pilot phase, as explained by some of the volunteers, there were mini-counselling sessions chaired by the Deputy Chief Magistrate Mr. Amirabadi who tested them by reviewing how some of the less experienced counsellors or younger volunteers would handle or respond to the more critical cases such as domestic violence or those having to do with *tamken*.

There were also monitoring visits sometimes in the course of counselling session through un-announced visits when the family counsellors’ performances were assessed directly. FCC authorities considered such monitoring as part of their mandate. It also facilitated internalisation of project results, as they proactively participated in its monitoring, enhancing their sense of ownership in the successes achieved and lessons learnt. This was highly appreciated by the family counsellors as the deputy chief magistrate provided useful feedback to them and made the necessary interventions to facilitate their work. His experience as a judge was also highly valuable as most of the counsellors were not fully familiar or up to date with the judicial and legal requirements.

Minimal inclusiveness of the judges: While initially and during the course of the research study almost all of the judges were fully briefed about the project and consulted on what would facilitate their work, due to several factors and primarily their more or less unwillingness of the judges to cooperate with the project kept them away from being proactively involved. From the briefing provided by the internal stakeholders, it seems that there was an attitudinal problem as the judges overall feeling about family counselling was not a positive one and they considered it as prolonging the process even further.

³³ The only information available in the form of a project proposal are two documents made available to the evaluator including a “Concept note for Extension of the Family Court Advocates Project” and “Annex A. Training Advocates on Family Court Procedures-Project Terms of Reference”.

They also wanted to have access to the confidential files on each case indicating that “this would be the only use of such “extra” formality introduced. The judges were quoted saying, “if they do not provide us with the information we need on the cases, so what is their use?” This was, of course, not acceptable to the family counsellors as it would mean that they would have to go against their professional ethics. It should be noted, however, that what the judges expected was in fact in line with the Concept Note whereby based on the initial scope of the project, “The social workers in the court serve as assistants to judges. In the case that the judge needs more information from the “field”, i.e. the place where the woman lives, they go to the neighbourhood and investigate”³⁴.

It seems that as the project changed and underwent a major reorientation, the function originally envisaged for the project social workers now replaced by family counsellors was no longer applicable. There is no record whether in the course of the consultation with the judges such issues were discussed or not. However, clearly there were no efficient mechanisms for their inclusion envisaged under the project subsequent the initial stage (i.e. in the course of conducting of the research study) when they were frequently consulted and their contribution to the study acknowledged as highly useful.

Furthermore, as suggested by one of the deputy chief magistrate, this fundamental separation seems to have contributed to the discontinuation of the project after the pilot phase impeding sustainability. In fact the judges could have been persuaded to support the family counselling initiative as they in fact were secondary beneficiaries of the project, in addition to women as the prime clienteles targeted. Because if the project achieved its objectives, the judges themselves would benefit by having their heavy workload reduced. In addition, even for those claimants where there was no reconciliation and the cases had to be processed, as clearly shown by the results of the project, with women becoming aware and with clearer problems once receiving family counselling services, the judges would be in a much better position in declaring their verdict as the court hearings would be smoother and faster.

As suggested by the FCC authorities, modalities to establish rapport with the judges, for instance addressing their needs would have facilitated their greater involvement. Through tailor-made and user-friendly training modules in the form of CDs, socio-psychological factors that contribute to the problems encountered by women could have been identified and presented to them. Providing them with sample case studies on the causes and effects of behavioural patterns of young couples could have been another source that would also help them analyse and research the cases in a much more effective manner. Such strategies to motivate the judges becoming proactively involved in supporting family counselling services, therefore, need to be addressed under future initiatives. These linkages would have increased project efficiency, coherence and impact, as pointed out both by the FCC authorities and the family counsellors alike.

Administrative coordination, timeliness & reporting: While similar to work programming, there were no systematic administrative coordination mechanism in place and only undertaken on a case by case basis and when required, ODVV taking the responsibility to undertake administrative coordination supporting tabulating of data collected, stenographic work, printing and publishing of the reports and timely substantive reporting by Dr. Shaditalab, though all drafted in Persian, was another indicator of project's efficiency. Regarding timeliness, In fact, the project began and completed more or less as initially planned.

There were mainly two reports prepared on the project. First, a comprehensive detailed report was prepared subsequent to the completion of the study conducted by Dr. Shaditalab and her team. This report with its five chapters under the headings of the methodology of the study (1st Chapter); summary review of the development of the family law in Iran (2nd Chapter); family court system and its legitimacy (3rd Chapter); the related processes of the family court complex No. 1 (4th Chapter); and conclusion and recommendations (5th

³⁴ Concept Note, p. 2

Chapter) in 87 pages and over 100 pages inclusive of annexes was an achievement by itself deserving acknowledgement.

The report, presently available only in Persian (Farsi) has even been presented to head of the judiciary and FCC. It is a unique study that covers issues regarding family courts addressed for the first time in the country. The quality of its content and qualitative method used is commendable. As explained by Dr. Shaditalab, subsequent minor editing and modification, it was published under the ODVV emblem.

There was also a succinct summary report of project results that was also drafted by Dr. Shaditalab and subsequently published by ODVV. The report also provides a series of practical recommendations that were also reconfirmed by the family counsellors on the basis of valuable first-hand experiences gained under the project. In addition, the data provided in this summary report were used in this evaluation as the only main source for the quantitative analysis of results.

The reporting of the project, therefore, though in Farsi (Persian), are excellent reference materials for future joint activities with the judiciary. They would be the best justification for the formulation and implementation of the future projects in the area of family counselling as well. They could be used as the working document by all those involved in family counselling as well. The report of the study and summary results of the project, once translated together with the evaluation report, are the starting point in documenting achievements of project activities. They can be considered as one of the major successful outputs of the project to be used as a main information source that is scarce about the prevailing situation of the institution of the family, its crisis, root causes and effects as well as judicial practices in the country. They could also be used as the basis for comparative studies and post follow-up phases.

The issue of cost efficiency: From the available information, the issue of cost efficiency was not directly addressed under the project proposal as there were no references to it in the Concept Note or Annex A – Project Terms of Reference. The fact that the family counsellors rendered their services on a voluntary basis with no fees charged was a plus in terms of cost efficiency and as a direct indication that costs were reduced substantially. Regarding budgeting concerns as they impact cost efficiency, however, it seems that a closer examination of the fees charged for the various activities, particularly the preparation of the training modules and the amount budgeted for the provision of training were essential. They seem over-estimated and much more than the prevailing rates.

Regarding cost efficiency for the conducting of the training workshop, for example, the assessment made under this evaluation is fundamentally based on the figures provided under Annex A stating that the workshop would be at least for ‘one week’³⁵. In the Concept Note Even the cost for one week is over the prevailing Performa figures most commonly used (e.g. 10,000,000 Rials per day). Considering that the total duration of the workshop was reduced to three days, the amount budgeted for this purpose (i.e. Rls. 83,137,500) seems to be too high. In future, it seems more appropriate to negotiate these costs much more intensively and with greater scrutiny using the standard procedures (e.g. calling for bids, short listing, etc.).

The efficiency considerations also apply to the content of the training offered. For instance, initially in the Terms of Reference separate budgetary allocations were made for the Training Module and the Training programme to be conducted in the form of the workshop to train advocates. While the reference manual covered, more or less the areas as anticipated, as mentioned earlier, the reference manual was not user-friendly (e.g. the manual is too bulky) and for sure not “very simple version of the most important laws” as envisaged under the original project’s Terms of Reference³⁶. In addition, as there is no financial report made available to the evaluator on how the major changes in the project’s scope were

³⁵ -- Ditto --

³⁶ Page 2 of “Annex A. Terms of Reference for the Training Advocates on Family Court Procedures-Project Terms of Reference”

efficiently considered in re-orienting the training module and in revising the conducting of the training workshop, there is no way to confirm whether the fees for the module (e.g. Rials 110,137,500) is cost-efficiently budgeted or not.

Awarding Volunteers: Another issue worth mentioning and directly linked to cost efficiency, was related to what was included under the Concept Note on “rewards for the participants” amounting 6,000,000 Toman while no reference to this is made under the Terms of Reference (Annex A) of the project. With no justification provided, in fact this was contrary to the overall strategy namely the use of voluntary services of family counsellors, at least under the pilot phase the services being free of charge. Fortunately, only a small amount of honorarium was provided to the volunteers instead.

Efficiency in apportionments of the budget: Regarding cost efficiency and whether or not the overhead cost for the diversity of tasks provided by ODVV was sufficient, the management, while appreciating in being selected as the partner responsible for administration, logistic, backstopping and coordination, considered the apportionments under-estimated and recommended more realistic budgeting for future collaborations. For example, all the costs for the time spent personally by the ODVV managing director associated with administrative coordination were not covered by the project. This is in spite the fact that due to the sensitivity of working with the judiciary, during the course of project implementation, a great portion of the time of ODVV’s managing directors as well as the deputies were spent to facilitate with the FCC, administer and provide the required logistic backstopping with the volunteer family counsellors for smooth delivery and timely rendering of services.

In addition, while for example only the cost associated with payment of one staff member who was full-time at the court during the pilot phase was covered by the project, in fact three full time staff members one in the court and two at ODVV (a secretary and the second back stopping staff) had to be tasked to maintain project administration as efficient as possible. The computer specialist who managed the data bank was also a part-time staff whose services not covered under the project. Furthermore most of the consultation and coordination work of the managing director of *Raha* were provided free of charge at no cost to the project and directly covered by ODVV.

In short, while the budget was sufficient to cover the cost of project activities and as mentioned above at times possibly over-estimated (e.g. cost of the training module and workshops), the overhead budgeted amount for ODVV (i.e. total 5%) was not sufficient and compatible to the actual expenditure by ODVV considering the extensive administrative coordination, logistics, and back stopping required for the activities undertaken and time spent on the project by the majority of ODVV’s management and staff. As UNFPA and the donor aim to enhance the capacities of such organisations working in the civil sector, mechanisms to reimburse ODVV for such costs under future joint initiatives are called for and therefore recommended.

Releasing of Funds: With the usual and minors delays in releasing the funds by UNFPA, the project did not encounter any major delays due to inadequate financial resources. One issue that was considered as lessons learnt by ODVV and raised in the course of project evaluation was realistic financial planning, leaving a small portion of the budget for incidental expenditures. As a consequence, in many instances, ODVV had to cover the cost of its staff or provide facilities under its own direct cost that was an additional financial burden that can potentially impede any organisation active in the civil sector and to be avoided in the future. Fortunately, ODVV was able to address these issues and as repeatedly mentioned by the managing director, “We were there to facilitate this project and financial consideration was not one of our concerns. The only reason that such issues (e.g. under-estimation of budgets) were raised was to further show our commitment to make the project work irrespective of the costs involved”³⁷.

³⁷ Taken from excerpts of the points that were raised in the course of the structured interview with the Managing Director of ODVV

CHAPTER IV: PROJECT EFFECTIVENESS AND POTENTIAL IMPACT

In order to evaluate the project effectiveness, potential impact and answer the overall question of “What to do to enhance and sustain results”, under findings and conclusion, the self-explanatory outcomes of SWOT³⁸ analysis is provided. With the qualitative review of success of project performance and in presenting some best practices (attached as Annex VI) the overall rating on effectiveness of the project and achievements is made and further reconfirmed with the quantitative assessment of project results. The chapter ends with a series of recommendations based on the views provided by the internal and external stakeholders as well as the project’s beneficiaries for the future expansion and sustainability of impact of counselling services under the follow up phase.

Findings and Conclusions: Qualitative Assessment of Results

Base on the terms of reference of the evaluation, SWOT analysis were to be conducted. During the third day of the evaluation workshop, with the exception of the donor, most of the internal stakeholders together with the representative from the UNFPA and ODVV took an active part in the SWOT exercise and openly expressed their views. This was accompanied by the questionnaire also completed by the donor. The projects effectiveness derived from its strengths vis-à-vis constraints and limitations primarily caused by weakness as well as the potential opportunities and threats/challenges during the course of implementation are respectively summarised and listed below:

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of the Project:

Strengths:

- Family counsellors serving on a voluntary basis
- Good and close relationship between the counsellors, the project director & FCC
- Giving the beneficiaries a new outlook in life, while becoming aware of their own capacities and familiar with the consequences of their decisions
- Attending to high divorce rates as the main problem causing family crisis
- Having consultation meetings amongst the counsellors with the project director³⁹
- Facilitation in administration rendered by ODVV
- Flexibility in project design after the conducting of the study
- Having the intensive training programme
- Positive view of the FCC authorities towards ODVV
- Using professional family counsellors
- Having a multi-dimensional approach with socio-psychological and social worker orientation
- Conducting applied research study prior to the implementation
- Having a needs-based project idea
- Having access to the required resources and budget
- Having a powerful project director
- Being accountable
- Monitoring of the project
- Being placed within the FCC⁴⁰ which gave authority to the counsellors
- NGOs willingness to be involved
- Putting into effect the Relief Law ratified by the Council of Cultural Revolution ratified in 1993 in line with the 10th Article of the Constitution
- Combining three perspectives (gender, social and legal)

Weaknesses:

³⁸ SWOT=Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

³⁹ It should be noted that as mentioned in Chapter III while these sessions were conducted regularly, however, there are no records to document them for use in the future as lessons learnt

⁴⁰ It should be mention that “Being placed within the FCC” was considered both as strength and a weakness

- Short duration of the project
- Being placed on 2nd and 3rd floor within the FCC and next to two courts along with not having enough space to undertake proper counselling (two counsellors had to share each room), there was little privacy and people in the corridors, particularly children [who accompanied their mothers] were witness to family disputes
- Lacking of expertise (being up-to-date)/ experience or being trained for family counselling by some of the volunteers
- Not having practical and applied follow-up training programmes
- Not maintaining standards in giving ample time to critical cases – not having enough counselling sessions in some cases
- Impossibility to follow-up as it was not allowed
- No success indicators to measure whether the counselling rendered was effective
- For beneficiaries being forced to make a plaintiff prior referral to the counsellors [family counselling made mandatory]
- Not having access legal counselling as some 65% of women decided to have court settlement,
- Not having complementary expertise (i.e. psychiatrists)
- Not being permitted to refer clientele to other NGOs for additional services (e.g. DIC centres for substance abusers in addiction cases)
- Lack of computerised recording (roster of clients) and data base N.B.: The data bank used by the project director and stationed at ODVV was not accessible to the family counsellors
- Vagueness in ways used to reflect the views of the family counsellors in the forms
- The system in place for returning the files without having access to it once closed
- Lack of capacity assessment of the counsellors
- Too many responsibilities by one person-the project director
- For UNFPA not being permitted to visit project site
- Not being able to be present at least one day a week (sometimes due to second or third sessions scheduled for a particular counsellor, the other ones could not go to the unit as initially planned)
- Unavailability of brochures to adequately inform the beneficiaries about family counselling

Opportunities:

- “Holiness” of the institution of the family
- Entry to the judiciary primarily due to positive attitude of the Chief Magistrate of the FCC towards the project
- Accessibility and voluntary contribution of organisations working on the family concerns
- Being placed within the FCC which is a different environment usually used for family counselling, giving it the required recognition
- Becoming aware of the court procedures to make claimant on family conflict cases
- Having UNFPA and international support (i.e. financial resources)
- Positive attitude of the Conflict Resolution Council towards the project
- Family counsellors feeling welcomed as expressed by the beneficiaries
- Having a participatory approach through teamwork involving family counsellors from different organisations that proved effective for building future networking
- Having access to university professors

Threats:

- Not having resources to continue the project
- Management and policy changes (N.B.: The Chief Magistrate changed three times during the course of the project) and relying mainly on one person within the FCC

- Time limitations
- Not being permitted to follow-up to measure project impact
- Negative attitudinal perspectives of some of the judges towards effectiveness of family counselling considering it as an additional hurdle to delay the court process, a waste of time and a “womanly” moves
- Lack of trust by the judicial system towards international organisations
- Minimal (low) trust of judicial system towards NGOs and people outside the judicial system
- Having family counselling added to the court processes and prolonging the procedures as viewed by the people in general
- Some family counsellors not being up-to-date
- Not having a support chain to make the project sustainable
- Return of some of the beneficiaries who had reconciled to revitalise their cases
- Legal constraints
- Not paying enough attention to family counsellors’ needs (i.e. training requirements)
- Deviations from the principle objectives of the project
- Not having access to a team of experts (social worker, psychologist, psychiatrist, and legal advisor)
- Interference of qualitative and quantitative indicators (N.B.: For example while there was an emphasis to get more couples to reconcile (quantitative indicators), in many cases, particularly where there was hidden violence such emphasis on the number of cases reaching reconciliation was inappropriate (qualitative measure of success).

Qualitative review of success in project results: At the outset, it should be emphasised once again, that due to lack of success indicators, also included under the analysis of threats of the project referred above, there was no way to directly assess qualitatively effectiveness/success of performance. However, indirectly and through the questionnaires completed by project partners who participated in the evaluation exercise, the basis for the rating of the project performance and effectiveness of results was provided. In addition, some dozen examples used as best practices were considered in the assessment of successes in project performance which are attached as Annex VI.

- Having provided the beneficiaries the possibility of being listened to as many wanted to discuss their problems and in the course of discussion found their way out;
- Similarly, having developed the skills (conflict resolution skills) needed for women along with their husband to tackle their problems and be able to discuss their concerns without getting into a fight;
- Having access to “independent counsel” and not taking sides was a success as this was what the clientele wanted most from the counsellors;
- Being able to have a healthy family life, particularly feeling content as they become mentally healthy, there would be greater happiness; several times I felt that the entire family became happy when the mother and father reconciled;
- For family counsellors getting first hand experience to work with critical cases at FCC was a success in itself;
- Advocating family counselling needs at the judiciary and getting them proactively involved as committed partners;
- Success in family counselling is only achieved when the clients by themselves are able to analyse their situation, finding the root causes and making appropriate decision to tackle the issues encountered; this was achieved under the project;
- It is too early to assess success and measure potential impact, as with any other development initiative, it is a process and it needs much more time to assess whether the project has succeeded or not; but it was a good start considering the short time available;

- The mere fact that the project brought down the cost to be paid by the beneficiaries as they did not have to pay for 3-4 sessions of counselling is in a way a success of the project;
- While the project was able to successfully identify the needs of women who go to courts and that is an achievement deserving to be acknowledged, as the issues involve many other stakeholders, their involvement (e.g. Social Welfare Organisation, Ministry of Labour, DICs, Welfare Clinics, Legal Aids; etc.), the success in performance is only sustained if such partnership is established and maintained; the project was a good start as it established such linkage with the FCC, but now it has to continue with others;
- Depending on who is defining success, the definition varies. For example, from the perspective of the following three groups, success would be defined as:
 - Family Counsellors: Feeling of content and acceptance of the decision irrespective of whether leading to reconciliation or divorce; this was done;
 - FCC Authorities: Decrease of the number of cases processed at the courts N.B.: It should be noted that several family counsellors also had the same indicator for success as quoted for the FCC authorities (namely reduction of the divorce cases); this was also partially achieved;
 - Project Director: Similar to the family counsellors, as mentioned in the course of project operation, “women being able to exert their rights irrespective of the decision taken”; this was also partially addressed;
- The smallest attitudinal change in the beneficiaries was a success as many of the problems in interpersonal relationships is deep-rooted and development/change of attitudinal perspectives will take time—the initial trend for the changes were achieved;
- In addition to counselling, preparation of CDs/training films with case studies on how to relate with each other would have enhanced the chances of sustaining project success and effectiveness with more impact;
- Having greater documentation of what worked and what did not (e.g. successful cases with details on reasons why the case was rated as a success or the causes for unsuccessful cases, etc.) to be used systematically to enhance project performance and success in results gained;
- As the cause of many cases were financial, getting the support mechanism in place by the relevant authorities is the only way to sustain impact, otherwise, even the reconciled cases will return after a short while as the issue for many is just inability to have the bear minimum of subsistence;
- The project would only be able to discuss success and review potential impact if the fact that there is a genuine “family counselling needs” is fully recognised by the policy makers and senior authorities to effectively establish places and render free of charge counselling in all sectors starting from schools (e.g. basic life skills) for both boys and girls;
- Societal attitudinal changes, particularly at the macro level with adequate socio-legal and legislative support as laws are lagging behind and not needs-based; otherwise what was done under the project was like giving aspirin to a cancer patient;
- If needs-based and demand driven services by the family counsellors are rendered aligned with what is expected by the beneficiaries, success is achieved; for this the project was instrumental and useful;
- If all project activities were completed as planned and in a timely manner then there is success; this was done under this project; and
- Everyone being responsible, take a stake, and committed to what the project expected of them and doing the best they can; taking steps towards teamwork and enhancing ownership and greater commitment to achieve success (e.g. networking with different organisations, using small groups to distribute work by family counsellors, participatory evaluation exercise, etc.); awareness raising (e.g. regarding the crisis within the institution of the family); creating an enabling environment to undertake innovative approaches and

preparing the cultural basis conducive to use family counselling to the extent possible during the course of project operation; and advocating with the authorities towards the need of taking stock of this major gap (i.e. family counselling at all levels namely, pre-marital, during marriage and post divorce); to enable young couple make better choices before marriage and if not able to continue with their marriage subsequently undergoing counselling [as was provided under the project] to cope with their problems; and to use their experience as lessons learnt with the support of family counsellors after marriage.

As fully summarised in the last assessment made by the managing director of ODVV and based on the above quantitative assessment of successes made under the project by the other internal stakeholders, it can be concluded that in assessing qualitative achievements of the project, what was done in such a short time, is indicative of project achieving its objective that deserve a satisfactory rating. This is not, however, neglecting the project's limitations and constraints as well as the challenges ahead. Being able to run for the first time in the country such an innovative programme, particularly after its re-orientation, sensitising the judiciary to the need of family counselling services that now, if the budgetary constraints and issues affiliated to resource mobilisation are rectified, there is an evident willingness to continue the scheme at the national level is an achievement that needs to be commended.

Particularly, the support extended to the project after the pilot phase by CWFA through the Social Welfare Organisation is an outstanding achievement, though undertaken directly and without consultation with the project authorities. With enhanced partnership, the enabling environment for the greater use of family counselling mechanisms has been created which is a big plus for the project.

Quantitative Assessment of Project Results:

For the qualitative assessment, first the various areas for which services were rendered by the family counsellors were reviewed. This was followed by the presentation of the percentages of cases that were successfully completed reaching reconciliation or "not following up", highlighting on the total number of persons who received family counselling services. On the basis of this assessment, the rating for quantitative achievement also reconfirmed the project's overall satisfactory performance rating.

Abuse (maltreatment) the main cause for women claiming *mehreyeh*: Chart 7 depicts the quantitative analysis of the reasons why the beneficiaries made a claim to receive their *mehreyeh*. These root causes for their claim of *mehreyeh* included cases of alimony (9.7%); husband's addiction (17%); husband's abandonment (9.1%); husband desire to divorce (4%), polygamy⁴¹ (2.1%), and the right to dowry (2.1%). Other areas indirectly addressed and placed under the overall category was abuse or maltreatment (*soae moashera*) with the highest percentage of 30.3. Cases of *tamkeen*⁴² when the wife has to submit or unconditional obedience (*tamkeen*) in having sexual relationships with her husband were also included under this latter category. Lack of *tamkeen* was most commonly used by men particularly when they wanted to get a second wife.

Interestingly, at the same time many women also used their refusal for *tamkeen* claiming that not wanting to submit to *tamkeen* was mainly due to abuse. Similarly, there is a range that abuse or maltreatment could be categorised from "soft"⁴³ maltreatment such as lack of understanding/incompatibility which is the second highest number of cases (20.3%). In response to the question of "how is this maltreatment", the majority of responses received indicated that their husband "did not know how to treat a woman". There was also "harsh"⁴⁴

⁴¹ While men are allowed to have four wives, they can have as many wives under temporary marriages know as *seigeh*.

⁴² A wife has to succumb to her husband's wishes in having sexual relationships at any time. This is considered as the only an obligatory duty of a wife in Islam and as the husband's unconditional right. All other matters that is customary as responsibilities by the wife under Islam are not obligatory and women could question undertaking them inclusive of breast feeding their children. For the latter, for example, they can charge their husband to undertaking such tasks.

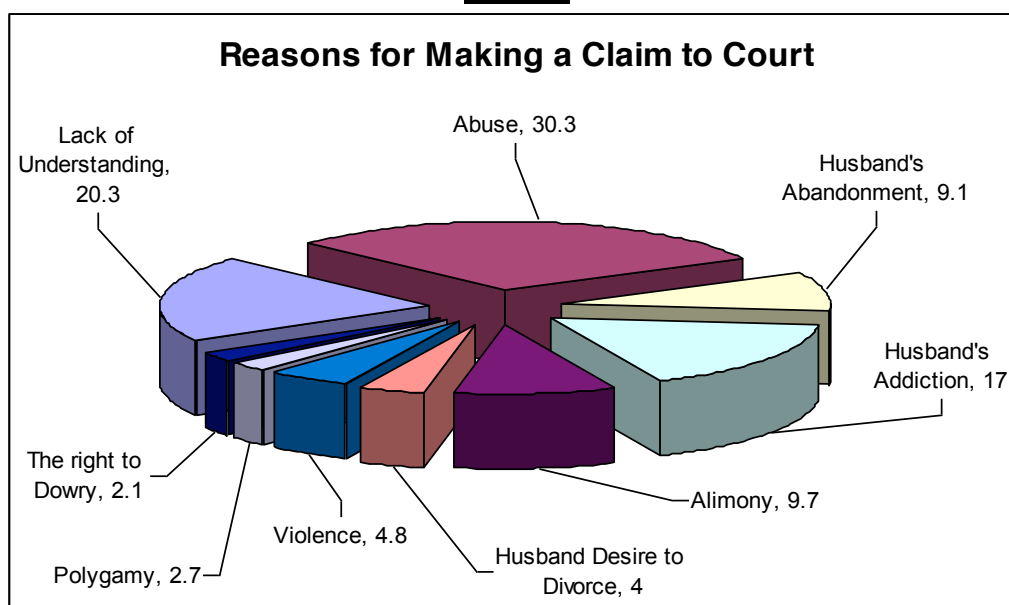
⁴³ Dr. Shaditalab, "Report of Results of *Hayaran Dadgah Khanevadeh* Project", p. 21

⁴⁴ -- Ditto --

behaviour on the other side of the spectrum of maltreatment such as physical violence with the figure of 4.8% (wife battering).

It is worthy to note that while cases of domestic violence appear very small (i.e. only 4.8%), the volunteer family counsellors and the beneficiaries confirmed that this is partially due to covert/hidden use of domestic violence included under the broad category of abuse which is the highest contributing factor to divorce cases (30.3%) along with lack of understanding/incompatibility 20.3%) which in total is over 50% of the cases. Many domestic violence cases are also usually not reported especially as the battered wife has to bring witnesses to prove her case. Also, most women usually were advised against making claimants for such cases by those⁴⁵ who are available and located in the family courts to be hired with small fee to write up the plaintiff, another complicated process in itself, also fully reflected in the study conducted under the project.

Chart 7



The family counsellors confirmed that many instances of family disputes reported as abuse (maltreatment) or lack of understanding were in some direct or indirect way related to domestic violence. Studies conducted by another UNFPA supported project as well as those involved in legal aids clinics also clearly demonstrate the existence of domestic violence, not openly expressed, as one of the root causes attributing to divorce cases. In addition, as also the case elsewhere in the world, Iranian women are reluctant to report cases of domestic violence as it is an issue impacting family "honour" and they feel ashamed in front of those outside of their immediate family to claim such clear cases of abuse inflicted upon them by their husbands.

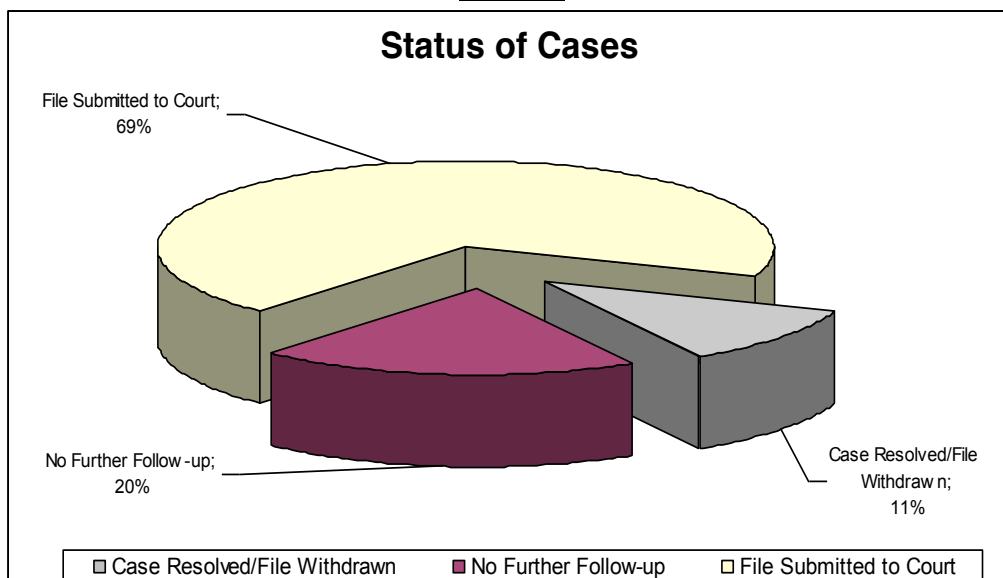
Based on the above findings, it can be concluded that the project was successful in addressing a wide array of cases covered under the claim for *mehreyeh* leading to divorce and effectively rendered services to the project beneficiaries, while fully recognising the limitations (i.e. loss of records for some 100 cases that were not properly recorded) and constraints associated with not being able to follow-up the cases after the beneficiaries received 3-4 sessions of counselling.

Total number of cases/families that benefited from the project: Chart 8 depicts the status of the cases covered by the family counsellors at the time of project completion. As shown under Chart 8, accumulatively at least 1/3 of the cases namely (20%) who received family counselling services reached reconciliation and have no further follow-up while the files are not yet completely withdrawn. Another 11% of cases as completely "resolved/file

⁴⁵ *Arizeh neviesi* (write up of the plaintiff) is one of the main steps when going through the courts. It is the basis for all other steps. Usually, the persons who have become expert in these write ups also provide their advice to women on what type of complaints gives faster results through the courts.

withdrawn”. This brings the total number of cases to 31% who through the successful services rendered by the family counsellors to couples (both the wife and the husband) were able to reconcile and settle their cases.

Chart 8



Even for the 69% who have still maintained their cases and submitted them to settlement by the courts, their processing of their claimants were facilitated by the family counsellors. This was confirmed by the beneficiaries who participated in the focussed group discussion. This, therefore, is another confirmation, in quantitative terms, of project achieving its objective with success by expediting the court processes. Putting number against these percentages, of the 540 cases handled, family counselling was extended to women, their husband, and children bringing the total number of people who received services close to 1,300 ($540 \times 2 = 1,080 + 200^{46} = 1,280$) persons.

Chart 9

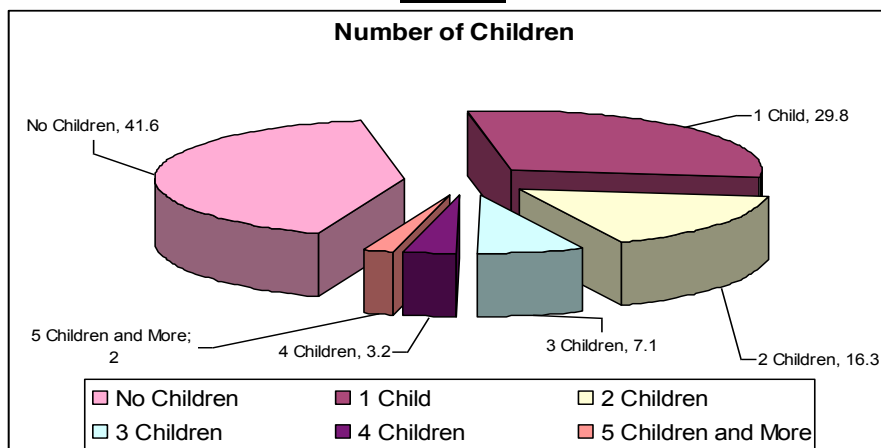


Chart 9 depicts the number of children of cases whose parents received counselling services. From the total number of cases covered under the project (i.e. 540), little over 40% had no children (41.6%). About 60% of the couples had at least one or more children. Even if one child is the average number of children, with 1/3 reaching reconciliation, about 200 children would have also directly benefited from the project, being saved from becoming “children of divorce” with all its social vulnerability and detrimental repercussions.

In summary and in an overall quantitative assessment of the project performance, with due consideration to the duration of the pilot phase (three months period) and the fact that there were 25 volunteer family counsellors who rendered their services by providing 3-4 counselling sessions free of charge to some 540 families inclusive of women, men and

⁴⁶ The 200 figure is an approximate number of children who benefited from the project derived from Chart 9.

children (approx. 1,300 persons) fully illustrated under charts 8 and 9, the project overall satisfactory rating of performance marked under the qualitative assessment is fully reconfirmed.

Recommendations:

The recommendations of this evaluation is primarily made on the basis of proposals and suggestion of internal and external stakeholders and the views expressed by the limited number of the beneficiaries who attended the focussed group discussions regarding how to enhance project impact (details provided in Annex VII).

In line with these suggestion and with due consideration of the findings and conclusion regarding the effectiveness of the project -- the genuine need and necessity of having family counselling, and to continue maintaining the momentum already generated, the main recommendations of the evaluation exercise for the future course of the project are provided below:

- Using a holistic approach, establishment of a multi-purpose network facility using professional male and female family counsellors initiated by ODVV as the interim secretariat with membership and partnering with stakeholders identified under the present project inclusive of those organisations that served as volunteer family counsellors, FCC No. 1 authorities as well as the judges.
- Considering the importance of pre-marital counselling, advocacy to increase the duration of present mandatory pre-marital counselling from present two-weeks to one month to be rendered preferably at cultural centres affiliated to the municipality is a prerequisite activity to the establishment of the network.
- The network is proposed to be registered with the Ministry of Interior and Social Welfare Organisation and work in a transparent manner accountable to the partner members, beneficiaries and the public at large.
- The capacity development paradigm of the three inner-circle model is to be used with “being”-identity, values, mission and vision formulated through consensus, “doing”-for demand-driven activities and “relating” with both internal and external stakeholders inclusive of donors both at the national and internationally will be used.
- Concentrating initially on its “being”, the network is expected to aim to maintain teamwork using a win-win approach and by keep its members up-to-date through intensive refresher courses. Once consensus reached on the mission and vision of the network, there would be systematic strategic planning, work programming, monitoring and evaluation with specific identification of roles and functions.
- With efficient fund raising mechanisms in place along with effective programming and budgeting, the initial financial support for the network to be provided using a multi-sectoral package (e.g. utilising support of the FCC No.1; the Municipality and its affiliate organisations; Social Welfare organisation; and other related ministries and related centres such as the CWFA as well as the academia and inclusive of international donors and agencies).
- Sustained linkage with DICs, legal aids clinics, volunteer lawyers’ network, Conflict Resolution Centre affiliated to the Bar Association, and gender-focussed CSOs, income generating cooperatives/CBOs, and charities working at the grassroots.
- Addressing the issue of sustainability of human resources namely the family counsellors and other member with different expertise through compensation schemes for their services by charging small fees. Of course, initially and for those who are unable to cover the cost, the services should be free of charge and alternative modalities to cover such costs envisaged.
- The network headquarter would be located in the vicinity of the FCCs (e.g. near FCC1 in south of Tehran) with adequate counselling and training facilities and

adequate telephone lines for the re-establishment of national hotlines [*Sedayeh Moshaver*]. In addition, the Network Facility has to be equipped with at least a play area/waiting room for accompanying children to stay while their family members are being received by the counsellors. Eventually the network is expected to have branches for each FCC.

- Setting up various specialised task forces within the network mandated to provide various types of counselling inclusive of pre-marital⁴⁷, post marriage and post divorce focusing on areas such as “needs and capacity assessment” of the clienteles, ways to tackle “gender based violence”, “vocational-technical (VOTEC) training”, “harm reduction of substance abuse” with the support of DICs, Social Welfare Clinics, and NGOs involved in demand/harm reduction as well as gender-focused CSOs
- The work programming and activities of the network are to be planned in a systematic manner using participatory mechanisms using professional facilitation techniques and through consensus building approaches on a regular six-monthly basis.
- Regular reviews of the performance of the network are essential using both qualitative and quantitative success indicators for monitoring, evaluation and self assessments.
- To enhance impact, follow-up will be routinely undertaken.
- Conducting of demand-driven short term courses and training programmes tailor-made to needs and capacities for various target groups, from students, to young couples, youth and parents focusing on areas such as basic life skills, conflict resolution, empathy, and adolescence counselling as well as other training areas proposed by the target groups as and when required.
- Formulation of demand driven and user-friendly training modules specifically designed for e-learning and CDs, brochures and IEC material addressing different practical and strategic needs of various categories of beneficiaries particularly in order to facilitate linkage with the judges and for their greater involvement to enhance work performance.
- Undertaking targeted, applied and practical research studies that are need-based to maintain the network function in line with prevailing conditions and with required flexibility to enhance effectiveness of the network.
- Making twinning arrangements and using mentoring schemes to establish and have chain of access to related expertises and resources (both in terms of financial and human), while maintaining independent identity at national, regional and international levels.
- Develop a data bank, roster of potential sources and have help desk through website to enhance greater outreach.

⁴⁷ As the Facility is expected to serve all categories of the clienteles, it should also render pre-marital counselling. However, it is better that such services are rendered using a different location such as the cultural centres affiliated to the Municipality

Evaluation Questions:

For each of the following headings the related questions are listed below:

Objective and the scope of the evaluation:

- I. Assess the design of the project in terms of relevance through specifically addressing the following issues :
 - a) being needs-based of the women targeted (project beneficiaries)
 - b) clarity of outputs and activities
 - c) soundness and use of alternative strategies and methodology in implementation;
 - d) Adequacy of activities and alternative strategies to produce the envisaged outputs.

For Internal Stakeholders:

The following questions are to be addressed in the structured interviews and the evaluation workshops with internal stakeholders (project management, staff, administrators, counsellors, donor, and UNFPA):

1. What was the main problem that the project aimed to address?
2. What were the main justifications to have the project implemented?
3. Which main (3) social and legal context/aspects influenced the priorities set under the project?
4. How were the needs of project beneficiaries identified?
5. How were these needs prioritised?
6. Who were involved in deciding on the original project scope and its subsequent revision?
7. Was the relation between activities, expected outputs, etc. logical and placed in a logical framework?
8. What were the expected and unforeseen outputs (with an emphasis on describing each--analysis under impact section)?
9. How was "success" in producing each of the outputs defined?
10. What were the indicators identified to measure "success" in producing outputs?
11. What were the reasons for selection/changes made in project activities?
12. In what way was the analysis of the context relevant and logically related to the strategies developed?
13. Were all the strategies developed followed in the course of implementation or were they changed as the project progressed?
14. Who were the target groups (size, age, class, educational level, etc.)?
15. What categories of problems did they encounter (e.g. divorce, custody, family dispute, dowry [obligatory at any time by the man], domestic violence, getting 2nd wife, alimony, etc.)?

- II. Assess the project efficiency in terms of :
 - a. Management of the project;
 - b. Strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation;
 - c. Technical assistance and backstopping provided;
 - d. Coordination mechanisms among various partners (i.e. UNFPA, donor, ODVV, Technical advisor to the project, Judiciary, etc.)
 - e. Budget and cost efficiency in implementing project activities and produce the envisaged outputs.

1. What was the comparative advantage of having ODVV to manage the project?
2. Who were the key stakeholders?
3. In line with the stakeholder matrix, how were the roles of each of the stakeholders defined?
4. What was the level of involvement of the key project stakeholders in project design/formulation/planning/management and implementation (e.g. the judiciary, ODVV, the donor, UNFPA, experts, social workers, other Government partners, etc.?) In other words, who did what?
5. How was the project managed? (TORs for internal stakeholders in place or did everyone knew what was expected of them)?
6. Was there a detailed work plan and how was it formulated?
7. Were the planning and M&E system in place sufficient to assess results?
8. What were the M&E mechanisms and who was responsible for the M&E?
9. How was the issue of follow-up addressed and who was tasked to undertake follow-up to ensure sustainability of project results on each of the individual cases as well as with the overall implementation/progress made?
10. What other mechanisms were envisaged to address the sustainability issue?
11. What was the mechanism used in project coordination and were the roles of each partner clearly specified to enhance coherence? If so what were these roles?
12. How was the issue of cost efficiency tackled?
13. What were the main planning/budgeting concerns/issues to address HR and other resources required for smooth project implementation?
14. In terms of financial and other support provided, were they sufficient? In what way?

III. Project effectiveness and potential impact through:

- a. Identify the strengths/weaknesses/opportunities/threats (SWOT) of project;
- b. Specify constraints and obstacles faced in undertaking project activities;
- c. Reviewing potential impact of family counselling in general and women counselling in particular on reduction of divorce cases;
- d. Address issues related to the expansion and sustainability of counselling services;
- e. Highlight successful case studies/best practices (e.g how could counselling help women solve their family problem and improve their quality of life);
- f. Provide practical and concrete recommendations incorporating the views of key stakeholders and beneficiaries to sustain project results; and
- g. Map ways to continue and/or expand the project, including specific activities, strategies, coordination modalities, etc. for the future course.

1. What are the SWOTs of the project at the time of project operation and what are they now? How do they differ, if any?
2. What are the tangible effects/impacts and expected results of the project in both qualitative and quantitative terms highlighting on what worked and best practices?
3. What were the expectations from the project as specified by each of the key stakeholders? Were they relevant and realistic? Were there different expectations?
4. Who did what for achieving the expected results?
5. How/in what way and what could facilitate improvement of project performance enhancing results?
6. Were the solutions and options offered to the target group considered relevant, realistic and consequently effective?
7. What were the key implementation constraints and challenges?
8. What practical recommendation would enhance impact and sustainability of project effects?
9. How to improve project impact/effectiveness in future? In answering this question strategies/modalities/approaches that proved effective could be used as guiding light.
10. What practical recommendations could help improve project implementation, management, effectiveness, efficiency and impact?

External Stakeholders:

Main questions to ask from the key external stakeholders in the structured interview:

1. What is your relationship with the project?
2. Are you familiar with its objectives? Could you highlight in your own words what you think it aimed to achieve?
3. To what extent do you believe that it has achieved it? In what way? [Please explain briefly].
4. What do you know about the types of services offered by the counsellors?
5. What would you say are the impact of the project?
6. In what way will the activities undertaken impact family relations?
7. How could the services be improved? Please explain briefly.
8. What were the strengths and challenges faced in providing the services offered?
9. In what way do you think you could help them in the future?

Beneficiaries:

Main questions to ask from the beneficiaries in a Focussed Group Discussion:

1. How did you find out about the counsellors (*Hamyaran-e Khanevadeh*)?
2. What did you expect them to do for you?
3. How did they become acquainted with you?
4. Could you briefly describe your relationship with the counsellors?
5. The advice given to you was it effective? In what way?
6. How are you handling the challenges you faced now?
7. Are you satisfied with the result/outcome of advice you received? In what way?
8. What could the counsellors do to improve their services? – Providing details on how the advice they received could become more effective.

List of Internal and External Stakeholders
Participating in the Evaluation Exercise

Internal Stakeholders: Project Management, Implementation, Administration, Logistics & Coordination

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| 1. Dr. Jaleh Shaditalab | Project Director, Faculty Member Tehran University |
| 2. Mr. Alireza Taheri | Managing Director ODVV |
| 3. Ms. Fahimeh Okhowat | Deputy Managing Director ODVV |
| 4. Ms. Hamideh Aboutorabi | Administrative Coordinator of the Project, Staff, ODVV |
| 5. Ms. Behnaz Aliyani | Expert, Data Bank, Staff, ODVV |
| 6. Ms. Layla Behnam | Managing Director, Raha [Free] Clinic, ODVV |

Internal Stakeholders: Volunteer Family Counsellors

- | Name | Organization/Association |
|------------------------------|--|
| 7. Ms. Irandokht Amirasefi | Society for Cultural Development of Children |
| 8. Ms. Akram Aminaee | Donya Children Research Centre |
| 9. Ms. Afagh Esmailivedad | Tehran Education Centre |
| 10. Ms. Roghayeh Bahari | <i>Yass</i> [Jasmine] Institute |
| 11. Ms. Fahimeh Pazooki | <i>Beh Afarinan Farda</i> [Creating a better future] Institute |
| 12. Ms. Azar Khayat Farahani | Society for Protection of Street & Working Children |
| 13. Ms. Mahboobeh Khansarieh | Harmonic Family Counselling Centre |
| 14. Ms. Mojghan Dastoori | Tehran University Research and Study Centre |
| 15. Ms. Neda Deylami | Harmonic Family Counselling Centre |
| 16. Ms. Farideh Rajpoost | <i>Asibdidegan</i> [Vulnerability] Society |
| 17. Ms. Mohtaram Ramazanloo | <i>Yass</i> [Jasmine] Institute |
| 18. Ms. Somayeh Shaabani | Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child |
| 19. Ms. Fatemeh Zarif Jalali | Women's Studies Centre |
| 20. Ms. Molook Aziz-zadeh | Women's Studies Centre |
| 21. Ms. Raheleh Gheyoomi | Women's Studies Centre |
| 22. Ms. Mansooreh Kalhor | Harmonic Family Counselling Centre |
| 23. Ms. Mitra Mohammadi Tari | Harmonic Family Counselling Centre |
| 24. Ms. Farideh Molajalali | Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child |
| 25. Ms. Efat Hedayati | Iran <i>Mehr</i> [Kindness] Kindergarten |
| 26. Ms. Neda Yaraee | Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child |
| 27. Ms. Shohreh Yousefi | <i>Donya</i> [World] Children Research Centre |
| 33. Ms. Mansooreh Arbabi | Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child |

External Stakeholders: Family Court Complex (FCC) No. 1

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 34. Mr. Mohammad Mehdi Cheraghian | Chief Magistrate |
| 35. Mr. Ferydoon Amirabadi | Chief Magistrate & Chief, Conflict Resolution Council |
| 36. Ms. Farahnaz Khosrooshahi, | Deputy Chief Magistrate |
| 37. Mr. Majid Mohajeri | Previous Chief Magistrate (Presently Chief Magistrate, Economics & Financial High Court) |
| 38. Ms. Layla-Sadat Assadi | Previous Deputy Chief Magistrate (Presently Deputy Chief Magistrate, Ahwaz) |

Internal & External Stakeholders:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 39. Ms. Soudabeh Ahmadzadeh | Assistant Resident Representative, UNFPA |
| 40. Dr. Monireh Basir | Programme Officer, Gender, UNFPA |
| 41. Ms. Shabnam Besharat | British Embassy |

Comparative Advantage of ODVV

There were several advantages of involving ODVV to administer the project. These were:

- Established in 1988 and registered with the Ministry of Interior, ODVV has long years of experience in working with vulnerable groups (i.e. victims of violence).
- With 12 full-time staff members, it is mandated to take appropriate strategies in defending victims of violence and it has identified and established appropriate channels to access the judiciary efficiently.
- Having a managing director who has served himself as a judge and worked very closely with high-level officials and authorities of the judiciary is an instrumental asset for the organisation.
- Competent full-time management and administration team and support staff members enabling the organisation to be in a position to render the required administrative, logistics and coordination support required under the project was acknowledged by all partners, external and internal to the project alike.
- Fully established Infra-structural base inclusive of office facilities, venue for conducting meetings, conferences and workshops with simultaneous translation and recording facilities is another plus for ODVV.
- Having up-to-date computer equipment and facilities with professional expertise in place for the establishment of a user-friendly data bank needed for the quantitative assessments is another advantage of having ODVV as the project partner responsible for logistics. ODVV's excellent access to printing and publishing firms for the timely production of documentations and reports as and when required was another comparative advantage of ODVV proving the selection of ODVV, as an efficient decision made by the project director.
- Above all, having *Raha* Counselling Centre that serves as a socio-psychological relief/aids clinic with professional staff with expertise in counselling is another comparative advantage of ODVV. With professional counsellor as director of *Raha* and the required support staff and excellent relations with other counselling firms, *Raha* was highly instrumental in the selection process of the volunteer family counsellors in the course of project implementation and following its completion, for the initiatives to be undertaken under the future phases.

Analysis of Stakeholders' Matrix

Roles Tasks	To Inform	Obtain Information From	To Consult	Partners	Control & Support
Plan & Formulate Dr. Shaditalab	FCC; Donor; UNFPA; ODVV ⁱ ; NGOs	FCC; Donor; UNFPA; EU/UK Best Practices; Experienced Judges who worked with family courts before the Revolution	FCC, ODVV;; academicians; religious scholars	ODVV; selected volunteering NGOs; selected academicians	<u>Control</u> UNFPA, FCC, donor <u>Support</u> ODVV
Manage: Primarily by: Dr. Shaditalab	FCC & Staff; Group leaders; Judges; Selected NGOs; volunteers; ODVV (Ms. Behnam)	NGOs; private counselling firms; ODVV counselling centre of <i>Raha</i> (particularly Ms. Behnam)	FCC; ODVV; Project Director: Dr. Shaditalab	For Management: Project Director: Dr. Shaditalab Admin.:ODVV For internal affairs within FCC:FCC Deputies	Overall: Dr. Shaditalab, Specific Support Tasks: FCC, UNFPA, Donor, ODVV
Implement: Primarily by: Dr. Shaditalab	NGOs; private counsel. firms; UNFPA; FCC; academicians; ODVV; Psychiatrist; volunteer counsellors	Project Director: Dr. Shaditalab; Group leaders; Conflict Resolution Council (FCC); Relevant NGOs	FCC; ODVV counsel. centre of <i>Raha</i> (Ms. Behnam*); Academicians; Volunteer Counsellors; the Justice Ministry	Project Director: Dr. Shaditalab; Administrator/ Logistics & support staff of ODVV Coordinators: ODVV staff; Group leaders; Internal Affairs: Deputy Chief Magistrate of Council of Resolution of FCC; Lawyers; and academicians	Project Director: Dr. Shaditalab; FCC; ODVV; UNFPA; Volunteer Counsellors; Group Leaders
Monitor & Evaluate Final: External Evaluator - Dr. Amiri Mid Point: Dr. Shaditalab	<u>Director</u> <u>Implement.</u> Dr. Shaditalab; ODVV; UNFPA; FCC; Majlis;	Group leaders; Project Director: Dr. Shaditalab; FCC; ODVV; academicians; UNFPA; Volunteer Counsellors	<u>Director:</u> Dr. Shaditalab; ODVV (Manager & Staff); Group Leaders; Donor; UNFPA; FCC; Volunteer Counsellors; & beneficiaries	<u>I Director:</u> Dr. Shaditalab; ODVV (Manager & Staff); Group Leaders; Donor; UNFPA; FCC; Volunteer Counsellors; & beneficiaries	<u>Director:</u> Dr. Shaditalab; UNFPA; Donor; ODVV
Report: Progress Reporting: Dr. Shaditalab Evaluation Report: Final: Dr. Amiri	Justice Ministry; ODVV; UNFPA; FCC; Majlis; Centre for Women & Family Affairs	External & Internal Counsellors; beneficiaries; FCC; judges (old & new)	External Evaluator; <u>Director:</u> Dr. Shaditalab; Internal Stakeholders	<u>Director:</u> Dr. Shaditalab (reporting results) <u>Logistic Support:</u> ODVV <u>Funding:</u> UNFPA & Donor <u>Evaluation Report:</u> External evaluator	<u>Director:</u> Dr. Shaditalab; UNFPA; Donor; ODVV
Follow- up**	Not undertaken	Not undertaken	Not undertaken	Not undertaken	Not undertaken

(*) Particularly Ms. Behnam as an experienced ODVV family counsellor who is responsible for the *Raha* Clinic of ODVV that provides counselling and socio-psychological support to victims of violence.

(**) For exceptional and limited of complex cases, on their own initiative some of the counsellors informally got the contact address of the beneficiaries

Methodology used in FGD with the Beneficiaries
Methodology of Focused Group Discussions with the Beneficiaries:

As one of the participatory methods used in the evaluation exercise, a focused group discussion was held to assess the views of the project's target group. Requesting to at least discuss with 10% of project beneficiaries with invitation extended to some 30 unsuccessful cases, ODVV was only able to reach seven (6 women and 1 man).

At the beginning of the meeting the beneficiaries were requested not to give their names to abide to code of secrecy.

As an ice-breaker 32 drawings depicting different feelings had been placed on a handout with a number written next to it and titling each drawing. They were asked the following four questions:

- 1- When they had first come to visit family counsellors which drawing described their feelings best? (Requested to place the number(s)/title(s) best depicting their feeling along with the title of the drawing next to their response).
- 2- When the family counsellors starting supporting them what was their feeling? (Requested to place the number(s)/title(s) best depicting their feeling next to their response).
- 3- When they were leaving their last session which drawing described their feelings best? (Requested to place the number(s)/title(s) best depicting their feeling next to their response).
- 4- Which drawing describes best their feeling today? (Requested to place the number(s)/title(s) best depicting their feeling next to their response).

The result of these questions that all almost all of the beneficiaries felt exhausted, disappointed, guilty, anxious, agonize, and frustrated trying to find a way to address their problems going through the court. They felt welcomed and listened to by family counsellors except the male beneficiary who claimed, "My wife made such an evil out of me that it took some time for me to convince the counsellor that I was not as bad as she thought". After their association with the family counsellors, they felt curious, confident, optimistic and blissful. Though they had not yet reached any results, they found family counselling useful, except the male beneficiary as he thought family counsellors should not be stationed at family courts. It was very embarrassing for him to be called to go to the courts with a writ issued by the court summoning him through his parent's home address and in his office.

The beneficiaries were then asked the questions included under Annex I under beneficiaries.

Best Practices ⁴⁸ :	
1.	A lady who was 30 and married for three years had problems with her husband (not being able to sexually satisfy her) wanted her <i>mehreyeh</i> in order to get a divorce and leave him. After 3-4 counselling sessions, they agreed to go to a physician and eventually their problem was resolved and case withdrawn. "All I did was that I helped both of them to be able to talk to each other instead at yelling at each other. It was as simple at that".
2.	A 43 years old woman who had been married for 20 years was worried that her husband is having extra-marital relations as he was not as active as in the past with her. In discussing the matter for the first time with her husband in front of the counsellor, after some initial resentment and anger, and with going through together to 3 sessions of counselling, reconciliation was reached and both of them left with no further follow-up on their case in the court.
3.	A young couple who did not have basic skills of communicating with each other and due to the interference by their families they were influenced by what they were told and blamed each other for each and every minor issue. In fact, they did not really know each other or what they really wanted out of marriage. She was told by her mother to show your power and go and claim your <i>mehreyeh</i> . They were able to use the counselling services to get to know each other better. As they could afford it, they even continued by going to counselling firms outside. After 6-7 sessions, they settled their case and withdrew/closed their case.
4.	Another case was an elderly mother who claimed that her young son and teenage daughter had motivated to claim her <i>mehreyeh</i> . The couple were both very stubborn and each brought their son and daughter to support their case as witnesses. In the third session, I asked the couple to step out of the room and starting talking with them. It became clear that they hated what their parents were doing to them and wanted them to get back together. With their support and frank feedback, the couple started to look at their real situation from a different perspective realising that what they were doing to each other was not at all constructive. Eventually, the got together and reconciled after four sessions.
5.	There was one young woman who only got married to leave home. She was looking for a man of her dreams. When asked what would you do after you get your <i>mehreyeh</i> and get your divorce, she had a puzzled look. The husband was able to provide for her and buy her whatever she wanted. "But this is not enough. I want a husband not a money maker machine". When inviting the husband, he was surprised to see her there. Could not believe that she is not happy. Family counselling was like a catalyser opening the eyes of couples to get to know each other better and improve their relationships.
6.	There were a man aged 66 and his wife at age 60. He did not want to provide for her any longer as she was having a lot of personal costs (e.g. related to her going through menopause/health. After 2-3 sessions, he accepted to provide for her and she withdrew her case. What was mainly needed in this case was an incentive for the woman to get to talk with her husband instead of him fighting with her as soon as she complained about her conditions. They settled and she did not follow her case anymore, while her file is not withdrawn. They did not return during the project duration. But, if he still refuses to cover for her expenses, she might come back once again.
7.	There was a young girl who while entering matrimony was still living with her relative. Her husband was epileptic with sever mental problems. Several times she

⁴⁸ The cases are excerpts gathered from the responses of the family counsellors.

	wanted to commit suicide. Coming to the court she was referred to the family counselling unit and after 2-3 sessions, she decided to get separated from him. Being able to stop a girl from suicide was a great achievement and a major success, though she would end up with a divorce.
8.	There was a case of “agreed separation”. Both were educated and were artists. They had one child. Married some 10-12 years ago, first the wife came for counselling and discussed her problem wanting to get a divorce. She talked about her husband as being irresponsible and that he would not come to counselling sessions. “Then I went to the corridor and firmly asked him to come for counselling, otherwise although they have reached an agreement for separation, I would not allow them to get a divorce. Finally he came to the room. He had a severe case of stuttering at first and I could not easily understand what he was saying. Then I asked the woman to leave the room. I realised that from the beginning they also had problems with their sexual life. Then I gave both of them some exercises asking them for following them carefully and gave them an appointment for next week. At the end of the fourth session, miraculously the stuttering was completely gone and he was speaking with full self confidence and calmly. The wife was also much more content. While I expected them to come back the following week, I never saw them again. Later, they withdrew their claimant altogether.
10.	A young couple aged 19 and 21, with 20 days old infant came to the office one day with the wife claiming her <i>mehreyeh</i> . She wanted to force her husband to bring the child so that she can breast-feed him as he had taken the child after they had a fight when the child was five days old. The baby was taken to mother-in-law (mother of the husband). Then I invited both the husband and the father of the clientele. The husband was from a low cultured family and started to yell and insult everyone particularly his wife. His job was collecting rubbish paper for recycling. His mother interfered regularly in their life. Finally after 2-3 sessions of counselling, he agreed to become assertive and stand in front of his mother getting his child from her and take the child to his wife so that she could continue breast feeding him. “I also had several sessions where I discussed with the wife separately on how to relate with her husband and cope with his problems not to make him angry. At the last session, the baby was brought back and they got back together again.
11.	Another case was a couple that really did not have a problem with each other but the mother had problem with their 14 year old daughter who was extremely bright making her feel not wanted and the father felt supportive of the daughter while not wanting to lose his wife as well. Getting her <i>mehreyeh</i> would make her feel better as she would become economically more independent. The husband agreed to pay her on a monthly basis while asking her to return. In talking with the daughter she also realised that she was not treating her mother right and because she was not as bright, she should not have made her feel belittled. They never returned and the case was fortunately dropped.

N.B.: As reflected in the above cases, though covering a limited number of issues handled by the family counselors, they indicate that with ample time given and active listening skills, many cases were reconciled as the major problem was lack of communication.

Recommendations:

I) Beneficiaries:

It is worthy to note that the suggestions made by the beneficiaries who in spite of the services received were going to continue with processing their cases to reach a court settlement based their recommendation on continuation of the present project (i.e. having family counselling unit located within the FCC premises):

1. Expectation of beneficiaries to be assessed prior to the rendering of family Counselling services: One of the main issues that were not addressed either under the comprehensive study or the questionnaire completed by the beneficiaries was their expectations when they were selected by the FCC authorities and referred to receive services by the volunteer family counsellors. This is a prerequisite, according to the beneficiaries as the counselling could be tailor-made to the needs of the target group/clients.
2. Building/maintaining required trust: As receiving family counselling services was made mandatory by the FCC, most of them did not easily trust the counsellors initially thinking that the information provided might be used against them in courts. Of course, after their initial dismay and resentment, due to the supportive atmosphere created as explained by one of the beneficiaries, they become satisfied to the extent that they even brought other people who had not even filed a claimant and requested for family counsellors to also render services for them.ⁱ Thus, it is better not to make going to counsellors as mandatory.
3. Embarrassment caused by receiving writ marked with FCC emblem: As also confirmed by several of the family counsellors, most of the men found the writs as being summoned and ordered to appear in courts. As explained by all the beneficiaries [also confirmed by family counsellors] this created anger and apprehension regarding what is to come. As they were forced to come to the FCC because of their wife's claimant, not only this was not a positive strategy, it even made the situation more distressful. As an alternative, it would be much better that prior to issuance of a writ with FCC emblem, first an invitation letter is issued from the family counsellor marked with confidential sent to a place more likely in maintaining privacy seeking his support to handle the problem while reminding him that if he refuses, there would be an official writ issued from the court.

In fact, the only male beneficiary who participated in the FGD elaborated on his what he called "wretched" experience. He called what his wife had done [going to the court] as "shameful", indicating that he had no problem with paying her the *mehreyeh* and continue with the marriage, but now with what she had done left him with no other solution but divorce as he no longer can 'save face' in front of his parents. The writ was sent to his parents' address intentionally "just to embarrass me in front of them [they did not know about their problem] and that made him angry. Then, the second letter went to his office from another court where he resides, "just to embarrass him even further", he continued. "She just wanted to hurt me and embarrass me in front of everyone. Now that I have gone to every interview with the counsellor, she is not showing up as she has nothing to say".

This was also confirmed by all the other participating beneficiaries in the focused group discussion stating that the writ marked with FCC emblem caused unwarranted resentment. It seems that alternative mechanisms have to be

devised to involve the husband (i.e. initially a confidential invitation letter) prior to an official summon and thus proposed.

4. Family counselling is necessary but not sufficient – Involving of DICs and other relevant organisations to address issues related to substance users (addiction), income generation, etc.: “Being a mother of two and doing everything I could even with the support of the family counsellor, my problem is still my husband’s addiction and unemployment. The family counsellor, though really supportive and helped me a lot on how to treat him and relate with my children, could not help him as after a short time, he is again back in using drugs. What could she [family counsellor] do with an addict?” Her suggestion was that other institutions like (DICs) should be also involved to address the problems most common amongst young men. “And then we need to work with someone who can help him find a job”, she claimed.

As also mentioned by the family counsellors, greater involvement of other key external stakeholders as also suggested in the course of the evaluation workshop along the lines proposed by the beneficiaries is essential. This could be facilitated by taking a holistic approach. With such an approach, the clients could more easily achieve both their practical and strategic needs with greater possibilities of manoeuvring that is essential to sustain impact and hence recommended.

5. Adequate number of needs-based counselling sessions: While couple of the participants in the FGD felt that they initially thought that their problems would be resolved very quickly, they later found out otherwise. Some of the cases required several visits and due to limitations of time and having small children accompanying them, it was very inconvenient for the beneficiaries, their children and the counsellors. Some also claimed that the number of sessions (3-4 per case) was not adequate for many women encountering domestic violence, sometimes requiring longer-term counselling even involving outside consultation with psychiatrists to provide treatments as well as legal advisers are required. It is, therefore, recommended that under the future initiative, the number of sessions as well as the timing for each case be needs-specific and tailor-made, involving various types of expertise services in addition to those rendered by the family counsellors.

6. Useful practice of Involving all family members: Though most of the beneficiaries and particularly their husband were at first reluctant to receive counselling, even for the cases that had no alternative but divorce, the overall comments were positive confirming that because of the counselling received, they were much more clear about what they should do. Also, they become aware of the consequences on their decision on their children and the ways to minimise such negative impacts.

Almost all wished that they could have access to counselling before marriage as their problems mainly stemmed from “not really knowing each other”, confirming that the need for “pre-marital counselling” is a genuine one. They also thought that if right from the time that they encountered their first conflict they had an opportunity to consult with a counsellor--“post marriage counselling”, their situation might have been completely different. Even now that they are going through divorce, once separated, they need the support of the counsellors even much more, on how to cope with the situation, particularly with their children. Involving all family members inclusive of children and at times even immediate family members (e.g. mothers and mother-in-laws) [as reflected in the case studies under Annex VI) who still tend to interfere with family affairs thus suggested.

II) Internal Stakeholders: Based on the views expressed in the course of the evaluation workshop and as suggested in their responses to the questionnaires, the following recommendations were made by the majority of family counsellors, ODVV staff, UNFPA, project director and the donor:

1. Learn from the international experience over the last 50 years;
2. Taking many of the family conflict related issues out of the courts, even for divorce cases and try to address the real issues (i.e. ways to interrelate with each other) vis-à-vis taking a materialist approach to marriage and settling it in the courts (i.e. with the payment of *mehreyeh* the man can just leave forgetting about his family and his obligations altogether);
3. Different family counselling centres teaming up with each other and establish an independent multi-purpose unit with different types of fields of expertise such as psychology, social work, DICs, psychiatry, VOTEC, etc.
4. Establish and strengthen family counselling centres with permits issued by the Social Welfare Organisations [similar to social welfare clinics] that are privately owned and outside the court, but with easy access working closely with the FCC;
5. Obtain resources from the municipality in each area for independent family counselling centres;
6. Find mechanisms to facilitate changing the negative attitudinal perspectives of the judges towards family counselling by also trying to provide services to them as well so to facilitate their work; and
7. Get different stakeholders involved to maximise impact using the same strategy of this pilot phase. However, more sessions like what was done in the course of evaluation workshop to assess performance and make the project transparent with management that is more participatory and accountable.

III) External Stakeholders:

Both the previous and present FCC authorities were the only external stakeholders interviewed. They generally supported the project, particularly the previous chief of magistrate and the present Deputy Chief Magistrate also responsible for the Conflict Resolution Council. Their prime concern was to reduce the lengthy procedures while increasing the numbers of reconciliation. Their recommendations were primarily threefold:

1. To enhance impact, there should be follow-up to see how the couple are relating to each other after receiving counselling. Without follow-up, there would be no way to know whether the cases that have reconciled now would not come back shortly thereafter.

In addition to make an impact assessment in addition to follow-up with the reconciliation and settlement cases, another way to measure success is to introduce a control group. The impact can be assessed using a comparative analysis of results, not only of those cases that have reached a settlement or reconciled, but of those who in fact want court settlements. If the ones receiving family counselling came to court with much more ease and really knowing what they wanted as compared with the situation of those who have not received such services, then it can be proven that the family counselling services have been able to succeed in rectifying the issues.

2. Greater linkage so that more comprehensive services can be provided. For instance much more important than providing family counselling at the time of divorce is pre-marital counselling. In any case working with private firms within the family courts cannot be on a continuous basis. With the support of the municipality or social welfare organisations may be better facilities outside the court somewhere nearby the area could be provided. For the short term though,

if the budget is provided, FCC is ready to provide the premise for the family counsellors.

3. Greater involvement of the judges with particular attention to facilitating their work through conducting well-targeted intensive training courses enhancing their awareness of prevailing socio-psychological issues faced by young couples to enable them make better decisions in issuing verdicts.