

## Crime through the public's eyes

The issue of crime in Lebanon has been significantly magnified in the wake of the murder of eight employees of the Social Security Fund for private school teachers in the UNESCO area in July 2002. In an effort to gauge perceptions on the factors for such emerging violence, as well as the public's views on different kinds of crime and the role of the authorities, *Information International* carried out an opinion poll of 600 people in the Greater Beirut area between September and October 2002. The random sample resulted in a gender distribution of 67.2% males and 32.8% females, with a margin of error of +/- 2%.

### Domestic crime

On the subject of domestic crime, 96% of the public replied that they are aware of crimes that have been committed recently, while 4% said they have no knowledge of them. 40.2% of those who have been following such events reported disgust at these kinds of crimes, while 28.4% said they fear a growing disintegration of the family unit, 17.8% described feelings of insecurity due to such crimes and 10.9% are interested in understanding the motives behind these crimes. 1.6% of respondents indicated understanding for such crimes, while 0.8% did not have any reaction and 0.3% did not specify.

In addition, over half (51.5%) of respondents stated that they follow up on investigations and any news being reported on domestic crime.

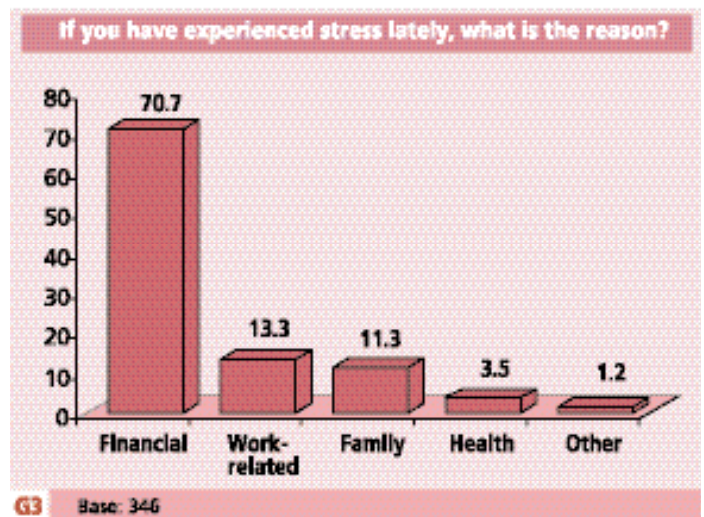
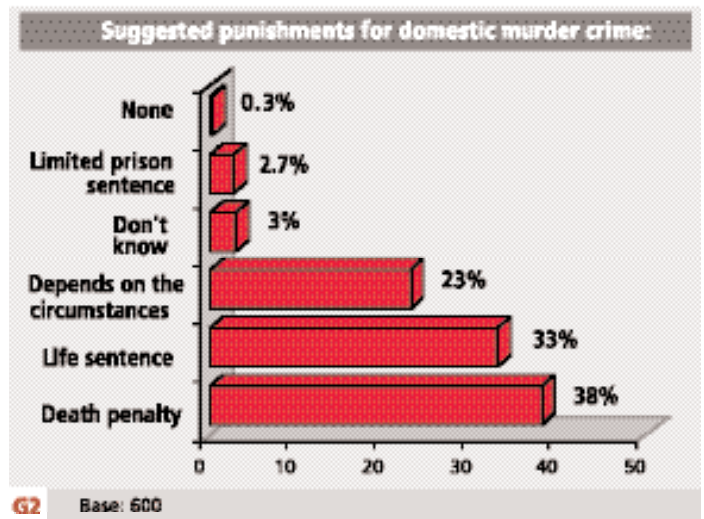
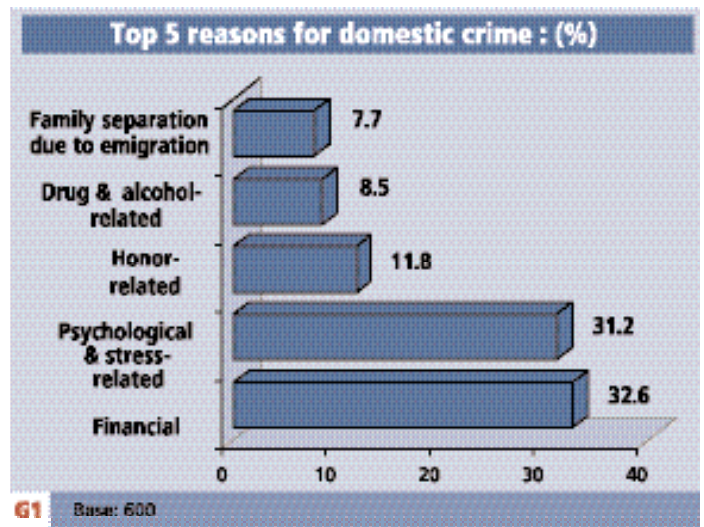
When asked to name instances of domestic crime that were committed this year, 42.4% identified the most recent incident, which occurred in Burj Abi Haidar in September 2002. 16.8% referred to the crime committed in the Chouf, while the remaining respondents noted other instances.

The majority of the public, as shown in **Graph 1**, attributes domestic crime to financial reasons, while 31.2% say these crimes occur because of psychological and stress-related causes. 11.8% perceive them to be "honor"-related, 8.5% lay the blame on drug or alcohol addiction, 7.7% believe family separation caused by emigration is the cause, while 2.5% say such crimes are after-effects of the war, and 2.2% consider violence on TV to be the motive. The remaining responses to this question represent less than 2% of the sample.

Suggested punishments revealed that the death penalty was the most highly favored, by 38% of respondents. A life sentence was advocated by 33%, followed by 23% who recommended that the sentence should be consistent with the crime. The remaining responses can be seen in **Graph 2**.

### State of mind

58% of respondents indicated that they had suffered a period of severe stress recently. As shown in **Graph 3**, the majority (70.7%) attributed it to financial reasons, while 13.3% said it was work-related, 11.3% identified family reasons, 3.5% reported health-related causes, and the remaining respondents referred to instability in the current socio-economic situation and problems with friends. 42% of those who suffered a recent bout of severe stress said it led to some negative and excessive behavior, with 26.7% reveal-



ing conflicts with their parents, 20.6% noting an increase in their smoking habits, 12.7 reporting thoughts of suicide, while 12.1% resorted to tranquilizer use, 10.9% experienced conflict with their employers, 10.3% turned to drinking more alcohol, 4.3% became more violent in general, and 2.4% became violent toward their family.

The majority (90.7%) of the Lebanese public are aware that honor crimes still take place today, while 4.8% claimed they were unaware of them and 4.5% did not know. Of those who are aware, 76.6% of them do not support such acts, while 11.6% said they understand the motives behind honor crimes, 11.6% stated that they support this behavior and 0.4% did not specify.

Graph 4 presents the rationale given by those who expressed support for honor crimes, with 43.5% stating that "shame could only be washed away by blood". While 4.9% stated that it helps to limit inter-religious marriages, this stands in contrast to the majority of respondents, who oppose such crimes. 41.5% attribute these acts to primitive tribal behavior, 35.7% believe that the rule of law should be upheld, while 16.1% stated that they do not support any form of violence and 6.7% said everyone had the right to their own choice.

Half of respondents suggested awareness campaigns be carried out by NGOs and TV stations to limit the occurrence of honor crimes, while 42.7% believed the use of severe punishment would be effective and 7.1% did not know.

#### Theft in Lebanon

Regarding the incidence of theft, almost 80% of respondents expect these crimes to increase, while 12.2% think rates of robbery will remain the same, 4.5% are unsure and only 4.2% believe theft will decrease. These perceptions are in contrast to a report issued by the Ministry of Interior, which states that crime rates have declined between the two-year period of October 2000 and October 2002, as illustrated in Graph 5.

While 20% of respondents to the poll claim to have been subject to some form of theft in the last year, 30.8% did not report the incident to the authorities. The most common wares that were stolen are shown in Graph 6, with the majority being cellular phones, while 1.7% reported that money was stolen, 0.8% said gold was taken and another 0.8% reported theft of their motorcycles.

Out of the respondents who reported the thefts to police, over half (50.6%) said that they were not aware of any outcome or follow-up in their case, while 49.4% reported follow-up by the authorities. Still, in 95.2% of the cases, the perpetrator was never caught and the goods were never recovered.

36.5% of respondents believe robberies are a result of the poor economic situation in the country, while 32% say there is a lack of law enforcement, 29.7% blame these crimes on foreigners living in Lebanon illegally, while 0.9% blame the government for neglect toward its citizens, 0.6% did not state a cause, 0.2% attribute theft to bad upbringing and 0.1% indicated that unemployment was the cause. n

