



Life Conditions of Syrian Refugees Before and After the COVID-19 Pandemic

A qualitative Cross-Sectional Assessment
Analytical Field Qualitative Study



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2020

Foreword

The Higher Population Council (HPC) is pleased to issue This Analysis Report and Brief lit Review on “Social Life of Syrian Refugees Before and After the COVID-19 Pandemic”, which aims to develop an empirical understanding of the heightened impact of SGBV on Syrian refugee women and girls in Jordan, with aim of reducing the impact on them through the recommendation of policies.

Amid the unprecedented COVID 19 pandemic, the imposed lockdown measures have deepened pre-existing conditions of abuse and violence for refugee women and girls; particularly because of the limited access to resources. According to the UN ‘the combination of economic and social stresses brought on by the pandemic, as well as restrictions on movement, have dramatically increased the numbers of women and girls facing abuse, in almost all countries’, prompting the UN’s chief to appeal to all governments to ‘put women’s safety first as they respond to the pandemic’ (UN News, 2020).

The risk of suffering mental health issues during confinement could potentially be higher. As researchers warn us confinement and restrict movement will seriously exacerbate pre-existing depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other mental and psychosomatic distress reactions e.g. insomnia, personality disorders (Yao et al, 2020). This type of risk could be injurious for some female refugees, as often young women and girls have experienced incidents of violence during their journey and are dealing with post-traumatic stress disorders upon their arrival to host countries.

HPC’s strategic priorities focus on evidence-based research on approaches for improving the well-being of vulnerable populations, especially girls and women including refugee women through empowering girls to lead productive lives through improved access to reproductive health services and reducing the prevalence of harmful practices such as Gender-based violence; HPC attaches great importance of rights and Accessibility to services to all especially refugees and youth through policy solutions to expand and improve access, equity and quality of services. Recent refugee crises have provoked a mass influx of diverse humanitarian actors, marked by a lack of coordination and danger of services duplication. We hope through this research to open up crucial spaces for policymakers and humanitarian-aid practitioners to critically examine the research findings, to evaluate how the findings from our study relate to their work/the landscape in which they operate and to reflect on current practice and possible new directions; thus leading to an increased desire for uptake of key findings to advance the development agenda, particularly in relation to SDG3, SDG5 and SDG10

Secretary General

Dr. Abla Amawi

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The (HPC) also expresses thanks to the staff of the (HPC) who worked on the technical support, review, guidance, and direction for the study in its final form, hoping that this research will be a reference for researchers, and policy makers to add new tangible knowledge for influencing to produce better policies and practices in SRH&RR for adolescent at national and region level.

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Executive Summary

Social life of Syrian refugees was significantly changed since they moved to Jordan. Their adaptation to the new environment requires enormous support and extensive efforts because of the rapid changes that occurred to their lifestyle and dramatic changes to their social and economic conditions. In addition, they were imposed by physical and emotional stress and potential health risks that affected their wellbeing. Refugees are a vulnerable population and at a higher risk of mental, physical, and social distress. They are also more prone to abuse, harassment, and domestic violence.

Jordan host the second highest number of refugees per capita. Their continuous social and medical needs necessitate continuous support and organized efforts to maintain the stability and wellbeing of refugee families. Otherwise, serious social and economic problems could develop if refugees' needs were not taken into considerations.

In Jordan, there are 91,051 refugees in the 0 - 4 age group, 140,227 in the 5-11 age group, 94,515 in the age group 12-17, 192,207 in the 18-35 age group, 114,808 in the 35-59 age group, and 26,856 in the 60 and above age group. There are 330,091 registered female refugees, composing 50% of refugees, of whom, 141,727 (43%) are between 12-35 years old. Although there are differences in needs and social challenges that face each age group, refugees share many similar values and common behaviors, which facilitate the understanding of problem sources and possible solutions for them.

Assessing the social and familial conditions of Syrian women refugees, and challenges they encounter in their life in Jordan is essential to provide the appropriate supportive care and to properly address their needs. This report summarizes specific research findings and policy recommendations to improve the social and familial life of Syrian women refugees in Jordan and to reduce SGBV violence. Moreover, understanding the heightened impact of SGBV and the protection of displaced and stateless women and girls during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is an urgent topic critically needing attention. As the health and security services as well as psychologic support services and refuge shelters come under restrain from demands made by local groups and citizens dealing with the pandemic, little room is left to attend female refugees surviving violence. Considering the psychological impacts of confinement and the limited mobility allowed in urban spaces the risk factors increase for female refugees. According to the UN Refugee Agency (2020), women without documentation and under deteriorating socio-economic conditions are more prone to survival sex or child marriages by their families. Moreover, reduced community interaction, as a result of restricted mobility, exacerbates ongoing intimate

partner violence as trapped women remain unable to access community workers or seek in-person support within camps.

This report was co-developed with the Higher Population Council (HPC) in collaboration with the main investigator of the study. The research fund was specific for the assessment of social and familial conditions of Syrian women refugees, challenges and issues they encounter during their daily life, and domestic violence they encountered before and after the lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Higher Population Council attaches great importance to the issue of domestic violence and social life, and family health of women refugees, which are important component of population dynamics, and community development. The integrity of the community relies largely on the social wellbeing of families including refugee women who have a significant contribution to the community and constitute a significant part of the society that is not separated from it. Syrian families should be completely included and assimilated in the local Jordanian communities.

Results of the study showed that Syrian women living in Jordan have a difficult social life. They suffer from low provision of essential life necessities due to the lack of money, deficient job market, and low payment jobs. The journey to Jordan was difficult surrounded by risks and hardship. Participants expressed their frustration when they moved and challenges, they encountered. They still live in small houses due to the high expense of rent, as they noted, that hardly could be secured at the end of the month. For them, life was more beautiful in Syrian before the war, but due to life insecurity, they prefer to stay in Jordan, especially that some of them got used to life in Jordan and prefer it over life in Syria.

Domestic violence was obvious as per the responses of participants who indicated that the level of violence, they encountered from husbands increased a lot since they moved to Jordan.

Most violence imposed on women was verbal, followed by physical violence. Few women encounter sexual violence represented by compulsion to have sex and beating or harming during the intercourse. Verbal and physical violence was significantly increased during the lock down of the COVID-19 pandemic. The familial relationship got worse as well and some tragedies occurred like hospitalization of some women due to the severe damage they received from their husbands and divorce of one of the participants.

The findings and recommendations provided in this report are useful for all organizations working with Syrian refuges, especially of issue related to

Syrian women. There is a demand to conduct further studies that are on a larger scale and include more of the Syrian women refugees. Each of these studies should be more focused on specific issues addressed in this studies that come up with a list of recommendation that could be practically used in educational and awareness programs and in policy making as well.

Chapter One Introduction and methodology

Preface

1. Although Jordan is limited with its resources, it encountered one of the highest influxes of Syrian refugees in the world. This significant and sudden influx of refugees had impacted services and provisions available to refugees, which were not possible to secure without the international assistance. The social life of refugees changed dramatically, causing adverse effects of many Syrian familial and tragic consequences for some of them, which include abuse, violence, separation, and divorce. Women faced many problems in Jordan that were not limited to family issues but was extended to difficulty to assimilate with the local community.
2. Considering the unattended and underreported cases of SGBV cases before the pandemic began in 2020, the likelihood of heightened risk of SGBV for women and girls in protracted crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic is extremely high. Thus, this research will focus on the impact of SGBV on refugee women and girls in Jordan. More specifically, it will attempt to develop a deeper, empirical understanding of the relationship between SGBVs and the ability of refugee women and girls to access education and employment, considered as the most powerful vehicles of sustainable development. In doing so, it aims to contribute to our empirical understanding of the impact of SGBV on female refugees in a humanitarian and fragile setting.

3. This study aimed to overview the current social and familial conditions of 20 Syrian refugee women, challenges they encounter, life needs, and domestic violence during and before the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The report of this study is organized in four chapters; chapter I present the objectives and the methodology. Chapter II reviews the theoretical framework and previous studies which discussed Syrian refugee women social and family life, particularly domestic violence during and before the pandemic. Chapter III presents an analysis of the statistical data extracted from the interviews conducted with Syrian refugee women selected from different regions in Jordan. Chapter IV provides a conclusion of the results and recommendations.

Study Objectives

- 1 | Provide an overview on the social and family life conditions of 20 Syrian refugee women living in Jordan, including the challenges they encounter in their life, before and after the lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2 | Develop baseline-data through 20 in-depth, interviews with Syrian RWG who have experienced heightened SGBV during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3 | Explore: the scope of SGBV perpetrated against Syrian WGR; the intersection of SGBV and access to food, healthcare, education-and-employment/livelihood-approaches/enterprises; the support-services available to WGR who experience SGBV and the barriers/challenges faced in accessing these services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodology

The research design will pursue a holistic approach to examine domestic violence among Syrian women and girl refugees during the pandemic of COVID – 19 through a detailed investigation that examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their experience of violence.

Study Community and its Sample

This was an observational cross – sectional qualitative study that used a detailed interview with an open – ended questions. The interviews were conducted with participants selected from different cities in Jordan. Syrian refugees are mostly living outside camps; among the Jordanian local communities. Thus, the study targeted those living in urban populations in Jordan because of the special living condition of the camps. Jordan hosts a total Syrian refugee population of 659,673 as of September 2020. It estimated that 533,825 (80.9%) of them live in urban areas, or outside camps. There are 330,091 registered female refugees, composing 50% of refugees. Among whom, 141,727 (43%) are between 12-35 years old.

Study participants and data collection

Study interviews were conducted with 20 female Syrian refugees. Both married and unmarried females were targeted in this study. The higher population council contacted

the Jordanian women’s union and the Noor al Hussein foundation and asked them to select participants for the study. Both organizations selected participants who were

reported to experience domestic violence and who regularly visit their facilities to receive services and support. Participants were selected from the following cities in Jordan: Irbid and Al-Ramtha in the north, Amman and Al Zarqa in the Middle, and Al-Karak and Maa’n in the south. Research assistants traveled to these cities to meet with the participants, and the interview was conducted in the above-mentioned organizations where the participants were originally recruited in the study.

The scope and objectives of the study were explained to participants before the initiation of the interview. Oral consent was received to participate in the study and to record their responses.

Although the selected women could share similar socio – economic status and comparable life experiences because of similar living conditions, they could still differ in their experience with violence because of differences in their personalities, life beliefs, social behaviors, and family relationships.

Two experienced and trained female research assistants who previously worked with refugees were recruited for data collection. However, because of the sensitivity of the study subject, interviews were conducted with each of the participants in a separate room to assure their safety, privacy, and confidentiality. These private and individualized interviews ensured the absence of fear from answering questions related violence and to explicitly

share their opinions.

Interview guide

Study interviews were open – ended detailed interview questions that were developed based on the literature of studies addressing domestic and gender – based violence [2, 10, 12, 14]. The questions were prepared and reviewed by experts before the study was conducted. Research assistants had a hard cope of the interview guide when they interviewed the participants. Every question was read loudly to the participant and the answer was recorded on a recorder to be transcribed later.

The interview guide was composed of five main sections as follows:

- 1) Questions related to demographic characteristics.
- 2) Questions related to background information, including marital and familial related questions.
- 3) Questions about life in Syrian before and after the war.
- 4) Questions about life in Jordan, including settlement, housing, financials, and social life.
- 5) Questions about violence, which included verbal, physical, and sexual violence, before and after the lock down due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 6) Questions related to life during the lockdown

The interview was initially developed in English, but to assure that participants fully comprehend the questions, it was translated into Arabic and a back translation was.

done to check accuracy of the translation. The Arabic version was reviewed to ensure that questions were clear and valid.

Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded. Responses of each participant were transcribed under their corresponding questions. Typed transcripts were coded and groups to themes that match the objectives of the study. Grouping of answers formed thematic domains of the responses, and codes were used to describe the proportion of participants who agreed/disagreed or supported/didn't support a certain aspect or concept within the theme and to explore the magnitude of an issue within each theme. Key messages were pointed out to highlight their importance, and some statements provided by participants were quoted to elaborate a certain key message or illustrate a specific aspect.

Study Determinants

It is well known that qualitative studies require relatively more time than statistical studies. The research team were limited by time to complete the study; therefore, they were not able to conduct more interviews that could include women in refugee camps.

Such sensitive studies require that the research team be fully committed to the ethics of research, and that participants voluntarily participate in the study, the matter which limits the access to more diverse and different experiences.

Finally, it is known that qualitative research does not lead to the generalization of its results. Consequently, the results of this study will not be distributed to other Syrian refugee women in Jordan or to Jordanian women except in relation to the statistical axis, but the magnitude of the problems related to the social and familial life of study participants are solely pertained to them.

Study Features

The report of this study is important in tapping on crucial spaces for policy makers and humanitarian aid practitioners to critically examine the study findings related to domestic violence, especially during the lockdown of the COVID-19, to evaluate how the findings from the study relate to their work/the landscape in which they operate and to reflect on current practice and possible new directions to reduce the prevalence of violence. The study is timely as there is considerable interest in Jordan for reliable data for informing programmatic interventions. The Research will foster the generation and dissemination of the knowledge and lessons learnt from the research result, such as practice ways to deal with violence. And, that the lessons learnt, will contribute meaningfully to the transformation of policies, practice and service delivery and ultimately in the promotion of knowledge in to action that will make a difference in the lives of Syrian refugee women, the research will add thus contributing to the realization of UN's SDG3, SDG5 and SDG10 related to protected rights of women and vulnerable populations.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework and Previous Studies

Introduction and methodology

The Syrian Refugee Crisis

According to the United National High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2019, there were 79 million forcibly displaced persons and 26 million refugees around the world. Since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, over 5.6 million individuals have sought refuge in neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. It is estimated that 45% of refugees are children and 21% women. Turkey hosts the largest number of registered Syrian refugees – currently 3.6 million. In Jordan, over 655,000 men, women and children are living in exile. Approximately 80% of them live outside camps, while more than 139,000 have found sanctuary at the camps of Za’atari and Azraq.

Humanitarian crises as consequences of natural disasters, political conflict and civil wars involving millions of displaced people across vast geographic regions necessitate a multidimensional international effort, aid funds and human resources. Refugee crisis challenge the interdependence of the international community. The provision of humanitarian aid and support to attend the needs of diverse groups among Syrian refugees has proven a complex task for local/national and international agencies. The UNHCR pledged \$1.991 billion for 2020’s Syrian Situation Response, as of July 2020 only 29% (5.8 million) has been funded (UNHCR, 2020). Attending refugee needs includes protecting basic human rights of those fleeing violence, political, ethnic and religious persecution. Respect for human rights prior to, during and after the process of refugee settlement is a necessary condition for both preventing and resolving refugee crisis. Safeguarding refugee rights and protection function has a legal basis and its exercise is mandatory for aid agencies and stakeholder bodies. In practical terms, the UNHCR main functions regarding refugee rights includes:

‘The prevention of refoulement, assistance in the processing of asylum seekers, providing legal counsel and aid, promoting arrangements for the

physical safety of refugees, promoting and assisting voluntary repatriation, and helping refugees to resettle' (article 8 of the Statute of the Office of the UNHCR).

However, evidence from the ground depicts a different reality in practice. According to Amnesty International (2016) an increasing number of refugees fleeing Syria have experienced serious abuse and human rights violations on their journey to Europe while other studies show that female refugees have endured sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) in transit and host communities (Freedman, 2016; Parker, 2015).

Researchers suggest that up to 69.3% of refugee women experienced violence upon

their arrival in the European Union (Keynaert et al., 2012). Gender-based violence (GBV) in conflict and post-conflict settings is hardly a new phenomenon as women and girls are disproportionately targeted and constitute most of all victims of war (Ward & Marsh, 2006). Even though sexual violence, specifically rape, is widely recognised as a weapon of war (Eriksson Baaz & Stern, 2013) leading to assumptions that military and armed actors are the sole violent perpetrators, other forms of gender-based violence including intimate partner violence, survival sex and early marriage are increasingly common. In 2012, the International Rescue Committee in collaboration with ABAAD-Resources Centre for Gender Equality assessed the vulnerabilities of Syrian women and girls to increase exposure of GBV and concluded the following:

Intimate partner violence (IPV), early marriage and survival sex were identified by adult women and adolescent girls as other forms of violence experienced since arriving in Lebanon. Adult female participants in several focus groups reported that IPV has increased since their arrival in Lebanon, while adolescent girls stated that early marriages have increased, most frequently framed as efforts by families to 'protect' girls from being raped or to ensure that they are 'under the protection of a man'. Survival sex, typically linked to women's and girls' desperate need to earn money to cover the cost of living since arriving in Lebanon, was also identified as a type of violence frequently experienced by Syrian women and girls. Many newly arrived women and girls are living in unplanned and overcrowded refugee settlements, with minimal privacy and compromised safety, particularly among those refugee populations inhabiting abandoned public buildings (Anani, 2013:76).

Accurate estimates determining the prevalence of sexual violence among refugee populations are unclear, considering unreported cases due to limited access to health and legal services, language barriers and most importantly, the shame and

stigma associated with sexual violence. However, an underestimation of the true prevalence indicates that one in five (21.4%) of refugees or displaced women in complex humanitarian settings across 14 countries experienced sexual violence (Vu et al., 2014).

Protracted displacement amid Covid-19 Pandemic

The SGBV problem among female Syrian refugee populations in camps has received little attention in the academic literature compared to the growing number of report and assessment studies produced by UNHRC, international NGOs and policy briefs. Interdisciplinary studies focusing on refugees arriving in Europe explain forms of GBV against women during transit journeys and within destination countries (Freedman, 2016; Keygnaert et al., 2012; Janssens et al., 2006). Research exploring women's experiences with intimate partner violence (IPV) in protracted displacement have also

contributed to our understanding of the complex challenges of displaced women (Usta et al., 2016; Pittaway, 2004). While political unrest, conflict and times of crises have been associated with the escalation of violence against women and children both in public and private spaces (El-Jack, 20003) the ongoing covid-19 pandemic has so far revealed similar trends in terms of increased GBV globally.

The imposed lockdown measures have deepened pre-existing conditions of abuse and violence for women and girls in different countries. Number of calls to domestic violence helplines have doubled in Lebanon and Malaysia while in the UK alone, numbers rose by 49% and killings doubled weeks after lockdown imposed in late March (BBC, 2020). According to the UN 'the combination of economic and social stresses brought on by the pandemic, as well as restrictions on movement, have dramatically increased the numbers of women and girls facing abuse, in almost all countries. This prompted for the UN's chief to appeal to all governments to 'put women's safety first as they respond to the pandemic' (UN News, 2020).

The most recent figures during the lockdown resulted from the COVID-19 evidence a fraction of the problem in established democracies where reporting system and safe shelters for survivors are in place. The more serious risk is however, for women and girls without access to such resources, in protracted displacement. The protection of refugee displaced

and stateless women and girls during the ongoing pandemic is an urgent topic begging for attention. As the health and security services as well as psychologic support services and refuge shelters come under restrain from demands made by local groups and citizens dealing with the pandemic, little room is left to attend female refugees surviving SGBV. Considering the psychological impacts of confinement and the limited mobility allowed in urban spaces the risk factors increase for female refugees. Mainly as according to the UN Refugee Agency (2020) women without documentation under deteriorating socio-economic conditions may be forced into survival sex or child marriages by their families. Moreover, reduced community interaction, as a result of restricted mobility, exacerbates ongoing intimate partner violence as trapped women remain unable to access community workers or seek in-person support within camps.

The risk of suffering mental health issues during confinement could potentially be higher. As researchers warn us confinement and restrict movement will seriously exacerbate pre-existing depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other mental and psychosomatic distress reactions e.g. insomnia, personality disorders, (Yao et al, 2020). This type of risk could be injurious for some female refugees, as often young women and girls have experienced incidents of violence during their journey and are dealing with post-traumatic stress disorders upon their arrival to host countries.

In July 2020, UN Women and the United Nation's sexual and reproductive health agency (UNFPA) made an emergency appeal to the international community amid the global pandemic for Syrian women and girls already facing dire conditions. Based on their op-ed:

It is estimated that more than half a million women inside Syria and in host communities throughout the region are pregnant. In some places, pregnant women are refraining from visiting health facilities due to movement restrictions or fears about exposure to the virus. This is putting the lives of women and newborns at risk. Perhaps most egregiously, the crisis has exposed a shadow pandemic of violence against women, one that has spiked in the face of lockdowns and quarantine measures. UNFPA projects that the pandemic could result in millions more cases of gender-based violence around the world (UNWOMEN, 2020)

SGBV, Employment and Education

Sexual and gender-based violence requires a deeper understanding before prevention and response assistance measures can be assessed and developed. In particular, as women and girls experiences of violence has heightened during the covid-19 pandemic, it is pertinent to review inherent factors in the context of fragile, precarious protracted crisis in which female refugees based in Jordan survive SGBV. By drawing on academic and grey literature, we identify two risk factors as challenge areas through which women and girls become susceptible to SGBV during protracted displacement. Sociocultural gender norms and changes in relation of power within families and couples play an important role in exacerbating SGBV in all risk areas. Our research focuses on highlighting the deeper implications of SGBV during lockdown as a result of the ongoing pandemic, however some risk areas intersect with well-known indicators that sustain the prevalence of broader forms of gender-based violence at a global level. For example, poverty and unemployment are widely recognised economic problems affecting women's vulnerability to intimate partner violence (IPV). Nonetheless, by elucidating nuances within the specific context of female refugees in the current pandemic we aim to inform our understanding of SGBV in order to enhance prevention and responses to this problem.

Work and unemployment

Even though precarious living conditions and the fragile setting of refugee camps make women's experiences of violence unique, economic insecurities have been widely acknowledged as a predominant factor linked to multiple types of violence against women (WHO, 2019). It is estimated that 93% of refugees in Jordan live below the poverty line. Many refugees arrive with limited means to cover even basic needs, and those who could at first rely on savings or support from host families are now increasingly in need of help (UNHCR, 2019).

Studies suggests that women's empowerment through education and occupational training can decrease the risk of violence while improving living standards and livelihoods (Ray & Heller, 2009). Case studies in Africa reported by international aid organisations suggest that increasing women's capability and skills to secure sustainable income revenues lower risk and vulnerability to SGBV (UNF, 2006). However, scholars have also

warned us about the counter effects of women's labour outside home associated with IPV which speaks to structural gender norms sustained in patriarchal societies. This situation is compounded by men's unemployment in the household, given strict gender roles where they are portrayed as family breadwinners. As explained by scholars:

'The Syrian culture, although men have historically been perceived as protectors of the family, this perception has now dramatically changed. Women continue to take care of the family; their workloads have increased while men's workloads have decreased overall because legal restrictions make it difficult for Syrian men to find employment in the host countries. Thus, they experience boredom, disempowerment, and low self-esteem. Lower self-esteem may lead refugee men to express their masculinity negatively. For example, these feelings are used as excuses to act violently against family members. This has contributed to an increase in gender-based violence among Syrians' (Yalim & Kim, 2018).

Refugees unable to provide and support financially their families in dire living conditions within host communities affects both men and women. In this context the need to adapt to adversity, changes the dynamics of power relations and gender roles. Women would become economic providers challenging the male privilege, which can potentially lead to IPV. However, the lack of job opportunities and access to work permits is often a major challenge, in particular, if authorities in hosting countries, with weak economies, apply severe restrictions on the right of refugees to work. As the depth of the financial impact of the pandemic is yet to be revealed, UN Women warns that:

'The impact of COVID-19 on the Arab States' economies is likely to be tremendous, with 1.7 million jobs expected to be lost in 2020, including 700,000 jobs for women. Even before the pandemic, the economic situation of Syrian refugee women was already extremely precarious, with jobs hard to come by and women making up almost 62 per cent of those working in the informal sector, such as daily and agriculture workers. A UN Women study found that the majority of Syrian refugee women said that finding income to support their families was their main concern. In Lebanon, only 1 per cent of the women in the study had a work permit. In Iraq, while 78 per cent of surveyed refugee women were entitled to legal employment, only 4 per cent had found employment. In Jordan, women got only 5% of the work permits issued to refugees so far. (UNWOMEN, 2020).

Against this backdrop, it is unclear to what extent the international community and UNHCR are able to support financially host countries and

the development of employment service centres, which refugees heavily rely on to sustain their families. Based on UNHCR annual report from 2019: 'Employment service centres were established inside the Zaatari refugee camp in 2017 and Azraq refugee camp in 2018. The centres were the result of work done by UNHCR with ILO in coordination with the Government of Jordan and sponsored by the Dutch Government. The centres provide refugees with counselling services on employment, work permits, and help them leave the camps to attend job fairs where they can meet employers and gain access to formal work opportunities across Jordan. This new leave system also provided refugees with increased protection and allowed them to take up job opportunities anywhere in the country within specified sectors. To date, 13 employment centres have helped some 10,000 people, both Jordanians and Syrians, to obtain employment and training opportunities, as well as other services. (UNHCR, 2019)

Chapter Three

Results of The Study

Introduction and methodology

The results are presented based on three main themes, and their subthemes, generated from the data analysis. These themes are: 1) background information of participants that include marriage issues and early marriage beliefs and practice 2) life in Syria including living condition, housing, and migration to Jordan 3) life in Jordan including settlement, housing, living condition, domestic violence and the pandemic experience.

Sociodemographic characteristics of participants

Participants were 20 females living in different regions of Jordan. There were 17 married participants, 1 divorced, 1 widowed, and 1 single. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 57 years, with an average of 35.5. Most women that participated in the study were either from Daraa or Damascus, but some were from other parts of Syria like Hums. All married participants had children, ranging from 4 to 8 children. Married participants were married at an early age, below 18, and some were as early as 13 years old.

Husbands were considered the head of the household, if present, and if the women was living with her parents, her father was considered the head of the household. Otherwise, women who were solely living with their children were the head of the household. Most participants reported that they migrated in 2012 to Jordan through the Jordanian – Syrian borders in the north part of Jordan, and it was only one participant who flew to the airport. Most participants had changed their initial place of residence they first moved to, at least once or twice. Participants had either one or two bedrooms regardless the size of their families. None of the participants completed college, some completed high school, and the rest had completed elementary education or never had any sort of education. One lady commented, *“For the seventh grade ... I swear by God I did not like studying, frankly, I mean.....my father and my mother wanted me to study, but I did not like to study There is no one who would support me. To be honest, there is no one to help us studying..... My mother was illiterate, and my father as well.....they (i.e. parents) wanted us to study but we never knew how to solve our home works and school assignments”*. Most husbands of married participants were having almost the same level of education as their wives, but few completed higher level of education at school. Some participants mentioned that they stopped their education because of the war but most of them stopped because they didn't like studying, which was way before the war started.

None of the participating women had a fixed job, rather, their jobs were occasional and intermittent. Although all participants were registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), none of them, or their husbands, possessed a work permit from the Jordanian government.

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Background information

Some women were married to a relative and others to men they never met or knew before marriage. Most marriages were arranged, by which they had no decision on accepting or refusing their parents'

– mainly father's – choice. Although most participants, and their mothers, were married at an early age, they wished they had never agreed on their daughter(s) marriage, and if they could have waited until their daughter were older. In addition, those whom daughters

were married in Jordan have done that for a variety of reasons. One woman commented that she was forced to get her daughter to marry because she worried about her safety. She said, *"The first thing I came across, when we moved here,*

was that there was no safety.....similar to when I was in Syria.....afraid of someone knocking on the door, or someone who would miss the heck of her (i.e. daughter) immediately.....so I protect her.....My daughter only dream was to have a job.....I responded, for example, a coiffeur, I wanted to teach her from my heart, and my daughter wanted to learn but the war.....even my daughter's study, she wanted to finish school, she only completed the fourth grade before the war broke out..... She had difficulty with education I wish her from my heart to study and open to life.....I take her to lectures wherever I find them. Now, she knows "deciphering the letter" on the mobile phone, combining letters and somehow read".

Other participants had their daughters marry early because of the expenses. One lady provided, *"I was wrong....I took my oldest daughter out of Tawjihi (i.e. high school) and got her to marry.... I could not spend on her ... she was 17 and a half old.....the circumstances forced me to do that.....also, something else had happened, my daughter was kidnapped by a Jordanian soldier.....he wanted to rape herone day, my daughter was late from school.....he had kidnapped her while she was on the way to school because he wanted her.....I did not want to give her away (i.e. marry him).....what I did at that time is that we followed him with some people who are 'important' to be able to take her back.....I told him you're supposed to be the protector of your homeland, but you are the garbage of your homeland.....but I was forced to let her marry him".*

The norm in Syria is to marry at an early age, while the culture of marriage in Jordan is better, which encourages women to complete their college education before thinking about marriage, as participants provided. One lady said, *"It's not our choice in Syria.....girls marry at an early age.....If she hit 19 or 20 that mean she is old and no men desire her anymore.....when we came here, our eyes were opened, no one force a girl to marry before she finishes college.....everyone is like that here.....this is better".* Another lady provided, *"My thinking differed, when I was in Homs, Levant, I did not go outside much.... we never attended awareness lectures..... Jordanian women here, uh with God willing, have a great desire to knowledge, and make their children study.....they don't worry if she (i.e. daughter) is 16 or 17 years old.....this is correct".*

Those who have younger daughters that were not married yet at the time of the interview changed their beliefs about early marriage and intend not to enforce their kids into early marriage but would rather wait. They also indicated that their way of thinking had changed when they lived in Jordan and had adapted this culture; believing that early marriage is a problem. Many participants said that they were not aware about what was happening when they got married because they were young, and many of them, regret their marriage after they grew older and time passed. One of the participants responded by saying, *"My daughters, no, no I don't want them to marry early..... I don't want to see my daughters going through what I went through.....the girl must be aware and her body*

growth is not complete yet you know what I mean.....my daughter and I took educational sessions, they taught us, in the first place, that the female should have her body and womb complete.....meaning everything is incomplete if she marry before the age of 18.....she is exposed to health problems.....she is also young and unaware of responsibility.....we began to see how they do marriage here, even the dowry.....a big difference.....our dowry was small in Syrian.....so

when we started to see the dowry of Jordanian women, we became like them I mean, here we have more rights.....”.

Participating women said that they never benefited from their dowry and they had sold the gold they brought with them from Syria to survive in Jordan. Dowry in Syria is only written in governmental and formal documents but is never chased in hands. One participant said, *“I sold all the gold I have because the life here is expensive.....we had to rent a house, buy some furniture and items for us..... we spent a lot of money.....I don’t have anything left now”*. Hence, they agree that woman should work and provide for their family. They also indicated that they would work anything if they get the chance, as a participant commented, *“It’s not a shame to work.....a woman is better than a thousand men.....I worked as a cleaning lady once, and in agriculture.....it is not a defect, and proudly I say that I worked in cleaning.....many men do nothing but sleeping.....but women, God bless them”*. However, most women complained that work is not available, even for their husbands, unless it’s a temporary job; a woman said, *“ my husband works some days.....some days not, its depends.....but now with the corona, its much worse”*. In addition, women complained that most work available to them is tedious and pay low. A comment provided by a participant was, *“I don’t want people to feel sorry for me because of my situation..... there are many men who offered to marry me and provide to my children.....I preferred to work but I work for 1 Jordanian dinar per hour, which means I make a 100 dinars at the end of the month.....it depends on the season”*.

When participants were asked if they receive help from anyone, including help to find a job, they replied that most people they know need help themselves. People in general are minding their own business as indicated by participants, and most participants barely, if any, received help when they first moved to Jordan. One of the participants said, *“no one helps anyone.....everyone is alone here”*, and another added, *“no one helped me.....I stayed with a family for 15 days when I came here.....then they couldn’t bare me anymore.....they took away everything they lent me and I started from zero again”*.

02



Life in Syria

Most women said that their life in Syrian was more beautiful than life in Jordan, except for those who were living in the same house with their in-laws, which caused a lot of problems. Most participants were complaining about the bad relationship with their husbands’ family, especially the mother in-law, leading to

sad and difficult life. One of the participants said, *“I wasn’t happy……. I was buried there in that life, I waked up here……I got married in my in-laws house……my sisters in-law used to beat me for any word I say……I was living like an animal……work all day in the house and get tired at night and sleep……that was it……my husband didn’t allow me to visit my family”*. Another participant who also suffered from living with her mother in-law added, *“I was pregnant at the time of my first child and I hated my husband a lot, I mean the smell of his sweat and his breath……my mother-in-law thought that I hated her son and it became a problem……one day I was laying on the bed……I was a bride at the time……my husband came to me and started to beat me on my cheeks very hard and my cheeks got swollen……I was shocked and was psychologically affected……even my hair started to fall down……my hair until now is never that what it was before……they (in-laws) were in control”*.

Participants expressed that their life, and their family life was beautiful before war, but the war had changed everything in their life. One of the women said, *“Before the war, it was much better…… we were happy, it was cheap……nothing was expensive…… you could live with any amount of money…… it was good, I mean a lot”*. Another one added, *“my life was beautiful ….my childhood was beautiful……I used to turn on music and dance with my children……we were happy……after the war everything was changed”*.

The tradition for many communities in Syria was to live in extended families – together – in the same house, and that was the case for most participants. One participant said, *“we were 9 in the house …(laughing)……my mom, my brother and sister, and my kids……I regret having four children……two is enough, not for anything but they should have their own rooms……we were many for the small fish can (house) we lived in……my father built a 3-bedroom apartment thinking that it was enough for us”*.

Some women in this study worked in the field with their husbands, some had their own business, and some worked for the government, but most had never worked. One lady who worked in agriculture said, *“I worked in agriculture……we had a 15 ‘donoms’ land that we rented for some people……planting tomato and other plants……we worked for them……but the land was for us”*. In addition, participants provided that their husbands had their own business like a mechanic shop or was a craft man such a painter or constructor.

Moving to Jordan wasn’t a pleasant experience for any of the participants. They experienced hardship and cruel circumstances during their journey. In addition, most of them expressed their wished to immigrate to a western country. For instance, one participant noted, *“here in Jordan, I was locked in at the airport ……*

the first time we were imprisoned for four days, we were mistreated.....and suffered a lot ! here, at the Jordanian airport.....I couldn't hold it for too long when I started yelling and cursing them.....we were not given water or anything and we couldn't buy anything.....even when we wanted to use the bathroom, security told us to gather 10 women altogether to use the bathroom....and guess what, to come 6 in the morning.....it was a lot of humiliation". Another lady expressed her experience when she first moved here, *"everything was difficult.....life here is very difficult.....you have to pay for everything....rent, I was pregnant and it was a difficult pregnancy, it was a difficult time, a lot, a lot....."*. Moving was rather difficult to most participants because many of them left family members behind them, *"I left my father and mother in Syria, and after that my father and my mother left as well.....but my mother passed away in the shelter....she couldn't endure the situation..... my father and my brother left to Egypt ... We are 9 girls and a single boy.....all of us are in different regions"*.

War and living with in-laws were the most devastating experience for participants in Syria. Otherwise, life in Syrian was beautiful for participants when they were young, but not after they got married and moved to live with their in-laws. A woman expressed her thoughts on

that, she said, *"I was happy when I was a kid playing with my sisters.....after I got married I didn't see a white day....I lived with my in-laws and my husband used to listen to what they say.....it was a difficult life and stayed like that until I got my third child when we moved to a separate house.....my life got much better after this movement.....until the war started and everything was gone"*. Another one added, *"the most difficult part in Syria is housing because I lived with my husband's family..... there was no privacy, and I was against it"*. There is trend in Syria that an extended family lives together to help and support each other. That is also believed to be a good for the married girl; to be protected from other, and this, don't bring shame to the family.

03



Life in Jordan

Most participants prefer life in Jordan over Syria with its current situation. They adapted to life in Jordan except for the expenses that they never encountered in Syria, especially the rent. However, most housing conditions were of a low quality that were not healthy and could have adverse effects on the long run. One participant commented about life in Jordan by saying, *"it's acceptable.....to some extent..... the most difficult thing is house rentby God Almighty .. 175 dinars aside from electricity which raise the total to 220 rent is the most difficult*

thing heremy husband has a piece of land, if he could sell it and buy us a house.....". Another participant shared her experience by saying, "I suffered when I came here because I came with my children without my husband.....I worked two days after we arrived.....but I discovered that the owner of the house was harassing my daughters.....orally and physically..... so I ran away from him and was afraid of the scandal.....I have limited resources to spend on my children by God, house rent is a problem, I always think about house rent".

Some women preferred life in Jordan over their life Syria, even before the war, and some did not. One of the participants said, "Here, I liked life here more than in Syria, even before the war.....put aside rent..... there was no house rent for us in Syria.....I liked it here because I see people and communicate with them.....I mean it's enough that you have the women union, where we go, see people and learn.....If you get a divorce in Syria, you never see your children again.....the law in Syria is against the women, but the law here defend the woman.....she has rights.....child custody (for example)....". This woman also added "the psychological status here is better.....you have these community centers that we never found there.....". Another explained her position about life in Jordan, she provided, "As a culture and awareness, I became more aware in Jordan because we were closed on the outer world back in Syrian.....my husband and my children, this all what we know.....after the war....we moved here.....that's right, I suffered here!....but my character changed a lot....I plan and think ahead of time.....I attend training sessions....my personality changed a lot compared to 10 years ago.....it's not even close (laughing)". Some women thought that familial.

relationships are better among Jordanian than Syrian. One woman expressed her opinion, "In my opinion, Syrian men are more nervous than Jordanian men, and they beat sometimes I feel that Jordanian men are calmer, but every house has its secrets". On the other side, some commented that life in Syria is better anyway because it's cheaper and easier. A participant said, "Life is okay In Jordan....but I swear its easier in Syria....you pay rent and electricity but It's nothing.....here rent and bills.....when you receive the electricity bill....you slap yourself and start to have a headache that don't go away in three days.....even after war, Syria is still beautiful.....its easy.....but here, if you don't have a dinar you worth nothing....."

Regarding the choice to move to Jordan, it was the only choice for many participants for migration. While some participants have relatives and family members in Jordan, others are lonely – considering their extended family. People moved quickly with only their clothes on them. One of the participants described the situation by saying, "we came here with only our cloths on us.....we ran out at night.....many buses came to our area of residence and were filled

quickly.....I couldn't change my pants for a week (crying).....or the diaper of my child, until people started to help us.....”.

04



Housing in Jordan

Some participants lived with their kids only while others lived with some of their extended family members. Regardless the size of the family, many participants live in in 1- or 2-bedroom apartments, while some lived in 3 - bedroom apartment. Bathrooms were either 1 or 2 bathrooms, which were not enough for the daily use of family members. One of the participants said, *“we used to have one bathroom only and everyone wanted to use it.....how come?.....we asked the owner to build an external bathroom and he did....it's a relief”.* Another added, *“we have one bathroom here, whoever wakes up early uses it, and we make a line, except for my husband who stays longer in the bathroom.....”.*

Syrian kids go to public schools in Jordan. They felt safe and many have their kids walk to school. Children of some participants have difficulty with education due to mental conditions. One woman said, *“My young son has a spectrum of autism, but praise be to God, he now goes to the Noor Al-Hussein Center and the Princess Basma Medical Center..... he was treated for hyperactivity and started to respond..... before, he used to benefit from the government school, and they used to put him in the resource room because of his special condition.....then I took him to the Noor Al Hussein Center”.* Another participant also have kids with learning disabilities, *“both of my little ones have learning problems.....one of them is almost six years old and he doesn't speak until now.....even at school, the teacher said that I feel your sons are somewhere else, they don't focus.....she explains and explains for them, but nothing works.....what should I do, thanks God...”.*

05



Financial condition

Participants complained about the shortage of money and lack of work. Women expressed their willingness to work if they find a job, they rely on coupons and some cash money provided by the UNHCR. Married women complained that their husbands have an intermittent job that barely covers their life expenses. One of the participants said, *“my husband works and my son works for a week then stays home for 2 moths....I wish he could work like others.....my father passed away and I inherited 300 JD from him.....I bought a golden lace but my back started to hurt.....I couldn't go to a public hospital.....so I sold my gold to get treatment.....they found that I have a 2 or 3 discs in my back....”.* Further, none of

the participants had a bank account, and even some of them laughed when they were asked this question.

06



Relationships and gender-based violence

All participants expressed that their life had completely changed when they moved to Jordan, including family relationships. Women were generally more comfortable and relaxed before the war. In addition, their relationships with their spouses have also changed since the moved to Jordan. One woman said, *“life had changed a lot since we were in Syria, it was much more beautiful”*. Moreover, their role in life and within their families had changed as well. One of the participants described that by saying, *“Uh, my role changed from dependency to responsibility, completely different ... before, I was dependent, I did not think about anything.....now, I am responsible”*. Another woman provided, *“Uh, my role in Syria has changed..... I didn't have to worry about anything or do anything.....for example, house duties and obligations, my husband used to answer them all..... Its forbidden that I leave the house.....but since we came to Jordan, we have to survive.....So my husband works and I go to get vegetables, gas, attend lectures.....all of which we were not used to do back there..... there is a huge lack of awareness in Syria”*.

Life changes and war consequences had caused different kinds of problems to many participants. For example, one woman said, *“Oh, my eldest son, he had an Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.....at the time he came from Syria, he travelled to see his aunt in Egypt.....and a gangster followed him, they beat him and asked him to give away his money.....he swore that he had no money and he is going to his aunt (other aunt) in Libya....., they said: Oh, give us the address of your aunt in Libya or we leave you dead.....my son gave them the address and they attacked my sister's house at night.....my brother in law got frightened.....he got diabetes after that....they gave the gang 3 thousand dollars as a ransom”*. Another lady experienced a different kind of a problem, she said, *“no, here, the situation got worse, I fought with my husband a lot.....we have no relationship....what should I do after I found my husband talking with a lady on the phone naked, and she was also naked.....what should I do?.....we stayed in separate bedrooms for 5 months...then what?....I told him that why you are leaving me like that, for whom?.....for this lady that you talk to.....when I said that, he beat me hard on my eye as you see....”*. It was not only this woman, but most participants indicated that their relationship with their spouses got worse when they moved to Jordan, because of the financial situation and social changes. One of them said, *“we fight much more.....but I understand.....no money.....no work.....its tough on*

him.....life now is harder”. Another one added, “my husband was a mad person in Syria...but he got much worse here.....there is a lot of pressure on him.....rent....and more expenses..”.

These life changes had psychologically affected women. Although it's better than living in a war, moving to a new country was not easy for them, especially at the beginning. A participant said, *“we are much better after we left the war environment.....but we were psychologically affected....you know....living conditions...family and responsibilities....”.* Another woman said, *“I was emotionally affected...whenever I visit the women union to attend lectures.....I tell ladies there that I want to breath.....I want to walk to feel better”.* The psychological status of both spouses had affected their overall relationship and the stability of the family, as a woman commented, *“The emotional life has changed, my husband personality changed a lot.....he is more nervous for any insignificant reason.....cursing me.....and because of his psychological status he got diseases, including a stroke, and diabetes that caused to cut his big toe.....he is in pain and is bothered a lot”.*

Upon this social and emotional instability, most women were experiencing physical and verbal violence, and some experienced sexual violence. A 38 – year old participants described the current situation regarding violence as, *“Uh, he beat the stick was broken on us.....go and see.....there are 3 sticks at home under the table, tied together.....3 stickswhenever he beats me, I curse his mother.....yes, I do.....I don't beat him but I curse.....even my little child said to me, you are bent haram (i.e. daughter of an illegal relationship)where did he get that from?.....from his father....off course”.* Women experience physical violence once or twice per month and some of them more often. One woman commented, *“he would beat or curse whenever he gets in and out the house”.* It's interesting though, that some women find it normal for a husband to beat his wife, for which, she should not complain. A 27-year old woman said, *“In Syria, women are all the same....the man beats his wife, its normal.....break her hand, it normal.....bleed her head, its normal.....when I came here I got surprised that this is not the norm.....I believe the woman should be patient with her husband”.* Nonetheless, this woman expressed that she doesn't feel safe at home and feel safer outside home (in the street).

These women are accustomed to violence. They are already suffering from violence in their country in Syria before asylum. Violence is not new to them. Most of them mentioned that they were exposed to violence in Syria, but never knew that they must not be hit or kicked until they came to Jordan, and most of them mentioned when they attended awareness sessions on gender-based violence, they heard about their rights as women, which were

lacking in Syria; both awareness and rights. Moreover, most of them mentioned that they want to be like Jordanian women; strong and educated, by which nobody can hit them.

Verbal violence is more often than other sorts of violence, and mainly occurs whenever something upset the husband. One of the participants described, *“he gets angry for no reason.....if I tell him that our kid did something wrong he starts to beat.. and if we buy something, he gets angry and curses”*. Another participant added, *“if water falls off a cup, he curses.....if a kid asked for something, he curses,....for anything he curses....”*. Participants attributed this anger to their life challenges, including expenses and social instability. However, one woman reasoned that by her husband’s bad health behaviors; she said, *“The wine, this is the main reason why he was angry....he got better after he married another woman (laughs), may a bad thing turn out to be a good thing (i.e. a proverb)”*. Other reasons also existed, one of the participants said that the reason of beating her, *“he doesn’t want me to get pregnant...so he knows whenever he beats me the baby dies and fall down....”*. However, it seemed that the main driver of violence is the husband feeling that he is losing his manhood and control over the house matters. A repeatedly sentence provided by participants when experiencing violence is *“do you want to be the man of the house?”*. This was frequently mentioned when the woman suggests or complains about something in the house.

Regarding sexual violence, women said that they were sometimes forced to have sexual intercourse with their husbands when they don’t want to, but they don’t oppose that, because of problems that could escalate by refusing their husbands’ request. Thus, they avoid getting in trouble. One woman expressed her position on that, *“Uh, as long as all the neighbors don't want to know (laughs), so I go along with him.....because otherwise he gets upset”*. Another woman complained that having sex is by coercion; she said, *“By God, it was all compulsion.....it wasn't long ago until I discovered that it was called the marriage rape.....because I frankly disgust him because of his character”*. Women didn’t have ownership over their bodies, they couldn’t oppose any decision related to their sexual or reproductive health, which was made solely by their husbands.

Although most women denied experiencing any violence during intercourse, few reported that they experience violence during sexual intercourse. One woman complained about violence during intercourse by saying, *“yes, he beats me”*. Another elaborated more on her experience, *“he forces me to sleep with him even if I’m bleeding.....he goes astray.....he sings happiness when I cried and was in pain.....imagine”*.

Most participants denied knowing if any of their friends is experiencing violence. One of the ladies said, *“we hear about things.....but no one knows.....houses have secrets”*. Another woman added, *“they don’t say it, but frankly, there is a lot of violence that they experience.....but they are not aware of it”*. However, one of the participants said that she hears about violence mainly when she attends an event or lecture in a community center; she said, *“we hear a lot from women in lectures complaining ...like he is drunk and not aware.....someone saying that she fought with her brother and beat each other.....like that”*.

07



Safety and support nets

Participants reported that sexual harassment is very common, and women frequently get harassed in public places. One woman commented on that, *“Uh, in the street, a lot of harassment.....even people who try to help and stop harassment get harassed as well.....although I’m old in age and protect myself, I still get harassed..”*. Another added, *“we always hear that...every time we walk in the street we hear a word...and the same thing happens to others....we hear that a lot”*. Women usually avoid the confrontation and walk away, but if they decide to complain about an incident, which is less likely to happen, they would go to family protection, women union, or the police office. However, women reported that they got used to the country (i.e. Jordan) and feel comfortable walking around by themselves without fear. One woman said, *“yeh.....there is safety in the streets.....I got used now”*. Another woman supported this feeling, *“Oh, because I knew the country and its nature..... at the beginning, I was scared..... but the UNHCR and family protection protect you and don’t joke with such incidences.....”*.

Most women reported that they have more freedom in Jordan compared to Syria. The difference was attributed to living circumstances and life obligations in their new living. Yet, in Syria, they had a lot of relatives, which allowed them to leave the house often to visit them, but they were more restricted on reasons to leave. Comparatively, they leave the house in Jordan for almost any reason because they must help the husband and support the family. A woman described that by saying, *“I was forbidden to leave or go out in Syria.....but here, we have to make living....”*. Women felt that their personalities have changed a lot since they moved to Jordan which helped them to leave the house and mingle with people, as a woman said, *“Moremuch more.....our personality strengthened here.....by God, there was no way I would visit my father-in-law house by myself in Syria.....here, there are rights for women wherever she goes”*.

08



Life during the pandemic lockdown

Living conditions changed a lot for participants. Life became more difficult, violence increased, and family relationships were intense. One of the participants described the situation during the lockdown, *“By God, it is very bad.....getting grocery is difficult.....inside the house is beating and humiliations.....we ran out of bread and food.....how could I get food? From where?.....I called different organizations asking for help.....I have nothing in my freezer,*

zero.....even violence increased...”. The pandemic affected relationship with relatives, like visiting them, in addition to tensions between family members inside the house. A woman

commented, *“My husband was getting angry from anything during the lockdown.....he was cursing me daily.....the house of my husband’s brother is next to us and he didn’t allow anyone to come to our house....”*.

Women lost their leisure to go out during the pandemic which affected them mentally. They were frustrated, specially that their husbands were home all the time, giving them orders and controlling their day. Moreover, they didn’t have access to sexual- and reproductive-health.

services, and other services as well. A woman commented on her experience during the lockdown by saying, *“During regular days, I used to wake up in the morning and drink a cup of herbs in the garden.....during the lockdown, no.....I wake up to prepare breakfast, the man is in the house....you have to keep working.....I spend most of my time in the kitchen.....cooking, making sweets ...”*. In addition, participants said that food consumption increased because their children were in the house all the time and they spent their time eating. However, because their men were not working during the lock down, it was difficult to secure food for them. One of the participants described that, *“off course, the kids were asking for more food.....I didn’t have enough money to store extra food.....so I picked “Khobazeh” from the ground and put it in the freezer”*. Another participant added, *“my husband is paid daily.....when he stopped working, we didn’t have money.....we were having only soup.....for three or four days in a row”*.

When women were asked to compare the lockdown situation with the war in Syria, they commented that there is no comparison. The war was scary, with a complete lack of safety. Although the lockdown was frustrating and difficult to many of them, they were safe and secured. One lady made the comparison by saying, *“during the*

corona ban, we were safe.....at least I can look from the window.....but during the war, with snipers around, it was way different.....corona war is difficult but its lighter than the war". Another one added, *"I'm not scared from disease.....bombing is worse than the disease....many people got corona but they get well.....but in the war we saw blood.....dead bodies in the street that you cannot pull because you will be killed.....there was no water no electricity, nothing...."*. However, one woman had a negative experience during the lockdown because of her child condition, she said, *"it was a tragedy.....I had no milk for my child and his fever was high.....the civil defense ambulance didn't come until 4 days passed.....his brain got shrunken because of the fluids that filled his head.....they have to take this fluid out....."*.

During the lock down, violence increased a lot, as report by most participants. One of them said, *"Yes because of the extra pressure.....we couldn't pay the rent for 3 months.....he got angry a lot.....we are done with his angriness (laugh).."*. Another participant added, *" yes, his madness increased a lot"*. However, few had a different experience; it seems that staying away from others and being among family had positive effects for some people. One woman said,

"I liked corona, my husbands didn't see other beloved ones....you know what I mean (laugh).....we made a nice family environment.....we made cake.....sweats....he calmed down".

Most violence experienced during the pandemic was verbal. One of the participants provided, *"during the corona, the pressure increased.....cursing.....angriness.....he beat me one*

time.....its was very difficult". However, some women experienced physical violence, which was severe in some cases, as one the participants said, *"he beat be badly"* and another participant faced significant physical humiliation. She said, *"I didn't go to the hospital....but he beat me until my eye was blue and my bones hurt me from the steaks he used to beat me.....I*

stayed sick for 3 days in the bed.....but I don't go to the hospital because I married him by choice and I don't want the community to make fun of me". Beating also included the children; one participant noted, *"I didn't go to the hospital.....it was bruises.....but one time he hit our boy hardly and his mouth was full of blood"*. Another woman provided, *"he beat me and my girls"*. The pressure on some women was extensive that some of them attempted suicide, even before the pandemic, as confessed by a woman who said, *"I tried to kill myself several times.....I ate a lot of medications, it didn't work.....I cut my veins with the knife....it didn't work...I want to die....I hate life..."*.

The most dominant matter that occupies participants' thoughts is the future of their children. One of them said, *"After Syria was gone.....I started to think about the future.....the future of my children.....I wish they can continue their education and get degrees.....I don't want them to face what I faced....."*. Another woman said, *"I want to see my children grow up ...get married...."*.

Women felt that they needed support in their life; psychological and financial support. While one woman said, *"money.....money is everything"*, another one provided that although financial support is important, psychological support is more important. She said, *"Off course.....the Syrian woman needs more support than the Jordanian woman....she left her country and suffered.....psychologicalfinancial.....but psychological support is more important to the woman"*. Another woman supported her opinion, *"The first important thing is the psychological support and increasing awareness.....women need to know how to deal with the family, husband, children.....children are the most important..."*. Another participant felt that workshops and educational sessions are a way to support the mental health of the women, she said, *"financial and psychological support, like the lectures they provide to us.....you go outside....see something new....get relaxed"*.

None of the women said that they would like to go back to Syria under the current conditions of the country. Even few expressed their willingness to stay in Jordan, whether the living conditions in Syria and safety improved or not. One woman noted, *"As long as Syria is like that we will never go back....never...never.....even the Syria is back to normal.....we got used to it here.....leaving Syria is difficult and going back is difficult as well"*.

Summary of Results

Syrian women refugees living in Jordanian feel insecure in the most part of their life. They have faced several issues in their familial and marital life, and their suffering significantly increased since they moved to Jordan. Settlement was not easy and was described by a difficult and harsh time. Overtime, life started to get better and participants were more accustomed to the cultural and social life in Jordan. Women gradually assimilated in the Jordanian community and adapted to life in general. However, the COVID -19 pandemic resulted in increased life difficulty for all refugee women participating in this study, which was mainly linked to the limited income and resource, which lead to increased domestic violence and instability of the familial life.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Syrian refugee women in this study suffered from difficulties in their family life represented by the husband control and cruelty, and his continuous use of violence. Violence took many forms including verbal violence, which was the most reported, physical violence, and sexual violence, which was the least reported. All these kinds of violence increased during the lock down period caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participating women liked the life in Syria more, except for those who lived with their in-laws in the same house. However, the inexpensive and easy life and the closeness of relatives and other family members was what participants missed the most. On the other side, participants complained about the expensive life in Jordan, especially rent, which made their life more difficult and attributed to the increased violence and instability in their families.

Women in this study clearly noted that lectures and workshops provided by community centers and several organizations is a great opportunity for women in Jordan, which they liked a lot. In addition, they complemented on the high level of freedom the Jordanian women possess, and the empowerment supported by the law for their rights. They also admired that the Jordanian women continue their education and don't rush into early marriage. Syrian women still have hope, regardless of their current difficult life condition, many were noticed – during the interview – that they were full of perseverance and determination. They are looking for a brighter future for themselves and their children.

Chapter Four

Recommendations

Introduction and methodology

Conclusions

There are significant social and cultural issues among the Syrian refugee population that should be well addressed in national humanitarian policies and carefully considered in educational and interventional programs that target refugees. There is a need to empower Syrian women through education, skills development, and community inclusion. There is also a need to advocate to policies that support women rights in the refugee community and to develop programs and closely monitor, report, and intervene with domestic and gender – based violence in a timely and appropriate matter, especially with COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences.

Syrian refugee women suffer in their daily life and therefore, a close attention to their needs is essential to assist them in improving their life, preserving their wellbeing and securing a better future.

Recommendations

Recommendations to improve the social and familial life of Syrian women and to reduce domestic and gender – based violence are categorized into multiple aspects. These aspects support the objectives of protecting women and improving their life. These recommendations are:

1. The political paradigm

- A. Raise public awareness about refugee matters and address their rights as one of the major human rights issues, especially that many of these rights could be breached during the COVID -19 pandemic due to the instability of many sectors of the country.
- B. Establish a national consultative group that address refugee issue to the UNCHR and focus on domestic violence that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- C. Design community programs that empower refugee women and address their needs.
- D. Implement policies that mandate organizations, business, and to assign a certain percentage of their employment for Syrian women.
- E. Implement policies that integrate refugees in the community through active participation in the political and social activities.
- F. Apply equal rights of refugees to their host citizens without restrictions or with minimal restrictions, especially that many refugees lost their jobs during the COVID-19 lockdown period.
- G. Develop an emergency crisis plan for refugees, given the priority of economic, health and psychological conditions, in addition to the state of instability.

2. The economic paradigm

- A. Apply an equal opportunity policy that provides refugees with access to education, training, employment.
- B. Lift the restrictions on the issuing of work permits in order to enable refugees to contribute effectively to the economic development.
- C. Facilitate access to the labor market by either recognizing refugees' qualifications acquired from abroad, or by allocating resources to help bring these qualifications to the standard required by institutions in the host society.
- D. Fund special training schemes that would enable refugee women to adapt their knowledge and acquire new skills relevant to the economy.
- E. Increase financial and technical support to refugee NGO's and business ventures.
- F. Encourage and support employers dedicated to providing work placement and employment opportunities to refugee women and find opportunities to hire them from home, especially with the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.
- G. Identify those refugees who can establish small businesses or engage in business ventures within the society and increase financial and logistical support to help them set up and run these businesses.
- H. Ensure access to financial assistance, gratis or low-cost, high-quality legal aid, medical, psychosocial and counselling services, education, affordable housing, land, childcare, training and employment opportunities for women who are victims/survivors and their family members.
- I. Recognize the contribution refugee women could make to the local economy, often taking up jobs that are unwanted by the mainstream society and by working unsocial hours.

3. The social paradigm

- A. Ensure that refugees are given the same rights enjoyed by citizens while granting welfare benefits such as education facilities, housing and healthcare

- services. Especially under the current economic situation and consequences of the COVID-19 lockdown.
- B. Assess the needs and problems of refugees and come up with positive policies designed to address these issues, with a focus of issue related to domestic violence that women encountered before and during the COVID-19 lockdown.
 - C. Promote a positive image of refugees in the media in order to change people's attitudes, perceptions, prejudices and stereotypes.
 - D. Protect the rights and needs of special categories of refugees such as women, children, and those with disabilities.
 - E. Apply family protection rights and enforce them, especially in circumstances when violence increases such as during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - F. Increase Awareness-raising programs that promote an understanding of gender-based violence against women as unacceptable and harmful, provide information about available legal recourses against it.
 - G. Develop and implement effective measures to make public spaces safe and accessible to all women and girls.

 - H. Develop Awareness-raising and change of social norms that support child marriage and gender inequality.
 - I. Provide mental health support for all family members including husbands, many Syrian women have been traumatized as a result of the conflict. Some of these have also experienced mistreatment at the hands of family members, including husbands.

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