

SEXUAL and GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE SYRIAN REFUGEES in Jordan

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Sub-Working Group
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Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict in 2011, well over 2,000,000 Syrians have fled to neighbouring countries. Almost 600,000 of these have come to Jordan¹ and live in camps and non-camp settings. Both as a direct result of the conflict and while fleeing from Syria to Jordan, some families have been separated. Traditional protection networks have broken down, which has increased the vulnerability of women, girls, boys and men to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV).²

SGBV among Syrian refugees in Jordan

Numerous assessments have been conducted to better understand the challenges that Syrian women, girls, boys and men face in relation to SGBV in Jordan, which have included the analysis of case management data. Forms of SGBV identified include, among others, domestic violence, early marriage, and sexual violence.³ A prominent concern expressed by Syrian adolescent boys and girls is physical and psychological violence committed by family members.⁴

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is the most commonly reported form of SGBV both inside and outside the camps. Social workers, psychologists, and lawyers, estimate that over 50% of the survivors seeking support services, are survivors of domestic violence. Syrian women have reported that their husbands are under immense stress and that this increases physical and psychological violence against them and against children within the home.⁵ SGBV incidents are most often reported to have been perpetrated by male relatives (husbands, uncles, and brothers).

Early and Forced marriage⁶

Early marriage is a culturally accepted practice for many of the Syrian refugees in Jordan. Parents believe that community members will show more respect for married girls and women. They believe that marriage might secure a better future for them and ease the financial burden on families who depend on humanitarian aid.

In 2012, 13% of all registered marriages for Jordanians and 18% for Syrians in Jordan were “early marriages”.⁷ Conversely, many parents have reported to humanitarian workers that this is not an appropriate environment to get married due to financial constraints, limited social networks and differences between cultural norms in Syria and Jordan.



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1. <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

2. Findings from the Inter-Agency Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence Assessment in the Zaatari Refugee Camp, Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence Sub-Working Group Jordan, 2013.

3. While it is essential to acknowledge the existence of SGBV, the inaccurate coverage of women and girls as solely vulnerable, has caused negative perceptions and subsequently has limited the mobility of women and girls out of fear. SGBV experts advocate for different approaches that also represent the power of women and girls and reduce the current generalized stigmatization of refugee women and girls in Jordan.

4. Mental Health/Psychosocial and Child Protection Assessment for Syrian Refugee Adolescents in Zaatari Refugee Camp, IMC/UNICEF, July 2013.

5. Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence Sub-Working Group Jordan, idem., CARE International, Syrian Refugees in Urban Jordan, 2013.

6. Forced marriage is defined as “the marriage of an individual against her or his will”. (GBVIMS User Guide 2010). Early or child marriage (marriage under the age of legal consent) is a form of forced marriage as the girls are not legally competent to agree to such unions. Sexual and Gender-Based Violence against Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons, (UNHCR, 2003).

According to the national definition the legal age of marriage in Jordan is set at 18 years as stipulated in article (10) of the Personal Status Law, but marriage above 15 can be allowed through a special approval from Sharia court judges.

7. UNICEF Assessment on Early Marriage in Jordan, 2014. The data in this assessment is based only on registered marriages in the Sharia Court. Data for 2013 are forthcoming.

Sexual Violence⁸

Humanitarian agencies have found that incidents of sexual violence are significantly under-reported owing to stigmatisation and fear of retaliation by family and community members. Women and girls, but also boys and men who have suffered sexual violence face significant obstacles in seeking support owing to a widespread culture of shame. The majority of survivors of sexual violence seeking support reported having experienced violence in Jordan.

Survival Sex

Limited access to livelihood opportunities in Jordan for Syrian refugees has led to an increase in harmful coping mechanisms.⁹ There is an increased risk of survival sex whereby women and girls -especially - trade sex for benefits in order to pay rent or gain access to services.

Harassment and Sense of Insecurity

Participants of an inter-agency assessment carried out across Jordan reported that harassment, a term which most refugees used to reference cases of unwanted verbal attention, is widespread. Some female refugees are not allowed to leave their homes unaccompanied because of a common feeling of insecurity. This mobility restriction is amplified by their own fears of being publicly seen without a male companion, which has negative connotations, especially for unaccompanied Syrian women. Many (41%) women and girls report rarely, or never, leaving their shelter, while 29% of boys and 15% of men rarely or never leave their shelter.¹⁰

Limited Access to Services

Women and girls who are isolated or whose movement is restricted face substantial obstacles in accessing services, particularly in urban settings, where services are located in town centres.¹¹ Additionally, refugees report mistrust of some CBOs. As a consequence, many males are now refusing to let females go to CBOs unaccompanied.¹² Limited capacities of existing service providers, distance to service centres and limited knowledge of services for SGBV survivors are preventing access to specialised assistance for refugees.¹³ Female-headed households report encountering difficulties in obtaining safe and adequate housing; landlords are often reluctant to rent houses to unaccompanied women.¹⁴ Refugees also express fear of sexual harassment against girls in schools, which prevents some of them from attending school.

Disclosure and Stigma

Survivors of SGBV are more likely to report incidents to other family members, rather than to service providers or the police. Survivors are often afraid to speak openly about SGBV and to discuss what has happened to them, because they may face abuse from family members.¹⁵ Men and boys who have experienced sexual violence are also reluctant to report incidents because of serious stigma attached to SGBV against males.

8. Sexual Violence is a category of violence that encompasses rape and sexual assault. Rape: Non-consensual penetration (however slight) of the vagina, anus or mouth with a penis or other body part. Also includes penetration of the vagina or anus with an object. Sexual assault: Any form of non-consensual sexual contact that does not result in or include penetration (GBVIMS User Guide 2010).

9. UNHCR Jordan, Focus Group Discussions among Syrian Female Refugees on Early Marriage, January 2013.

10. Inter-Agency Assessment of Gender-based Violence and Child Protection among urban Syrian refugees in Jordan, with a focus on Early Marriage, UN Women 2013.

11. Although refugees living in urban centres potentially have access to a wider variety of services, in smaller towns and rural areas outreach to the refugee population is more challenging. Some initiatives include help desks and field missions, opening of women safe spaces and clinics in remote areas. In order further enhance outreach and response capacity in urban and rural setting, members of the SGBV SWG and other sectors are planning to further expand their presence. This crucial expansion for the protection of refugees will require support in terms of structure, staffing, programming and coordination.

12. Care Assessment, idem.

13. When refugees outside of the camps were asked about knowledge of available services, most (83%) responded that they were not aware of any services available to survivors of GBV in their community: UN Women, idem.

14. Care Report, idem.

15. UN Women, idem.

Inter-agency SGBV Response in Jordan

Prevention

SGBV actors in Jordan engage in prevention activities at several levels. At the community level, these include awareness-raising sessions, social and recreational activities for women and girls and other prevention activities tailored for men and boys. At the service-provider level, SGBV actors offer training to build the capacity of police, border patrols and other stakeholders to support SGBV survivors.

SGBV actors in Jordan also work to mitigate the risk of SGBV by, for example, undertaking safety surveys of camp and non-camp sites, operating a protection monitoring system and other concrete measures to ensure that the delivery of humanitarian assistance does not create risks of SGBV across other sectors. Mainstreaming of SGBV prevention measures include a 24-hour presence of male and female protection staff in Zaatari camp, consideration of SGBV risk factors in planning of camp sites and shelters, installation and maintenance of lighting in camps to ensure safer access to the water and sanitation facilities – especially for women and girls – at night, and segregation at distribution points.

Multi-Sectorial Assistance

SGBV actors in Jordan have case managers trained in dealing with SGBV survivors and ensuring safe and confidential referrals to multi-sectorial services. They have established women and girls' safe spaces, where multi-sectorial services are made available. Technical and financial support is also provided to strengthen health facilities in delivering quality clinical care, psycho-social support and counselling to SGBV survivors. Capacity building of medical, legal and psychosocial personnel is ongoing, as well as measures to strengthen survivor's access to justice and safe shelter. Training is provided to specialised police (Family Protection Department) and other police departments, including Syrian Refugee Assistance Department personnel. SGBV services tailored for male survivors remain limited, although expertise and capacity is currently being expanded to respond to the specific needs of male survivors.

Coordination

Effective prevention and response to SGBV requires that all actors involved in the Syrian refugee response coordinate their activities at both the national and field levels. To this end, a national SGBV sub-working group coordinated by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established under the auspices of the Protection Working Group led by UNHCR and International Relief and Development (IRD). The SGBV sub-working group's achievements to date include: a strategy and work plan for its advocacy, awareness raising and the prevention and response work of its members; the preparation and coordination of interagency assessments; the establishment of inter-agency emergency SGBV and Child Protection Standard Operating Procedures (CP/GBV SOPs), as well as several capacity-building initiatives including training on specialised case management. Training sessions on the CP/GBV SOPs are conducted for SGBV service providers in all governorates of Jordan, as well as for actors operating in other sectors of the humanitarian response including the health, food, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sectors.

The awareness-raising activities of the sub-working group have included the production of key messages common to the protection sub-sectors,¹⁶ country-wide distribution of approximately 9,000 comprehensive guides to services available to refugees, and participation in the global "16 Days of Activism against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence" campaign. A specialised Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) has been established and is linked with the UNHCR refugee registration data base. The implementation of this system in the coming months will facilitate safe and confidential SGBV data collection and information sharing. Finally, the recently established Early and Forced Marriage Task Force is looking into ways of reducing the risk and mitigating the consequences of forced and early marriage.

16. Protection, Child protection, SGBV, Mental Health and Psycho Social Services.

Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA)

The establishment of a PSEA Network, which aims to reduce the risk of exploitation and abuse by humanitarian personnel and others involved in the provision of services to refugees, is ongoing; training sessions on relevant Codes of Conduct are delivered to personnel working directly with the refugee population. Focus group discussions with refugee women, girls, boys and men have taken place in the main refugee camp to agree on how best to develop and implement a safe and confidential complaint mechanism for cases of alleged sexual exploitation and abuse.



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What are Inter-Agency Standard Operating Procedures?

The CP/GBV standard operating procedures are specific procedures agreed by concerned organisations, which prescribe individual organisations' roles and responsibilities in the prevention and response to SGBV. The procedures include agreements on how, and to whom, to safely and confidentially refer SGBV survivors for specialised assistance.

What is the GBV IMS?

The Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) is a data management system that enables service providers working with SGBV survivors to effectively and safely collect, store, analyze, and share data related to reported incidents of SGBV.

Media guidelines for Reporting on Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Contexts

The guidelines are intended to ensure that all actors who play a role in facilitating or engaging in media reporting on SGBV are aware of and able to prioritize the ethical and safety considerations that preserve the safety, confidentiality and dignity of survivors, their families, their communities, and those who are trying to help them. Please consult the guidelines at <http://goo.gl/h1oFA8>.

The Sexual and Gender Based Violence Sub-Working Group in Jordan (SGBV SWG)

The objective of the SGBV SWG is to strengthen multi-sectoral SGBV prevention and response in the context of the Syrian refugee emergency in Jordan. The group is chaired by UNHCR and UNFPA. Members of the Sub-Working Group include UN agencies, international and national NGOs, ministries of the Government of Jordan and national institutions.



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