SEXUAL and GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
SYRIAN REFUGEES in Jordan

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.

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 recognize the power of women and girls to reduce the current generalized stigmatization of refugee women and girls in Jordan.
6. Forced marriage is defined as “the marriage of an individual against her or his will”. (GSM/VMS 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).
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.

© M. RENDUESZ-UNHCR