

**‘We just keep silent’**

**Gender-based violence amongst Syrian  
refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq**



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### **Gender-based violence amongst Syrian refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq**



**Peace and Security**

**UN Women**

**Kurdistan Region of Iraq, April 2014**



This research builds on UN Women's and other international and national agencies work in the region on the level and impact of gender-based violence on Syrian women and girls living as refugees in the Middle East.

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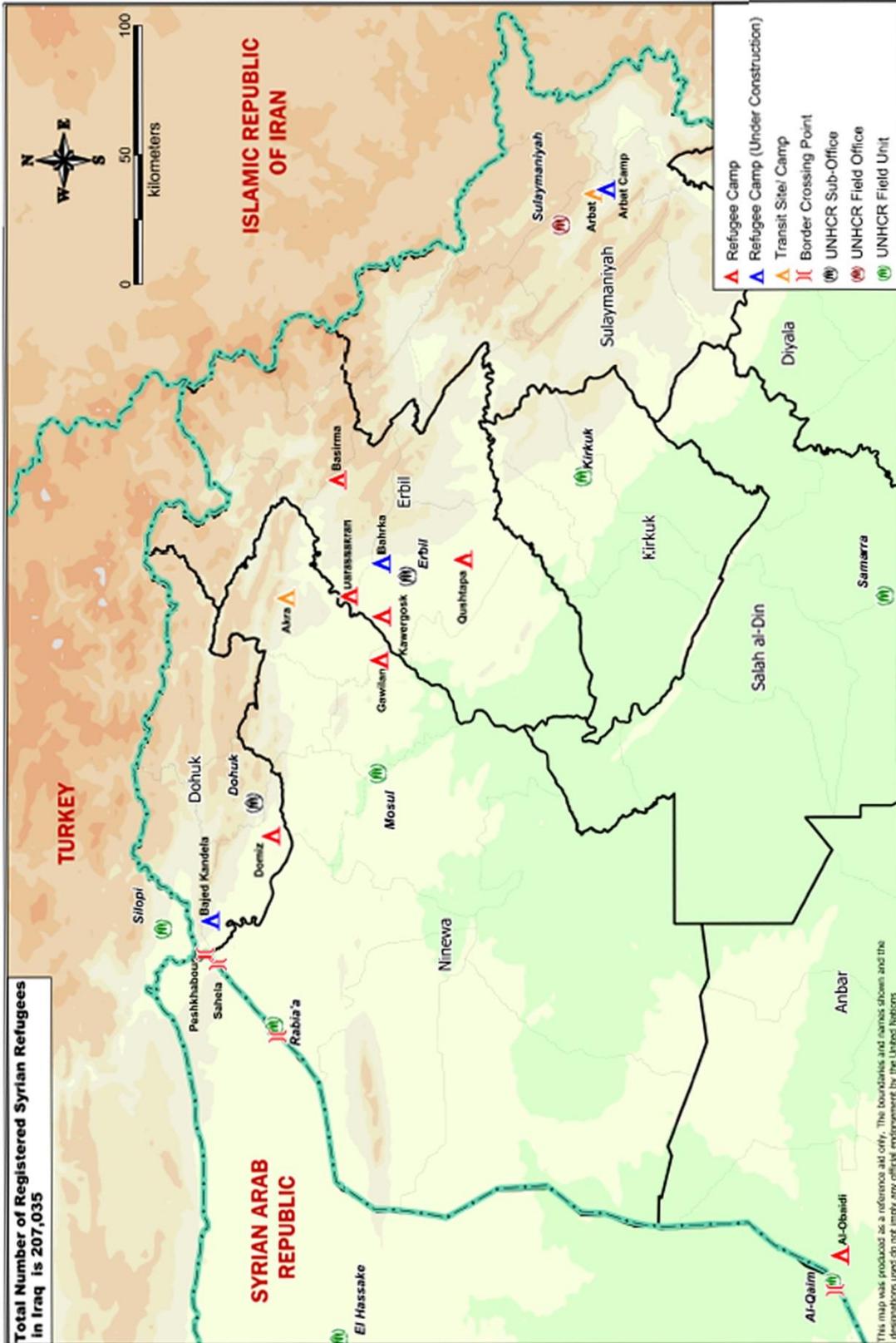
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### Syrian Refugees Camps / Sites in Iraq

As of 4 December 2013



www.unhcr.org



## FOREWORD UNWOMEN

Women and girl refugees all over the world suffer from all kinds of sexual and gender based violence. It is therefore no surprise that Syrian refugees everywhere should become vulnerable to the predators who abuse the weak. Much discussion has already occurred about the situation of Syrian women in Jordan and Lebanon. Less attention has focused on refugees in Iraq. This is partly because most of the refugees in Iraq are Syrian Kurds who have taken refuge in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq and the population of the region have been extremely hospitable and open, permitting relative freedom of movement and access to employment, as well as providing a wide range

of services for refugees especially those inside camps.

But even in a hospitable environment, life remains very tough for refugees and women and girls are particularly vulnerable. This report set out to identify what are the particular challenges for female refugees in Iraqi Kurdistan through a statistically relevant survey of camp and non-camp refugees. Hard data on the prevalence of sexual violence is difficult in any circumstance given the potential shame involved in being a victim. Refugees are perhaps even more reticent to admit problems. The survey was therefore backed up by a series of focus group discussions. However circumstantial data sometimes appears, UNWomen stands by the rule that there is no smoke without fire. Women who are afraid to leave suffocating tents have good reason to be afraid. Women suffering silently the violence of their partners need support. All humanitarian actors, governmental and nongovernmental, need to find new ways to prevent the worst kinds of exploitation and help economically deprived women escape the need to sell their bodies against their will.

UNWomen thanks the Regional Government of Kurdistan for all the support it is giving to all the refugees in Iraqi Kurdistan; Iranians, Turks and Syrians and calls on the government and other humanitarian actors to do more to help prevent the sexual exploitation of women, to help end impunity for those carrying out crimes including trafficking and to offer specific services to victims. Above all UNWomen calls on everyone who can help create the political circumstances that will allow Syrian refugees to return home to act now.

Dr. Sameera Al-Tuwaijri

Regional Director, Arab States

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## PART ONE: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the Syrian conflict enters its fourth year, the devastating impact on the Syrian people continues to worsen. Launching its largest ever appeal to donors for a single humanitarian emergency, in December 2013 the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) noted that the Syrian conflict has created “one of the largest refugee exoduses in recent history” and that nearly three-quarters of Syrians will need humanitarian aid in 2014.<sup>1</sup> As of February 2014, UNHCR has registered 2,450,513 Syrian refugees, 224,356 of them in Iraq, 97 per cent of whom are in the three governorates of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI).

The majority of Syrian refugees in KRI are ethnic Kurds. Some 43 per cent are in camps, the remainder in urban areas. UNHCR reports that 47.5 per cent of registered refugees in Iraq are women. There are currently 13 refugee camps or

transit sites in KRI, the largest of which – Domiz Camp near the northern city of Dohuk – has a population of 58,500. The size of the Syrian refugee population in KRI has more than doubled since February 2013.<sup>2</sup>

The scale of the accelerating influx has placed considerable strain on administration, infrastructure and services in KRI. The response of the international community in addressing the needs of Syrians displaced to Iraq has been less than that provided to most other neighbouring host states.<sup>3</sup>

As with displaced populations everywhere, the experience of forced relocation has meant increased levels of violence and insecurity for women and girls. Women and girls face a range of serious and complex protection and

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<sup>2</sup> UNHCR, February 2014, *Iraq Syrian Refugee Stats as of 23 February 2014*. <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=103#>

<sup>3</sup> At the end of December 2013, only 53 per cent of funds required for the UN’s Revised Syria Regional Response Plan had been pledged by donors, compared with 75 per cent in the case of Jordan. See: <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2014-01-08RRP5fundingtrackingallagencies.pdf>

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<sup>1</sup>

<http://www.unhcr.org.tr/?lang=en&content=417>

gender-based violence (GBV) issues in both camp and non-camp settings.

### Nature and scale of GBV

*Gender-based violence is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will, and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females. Acts of GBV violate a number of international human rights protected by international instruments and conventions. Many — but not all — forms of GBV are illegal and criminal acts in national laws and policies*

*... The term "gender-based violence" highlights the gender dimension of these types of acts; in other words, the relationship between females' subordinate status in society and their increased vulnerability to violence.<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), *Guidelines for Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings*, p.7. [http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/documents/subsidi/tf\\_gender/GBV/GBV%20Guidelines%20Definitions.pdf](http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/documents/subsidi/tf_gender/GBV/GBV%20Guidelines%20Definitions.pdf)

UN Women estimates that globally, up to six out of every ten women experience physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime.<sup>5</sup> GBV is particularly prevalent in the region:

*... one in three women in the world will experience physical and/or sexual violence by a partner or sexual violence by a non-partner. The corresponding statistic for the region that includes almost all Arab countries is 37 percent, which makes it the region with the second highest prevalence in the world.<sup>6</sup>*

In KRI, concerns about Syrian refugees' exposure to GBV are exacerbated by inadequate access to affordable safe housing, overcrowding and a lack of opportunities for employment and education. Combined with displacement-related stress, this contributes to feelings

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<sup>5</sup>

[http://www.unifem.org/gender\\_issues/violence\\_against\\_women/](http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/)

<sup>6</sup> UNFPA, December, 2013, *UNFPA Regional Strategy on Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence in the Arab States Region*, p. 4. [http://arabstates.unfpa.org/webdav/site/as/shared/docs/2013\\_ArabGBVStrategy\\_English.pdf](http://arabstates.unfpa.org/webdav/site/as/shared/docs/2013_ArabGBVStrategy_English.pdf)

of helplessness and frustrations among husbands and other male family members.

This report seeks to shed light on the range of GBV issues affecting Syrian refugee women in KRI. It examines the challenges that Syrian refugee women and girls face, including increased protection risks and exposure to and risk of GBV.

Data for this study was collected in two phases over a five-month period from August to December 2013. The study focused on both camp and non-camp refugees, with each setting proving to produce their own unique challenges for women. The findings in this report are based on information gathered via 1,660 household surveys, 27 key informant interviews (KIIs) and 19 focus group discussions (FGDs) with refugee women, men and youth.

In KRI, underreporting of violence against women and girls, inefficient data collection and management, stigmatisation of GBV survivors and inadequate service provision for survivors make it impossible to obtain precise information on the prevalence of GBV

crimes.<sup>7</sup> This report, like others is thus unable to provide a complete and comprehensive picture but does highlight the need for extensive efforts to understand and respond to the kinds of violence that Syrian refugee women displaced to the KRI are exposed to. In order to meet the obligations to address gender discrimination which Iraq has assumed as a signatory of the *UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW)<sup>8</sup> there is a need for:

- greater advocacy for the strengthening of humanitarian prevention and response programmes and initiatives
- encouragement of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to hold perpetrators of violence to account
- intensified efforts to support and rehabilitate survivors, their families and communities.

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<sup>7</sup> International Rescue Committee, 2013, *Working Together to Address Violence against Women and Girls in Iraqi Kurdistan*, p.6. <http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/resource-file/IRC%20Addressing%20Violence%20Against%20Women%20in%20Kurdistan%205-12.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm>

More than half of those interviewed for this report stated that fear of rape was a primary driving factor for their fleeing Syria – a finding similar to that found in a 2012 assessment in Lebanon.<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that pre-conflict levels of violence against women (VAW) in Syria were already high. A 2005 UNIFEM survey – interviewing women from families in urban and rural areas in all the governorates of Syria – found that 13 per cent of husbands committed violence against their wives and that 67 per cent of women reported having received punishment, 87 per cent of its physical, in front of their family members.<sup>10</sup> Syrian law does not specifically prohibit domestic violence.<sup>11</sup> In all FGDs women reported sexual violence taking place in Syria. Young women especially mentioned that in the months (and in several cases) years before fleeing Syria that they had stopped going to university or work and limited their

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<sup>9</sup> International Rescue Committee, 2012, *Syrian Women & Girls: Fleeing death, facing ongoing threats and humiliation: A Gender-based Violence Rapid Assessment*

<http://www.alnap.org/resource/9166.aspx>

<sup>10</sup> UNIFEM, 2005, *Violence Against Women Study: Syria 2005*, p.2.

[http://www.unifem.org/attachments/stories/currents\\_200606\\_SyriaVAWstudyKeyFindings.pdf](http://www.unifem.org/attachments/stories/currents_200606_SyriaVAWstudyKeyFindings.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of State, 2010, *Human Rights Report: Syria*

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154473.htm>

social interactions so as to avoid leaving the relative safety of their homes.

The risk of exposure to GBV has continued, and probably intensified, for Syrian refugee women after their flight to KRI. Findings from this report reveal that being a refugee in KRI – whether in an official refugee camp, urban areas, within the home or in public spaces – does not protect Syrian women from the many forms of GBV. Our evidence indicates:

- Married women experience higher rates of intimate partner violence than they had pre-conflict, particularly those whose husbands were unemployed.
- Teenage girls reported being afraid of having to marry someone not of their choice or liking.
- Women working in non-camp areas reported high levels of sexual harassment by employers and by the taxi drivers they have to use to get to and from work.
- Both women and men reported knowing about women and girls engaged in the selling of sex in camp and non-camp settings.

- Almost all men reported feeling afraid for the safety of their wives and daughters.

Perpetrators were reported as being family members – including husbands, fathers and brothers – as well as employers, taxi drivers, government employees and migrant and foreign workers. Those we interviewed report perpetrators are also found among those working for humanitarian agencies.

It is important to note that several of these issues were reported to the research team not by the survivor her/himself, but rather by community members or national and international NGO staff who had heard rumours of such abuse taking place. It is critical that such allegations are taken seriously and acted upon. All stakeholders should be proactive and proceed accordingly, putting in place preventative measures and response mechanisms.

Women and NGO workers alike urgently asked for appropriate reproductive health care, psychosocial assistance to deal with (suspected) post-traumatic stress disorder, education and job training to ensure sustained economic viability for improved accommodation and immediate

and long-term protection strategies for survivors who report GBV from suffering from further violence. Women who have reported sexual violence are particularly in need of protection from the very real risk of so-called honour killing.

### Scale of honour killings

Evidence is hard to gather or confirm but it is clear that honour killings are common in both Syria and KRI. It has been estimated that “after natural causes, honour killings are thought to be one of the leading causes of death for women in Kurdistan.”<sup>12</sup> The UN reports cases of 40 murders of women in Iraqi Kurdistan in the first 6 months of 2013 as well as 163 cases of self-immolation, while acknowledging at the same time that real figures are likely to be higher. In Syria it is reported that there are between 300 and 400 cases of honour killings annually.<sup>13</sup>

It is impossible to capture the real number of sexual violence cases given the sensitive nature of this type of violence

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<sup>12</sup> Berivan Dosky, “My broken dream for Iraqi Kurdistan”, *The Guardian*, 17 March, 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/mar/17/broken-dream-iraqi-kurdistan>

<sup>13</sup> U.S. State Department, *2012 Human Rights Reports: Syria* <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2012/nea/204383.htm>

and the potentially catastrophic repercussions that survivors face should the violence become known to their families or the wider community. It is clear, however, that extensive sexual harassment, intimidation, and threat (perceived or actual) of sexual violence compounded women's feelings of vulnerability and fear. Accumulated evidence from the survey data and FGDs points clearly to sexual violence being present in private and public spaces, for women and girls based in both camp and non-camp settings. 68 per cent of women reported knowing someone who had been abused and 82 per cent lived in daily fear of abuse or aggression. 35 per cent said that they were not allowed to leave their homes because of expected aggression.

### **Pervasive harassment**

The most common form of sexual violence reported to the research team was sexual harassment – whereby men, both Syrian and non-Syrian, approach Syrian women, particularly when they are by themselves in public spaces, in taxis and in their places of employment. They reportedly repeatedly demand inappropriate relationships, sexual favours and their phone numbers, while making unwanted comments on their bodies and physical

appearance. Many Syrian women in non-camp settings reported non-Syrian men approaching them and saying things like “we know you are Syrian, we have money”. In camps, women reported “accidentally” entering their tents, trying to catch them alone or undressed. Such issues have forced women to change their behaviour and routines, limiting where they go and the time they spend alone. Several women also reported that when their fathers, husbands or brothers found out about the harassment they (the women) were blamed. Seven women reported suffering from physical violence as a result of the harassment becoming known.

In seven of the nineteen FGDs women interviewed stated that they knew of women and girls engaged in transactional and survival sex in camp and non-camp settings. One woman stated, “if you come into the camp at night you will see what is happening. It is not hard to see where these men are going and what they are coming for”. Unconfirmed rumours of suspected trafficking of Syrian women for sex work were also mentioned. They were however unwilling to discuss whom they thought was involved and possibly profiting from this, stating that they knew

of families who had complained about other issues being deported to Syria. At least four non-refugee informants also confirmed hearing of such rumours but noted they could do nothing without specific information. They reported survivors come to them with allegations of abuses but when pressed for details decline to provide information, refuse to talk and do not pursue cases.

Abuse of power and reports of sexual exploitation and abuse by Syrian and non-Syrian men were reported to be taking place in all of the locations – camp and non-camp. However few survivors are reporting such abuse, either because they do not know how to navigate the system or do not trust it. Women in one camp reported that if they want to leave the camp, or want items additional to those being distributed by relief agencies, they had to, in the words of one “to make friends with them... if you are young and beautiful you will get what you want.”

### **Increased intimate partner violence**

Clearly many Syrian women refugees were victims of domestic violence long before they arrived in KRI. But the special pressures, uncertainties and indignities associated with their flight, and the

housing, security, inadequate food, and other problems that they face, appear to have exacerbated already fraught domestic situations, leading to increased violence within the home.

Without exception, a key finding of all of the FGDs was the belief that violence perpetrated by husbands against wives was increasing. Researchers were told that whereas in Syria a husband would ‘just’ verbally abuse his wife, now he uses his fists. Interviews with male leaders in the camps found that many men were themselves aware of this increase in violence but felt powerless to stop it. As one said:

*I cannot cope anymore, how can we live like this? I used to go to work every day, now I do nothing. If it wasn't for my children I would go back to Syria. Better to die there than keep living like this... I am angry all the time, at my children and my wife.*

### **Forced and Early Marriage**

In all FGDs and KIIs it was reported that early marriage and marriage of women to

men that would not normally be considered “suitable” has been increasing since arriving in KRI. It was felt that the main reasons for this was the belief that it increased the protection of the women. Men in particular reported feeling that while early marriage of their daughters was certainly not desirable in some cases it was their best option. Arranged marriages between adult refugee women and non-Syrian men was reported in 15 of 19 FGDs as being an issue of concern, especially for women aged between 18 and 25, with many citing examples of friends who had had to marry men much older than them. In contrast to the reason for early marriages, the main reason for arranged marriages was reported to be financial. The bride wealth payment given to the girl’s family, which can be as high as \$10,000, is an astronomical amount for most refugees in their current destitute circumstances.

Rumours of non-Syrian men coming to the camps and “shopping” for brides was reported as taking place in two of the four camps visited. Such arrangements were reported to be facilitated by mostly older women in the camps who act as a type of introduction agency between the man and fathers. In one camp, a women reported

to having been visited by a women and man (whom she believed to be non-Syrian) on three separate occasions asking if she wanted to “marry off one of her two daughters”. Of concern, women mentioned that they knew of families that had agreed to such arrangements, only to have the man divorce and return their daughter to them three to four months later.

#### **Restrictions on freedom of movement:**

Women and girls reported experiencing significant and increased restrictions on their freedom of movement, particularly in non-camp settings. Following their experience of conflict inside Syria, and the subsequent flight and displacement, the restrictions are being driven by fear of violence, stories of exploitation in the workplace and in public spaces, concerns for safety and for the ‘reputations’ of women and girls. The lack of safe transport, little information about service, and not knowing the surrounding host community and local terrain all contributed to women’s isolation.

There are multiple impacts of such restrictions:

- women are denied potential opportunities to take on paid work and augment household income
- reduced opportunities for girls to further their education
- limited access to social spaces to interact and seek support from peers , thus weakening mechanisms for coping with displacement-related stress
- limited opportunities for women to report and seek support for GBV abuses
- most insidiously, reinforcement of the belief of many women that they must just accept the violence and constraints they are facing.

### **No refuge for survivors**

There is a clear need to provide some form of immediate safe haven and temporary respite for survivors of intimate partner violence. Currently the only option is to refer such cases to safe houses run by the KRG. These were reported to have varying levels of capacity and willingness to help Syrian refugees. Worryingly, informants reported GBV survivors could only access them after first reporting to the police. Lacking such shelters, female survivors of intimate partner violence said they often seek help

from their small network of relatives and friends, with abused women looking to other, sympathetic refugees to give them temporary shelter in their own homes and to share their food rations with them.

### **Severely limited access to services**

Refugees expressed deep gratitude for the safety and asylum they had received from the KRG and host communities. At the same time, both refugees and service providers were becoming increasingly frustrated by what was being offered (or not offered). The restrictions to refugee women's movements were complicated by lack of information and compounded by a lack of access to services. There were significant and worrying comments about the mismatch between what international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) in particular were offering in response to GBV, and what women said was realistic, realisable, useful and meaningful in the circumstances.

This is particularly the case for health care, where women and men reported feeling mistreated, not listened to and unable to access medical treatment without significant financial hardship. The KRG has generously offered Syrians the same access to government hospitals as

Iraqi citizens yet unwillingness of health staff and administrators to include them was reported by both international and national actors we spoke to. There are few doctors (female or male) trained in clinical management of rape who are willing to provide medical services to survivors of sexual violence.

Access to reproductive and maternal health services was also reported as being weak. This is believed to be due to a combination of culturally appropriate services not being available and women not knowing where to go. In three of four camps visited access to a female doctor is very limited, with one camp having no

female doctor in its health centre, even on a rotational basis. In another camp adequate availability of two types of contraception and a full time female gynaecologist was confirmed, yet 47 per cent of women interviewed reported that they were unable to access contraception, believing that such assistance was not available in the camp. This indicates a gap in refugees understanding of what services are available to them. Since the completion of this report, reproductive health services have been considerably improved in most camps, with enhanced provision of doctors and gynaecological services.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## **PART TWO:**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Preventing violence against women from occurring in the first place is the ultimate goal of all GBV interventions. Central to this is the changing of community attitudes that see violence against women as being acceptable and a private matter. Increasing the status of women in society and promoting gender equality are equally critical. Challenging violence against women requires a whole of community response, involving all stakeholders, including the government, civil society, religious leaders and humanitarian actors. It also requires widening women's space for action in their new environments in KRI. That is, creating and nurturing women's participation in, collaboration with, and leadership of initiatives to improve the lives of all Syrian refugees in KRI.

The KRG has taken preliminary steps to protect Syrian refugees living in KRI from gender-based violence. This follows increasing recognition of the need to provide better protection for local

women.<sup>14</sup> In 2007, the Interior Ministry created mechanisms to monitor violence, following a surge in cases of murder and suicide. The KRG parliament passed a domestic violence law prohibiting "any person associated with a family to commit violence – whether physical, sexual or psychological – within the family".<sup>15</sup> It is vital that these initiatives be extended and prohibitions on GBV be enforced both for host and refugee women. A key strategy here is to reinforce and extend dialogue with and collaboration between Iraqi Kurdish women's and civil society groups, and Syrian Kurdish women.

The recommendations that follow could provide benchmarks against which the actions of the UN, INGOs and the KRG can be monitored to ensure that the rights of refugees, particularly those of vulnerable women and girls are better protected.

#### **KURDISTAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT**

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<sup>14</sup> See Heartland Alliance, 2009, *Documenting Violence Against Women in Iraqi Kurdistan* <http://www.heartlandalliance.org/international/research/gbv-in-kr.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> *Violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan increases in 2013* <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2013/10/state7399.htm>

1. Allow humanitarian actors to provide aid to non-camp based refugees; particularly livelihood programmes and shelter assistance so as to reduce the vulnerability of women and girls.
  2. Strengthen laws to punish and hold perpetrators of violence against women to account.
  3. Establish and strengthen existing training programmes for security and rule of law actors on the laws relating to GBV and the services available for survivors of GBV.
  4. Actively strengthen and facilitate dialogue with and collaboration between Iraqi Kurdish women's and civil society groups, and Syrian Kurdish formal and/or informal women's groups.
- Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings.*<sup>16</sup>
2. Establish and strengthen existing interventions that focus on the prevention of GBV.
  3. Involve women and men in meaningful participation to devise durable short, medium and long-term interventions designed to address the cultural, social, economic and political marginalisation of women and which contribute to GBV.
  4. Involve women and men in meaningful participation to develop, administer and manage durable short, medium and long term responses to the living priorities arising from their status as refugees from the war in Syria.

### **HUMANITARIAN ACTORS**

1. Ensure all implementing partners of GBV prevention and response initiatives adhere to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) *Guidelines for Gender Based*

5. Prioritise the development of livelihood training and micro credit schemes for women and men.

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<sup>16</sup>

[http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/pageloader.aspx?page=content-subsidi-tf\\_gender-gbv](http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/pageloader.aspx?page=content-subsidi-tf_gender-gbv)

6. Address structural barriers to help-seeking behaviour by survivors of GBV:
  - a. Increase the breadth and depth of information provided to refugees on specific locations and what type of support they can access within camp and non-camp settings.
  - b. Reduce the number of steps required for a survivor of GBV to receive comprehensive, qualified support for GBV.
7. Cultivate male involvement in GBV prevention and response initiatives, ensuring their acceptance, support and engagement as both participants and allies, and then eventually as agents of change.
8. Recognise that women and girls with disabilities face not only greater risks of violence and abuse, but also face particular barriers in accessing information about their rights and accessing appropriate support services.
9. Support the establishment of small market economy within the camps that encourages and prioritises diversification of employment options, goods available in the camps and addresses the issue of items that are brought in by private businesses being overpriced.
10. Create development and leadership opportunities for young women and young men that are based on mutual respect and recognition for their dignity and equality, and which are aimed at their re-building their futures.

## **DONORS**

1. Continue and expand financial support to addressing the Syria refugee crisis in KRI.
2. Demonstrate long term commitment to invest in and advocate for restoring the lives of

women and girls who have experienced violence as well as ensuring technical experts on GBV prevention and response are available in KRG institutions and international and local organisations. The Norwegian Refugee Council's Gender Standby Capacity roster (GenCap)<sup>17</sup> could be a possible provider of this technical expertise.

3. Donors should hold their partners accountable for how they identify and address GBV in all their programmes – and not just in GBV specific initiatives. Donors should demand that grant recipients demonstrate inclusion of women and girls – not just in terms of numbers but also through solid systems of beneficiary-centred accountability.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.nrc.no/?aid=9160724>

**RESEARCH PROBLEM**

## PART THREE: RESEARCH PROBLEM

The Syrian conflict has generated a humanitarian and regional catastrophe. As of February 2014, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had registered 2,450,513 Syrian refugees, 224,356 of them in Iraq, 97 per cent of whom are in the three governorates of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). The majority of Syrian refugees in KRI are ethnic Kurds. Some 43 per cent are in camps, the remainder in urban areas. UNHCR reports that 47.5 per cent of registered refugees in Iraq are women. There are currently 13 refugee camps or transit sites in KRI, the largest of which – Domiz Camp near the northern city of Dohuk – has a population of 58,500. The size of the Syrian refugee population in KRI has more than doubled since February 2013.<sup>18</sup>

The lives of women and girls in the region had been changing rapidly in traditionally restrictive environments, yet war and

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<sup>18</sup> UNHCR, February 2014, *Iraq Syrian Refugee Stats as of 23 February 2014*. <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=103#>

displacement threaten to challenge this progress. Gender based violence (GBV) in its many forms, particularly intimate partner violence and sexual harassment, is reviving fear and reasserting controls<sup>19</sup>. Syrian women's experiences of GBV are exacerbated by the vulnerabilities of their status as refugees. The massive displacement of Syrians into areas of Iraq that are already struggling to emerge from years of war and civil strife has placed extraordinary demands on infrastructure and basic services. Without recognition of the implications the long-term consequences, for women especially, will be profound.

Media and humanitarian agency reports of targeted sexual violence against women in the Syrian war, attacks on refugee women and girls in Iraq, sexual exploitation and domestic and other

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<sup>19</sup> With regard to the gender focus of this report, there is a range of academic literature urging greater engagement with the complexity of the region and women's lives. On gender and social change see, for example, Moghadam, V. (2003) *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East*, Second Edition, Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., Boulder, Colorado. On gender and refugee identities see, for example, Hajdukowski-Ahmed, M., Khanlou, N, & Moussa, H. (eds.) (2008), *Not Born a Refugee Woman: contesting identities, rethinking practices*, Berghahn Books, New York. UNFPA (December 2013) has also reflected on how the changing environment in the Arab States Region relates to initiatives on GBV.

family violence have generated increasing concern.<sup>20</sup> Reports have also highlighted the brutality visited on women and girls by different warring parties in Syria.<sup>21</sup> The magnitude and scope of instances of GBV highlight a pressing need for more in-depth and accurate information.

As the key international agency promoting the interests of women and girls worldwide, UN Women sought research that estimated the extent and impact of GBV amongst Syrian women refugees, and the risks of and contexts to that violence. UN Women was also interested to learn of ideas from the research that could inform initiatives designed to assist Syrian refugee women, girls and communities.

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<sup>20</sup> For example, see

<http://basnews.com/en/News/Details/Seven-Iraqi-Kurds-rape-Syrian-Kurdish-refugee/9838> and <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9800528/Fear-of-rape-driving-Syria-refugee-crisis.html> ]

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Nasar, S. (2013), *Violence Against Women, Bleeding Wound in the Syrian Conflict*, Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, Copenhagen <http://www.euromedrights.org/eng/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Doc-report-VAW-Syria.pdf> ; Human Rights Council (2013), *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, A/HRC/21/50, <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G12/160/66/PDF/G1216066.pdf?OpenElement> and on rape as a weapon of war more generally, see Office for the High Commissioner of Human Rights, *Rape: Weapon of War*, <http://www.ohchr.org/en/newsevents/pages/rape-weaponwar.aspx>

In taking this interest forward, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has emphasised the importance of working with local partners. Research in such specific areas of interest as early marriage and forced marriage was integrated into the wider experiences of gendered and other violence.

Very specific questions needed to be answered:

- What is the impact of displacement on Syrian women and men refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)?
- How is this different to that for other Syrian refugees in other areas of the region, if at all?
- What are women's experiences of GBV in this volatile environment?<sup>22</sup>
- What are the opinions about GBV and ways to respond to it within the refugee context? What would

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<sup>22</sup> In the region as a whole, where the enquiries have examined social and cultural factors in GBV outside of conflict settings, there has been significant attention paid to so-called 'honour crimes' and to female genital mutilation. See: Osten-Sacken, T. & Uwer, T. 2007 "Female circumcision not just African issue", *Baltimore Sun*, Feb. 12, 2007 [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2007-02-12/news/0702120027\\_1\\_fgm-iraqi-kurdistan-female-circumcision](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2007-02-12/news/0702120027_1_fgm-iraqi-kurdistan-female-circumcision) . For more on intimate partner and other family violence in the region see Boy, A. and Kulczycki, A. (2008), *What we know about intimate partner violence in the Middle East and North Africa*, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18096859>

they like to see happen to prevent GBV and to protect Syrian refugee women and girls?<sup>23</sup>

These questions appear simple but the research challenge was significant. Syrian women refugees in KRI are scattered in urban settings as well as concentrated in camps accommodating thousands of people. As well, GBV is a complex phenomenon. It describes a diverse set of inter-personal behaviours that are facilitated by the 'socially ascribed' status and subordination of women.<sup>24</sup> A broader notion of 'gendered violence' further argues that all forms of violence including war, civil unrest and displacement are gendered.<sup>25</sup> This wider lens sharpens focus on the structural relations and

<sup>23</sup> The research was interested in the experience of Syrian girls but surveying under age people is fraught with ethical challenges. Only ten girls and 12 boys under 18 completed the survey and some participated in focus groups and one-to-one interviews as part of this research. Therefore findings in relation to these age groups are tentative.

<sup>24</sup> IASC (2005), *op. cit.* p.7; Stone, A. (2012), *NRC Gender Learning Package*, Norwegian Refugee Council, Oslo.

<sup>25</sup> Sjoberg, L. and Via, S. (eds.) (2010), *Gender, War, and Militarism: feminist perspectives*, Praeger, Santa Barbara. A notable feature of the wider lens on gendered violence is consideration of sexual violence as a weapon of war. See Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) n.d., *Rape: Weapon of War*, <http://www.ohchr.org/en/newsevents/pages/rape-weaponwar.aspx>

forms of power that create and sustain the conditions in which GBV is fostered.

This research was designed to complement and supplement existing information. Recent research into sexual and gender-based violence amongst Syrian women refugees in Erbil in KRI,<sup>26</sup> Jordan<sup>27</sup> and Lebanon<sup>28</sup> has pursued similar enquiries. In addition, an inter-agency project conducted a comprehensive service mapping exercise in 2013, identifying government, international and national actors

<sup>26</sup> Al-Mesalla (2013), *A Report on the Syrian Women Refugee Situation in Erbil: Needs Assessment*, Organisation for Human Resources Development.

<http://www.ncciraq.org/en/srmap/miscrep/item/2542-al-mesalla-report-on-the-syrian-women-refugee-situation-in-erbil>

<sup>27</sup> UN Women (July 2013), *Gender-based violence and child protection among Syrian refugees in Jordan with a focus on early marriage*, Interagency assessment <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/library/gender-based-violence-and-child-protection-against-syrian-refugees-jordan-focus-early> ; Washington, K. and Rowell, J. (2013), *Syrian Refugees in Urban Jordan: rapid participatory community assessment*, CARE Jordan <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=1922> ; International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) (2012), *Violence Against Women In Syria: breaking the silence*, Briefing Paper. <http://www.fidh.org/en/north-africa-middle-east/syria/Violence-against-women-in-Syria-Breaking-the-silence-13134>

<sup>28</sup> International Rescue Committee (IRC) (2012), *Syrian Women and Girls: fleeing death, facing ongoing threats and humiliation*, A GBV Rapid Assessment,

providing response services.<sup>29</sup> A 2012 report also examined the barriers facing women resident in KRI in accessing legal protection.<sup>30</sup> The situation on the ground is rapidly evolving in terms of the influx of refugees, the dynamics of the problems refugees are facing, the growing humanitarian presence, and from recognition that the massive population displacement looks set to continue for some years.

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<sup>29</sup>SGBV Sub Working Groups – Iraq (2013), *Findings from the Inter- Agency Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) Mapping in Iraq (Snapshot)*.

<sup>30</sup> *Working Together to Address Violence Against Women and Girls in Iraqi Kurdistan* (nd), AusAID and International Rescue Committee, <http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/resource/file/IRC%20Addressing%20Violence%20Against%20Women%20in%20Kurdistan%205-12.pdf>

**DEFINING KEY  
TERMS**

## PART FOUR: DEFINING KEY TERMS

**Gender-based Violence** is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will, and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females<sup>31</sup>. *Gender-based violence is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will, and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females.*<sup>32</sup>

GBV encompasses 'everyday' forms of violence such as from spouses, as well as common experiences of sexual harassment. It extends to more complex social and political forms of violence such as trafficking and sexual exploitation. Civil war and displacement constitute a complex emergency in which the 'everyday' forms of GBV are exacerbated and new forms emerge, and where prevention and response challenges are magnified.

Women and girls are vulnerable in flight and in refugee situations in asylum, and in

resettlement and return.<sup>33</sup> At the same time old practices are unsettled, additional responsibilities are shouldered, new demands arise and opportunities present themselves. The critical role of women in refugee, asylum and resettlement settings in stabilising families, establishing new versions of community, and building peace and security is increasingly recognised at local, national and international levels.<sup>34</sup> Thus women are not 'only' victims or 'just' heroes. This more rounded reading of women's situation, which acknowledges both the constraints and opportunities

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<sup>33</sup> Hajdukowski-Ahmed, M., Khanlou, N, & Moussa, H. (eds.) (2008), *Not Born a Refugee Woman: contesting identities, rethinking practices*, Berghan Books, New York, p.2.

<sup>34</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325, October 2000), alongside other resolutions under the United Nations Women, Peace and Security agenda, addresses the impact of conflict on women and girls, and highlights the critical role women can play in preventing, managing and resolving conflict. The UN Women portal [www.womenwarpeace.org](http://www.womenwarpeace.org) contains resolutions, documents and publications related to Resolution 1325 and related Resolutions 1820, 1888 and 1889.

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31 IASC GBV Guidelines

<sup>32</sup> IASC, *op. cit.* p.7.

that they are struggling with, is likely to meet with more success on the ground.

**Intimate partner violence** describes physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse. This type of violence can occur among heterosexual or same-sex couples and does not require sexual intimacy<sup>35</sup>.

**Sexual abuse** means the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions<sup>36</sup>.

**Sexual exploitation** means any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another<sup>37</sup>.

**Sexual harassment** is defined as any unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature<sup>38</sup>.

**Sex trafficking** means the recruitment, harbouring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act<sup>39</sup>.

**Survival sex** is defined whereby women and men who have occasional commercial sexual transactions or where sex is exchanged for food, shelter or protection but would not consider themselves to be linked to formal sex work<sup>40</sup>.

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35 Center of Disease Control and Prevention:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/definitions.html>

36 UN Secretary-General's Bulletin on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) (ST/SGB/2003/13)  
<http://www.un.org/en/pseataaskforce/overview.shtml>

37 UN Secretary-General's Bulletin on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) (ST/SGB/2003/13)

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<http://www.un.org/en/pseataaskforce/overview.shtml>

38 UN Equal Employment Opportunity Commission-  
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/whatisssh.pdf>

39  
<http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/22/7102>

40  
[http://www.unfpa.org/hiv/docs/factsheet\\_genderwork.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/hiv/docs/factsheet_genderwork.pdf)

# METHODOLOGY

## PART FIVE: METHODOLOGY

The research team worked extensively with local partners and refugee communities to develop and implement a research design that would throw light onto difficult issues but also enable women to tell their stories and their ideas for change. Local partners included the Warvin Foundation for Women's Issues<sup>41</sup> and the Department of Politics and Science, Salahaddin University<sup>42</sup>, Erbil.

To obtain as much information as possible the research design involved a two phase process and a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods (Table 1 and see Annex 1 Research Methodology). The first phase of the research was conducted in Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Dohuk, and in the Domiz camp,<sup>43</sup> the second in camp sites at Domiz, Basimra, Kawergosk and Darashakran, with further key person interviews in Erbil and Dohuk.

The first phase involved a literature review and two household surveys in August-September 2013 – one of 830

Syrian refugee women and another of 830 Syrian refugee men living in urban and refugee camp settings.<sup>44</sup> The survey enumerators, many of whom were Syrian refugees, were provided with approximately 14 hours of training over three sessions. The surveys were piloted with 20 men and 20 women and reviewed before implementation.

Also in the first phase there were 11 focus group discussions with a total of 150 Syrian refugee women and men in KRI. These involved all female and all male groups in the seven research locations. Eleven key person interviews were conducted with local and international actors, including civil servants from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), representatives of Kurdish civil society and international humanitarian and gender specialists.

The second phase consisted of six key informant interviews, six focus groups and

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<sup>41</sup> <http://www.warvin.org/english.aspx>

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.suh-edu.com/>

<sup>43</sup> This report uses the transliterations of Kurdish place names used by UNHCR.

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<sup>44</sup> Survey sampling was conducted on a one in ten formula from the total refugee population. There is no record of the total number of households approached or the numbers of interviews declined by household members.

a sample of one-to-one interviews with women survivors of violence in November-December 2013. These interviews were

designed to enquire more deeply into sensitive issues that had proven difficult to explore in depth in phase one.

**FIGURE 2: Research components, locations and participant numbers**

RESEARCH TOOL	WHEN COLLECTED	WHERE COLLECTED	TOTAL PARTICIPANTS
Women's survey (Phase 1)	August-September 2013	Domiz camp, and urban centres of Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah	830
Men's survey (Phase 1)	August-September 2013	Domiz camp, and urban centres of Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah	830
Focus group discussions (Phase 1)	September – November 2013	Urban centres of Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah	c.150 (11 FGD)
Focus group discussions (Phase 2)	December 2013	Camp locations Domiz, Basimra, Kawergosk and Darashakran	c. 82 (6 FGD)
Key informant interviews (Phase 1)	September – October 2013	Urban centres of Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah	11
Key informant interviews (Phase 2)	December 2013 – January 2014	Urban centres of Erbil and Dohuk, and Domiz camp	15
Survivor conversations (Phase 2)	December 2013 - January 2014	Camp locations	7
Selected literature analysis (Phase 1)	October 2013	Desk study	

## Research limitations

This research and other reports examining GBV in the region have identified uncertainties concerning the silencing effects of shame and self-censorship amongst Syrian women.<sup>45</sup> Consequently

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, UN Women (2013) *Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection Among Syrian Refugees in Jordan, with a Focus on Early Marriage*. p.2 [http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publicatio](http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/7/Report-web%20pdf.pdf)

research has tended to emphasise reflection on third party knowledge and awareness. This introduces an element of ambiguity to responses. For example,

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[ns/2013/7/Report-web%20pdf.pdf](http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/7/Report-web%20pdf.pdf) and FIDH, op. cit. 2012: p.7 and p.13. UN Women research in Jordan noted that women were more likely to acknowledge violence to others in their family rather than to themselves. In addition, there were reports by enumerators that privacy for respondents could not always be maintained. They reported it was common that participants in the focus groups said that their situation was fine and then, after the group, approached researchers for one-to-one conversations to share accounts of abuse and violence.

when survey participants affirm that they 'know' of certain behaviours, this 'knowing' could range from direct knowledge through personal contact or witness to something heard via the media. There is also an imprecision of scale: does it mean knowing of one incident or knowing one hundred? Furthermore, the sheer breadth of behaviours encompassed by the term GBV makes survey precision very difficult and limits emphatic findings. The second phase focus groups and interviews were an attempt to go beyond these constraints by conducting more in-depth and one-to-one conversations.

Other constraints in the research process were more particular to the environment. Refugees are dependent on humanitarian and host generosity. Their preparedness to speak openly of the difficulties they may be experiencing takes place within this context. Being able to say (and be heard) that they are both grateful for the support they receive *and* that they would like some things done better or differently is a challenge. Moreover, there is a growing distrust of organisations that collect information. In the focus group discussion with enumerators, one man said that there were instances where householders had refused him entry,

refusing to give information and complaining that "you are all asking for information but not giving."

Research in cross-cultural, multi-lingual and gendered environments is always rich with potential for misunderstanding as well as for gaining new knowledge. The two survey instruments were initially drafted in English and then translated to Kurmanji (with some Arabic), and statistical analysis was conducted in English by Kurdish speakers. Final analysis was conducted in English. Differences in language also mask different conceptual understandings. Add to this the many ethical and practical concerns in conducting research in a humanitarian emergency, and great care is required.<sup>46</sup> All research collection methods adhered to World Health Organisations guidelines WHO guidelines on research into violence against women.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Practical challenges included the logistics and transportation to move enumerators to different sites. In addition there were persistent concerns about privacy for female respondents in particular.

<sup>47</sup> World Health Organisation (2001), *Putting Women First: Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on Domestic Violence Against Women*, <http://www.who.int/gender/violence/women/firtseng.pdf>

### Study Limitations:

The information provided in this report is based primarily on individual (survey) interviews, KI (Key Informant) interviews with service providers, and FGDs (Focus Group Discussions) with adolescents and adults from the community. It does not represent the views of the entire Syrian refugee population or include representatives from all service providers in the urban setting, but rather provides an overview of priority child protection and gender-based violence concerns. Notable limitations include the following:

- Questions articulated during male-only FGD sessions were often framed in a “yes or no” format, making it difficult to gauge the nuances of male participants’ opinions on social issues, since these questions did not often lead to extended discussions of the topics.
- Relatively low turnout for male FGDs, one of which only included three participants. Men have more access to the outside world than women do and may not have viewed the FGD as a worthwhile activity or use of time.
- Even though non-participants were not permitted to sit in on the discussion, the fact that many participants needed to be accompanied to and from the CDCs by supervisory figures, such as mothers, fathers, or other male family members, may have caused participants to feel more

constrained, either emotionally or time-wise. Some participants had to leave early from discussions if a family member was waiting for them.

- Most focus group participants talked about their situation in Syria, including problems they had encountered with the Syrian regime and profound distress they or their family members may have sustained before coming to Jordan, rather than focusing exclusively on their current situation in displacement.
- Most of the selected key informants worked primarily as general service providers, which made it more difficult to discern the availability and quality of specialized resources for Syrian refugee women and children. This may also be a reflection of the general lack of gender-specific resources for refugees in Jordan, and should be investigated further.

These issues argue for strategic investment in strengthening the expertise of local and other researchers in sharing and deepening appropriate methodologies, including for quantitative, qualitative and participatory research.<sup>48</sup> Given the ‘research fatigue’ amongst refugee communities, there would be benefits for civil society, NGO and government actors to plan and collaborate on data collection. Research plays a critical role in enabling communities to give their own voice to their own concerns. It is a key element in facilitating self-determination through self-representation, reflection and debate.

### Ethical Considerations:

Following the World Health Organization’s (WHO) *Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Researching, Documenting, and Monitoring Sexual Violence*, special care was taken to ensure that the individuals who participated in the interviews were not exposed to

further risks while providing information on sensitive subjects, and additional safeguards were put in place when children between 15 and 17 years old were involved.<sup>49</sup> These ethical considerations were emphasized during targeted trainings to those involved in data collection, FGDs, and in-depth interviews, as well as throughout the data collection process. In particular, it was ensured that all data collectors received training on issue-sensitization and child-friendly interview techniques; that all participants in this study were involved on a voluntary basis and fully informed of what their participation entailed prior to the beginning of discussions or survey questions, including additional consent by parents for participants under the age of 18; that basic services and support were available locally before commencing any information-gathering; referral forms and information were available to informant to deal with cases if disclosed during interviews; that the methods used posed the least possible risks to respondents and

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<sup>48</sup> This point is also made by the Sexual Violence Research Initiative of the World Health Organization. See Rowley, E., Garcia-Moreno, G. and Darnell, E. (2012), *Research themes and questions to guide research on sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict settings*, World Health Organization, <http://www.svri.org/Researchthemes.pdf>

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<sup>49</sup> World Health Organization (WHO), *WHO Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Researching, Documenting and Monitoring Sexual Violence in Emergencies* (2007), available at: [http://www.who.int/gender/documents/OMS\\_Ethics&Safety10Aug07.pdf](http://www.who.int/gender/documents/OMS_Ethics&Safety10Aug07.pdf) (accessed 27 May 2013).

built on existing good practice; that all researchers signed a confidentiality form, had prior relevant experience on top of additional training on GBV, child protection, and ethical considerations involved in this type of research; that participants were told that they could stop at any time, skip any questions that they wanted to, encouraged to bring up any questions or concerns they had at any time during sessions, and given the choice not to record the FGDs if it made them more comfortable. Finally, the confidentiality and anonymity of participants was ensured by gathering all the information in private, closed rooms, and by not using names or attributing responses to specific individuals that took part in the survey or the FGDs.

- KAP survey results were subjected to randomized checks to ensure the quality of the data.
- When the permission of participants was obtained, all FGD and in-depth interviews were recorded both electronically and by hand in order to ensure accuracy of information.
- Ongoing coordination with team members in all locations and all stages of the study confirmed the use of best practices and the attainment of research objectives.

### Quality Assurance:

The following quality control standards and criteria were implemented during the study:

- All study tools were tested before finalizing them for use in the main research phase.
- Only team members that had received relevant training on data collection, GBV and child protection, and the ethical considerations related to this research, were used. All FGD facilitators were experienced and pre-screened.

# ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

## PART SIX: ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

### 1. A perspective on Kurdish and Syrian women's rights

Violence against women in pre-conflict Syria and in Iraq was sustained by a combination of beliefs and attitudes, harmful social practices and general disadvantage.<sup>50</sup> As one Syrian woman refugee commented:

*Yes, I am afraid of men because we were brought up like that. We have been taught to be scared of men. This is something cultural, and also there is no protection for women in terms of law.*

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<sup>50</sup> The effects of discrimination are discussed further in the section on social and demographic characteristics of the surveyed population. The Social Institutions and Gender Index provides basic country information on issues of discrimination, socio-economic position, and social and legal restrictions. See [www.genderindex.org](http://www.genderindex.org). For Iraq, see Minwalla, op. cit. For Syria see also ENPI (2010), National Situation Analysis Report: Women's Human Rights and Gender Equality in Syria, <http://www.enpi-info.eu/library/content/national-situation-analysis-report-women%E2%80%99s-human-rights-and-gender-equality-syria> and Unifem (2005), Violence Against Women in Syria Study, [http://www.unifem.org/attachments/stories/currents\\_200606\\_SyriaVAWstudyKeyFindings.pdf](http://www.unifem.org/attachments/stories/currents_200606_SyriaVAWstudyKeyFindings.pdf).

In these settings, violence is 'institutionalized' in social, legal, political and economic systems.<sup>51</sup>

Kurdish women have long been active in political organising.<sup>52</sup> The Kurdish women's movement has joined with other Iraqi women as well as those across regional borders in efforts to address areas of discrimination in public and private life. It is in these areas that Kurdish women share much with other women across the region. Theirs are common cultures that burden women by connecting notions of family honour with their sexuality, and which restrict opportunities for full participation in public life.

However, women in the region also share the experiences of rapidly changing local economies, reactions against traditional forms of governance, previously unheard of access to information about global

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<sup>51</sup> Minwalla, op. cit. p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> Mojab, S. (1997) (ed.). *Women of a Non-state Nation: The Kurds*, No. 3, Mazda Publishers. [http://www.utoronto.ca/wwdl/resources/the\\_kurds\\_contents.pdf](http://www.utoronto.ca/wwdl/resources/the_kurds_contents.pdf)

affairs and immense social changes. The research found Syrian refugees, especially young women and men, strongly connected to the wider world, largely through mobile technology, while at the same time enmeshed in a complex social environment now torn apart by war.

Kurdish women in Syria experienced unique hardship due to state-initiated discrimination against Kurdish communities from the 1960s to contemporary times.<sup>53</sup> The different histories of Kurdish communities under the Baath party regimes of Syria and Iraq, as well as their different social, cultural and religious practices, urges caution in assuming complete similarity with other Syrian Arab refugee communities in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Across the region, Kurdish women were and are active in nationalist struggles, in politics and in women's rights actions.<sup>54</sup> This challenges a simple reading of violence

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<sup>53</sup> The discrimination can be traced back to colonial times. The Kurds status as a stateless minority in the region has its roots in the politics of the First World War when the Anglo-French Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 denied the Kurds sovereignty and divided them among the four states of Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq.

<sup>54</sup> See Ahnetbeyzade, C. (2000), 'Kurdish nationalism in Turkey and the role of peasant women', in Mayer, T. (ed), *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: sexing the nation*, Routledge, London and Mojab, S. (2001), *op. cit.*

against Kurdish women as a manifestation of patriarchy or of religious fundamentalism.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, the role of honour, shame and family in constraining women's lives is similar across much of the Middle East and Levant.<sup>56</sup>

These are opportunities and challenges that have been almost completely derailed by the civil war and exodus. It is true that the refugee experience drives individual women and men, girls and boys to seek work and to participate in public and communal affairs as they might never have before. However, the uncertainty, fear, anxiety and vulnerability of their refugee status provide a corrosive counterweight. This is also an environment that creates pressure on inter-personal relationships and increases family and domestic violence, and it is an environment that has fostered opportunities for sexual exploitation and abuse on a massive scale.

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<sup>55</sup> Mojab coins the term 'gendercide' in an effort to conceptualise this complexity. See: Mojab, S. (2003), "Kurdish women in the zone of genocide and gendercide", *Al-Raida*, vol. 21, no.103, pp.20-25.  
<http://www.kurdipedia.org/documents/87353/0001.PDF>

<sup>56</sup> UNFPA (2013), *op. cit.* p. 6. and Welchman, L. and Hossain, S. eds. (2005), *Honour: crimes, paradigms, and violence against women*, Zed Books, London.

## 2. Demographic and socio-economic profile

The participants in the population survey (830 men and 830 women, all identifying themselves as Muslims) come from Syria, where Kurds comprise some 11 per cent of the population. Most had arrived in KRI in 2013. Most were with nuclear or extended families, with an average five people per household. The financial position of households was tenuous with extremely limited employment opportunities and little to no employment protection for women and men. Women's literacy levels were low, as was their level of educational attainment.

Over one third of all survey participants were located in Dohuk, a quarter in Erbil and ten per cent in Sulaymaniyah. A third resided in the Domiz refugee camp near Dohuk, which was planned for two thousand people but now has a population of 58,500.<sup>57</sup> Two thirds of the sample comprised urban (or non-camp) residents. For Iraq as a whole, 61 per cent

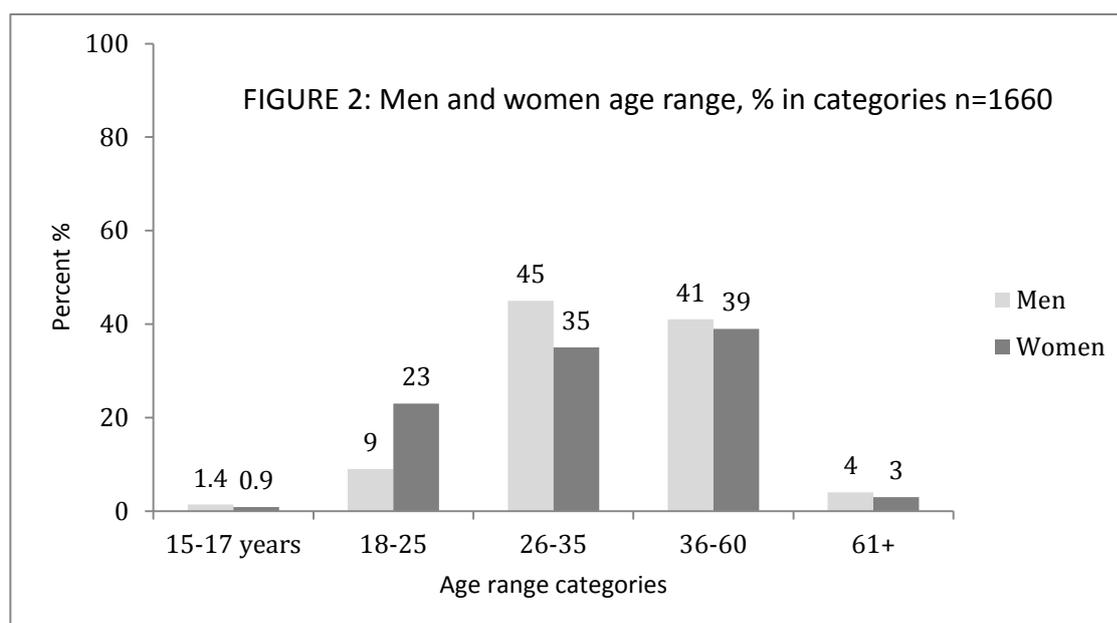
of Syrian refugees derive from the Hassakeh region, 17 per cent from Aleppo and 11 per cent from Damascus.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> UNHCR, February 2014, Iraq Syrian Refugee Stats as of 23 February 2014. <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=103#>

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<sup>58</sup> UNHCR Iraq, Registration Trends for Syrians, 21 October 2013.



The age distribution of women was different between those residing in Domiz camp and those residing in urban areas. In Domiz, 44 per cent of women were aged 26-35, as opposed to 31 per cent of women in urban areas. In urban areas 41 per cent were women, as opposed to 33 per cent in Domiz, were aged between 36-60 years. Marginally more young women aged less than 25 years were located in urban areas (26 per cent as opposed to 21 per cent).

Nearly half of survey participants (48 per cent) were residing within a nuclear family in KRI, with 40 per cent residing with an extended family. The vast majority of women (90 per cent) were married. Half said that there were five or more persons

in the family (mean 5.1) with a quarter having four persons.

Over half (59 per cent) of participants said that their family arrived in KRI in 2013 and 39 per cent arrived in 2012. Over a third (37 per cent) had changed their residence at least once since arriving in KRI. In the main this was within a city (15 per cent, n=127) or from camp to city (13 per cent, n=104). Of those who had re-settled the main reason for this was for work purposes (21 per cent, n=170).

Of those who arrived in 2013, 70 per cent resided in the three urban areas and 54 per cent had always been in the same residence. Of those who arrived in 2012, 29 per cent resided in the urban areas and

46 per cent had always been in the same residence.

Nearly all (91 per cent) respondent males were registered with UNHCR. Similarly high proportions were UNHCR registered, irrespective of whether they were urban or camp residents and when they arrived in KRI. However, of that small number who were not registered (n=47), the majority were households who had arrived in 2013 and resided in urban areas. Of those who were not registered, over a third indicated that they thought UNHCR would be the one to initiate contact. A further third were not aware of the place for registration and 15 per cent had no identification papers.

### Work and employment prospects

Men indicated that a large proportion of households (47 per cent n=392) manage on less than 300,000 Iraqi dinars per (c.US\$250 / month, with a further proportion on between 300-500,000 dinars per month (28 per cent n=232). Over half (58 per cent) derive their income from daily 'cash in hand' work and a quarter (26 per cent) from contracted labour. The majority of households (71 per cent) rely on a single person for their income, usually a male aged over 18 (71 per cent).

In focus group discussion there was acknowledgement that the actual income level meant different things in different contexts. One man commented that if he would not have come to Kurdistan if he had been paid so well in Syria. The problem for them as refugees in KRI was the cost of living and escalating rents – a woman residing in Erbil reporting their rent had risen from US\$200 to US\$600 and would have been even higher if they had not rented it through an Iraqi Kurd.

Seventy per cent of men have no work contract and are involved in daily labour. A high proportion says that the main risk for those in work is not being paid their wages. In focus groups the issue of labour exploitation was the topic most consistently raised by women as well as men. Commented one man:

*We have no jobs. Sometimes we can find temporary work but then it is difficult to get our money. When we ask for a work contract the owner immediately finds other workers.*

Even prior to the refugee influx, there was local attention to the problem of labour exploitation in Iraq and KRI. A 2012 report by a local human rights agency, the Civil Development Organisation, found that:

*A high percentage of those that are employed are subjected to working longer hours without sufficient wages, or in poor and unsafe working environments without legal or contractually binding agreements to protect the employee's rights.<sup>59</sup>*

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<sup>59</sup> Civil Development Organisation (2012), *Situation in Iraq and Kurdistan Regions: monitoring report on workers' rights*,

The influx of refugees has unsettled the situation still further, disadvantaging both Syrian and local workers and benefitting local and international employers.<sup>60</sup> The pre-existing position of economic disadvantage that is the experience of many workers in many countries of the Levant has become exacerbated by conflict and competition for scarce work.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the situation is known to be extremely dire for those disabled by injury. With little or no social security in either Iraq or Syria, the only way to survive for many of those with disabilities is through begging.<sup>62</sup>

Men also feel unable to influence the risks in the workplace with nearly half believing there is nothing they can do about workplace exploitation. More

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<http://www.cdo-iraq.org/en/fighting-for-labor-rights/>

<sup>60</sup> For example, one interviewee gave a story of another who had worked for a number of months for a Turkish company. He returned to Syria when he could not get his wages paid.

<sup>61</sup> Billingsly, A., (2013), "Mutual misery: the Syrian crisis, Lebanon and Australia", *The Conversation* (30 October 2013),

<https://theconversation.com/mutual-misery-the-syrian-refugee-crisis-lebanon-and-australia-19304>

<sup>62</sup> See Civil Development Organisation (2013), *Treatment of disabled persons in Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Baghdad and Kirkuk provinces* <http://www.cdo-iraq.org/en/treatment-of-disabled-persons-in-erbil-sulaymaniyah-baghdad-and-kirkuk-provinces/>

optimistically, a third believe they can ask for help to protect themselves in the workplace. The question is, of course, ask who? Furthermore, both men and women experienced discrimination in seeking work. Over half of women said that they knew or had heard of other women and girls being refused work in the private sector in KRI.

As an indication of the negative impact of war and displacement, women reported less capacity for employment. While 15 per cent of women stated that they had some occupation in Syria other than domestic work,<sup>63</sup> only five per cent indicated they had occupations in KRI. Most women (83 per cent) indicated that they had primarily taken care of their homes in Syria with this proportion increasing to 93 per cent while resident in KRI. The research found a strong perception of risks to Syrian refugee women in employment settings. This perception created as deep a barrier as actual discrimination.

Notwithstanding the difficulties, half of the women said that they were willing or

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<sup>63</sup> Of these, seven per cent were civil servants, three per cent worked in the private sector, two per cent had skilled jobs and three per cent had unskilled jobs.

desired to work in KRI albeit preferably in a part-time capacity. In an urban focus group discussion, women reported that there were skilled women working as tailors, cooks and hairdressers. There was variation in the extent to which women reported being free to move and work in Syria prior to their flight to KRI. This variation may relate to differences between women in terms of educational attainment and other social status criteria.

Interpreting this interest from women in having their own income was an exercise in cross-cultural understanding. Asking why women might want this, some indicated that it was in order to raise the income level of the family as a whole, rather than as a route to autonomy. One woman said she wanted to help her husband because of the cost of living in Kurdistan. Several women said it was good to earn money themselves. The refugee experience clearly opens new possibilities for women to earn income while, at the same time, closes them down.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Nicholson, F. (2011), *Refugee Women: Survivors, Protectors, Providers*, UNHCR, <http://www.unhcr.org.uk/resources/monthly-updates/november-2011-update/refugee-women-survivors-protectors-providers.html>

## Women's education and literacy

**FIGURE 3: Women's literacy and educational attainment, age category (n=819, %)**

Age Category	No/little literacy	No/informal education
18 years and under	2%	0%
19-29 years	28%	26%
30-39 years	28%	20%
40-49 years	22%	29%
50-59 years	15%	18%
60 years and over	7%	8%

Most Syrian women refugees (44 per cent) had no education or informal education. Unsurprisingly a majority (55 per cent per cent) could not read or read without difficulty.<sup>65</sup> Under a quarter (23 per cent) had primary school education and under a quarter (23 per cent) secondary.<sup>66</sup> Just ten per cent (n=80) had a university education. Given the overall high literacy rates for women in Syria,<sup>67</sup> these results are surprising and warrant closer investigation. As noted previously,

<sup>65</sup> However, a survey of literacy among Syrian refugees in KRI found that the rate of illiteracy among men was 23%. See <http://npormohamadian.blogfa.com/88051.aspx> Email communication with Bayan Azizi (21 October 2013).

<sup>66</sup> The measure for 'no education' combined 'informal education' and 'no education'. The measure for 'illiteracy' combined 'cannot read' and 'reads with difficulty'.

<sup>67</sup> In the 2004 census, overall literacy for Syrian women was 74 per cent. See [http://www.indexmundi.com/syria/demographics\\_profile.html](http://www.indexmundi.com/syria/demographics_profile.html)

there was structural discrimination against Kurdish people in Syria. In KRI itself, female literacy is lower at 64 per cent.<sup>68</sup>

In focus group discussions advances in women's education were perceived to be in danger. Some younger women spoke of being unable to complete their schooling or university due to the conflict and displacement. Others spoke of the discrimination against Kurds in Syria in their access to education and obtaining accreditation of achievement. At the same time, younger women spoke of being free to move around, to go to school and to go to work back in Syria. Others spoke of their concern for their children's disrupted

<sup>68</sup> Source: Kurdistan Region Statistics Office (KRSO) and Iraq Knowledge Network

schooling, one saying that “the students coming from Syria are not allowed to continue their education here”. It is clear that provision is inadequate. UNICEF report that 78 per cent of primary school aged children in camps are enrolled but in non-camp settings the rate is only 38 per cent. Rates for secondary enrolment are 45 per cent in camps and 22 per cent for youths in non-camp settings.

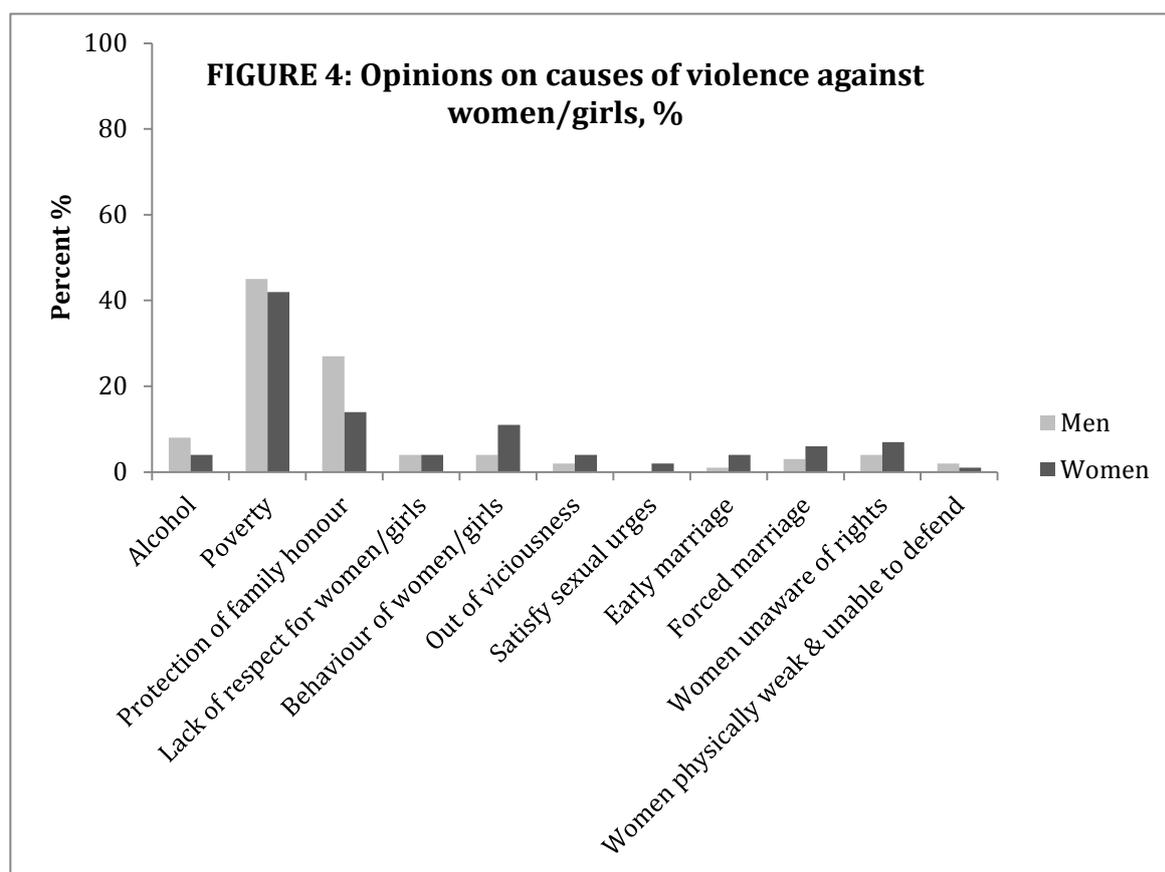
There are a number of possible interpretations to the literacy and education question for women. It may result from:

- cultural constraints placed on them as women by their families
- systemic and structural discrimination against Kurds in Syria

- problems with the quality of education in Syria for Kurdish women and girls
- disruption due to the conflict
- lack of access for women and girls to adequate and quality schooling in Syria and KRI.

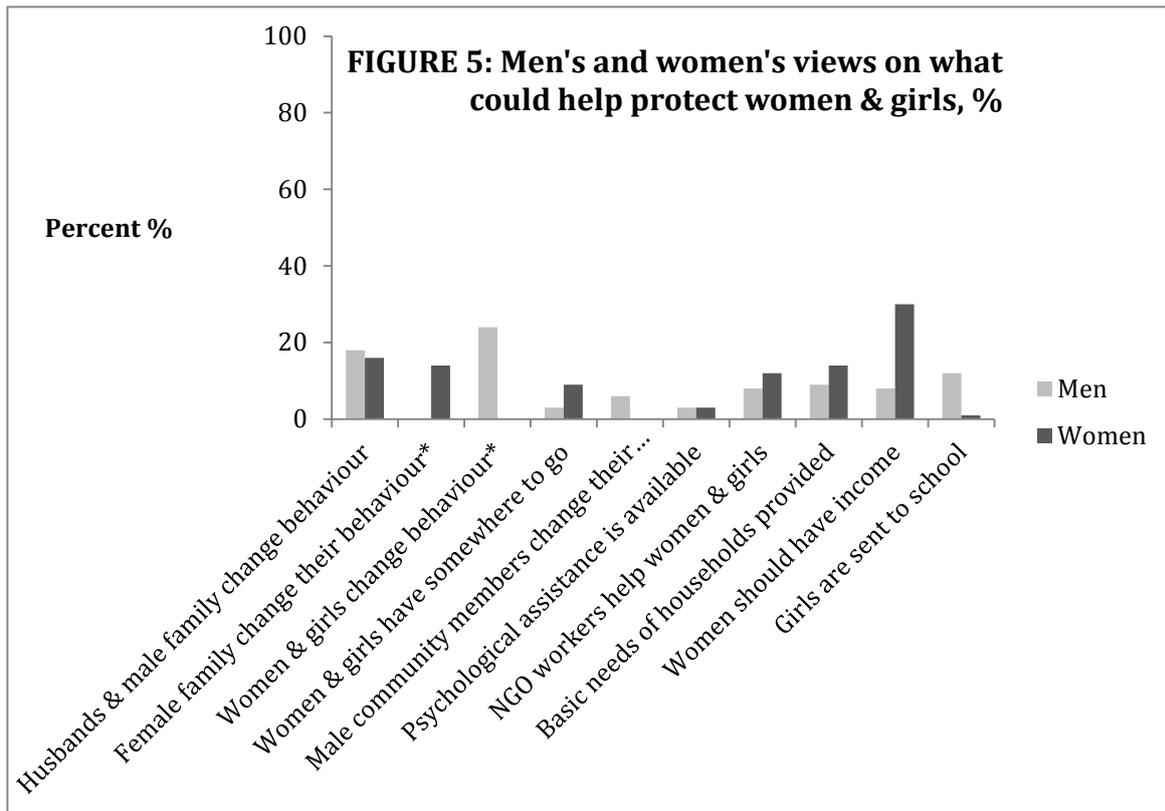
### 3. Opinions and perceptions of safety and causes of violence against women

Men and women had similar views on the causes of violence against women and girls with both groups selecting poverty as the main cause (Chart 10). While both groups thought that *the protection of family honour* was a cause, men (27 per cent) emphasized this more strongly than did women (14 per cent).



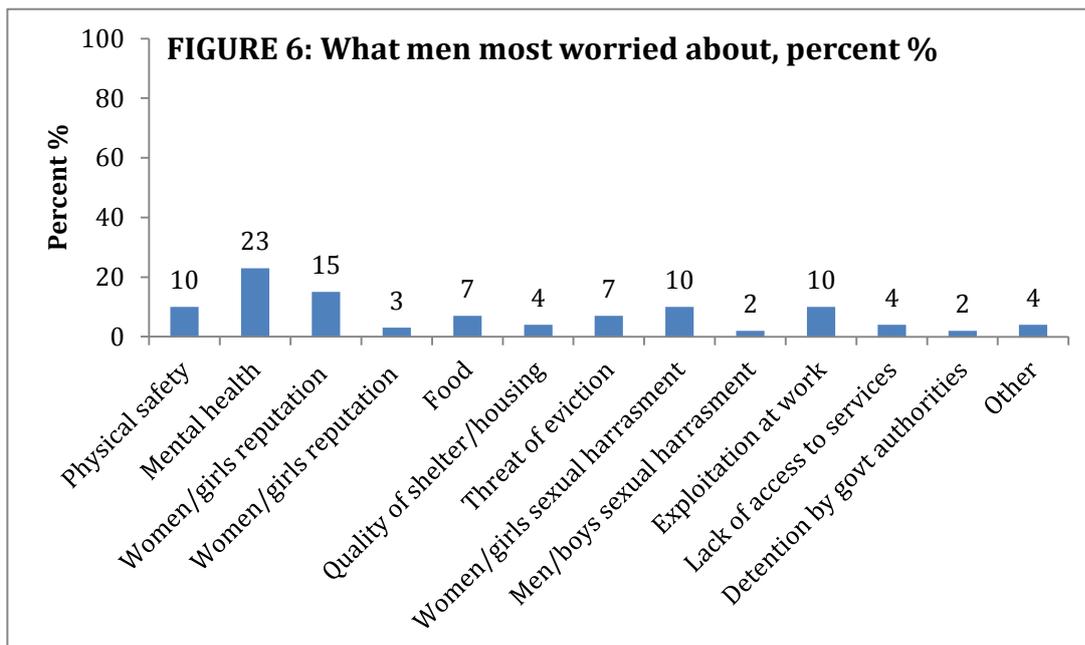
Asked what changes they thought could help protect women and girls in their homes<sup>69</sup> and men predominately thought women and girls could change their behaviour (24 per cent) (Chart 12). Women overwhelmingly specified that women should have their own income – 30 per cent as opposed to 8 per cent of men – when responding to the choice options. The next largest category for women was that husbands and other male family members should change their behaviour (16 per cent). Women also felt that the basic needs of the household should be met (14 per cent).

<sup>69</sup> The men's survey asked "... in the community or in their homes". Some questions, marked \*, were only asked of men or of women.



### Overall Key Concerns of Male Refugees Related to Safety

Asked to select from a menu of thirteen options what they were most worried about, men nominated psychological/mental health as top of the list (Chart 4). Following this was the reputation of women and girls (15 per cent).



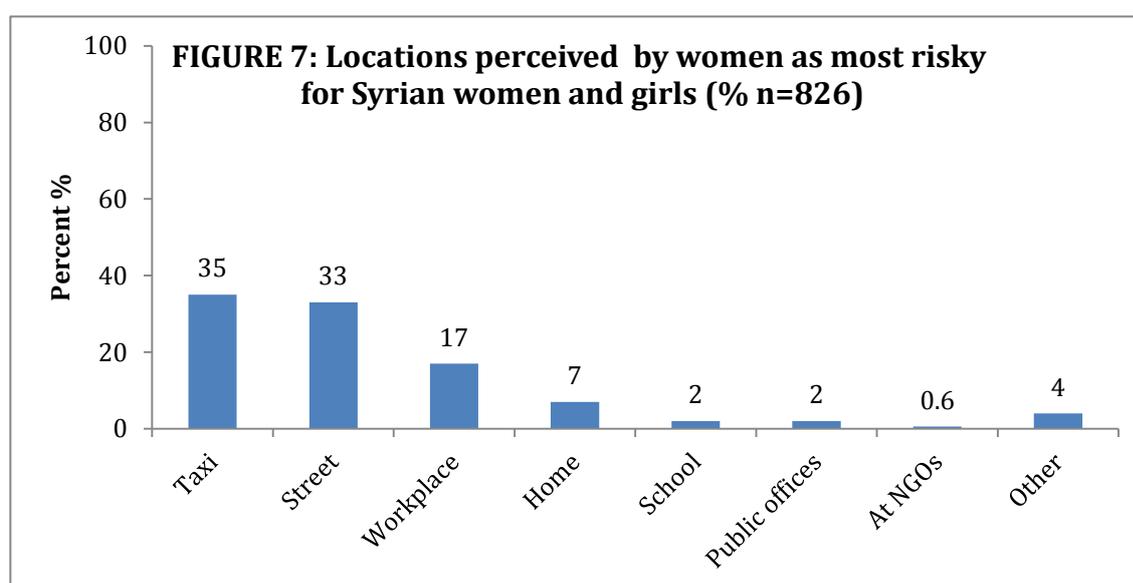
Women as well as men were concerned about the impact of boredom, the absence of work and the unattended traumas of the war. In focus group discussion one woman said that “if the men are in good health and not disabled, they try to work. Some of the boys go to school while the others have to stay at home since there is no place for them in the few schools”.

Examining these specific worries, show men’s concerns directed towards certain groups in their community. They assessed young women as more exposed to sexual harassment (48 per cent), and young women’s (40 per cent) and adult women’s (36 per cent) as more exposed to sexual exploitation. They also assessed young women’s (40 per cent) and adult women’s (36 per cent) as more exposed to sexual

exploitation from government offices and from NGOs in return for services. Men assessed women and girls’ as more exposed to physical violence outside and inside the home. Perhaps unsurprisingly, men assessed young women as more affected by restrictions to their freedom of movement (41 per cent). However, with regard to risk of detention by government authorities, and denial of access to services they felt more worried for adult men.

### Overall Key Concerns of Female Refugees Related to Safety

Asked what places women and girls are most unsafe, women respondents identified sites outside of the home. In particular these were taxis, the street and in workplaces (Chart 6).



In the taxis Syrian refugee women would describe the rudeness and disrespect. One young woman said it was more the things taxi drivers said than what they did.<sup>70</sup> A number of women, when asked about women-driver-only taxis, were enthusiastic about the idea.

Women felt that the single greatest contributor to these feelings of being unsafe was the lack of respect from local men (35 per cent), that there is impunity (18 per cent), and that the local community does not accept Syrian refugees (16 per cent). Of other groups of Syrian refugees, women felt that it was young women who most at risk of violence and threats by non-Syrians (25 per cent) as well as by Syrians (28 per cent). One woman commented on the feeling of relentless exposure to disrespect, reporting that “every time I am in the street every car goes toot, toot”.

In consequence of perceived risks, many women do not venture out of their residence or are disallowed freedom of movement. Said a female participant in one of the urban focus groups “*it has been*

*a long time that we do not go inside the society, so we haven't seen anything bad”.*

While many women did not find camp life very safe (see Table 3), for some it was safer than perceived risks from outside.

*The problems and challenges women and girls face when they move around this community are that they are prejudiced by men and everybody [...] think of the girls that they are prostitutes. There are no places where they are safe.*

Women were further asked ‘if you go out rarely, or never, what is the reason’. In the main, and perhaps contrary to some of their other answers, the majority of women indicated that they ‘*have no problems with going out alone or with others*’ (33 per cent). However, a similar proportion (32 per cent) indicated that they ‘*cannot go outside unaccompanied*’. Smaller proportions (6-7 per cent) indicated that they feared that family members would disapprove, they feared verbal abuse by local community members, and had a feeling of danger outside the home.

Of women living in urban areas over a third (37 per cent) indicated that they have no problems going out alone or with

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<sup>70</sup> Both women and men in FGD said that taxi drivers in Syria were even worse.

others, where as 23 per cent of women living in the camp situation felt the same.

## Living arrangements and safety in

### KRI

Just over half of households (55 per cent) resided in a rented flat or house. A third (31 per cent) were residing in a refugee camp. While many felt safer as refugees in Iraq than they had been in the war zones of Syria, there were still problems. Many felt that the family residence was unsafe, temporary and that they risked eviction. The single most common reason given by men for a lack of safety in the residence was that Syrian refugees were not accepted by the local community. A further proportion felt they were far from services such as health care and police.

Interviews with local actors as well as with refugees indicated that overcrowding and poor living arrangements were a problem. One reported that “my son is sick, I am dealing with him. We are ten people in a house and my husband is unemployed.” A *mukhtar* (traditional neighbourhood leader) commented that:

*Many of the refugees are in a weak economic condition and cannot afford to independently rent a house. Instead it is common to find several Syrian families jointly renting a house to save on rent. Such living conditions increases tension within the family unit due to overcrowding and puts women and girls especially at risk of violence particularly if they are having to share bathrooms and latrine facilities with the other family.*

A distorted rental market and exploitation by landlords were also mentioned throughout the research. Of critical concern was overcrowding and lack of privacy especially for women and girls. At the same time, NGOs and other stakeholders agreed that camp residents had easier and more timely access to basic services and to information than did those refugees resident in towns and villages.

## 4. Community relations

The Kurdish Iraqi population have demonstrated “profound solidarity” with

the Syrian refugees.<sup>71</sup> Individually and collectively the host community has rallied with material and financial support. From the outset of the arrivals of Syrians in KRI, local civil society groups mobilised assistance and urged the KRG and the private sector to increase their levels of support so as to meet the most urgent needs of the Syrians. However, there appear to be strains to this on-going support.

The initial response of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) was welcoming and

*grounded in a sense of ethnic solidarity with the overwhelming Kurdish character of the Syrian refugee population in the KR, a shared experience of armed conflict and displacement, as well as a desire to be seen by the international community as a capable and responsible host.*<sup>72</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council (2013), *Failing Syrian refugees in Iraq's Kurdish region; international actors can do more*, p.3. <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/NRC%20report%20-%20Syrian%20refugees%20in%20the%20Kurdish%20region%20and%20Iraq%20June%202013.pdf>

<sup>72</sup> UNHCR, (2003), *From slow boil to breaking point. A real-time evaluation of UNHCR's*

The KRG has provided residency permits to the refugees that have enabled them to work, to move freely in the region, and to access health care and education. People have been free to choose where to live and to rent private accommodation. However, the enormity of the refugee influx has shifted the rhetoric of integration to a new level of uncertainty.<sup>73</sup> Even for the host community there is now recognition that, as an NGO informant told us, “we are all Kurdish but we are different”.

In August 2013, the KRG and humanitarian organisations scrambled to respond to a further sudden influx of refugees following the opening of the border.<sup>74</sup> Numbers are expected to double over the next 12-18 months.<sup>75</sup>

The ever-increasing numbers have augmented labour competition, reduced wages, increased the cost of living and

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*response to the Syrian refugee emergency*, p.16. <http://www.unhcr.org/52b83e539.pdf>

<sup>73</sup> NRC (2013), *op. cit.*

<sup>74</sup> UNHCR (September 2013), REACH Situational Report, *Refugee Influx into Northern Iraq*, <http://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/refugee-influx-kurdistan-region-iraq-reach-situation-report-september-12th-2013>

<sup>75</sup> UNHCR (December 2013), *2014 Syria Regional Response Plan: strategic overview*, #6 <http://www.unhcr.org/syriarrp6/>

placed extraordinary pressure on education and health services. A police officer serving in a refugee camp reported “we don’t have enough staff or money to serve the Syrian refugees. We did not get more in our budget for this”. In urban settings a *mukhtar* told researchers that:

*Services to aid refugees are not enough. Healthcare, educational, social, medical and welfare service are not enough, and a large number of refugees live together in the same house. Many refugees are not even aware of the existence of these limited facilities.*

Although government authorities attempt to respond to issues raised both in urban and camp areas they worry about the longer term. As one put it, “they are part of our nation but in the long term there is maybe a problem for our society”.

Some local and international humanitarian actors suggest that improved coordination and clarity of objectives and programmes are critical for the future. A KRG official noted the importance of coordination and better knowledge of who is doing what and where.

An INGO informant expressed confidence that it would be possible to provide ongoing support “because we have many resources but we have bad management. If we have good management then it will be possible for two or three years.”

### Shifting relationships between refugees and communities

The reception by the local Iraqi Kurdish community of the Syrian refugees has been experienced differently in different locations. An informant living in a small village said she had never been bothered and no one had done her any harm. However, for many refugees the difficulties that they have in accessing services is perceived by many as a lack of welcome. In one focus group, a male refugee reported that “they call us Syrians ... they use it as a bad word and we are not given any jobs, houses and so on”. Male survey respondents attributed their lack of safety to a sense that refugees were not accepted by the local community.

Syrian refugee women emphasised different aspects of their reception by the local community. A majority (57 per cent) had direct experience of verbal sexual

harassment since their arrival in KRI. Many others said they had seen or known other women being verbally harassed. One young woman reported that whenever she is waiting on a road for her friend that men in cars slow down and talk to her, thus making her too scared to now go out alone. Another reported that she had quit her waitressing job as the male owner and his friends kept offering her money to go out with them: “They thought because I am Syrian that I will disgrace my family. They wouldn’t do that to their own women”.

They indicated that the lack of acceptance of Syrian refugees by local people was a significant contribution to feeling generally unsafe and that the lack of respect they experienced from local men was a primary reason why they felt unsafe. In both focus group discussions and key informant interviews Syrian refugee women and men repeatedly reiterated this.

It is important to note however that women interviewed, reported experiencing increased risk, uncertainty and exclusion from both non-Syrians and Syrians. In the interviews and focus groups, there was particular concern

about a growing sense of physical, sexual and economic exploitation of Syrian refugee women and girls.

## 5. Sexual violence

Sexual violence and the threat of it were found to be an ever present reality for women and girls. Fear is heightened by the vulnerability that displacement brings. In one camp, two cases of girls disappearing were raised during the course of the research. A majority of Syrian women refugees (54 per cent) believe there is a very high risk of being sexually harassed in KRI.

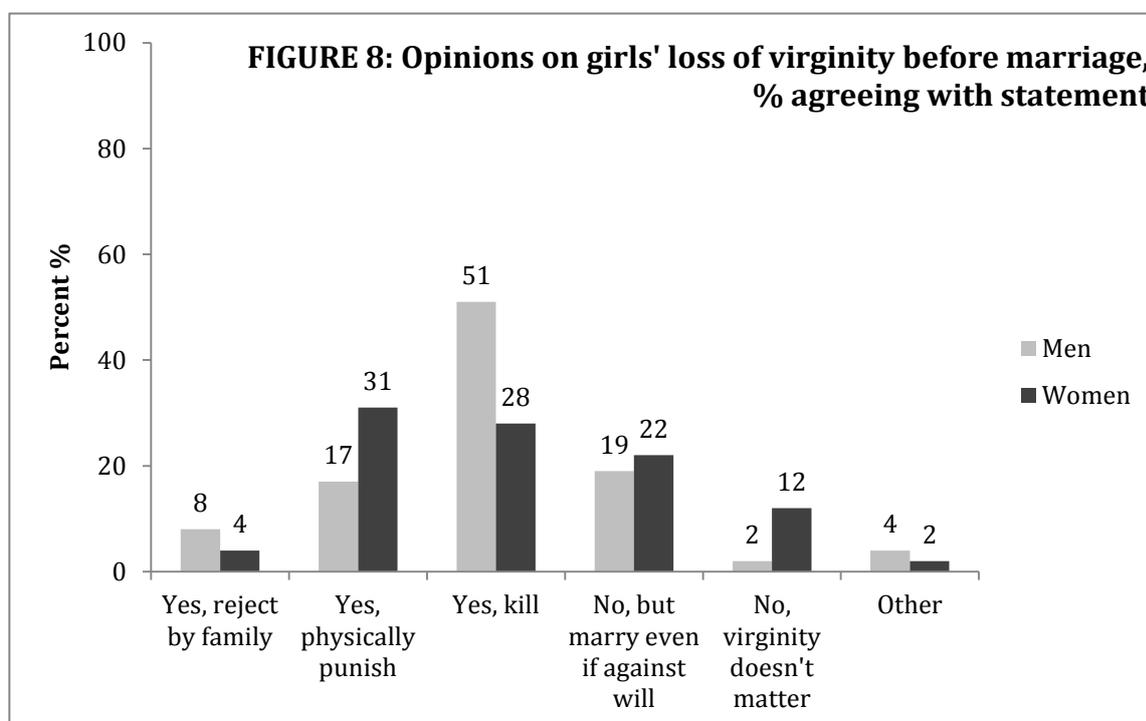
Sexual violence in war, sexual exploitation and abuse, survival sex and sex trafficking were all raised as concerns by informants. So entangled are women’s experiences of sexual violence with the armed conflict, in everyday settings, and in family situations that it is difficult to separate them.

Women mentioned numerous instances of pressure for sex. One in five women surveyed said she had directly been offered money for sexual services. More alarmingly, one in ten women indicated that they had been pressured by government officials, organised gangs,

police and other security personnel, NGOs, and by members of both the Syrian and non-Syrian communities to engage in physical relationships.

How men thought about the importance of early marriage and girls' reputations is illuminated by their views on whether women and girls should be punished for losing their virginity before marriage.

Overwhelmingly men were of the view that she should be killed (51 per cent) (Chart 14). At the same time, over a quarter of women thought the same and a third were of the view that physical punishment was in order (31 per cent).



This view was not uniform, however. Different contexts appeared to be influential on attitudes. For example, in one of the discussion groups a man said that, *“if a girl really is raped then the family will defend her and nothing will happen to her, and if it isn't that case then*

*most likely the girl and the boy are killed by their families”*.

A significant majority of women (85 per cent) said that she knew or had heard of a woman or girl being killed in order to preserve the family honour; 86 per cent said that these killings had taken place in

Syria. Nearly all of the women (92 per cent) indicated that for a woman to lose her virginity before marriage is never accepted within the Syrian refugee community.

The high degree of social acceptability of these ideas among both men and women urge great caution is employed before implementing programs that encourage young women and girls to speak out and disclose experiences. These may unwittingly place them in mortal danger.

### Sexual harassment and assault

*One day, one of the neighbours had a visitor, another Syrian man. He found out that the woman was alone and one night sexually assaulted her. Everyone knew about it.*

*A young girl who went to work in a café. She was forced by her boss to flirt with the customers; most of the people think that Syrian girls are prostitutes.*

Women's experience of sexual harassment was common. Twenty seven per cent of female informants indicated that non-Syrians men subjected women to sexual harassment. Twenty four per cent indicated that they also experienced this from Syrian men. (

Asked their opinion on why women were sexually harassed and exploited or mistreated in the community, women indicated that they thought it was because:

- men could do it without punishment
- women's behaviour was not appropriate
- men didn't respect Syrian women
- men didn't respect women in public.

It was not just strangers to whom women refugees were vulnerable. One in five indicated that they had experienced rape or the threat of sexual abuse. Eleven per cent indicated that the perpetrator in these instances was a family member, relative, neighbour or work colleague.

Vulnerability to sexual violence was not restricted to women and girls. A young woman raised a case of a boy whose family she had visited:

*The mother started crying and her 13 year old boy who was sitting there also started crying. She said he had worked in a fruit shop and at the end he was supposed to be paid. But three men raped him and told him that if he comes back they will do the same to his mother and sisters.*

### Survival sex and sex trafficking

*Transit 1 in the camp is the base for prostitution. Everyone knows this. We do not dare say anything. It is organised and we do not know who is behind it. Maybe someone important and we would have problems if we speak.*

Numerous cases of survival sex and sex trafficking were mentioned during the course of this research. The vulnerable social and financial situation for many refugees drives these activities. One young woman shared her experience:

*I have been applying for a job for a while and shared my number with UNICEF and the Red Cross. Someone called me and said he had a job to offer me and I thought it was from an organisation. I asked what type of job, he said going to meetings. I said what type of meeting; he said sex-related meetings.*

As savings diminish and living conditions worsen, these problems can only worsen. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Syrian refugees believe that, international humanitarian actors and staff of government departments know about these issues but have failed to adequately address them.

Displacement fragments protective communal bonds just as it strengthens other forms of social control over women. Said one young woman:

*In Syria we lived among people that we knew. Everyone knew each other in the neighbourhood. We lived among relatives and felt safe. Here, people come from different places; they do whatever they want and are not afraid of anything.*

## Views about sexual exploitation and abuse

Women were more likely than male survey participants to blame men who pay for sex, rather than blame women engaged in survival sex. While Syrian male refugees generally agreed that sexual violence was a problem that women and girls faced, they mostly blamed women for the different forms of sexual violence. They placed responsibility for dealing with it onto women themselves. Nearly a quarter of men said women were to blame for sexual exploitation and survival sex while nearly half said that women are sexually harassed in the community because they did not dress or behave appropriately. One spoke of the long-term taint on the reputation of Syrian women:

*In the other camps, they talk about Domiz women as prostitutes. The reputation has even spread to Europe. Domiz is now associated with prostitution and all the women are affected. This reputation will probably remain even when people return to Syria.*

Women also agreed with such perceptions, feeling women's behaviour/dress was to blame while also noting it was due to local men's disrespect

of Syrian women and that there was a sense of impunity.

## 6. Intimate partner and family violence

*A woman was being beaten by her husband. She went to the police and the officer told her "so what if your husband is beating you?"*

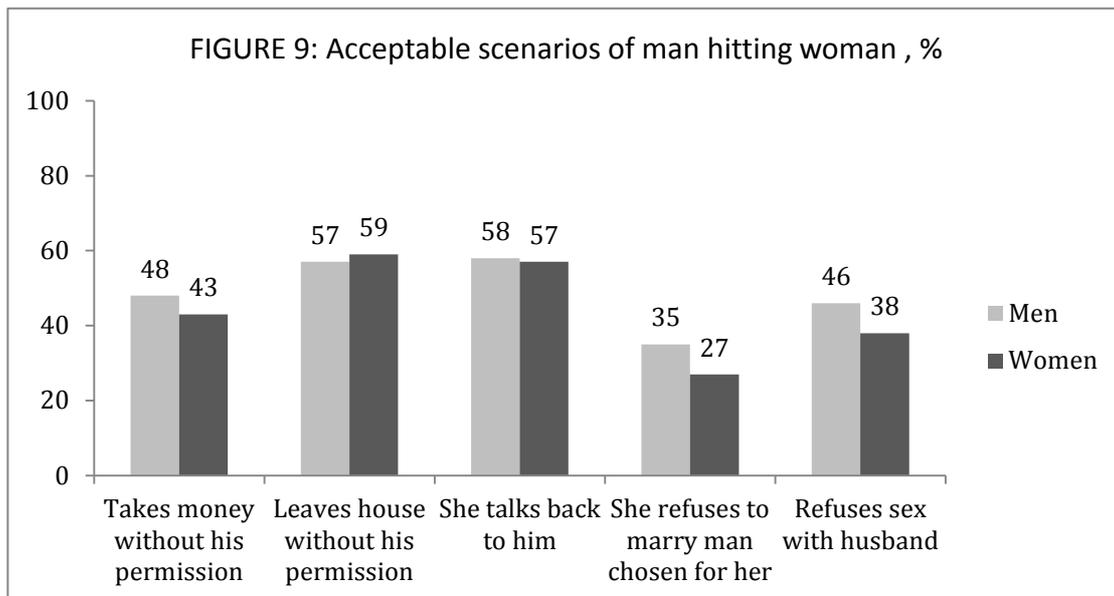
As one of the most predominant forms of GBV, domestic and family violence has been common for Syrian women refugees and a key concern for humanitarian actors. Domestic and family violence undermines women's dignity and capacity and saps morale. In KRI it has contributed to feelings of despair and hopelessness. Over half of the women surveyed said that they knew of women who had been physically hurt, verbally abused and socially restricted by a husband and by other family.

Humanitarian actors and women refugees agreed that the experience

of displacement had exacerbated pre-existing abuse. Nearly half of the women surveyed (45 per cent) felt that there had been an increase in violence in the home since leaving Syria. In one focus group discussion, it was noted that:

*The kind of violence in the camp is different from the kind of violence in Syria. In the camp there are more cases of divorce. In Syria they felt safer and they were in good mental health, because they had no problems and lived their lives.*

There is wide knowledge of abuse problems and this awareness is significantly embedded within social norms and expectations. Both women and men in the surveys expressed high tolerance of men hitting a woman in certain circumstances.



Some of the men in discussion groups attributed this to the hardship of life in KRI. One man noted that “conditions are changing the character of people. When you have hard times you can get angry easily and it causes some results that you don’t really like.” A man in the same group disagreed, saying that “we do not use physical violence but sometimes we get angry with each other”. For both men and women poverty is regarded as the predominate cause of violence against women and girls.

Many women agreed that the strains of close living arrangements, having their men folk daily around the residence, financial stress and the emotional impact of the war in Syria contributed to domestic violence. But

women also generally agreed that there was social tolerance for husbands and other male family members to be physically violent to wives, daughters and sisters. As one woman reported:

*One day we were waiting in the food voucher queue. The line was very long. Suddenly a man came and dragged his wife out of the queue and started beating her. He was asking where have you been all day? Why haven’t your prepared food?*

While men held women responsible for modifying their behaviour to prevent violence in the home, women overwhelmingly specified that they

should have their own income – 30 per cent as opposed to eight per cent of men. A further large proportion of women felt that husbands and other male family members should change their behaviour. Women also felt that the basic needs of the household should be met. These findings point to the significant additional strains on families generated by life as a refugee.

Service providers interviewed agreed that domestic and family violence was a significant problem that was exacerbated by the refugees' living conditions. They acknowledged the limitations of their services given the extent of need. The practical problems include severe over-crowding, few community or recreational activities, boredom, stress and an absence of privacy. One woman camp resident said that she and her family were among 13 people living in a pre-fabricated hut 7x4m.

The close living arrangements, combined with social pressures, were found to constrain women's help-seeking. A community-based worker said that:

*One major problem is that the women are worried that their husbands will divorce them if they report. It is the reality and who would take care of them if they are left by their husbands? Not the government and not the NGOs, so where would they go?*

An INGO worker recounted assisting a woman with three children who had been severely beaten by an older husband since she had married aged 16. The woman was finally able to escape her abusive husband but no safe alternative accommodation could be found in the existing camps. Eventually, after much negotiation, a tent was sourced in a camp that had been designated full and closed. The worker was awaiting a decision from UNHCR whether the woman and her children were eligible for one of the limited number of places for third country re-settlement.

Humanitarian actors are painfully aware that available options to women experiencing domestic and family violence are not practically realistic. There have been many

reports of women in fear of death for allegedly bringing 'shame' on the family.

## 7. Forced / Harmful Marriage

A senior police officer reported that Syrian women are increasingly being married as a second wife to Iraqi Kurds. In 2008, the KRG amended the 1959 Iraqi Personal Status Law, restricting men to two wives (rather than the four allowed in *sharia* law) and making it only permissible to take a second wife if the first is unable to bear children or is infirm.<sup>76</sup> Significantly, the consent of the first wife is required. Allegedly, enforcement of these requirements in KRI is inadequate.<sup>77</sup> Researchers were told that men seeking second wives are able to register the marriage in the Iraqi governorates outside the three which are under the authority of the

KRG. Such arrangements are believed to be increasing hostilities between host and refugee communities.

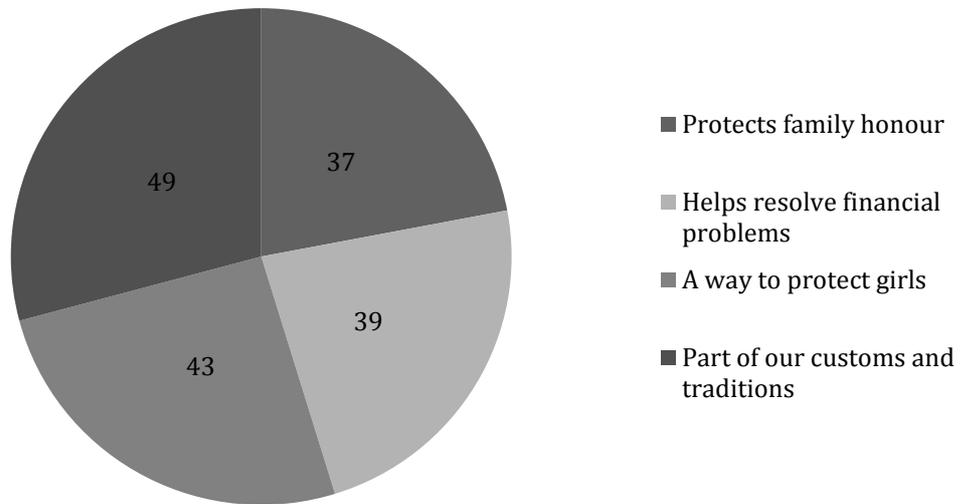
Men's views on early marriage (that is, marriage under 18 years) showed a high degree of acceptance on a number of grounds (Chart 13).

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<sup>76</sup> "Polygamy in the Muslim world and new restrictions in Iraqi Kurdistan", *Kurdish Herald*, 1 February 2010, <http://www.kurdishherald.com/issue/v002/001/article08.php>

<sup>77</sup> See <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2011/9/state5458.htm> and <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2010/9/state4179.htm>

**FIGURE 10: Marriage under 18 and men's views about acceptability, % agreeing**



However, men also thought that marriage under 18 years could negatively affect the health of a child (53 per cent agreeing) and the psychological wellbeing of the child (54 per cent agreeing).

It was not just men who perceived that early marriage was important. Women were asked if early marriage had increased what were the main reasons. They indicated that the influence of custom and tradition (29 per cent) as well as the protection of family honour (19 per cent) could be influential. It is important to note that responses to this question do not necessarily mean agreement with the

reasons, just that these are possible reasons.

Clearly the notions of family honour and women's reputations are important influences yet it appears they are more important to male respondents than to female. Men worried about this in relation to the risks women faced if they leave the residence to earn a living and as a general worry. Men thought that family members could protect themselves from early and forced marriage by changing his/her behaviour (63 per cent and 64 per cent). They also connected the preservation of family honour as

something a woman could do to reduce violence at home (37 per cent).

## 8. Restrictions on freedom of movement

A unique and toxic combination of factors was found to be creating significant restrictions to the freedom of movement of women and girls. These include the actual and perceived risks of harassment and abuse in workplaces and other public areas, uncertainty about the surrounding society and how things worked, knowledge of or rumour about attacks on women, perceived disrespect from the surrounding local community and men's oversight and control more generally of the movement of family members. Research informants agreed that access to information, services and opportunities for women and girls is tightening.

Both women and men were concerned about the safety of women and girls outside of the home. As one informant noted:

*The men are always worried about their families. Some of them have to be away for a week when working far away and they always worry about what is happening with their wives, daughters and sisters.*

Participants in the research emphasised the experience of harassment of women and girls in workplaces and in taxis. One told us:

*The taxi driver didn't take me to where I wanted to go. He drove me to another place, where there was another man in a car waiting. I heard the driver tell this man that I was Syrian. When I refused to go with him I screamed and ran away.*

Whether the stories of abuse were from direct experience or third party knowledge was irrelevant. The heightened concern fuelled women's sense of vulnerability and threat and stoked men's concern to ensure the safety of wives and daughters. Men were particularly concerned for the potential damage to women and girls'

reputation. Their response was to only allow women to work at places the family could trust, or for women and girls not to be allowed to work outside the home at all.

There was a significant degree of concern from humanitarian and other actors that this situation was contributing to reports of early and forced marriage.<sup>78</sup>

Many men and women spoke of cases they had heard of whereby families were approached with financial offers for their young daughters or where families were 'selling off' their daughters to local men as a means of later securing residence<sup>79</sup> for the

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<sup>78</sup> Early marriage is regarded as being less common in KRI than in other areas of the Middle East. However, most key informants agreed there are instances of early marriage. One thought that social acceptance of early marriage was on the wane. There are different definitions of 'early marriage' including those where the girl is prepubescent or in early puberty. For an overview see, Roudi-Fahim, F. and Ibrahim, S. (2013), *Ending child marriage in the Arab region*, Population Reference Bureau, Washington DC. <http://www.prb.org/Publications/Reports/2013/child-marriage-mena.aspx>

<sup>79</sup> This status allows Syrians full access to employment opportunities in KRI as well as the right to travel abroad in search of third-country resettlement options, and

family and/or money to support the family. Some spoke of early marriage as a way of 'protecting' young women in volatile and uncertain times. As the financial resources of refugee families diminish these problems are likely to emerge more strongly in KRI – as they have done in Jordan.<sup>80</sup>

The near constant sexual propositioning and verbal comments that women and girls are subjected to was frequently mentioned by informants. Its impact was more powerful due to the uncertainty about if and who to disclose it to, and a lack of knowledge about the attitudes and practices of the surrounding community. Above all else, there is concern about perceived damage to reputation and the consequences for women. In this context, proposals to close the camps to all except residents – as made by one of our informants – may appear sensible, but run the risk of further entrapping women.

Younger women in the focus groups were more likely to say that they

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potentially then enable family members to also do so.

<sup>80</sup> See UN Women (2013) *op. cit.*

would not tell a husband or father or brother about the experience of sexual harassment by an employer for fear of the consequences. It was suggested that an international organisation could act as a sponsor or facilitator of safe local workplaces for Syrian refugees, thus protecting them from abuse.

*I have a daughter, she is working and men are always asking for her telephone number, it makes us upset.*

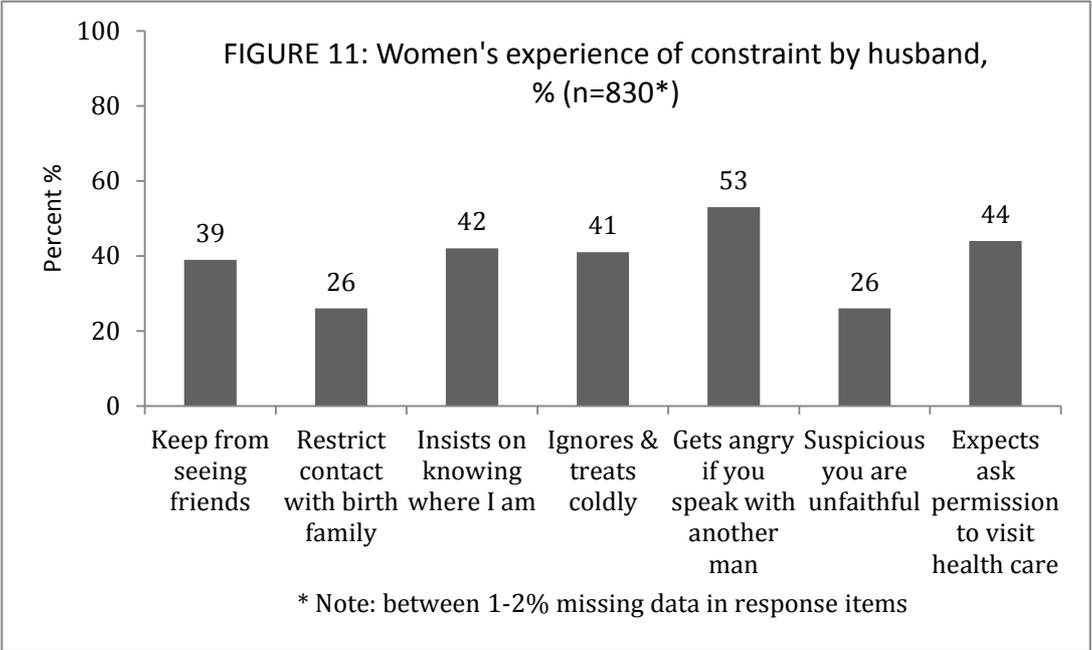
Overall, women concurred that restrictions were ever present. Said one woman in Dohuk:

*The women in this community mostly spend their time with housework or taking care of their little children. These women want to work and have an occupation, but there are no opportunities. Some of the young girls go to school, but most of them stay at home, because there is no place in those schools.*

The situation is compounded by almost universal complaint about the predatory behaviour of taxi drivers and the absence of other transport alternatives. A young woman reflected the experience of many when she related the following:

*A woman who works in the hospital coming back from Dohuk. When she took the taxi, he insisted that she should sit in the front seat. She refused; finally she noticed that he was driving in a different direction, up the hills. She told him to stop so that she could move to the front seat. When he stopped, she ran away. She was so scared that she didn't even look to get the taxi number.*

For women, marriage brings constraints on independent travel and other lifestyle options.



ACCESS TO  
SERVICES

## PART SEVEN: - ACCESS TO SERVICES

### Service mapping

Mapping of services in Iraq relevant to GBV was conducted in October 2013 by a group of agencies.<sup>81</sup> This identified protection gaps arising from:

*Lenient enforcement and implementation of the Law on Violence Against Women and its accompanying Strategy; widespread ignorance with regard to women's rights and national/regional laws; a culture of impunity and tolerance towards incidents of honour killing. Moreover, the current support system for survivors seems largely to privilege family unity over the rights, choices and wishes of the survivor. Potential breaches of the survivor-centered approach therefore remain an issue of serious concern. (p.4)*

Specifically with regard to KRI, the service mapping found:

- SGBV Action Groups were established in Erbil and Domiz and training and awareness raising undertaken. A draft *SGBV Action Plan for KRI* had been developed.
- Protection Networks/Protection and Reintegration Centres (PARC) were available in each governorate of Iraq offering counselling, legal advice, psychosocial support, advice and referral to survivors of SGBV.
- Listening Centres (“women and girls’ safe spaces”) were set up in Al Qa’im and Domiz camps. Legal services offered include representation in court and referrals to other legal service providers to assist in the resolution of a variety of cases, including divorce, alimony, custody and documentation. In addition protection hotlines were operational 24/7. A

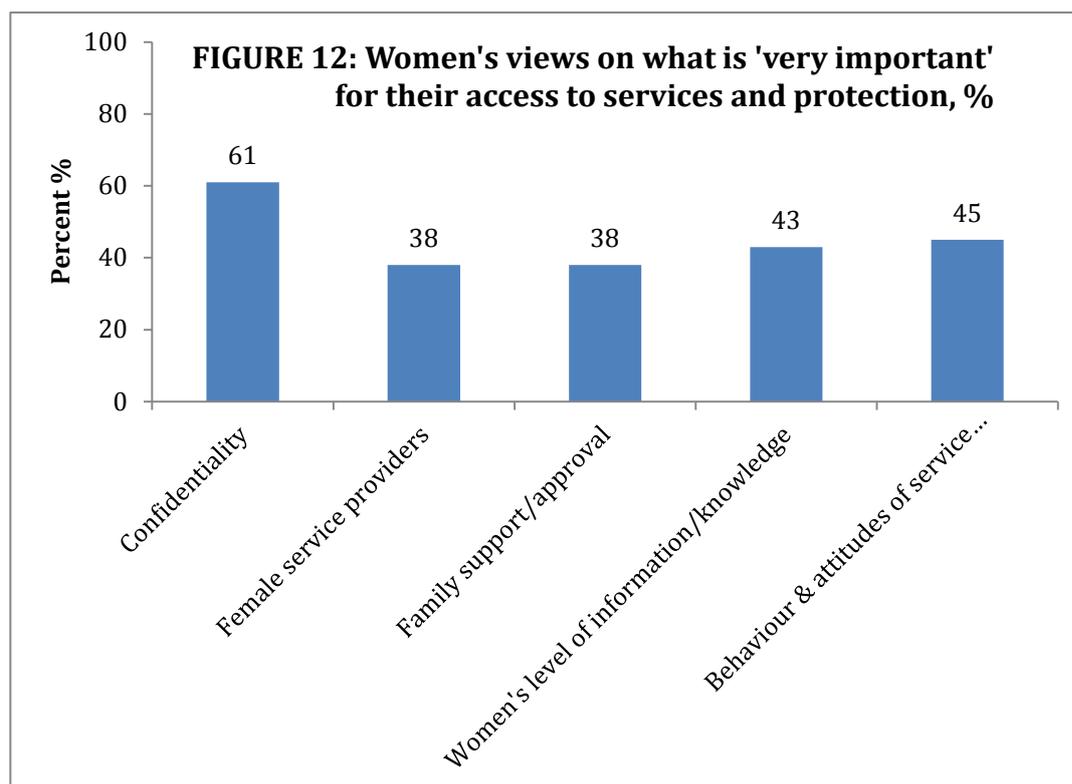
<sup>81</sup> Findings from the Inter- Agency Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) Mapping in Iraq (Snapshot), October 2013.

- gynaecologist was permanently based in Domiz camp.
- Women committees had been established in Al Qa'im and Domiz refugee camps.
  - Over 20 GBV-relevant agencies were identified as operating in KRI with preponderance towards legal services provision and referral.
  - A shelter network existed in KRI, although with long waiting periods.
  - A number of emergency and advice type hotlines being run in KRI by NGOs, and others by governmental and semi-governmental organisations.
  - Psychosocial counselling was provided in KRI by women's NGOs although case management practices were found to be limited.
  - Some youth work was conducted in Domiz.
  - Medical and health services to survivors of GBV and reproductive services were available in Domiz. The KRG had granted access to Syrian refugees to consultations, medication, referrals and surgeries free of charge.
  - Advocacy for women, especially on internationally celebrated dates such as March 8 (International Women's Day
  - Refugee community engagement on GBV issues was limited except in Domiz where a women's safety committee was active.
- The gaps and challenges identified in the service mapping included:
- low levels of disclosure by women of incidents of violence against them
  - low take-up of legal services
  - weak coordination and referral mechanisms
  - low capacity for case management
  - limited availability of emergency health services
  - limited outreach and limited community engagement and participation.

## Access to services: the research findings

Women were provided with a list of criteria relevant to women's access to

services and protection and to rank these in order of importance. All of the criteria were assessed as very important or important. Chart 15 shows the criteria ranked as 'very important'.



The research identified a serious mismatch between the services provided by government and NGOs, and what women identified as relevant and helpful. Survey participants indicated they knew of various services but were very vague on details about where they were, how they could be accessed and what specifically they provided. This highlights the need for

one place, a 'one stop shop' to which women could turn to.

Current provisions are not attracting those in need. Said one informant:

*The first three months after opening of the listening centre, we did not receive one single GBV case. The women said that the*

*name “listening centre” should not be there. Finally we distributed dignity kits to attract the women to the centre and then organised different recreational/ occupational activities ... the women don’t want to seek help because they think that the only solutions we will offer are either to divorce or to file legal charges*

When confronted with personal or family problems, Syrian women refugees indicated that they confided in their spouse or other family members. However, if a friend told them that she needed help for severe physical or sexual violence that was taking place in her home women were less emphatic about turning to family. In these instances they indicated they would advise the friend to go to police, to a women’s support group, or to change her own behaviour.

However, caution was also expressed about telling a spouse or family about GBV. Commented one woman:

*If something happens outside, it is not easy for me to tell the man of the house because then the problem can be bigger, but we tell*

*the woman like mother, sister, neighbours.*

Women also voiced a view that if they said anything, then this might lead to further constraints on them. Said one: “I can’t tell my husband, then he can get very angry to me and he will never let me go out again, it is better to keep silent.”

Women ranked confidentiality as the most important criteria enabling access to services and protection, but generally felt that this was not provided. They had mixed views about whether they would attempt to access specialist services following violence against them. Said one young woman:

*The UN and NGOs do not meet our needs. They come and ask questions all the time, about what we need and what we want but nothing changes. Too many questions and too little action.*

Women were critical of the initiatives that had been implemented. The emphasis on disclosure to authorities they generally felt to be misplaced. Said one:

*Women do not want to go to someone else. They are very scared of their husbands divorcing them; scared of losing their children. Where would they go if they are divorced?'*

Some examples of the service/survivor mismatch uncovered in this research include:

*No one understands our problems. Even the people that work for the organisations and the government seem tired of us. They do not understand women's problems at all. They cannot provide even the most basic of medical treatment, for them or their children. How then can a woman trust them with the more difficult problems they are facing?*

*The KRG has opened an office here in the camp. They distributed a card with phone numbers and information. A 13-year-old girl had been beaten by her brother and she called the number but no one answered. The next day she asked her teacher why they don't answer and the teacher told her because*

*that offices is assisting Iraqi women only. No one knows how it really works.*

*There are protection groups that walk around the camp and try to raise awareness about different GBV and protection problems. But they focus on women's rights and present the information in a way that if the women follow their advice half of them would have to divorce in order to access any of those rights. For example they tell the women that they should move freely, go out and come home whenever they want without anyone (even their husbands) having the right to ask where they have been. The focus is only on raising awareness and the alternatives that are presented to the women are so risky that the women feel that they would be in a worse situation if they follow the advice offered.*

There was some indication that non-traditional services and service providers were viewed positively by women. Discussion groups mentioned mobile teams, recreational activities, awareness

raising, women's leadership training, non-legal options, work with men and boys, dealing with problem taxi drivers and greater outreach. Responding to a query about who helps with domestic and family problems, a woman reported that:

*The political parties very often get involved. They do not have offices in the camp but they have representatives among the refugees. They often resolve problems and the refugees trust them. They have a positive agenda in terms of women's rights and play a positive role.*

Anecdotes such as this suggest that local and international humanitarian actors might usefully explore more innovative engagements and participatory approaches. More deliberate engagement with local civil society actors such as trade unions, human rights agencies, welfare and faith-based support organisations and school communities could ease tensions between refugee and host communities.

CONCLUSIONS

## PART EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS

Although there are many NGO, UN and KRG actors working to maintain awareness of the negative circumstances Syrian women face daily as refugees in KRI, the pressures faced by women remain unabated. Putting an end to the multiple GBV abuses and human rights violations they encounter will require:

- ending impunity for perpetrators
- increasing the level of protection for women
- encouraging women to report crimes and to feel safe doing so
- bringing up children in a culture that does not condone sexual abuse
- enhancing support mechanisms for refugee health and well-being
- strengthening the legal system to enforce punishment and justice
- showing survivors of violence that both the KRG authorities and the international community are listening, respecting and doing everything possible to create safer and healthier lives for all.

The Syrian refugees we have interviewed in KRI, both men and women, are extremely concerned about:

- **healthcare:** the lack of suitable doctors and medication
- **accommodation:** high rental costs, discriminatory rental, lack of privacy, and overcrowding
- **education:** lack of school places for children and very limited secondary schooling and vocational opportunities
- **workplace exploitation:** failure to pay wages, no work opportunities, casual labour, sexual harassment and pressure for sex
- **lack of a future:** hopelessness, anxiety for their children, perception of being trapped and intense desire for third country resettlement.

The KRG, international donors, and international and local non-government actors need to come together to consider

the implications of this research and the other research publications, which have been cited in this report.

There is much that could be done in planned and sustained collaboration. Responses to GBV have to be crosscutting priority and not one confined to specialised agencies such as UN Women. It is critically important to involve Syrian women and men in identifying priorities and debating ways forward. This research has shown how both women and men look for ways to live their lives, as individuals, in families, with friendship networks, as activists and as people with aspirations even within the constraints of war, displacement, gendered stereotypes and other socially imposed discriminatory practices.

There is a critical need to re-double efforts at livelihood initiatives, education and vocational training, micro-businesses and other interventions seeking to bolster already high levels of refugee resilience.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> UNDP in a recent paper on responses to the crisis has defined resilience as “the ability of households, communities, markets and societies to withstand shocks, recover and support transformational change for sustainability.” United Nations Development Programme, 2013, *Position Paper: A Resilience-based Development Response to the crisis in Syria*

It is important that both women and men be the recipients of these initiatives.

Young women and men see themselves as carrying the potential to model a different future, one not constrained by the current constraints, confusion and gender discrimination.

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*and neighbouring Countries*, p.2  
[http://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/SyriaResponse/Amman\\_Donor\\_Meeting/Position%20Paper%20-%20Resilience-Based%20Development%20Response%20to%20Syrian%20Crisis%20%28Dec%2010%29.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/SyriaResponse/Amman_Donor_Meeting/Position%20Paper%20-%20Resilience-Based%20Development%20Response%20to%20Syrian%20Crisis%20%28Dec%2010%29.pdf)

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**SUMMARY OF CHARTS AND**  
**TABLES**

## PART TEN: LIST OF ANNEXES

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x 1: Methodology Report

## ANNEX 1: METHODOLOGY REPORT

The research combined a two-phased design of mixed methods:

- survey of Syrian refugee women (n=830)
- survey of Syrian refugee male head of household (n=830)
- focus group discussions
- key informant interviews
- survivor conversations
- legal and social analysis
- selected literature analysis.

Overview of research components, locations and participant numbers:

RESEARCH TOOL	WHEN COLLECTED	WHERE COLLECTED	TOTAL PARTICIPANTS
Women's survey (Phase 1)	August-September 2013	Domiz camp, and urban centres of Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah	830
Men's survey (Phase 1)	August-September 2013	Domiz camp, and urban centres of Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah	830
Focus group discussions (Phase 1)	September – November 2013	Urban centres of Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah	c.150 (11 FGD)
Focus group discussions (Phase 2)	December 2013	Camp locations Domiz, Basimra, Kawergosk and Darashakran	c. 82 (6 FGD)
Key informant interviews (Phase 1)	September – October 2013	Urban centres of Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah	11
Key informant interviews (Phase 2)	December 2013	Urban centres of Erbil and Dohuk, and Domiz camp	6
Survivor conversations (Phase 2)	December 2013	Camp locations	3
Selected literature analysis (Phase 1)	October 2013		

The research was conducted in accordance with available ethical guidelines.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> NRC (nd), *Ethical Guidelines: researching and reporting on GBV* (draft), on file with the author.

## The surveys

The surveys were first developed in English by NRC staff, and then revised with local partners from the Department of Politics and Science at Salahaddin University and the Warvin Foundation for Women's Issues. These were translated initially into the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish<sup>84</sup> together with some Arabic words.

The surveys were piloted with 40 respondents (20 women and 20 men). Subsequent further review of the survey instruments was conducted and changes made. The women's survey contained some 56 questions and the men's 45. Nearly all questions contained sub-questions. Each question contained multiple response items, ranging from a minimum of four response items to a maximum of nine.

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<sup>84</sup> Kurds in Syria speak Kurmanji while most Kurds in KRI (except in areas such as Mosul and Dohuk) speak Sorani. Many words and concepts are also written and understood in Arabic. On the Kurdish language and its different branches, see Kreyenbroek, P. (1992), 'On the Kurdish Language' in Kreyenbroek, P. and Sperl, S. (eds), *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, Routledge, London.

## Sampling

The statistical sample was based on a one in ten formula from the refugee population, which generated a sample size of 1,660. Within the urban sites, enumerators worked through local knowledge and local networks to approach households in which it was known or suspected that Syrian refugees resided. No record was kept of the total number of households approached and the number of refusals.

## Data analysis

Coding of the surveys, data cleaning and entry, and statistical analysis was conducted by a team using the social science software, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Coding was done in English.<sup>85</sup> An initial descriptive analysis was done by this team. Due to the number of language iterations that the surveys and the survey results had gone through, considerable time was spent ensuring that the final analysis in English rested upon understanding the meaning of

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<sup>85</sup> The statistical team did not have copies of the surveys in English so their English coding derived from the Kurmanji (Email communication from S. Eliasi, NRC Area Manager, 14 October 2013).

words and terms as 'heard' by the respondents in context.

A preliminary second stage of statistical analysis focused on re-coding similar categorical and response variables, and on cross-tabulations. These provided numeric distributions.

### Focus group discussions

In the first phase of the research, eleven focus group discussions were held (including one pilot group) comprising some 150 men and women in total. One focus group was conducted with men and three women who had worked as survey enumerators. In the second phase of the research, a further six focus group discussions were held comprising about 60 participants.

The majority of focus group discussions were conducted in Kurmanji by local partners who took contemporaneous notes. Summaries of key points and selected participant quotations were then supplied in English for analysis.

### Key informant interviews

A total of 11 key informant interviews were conducted in the first phase of the research with a further six taking place in the second phase. The majority of interviews with local actors were conducted in Kurmanji by local partners who took contemporaneous notes. A few interviews were conducted by the report writer in English.

Contemporaneous notes of interviews were taken. Most of these were transcribed into the words of the respondent although no verbatim transcriptions were taken. Translation to English was undertaken by the interviewer and this report writer. The English interviews were more fully transcribed.

### Survivor conversations

In the second phase of the research, one-to-one and in-depth conversations with three survivors of GBV were conducted. These were held in private settings in secure locations.

## Analysis of selected literature

Selected literature from the humanitarian and development sectors, especially that focused on the Syrian crisis, was examined. Selected scholarly historical and empirical research from the social and political sciences was considered as background analysis for this report.

## Enumerators

Survey enumerators were recruited by our NGO partner, the Warvin Foundation for Women's Issues. Many of the 72 recruited were themselves Syrian refugees of Kurdish origin and many were university educated. A number of the women were already participating in a women's leadership programme being conducted by Warvin. The surveying was conducted by a female and male pair who worked in shifts as pairs. Separate interviews of women were done by the women interviewer while men interviewed men. Their training required that the interviews be conducted in separate private spaces. Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to two hours.

Enumerators experienced both distrust and wariness of questions by households, as well as hospitality and preparedness to converse. Some enumerators expressed distress at the living conditions of some households. At the end of each survey interview, enumerators provided people with information cards of available services.



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