

Barriers of Reporting Sexual Violence in Syrian Refugee Camps

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ABSTRACT

Barriers in reporting sexual violence have emerged as a common problem for refugee camps hosting women. Approaches to increase reporting among women who have experienced sexual violence have not adequately considered the cultural context and what actions would help or hinder Syrian women from reporting sexual gender-based violence.

In a qualitative case study, agencies operating in Vancouver, Canada and Zaatari Camp, Jordan found that Syrian women did not report due to shame, lack of trust in helpers, and a strained legal framework which contributed to non-reporting of sexual violence. With input from agencies helping refugees, this study's findings suggest that awareness of sexual violence and its consequences need to be directed towards both men and women, to promote the idea that victims are blameless when they experience sexual violence.

Keywords: gender-based violence, sexual violence, refugees, female refugees, Syria, barriers to reporting, Zaatari refugee camp

INTRODUCTION

In March 2011, the Syrian regime headed by Bashar Al-Assad targeted and used extreme violence against pro-democracy demonstrators. This violence escalated until opposition rebels began arming themselves to defend against Assad's regime. As of September 13, 2018,¹ 5,618,955 people have registered as refugees with the UNHCR, and at least 7.6 million people have been displaced inside the country.² Even before 2011, violence against Syrian women and minorities was inflicted by the Assad regime, which supported discriminatory practices against women and ignored sexual gender-based violence (SGBV) issues.³ This discrimination was embedded in Syria's legal system pre-conflict where "rapists could escape punishment if they marry their victims" and "excluding spousal rape as a punishable offence under the legal definition of rape."⁴ With the deterioration of

1. United Nations, Seeking accountability and demanding change: A report of women's human rights violations in Syria before and during the conflict, (Geneva, United Nations, 2014).

2. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), Violations against women in Syria and the disproportionate impact of the conflict on them. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 2016, 20.

3. United Nations, Seeking accountability, 19; Syria Research and Evaluation Organization (2015). Societal attitudes toward sexual and gender-based violence in Syria, (Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, 2015), 19.

4. United Nations, 5.

control by the Assad regime, other non-state actors have stepped into the vacuum and proceeded to perpetrate barbaric violence throughout the areas under their control. One of these groups, Daesh or more commonly known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), has committed brutal atrocities against women and girls. Daesh has been abducting women and girls to become sex slaves, selling them at slave markets, and in some cases killing women and girls who resist rape and sexual assault.⁵ With the violence soaring, many women, men, and children sought refuge in neighbouring states, including Zaatari camp, Jordan. The SGBV against Syrian women affected by the conflict has been described as a “prominent and disturbing feature” in the Syrian conflict.⁶ In addition to a high incidence of sexual violence, there are also barriers to women seeking to report these crimes to the government authority of the refugee camp, to the UNHCR, or non-governmental organisations working in the camp. These barriers serve to prevent women from reporting SGBV, promoting the need for a more effective and coordinated response to the problem of sexual violence among refugees by camp management that includes government and inter-agency participation. The female refugee experience is fraught with sexual violence, whether it is perpetrated by family members, acquaintances, strangers, or agency workers.⁷ This appears to be the case among Syrian refugees, whether they flee to Jordan, Lebanon, or Turkey.

With the Syrian conflict reaching an unprecedented pace of suffering and loss of life and the ongoing movements of displaced persons, the sexual violence women are exposed to in their journey to safety is often continued in the refugee camp.⁸ These camps are continually challenged in meeting the assistance needs of the population affected by the conflict in Syria, including trauma counselling and health care.⁹ This paper intends to present findings through a mixed methods

5. Jay Akbar and Simon Tomlinson, “ISIS burn woman alive for refusing to take part in ‘extreme sex act,’ reveals UN official, as the Islamist fighters’ sadism becomes even more depraved,” Daily Mail., Accessed June 5, 2019, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3097033/ISIS-burn-woman-alive-refusing-extreme-sex-act-reveals-official.html>

6. WILPF, Violations against, 7.

7. Claire Waithira Mwangi, “Women refugees and sexual violence in Kakuma Camp, Kenya: Invisible rights, justice, protracted protection and human insecurity,” (Master’s thesis, Erasmus University, 2012); Elizabeth Ferris, “Abuse of power: Sexual exploitation of refugee women and girls,” Signs 32, no. 4 (2007).

8. Farrah Hassen, “Refugee crisis: The stunning collapse of Syria’s safe spaces,” Foreign Policy in Focus, (Washington: Inter-Hemispheric Resource Center Press, 2014).

9. Omer Karasapan, “The challenges in providing health care to Syrian refugees,” Accessed January 7, 2019. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2018/11/15/the-challenges-in-providing-health-care-to-syrian-refugees/>

research study and information stemming from this is based on original research on this topic. Ultimately, the lack of effective reporting mechanisms is hindering progress in addressing GBV, and the specific barriers need to be understood to better address and stop further violence against women.

The Definition of Sexual Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)

Throughout the history of conflict, sexual gender-based violence has been prevalent in conflict and war, often a silent and ignored characteristic of conflict, yet one that is devastatingly harmful to communities during and after the cessation of hostilities. The definition of SGBV has evolved and essentially highlights that women and girls are subjected to a disproportionate amount of violence and sexual harassment, and often in specific ways and patterns as a result of their gender.¹⁰ This gender-specific definition is essential to understanding the role of gender socialisation and harmful social norms. Further, this research defines sexual gender-based violence as an act or acts that are perpetrated against a non-consenting person through verbal, physical, emotional, or psychological harm that is perpetuated based on direct or indirect social norms and values. It is acknowledged that men and boys are also subjected to these acts; however, women and girls are disproportionately exposed to such treatment due to their subordinate role within family, community and society. The definition of sexual gender-based violence applied in this study remains broad in an attempt to capture the extraordinary acts of sexual violence that are perpetrated by different means and actors.

Jordanian Law

Refugees in Jordan are subject to Jordanian law. Under these laws, government employees are required to report misdemeanours and felonies, including acts of SGBV and they have to inform the survivor of this obligation; however, non-medical staff are not required to report incidences of SGBV.¹¹ While gains have been made regarding protections for refugee women, past discriminatory and harmful marriage law reflects common attitudes towards women for gender-based sexual violence. Past law in Jordan did not prohibit child marriages, and this may enable

10. Amanda Kaladelfo, "Sexual and gender-based violence: definitions, contexts, meanings," *Australian Feminist Studies*, 29, no. 81 (2014), 233.

11. SOP Task Force, *Inter-agency emergency standard operating procedures for prevention of and response to gender-based violence and child protection in Jordan*, (Save the Children, 2013), 28.

SGBV against girls, who were likely raped in a context of early marriage. Further, forced marriages are also prevalent, and these forms of marriage also enable SGBV within the marriage. Other provisions, since appealed, included Article 308 of the Jordanian Penal Code, which allowed “exemption from investigation and prosecution for persons accused of sexual assault who agree to marry their victims for at least five years.”¹² Despite the progress made for those affected by SGBV, harmful attitudes and social modelling continues. Previous justifications for laws of this nature include the protection of victims. This was exemplified by former Jordanian Justice Minister Bassam Talhouni, who stated laws like Article 308 that allowed for a perpetrator to escape conviction if they married their accuser, “protect the victim, especially since it is consensual and she willingly accepted to get married.”¹³ These regressive and ignorant attitudes towards women’s rights in Jordan extend towards Syrian women living in refugee camps, as they fall under the authority of Jordanian law.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Research Methods

Data collection was completed through a qualitative research study. This study used a case study methodology to review and analyse primary data that was collected from frontline workers and others with direct experience in refugee camps, and also reviewed current camp policies and practices relevant to the topic, in the camps. A survey was used to gather information and experiences from respondents who were located in different countries and time zones and could not easily be interviewed. The survey also allowed respondents to modify their responses before submitting them. The survey questionnaire contained 17 open-ended questions. Approximately 50 agencies were contacted to complete the survey, and of these, 12 submitted completed surveys. Along with this data, existing policies that affected Zaatari camp, including Jordanian law and

12. Human Rights Watch, “Jordan: Strengthen penal code overhaul,” Accessed July 19, 2019. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/09/13/jordan-strengthen-penal-code-overhaul>; George Sade, “Jordan: Ministerial Committee decides to repeal controversial rape provision,” Accessed June 1, 2019. <http://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/jordan-ministerial-committee-decides-to-repeal-controversial-rape-provision/>

13. Rana Hussein, “Cabinet Scraps Provision Allowing Rapists to Escape Punishment by Marrying Victims,” Accessed June 15, 2019. <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/cabinet-scraps-provision-allowing-rapists-escape-punishment-marrying-victims>

NGO policy to find possible barriers these posed to women. Surveying platform SurveyMonkey was used to obtain responses, which were later analysed with NVivo qualitative coding software.

Agency Criteria and Selection

Agencies were selected for their credibility and history in working with refugees. For agencies operating in Canada, participant selections were guided by recommendations from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) who offer a listing of providers for immigrant and refugee assistance to Syrian refugees. IRCC was selected as a source because agencies listed on their website are federally funded and are to adhere to a code of conduct to receive funding. Service providers would require experience with female Syrian refugees originating from Zaatari camp in Jordan to provide consistency in restricting information about camp management and barriers of reporting sexual violence to originate from the same area. Zaatari was selected based on its proximity to Syria, its high population of Syrian refugees, and its development as an urbanised camp. Further, participants were also sourced from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) directory of agencies operating in Zaatari camp. Snowball sampling was used to contact participants. Often once agencies were contacted, they would redirect the initial survey to a colleague who worked in Zaatari or had experience with refugees from Zaatari.

Limitations

The study had several limitations. The initial design of this research proposed a data set drawn from interviews with female Syrian refugees, with questions on the topic of the barriers they faced in reporting sexual violence. As this study was completed upon acceptance of an ethical review from Royal Roads University, Canada, the researcher had to adhere to specific conditions, which did not allow for the interviewing of Syrian refugees and survivors of SGBV on these topics. The reasoning for this was the sensitive nature and potentially traumatising topic. This resulted in a twofold limitation: direct accounts from survivors would not inform the findings, as well as the risk of denying survivors the chance to share their experiences, which could be perceived as silencing their voices and limiting their agency to speak about their experiences. For future study, it would be essential to triangulate the data with interviews from women who were affected by these policies to find their perspective and opinion on policy. Another limitation is borne out of the use of open-ended survey responses, which has the potential to produce less detail in response. As those who were contacted had limited time to respond and busy schedules, the survey design

allowed for respondents to complete questions at their convenience and revise their responses before submission. Despite this limitation, data received from the survey responses were relevant and applicable to the research questions.

FINDINGS

After data had been coded, distinct themes emerged from the surveys. The most prevalent theme was the importance of education and awareness building, which was referenced frequently by different participants who represented agencies that operate in Canada or in Zaatari camp. The education theme was followed by the theme of trust, which was noted nine times within the participant group. Other themes included opinions on the general reporting system, services provided, shame, fear, and general social barriers that women face. Participants included staff of settlement agencies, counsellors, sponsorship organisations, and representatives of organisations that have worked or are currently working in Jordan with Syrian refugees.

The General Process of Reporting

In the course of the survey, participants detailed the process for reporting SGBV, as either a primary witness or as having heard of the experience from refugees. In these instances, multiple participants described how authority figures assisted in clearing those involved in alleged incidences of SGBV. The label of SGBV or related labels would also often be removed from the claim and labelled more generally as “violence.” In some cases, the perpetrator would escape punishment because the survivor was unsure or afraid of sharing their traumatic experience and one participant believed a counter to this would be the building of self-confidence and promoting trust and sharing with the survivor. In addition, reframing SGBV as a community issue could promote reporting but concepts of shame and honour continued to restrict affected individuals and serve as a barrier. The main messaging for this reframing was that non-reporting led to helping the perpetrator in inflicting that trauma on another individual.

As reporting SGBV in Zaatari camp is largely dependent on the survivor, women only received assistance if they were willing to share their experience and thus risk stigmatisation within the community. Some participants asserted that reporting schemes were effective and dependent on the individuals and how much information they were willing to divulge. Through this, the survivor would then be referred through counselling. Others described reporting systems as weak and having very little structure. Follow-ups to cases were also sporadic and led to delays or

complete service gaps in addressing survivor trauma, including apprehension of the perpetrator. Other processes completely circumvented the convoluted Jordanian legal system, if chosen by the survivor. Instead, cases being referred to the Family Protection Department (FPD) in Jordan, International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) placed survivors in their programs centred on sexual violence and would track progress through their own follow-up system.

Participants were also asked where survivors were likely to report violence. In a quantitative question, 63.64% of participants believed that survivors would approach a non-profit organisation about the occurrence of sexual violence. This was followed by 45.45% of respondents that believed that survivors would report to a UN agency. Only 9.09% believed that survivors would report to the local police. A minority of respondents answered that women would not report or that they would tell a community leader about violence.

Barriers of reporting

There were three distinct barriers identified that prevented women from reporting SGBV. These included a lack of trust in the reporting process or agency, fear of retaliation, and stigma and blame from the community. The idea that women's honour and dignity is derived from their virginity or chasteness is reflected in the comments of agency representatives, including those operating in refugee camps and those that have settled refugees in Canada.

A trust deficit in institutions was frequently cited as a barrier to reporting SGBV. The void of trust was attributed to a range of reasons, including the refugee's limited relationship with agency and service providers, and therefore lack of assurance that they would respond with the survivor's best interests in mind. Concerns of confidentiality in the reporting process were also problematic, as fear of retaliation by influential or government figures within the course of the reporting process. A participant in this study detailed the reality of reporting within the Jordanian system, and how corruption in the government had created an environment for organised sex trade and forced marriages of girls. Many of these young women and girls feared retaliation after reporting and retribution from a corrupt and indiscriminate legal system in Jordan.

Trust was also a pivotal requirement in ensuring women were comfortable sharing their SGBV experiences. This trust had to be built over time with the community. Given the sensitivities surrounding the topic, Syrian women preferred to engage with other trusted females when discussing their experiences. Multiple sessions would likely be required to ensure that survivors

were comfortable disclosing incidences of SGBV. Also, continuous support was a necessity, not just a one-time meeting. Even employment of Syrian refugees from within the Zaatari camp as interpreters for SGBV cases can undermine the trust the survivor has in the assisting agency. If survivors are aware that locals may be involved in the reporting process, they may choose not to report because of the risk that someone in the community could disclose their experience to others in the camp.

For barriers relating to stigma and fear, several participants noted that women avoided telling others within the camp due to fear of reprisals, shame, or stigma from the community. One participant found that a fear of an “honour-based” killing could occur even if the woman were a victim of sexual violence. In some cases, the response from the survivor’s family could start a tribal or familial feud by killing the perpetrator of an act of SGBV. Faith and religion can affect a woman’s decision of whether to report. Placing an intense value on a woman’s “purity” also complicates reporting, as women fail to disclose violence because of the high risk to their family’s honour. This fear and shame would not allow women to disclose SGBV readily to a program or agency.

Also, important but scarcely mentioned by other participants, was the outcome of the reporting process, which included cases of sexual violence. Cases involving SGBV were reduced to physical crimes, while other cases were dropped because the perpetrator was no longer in the vicinity where the crime occurred. First, this demonstrated that prosecutors redefined SGBV as simple assault, blocking survivors seeking justice, and second, some cases could not be tried due to geographical locations of the survivor and the perpetrator.

Counters to Barriers

Education and Awareness Raising

Education and awareness-raising were the most common themes drawn from participant responses. Those working within the camp believed that refugees required education and awareness of the different supports available in the camp. It was also acknowledged that poverty, illiteracy or limited literacy among many refugees affected their awareness levels of these programs, rendering them more vulnerable than others with reading comprehension. There is also a need for better awareness among INGOs and NGOs operating in the camps on the prevalence of SGBV and what prevents women from reporting incidents so that these agencies can do more to

create a safe environment for survivors, as well as deter further SGBV. A Canadian refugee coordinator involved in the study recommended that the Canadian Red Cross' *Ten Steps to Creating Safe Environments* should be implemented within refugee camps to establish a welcoming space for SGBV survivors. Another issue was the way women learned about the process of reporting SGBV, which was mostly word-of-mouth, and typically stayed within a small circle of females to prevent their victimisation from spreading publicly. There has been some progress in educational campaigns within camps, specifically in Jordan.

One of these programs include the Amani Campaign (or “my safety” in English), seeks to change harmful behaviours and attitudes “related to violence, abuse, and exploitation in Jordan.”¹⁴ Within the Amani Campaign, there are key messages conveyed through activities, interactive educational sessions, and collaborative communication sessions.¹⁵ The key messages included those concerning intimate partner violence, child marriage, rights in regards to humanitarian aid, reporting sexual violence, and counselling support.¹⁶ While this program is an important and necessary step in combating SGBV within refugee camps, it remains to see whether the practical effect of it is making a difference at the implementation level.

The initial admittance of refugees into the camp was also a lost opportunity to disseminate information about SGBV programs and available reporting mechanisms, as arriving refugees may be overwhelmed with information. At the same time, providing this information upon arrival as a matter of protocol could help allay suspicion regarding why someone is aware of the reporting mechanisms. In Zaatari specifically, there are numerous forms and information required during entry into the camp, which is further compounded by trauma experienced in transit to the refugee camp and also prior to seeking refuge. This would also include information provided by NGOs or camp officials that detail the process of reporting violence in general. From the view of frontline works, the main concern is to focus on essential needs rather than reviewing literature that is provided upon entry. Information that is received at the entrance of the camp is later lost among

14. Relief Web, “Amani campaign implementation guide – Jordan,” Accessed January 10, 2019.

<https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/amani-campaign-implementation-guide-jordan>

15. SGBV Protection Sub-Working Group, “Amani Campaign Implementation Guide,” Accessed June 20, 2016.

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/AmaniImplementationguideEnglish%28online%29.pdf>

16. SGBV Protection Sub-Working Group, “Amani Campaign.”

the other worries and difficulties that camp life poses to migrants and vulnerable populations. There was also urgency to implement a dissemination system to redistribute information regarding SGBV practices after the family or individual has been relatively settled in the camp.

Trust Building

The trust component in addressing SGBV was cited as an area of concern that affects refugee women. Through the data collected, some believed that adequate time was not given to building relationships with SGBV survivors that resulted in trust, and therefore was ineffective at encouraging more women to come forward to report violence. One of these essential requirements was raising awareness about SGBV programs and allowing women a platform to share their experiences. It was also found that agencies operating in refugee camps invested little in creating trust relationships, yet this required a continuous effort on the part of agencies to encourage reporting.

While trust was a component, the gender of agency representatives also served as a barrier to women. Syrian refugee women typically preferred to speak with other women in protection programs and were willing to open up more once that trust relationship was established. Direct outreach was also cited as an area for improvement within the refugee camp, as it currently requires victims to self-identify. Proactive outreach programs were decidedly more effective than reactionary reporting to encourage women to come forward. Survivors of SGBV did not typically seek support after trauma, and absent of a trust relationship would rarely feel safe to report to agency or camp workers.

DISCUSSION

Contribution of Jordanian Law to Barriers of Reporting

The findings from participants highlighted gaps in the policy in the host countries of Jordan, where legislation protecting women and girls from violence is weak. Jordan's laws on SGBV fail to adequately criminalise or prevent gender-based violence, forced marriage, and early marriage, by using language that would permit child sex assault within the context of marriage. Findings also highlighted examples of how INGOs and NGOs in their referral of cases that are submitted to FPD. In addition, the process is largely driven by a survivor deciding to report; there is little overt outreach to encourage reporting. This also includes a distinct lack of oversight from the Jordanian

government to ensure that SGBV cases are followed through to bring justice to the survivor, and little attention paid to protecting female refugees from SGBV.

In essence, the current mechanisms in place are limited and unresponsive to the gender inequality rooted in experiences pre- and post-conflict, which persist at so-called “safe havens.” Systems are not structured to reach out to women, and the systems are largely blind to the risks women face in coming forward. While many agencies do advocate for the rights of survivors, reporting still carries risks of revealing a woman’s experience of SGBV to her community or her family. This risk is exemplified by the fact that SGBV cases in Jordan could be rendered public or private based on a judge’s discretion. If the judge wishes to deter a survivor from reporting against a perpetrator, the judge has the option to rule the SGBV case as a public hearing.

The practices of the Jordanian government invite the risk of stigma and harassment for the survivor. The survivor-initiated system is also a concern in that it inevitably allows innumerable cases to slip through unreported. Women’s restricted mobility also limits the use of reporting structures, where women may be afraid or unable to leave their homes without a male companion. Ultimately the reward of reporting and the likelihood of achieving justice pales in comparison to the risk involved with reporting, where women must self-identify, particularly when the survivor may have little confidence in the outcome of the reporting process.

Aid personnel working in the camps have access to resources and knowledge about vulnerabilities within the camp reporting structure. Thus those who are perpetrators of SGBV may be confident they can go unpunished, whether they are local or non-local workers. Indeed, the lack of the rule of law enables perpetrators to evade detection and prosecution. Those that are non-medical staff in Jordan do not have a legal obligation to report SGBV. If staff were obliged or at least encouraged through policy to report signs of abuse, this could facilitate inquiry that may help women who experienced or are experiencing SGBV and need support initiated through direct outreach. At the minimum, these women should be made aware of the option of reporting, and the steps involved, and they may be more likely to report if that is then followed up with the development of a trusting relationship. Non-medical staff reporting these incidences to the FPD or the UNHCR removes the follow-up that could potentially encourage a survivor to report through ongoing confidential contact with the survivor. Obligation to report must, however, be weighed against the risk that women would be deterred from coming to staff over a fear of being identified

as an SGBV victim without consent. Instead, agencies could strive to implement a procedure for their clients who may have suffered SGBV and could provide programming, resources, and options available. Several cautions come with obligatory reporting, most of which were thought to be negative or harmful through responses from frontline workers, and it would seem this method of invoking survivors to come forward to aid organisations is generally harmful. However, it remains to be seen if survivors of SGBV would be supportive of this method of reporting or if they view it in the same manner as the frontline workers.

Trust in Service Providers

The respondents in this study believed that trust was an essential requirement for increasing reporting from female refugees. The limited opportunity for rapport building with women is a hindrance, and one-time meetings are not entirely effective in establishing sufficient trust with an SGBV survivor to convince her to report. As noted by participants within the study, the employment of other Syrian refugees living in Zaatari as interpreters could prevent women from reporting. Although employing refugees is good practice in terms of both economic support to refugees and ensuring there are local staff with relevant language and cultural skills, agencies should give careful consideration to their staffing process, so they are focused on response and/or prevention of SGBV. This caution extends to outreach with refugee women who may be survivors of SGBV. Staffing arrangements should give precedence to concerns around confidentiality and local networks, in contexts where women fear information about their case being shared in their community. This would point to the need for small groups to discuss incidences of SGBV experiences.

Coupled with outreach by female agency workers, this approach will provide a contact when a woman wishes to speak out about violence. The data collected suggests that the notions of shame and honour are central cultural preoccupations that have powerful influences over women's bodily integrity, and fear of bringing dishonour or shame to themselves and/or their families are powerful deterrents to reporting SGBV. Behaviour change, communications and outreach activities seeking to address SGBV must speak to the pre-eminence of these cultural values and how they work to shape perceptions of sexual violence. A key message must be focused on the meaning and importance of consent in sexual relations, the need to support and defend victims of SGBV rather than shaming them and placing responsibility and blame on perpetrators instead of

victims.

Education and Awareness Raising

Reframing the issue of SGBV as a community problem rather than as a private problem can shift stigma away from women and shift responsibility onto the community to assist in protecting women and girls from violence. Education and raising awareness was the most referenced theme emerging from the study, as such campaigns allowed for discourse on the taboo topic of SGBV. Communications, behaviour change and awareness-raising activities are opportunities to address both root causes and the enabling environment of SGBV and require the participation from male members of society. Without this, SGBV will continue to be misunderstood by male members of the family. There should also be a consensus among the Jordanian government, the UNHCR, and other agencies that messaging should encourage reporting as a means of harm reduction, rights protection, and justice.

Changing the narrative would take a tremendous amount of advocacy and campaigning effort, but this shift needs to occur. As reported by one respondent, refugees are inundated with materials when they first arrive, and may not be able to process all the information they receive at that time, and information on SGBV handed out at that time risks being ignored. While the UNHCR has developed other methods of communication with camp residents through cellphone and social media, distinct attention needs to be focused on distributing information about SGBV regularly and doing continuous outreach with different segments: youth, men, and women.

Community-Based Dialogue

It is integral to allow time and effort to foster relationships within the camp community. As many camps become more urbanised and semi-permanent in some cases, a community-minded approach that allows for ongoing dialogue with women in different forms will allow women space to discuss their needs, and ultimately, experiences with SGBV. These sessions include the discussion of issues with other women exclusively. SGBV survivors have remained silent due to a variety of social and legal factors. Other feminist approaches that operate outside of Western ideas of change should be used in the development of strategies intended to give a voice to women refugees by promoting curiosity, deliberation, and changes within the Zaatari camp that would be “inclusive of the

perspectives of those marginalised by their silence.”¹⁷ Applicable practice drawn from the Third World feminist perspective is illustrated in a campaign headed by women in Deir El Balah refugee camp in Gaza. A group of 10 women launched an initiative for improved street lighting in their camp community to increase safety and security.¹⁸ One of the women who participated in this campaign acknowledged the challenges of making their voice heard within the community: “the first challenge we faced is that people said no one would support us or listen to us, especially because we are women.”¹⁹ However, these women continued to campaign for change by promoting a discussion within their community on improving street lighting. The women were empowered by their work and “many of their husbands who were opposed to the idea at first now also actively participate in the initiative and provide support.”²⁰ This is a small example of how female deliberation can be applied in practice with SGBV discussion and shifting attitudes on harmful gender norms.

Focusing on reducing the voicelessness and marginalisation of Syrian women can establish an avenue for the provision of services for survivors. The current approaches used in Zaatari are characterised by a lack of available information on the processes for reporting and fail to halt the perpetuation of myths surrounding SGBV. Syrian women are extremely reluctant to approach “authority” figures like representatives of the UN or NGOs unless they know someone they trust whom they can go to personally. If that connection is not present, neither will be the willingness to open up about SGBV, and ultimately, to report it.

Summary

Significant gaps remain in reporting protection for women, hindered by a variety of factors including the Jordanian law structure, gender norms and attitudes, and the inherent risk for a survivor of SGBV to report. While there are campaigns and education initiatives sponsored by NGOs to offset these harms, regressive laws imposed on Syrian women contribute to perpetuate

17. Ranjoo Herr., “Reclaiming third world feminism: Or why transnational feminism needs third world feminism,” *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, 12, no. 1 (2014), 23.

18. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), “Refugee women launch initiative to increase safety and security in their community,” Accessed June 5, 2019. <http://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/refugee-women-launch-initiative-increase-safety-and-security-their-community>

19. UNRWA, “Refugee women.”

20. UNRWA, “Refugee women”

harmful practices to women's wellbeing. The findings drawn from participant surveys and existing literature suggested that Syrian women required trust relationships to be in place to encourage reporting of acts of SGBV. This need is rooted in cultural-based fear around the consequences to individuals and their families of reporting. These types of trust relationships should be comprised of small groups, so women feel safe sharing their stories and traumatic experiences. Without these types of relationships, shame and fear remain deterrents to reporting. As found by this study, education has the greatest potential to be the biggest driver of change to shift these gender norms and allow for the erosion of the stigma surrounding SGBV. Initiatives focused in this area need to be directed towards men and women to improve equity in gender relations. Combining education with community-based dialogue creates a discussion on SGBV and in doing so, allows female empowerment while including males in this advocacy. This is a cornerstone of Feminist Social Criticism Theory where lasting changes are not forced by agencies or government bodies, but through gradual changes brought about by discussion that fits within the appropriate cultural context and not projected by Western standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The discussion of findings and the literature review uncovered immense challenges in reporting SGBV in refugee camps. The recommendations that follow are proposed in response to these findings and are suggested with the intent of fostering change within refugee camps that would better protect women from SGBV and give them a greater chance of achieving justice.

Apply International Legal Standards on SGBV in Refugee Host Countries

There are inherent weaknesses in Jordanian laws that result in a failure to protect women and girls from SGBV adequately. While Jordan has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), harmful local laws continue to prevent SGBV survivors from coming forward. Hosts should be legally obliged to uphold the principles in CEDAW for refugees and their own citizens. Jordan's current approach to SGBV should be reformed to protect SGBV victims and allow all actions in court to be private. Limiting the judge's discretion in these cases eliminates the chance for abuse of power or deterring a woman from following through with pursuing prosecution of the perpetrator.

Develop Direct Outreach Routines

Cultural restrictions and taboos, the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder, mobility restrictions, and lack of trust in camp institutions play major roles in preventing women from reporting sexual violence in refugee camps. To overcome these barriers, employing non-Jordanian and non-Syrian female outreach workers in the camp will enhance communications, build trusting relationships, and create safe spaces. However, outreach workers who are trained in counselling SGBV trauma should discuss and share information about services related to SGBV within the scope of general outreach work. This type of direct outreach serves to promote trust by establishing informal connections with women rather than only approaching them when there is a problem. It would allow refugees to access an advocate in cases of domestic violence, spousal rape, or other forms of SGBV.

Frequent Orientation and Workshops

Due to the mental and physical conditions in which many refugees first enter a camp, they may not retain information distributed to them upon arrival. Information should be delivered frequently and repeatedly to increase awareness of camp services and procedures. These orientations would include the dissemination of clear and concise information on SGBV, its causes and consequences, and on reporting processes accessible in camps. This should be combined with the dissemination of other mandatory information to camp residents such as information about food distribution so that women are not singled out for being given or taking SGBV information resources. Information on SGBV for camp residents also needs to provide the simplified legal information, and clearly define the various options for reporting and pursuing justice, and the risks and rewards of each. Also, INGOs and NGOs operating in Zaatari should undertake direct outreach addressing the shame and stigma of SGBV and convey that camp authorities and assistance agencies are observant and concerned with women's wellbeing and their protection from SGBV. Agencies can also identify ways to improve access to services for women who face mobility and cultural restrictions, such as providing transportation to a community centre. Such actions will create opportunities for reporting that go beyond relying solely on survivor-initiated approaches.

Education and Community Sessions

An educational campaign aimed at reframing the issue of SGBV as an issue of community concern will serve the purpose of raising awareness. Programs like the Amani campaign have the potential

to rework conceptions of SGBV while providing information about camp reporting procedures and should be well-funded by the UNCHR and its partners. Dissemination methods of information are often sent through mobile phones in Zaatari. Refugees frequently used cellphones to keep in touch with relatives or friends in Syria, often checking their phones regularly for news.²¹ As a result, the UNHCR has distributed information through text, including “brief updates about camp news, such as security issues following a riot or information on when a broken service will be repaired.”²² If this system could be utilised to send out briefings and information on SGBV, it could reach a massive audience that traditional methods have been unable to achieve. However, this information sent by SMS cannot be the sole delivery of information, as “refugees tend to trust information told to them in person more than a text message or post.”²³ Therefore, community meetings are required to build trust with the refugee population. As Zaatari becomes more of an urbanised settlement than a traditional, temporary refugee camp, creating community outreach mechanisms would enable Syrian women to share their stories confidentially within a closed group, in order to ultimately take actions that challenge harmful attitudes towards SGBV and end the impunity of perpetrators.

Reporting Requirements

The UNHCR should publish systematic and quarterly public reports on SGBV incidence in camps so that increases or decreases in the incidence of SGBV can be tracked over time. Report findings should be used to identify areas where SGBV is concentrated and focus resources there, such as enhanced security, outreach, and awareness-raising activities.

Addressing SGBV Education in Basic Education Curriculum

As demonstrated through the Amani Campaign, efforts are already underway to educate children, women, and men on violence in the refugee community. Refugee crises can last for years or even decades, and the length of time that people will reside in camps is unpredictable. Therefore, taking a long-term proactive approach can include addressing SGBV within the primary years can explain the community responsibility for violence, including detailed messages to be provided by agencies.

21. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Innovation. “Social media and SMS outreach,” Accessed May 1, 2019. http://innovation.unhcr.org/labs_post/social-media-and-sms-outreach

22. UNHCR Innovation, “Social media.”

23. UNHCR Innovation, “Social media.”

This proactively teaches inclusion of human rights and gender equity in education, with a violence prevention focus that defines SGBV and articulates its consequences from a rights perspective. If these campaigns are initiated formally within the school system in Zaatari, they can serve as sites where information is disseminated to girls and young women on services relevant to SGBV reporting and assistance such as counselling or medical care.

CONCLUSION

Sexual gender-based violence continues to characterise the refugee experience. Common perceptions surrounding SGBV in Syrian and Jordanian culture are regressive towards women, which is exemplified in practices like compelling the victim to replay their trauma in public in court, placing blame on the victim, and making women's bodies the symbols of family honour. Since many Syrian refugees have migrated to Jordan to escape violence, these attitudes continue in their host countries. Barriers to reporting are derived from a cultural interpretation of SGBV as a scandal rather than a criminal matter. These misconceptions in Jordan and within refugee camps need to be changed through open discussion and awareness-raising with NGOs and government bodies. Community-based dialogue could allow Syrians to come to an understanding of the harms of SGBV, instead of forcing these views upon a culture that has rejected such sentiments in the past. Laws that allow SGBV crimes to occur will further entrench harmful attitudes and practices, leading to a society that places women and girls in harm's way. These crimes not only affect women but change the way that women raise their daughters and sons – affecting an entire generation of people already devastated by war and conflict. This is why focusing on dismantling reporting barriers, and challenging cultural norms that perpetuate shame and stigma around sexual violence should be a priority in responding to the refugee crisis. It should also be part of efforts to improve the quality of life in refugee camps – and ultimately, refugees' prospects for integrating back into a post-conflict society, if they are ever able to return home.

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