

*Listening to the voices of Syrian women and girls living as urban refugees in Northern Jordan - a narrative ethnography of early marriage*

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**ABSTRACT**

*Syria's turmoil, which is entering its fifth year and shows no sign of coming to an end in the near future, has forced over four million Syrians to flee the conflict, with many more millions displaced and uprooted inside Syria. More than half million refugees have sought a safe haven in Jordan. Many of the incoming refugees are women. With less than 20% of the total refugee population of Jordan in the camps, increasing numbers of refugees in Northern Jordan make the choice to leave and head for Irbid and the surrounding villages. This often means losing social and economic assistance from international and regional humanitarian agencies putting them at increasing risk. Living scattered across Irbid's deprived neighbourhoods, and in the border villages, Syrian refugee women found themselves under difficult conditions enforcing them to cope with new economic challenges and harsh social environments. This paper is an ethnographic exploration of the risks and vulnerabilities of the Syrian refugee women living outside of the refugee camps in Northern Jordan, in particular the risks to young girls entering agreements of early marriage. Drawing on the personal narratives Syrian women of different ages and social backgrounds living in two urban centres of Northern*

*Jordan; Irbid and Al Ramtha, this paper offers an insight into their perspectives on the choices they make. The initial choice, to live in the relative financial insecurity outside the camps and the continued decisions around marriage are presented within a historical and cultural context. By giving a voice to the women themselves this paper sheds light on some of their, concerns and decisions around marriage, so contributing to the development of culturally sensitive responses on the part of policy makers and practitioners working with families in the region.*

## INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the twelve months between July 2014 and July 2015, Syrian refugees living outside the camps in Jordan have come under increasing financial pressure with 98% of urban refugees renting their accommodation (Care, 2015, p.4) and 86% of Syrian refugee households in Jordan now living under the poverty line (UNHCR, 2015)<sup>1</sup>. In an assessment of the needs of refugees living outside camps in Jordan published by Care in July 2015, 79% of the 1,300 households interviewed identified paying the rent as their main concern, while 3 out of 10 Syrian households had been unable to access health services when needed (Care 2015, p.3). Policy changes made over the year were cited as having ‘negatively affected’ the lives of Syrian refugees<sup>2</sup>(ibid). The protracted nature of the refugees displacement and the financial

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<sup>1</sup> On August 20 2015, the number of Syrians seeking refuge in Jordan was 630,224 of them in Jordan see UNHCR Information Sharing Portal for current data <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=107>

<sup>2</sup> In October 2014 the World Food Programme (WFP) excluded refugee families considered not in need from their food assistance services. The value of the food vouchers was also repeatedly reduced. In November 2014 Jordanian authorities introduced fees for Syrian refugees accessing public health centres, and in February 2015, a verification process was launched requiring Syrians residing outside the camps to re-register with the Jordanian authorities providing a rental agreement and certificate of good health.

challenges highlighted in the needs assessment is impacting all family life. In the following ethnography we will focus on how it is impacting decisions made around marriage and the subsequent risk to young girls. Less than 10% of Syrian refugees have obtained a work permit while almost three quarters of the households in the recent needs assessment gain an income from work (ibid). The work found without work permits is often low paid and insecure, with refugees working illegally at risk both of exploitation and abuse by employers and of arrest and expulsion by the Jordanian authorities. These difficulties in employment impact all those living in the family home. They lead to an increase in ‘intimate family violence’, further vulnerability outside the home as more women and children enter the informal economy, and ‘increasing rates of early and forced marriages, in particular of girls’ (ibid, p.7). There are additional pressures on the one third of the Syrian households in Jordan headed by women (ibid.p6). These women are often looking after a number of young children and struggle to sustain their family at the same time. This has forced many women responsible for the material needs of their family into decisions that negatively affect the safety of their children. With the crisis in Syria entering its fifth year and no political solution to the on-going conflict in sight, this situation is likely to have a long term impact on the next generation of young Syrians growing up in exile and their Jordanian hosts. The decisions made by the policy makers and practitioners working in the region have the potential to positively impact the short and long-term risks to the next generation. They are likely to be more effective if they take the culturally specific perspective of the refugees, in particular the women and young girls into account. From a series of interviews conducted over a one-year period from September 2013 to September 2014, this paper presents selected narratives and testimonies taken from interviews with

around fifty Syrian women and young girls living in Northern Jordan. These Syrian voices are presented within a historical and cultural context, [Shedding light on the relationship between increased financial hardship and marriage and the subsequent increased isolation, and vulnerability from the perspective of the of young girls themselves.](#)

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

At the height of the Syrian exodus in April 2013, it was estimated that 6,000 Syrian refugees were entering Northern Jordan each day (Hummer, 2013), and the international agencies that had initially focussed their efforts on the complex challenges of providing emergency relief, largely in the refugee camps, were becoming increasingly aware that the majority of the Syrians arriving in Jordan had been ‘voting with their feet’ (Ferguson, 2007), resorting to often extreme measures to be able to leave the Refugee Camps and settle in the nearby towns and villages. In the 8 months between April and December 2013, thousands of refugees continued to enter Jordan each week, however, the population of Za’atari, the largest refugee camp in Jordan dropped by 40% (UNHCR, 2014)<sup>3</sup>. Soon, 80% of the refugee population in Jordan were living outside of the camps. (UNHCR, 2014). Although much effort went into ensuring the needs of the vulnerable urban refugee population, the tens of thousands of women and children who left the camps, often motivated by reasons of security (see findings below) were soon at greater risk of a series of threats including “labour exploitation, including child labour; early marriage; as well as domestic, sexual and gender-based violence” (UNHCR PDES, 2013). New ‘comprehensive and proactive strategies’ were called for to ‘focus

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<sup>3</sup> In July 2014, urban refugees without official documentation of a ‘bailout’ from a Jordanian national were no longer able to register with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in urban areas, preventing them access to services.

on more extensive and effective outreach to out-of-camp refugees’ (UNHCR PDES, 2013), and it was deemed ‘essential’ that ‘UNHCR national and international staff, as well as partners, are regularly present in communities, working with them to address the challenges they face’ (ibid). “Quick Impact Projects” were recommended to “provide immediate and tangible benefits to those living in refugee-populated areas”. It was recognised such projects “should be accompanied by an effective communications strategy, so as to ensure that their purposes are well understood and that messages of solidarity and community cohesion are conveyed to refugees and host populations alike”. (ibid) A Harvard Field Study published in January 2014 argues that without these ‘innovative and creative programmatic responses’, the presence of such large number of refugees living outside the camps in Northern Jordan could increase the instability in the region (HPCR, 2014). The authors focus in this study is in the users and of the fifty women and girls interviewed in the study, one was involved in one of these initiatives in September 2013 and four by September 2014<sup>4</sup>. All were high school educated. The majority of the women did not see such groups as appropriate for them to attend. They gave a number of explanations, including the non-segregated environments, the distance and the cost of travel, the constant demands of their children, or the fact that their husbands would not give them permission. In the Care needs assessment published in June 2015, the recommendations made to national and international humanitarian actors reflect those made two years previously. These include expanding ‘the support to women and men for prevention of gender based violence, ... supporting men in finding ways to cope with idleness because of the

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<sup>4</sup> A 19 year old woman in high school education was volunteering at a local centre for refugees in September 2013. A year later she had convinced her mother to attend English lessons at the same centre. In one focus group conducted in September 2014, Two recent arrivals from Homs. both university students before the crisis also had started volunteering at a local centre.

inability to work (legally), and ‘much more intensive work with communities to prevent early marriage’ (Care, 2015). Such initiatives need to be devised with extreme cultural sensitivity if such initiatives are to be effective.

## GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

The majority of the Syrian refugees entering Northern Jordan are from the city of Dera’a, only 30 kilometres from Jordanians second largest city, Irbid. Dera’a in the Sunni-majority agricultural region is where the Assad regime decided to use lethal force in 2011 in an effort to contain the first demonstrations of the conflict. The protestors destroyed government buildings in the town of Dera’a resulting in an aggressive government response that left 15 protestors dead and many more injured. The ‘decisive response’ (Holliday, 2011:6) sent shockwaves throughout Syria, and the start of the mass exodus to safer neighbours in the region. Dera’a is part of the Hauran region, one of the most fertile regions in Syria with farming and herding as the main sources of income. Historically the Hauran region constituted one entity and one territory, however, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century this region was divided between Jordan and Syria, making the political and social divisions between the two countries relatively recent. (Mallia 2000). Despite the geographical similarities and the shared Arab identity between the Jordanians and Syrians on either side of the border, political and socio-economic differences however make the two peoples in many ways dissimilar.

The traditional Islamic societies scattered throughout the Hauran region in Syria are made up of large extended families. Prior to the crisis, trade, marriage and movement between Jordanians and Syrians were commonplace. As a result of the deep historic bonds many Syrians moved to Jordan to stay with relatives when the conflict first

began, not considering themselves as “refugees”. Strains to this hospitality started to manifest in 2013 as the numbers of refugees arriving began to put pressures on the local resources.

The Jordanian directorates of Irbid Al Ramtha, Tura, Shajara, and Emrawa were identified as a ‘poverty pocket’ by the UNHCR at the start of Syrian crisis. Yet in the space of six months between January and July 2013 over a half a million refugees arrived increasing their population by 10% (UNHCR PDES, 2013) and the already struggling Jordanian residents soon felt the economic strains of hosting their guests. With an already straining infrastructure, with shortages of water, electricity, housing, schooling and healthcare, the tenfold rent increases (Hummer, 2013), and pressure on the fragile informal job market proved too much for the previously integrated Jordanian and Syrian populations of the Horan. Perhaps without the shared historic connection, Northern Jordan would not have seen the four years of relative peace that it continues to sustain, despite all the seemingly insurmountable challenges.

## METHODOLOGY

Over a period of twelve months, we spent time with about 30 extended families in Irbid and Al Ramtha, and created eight groups of between six and twenty individuals, two of the smaller family focus groups included men. Through a combination of conversations, group interviews and careful observations of the often-inexpressible realities, sometimes transmitted through silence, body language and often tears, we began to build a picture of both the spoken and unspoken fears and dreams of these women. In her article on Speech, Gender and Power, Cecile Jackson argues that the challenge for

researchers and development practitioners is ‘to improve their ability to listen and hear’ (Jackson, 2011). Silences, she argues, ‘can be resistant and expressive’ while speech can be associated with ‘a loss of agency’ (Jackson, 2012:1020). Throughout this study our theoretical standpoint was to create an atmosphere of trust where the women could feel comfortable to speak and voice their experiences. Where there was silence, we ‘listened’.

Throughout this study our ethnographic approach is characterised by the different perspectives of the two authors of this paper; a Jordanian anthropologist and a British documentary film-maker. The data was gathered using both an objective analytical approach and a more subjective empathetic interpretation of the human experiences shared with us. The partnership between the two researchers was an essential element in the methodology behind this research. Through the outside/inside perspective of this partnership we were able to draw on our different perspectives and multi-layered observations, analysis and evaluations<sup>5</sup>.

It was important to us as independent researchers that our access to the families was also as independent as possible. We selected two distinct localities where refugees were living in large numbers outside of the camp setting, one in the city of Irbid and the other in the semi-urban villages of the Al Ramtha district, 25 Kilometres from Irbid and about one Kilometre from the Syrian border. In Irbid the connection was made largely through private landlords who rented buildings to the refugees and in Tura through a

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<sup>5</sup> The authors recognize that both were clearly ‘outsiders’ when it came to identifying with the experience of the Syrian refugees and due to differences in class, nationality and education, the ‘insider’ perspective of the Jordanian ethnographer was limited to a sharing of common cultural codes and values shared between Northern Jordan and Syria.



group of local volunteers offering support to the refugee population<sup>6</sup>. Our intention was to provide a safe and comfortable space for the women we met to discuss the issues that were most important to them. We interviewed most families in their homes, or in the home of one of the community members. In order to gauge a broader sense of the realities of larger number of refugees, we also spoke to individuals in public areas of Irbid where refugees gathered for urban registration and collection of food and coupons. Our individual family interviews lasted an average of two hours, with the focus groups lasting around four hours. The subject matter of each interview varied slightly depending on the context of each encounter. Common themes were the journey from Syria to Jordan, initial impressions upon arrival and how this has changed over time, and descriptions of both day-to-day activities and significant events since their arrival such as marriages and access to employment. The aspect of psychological and emotional wellbeing was soon included as an area of discussion. Questions regarding the connections and interactions with members of both the non-refugee and the refugee communities were also included. Keeping a flexible and intuitive response to the line of questioning, we were able to pose new questions and so discover new realities and respond to them as they became apparent. All interviews with the refugees were conducted in Arabic and where possible audio recordings were made both to facilitate future translation and to enable the researchers to fully engage with the interviewees rather than taking notes. Information and data has also been collected through interviews with representatives of both the Jordanian government and humanitarian aid agencies and supported by published and online sources.

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<sup>6</sup> It is recognized that no introduction made between researcher and their subject comes without a complex set of expectations and assumptions. However, through initial introductions from outside of those already accessing services, we believe we were able to connect with a more representative group of refugees.

## **FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH**

Over 80% of the Syrian refugees living in Jordan have settled outside of the refugee camps (UNHCR, 2013). The majority of these were taken by the Jordanian military from the border to the largest camp, Al Za’atari, which is close to the border and 27 miles from the city of Irbid. There, with some of the last remaining money or possessions most bought their way out of the camp.

Some families we interviewed were smuggled out of Al Za’atari, some were provided with the necessary documents that enabled them to leave officially.<sup>7</sup> Om Adel arrived in Za’atari from Daal, two years ago in a family group of seventeen people.

“They gave us cards in Za’atari to get tents and food we gave these cards as money to the person who took us outside.” (*Om Adel January 2014*)

## **THE CHOICE TO LEAVE THE CAMP**

The difficulties described by the interviewees that motivated them to leave the camps ranged from physical discomfort, especially those arriving in the winter months, to psychological and emotional stress, not least for fear of the safety of their daughters.

Om Omar, who lives now with nine family members in a small apartment in Irbid, arrived in Za’atari in the winter of 2012 and stayed only two days before deciding to leave. Life for Om Omar outside the camp was more difficult than she

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<sup>7</sup> The Jordanian Government requires that each refugee living outside the camp has a Jordanian guarantor. A lucrative business has developed around the camps to provide these guarantors for a sum. The sum varies but it was often quoted at around 200 Jordanian Dinar (approx. £175) per person.

expected.

“My ex-neighbour lives in Al Za’atari. Her daughter is 11 years old and got married last month because she is worried about her from rape. Our life is a tragedy. Inside or outside the camps we are all living in a misery, but we can protect our children better outside the camps” (*Om Omar, January 2014*)

Many of those we interviewed talked of the perceived risk of rape of their younger daughters. It is difficult to know if this fear is founded on experience and no particular cases of rape were cited by any of our interviewees. Official statistics are also unlikely to be representative for a number of reasons, not least due to the general mistrust the Syrians have for authority figures. In November 2013, the Jordanian police working in Za’atari, had only one recorded rape case on file in Za’atari since the camp opened (Hmoud, 2014). The perceived threat continues to pervade the camp however, and with virginity so important to unmarried girls, many of our interviewees found the public nature of the camps, where toilet and cooking facilities were some distance from the family tent or caravan and even the sleeping quarters sometimes shared with strangers<sup>8</sup>.

“I couldn’t bear to risk seeing my daughter raped in front of my eyes. Especially if I wanted to go back to Syria, I couldn’t live with this shame” (*Interview with Abu Nour, January 2014*)

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<sup>8</sup> See “Gender based violence and child-protection among Syrian refugees in Jordan with a focus on Early Marriage” UNWOMEN in 2013 <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2013/7/report-web%20pdf.pdf%29> (accessed July 2015)

In the case of the marriage of Abu Nour's 16 year old daughter Nasreen, the marriage of his daughter also meant an exit pass from Al Za'atari for his entire family. This influenced Nasreen's decision to accept the proposal.

“When we were in Al Za'atari we were so depressed and unhappy. My family were starving and we lived 11 persons in one tent. A Syrian woman visited us and told my mother that there is a groom for your daughter. At the beginning I refused, but later I thought this man would save the whole family. He promised to take us out of the camp and give us a lot of money. I married him and he took us all out of the camp to this home where we live now.” (*Nasreen, January 2014*)

Nasreen and her family were provided with the information that reassured them their daughter would be well treated.

“My father asked him what's the story of his life. He said, it's good. He's an Imam in the mosque and he's got one wife. I said yes, because he's an Imam. He has faith in God. I married him. We stayed here one month, more than one month. Then we went to United Arab Emirates”.

(*Nasreen, January 2014*)

## **OUT OF CAMP RISKS TO CHILDREN**

For many of the families interviewed, the marriage of a young daughter was seen as a solution to a number of difficulties, including financial. On our visit to their home in Irbid, Om Omar was preparing her 15-year-old daughter Majed for marriage with tales of her own marriage when she was even younger than her daughter. The wedding imminent and Majed knew very little of her future husband. He was 19 and lived in the same building. He saw her one day and proposed the union to her family.

“I am marrying next week, but I feel I’m not in a position of responsibility. I am aware of how to treat my husband how I am going to be pregnant and raise children but I am afraid I can’t cook.” (*Majed, January 2014*)

Om Omar explained to us, rather apologetically, how, with nine people in their two roomed apartment, including her 19 year old son and his 16 year old wife, and rent just increased to 270 JD’s (€350.00) a month, it was necessary for her young daughter to marry and be fed by her husband’s family.

For the young men, it is important to start a family, and a high priority as soon as financially possible. When 21 year Adel found a job in an electronic shop he soon found a 16-year-old wife. This is a common practise in Syria for many of the refugees we spoke to, as Adel’s mother explained.

“We have this tradition in Dera’a. If a good man proposes to my daughters, I would not mind them marrying at this early age. Girls are a big

responsibility. A family with a lot of girls is paralysed. The girl's parents told us that if you want to take our daughter as your son's wife we don't mind because we don't have enough money to feed her. The girls life is bitter, from the beginning of life to the death." (*Om Adel, January 2014*)

In studies conducted by UNWOMEN, no conclusive evidence was found that Syrian refugees were marrying earlier or at a higher rate in Jordan than in Syria. However their report stated that 'the sense of economic and physical insecurity that, among other factors, drive early marriage is amplified in displacement. (UNWOMEN, 2013) Care's 2015 Needs Assessment also provided no statistical data, but cited economic hardship as 'one of the factors contributing to increasing rates of early and forced marriages' (Care. 2015) Whether the number of early marriages of young Syrian girls has or has not increased, the likelihood of girls being married into an unknown family, has, putting them at greater risk of greater isolation and vulnerability. In a number of the houses visited, young brides were dutifully helping their new mother in laws, cleaning and caring for smaller children, their sadness and loneliness palpable in their silence.

Some families interviewed were tempted to make unions for their daughters with unknown foreigners in the hope that this might be a ticket out of the country and into a new and more affluent life. For a large number of the girls interviewed, however, the union was short-lived. Noura now lives back with her family in Toura after having been only two months with her husband.

"My husband paid for the whole family to leave the camp. Two months later

he told me he was going to Saudi Arabia to get the required papers for me to be able to go to Saudi Arabia. I spoke to him several times but later his phone did not work. Now, I don't know where is he. He dumped me.”

*(Noura, 2014)*

Areen was living back with her family in Irbid after a short-lived trip to Dubai. She was married to a 39-year-old man from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) when she was 14. She went with her new husband to Dubai for one month before he sent her back to Jordan. She was unhappy, regularly beaten and bullied by the husband’s three other wives. Her story is sadly mirrored by that of Nasreen, the daughter of Abu Nour. She left Al Za’atari for the United Arab Emirates with her cousin, and their new grooms. Both were 14 years old. Nasreen’s husband was 32 years old. After four months of marriage, she begged to be sent home, despite the shame brought to her family. She does not want to talk of her experience.

Fortunately none of these young girls fell pregnant, however unlike their unmarried siblings, they remain at home, not attend the local school and living in shame. Not officially divorced, Noura and Areen are unable to remarry. Nasreen was granted a divorce by her husband, but without making the settlement payments her father requested. He is now looking for another groom. So far he has received two offers, the first a disabled man, the second an old widower in need of care. Nasreen has not left her home in six months. She would like to go to school, but her father does not see that as a solution. The experiences of Nasreen, Noura and Areen, are an indication of the additional unseen risks of early marriage. The subject of the impact of early divorce and abandonment is one that was identified during the research as being in

urgent need of further analysis.

## **OUT OF CAMP RISK OF ISOLATION**

The Islamic principles of modesty, piety and honour have a particular impact on the social networks of Syrian refugees in Jordan and this exacerbates the extreme isolation for many women and adolescent girls. Back home, the lives of the women interviewed remained largely in the private domain, which, with extended family members living close by, was extremely social. With the fragmentation of the traditional extended families, gathering in larger family groups in Jordan is rare and mixing with outsiders generally kept to a minimum.

Om Omar, a 32-year-old single mother lives with her eleven children in a two-room apartment in Irbid. She doesn't know her neighbours.

“We don't gather with anybody in this building, not even the Syrian people.

We don't want trouble. It is more comfortable to be alone, we say ‘with no eyes to see and no hearts to be sad’. In Dera'a the whole village was one

family, but here I am living alone with fear. *(Om Omar, January 2014)*

The perceived vulnerability of Syrian women and girls in the public domain and the reduced number of male family members available to escort the women in public has severely restricted their physical movement outside the house. This has led to the



extreme isolation of Syrian women and girls, tens of thousands of whom are confined in small homes in Jordan, sometimes for months at a time. Fatima's description of life in exile reflected that of many of her young peers.

“We are bored here. There is nothing to do. We are not allowed to go to school, we are not allowed to go out, we are not allowed to mix with other people because we are girls. Death is better than this life. If we ask for anything the answer is we can get it when we go back to Syria. Our day begins with helping our mother and then cleaning. After that we watch TV, cry for a while after watching the news and then sleep. This is our daily routine”. (*Fatima, November, 2013*)

In many instances the previous tight-knit social networks have not been replaced, and many women interviewed lamented the difficulties in seeing their mothers or sisters even when they are in the same town. 16-year-old Abla had recently moved into her new husband's cramped home. They had tried to settle in a village outside Irbid as it was cheaper, but she was so lonely she returned.

“I was struggling. It was like prison there. I did not know anybody. I couldn't go outside. I told my husband I want to live with your mother because I am worried if I get killed here no one will know.” (*Abla, January 2014*)

In 2013 it was found that over 20% of girls under the age of 16 and nearly 19%

of women never leave their homes and nearly 50% of both women and girls very rarely left the home. (UNWOMEN, 2013 p.22-23) For the young girls recently married into a new family these feelings of loneliness and isolation are particularly marked. During the family discussions and focus groups, the recent young brides spoke little, if at all, their sadness often palpable in their silence. One young bride, Rahaf, had married into Om Abdullah's small family soon after arriving in Jordan when she was 15-years-old. She lived in a small dark basement room with her 25-year-old sister in law, a widow with a small child and a young sister to care for. Her 19-year-old husband had been caught working illegally and in fear of being sent back to Syria now slept all day and rarely left the house. Om Abdulla was in deep shock and still grieving the brutal torture and murder of her husband. Ralaf sat quietly during the interview, encouraging the young children to draw. When asked about her family her eyes welled up and no words came. Her sister in law explained she had left a large family and missed them terribly.

Over the course of the year, some new social networks were seen to be developing. In one building where women headed the majority of the households, a private communal area had been created on the rooftop where women took their children and relaxed together. In another, two of the younger daughters had taken to volunteering at a small centre providing medical support to refugee women. In a third, one of the refugees had enrolled in an English class provided by a local charity and talked of discovering a new confidence as she started to leave the home more. In the year between September 2013 and September 2014, tentative relationships had developed between the women of one of the focus groups, their shared experiences uniting them over time. This additional social contact was described as being extremely important, reducing the loneliness and isolation. It was noted that those who had taken

the steps towards creating new social networks had generally had previous access to education in Syria. Those who had been taken out of primary school to marry early were less likely to have found mechanisms for reducing their isolation.

## **Conclusion**

Prior to the war in Syria, marrying at young age, and consequently leaving formal education were commonplace. However more support networks were in place to diminish the risks to their physical and emotional well-being. One apparent impact in post-displacement is the increased risk of such practices. With the urgent need to financially support the girl's family and avoid sexual assault, hasty decisions are being made leaving young brides more vulnerable, isolated and alone than they would have been within the support mechanisms of their communities and extended families in Syria. Culturally appropriate help and support for vulnerable Syrian women and young girls is still needed on a large scale. Cost effective and sustainable solutions need to be encouraged and supported. This could involve training Syrian refugee women who as local representatives and liaison support workers, creating informal supportive environments for women within buildings or local regional areas known to have a large refugee population and home-schooling or small informal literacy classes where refugee women with higher levels of education volunteer to support young girls who left schooling to increase their literacy and education levels within the safe residential environments. Further research is needed on the increased risks to young girls as a result of early divorce and abandonment and on both pre and post-displacement experiences. This will inform practitioners and policy makers in finding culturally appropriate

solutions to enhance the refugees stability and wellbeing. This is likely to have a long-term impact on social cohesion not only amongst refugees but for all members of the local community. With the crisis in Syria entering its fifth year, the protracted nature of the refugees displacement and the increasing financial challenges is exacerbating the risks and vulnerability of women and young girls living as refugees in Northern Jordan is likely to have a long term impact on the next generation of young Syrians growing up in exile and their Jordanian hosts. The decisions made by the policy makers and practitioners working in the region have the potential to positively impact the short and long-term risks to the next generation. They are likely to be more effective if they take the culturally specific perspective of the refugees, in particular the women and young girls into account

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