

## Research Briefing Notes

# The Aftermath of the Syrian Crisis: A Glimpse of the Challenging Life of Widowed and Divorced Refugee Women in Jordan

### Summary

The article addresses the following questions: What challenges are Syrian widowed and divorced women encountering? How do they rearrange their lives and parenting when the husband is not with them anymore? How do they cope with everyday challenges? To respond to these questions, the article relies on empirical research, including interviews with 20 divorced and widowed Syrian women in Jordan's Amman, Irbid and Al Ramtha. The collected material was analysed by using thematic and interpretative social science methods. The study draws from the disciplines of social work and psychology. This study investigates the social, economic and emotional challenges Syrian refugee widows and divorcees faced while raising their children alone outside of camps in Jordan and presents the coping mechanisms of the widows to overcome these difficulties. The findings contribute to further exploring women's empowerment and agency as well as the severe challenges encountered by them as a result of forced displacement and the loss of their husbands.

### Research Background

Syrian familial structure in exile has been directly impacted by the dramatic changes that women have experienced as a result of being thrust suddenly and forcibly into extremely challenging circumstances; given that approximately 22% of families are headed by women and that 16% of all homes are headed by single parents. Few scholars have focused on distinct groups of Syrian refugee women, like widows and divorcees, despite the growing body of scholarship. The relative lack of literature on recent accounts of widowhood and divorce among Syrian refugee women as a result of emergency situations suggests that this aspect of lived experience is understudied. This study will therefore concentrate on Syrian refugee widows and divorcees who are raising their children in specially designated compounds in Jordan and the difficulties they face on social, economic and emotional levels. Additionally, it will examine how they manage to raise their kids in the host nation as single parents to shed light on the parenting dilemmas and difficulties these single mothers encounter in Jordan.

### Key Findings

- 1) Social–communal relationships (such as neighbour relations) in Jordan are said to be more formal and limited than those in Syria, which further isolated the women and their children. Except in a few unique cases, the similarities in culture and traditions relieved the mothers of most of the burden. In addition, Quranic groups are consistently praised for being free and accessible spaces where families can fortify their bonds with one another. Due to

Jordanian law and the organizations that support them, divorcees appear to face less social pressure than widows remarkably when searching for jobs.

- 2) The main and biggest challenge for mothers is to pay for school and medical expenses, which has serious repercussions on mothers themselves and their relationships with their children. In some cases, when mothers are unable to provide for their children's basic needs due to financial constraints, their children become disobedient.
- 3) Children's responsibility alone stands as a challenging obstacle in finding a job, as there is no one to take care of them during work time especially if they are too young. Divorcees' circumstances are significantly worse than widows' because they cannot receive orphan sponsorships or child support. Housing is a major problem for them because the rules of the compounds only allowed families with male children to stay there until they were 14 years old. This increases their financial burdens because they must pay rent costs.
- 4) The most notable effects experienced by widows included trauma, sadness and loss of hope. Divorced women experienced greater sadness for themselves because this stage had taken up a significant portion of their lives.

## **Key Explanations for these Findings**

1. When provided, sociocultural viewpoints of Syrian refugee widows and divorcees in Jordan highlight their varied and contextual experiences.
2. Losing a spouse in such circumstances can exacerbate displacement and resettlement concerns because widowhood or divorce has social and cultural repercussions. For these women, things got particularly difficult because they were left to handle all of the childcare duties by themselves. It is obvious that single-parent refugee women may experience more difficulties with resettlement.
3. The formal and informal assistance channels available to refugee women are limited. Living in communities designed exclusively for widows and divorcees eases some of the burdens of paying rent because these communities are exempt from rent.
4. Refugee women use a variety of coping mechanisms to adjust to the new environment. Regardless of their unsettled situation and continual distress, these women can often preserve balance with the help of spiritual satisfaction and social assistance.
5. The severe situation made women more empowered and claimed agency to navigate circumstances.

## **Key Implications for Policy Action or Further Ways to Address Knowledge Gap**

The study proposes some recommendations for policy action:

1. There is a need for provision of psychological and social support for mothers and children to help them cope with challenging situations like refugee status, being widowed or divorced and losing their fathers as children.
2. In addition to the social and legal support that helps them find jobs, mothers should receive financial assistance as well as the assistance they need to find childcare while they are at work.
3. Conflict prevention strategies at the community level can be part of policy interventions.

Empirical insights suggest that schools, refugee compounds and households are critical sites for conflicts, thus innovative conflict preventive measures should be adopted in such sites. Regarding

knowledge gap, there is still a need for future research on intersecting vulnerabilities and coping mechanisms of sub-refugee groups such as single women, elderly and unaccompanied children as well as studies taking households into account in the analysis.

## Key Policy Target Groups

In relation to the recommendation, the key policy target group is government departments and international organisations, particularly UN agencies. Particularly, the departments which concentrate on protection and livelihood sections. Civil society can be also taken as one target group as they provide complementary services, such as psychological support or childcare support to these women. As some of these women live in camps, the camp administrations can also find recommendations related to issues.

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