Voices from Syria 2022

EasyRead version
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>About this paper</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is happening in Syria now</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why things are getting worse in Syria</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who we talked with to get information for this report</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why violence against women and girls is still seen as normal</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different types of violence that women suffer</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women and girls have no rights and freedom</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using technology and violence

Men behaving violently to their wives

Other ways violence is happening to women and girls

Places where women and girls are most at risk

How violence affects women and girls

How women are managing

What helps women and girls get away from violence
Other work we need to do 34

The things women and girls hope for 36

What we need to do 37

Getting better at stopping violence against women and girls 39

What the words mean 41
About this paper

This is an Easy Read Paper on our report called “Voices from Syria 2022”.

There are some more difficult words printed in **bold**. These are explained at the back of the paper.

It gives information on what happened to women and girls in Syria in 2021.

Our work is helping organisations that deal with **violence** against women and girls in Syria. This is called **Gender Based Violence**.
Our report is also to help other organisations who come across violence against women and girls in their work.

This report is written from information collected from women and girls. We also collected some information from men and boys.

This report gives a chance for Syrian women and girls to be heard.

It is helping people to understand more about the difficulties women and girls have because of what is happening in Syria.
Since 2011, over 5 million people have left Syria to find safety.

Over 6 million people have had to leave their homes to live somewhere else in Syria.

Women and girls are still being hurt and attacked. A young mother from Ar-Raqqa said she wants:

- to live safely
- a small plot of land and a house
- her children to be safe from the cold in winter and the heat in summer
- money so she does not have to ask people or organisations for help.
Things have got worse for women and girls in Syria. **Violence** against women and girls is happening more. They just want it to stop.

Young women are starting to say that it can change. They are brave and are starting to fight back to change what has become normal in Syria.

For example, they are starting to make sure they have their own money and independence.
The war in Syria started in 2011, 11 years ago.

Because of the war the economy in Syria is in crisis. This means that it is even harder for people to earn money and get food and water.

Women and girls say that this, along with the COVID has made violence worse than ever.

It is now even harder for them to keep going. The war has meant more people than ever have had to move and are living in camps.
People have been killed in the **camps** and there is not much security.

Women and girls are often targeted and killed.

We know that during war families are under much more pressure. This can lead to more abuse of women by their husbands.

During war women and girls have:

- less freedom
- less work
- less protection
- less information about their health and wellbeing.
A lot of people in Syria say they have no money at all.

A woman from Harim said that people have no money for rents and must go and live in the camps.

COVID has happened in Syria. Only 1 in 100 people have had a vaccination. This means that COVID continues to spread.

Covid has caused lockdowns and a lot of unemployment. This means that more people are at home and more women and girls experience violence in the home.
It has meant women and girls are not able to move around.

There has been a change in what women and girls do in Syria because of the war, the poor economy and COVID.

In Syria men are the ones who usually make sure their families have money and food.

Now more women and girls have to work to get money and food for their families.

This means women are being asked about things now. They are involved in making decisions in their families.
A man from Ar-Raqqa for example said that his wife works, and she has the right to say what she thinks.

The situation means some women and girls are being treated more equally than before.

Despite that, violence against women and girls is still a real danger to them.
To get the information for this report, we talked to lots of women and girls.

We also talked to some men and boys.

This included girls and boys aged 12-14 and 15-17 and women and men aged 18-64 and women over 65.

We talked to women and girls with disabilities and their carers.

And women who face more than 1 kind of discrimination.

This included women of different ages and with disabilities.
We talked to people in groups called Focus Groups.

Notes were taken in Arabic and translated into English.

Security staff helped to make sure people were treated safely, with dignity and in private.

We made sure that people could get support after the groups if they needed it.

We talked to experts working in Syria. We got information from other work and other reports.
This helped us to try and make sure to stop violence and help everyone who needs it.
Why violence against women and girls is still seen as normal

Violence against women and girls is still seen as normal. Women and girls can be seen as worthless.

Men control their lives and often blame the women for the violence they face.

A woman from As-Sweida told us the violence is getting worse because husbands cannot earn a living. She also said women were afraid to go out of the house.

The violence happens in different ways. It happens both inside and outside of the home. It is done by husbands and other males in the family as well as others.
It includes things like:

- sexual violence
- rape
- controlling what women can do, how they can dress, where they can go, who they can meet
- forced marriage, being made to get married
- being made to get married young
- physical violence like hitting, punching, slapping and so on
- emotional violence, like calling names, preferring male children to female children, saying that women and girls are not worth, are not capable, and so on.
Different types of violence that women suffer

The murder, rape and sexual attacks of women or girls is happening more often than before.

It is happening in the camps. A woman from Al-Hasakeh told us that unknown people are murdering women who mostly live in the camps.

Younger women experience honour killings at home. This is when someone is killed because the family think they have done wrong.

Between January 2020 and February 2021 there were 22 women killed.
Girls as young as 10 are forced to marry. This is usual in Syria.

Girls are seen as a burden on families so early marriage means they no longer have to support them.

If families are living in the camps, early marriage is seen as a way of protecting them from sexual violence. This makes her husband responsible for the girl instead of her family.
Women and girls have no rights and freedom

Women and girls in Syria have no rights or freedom. They do not get to go to school.

Younger girls are not allowed to go anywhere without their father or brothers. This happens to older women too.

Women who are widowed or divorced are kept at home by their parents, brothers or brothers in law.

Women and girls are told what clothes to wear.

Older women are not given the food or healthcare that they need.
Using technology and violence

Technology is getting more common in helping violence against women and girls with things like:

- social media
- online gaming
- online file sharing.

Men and boys are using these things to make rude comments to women and girls. They are chasing and bullying them online and using rude pictures.

Sometimes they use these pictures as threats to get money or sex, this is called blackmail.

This technology is also being used for grooming when someone is nice to you and tricks you into doing something.
Men behaving violently to their wives

Men being violent to their wives is happening more than before.

There are different reasons for this:

- COVID lockdowns
- men not being able to earn enough money for their families and not being able to control their stress and anxiety
- men being at home more
- poor housing or having to move from home.

Women have the added fear from their husbands violence and having their children taken away from them.
If they try to get help, they are afraid of what might happen and the disgrace of a divorce.

These things mean many women do not tell anyone about what is happening to them.
Women and girls who try to find work face different types of violence. Sometimes they are rejected by their community for this.

They are not treated equally to men so have to work for low pay. They cannot ask for better pay for fear they would lose their jobs.

A woman from the Sahla Albanat camp told us she has an illness, but her employer will not allow her a break to rest. She is afraid he might not let her work.
Women who have had to move from home face insults and discrimination from communities. This can be because there is more competition over things like having a house to live in.

Landlords can abuse women and girls for money or sex.

More girls are being kidnapped. The usual reason for this is to get ransom money from their families.
Places where women and girls are most at risk

Women and girls at risk almost everywhere, including at:

- home
- school
- camps
- work
- public places
- prisons and detention centres
- markets
- the internet and social media.

Home is still the most dangerous place for women and girls, especially with verbal and physical abuse.
At school there is a risk from teachers.

More women and girls need to work to support their families and this puts them at more risk than before.

More people using social media are putting women and girls at more risk.

A girl from Daneb told us that men use pictures of them to blackmail them. If the pictures are sent to their family, they are in danger of being killed.
How violence affects women and girls

When women and girls are kept at home it is harder for them to get help from services.

Many teenage girls cannot remember a time when there wasn’t a war affecting their lives. They can be forgotten about and kept alone.

Because of no education it is harder for women and girls with learning disabilities to get support.

Older women can be ignored by their families. They are often beaten by family members they live with.
Women and girls who are widowed or divorced are treated badly by their communities.

A woman from a camp in Aleppo told us her daughter is a widow. She has a job and runs her house, but everyone watches her coming and going.

Widows in the camps are stopped from going places. There are special areas in the camps for widows.

Boys between 13-15 are not allowed in these areas. This means women are unable to see their older children.
Experts say women and girls are having more mental health problems.

Young girls are saying they feel helpless. They are using social media to escape what is happening to them.

Women say they are losing hope of the violence ever stopping. Some say they are smoking or using drugs to help them cope.

Some women are hurting themselves.
Keeping quiet about what is happening to them is another way of coping. Others find it helps to talk to friends or family members.

Women and girls travelled to the city for help. A young girl from Tadaf told us that women and girls would go to Aleppo for help.

Women and girls also go to the mosque or read the Qu’ran because praying helps.

Some women are trying to tell others about violence. They hope this will change what is happening in Syria.
What helps women and girls get away from violence

Having safe spaces was the most talked about thing when we talked about violence against women and girls and where to find support.

These are places where women and girls can get away from men, their worries and do activities.

More women and girls now know about safe spaces. These spaces are becoming more important to women and girls.

A girl from Jisr Ash Shugur told us that because girls are thought to be responsible for everything that creates a lot of pressure, they need safe spaces to get away from all that stress.
Women are talking more about the violence they suffer and are seeking help more often because safe spaces are more accepted.

Younger girls are finding comfort in the safe spaces and their parents do not have worries about them joining in activities at the safe space.

Those who use the safe spaces are finding more friends outside of their families.

Safe spaces are also good for widows and divorced women. A woman from Deir-ez-Zor said that some divorced women come for education and entertainment.
Sadly, when projects close women and girls have nowhere else to go.

Group support and activities help.

Health services for women are getting better in some places but not in others.

In some of the camps there are no health services for women and girls.

Getting medical care and medicine costs a lot of money families do not have. A woman from Kisreh said there are no medical centres that are free.
There is not enough safe affordable transport for women and girls to get medical help.

There are not a lot of services to help women and girls who have been raped.

Some women and girls do not report violence. This is because they are afraid of what will happen to them.

COVID made people more aware of violence against women and girls.

Services had to change how they worked because of Covid. The online services helped more women and girls to get help.
A girl from Tall Kalakh said that they continued contact and training when their centre closed. They used WhatsApp and social media but it was better to do things in the centres.

Some women and girls could not use online services because:

- they have no phone or laptop
- they live with the person being violent.

More women and girls are aware of being able to get legal help but this is not free. They are also afraid to get legal help because of what could happen to them.

Many women and girls still have little or no money.
Other work we need to do

We need to do more to keep women and girls safe, for example:

- **child protection** – children, including girls, are often forced to work. This should not happen.

- **education** - boys should not be treated more fairly than girls.

- **girls should not be kept apart from their families** - this happens because of things like being moved around, getting married again, a parent dying.

- **girls should get money when their parents die**, but often they don’t get it - this happens because of customs and because women and girls do not get treated equally.
- landmines - often there are things from the war like landmines which have not exploded and cause danger

- camp and shelter management - the camps and shelters need to be made safer for women and girls

- aid distribution areas - the areas where people can get aid like food and water are not always safe places

- toilets and shower areas should be clean and safe for women and girls, for example, they should always close and have enough light to access them even at night.
The things women and girls hope for

Women and girls want a better life.

They want to be able to live safely and have the basic things they need.

Younger girls are getting stronger. They want to be treated equally.

They want to be involved in making changes to their lives.
What we need to do

We need more special services so more abused women and girls can use them. This includes support for:

- mental health
- safe spaces
- protection
- legal services
- health services.

We need more services for women and girls who are:

- living away from their homes
- divorced
- widowed
- older
- disabled
- adolescent
We need more face to face services.

We need more support for women and girls to have more money of their own.

This includes:

- giving help with cash and vouchers to women and girls, especially ones who are in charge of the home
- making sure women and girls can get period products and family planning
- giving women help and training to get a job
- helping girls go to school
- more help to get free schools
- giving money and support to people who are carers.
Getting better at stopping violence against women and girls

We need to get better at stopping violence from men by:

- telling more people about the problem and helping them stop violence against women and girls
- getting services accepted in the community
- raising awareness with men and boys
- supporting women and girls work and trying get them treated equally
- making legal help easier to get so that people are punished
● making our ways of working with women and girls better after COVID

● making sure we do things that reduce the risk of violence against women and girls

● using the things women and girls say to make rules and recommendations

● getting better at how we report and look into violence.
Blackmail – being threatened with something for money.

Camps – the large places people are living in when they have had to move from their own homes.

Economy – how well a country is doing money wise.

Focus Groups – groups of people meeting to talk about something special.

Gender Based Violence – violence against someone of the opposite sex, usually violence by men against women.

Grooming – when someone is nice to you and tricks you into doing things.

Honour killing – when someone is killed because the family think they have done wrong.

Rape – when you are forced to have sex when you do not want to.

Rights – rights are things you are allowed to do like getting married or the right to vote. Rights tell us how we should be treated. For example, you have the right to be treated with respect.

Technology – new things usually electronic like modern mobile phones or computers.
**Violence** includes things like:

- hitting
- slapping
- choking
- cutting
- pushing
- burning
- shooting
- using any weapons
- acid attacks
- being touched in private parts when you don’t want to
- being forced to do something sexual that you don’t like
- any other act that results in pain or being hurt.
Credits

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