

# **Roots & Consequences**

## ***Further explorations into the Syrian Uprising***

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**Jörg Michael Dostal**

**Özlem Özdemir**

**Omar Imady**

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**UK National Print Media Coverage of Sexual and Gender-Based  
Violence (SGBV) against Refugee Women in Syrian Refugee  
Camps**

**Özlem Özdemir**

## **Abstract**

The vulnerability of Syrian refugee women does not draw the public attention it deserves. In this regard, media coverage thus has an important role to illustrate these women's vulnerable situation and to create public awareness. This research aims to reveal the sensitivity and awareness level of the UK national print media of SGBV (sexual and gender-based violence) against refugee women in Syrian refugee camps. News published in five daily major UK national newspapers (Guardian, Independent, Daily Telegraph, Times and Sun) between March 15, 2011, and December 15, 2014 referencing Syrian refugee women have been analysed in accordance with feminist critical discourse analysis methods. Results show that media coverage of SGBV against Syrian refugee women is limited. Gender and violence perspectives of the refugee dilemma are mostly ignored.

**Keywords:** Syrian refugee women, print media, sexual and gender-based violence, Syrian refugee camp, Syrian conflict, Middle East

## Introduction

The birth of the Arab Spring in the Middle East began in Tunisia, with the self-immolation of 26 year old street vendor Mohammed Bouazizi on December 17, 2010, after fighting with Tunisian police, who wanted to take away his vegetable and fruit cart in the town of Sidi Bouzid. This tragic event sparked country wide mass protests and violence. Pro-democracy protest spread throughout the Middle East. Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Morocco, Sudan, and Algeria, targeting dictatorships, injustices, corruption, human rights abuses, poverty, unemployment and repression of free expression prevalent across the region.

Similar pro-democracy protests began on the streets of Syria, not welcomed by the Syrian Government. Consequently, fifteen protesting children between the ages of 10 and 15 in Daraa, who spray-painted slogans against the regime on school walls, were arrested and tortured by the police in late February 2011 (Human Rights Watch, 2011). Nonetheless, protests demanding Bashar Al-Asad's resignation soon erupted across Syria, with opposition insurgent groups such as Free Syrian Army emerging to launch an armed struggle against the regime (Rodgers et al, 2014). Since then, Syria has been in a civil war, forcing millions to flee their country.

According the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2015a), as of October 2015, 4,180,631 Syrian refugees are now outside their country, and around 6.5 million displaced within Syria (OCHA, 2015). Syrian refugees have become the world's largest population under UNHCR care (UN News Centre, 2014). Most arrived in refugee camps located in neighbouring countries, such as Turkey (22 refugee camps), Jordan (3) and Iraq (11). The other neighbouring country, Lebanon, has no formal refugee camps but more than one million Syrians live in rented housing or nomadic camps. (UNHCR, 2015b; 2015c; 2015d).

Within the camps, gender balance is roughly equal (UNHCR, 2014) but camps often unsafe, especially for women. Women tend to suffer harshly on becoming a refugee and need additional protection to prevent sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), such as rape, sexual exploitation, violence, harassment, abuse, early marriage and forced marriage. Unfortunately, such protection is often far from forthcoming.

There is thus a clear role here for the combined power of the mass media to focus and highlight this issue of SGBV in the refugee camps. However, there is no data collection on how many refugee women have suffered from violation. It is still difficult to measure the nature and extent of crimes of SGBV in camps, for reasons including shame, social stigma, honour killing, and fear of reprisal or the case going to trial. As a result, number of victims in need of professional medical assistance and psycho-social support do not have access to services (UNHCR, 1991; 2008; FIDH, 2012).

To break the social, cultural and traditional taboos on SGBV, public awareness and agenda-setting can be raised through discussion programmes on TV and radio, documentaries, films, public service announcement, columns, articles. High visibility of SGBV with the media could shape public opinion on the issue. For this reason, the present research attempts to reveal the sensitivity and the awareness level of UK national print media of SGBV against refugee women in Syrian refugee camps. First, however, SGBV itself and its expression with the Syrian refugee camps merits further introduction.



## **Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in Refugee Camps**

SGBV is one of the world's most widespread human rights violations (UN, 2013). The overwhelming majority of victims/survivors of SGBV are women and girls (UNHCR, 2003; Walby, 1990, p.132; Bastick et al, 2007). Here, interchangeable terms, such as sexual violence, gender-based violence and violence against women, signify physical, sexual and psychological harm that not only impacts on the individual but ultimately strengthens female subordination and extends male authority and control more widely (UNHCR, 2003). Such violence can thus be associated with the hierarchically structured unequal patriarchal gender relations between men and women (Walby, 1990, pp.142-143). Such inequality relations also help shape the types of SGBV experienced. According to classification within a UNHCR (2003) report, the most common forms are; sexual violence (rape, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, forced prostitution and sexual harassment); physical violence (physical assault, trafficking in persons); emotional and psychological violence (abuse/humiliation); and harmful traditional practices (early marriage, forced marriage, dowry, polygamy, honour killing).

Yet, SGBV during intrastate and interstate conflicts, and in post-conflict, insurgency, natural disaster, flight, displacement refugee camp contexts. Vulnerability of women and girls is increased during or after all these conditions, where there is weakened control by public officials and other authority figures. Perpetrators can be gangs, civilians, bandits, border guards, humanitarian workers and even peacekeepers. (Butler, Gluch & Mitchell, 2007; Fowler, Dugan & Bolton, 2000; Laville, 2015).

Many initiatives have been launched by the UN and other international bodies that seen to eliminate SGBV. For example, The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1981), the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998). The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on 31 October 2000, which for the first time, considered the effects of armed conflict on women and girls. The Resolution states: "all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict" (UN Security Council, 2000). Yet, whilst this resolution stresses the responsibility of all governments to protect girls and women from every kind of violence, a perception of relative impunity for actions of SGBV committed during conflict perpetuates a tolerance for such crimes against females; an ongoing 'heritage' of conflict or war (Bastick et al, 2007).

There is plenty of documented evidence of how women are faced with SGBV in refugee camps and how they become victims within the camps. This is not least borrowing statements given by women who have faced incidents of SGBV (Greenwood, 2013; Harper, 2014; Letsch, 2014; Mahmood, 2014). They highlight a number of key themes in respect of SGBV in the camps. For example, an important factor in the camps is how its internal geography affects the security of refugee women. Locations of basic facilities, such as wash facilities and latrines, are often at a distance from where women are camped, presenting risk zones for violence. Possible harassment at such facilities by men is a potential danger. Another factor that endangers female security is related to collecting food, fuel or water. Because of their gender roles, they typically have to cook and do housework for their children and spouse. Walking long distances from camp are times of vulnerability, where the women

may be raped, killed, and further abused by men. The food distribution process in the camps can also lead to enhanced masculine dominance over women. Thus, humanitarian workers, security forces or guards who are supposed to protect women, have been known to force them to give sexual favours in exchange for food or asylum hearings (Human Rights Watch, 2002; Hyndman, 2004; Freedman, 2007; Kreitzer, 2002; Callamard, 2002; UNHCR, 2006).

A second theme is how women often face domestic violence in refugee camps, which is rarely reported and usually remains hidden. This makes it difficult to intervene on behalf of the women concerned. Such violence mostly comes from husbands, fathers, mothers in law and other male and female family members. Thus, it is often regarded as a private matter. Contributing to the prevalence of domestic violence are stress and uncertainties, men's loss of their traditional roles, cultural traditions, lack of resources, and general dissatisfaction (UNHCR, 2008; UN WOMEN, 2013).

Third, the physical situation of the refugee camps can also facilitate an increase in SGBV against women. Some camps, for instance, are overwhelmingly overcrowded and there is rarely enough room for every family. Therefore, different families and individual strangers share common shelter, where the accommodation is often too small and does not provide enough privacy. Living with strangers at the same place for a long time can result in harassment, abuse or sexual exploitation of single, divorced and widowed refugee women, for example.

As the fourth theme, the pressure to engage in prostitution, or the fear of denigration is an important factor that frequently threatens mainly single refugee women and girls who are unaccompanied. Here, gender-based violence can happen when refugee women are deprived of male protection (UNHCR, 1991; 2008), even when male relatives or others protect women and girls from strangers, they may exhibit another kind of gender-based violence, notably forced or early marriage. To protect girls from rape, sexual harassment, sexual abuse or trafficking, family members have forced their daughters in early marriage. (FIDH, 2012; Watt & Wintour, 2014; Save the Children, 2014).

Thus, in spite of all these UN and other international initiatives documents, SGBV still exists even in the refugee camps which should be the safest place, especially for women. According to Hyndman (2004, pp.199-200), "primary purpose of UNHCR gender policies is to promote women's well-being and protection within the organisation, as well as in refugee camps and conflict zones. Yet, while vast improvements have occurred over the last decade, the implementation of UNHCR gender policies and projects aimed at protecting women in the 1990s remain incomplete".

### **The Importance of Media Coverage**

SGBV is thus both a chronic and acute issue for women resident in refugee camps. However, greater awareness of this terrible situation might hopefully change both governments' and popular perceptions of these camps, feeding into new ways of governing and resourcing them. Most definitely, awareness is clearly required if any durable solutions are to be found to refugee crises. Yet, the evidence suggests that general awareness of life in the camps is very limited.

The media, in all its many guises as a powerful tool, has a very important role to play in changing or directing ideas, perceptions, attitudes or decisions about issues or situations. Not least, mass media such as TV, radio, internet, newspapers and magazines can powerfully

influence the agenda-setting process. The media has a powerful agenda-setting role, communicates to the public what and how to think about an issue (Cohen, 1963; McCombs, and Reynolds, 2008, pp.1-18). Yet, well known that whilst certain issues become newsworthy and widely available for public consumption, others are largely overlooked (Dearing & Rogers, 1996; Wood, 2009, p.274; McCombs & Reynolds, 2008, pp.1-18). Therefore, in the context of this paper, the public, NGOs and governments might well focus more on SGBV in Syrian refugee camps if the mass media carried the issue as a priority agenda item. Indeed, by “mediating, interpreting, critiquing, and/or facilitating images, we continue to realize how powerful a role media plays in warfare” (Fuller, 2010, p.69).

Media reports on SGBV in Syrian refugee camps can contribute in many ways. First of all, the public, NGOs and governments will become more aware of SGBV, its types, consequences and survivors’ conditions in camps. It will become more ‘visible’ on mass media as a problem of vulnerable and defenceless refugee women. Secondly, because in spite of the difficulties related to the data collection of SGBV, expressions of forced marriage, early marriage, pleasure marriage, forced prostitution, humiliation, domestic violence etc. are still observable in Syrian refugee camps (UN Women, 2013; The International Federation for Human Rights, 2013; El-Masri et al, 2013). Thus, more pressure by the media may than be put on policy makers for the protection of vulnerable refugee women in refugee camps, where the perpetrators are mostly unpunished. Third, media coverage of SGBV may also help to deconstruct any ‘normal’ ‘traditional’ or ‘cultural’ context which can contribute to the victimisation process of refugee women. Framing that early or forced marriage is not the ‘desired’ way to secure for daughters’ safety and security (The International Federation for Human Rights, 2013; UNHCR, 2014, p.8).

Additionally, if SGBV is seen as a human rights violation, it increases the duty on journalists to report this kind of crime. Certainly, SGBV should not be reported as a mundane event, with reporting statements of experts such as sociologists or psychologists also important for convincing the public of its unacceptability (Global Protection Cluster, 2013; The Ethical Journalism Initiative, 2009).

## **Methodology**

The methodologies vary significantly in different studies such as gender, media or racism on account of the purposes of the research (Weiss & Wodak 2003, p.12). For this reasons, content analysis and feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) are used for this research. Using both analyses helped to see the results from a feminist perspective. Indeed, no method is feminist in nature; researcher makes the work feminist according to aim of the research. For example, content analysis is a study of texts, cultural products or non-living data forms (Leavy, 2007, pp.227-228).

In other words, content analysis is a research technique of documents and texts that focuses on the frequency of specific words. The use/choice of some words in media texts rather than others can be very important for revealing predilection of some events (Bryman, 2012). In sum, it helps the researcher to collect pre-existing data, such as newspapers, books, magazines, pictures, television programs etc. Looking at these documents from a feminist perspective, enables researchers to find statistically important data about gendered society (Leavy, 2007, pp. 227-228).

FCDA brings feminist studies and critical discourse analysis (CDA) together (Lazar, 2007). First of all, feminist studies are critical in nature and expose gender relations, gender blindness and patriarchal society by documenting women's lives, experiences and concerns. Its basic aim is to empower women, give voice to them and apply their findings in the task of upholding social change and social justice (Sarantakos, 2005, p.54; Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007, p.4).

However, cornerstones of CDA are ideology, power and discourse. For CDA, unequal power relations are maintained through ideology and discourse. As a relation of differences, power is about the effects of differences in society (Weiss & Wodak, 2003, p.13, 15). Van Dijk calls it 'abuse of power' which results in social inequalities and injustice (2008, p.1). As regards discourse, it reproduces unequal power relations between social classes, genders, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258).

For this research, FCDA intends to show how gender, unequal power relations between men and women, patriarchal ideology and its violence and hegemonic power relations in Syrian refugee camps reflect on UK print media. Therefore, SGBV is a key term for this research according to classification of UNHRC report 2003. The reason of choosing the categories of UNHRC report is that it presents basic, comprehensive, and most common forms of SGBV. These classification includes sexual violence (rape, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, forced prostitution, sexual harassment), physical violence (physical assault, trafficking), emotional and psychological violence (abuse/humiliation), harmful traditional practices (early marriage, forced marriage, honour killing, denial of education for girls or women) (UNHRC, 2003). Thus, the research question of this article; "To what extent daily national UK print media pay attention to SGBV against Syrian refugee women in Syrian refugee camps?" has been analysed according to FCDA.

## **Sample**

The research aimed to reveal the sensitivity and awareness level of a selection of the daily national UK print media of SGBV. Media coverage of Syrian refugee camps is taken as the specific example. Five major daily national newspapers of the UK, Guardian (left-leaning social-liberal), Independent (centre-left), Daily Telegraph (conservative), Times (centre-right) and Sun (conservative) (BBC, 2009) were taken for research purposes.<sup>1</sup>

## **Analysis**

The scanning of the five major, above mentioned daily national newspapers of the UK published between March 15, 2011, and December 15, 2014 yielded 381 news reports on Syrian refugee camps, yet only nine of them were about SGBV in refugee camps. One of them was in The Independent, one of them was in The Daily Telegraph, and seven of them were in The Guardian. Therefore, only nine news were analysed and coded for this research.

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<sup>1</sup> Total weekly readers; Guardian has 793,000 (50.3% men and 48.0 % women), Independent has 309,000 (66.3% men and 33.7 % women), Daily Telegraph has 1,313,000 (49.3% men and 50.7 % women) Times has 1,155,000 (58.4 % men and 41.6 % women) Sun has 5,685,000 (57.6 % men and 42.3 % women) (Media UK 2014; National Readers Survey 2014).

The Times and The Sun made no reports on SGBV. In 2011 and 2012 none of the five newspapers reported on SGBV. The Daily Telegraph was the first newspaper which paid attention to SGBV against Syrian refugee women in refugee camps in 2013. In 2013 and 2014 The Guardian and Daily Telegraphy started to make news on SGBV against Syrian refugee women in refugee camps. The news was mostly on sexual violence, physical violence and harmful traditional practices. Between 2013 and 2014 most frequency words of sexual violence mentioned in The Guardian, Daily Telegraphy, Independent, Times and Sun (Figure 1).

Figure 1 word frequency forms of SGBV in The Guardian, Daily Telegraphy, Times, Sun and Independent.

<b>Forms of Violence</b>	<b>Words frequency</b>				
	<b>Guardian (2013- 2014)</b>	<b>Daily Telegraphy (2013)</b>	<b>The Independent (2013-2014)</b>	<b>The Times (2013- 2014)</b>	<b>The Sun (2013- 2014)</b>
<b>Rape</b>	20	1	-	-	-
<b>sexual assault/abuse</b>	18	1	1	-	-
<b>sexual exploitation</b>	10	1	-	-	-
<b>sexual harassment</b>	8	-	-	-	-
<b>forced prostitution</b>	2	2	-	-	-
<b>trafficking</b>	9	2	-	-	-
<b>domestic violence</b>	4	-	-	-	-
<b>early marriage</b>	14	-	-	-	-
<b>forced marriage</b>	14	2	-	-	-
<b>dowry</b>	5	2	-	-	-
<b>kuma/polygamy</b>	4	2	-	-	-
<b>honour killing</b>	1	-	-	-	-
<b>abuse/humiliation</b>	3	1	-	-	-

### **Findings - Sexual Violence**

Sexual violence is a form of gender-based violence that results in physical, psychological and emotional harm refers to any action, attempt or threat of a sexual nature of the victim. Therefore, consequences of all these harms reinforce female subordination and perpetuate male power and control (UNHCR, 2003). For example, rape is one of the forms of sexual violence defined as, the unwanted act or physical force against any part of the body of the

victim with a sexual organ or genital opening of the victim with any object (International Criminal Court, 1998). Its legal definition might vary in different countries.

According to Greenwood (2013), the UN and aid workers reported a number of sexual assaults, rampant sexual exploitation, domestic violence and rape outside the conflict, in camps or in host communities. Syrian refugee women are facing the same problems as well. However, sexual violence experienced by Syrian women and girls remains hidden mostly. So, it makes it difficult for a comprehensive data collection of SGBV. It may have many reasons why victim/survivor cannot speak it openly or report. For example, she may be afraid of honour killing, social isolation, outcast, or stigmatized of her community, family and society. As a result, the impunity contributes to further violence and creates new victims/survivors. The word “victim” or “survivor” refers to a person who has suffered from SGBV. However, reporters should be very careful when reporting victim or survivor terms. When seeking legal redress the victim term is used but in non-legal situations it can imply weakness and stigmatization (UNHCR, 2003).

“Rape and domestic violence follow Syrian women into refugee camps. Victims hide their shame to avoid being stigmatized for life after assaults by marauding gangs [...] Dr Manal Tahtamouni [...] in Za’atari refugee camp. When asked, she says, most women will not admit to being raped. They will say they have seen others being raped. This is a conservative area. If you have been raped, you wouldn’t talk openly about it because you would be stigmatized for your entire life. The phenomenon is massively under-reported. Only after a long process of building trust through one-on-one counselling sessions might a rape survivor talk” (Greenwood, 2013).

Another kind of sexual violence that refugee women come across in camps is sexual abuse. They are mostly abused under the name of polygamy. Some Muslim men exploit the meaning of al-Nisa verse in Holy Koran<sup>2</sup> which allows men to marry up to four women to guarantee their safety and protection especially during war. However, in modern society, legal rights are for civil marriage which exists solely between a man and a woman. In this case, second, third or fourth wives which are called kuma have no legal protection as a wife and increases the vulnerability of women.

“Syria’s refugees: fears of abuse grow as Turkish men snap up wives. Increasing number of women who have fled conflict are opting to marry Turks, many as second, third or even fourth wives [...] Turkish human rights groups warn that polygamy, outlawed in Turkey almost a century ago but still practiced in conservative rural areas in south-eastern Anatolia, is on the rise. Second, third, or even fourth wives – called kuma in Turkish – lack legal protection and are especially vulnerable to abuse” (Letsch, 2014).

Syrian refugee women are not only abused, they are also sexually exploited by men. There are many reasons of sexual exploitation such as unequal power relations, vulnerability, and economic problems (UNHCR, 2003). Hence, in this flawed social structures that bear unequal power relations, while women are highlighted as vulnerable victims, men are stated

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<sup>2</sup> “Marry women of your choice, two, or three, or four; But if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one” (4:3, translated by Yusuf Ali, 2004, p. 184).

as perpetrators. “Syrian women in Jordan [are] at risk of sexual exploitation at refugee camps. Vulnerable young Syrian women are being sold into marriage, trafficked and exploited by predatory men, say aid workers” (Harper, 2014).

Sexual harassment is another form of violence that Syrian refugee women encounter, particularly widowed women, young girls or single women. They become more vulnerable and defenceless without a male partner. It is mostly in the form of unwanted verbal or physical sexual actions and demands for favours (UNHCR, 2003). If a refugee woman is head of the family, she may be exposed to harassment by aid workers for favours during food distribution, which also translates into harassment or inappropriate behaviours to women by men due to the access distance of public latrines.

“[...] even Abu Hussein, a local boss of Zaatari's brothel and bar district, has requested that UN officials launch patrols to control gangs of young men wreaking havoc in the camp and harassing women. Groping and lewd name-calling during food distributions and in the public latrines are common.” (Greenwood, 2013).

“Syria's female refugees [are] facing poverty, harassment and isolation. Women are the sole providers for one in four Syrian refugee families, struggling to provide food and shelter for their children and often facing harassment, humiliation and isolation, according to a report from the UNHCR (Sherwood, 2014).

Unfortunately one of the sexual violence aspects that vulnerable refugee women face is forced prostitution. It is in the form of forced sex trade in exchange for material resources and services (UNHCR, 2003). “[...] Syrian women and girls, some as young as 14 years old, are being 'sold' into forced marriages or prostitution after becoming refugees, aid workers and religious charities have said” (Sherlock and Malouf, 2013).

### **Findings - Physical Violence**

The number of refugee women are also a target of such violence, which includes physical assault, trafficking and domestic violence. Vulnerable refugee women may be forced or physically abused in camps for sexual activity in favour of some goods, money, service, protection, or refugee status.

“[...] More overt prostitution is also common among Syrian refugees said Wissam, a Jordanian resident who knows people involved in the trade: There is a woman who acts like an agent, bringing the girls from the camps. The normal cost for one hour with a Syrian girl is 50JD, but if she only recently lost her virginity then you pay 100JD. One French aid worker inside Zataari camp said a woman in the camp regularly offers girls to the camp's security guards [...] The Daily Telegraph followed Wissam as he posed as a client interested in marrying a girl: I want a cheap Syrian girl, said Wissam, with his phone on loudspeaker. In Zarqa we have married 16 for a dowry cost of 2000JD, came the reply. The men proceeded to bargain, with Wissam quoting lower figures than he said he had been offered in other camps. "Before the revolution it cost several times that sum to marry a Syrian girl. Now it has become the running joke in Jordan that if you are running low on cash or finding it hard to get

married, you should marry a Syrian girl," said Wissam. It has become a business transaction" (Sherlock & Malouf, 2013).

In the item, commodification of Syrian refugee women's and girls' bodies is emphasised by the words such as prostitution, trade (trafficking), cost for one hour, virginity, offering girls, cheap girl, dowry, running joke, business transaction. Trafficking in the refugee camps is not always involved with men sometimes it involves women who act as an agent. She brings the girls offered to a man who pays the money. Her lost chastity or not increases or lowers her cost. The words "cheap Syrian girls" indicates the vulnerability of girls and it is clear that women or girls become the real victims of conflict.

Domestic violence also occurs in camps, which keeps women subordinate to men (fathers, stepfathers, grandfathers, brothers and uncles as perpetrators) or other female member (mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law) of the family (UNHCR 2003). Within the unequal power relations females are the real victims of domestic violence. "[...] Dr Manal Tahtamouni [...] was among the first to open a women's clinic in Zaatari refugee camp. Of the 300 to 400 cases her clinics receive in a day, 100 are female victims of violence, mostly domestic" (Greenwood, 2013).

### **Findings - Emotional and Psychological Violence**

Emotional and psychological violence is a kind of non-physical violence that damages the dignity of female victims. Manipulative men victimise refugee women by lowering their self-esteem, self-respect, ability, self-confidence and self-sufficiency.

"[...] it was a big shock when an old Jordanian man came to my mother's tent asking for her hand. He said that he wanted to provide her with a better life and spare her humiliation. These Jordanians are really exploiting Syrian refugees' terrible circumstances.

An acquaintance in a nearby tent had an 18-year-old nephew, Omer, who worked in an embroidering workshop. She told him about our daughter, came to our tent and told us she wanted Rulla (13 years) for her nephew. Rulla blushed in astonishment. For me, it was hard to accept the idea. She was still a child, playing with kids in the camp. But the war, hunger, humiliation and fear forced me in the end to accept the offer. It was difficult to throw my daughter into a new life I do not know and she herself does not know either. Rulla knew nothing about marriage; I had to teach her every single thing" (Mahmood, 2014).

"[...] my husband is old and not well, and my sons are little boys [...] two sons and five daughters there is no one to protect us... The tents are too close to each other; young men would pass by and stare at our tent" (Mahmood, 2014).

As understood from the testimony of a Syrian refugee woman, she was faced with two problems; war and hunger from one side, and humiliation by men from the other. The old Jordanian man abused the mother by implying that they are weak, need a man to protect and provide a better life. She has no male support from neither from her husband nor sons. In this situation, the inability of her husband and humiliation from men in the camp forced her to make her daughters marry. The mother admits that her daughter Rulla is too young for marriage, but the risk of rape or kidnap seems a proper justification, why they made the daughter become a child bride, for the mother in these circumstances. Beyond the physical



consequences of these risks, the humiliation in the society, which might be caused by rape of the daughter and the inability of the mother to prevent it, lays a heavier burden on the shoulders of the mother.

In a similar manner, adult male figure is regarded as a protection and guarantee for women in refugee camps. Thus, marriage leads to the idea that male power might protect women as a humiliated and weak figure in the society from rape, sexual abuse or humiliation. For this reason child marriage is an inevitable reality in refugee camps.

### **Findings - Harmful Traditional Practices**

Some cultural and traditional practices reinforce the inferior situation of women such as early marriage, forced marriage, honour killing, dowry, temporary marriage and polygamy. Sometimes unexpected situations like conflict, war or turmoil may lead these practices to be a necessity to prevent women from rape, abuse, humiliation and trafficking. For example, forced marriage is an arranged marriage, which is decided between the family members of the girl and the boy/man. Mostly dowries are paid to the family of the girl and she has no other choice when she refuses, there could be violent and/or abusive consequences (UNHCR, 2003).

Forced marriage is one of the biggest problems that Syrian refugee females are facing. The Guardian, of 8th Sept, 2014, giving headline showing the awareness and summarizes the situation, “Britain to tackle big rise in Syrian refugee girls forced to marry. UNICEF figures show one in five girls, some under 10, forced to marry by parents to protect against sexual violence” (Watt & Wintour, 2014).

“[...] Maha, 13, said: "My father forced me to get married because he heard about a rape case nearby. He was scared the same would happen to my sister and me ... I would've liked to finish my studies, but I couldn't do that” (Anderson, 2014).

“Child marriage soars among Syrian refugees in Jordan. Yasmine, a 16-year-old Syrian refugee who lives in a camp in Jordan, told UNICEF she married a 24-year-old man nine months ago. She is five months pregnant. "When I was younger I was dreaming about being a fashion designer, but now I can't achieve that because of my situation,” she said (Anderson, 2014).

“Syrian mother's agony: why I made my teenage daughter become a child bride. Mothers explain why they pushed their girls into marrying older men to protect them from rape and kidnap. Most marriages in the Zaatari camp are for girls of 12, 13 or 14, but even 10-year-olds might get engaged if they are tall and developed” (Mahmood, 2014).

Many more stories could be heard about early marriage from the voices of Syrian refugees. One of the harmful traditional practices of early marriage is a common experience for Syrian girls. Parents force their daughters to marry a man that she has never seen before. Grooms are sometimes as old as girl's fathers or grandfathers. The only idea in the parents mind is marry off their daughter which makes them more vulnerable to abuse. Men, from outside or in the camp, exploit the situation. As “The imam, speaking on [...] the men come into the camp and [...] they are just buying girls” (Harper, 2014). The man is trying to buy a young girl as young as he can. This so-called marriage under the name of dowry results another kind of violence such as domestic violence.

Because of their age, child brides do not know how to behave toward their husband, kids or mother-in laws, and to maintain a household. They have only two choices, one of them is to bear it as long as they can, and the other one is to divorce. However, divorce is the last solution because it stated as shame of the girl and the family, so in most cases it does not seem a reasonable or possible solution. At the same time, early marriage has another undesired result for child brides. First of all they have to give up their education, desired jobs and dreams after marriage. Because of gender roles, she has to take of the household as a woman, look after the kids as a mother, and satisfy her husband as a wife.

“[...] Three days after the wedding, I went to see Dima in her new home to find out how she was.[...] she told me in broken words that she could not have any sleep in the same bed as a strange man. She pleaded with me to take her home and let her go back to school [...] Then my son-in-law came to tell me it was hard to put up with Dima's stubbornness and childlike demeanour. [...] Soon afterwards, Hassan came to me infuriated. He complained Dima was not obeying him and they were fighting all the time [...] after less than two months, Hassan dropped her at my house and said to me: "I have divorced your daughter, she can't be a wife for me anymore. I will look for another woman." [...] Dima refused to go back to school. She did not want to mingle with people any more. She was too bashful and ashamed to tell her friends she was divorced. She was broken and lost her avidity for reading. All she wants is to be left alone” (Mahmood, 2014).

Another harmful traditional practice dowry, which is for the guarantee of the bride's security, becomes payment for sex in reality. In this regard a certain number of Syrian refugee girls' bodies are commodified in terms of mut'a nikah. Although mut'a nikah as an allegedly quite limited practice confined to certain groups or sects is forbidden by (sunni) orthodox Islamic Law, it remains a sensitive area of Islamic debate and has historical roots pre-Islamic Arabic society (Esposito 2003). Men just exploit young girls in the name of mut'a. It is an agreement for marriage between a man and a woman for a period of time. During this contract period, man pays wage to woman in exchange for sexual relations. When the duration of contract finishes, woman is allowed to make another mut'a after forty-five-day waiting period which is called 'idda (Ruffle, 2011).

“[...] In Jordan, hundreds of Syrian females have been affected by an informal trade that has sprung up since the start of the war in Syria, where men use "agents" to source Syrian refugees to use for sex. Often this is done under the guise of "marriage": The 'dowry', which in Muslim society is traditionally paid by the groom as a guarantee of the bride's security has become a payment for sex. And the "marriage", is an affair that lasts only a few days or even hours. "We realised these were Mut'ah or 'pleasure marriages'," said Ziyad Hamad, whose charity, Kitab al Sunna, is one of the largest organisations working with Syrian refugees in Jordan. "It is a fake marriage; they use handwritten documents that are not registered by a Shiekh [religious leader]. Men travelled from Saudi Arabia and other countries to marry girls in the camps. They would pay rent for a home outside the camp and tell the women they would support them. Then they would have sex with them and divorce them one week later” (Sherlock & Malouf, 2013).

Honour killing is another form of harmful traditional practices. The reason of honour killing is that rape of a girl/woman is perceived to bring shame, dishonour upon her family.

Unfortunately, victims/survivors of sexual violence do not report such crimes due to fears of social isolation, re-victimization or being the victim of honour killing. Honour killing takes place when a girl/woman, is killed by her male relatives, generally a husband, father, brother or uncle, but sometimes a female relative (Bastick et al, 2007, p.129).

“[...] my daughters were a huge burden to me. I never thought I would think of them like that. I was so glad when they born. You can't imagine the fear of a mother when she looks at her daughter and thinks she might be raped at any moment. It is horrible to think if the rape story became known publicly, her uncles would kill her immediately. I felt like dying when I thought of that moment” (Mahmood, 2014).

Parents are mostly terrified of sexual violence against their daughters. For this reason, mother stated that her daughters are huge burden for her. She is afraid of honour killing of her uncles if the rape case occurs.

Polygamy or kuma at traditional meaning which girls/women illegally become second, third partner of men. It is one of the most common practices among Syrian refugees. For example, “[...] Hanan, 45, says her 23-year-old daughter will become the second wife of a 35-year-old Turk. He promised to do the house and his car in her name. She will be better off that way” (Letsch, 2014). “[...] Men are coming here to take young girls as second wives. It is under the pretext of being charitable, of helping us” (Sherlock & Malouf, 2013). As it is understood from the previous reports and news on polygamy, men from various countries are coming to take girls from the refugee camps. They are just abusing the vulnerable situation of young girls in pretext of being a good husband. They mostly offer dowry or promise a house to her or her parents.

As revealed from the headlines and items reported from The Guardian and The Daily Telegraph newspapers, refugee camps for Syrian refugee women are not always safe places for them to live. They are vulnerable to SGBV at camps. First of all, parents are afraid of their daughters or other female relatives being raped. That is the reason of forcing their daughters for marriage with a man that they have never seen. The idea is that power of a male partner would protect girls from being a victim of rape. She will be the property of one man that nobody could touch.

In a conservative society a rape victim is considered as dirty because of the patriarchal request on the pureness of women's bodies protected through governing their sexuality. The Muslim and other conservative societies pride themselves on the virginity of their women/girls as a source of honour/morality for their families and community (Zabeida, 2010, p.21). That is one of the reasons of early and forced marriage is so common among young Syrian refugee girls.

## **Conclusions**

News published in five daily major UK national newspapers (Guardian, Independent, Daily Telegraph, Times and Sun) referencing SGBV in Syrian refugee camps have been analysed to show how much they are sensitive and aware of the situation. Results show that only nine article news (The Independent has one, The Daily Telegraph has one, and The Guardian has seven) were about the SGBV in refugee camps.

According to nine press media coverage; the most common forms of SGBV at Syrian refugee camps are forced marriage, early marriage, dowry and polygamy. One of the reasons these things occur is that parents are afraid of their young daughters being raped or sexually abused at the camps, which brings shame to the family. So, parents force their daughters to marry in favour of dowry or protection. Among poor Syrian refugees, their daughters' bodies are the only properties they have. In this way, child brides become the victims of forced marriage, early marriage, pleasure marriage, domestic violence, polygamy, sexual abuse, and trafficking. It is not surprising that these women and young girls suffer from masculinity in patriarchal society. Their bodies became commodity in the hands of men in exchange of favour. Hence, the most frequently mentioned words related to refugee women discourses at refugee camps are, afraid, scare, victim/survivor, at risk, in danger, isolation, shame, weak, morality, honour, vulnerable, submission, femininity, passive, defenceless, dependent and alone.

In this regard, SGBV can be seen as facilitator of a vicious circle. For instance, economic motivation of dowry leads parent child marriages, and child bride who does not know how to take care of household or look after kids would be a victim of domestic violence or divorce. Moreover, end of education and lack of job opportunities of refugee girls create another form of abuse. In sum, results show that the attitude of the UK national print media coverage of SGBV against Syrian refugee women in refugee camps is limited. Gender and violence perspectives of the refugee dilemma are mostly ignored. Reports mainly focus on refugees' displacement, resettlement, vulnerability, and their numbers in these camps.

As regards 'Limitations and Future Research', there is no data collection or reports to prove how many refugee women have been suffered from violation in Syrian refugee camp (UNHCR, 1991, 2008; FIDH, 2012). Therefore, it was difficult to compare the media coverage with virtual SGBV cases in camps. Also, the sample consisted this study is confined to U.K national print media. Further research is recommended to discover why media coverage is so limited and why they do not pay enough attention to SGBV in camps.

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