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Crisis within crisis

The psychosocial toll of Lebanon's economic and political turmoil on Syrian refugee adolescents

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Abstract

Syrian refugee adolescents in crisis-stricken Lebanon are facing growing challenges to their overall well-being, including their psychosocial well-being. With almost all the Syrian population in Lebanon sinking into severe poverty, the country's compound crisis is taking a heavy toll on the mental health and psychosocial well-being of ever more vulnerable Syrian refugees. Isolation and mental health problems have been increasing among Syrian refugees, particularly adolescents and young people, as a direct result of the pressures caused by the economic crisis. Stigma surrounding mental health and lack of access to support services threatens the psychosocial well-being of all adolescents, but especially married girls.

Major insecurity and hyperinflation, within a turbulent political and socioeconomic environment, is negatively impacting refugee adolescents' movement in the community and their overall psychosocial well-being. Adolescents, and especially girls – who already experienced restrictions on their movement and limited access to public spaces and peer support even before the crisis – are now even more isolated. Married girls are increasingly bearing the weight of the deepening vulnerability of their households and are taking on more responsibilities at home. Their highly restricted mobility and limited access to social support is becoming even worse. Levels of household stress and domestic violence are increasing and becoming almost universal among married girls, but also among boys, including those who are married.

This report explores the impacts of this compound crisis on Syrian refugee adolescents' psychosocial well-being and their opportunities to exercise voice and agency in their family and community. Drawing on a capabilities approach, the report presents findings from participatory research undertaken with 30 Syrian refugee adolescent girls and boys in Lebanon between 2019 and 2022. It explores gendered differences in voice and agency, and psychosocial well-being, by focusing on adolescents' lived experiences amid the turbulent and deteriorating socioeconomic and political environment. It concludes with recommendations for policy and programming so that refugee adolescents can be supported to reach their full capabilities.

Introduction

The economic crisis in Lebanon, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic since 2020, has had a huge impact on the lives of children and adolescents across all communities but especially the already struggling Syrian refugee community. The increasing vulnerability of Syrian households means they cannot afford basics such as food, education and health. As a result, families are forced to resort to negative coping strategies – including pulling children out of school and sending boys to work to support their struggling family. Child labour and the deteriorating socioeconomic and political environment in Lebanon have put adolescents at increased risk, whether from child marriage, exposure to violence or mental health problems.

These rising levels of mental distress and mental health challenges are making it increasingly difficult for all Syrian refugees, but particularly girls and young mothers, to cope on a daily basis. Growing levels of stress, isolation and trauma have led to an increase in mental health disorders – including depression, anxiety and aggressive behaviours – among both Syrian refugee and Lebanese host communities. In 2021, it was estimated that 1 in 4 adolescents in Lebanon (from host and refugee communities) suffered from a psychiatric disorder, with a striking 94% of those who were suffering mental illness not receiving any treatment. Likewise, 1 in 4 adolescents and young people (aged 15–24) were experiencing depression and reported a deterioration in their quality of life. Among Syrian adolescents and young people, 36% are suffering from frequent depression symptoms and 70% reported that their life had worsened over the past year, with 56% expecting it to worsen even more over the next year. Feelings of worry and anxiety are also rampant.

Among Syrian adolescents, around 72% are experiencing stress and anxiety, with higher rates among girls than boys (Government of Lebanon and United Nations, 2022; UNICEF, 2022). Alarmingly, around 87% of Syrian adolescents have not been accessing any psychosocial support activities. It is worth noting that mental health challenges and issues are under-reported due to the social stigma and sensitivity surrounding them (Inter-Agency Coordination, 2022).

This report explores the impact of the compound economic, political and Covid-19 crises on Syrian refugee adolescents' psychosocial well-being and their ability to exercise voice and agency in their family and community. Framed within the capabilities conceptual framework of the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) longitudinal study, and drawing on group and individual interviews with 30 Syrian adolescent girls and boys in Lebanon between 2019 and 2022, we explore gendered differences in voice and agency, and psychosocial well-being, by focusing on adolescents' lived experiences amid the turbulent and deteriorating socioeconomic and political environment.

The report is structured as follows: after discussing the background to the current compound crisis, and the emerging literature on its psychosocial toll on young people, we describe our research methodology and conceptual framework. We then discuss our findings, beginning with the effects of the compound crisis on the psychosocial well-being of adolescent girls and boys, including their emotional resilience, access to support from trusted adults and peers, and access to psychosocial services. We then explore the effects of the crisis on their ability to exercise voice and agency in their family and community. We conclude by discussing the implications of our findings for policy and programming.

Background

Syrian refugees' status in Lebanon

Lebanon hosts the highest number of refugees per capita, including around 1.5 million Syrian refugees (Lebanese government estimate), more than 200,000 Palestinian refugees (including around 180,000 Palestine refugees in Lebanon (PRL) and more than 29,000 Palestine refugees from Syria (PRS)), as well as an estimated 13,715 refugees of other nationalities. As of March 2022, 839,086 Syrian refugees had been registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Lebanon.[1] Yet Lebanon has not ratified the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Under Lebanese law, refugees are considered '*foreigners*'; they have no special legal status and no civil, political or economic rights (UNHCR, 2022; Government of Lebanon and United Nations, 2022). United Nations (UN) agencies are the main service providers for refugees in Lebanon. Syrian refugees fall under the mandate of UNHCR. Lebanon's complex socio-political history is discussed in more detail in Box 1.

Lebanon's economic crisis

Lebanon's acute economic crisis is a direct result of the corruption of its power-sharing political elite and their lack of interest in reforms for development. Between 2019 and 2021, Lebanon's gross domestic product (GDP) contracted by more than 58%, and is expected to decline even further as the crisis continues. Its currency has depreciated by 219% year-on-year, losing 90% of its value since the beginning of the crisis. Soaring inflation had reached 200% by November 2021, making it the third highest rate globally. Food inflation peaked at 441%, making it very difficult for struggling families to afford to eat. Even well before the crisis, Lebanon was one of the world's most unequal countries. The crisis has weighed heavily on vulnerable groups, driving them into extreme poverty or even destitution, even pushing middle-class households into poverty (World Bank, 2022).

Poverty levels are increasing dramatically among host and refugee communities alike. Lebanon's economic crisis, exacerbated by the impacts of Covid-19 and the Beirut

[1] In May 2015, UNHCR's registration of Syrian refugees was suspended based on a decision by the Lebanese government because the country had already absorbed a very significant number of asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2022).

Box 1: Lebanon's complex socio-political history

Lebanon's recent history is marked by instability, largely due to sectarian and ethnic cleavages and conflicts. The 15-year civil war (1975–1990) was driven by the state's inability to address mounting class, sectarian and regional inequalities. Muslim communities suffered most from poverty and supported the Palestinian militias in Lebanon. Christian communities, wary of the surge of militarisation among Palestinians, perceived it as a threat to the Lebanese state. Furthermore, the Syrian state became involved in the war and fought alongside different factions. The peace settlement (Ta'if Accord) that ended the war established power-sharing between the Muslim and Christian communities (Traboulsi, 2012). However, Syrian troops only left Lebanon in 2005 following nationwide protests demanding an end to their presence. These protests were ignited by the assassination of the then Lebanese prime minister, which was blamed on the Syrian regime.

Since the end of the civil war, Lebanon has been struggling with internal socio-political conflicts, wars with Israel, and a continually deteriorating economy. Syria's own civil war, which prompted a massive influx of refugees into Lebanon, has exacerbated the country's socioeconomic instabilities. The worsening situation led to anti-government protests in October 2019, which marked a rapid acceleration of the economic crisis, fuelled by Covid-19 lockdowns in 2020. The year 2019 also saw a government crackdown on refugees, especially those from Syria. In July 2019, the Ministry of Labour announced that all foreigners working in the country would need to apply for a work permit. There was then a crackdown on illegal foreign workers (including refugees) and the businesses employing them.

port blast, has resulted in a situation where 9 out of 10 Syrian refugees live in extreme poverty (UNHCR, 2022). Yet only 3 out of 10 households reported receiving some form of social assistance in 2021 (UNICEF, 2021), even though assistance is the main source of income for Syrian refugees in Lebanon (UNICEF et al., 2021). Widespread poverty is pushing many families to use harmful coping mechanisms to survive, which often puts children and adolescents at high risk of exploitation and abuse.

Demographics of the Syrian population

The Syrian population in Lebanon is young; around 51% are under 18 years (UNICEF et al., 2021). All Syrian refugees over the age of 15 are required to obtain a temporary residence permit, which continues to be one of the major hardships facing refugees. The number of Syrian refugees who hold a valid residence permit has been declining, especially following the current crisis, as refugees are often unable to pay the renewal fees or are not formally registered with UNHCR (as is the case with those who arrived after 2015). Lack of a permit hinders refugees' access to basic services, including education and civil documentation (for marriage and birth documentation, for example), and limits their mobility, putting them at increased risk of eviction, arrest, detention or deportation (UNHCR, 2022; Access Center for Human Rights, 2022). In 2021, only 16% of registered Syrian refugees (aged 15 and above) had a legal residence permit compared to 27% and 22% in 2018 and 2019 respectively. Most of those who hold a residence permit are middle-aged men, with lower rates among women and young people. Across all age groups, males are more likely to hold a permit (19%) than females (14%), with the exception of adolescents aged 15–19, among whom rates are almost the same (13% for females, 12% for males) (UNICEF et al., 2021). The lack of access to legal papers has a profound impact on Syrian refugee adolescents and young people, as it impacts all aspects of their lives, but particularly their access to community and peer support networks, which adversely impacts their psychosocial well-being.

Most Syrian refugees live among the Lebanese community, as the state prohibits formal refugee camps.[2] Most live in residential housing (69%) but a significant proportion of households (22%) live in informal tented settlements. Most Syrian refugees in Lebanon (57%) live in below-standard shelters that are overcrowded and prone to collapse. In 2021, families living in informal tented settlements saw their rental costs increase by 43%, pushing many into debt or facing eviction. More than 9 out of 10 Syrian refugee households are in debt; the main reasons cited for borrowing include food (93%) and rent (49%) (ibid.).

Work opportunities and employment

Syrian refugees in Lebanon are only permitted to work in three sectors (agriculture, construction and cleaning). Work opportunities for Syrian women and young people

[2] The Lebanese authorities refused to build formal camps for Syrian refugees for fear that this may lead to permanent settlement, as is the case with the large numbers of Palestinian refugees who have been living in camps in Lebanon since the 1948 Palestine–Israeli war.

are very limited. The employment-to-population ratio[3] among Syrian refugees is around 33% (59% for men, 9% for women), while for young people (aged 18–24) it is slightly lower, at 30% (57% for men, 8% for women). Unemployment among Syrians aged 18 and above is 30%, with 1 in 5 men unemployed, compared to 2 in 5 women. Just over a third (34%) of young people are unemployed (30% for males, 51% for females). The labour force participation rate[4] is 47% (45% for young people aged 18–24), with a significant gender gap: 16% for women versus 81% for men (UNICEF et al., 2021).

Young Syrians, especially women, are becoming increasingly marginalised and deprived of opportunities to learn and work. In 2021, two-thirds (67%) of young Syrians aged 15–24 were classed as not in education, employment or training (NEET), with a striking gender gap: 80% for females, 52% for males. However, this gender gap rises dramatically with age: whereas 69% of girls and boys aged 15–18 were NEET, this rose to 87% among young women aged 19–24, compared to 38% among young men (ibid.).

Young Syrian refugees mostly work in agriculture (30%), construction (17%) and the service sector (16%)[5], though economic activity continues to decline. For example, agriculture employed 32% of working Syrians (aged 18 and above) in 2020, but only 27% in 2021. Employment in construction also fell from 24% in 2020 to 19% in 2021. Most Syrian women are employed in agriculture (46% compared to 25% of men) while 22% of men work in construction (there are no women working in that sector) (ibid.)

The impacts of the deteriorating situation

Insecurity and instability are deepening in Lebanon as a result of the failing economy and state institutions, further jeopardising public safety. The state's armed forces have been incapable of policing the streets, especially in peripheral and disadvantaged areas. As a result, there has been a sharp rise in crime rates – robberies and murders increased by 57.4% and 91% respectively in 2020 compared to 2019 (The Monthly Magazine, 2021). The emergence of local militias has also seen rising tensions between communities, leading to armed clashes, and many citizens have obtained weapons so that they can protect their family and property. The deteriorating security situation has aggravated the challenges facing adolescents and young people, restricting their mobility even further.

The increasing levels of deprivation, insecurity, violence and exploitation have had a substantial impact on the mental health and psychosocial well-being of adolescents and young people. In 2021, around a quarter of Syrian adult refugees reported experiencing psychological distress. Adolescents (and particularly girls) are most exposed to mental health risks, and rates of depression among young Syrian mothers have been increasing. Lack of access to basic needs such as menstrual hygiene pads (which many cannot afford) also affects girls' and women's mental health. Around 76% of girls and women in Lebanon (from host and refugee communities alike) reported difficulty accessing menstrual hygiene products, and 43% were experiencing stress and anxiety as a result. Furthermore, girls and women increasingly report feeling unsafe in their own home. In 2020, there was a 35% increase in the percentage of survivors seeking services from organisations compared to the previous year (Government of Lebanon and United Nations, 2022; Inter-Agency Coordination, 2022; UNICEF et al., 2021).

Adolescents and young people are increasingly resorting to harmful coping strategies. Reports of self-harm, suicide attempts and suicides have been on the rise, along with a rapid deterioration in private and public services and infrastructure, including health services (Government of Lebanon and United Nations, 2022). Levels of substance abuse and gender-based violence are also increasing (UNICEF, 2022). In 2021, telephone calls to the Embrace Lifeline, a national support and suicide prevention helpline, doubled compared to 2020 (Inter-Agency Coordination, 2022). These combined challenges are impacting intra-family relationships and access to community support for adolescents and young people (Government of Lebanon and United Nations, 2022).

Impacts of the crisis on education, child marriage, and voice and agency

Increasing levels of poverty mean that Syrian children are missing out on education and learning, which undermines their psychosocial well-being. A survey conducted by UNICEF between April and October 2021 found that 74% of Syrian households were reducing spending on their

[3] Employment-to-population ratio is the proportion of the working-age (18 years old and over) population that is employed.
[4] Labour force participation rate is the sum of employed population and unemployed population, divided by the total population aged 18 and over.
[5] Note that while working in cleaning is permitted, work in the service sector more broadly is not.

children's education, and 69% of Syrian adolescents and young people (aged 15–24) had dropped out of education (UNICEF, 2021). In 2021, 5.5% of children aged 5–17 were reported to be engaged in child labour (up from 2.5% in 2019), although figures are likely to be under-reported. There are higher rates among boys (8%) compared to girls (2%), with the highest rate among older adolescents aged 15–17 (Government of Lebanon and United Nations, 2022; UNICEF et al., 2021).

Although early marriage remains a major risk for Syrian adolescent girls, the rate among girls aged 15–19 has decreased, from 27% in 2019 to 20% in 2021. This could be partly explained by the fact that the Sunni Personal Status Courts raised the minimum age of marriage to 18 in April 2021 (most Syrian refugees in Lebanon are Sunni).[6] Nonetheless, despite this decrease, the risk of child marriage has increased due to households' greater vulnerability and decreased access to education. Furthermore, early marriage within the Syrian community is often seen as a protective option, driven by parental concerns around sexual and gender-based violence. Adolescent girls themselves often perceive marriage as a source of protection, generally identifying it as their own choice and seeing it as something very positive. Conversely, only 1% of boys aged 15–19 reported being married (Government of Lebanon and United Nations, 2022; UNICEF et al., 2021; Youssef, 2021).

The combined impacts of the compound crisis, reduced capacities of public institutions, growing violence, and barriers to accessing services have overstretched community support networks. They have also reduced the ability of people of all ages – in host and refugee communities alike – to have a say in decisions that affect their lives (Government of Lebanon and United Nations, 2022). Syrian adolescents and young people who already had limited involvement in decision-making and almost no avenues for civic and political participation in Lebanon are becoming increasingly isolated, and face more risks at both the community and state levels (Youssef, 2020).

Sexual exploitation and abuse (especially of girls and women), including forced prostitution, has also increased. Cases of sexual exploitation were reported to have doubled in the first half of 2021 compared to 2020. However, it is also worth noting that sexual harassment and exploitation are typically under-reported within the Syrian community. Marital violence and violent discipline of children are also reported to be increasing (Government of Lebanon and United Nations, 2022; Inter-Agency Coordination, 2022).

Lebanon's fragmented and weak support services

Lebanon's mental health services are characterised by weak referral systems and lack of availability and accessibility, especially for vulnerable populations. Most services are concentrated in the expensive private sector. In 2015, Lebanon launched its National Mental Health strategy, which identifies refugee populations as one of the most vulnerable groups. However, the strategy does not include an emergency plan for mental health. Mental health and psychosocial support for refugees are integrated in programming provided by international and national organisations. The Lebanese government has not grasped a leadership role or engaged in effective coordination and implementation of programmes and services, leaving non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to fill the gap. Most programmes offer non-specialist support and community/family support, with specialist services particularly thinly spread. Lack of funding is the main challenge. The result is that refugees' basic needs (for food, shelter and healthcare) and their needs for mental health and psychosocial support are unmet (Youssef, 2021).

Furthermore, the mental health needs of refugees in Lebanon have not been assessed thoroughly. Refugees face many challenges in accessing mental health and psychosocial support services, including limited mobility, lack of residence permits, lack of information, and inability to afford transport costs. And although most services are free of charge, some organisations require a token fee, which, although low, would still be prohibitive for most refugees. Activities provided under the guise of '*psychosocial support*' often lack rigour and assessment. Organisations tend to work with refugees they can access easily rather than those who may have the greatest need but may be harder to reach. Programming and services that target adolescents are particularly lacking. Adolescents are often subsumed under '*children and women*' as a vulnerable category that requires specific attention; however, adolescents' age- and gender-specific

[6] In Lebanon, 18 different religious sects are officially recognised by law, including 12 Christian, 4 Muslim, 1 Druze and 1 Jewish sect. Religious communities are granted the legal autonomy to regulate their communal rights, including family law. There are 15 separate family laws in Lebanon, which are administered by religious courts.

needs are rarely addressed. Some studies partially refer to the factors affecting refugee adolescents' well-being but overlook the implications for young people's aspirations and choices (ibid.).

The growing protection and support needs among all communities due to the compound crisis has overstretched Lebanon's already weak and fragmented mental health and psychosocial support services, further constraining access to quality support (Inter-Agency Coordination, 2022). Syrian girls in particular lack access to psychosocial support networks and services, mainly due to patriarchal gender norms that limit girls' mobility.

Increasing legal and policy restrictions

Poor social cohesion between the different communities and religious sects in Lebanon is exacerbated by the economic crisis and discriminatory policies against some groups, particularly Syrian refugees. The Lebanese government is keen to encourage Syrian refugees to return to Syria. Its General Policy for the Return of Displaced Persons to Syria, launched in 2020, was accompanied by mass arbitrary deportations, with hate speech by politicians and political parties further promoting tensions. Lebanese authorities are continuing to implement policies for arbitrary eviction, destruction of Syrian refugee settlements, and restricting renewal of residence permits. Syrian refugees are increasingly subject to harassment and arbitrary arrest (Access Center for Human Rights, 2022; Freedom House, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Syrian refugees – particularly adolescent boys and young men – increasingly experience discrimination and violent attacks, which undermine their psychosocial well-being. Hostility is mainly driven by host community perceptions that Syrians represent competition for jobs and services, especially in deprived areas (Youssef, 2020), and by scapegoating of Syrian refugees during the crisis for political purposes. Stricter curfew measures further limit their free movement and increase their risk of harassment by local authorities (Access Center for Human Rights, 2022; Freedom House, 2022). As a result, boys tend to avoid public spaces – especially those where large groups gather – because of their high vulnerability to violence arising from hostility among host communities. Many Syrian boys and young men do not feel safe in public spaces unless accompanied by women (reversing traditional gender roles), who are perceived as less of a threat. This situation affects adolescents' and young men's psychosocial well-being, as well as their ability to sustain relationships and access work opportunities (Youssef, 2020).

The deteriorating situation in Lebanon has been pushing more Syrian refugees (especially males) to migrate to seek better living conditions outside Lebanon (Access Center for Human Rights, 2022). In 2020, a UNICEF survey showed that 58% of adolescents and young people (aged 15–24) from host and refugee communities believed they would not be able to find a job in Lebanon, with 41% believing their only chance was to seek opportunities abroad (UNICEF, 2022). And as the crisis deepens, refugees in Lebanon are at much greater risk of exploitative work conditions, sex trafficking and child labour – risks already facing many young Syrian refugees (Freedom House, 2022).

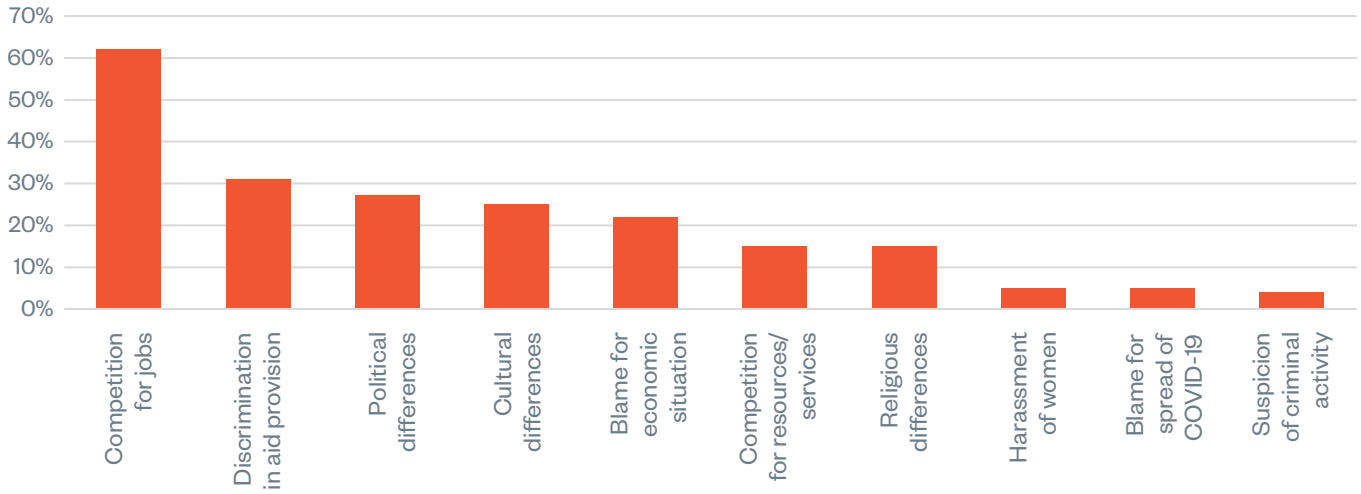
Growing inter-communal tensions

Although most Syrians classify their relationship with Lebanese people as either positive or neutral, inter-community relations between host and Syrian refugee communities have plummeted since the compound crisis, with 36% of Syrian refugees reporting negative inter-community relations in 2021 compared to 21% in 2018. Tensions are increasingly linked to political and socioeconomic turbulence. The most commonly cited factors behind inter-community tensions include: competition for jobs (62%); perceived or real discrimination in provision of humanitarian assistance (31%); political differences (27%); cultural differences (25%); and scapegoating for the economic crisis (22%). Competition over services and resources has been increasingly cited over the past couple of years as a driver of inter-community tensions (Government of Lebanon and United Nations, 2022; UNICEF et al., 2021) (see Figure 1).

Limitations on adolescents' voice and agency

The challenges caused by the compound crisis in Lebanon – not least the rise in insecurity and increased harassment of Syrian refugees – have had varied impacts on adolescent girls and boys. Adolescents faced many cultural restrictions on their freedoms, choices and agency even before the crisis, but these restrictions have intensified, especially for boys. Syrian girls, who already had little control over their choices, voice and mobility, are losing the very few opportunities they had to do any activities outside their home. The Syrian community is strongly patriarchal and based on seniority, which significantly limits adolescents' and young people's ability to make

Figure 1: Key factors driving tensions between Syrian refugees and host communities



Source: UNICEF et al., 2021.

decisions about matters that affect them, whether in their family or community. Key life choices – about education, work and marriage, for example – are a family matter, especially where young girls are concerned. Parental control is pervasive in Syrian culture, which continues as adolescents transition into adulthood. Adults typically use authoritative communication styles with adolescents and young people.

Violent discipline of children (physical and psychological) is normalised and almost universal among Syrian refugee families; more than half of Syrian children under 14 reported experiencing at least one form of violence from their parents (UNICEF et al., 2021). As families struggle to cope, violence against children appears to be increasing. In 2020, 50% of Syrian children aged up to 14 years were subject to at least one form of violent discipline from their parents; by 2021, the rate had risen to 56%, with no significant difference by gender or age (ibid.).

Syrian adolescents and young people in Lebanon lack autonomy (including financial autonomy) and decision-making opportunities, as important life decisions are generally made by older males, husbands and (in some cases) older females in the family. Syrian adolescents and young people also lack avenues for civic and political participation in Lebanon, and do not have the right to form associations. Lack of legal papers (both residency permits and identity documents) remains a major challenge for adolescents and young people to have free movement and to exercise choice in their lives. Only private schools and universities offer school-based clubs, civic and sports activities, which are unaffordable for most Syrian refugee households (Youssef, 2020).

Child marriage, including forced marriage, continues to be a harmful element of Syrian culture. Married Syrian girls and young mothers are even less likely than their unmarried counterparts to exercise agency and autonomy in their household or community. Upon marriage, girls move from their family controlling their freedoms, choices and agency, to control by their husband and in-laws, who often exercise even stricter control in key areas such as household expenditure, access to a mobile phone, when to have children, and family size. Married Syrian girls have little if any access to activities outside the house – except girls living in informal tented settlements, who work in the fields alongside caregivers or relatives.

The next section describes how the GAGE conceptual framework helps us to explore the different dimensions of support that adolescent girls and boys need to develop their full capabilities. For the purposes of this report, we focus on two of those capabilities: voice and agency, and psychosocial well-being.

GAGE conceptual framework

GAGE's conceptual framework takes a holistic approach based on the interconnectedness of '*the 3 Cs*' – capabilities, change strategies and contexts – to understand what works to support adolescents' development and empowerment, both now and in the future (see figures 2 and 3). This framing draws on the three components of Pawson and Tilley's (1997) approach to evaluation, which highlights the importance of outcomes, causal mechanisms and contexts. We tailor that approach to the specific challenges of understanding what works to improve adolescent girls' and boys' capabilities and how they can develop to their full potential.

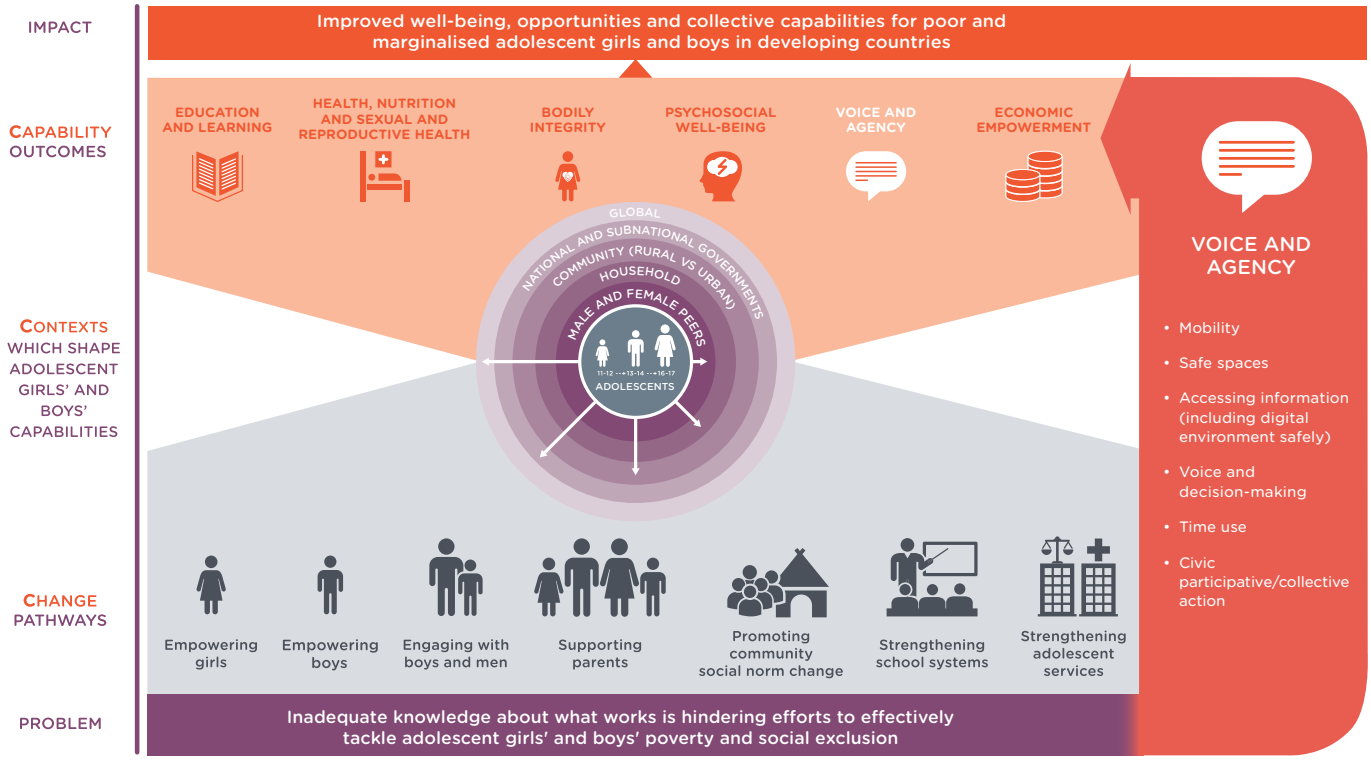
The first building block of our conceptual framework is capability outcomes. Championed originally by Amartya Sen (1984, 2004), and nuanced to better capture complex gender dynamics at intra-household and societal levels by Martha Nussbaum (2011) and Naila Kabeer (2003), the capabilities approach has evolved as a broad normative framework that explores the assets (economic, human, political, emotional and social) needed to expand an individual's capacity to achieve valued ways of '*doing and being*'. Importantly, the approach can encompass relevant investments in the lives of girls and boys with diverse trajectories, including those who are '*hardest to reach*'.

The second building block in our conceptual framework is context. This recognises that adolescent girls' and boys' capability outcomes are highly dependent on their family, household, community, state and global contexts.

The third and final building block acknowledges that girls' and boys' contextual realities can be mediated by a range of change strategies, including: empowering individual adolescents; supporting parents; engaging with men and boys; sensitising community leaders; enhancing adolescent-responsive services; and addressing system-level deficits.

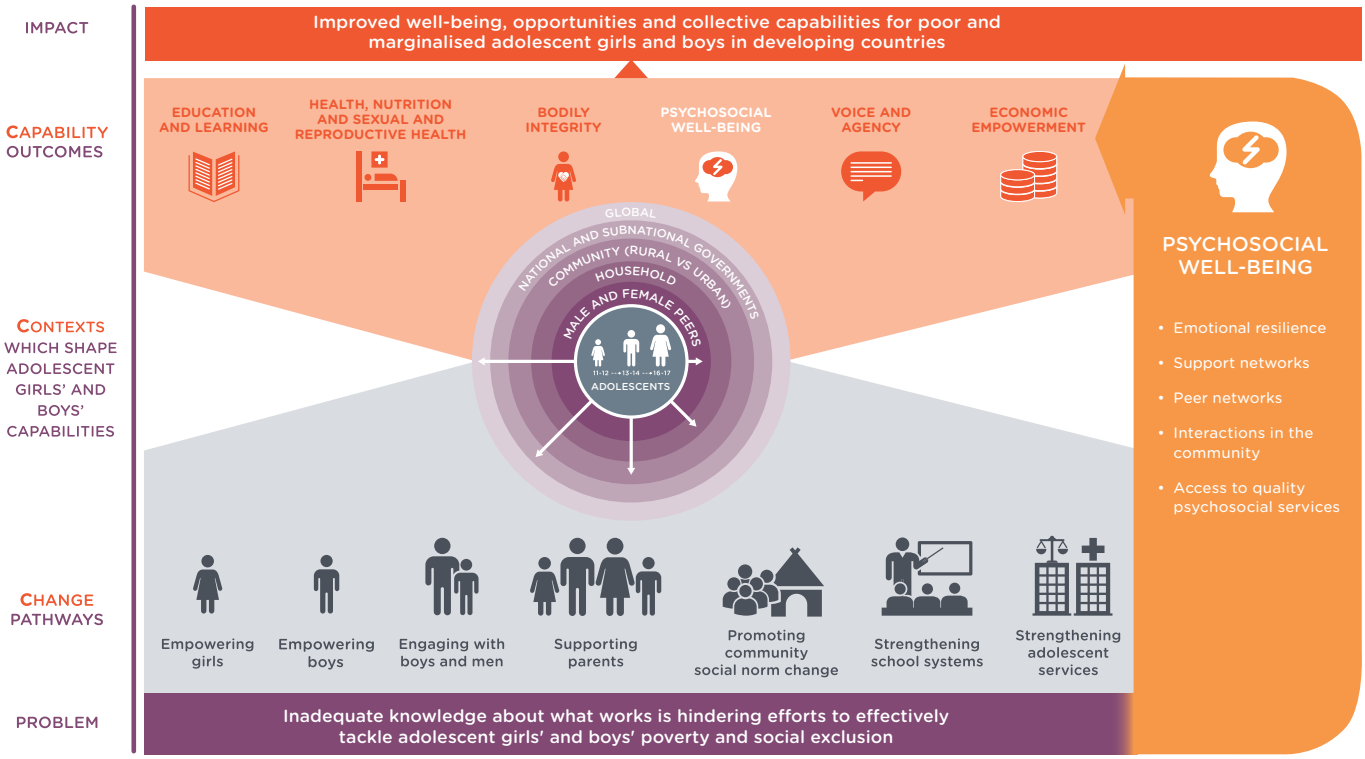
GAGE explores six key capability domains: education and learning; health, nutrition, and sexual and reproductive health; bodily integrity and freedom from violence; psychosocial well-being; voice and agency; and economic empowerment. In this report, we focus on two: voice and agency, and psychosocial well-being (see figure 2 and 3). The voice and agency domain looks at

Figure 2: GAGE conceptual framework – voice and agency



Source: GAGE consortium, 2019.

Figure 3: GAGE conceptual framework – psychosocial well-being



Source: GAGE consortium, 2019.

adolescents' mobility and access to safe spaces, access to age-appropriate information and digital technology, opportunities for voice and decision-making within the family and community, and civic engagement. The psychosocial well-being domain looks at adolescents' resilience and emotional intelligence, access to emotional support from adults and social support from peers, and access to quality psychosocial support services. (For a detailed overview of GAGE's conceptual framework, see GAGE consortium, 2019.)

Research methodology

This report draws on longitudinal participatory research by GAGE with older adolescents and young people (aged 15–21 years). The overall sample includes more than 100 older adolescent boys and girls from vulnerable Lebanese communities and Syrian and Palestinian refugees. It includes the most vulnerable groups, such as out-of-school adolescents (or those at risk of dropping out), working adolescents, married adolescents (or those at risk of early marriage), and adolescents involved with or at risk of joining the armed forces.

In this report we focus in on the experiences of 30 Syrian refugee adolescent boys and girls living in Baalbek city (a heavily weaponised area): 10 married Syrian girls and young mothers living in informal tented settlements who come from Raqqa in Syria; 10 married Syrian girls and young mothers (7 from Aleppo and 3 from Damascus region); and 10 Syrian boys (3 of them married, from Aleppo) living in collective shelters.

Research tools included 12 focus group discussions (FGDs) and three rounds of individual in-depth interviews (IDIs) that started in July 2019, including two FGDs and one IDI round conducted at the beginning of the pandemic (between March and June 2020) and following the crisis (up to April 2022). There were also interactive activities such as participatory photography, intergenerational trios (interviews with adolescents' parents and grandparents) and peer-to-peer research.

Findings

Syrian adolescents and young people in Lebanon – who had already been living in precarious conditions and under multitude pressures even prior to the compound crisis – have experienced a range of intersecting challenges related to exposure to war, displacement, loss of education, child labour and early marriage. Living in overcrowded informal tented settlements or collective shelters, facing financial pressures, and experiencing discrimination from the Lebanese community and authorities have strongly impacted Syrian adolescents' ability to lead a healthy life. Married adolescent girls, who lack mobility and agency, are very isolated and take on overwhelming domestic and child-rearing responsibilities from an early age. The compound crisis has added more challenges to Syrian adolescents' lives, and negatively impacted their overall well-being, including their mental health and psychosocial well-being. The deteriorating socioeconomic situation and increased insecurity have led to more constraints on adolescents' mobility and agency.

Life in displacement and its implications on adolescents' overall well-being, including their mental health

Challenging living conditions

As already noted, many Syrian adolescents live with their families in poverty, in makeshift and overcrowded shelters that offer little protection against the severe winter conditions of the Baalbek region, where temperatures often fall below zero. A 20-year-old Syrian young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained, '*It is scary during storms and wind… The wind can blow away your tent…*' The tents are built on agricultural land, which gets very muddy in winter. A 19-year-old Syrian young mother said:

> *The mud is the worst thing in our life… If you want to go to the bathroom, you will be full of mud. If your children go out, they will be muddy and the house will get dirty… You keep cleaning the house from the mud all the time… It makes you hate your life.*

Married girls living in informal tented settlements also lack privacy, either due to sharing a tent with in-laws or due to the proximity of other tents. This can put severe strain on marital relationships. An 18-year-old Syrian young mother explained:

> *If you want to talk with your husband, you whisper to him so that your neighbour does not listen to you or your in-laws… You cannot even laugh at home… It is as if the whole camp lives in a single tent.*

These harsh conditions limits most married girls' ambitions to live in a house with better conditions. A 17-year-old married Syrian girl explained:

> *My only dream in life is to have my own house. A house where I can live comfortably without the dust and the mud. And I can have furniture, a bed and a closet is the most I want… In my house, I can dress the way I want inside, and I can do whatever I want without the whole camp knowing… I want to wake up the time I want, instead of waking up every day on my neighbours' children's noise while playing in the early morning.*

Collective shelters consist of old, unfinished apartment buildings or non-residential spaces that lack appropriate infrastructure. An 18-year-old Syrian young mother explained:

> *I live in an underground room in my building that was initially made for storage. I do not have windows and I do not see the sun in my house… I spend all my time in a gloomy house and it is depressing.*

These shelters often house extended families, making them very overcrowded. Financial pressures on households often prevent married boys and young men setting up house separately, so they live with their wife and family, completely lacking privacy and independence. Married Syrian girls also lack privacy at home, as most share their house with their in-laws. An 18-year-old Syrian young mother explained:

> *I do not feel I live in my own house… My in-laws make sure to remind me that I live with them and the house is theirs… My father-in-law always tells me that even my bedroom is not mine and that he bought it, not my husband… My mother-in-law interferes in everything, she even enters my bedroom and sleeps on the bed next to my husband while we are in bed… The problem is you do not have privacy, either in your parents' or your husband's house.*

Photo 1: Photo story by Shourouk, a 19-year-old Syrian young mother living in a tented settlement in Baalbek city

Shourouk says: 'Living in bad conditions is a type of psychological violence. When we see nice houses and neighbourhoods, we start comparing it to our crumbling tents and thinking about all the things we need at home. Our tents lack a lot of material and no matter how much we try to fix them, they still collapse. Not being able to have a decent house is violence because it is unfair. It makes us feel sad and suffocating. Our tents are crumbling and we do not have the money to fix them. In the winter, many tents fall apart. Living in tents that lack everything is depressing and no one is helping us to get better material and fix our houses.'

Under such crowded conditions, tensions between married girls and their in-laws can often erupt, in some cases leading to violence. A 17-year-old Syrian young mother reported that:

> *I had a fight with my sisters-in-law and we beat each other and pulled each other's hair. One of them is always jealous of me and interfering in everything... She started the shouting and the hitting and I could not stay silent and not defend myself.*

Increasing housing challenges following the crisis

The rising cost of living has caused many challenges for adolescents and their families, who cannot now afford rent and other basic amenities. This has made it even more difficult to secure decent accommodation. An 18-year-old Syrian young mother explained:

> *My husband's wage is still the same and the rent is now priced in US dollars while our husbands are paid in Lebanese liras... We live now in old and disgusting houses that are too expensive as well.*

An 18-year-old Syrian young man confirmed that:

> *The problem is all in the US dollar. They are all raising the rents... We pay most of our money and in the end I am still living in a house that leaks and floods with water in the winter!*

Rising rents have pushed many households into debt. A 19-year-old Syrian young mother explained that:

> *In this crisis, our husbands stay at home most of the days because they cannot find work. Even if they work for a few days, the money is not enough to pay the rent. We do not have money enough for anything. We are borrowing money each month for the rent and our husbands pay it back when they work.*

Similarly, married girls in informal tented settlements highlighted the increased stress they feel due to rising rents and fear of eviction. As a 21-year-old Syrian young mother explained:

> *The landowner increased the rent... and it has added to our problems... He always threatens us that if we do not pay, he will remove the camp and replace us with other residents... Our psyche remains stressed and unstable.*

As a result of rising rents, some adolescents in collective shelters are moving to smaller, cheaper houses, making overcrowded conditions even worse. Some of the few married adolescent girls who lived in their own house (as their in-laws live in Syria) had moved back with their natal family, as they could not afford rent anymore. Some girls even reported that they and their family had to downsize to save on rent costs. A 19-year-old Syrian young mother said:

> *My husband cannot afford a house rent so we live with my family who moved to a very small house. My husband, young daughter and I, with my parents and two younger brothers, are all now living in a house consisting of two small rooms... I feel like we are living in a can of sardines.*

Some married girls also reported that they had to move to abandoned houses or insecure neighbourhoods infamous for armed clashes between Lebanese clans. A 19-year-old Syrian young mother explained the impact this had on her:

> *We had to move and rent a house in Shrawneh because the rents are the cheapest in this neighbourhood... No one wants to rent a house there because of the constant fights and arms firing. All the houses have holes from bullets... We had to move because it is the only way we*

can afford to live in a house, but it is very scary and I am too afraid to leave my house.

Some adolescents in collective shelters also noted that many families had moved to tented settlements as they are unable to afford rent for more permanent housing. A 17-year-old Syrian boy explained: '*I know many people who moved to tents. They cannot afford a house rent anymore because they are too expensive.*' Some boys and young men also described coming under increasing pressure from landlords, which has led them to consider moving to a tented settlement. A 20-year-old young father explained:

I have been living in my house for 12 years… When we moved to the house, it was uninhabitable… We fixed everything in the house, the tiles, the windows and the roof. We almost rebuilt it from our own money… Now the landlord is asking for 1,200,000 Lebanese pounds [LBP], how are we supposed to get this money for rent?… If you are late on rent, he will threaten you that you will be expelled [evicted] by the middle of the month if you do not pay… If he knows you are unemployed, he wants you to leave because he is afraid you won't pay the rent… What am I supposed to do?!… The only solution I have is to go and live in a tent, or else I will burn this house and be finished with everything.

Syrian adolescents at risk of child labour

Working in agricultural fields

Due to economic hardships, married girls living in informal tented settlements have to work in the fields (often before and after marriage) to help their families earn income. A 19-year-old Syrian young mother explained that, '*If you are not married, you should work to help your family. If you are married, you should work to help your husband.*' Although some girls used to migrate seasonally with their families to work in the Lebanese fields prior to the Syrian conflict, they still had access to free education in Syria and future career opportunities. Since becoming displaced, the girls now only work in the fields and have not enrolled in school in Lebanon. A 20-year-old Syrian mother reported that:

When we came to Lebanon, we started working in the fields directly. I remember I started working the next day after my arrival… No one thought about education at that time, everyone was working, the children, young people and the elderly.

Although work in the fields used to be enough for Syrian families to get by in Syria prior to the conflict, the high living costs in Lebanon make it extremely challenging for them to afford even basic needs. A 19-year-old Syrian young mother explained:

The hourly wage did not change since our mothers' time… When we exchanged the money to Syrian Lira, it was sufficient to buy many things… But here, in Lebanon, we can afford only a few basic things… The economic struggle in Lebanon caused us psychological and social problems.

The economic situation is such that many Syrian families have now spent any savings they had and are increasingly resorting to borrowing. As a 19-year-old Syrian young mother commented:

Previously, we used to save some money to build a house in Syria, but now we spent all the money we saved and we instantly spend what we earn on food… The wage is only enough for the cost of bread… nothing is left for us… We are always borrowing from the shawish [the settlement supervisor] for food, medicine, doctor's appointments.

Photo 2: Photo story by Farah, a 19-year-old Syrian young mother living in an informal tented settlement in Baalbek city

Farah says: 'Girls as young as 10 years of age have to work to help their families, and this has not changed over the generations, as my grandmother, mother and I were forced to work at a young age due to the dire living conditions. In the past, parents never sent girls to school, because they needed the girls to take care of the housework. Nowadays, girls can choose education or work, but the war in Syria prevented them from continuing their education.'

Agricultural workers' wages have increased (after workers withdrew their labour in protest) but have not been able to keep up with inflation and price rises. A 20-year-old Syrian mother explained:

> *The workers stopped working for a while… We were asking for a wage increase or else we stop working. After a hard fight, they increased the daily wage to 20,000 [LBP] [from 6,000]. The workers went back to work because we have no hope of increasing it more than that… [With hyperinflation] that means we are earning less than $1 whereas we used to earn $4 before the crisis for working five hours.*

Even though the adolescent girls taking part in our research explained that their wages are too low to afford much food, they noted that it helped them by being able to provide bread or bring vegetables from the fields. A 19-year-old Syrian young woman explained, *'It would be a disaster if we do not go to work. How can we live? At least, we can bring potatoes from the fields, we bring food for our family.'* Girls also described how the low wages have sapped their motivation. A 17-year-old married Syrian girl explained:

> *Our life was much more comfortable for sure. Even when we worked, even if we felt tired, at least we worked and saved money, we were able to live a good life… Now, we do not… The degree of fatigue is the same. We lost the desire. We work all day, and that is not sufficient for us! Imagine yourself working for 5 hours, and the weather is cold, and there is mud, just for 90 cents!… Psychologically, we do not have the same push to go for work. We just work to survive….*

Unlike the Syrian girls living in informal tented settlements, married Syrian girls living in collective shelters and coming from different regions of Syria do not do any paid work. This is because communities from different regions in Syrian have divergent attitudes towards girls working. Girls belonging to families from more rural, agricultural and tribal communities of origin in Syria are more likely to be expected to work to contribute to household income, as this is perceived as one of a girl's main responsibilities, as discussed above. Other communities largely have negative attitudes towards girls working outside the house. These negative perceptions stem from conservative attitudes and norms, which drive reluctance to allow girls to be in gender-mixed places as well as to leave or spend long periods of time outside the house alone. These attitudes are fuelled by strong adherence to tradition as well as fears about the threat of sexual violence. Girls' honour is closely linked to family honour, and parents fear community gossip if girls do not adhere to traditions regarding restrictions on girls' mobility. This is reinforced by strict gender roles within the communities, which stipulate that girls' role is strictly to stay at home, whereas boys take on the breadwinner role in the household and therefore need much greater freedom of movement. Apart from a few exceptions, girls' natal families, husbands and in-laws forbid them from working outside the home even if they want to work and contribute to their family's income. An 18-year-old Syrian young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

> *I always ask my husband to allow me to work but he always refuses even though our situation is really bad. I tell him that if I work, I will help with the expenses and our situation will be better. I tried to convince him that I can work in a place for women only like in a hair salon but he refuses to even consider the idea.*

Syrian culture and tradition regards males as the household breadwinner and decision-maker – a role that is closely linked to notions of masculinity. Husbands are harshly criticised if their wife works (which would also suggest the husband is unable to control his wife). One of the young women in our study (a 19-year-old mother) who used to work before marriage explained that her husband and in-laws forbade her from seeking work, regardless of their financial challenges:

> *My husband is unable to support us and his family. I always take money from my mother to buy my and my daughter's needs. My husband and in-laws are not allowing me to work although I used to work before marriage. They say that I will shame them and people will say that my husband is not a man.*

Forced work and violence (physical and sexual) against girls

Syrian refugee girls whose families were originally from more rural, agricultural areas in Syria typically perceive working in the fields to support their family (natal or marital) as one of their duties. If they do not conform to this social norm, and do not work to contribute to the household income (especially after marriage), they come under increasing scrutiny and pressure. A 20-year-old Syrian mother explained that:

> *If we stay long without going to the fields after marriage, people in the camp will start talking, 'why are you not helping your husband?' They will say that your parents*

did not raise you properly. And the in-laws will keep throwing words at you that you need to work… Your husband will say things like 'look at your neighbour, she is working, why can't you be like her?!' Isn't this a [form of] psychological violence when we are always compared with others?!

Although girls rarely object to working in the fields, in some cases this was forced on them, especially by their in-laws. A 16-year-old Syrian young mother explained how:

My parents conditioned my marriage to my husband by not sending me to work in the fields, and told him that after marriage, my only work will be as a housewife… That changed after marriage and his family started fighting with me every day and wanted to force me to go to the fields, telling me that I am no different from the other girls in the camp and that I have to bring money to the house… My husband did not object to this. The pressure was too much for me… so I left my husband and returned to my parents' house with my son.

Photo 3: Photo story by Shourouk, a 19-year-old Syrian young mother living in an informal tented settlement in Baalbek city.

Shourouk says: 'Most men in our community send their wives to work in the fields because they want them to bring more income to the house. Only few men do not like sending their wives to work and want them to be housewives. Many girls themselves want to work in the field because going to the field is the only way for them to go outside the house and see their friends, or because they want to avoid problems with the husband and in-laws and gossips in the community. People in our community criticise the girls who do not go to the field to help their husbands and they shame them. Some girls do not like working in the field and want to be housewives but they have no choice. Refusing to go to the field creates problems between the girl and her husband and in-laws.'

Almost all of the married girls living in informal tented settlements told of being pressured to go to work or being forced to work by the *shawish* (the settlement supervisor) or employers (the *shawish* is a key intermediary providing workers for employers in agriculture.) The *shawish* typically pressures families or in-laws to send the girls to the fields, believing they should be readily available for work when needed. A 17-year-old married Syrian girl explained that:

If the shawish needs you to go to work, you cannot refuse, even if you are tired or do not want to go to work… He would ask the families to send the girls to work.

Forced work by employers, often at gunpoint, is alarmingly common. The shawish and girls in the settlements are often forced to work in fields by Lebanese employers and, in some cases, without being paid. We also heard many accounts of the settlement being raided by weaponised Lebanese employers or the shawish being attacked and beaten to get them to send workers. A 19-year-old married Syrian young woman explained that:

The shawish cannot refuse sending workers, especially when the employer has weapons. They will come with their weapons to the camp and threaten the shawish to shoot him and burn the camp. They say '… give us workers or you all die' … The shawish was attacked in his house and beaten by armed employers many times for refusing to send workers… He cannot do anything about it.

Some girls reported being forced to work in drug plantations, which also puts them at risk of being persecuted by authorities. A 20-year-old Syrian young mother explained:

When the clans need workers in the cannabis fields, they come to camp with their weapons, threatening to kill us if we do not go with them… They make us work against the shawish's will and against our will, and we cannot do anything about it.

In these circumstances, Syrian girls face high levels of harassment and violence. Married girls reported that verbal and physical violence by landowners and watchmen in the fields is rampant. As an 18-year-old married Syrian girl explained:

Some of the landowners and the watchmen shout at and talk to us in a bad way… They would also hit us with a stick to make us work harder, especially the small children… as if we are animals.

Sexual violence is also widespread in agricultural work. An 18-year-old married Syrian girl explained that:

> *Some employers keep touching the girls, they put their hands on your waist or shoulders or hug you… They talk in a sexual way with us and some even suggest paying the girl for sex.*

Despite sexual violence being common, the girls noted that neither they nor the shawish can do anything about it, as they fear retaliation from the Lebanese employers. As a 19-year-old married Syrian girl commented, '*The shawish cannot do anything about it… You hate work when you face this and feel disgusted, but we have no option but to remain silent…*'

Work as an opportunity for girls to socialise

Although working in the fields is physically demanding and tiring, and (as already explained) puts girls at risk of physical and sexual violence, it is also one of the few opportunities for married Syrian girls to go outside of their informal tented settlement, and so offers a way to cope with stresses and negative feelings. A 17-year-old married Syrian girl explained:

> *Working in the fields… even if it is more tiring and we work under the sun… It comforts the mind… and is more comfortable than staying at the house.*

It is also an opportunity for girls to meet friends and spend time with them, which they cannot do otherwise owing to cultural restrictions on their mobility. A 19-year-old Syrian young mother noted that:

> *I love going to work because I see my friends there and we talk, joke and laugh. Otherwise, I cannot see them if I stay at home.*

Working in the fields offers girls an opportunity to escape some of the pressures they feel at home. A 20-year-old Syrian mother explained:

> *A girl must go outside the house and work even if she worked all day inside and outside the house and is tired… Work in the fields allows us to get rid of the demands at home from the husband and in-laws and the children… You just relax and rest your head at work.*

Photo 4: Photo story by Basmala, a 20-year-old Syrian young mother living in an informal tented settlement in Baalbek city

Basmala says: 'Unwanted touching by employers is very widespread at work. Employers hug the girls in the fields, they touch our breasts, they put their hands on our shoulders or on our stomach, and talk to them in a sexual way and to touch them. Some employers even offer money to girls to sleep with them. Touching is not the only thing that girls face at work. Employers start shouting, cursing, swearing and beating us if we do not work fast and many times they refuse to pay our wages to the shawish. They do not allow us to take breaks at all and they push us to work non-stop no matter how tired we are. When girls face this at work, they hate going to work and they live in constant fear at work.'

Restrictions on the type of work Syrian girls and women can do

Although it is generally not considered acceptable for Syrian girls to work in sectors other than agriculture, some girls expressed aspirations to do other types of work with better pay and conditions. As a 20-year-old Syrian mother explained:

> *Cleaning houses is much better and less tiring than working in the fields… You work inside a house not under the sun and for fewer hours for more money… Most importantly you remain clean… But our community considers this work to be shameful for women… They also fear sending a girl alone [for this work] because they fear courtship, kidnapping, rape and such things.*

The girls in our study noted that they cannot choose which type of work they do because their family, husband and even the community limits their choices to agriculture. A 20-year-old Syrian mother lamented that:

> *Girls face repression in everything! I mean, for example, there are women who want to work in a restaurant or in a store in the market and are not allowed, this is repression… A girl cannot make any decision on her own. Neither do they take her opinion into account in anything.*

The girls explained that even if the family or husband did not object to a girl working in another sector, they tend to conform with community norms to avoid criticism and gossip. A 19-year-old Syrian young mother noted:

> *Our community interferes in everything. They keep gossiping about the girls. Even if, for example, the parents or the husband finds it normal for the girl to work in domestic work or shops, people in the community will stop them. They will start gossiping about the girl and her husband and family, and shaming them. Gossip influences their opinion even if the girl succeeds in convincing them.*

Another Syrian young mother, aged 20, explained how a girl's husband or in-laws control her opportunities for education and work:

> *Our life is based on oppression and control. Sometimes, a girl wants to do things for her future or to change her psyche or anything, to continue her education or to learn a profession, but her husband, family and everyone tells her it is forbidden… you cannot go, you cannot do this work.*

A 21-year-old Syrian mother whose university graduate husband promised that she could continue her education after marriage described the impact on her well-being when he subsequently refused:

> *I wanted to complete my studies after marriage as this was my biggest dream, and my husband was supportive before we got married, but then changed his mind… This in itself is something that destroys your psychology and shakes you. I mean, everyone has something they want, but we cannot have anything. We live according to other people's desires and the husband's will. This is a complete destruction of me, not only violence against me.*

Boys' role as the main breadwinner

In line with their traditional role as family breadwinner, Syrian boys who live in collective shelters (similar to girls living in informal tented settlements) have mostly been working since they arrived in Lebanon. Child labour was not common among boys when they were back home in Syria; they were mostly in school. As an 18-year-old Syrian boy explained:

> *In Syria we were happy, we used to travel for vacations during the summer. We went to Turkey and Jordan. However, when we came to Lebanon it was different. Our life here is miserable.*

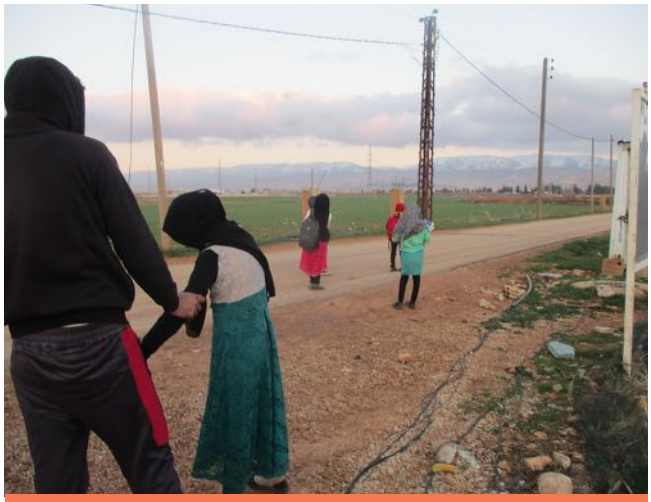


Photo 5: Photo story by Basmala, a 20-year-old Syrian young mother living in an informal tented settlement in Baalbek city

Basmala says: 'Women do not have any control over their life in our community. Men control their lives. They take the decisions of everything in their lives. When the girl is single, the father and the brother control her life, and when she gets married, the husband does. The men decide about the girl's education, they decide about her clothes and her work. Women should obey men in everything. Girls are not happy about how their life is, they feel that they do not have value nor existence. We do not have a voice nor can take any decisions in our lives. We are unable to have a private life of our own. We are born to get married, work in the fields, work at home, raise children and take care of the men. Women are born to obey and have no right to choose a life of their own.'

The harsh socioeconomic conditions in Lebanon have pushed even younger boys into work to help their struggling families. A 16-year-old Syrian boy explained:

> *When I came to Lebanon, I was shocked with the life here… We used to live in a village and go to school. We were only concerned about school and playing, we did not think about work or renting a house, but in Lebanon, we started thinking about many responsibilities. Here in Lebanon, the little boy is ready to do any work and anything to get money to help his family… Nothing can describe the sadness we face in Lebanon.*

While some boys attempted to continue their education in Lebanon, they were forced to prioritise work over education as they became the main family breadwinner. As a 19-year-old young man explained:

> *When we came to Lebanon, I had to start working to help my family. Then a year later, I went to school but I did not continue my year… You have to choose in Lebanon – either you work or you study, and we need to work.*

The boys cited various other barriers to their education in Lebanon, including discrimination, violence, distance from school, challenges learning a foreign language, the curriculum, and having to repeat classes. But they said that taking on the role of the main breadwinner was the main driver pushing them out of school and into work.

The boys in our study often talked about having lost their childhood as a result of war and displacement – describing themselves as a '*failed generation*', as one 17-year-old Syrian boy explained:

> *I lost my childhood and also my education was lost, my childhood was destroyed due to the events in Syria. I am not talking about myself only, I am talking about all the Syrian boys in Lebanon. We live in the same conditions, we were all living in our villages in Syria and going to school... When we came to Lebanon, we started spending most of our time working, and barely do anything else or meet our friends.*

Photo 6: Photo story by Soma, a 17-year-old Syrian boy living in a collective shelter in Baalbek city

Soma says: 'Syrian youth attending school is considered a privilege in Lebanon. Although most boys prefer getting a decent education, life and family obligations force them to work, sometimes as the sole provider for the family. Only the fortunate Syrians were able to study in Lebanon.'

Work limitations and threats from the authorities, amplified by the crisis

Boys described working as wageworkers in different sectors, including construction, public works, factories, porterage or in local supermarkets. They said they are sometimes subject to verbal and physical violence from Lebanese employers and sometimes do not get paid. They also expressed heightened safety fears when they travel to and from work, describing harassment and violence from the Lebanese community or threats of detention by the authorities, especially at road checkpoints. As a 17-year-old boy explained:

> *I go to work at 6.30 a.m. and on my way I pass by two army checkpoints... There is not one day they do not stop me, to and from work, and start questioning me... It is exhausting and annoying, you feel like you are a criminal.*

The Minister of Labour's 2019 decision to require all foreigners working in Lebanon (including refugees) to obtain a work permit has heightened the threat of harassment and detention of Syrian boys. It has also threatened their incomes and their family's survival, as the authorities have been targeting Syrian workers and their Lebanese employers in crackdowns. As a 17-year-old boy noted:

> *We are always afraid now because the army and the police became very strict with us. Many Syrians had to leave their work because the employers will be in trouble if the police came... We are living in a fear of losing our jobs anytime and getting detained for working.*

Alongside Lebanon's economic crisis, Covid-19 lockdowns have made it even more difficult for boys to find paid work, as does lack of legal documents. An 18-year-old boy explained:

> *At first we stopped working because there was a lockdown, then when we could work, there were no jobs. When you find a job, you cannot go because you do not have papers. The situation is desperate.*

The compound crisis in Lebanon has meant that Syrian adolescent boys and young men have been struggling to find work, and even those that are working do not earn enough to meet their household's needs. This has put enormous strain on them, leading to a deterioration in their psychosocial well-being. A 21-year-old young father explained:

> *There are no jobs available now like before... We are only able to work for a week or 10 days in a month and the money is only enough for transportation and bringing*

bread to our family. We go home without any money… The economic crisis caused us a psychological crisis. We are always worried about everything. We think about the house expenses, the rent, our family's needs, our own needs, and how will we find work and bring money… Today we live broken, and we know we will be broken tomorrow as well… We are only working to live day-by-day, that is it! We are really tired.

Boys' inability to meet their household needs gives rise to feelings of failure in their role as breadwinner and provider for their family. A 19-year-old young father noted that:

There are not any jobs in Baalbek anymore… No one is working… What can be a more miserable situation than this?!… What am I worth as a man if I cannot bring food for my family? How am I supposed to feel as a father if I cannot provide my newborn baby with a bottle of milk?

Violence perpetrated by fathers against their sons, especially those who are married, has been increasing as a result of boys' inability to find work that can support their family. However, boys were less likely to report experiencing violence; the girls in our study sample were more likely to report that boys were subject to violence. A 16-year-old Syrian young mother whose married brother was also a participant in our study reported that:

My father beats my brothers all the time because they are sitting at home and not working… He even beats my brother in front of his wife… I do not know what is wrong with them, they are maybe depressed. But they need to work to support my family, my father is ill and cannot work. My brother also has a family, he cannot sit like this, who will feed his family?

Decreasing incomes and rising inflation have also limited boys' ability to save money and work towards achieving their future ambitions. A 19-year-old Syrian young man explained how these feelings of despair were making him have suicidal thoughts:

Previously, in 2019, we were all working and getting a daily wage equivalent to $20. We used to be able to spend and save money from that wage. Now, we work and earn a quarter of that amount and it is spent on the same day, we cannot save money anymore… We used to save to buy a car or motorcycle, buy clothes or shoes… or buy a better phone. Sometimes we saved to go on a trip and have a walk on the beach. But we cannot get any of these now, let alone thinking about saving for building a house in Syria or getting married in the future. I am thinking the best thing is to get a bullet in the middle of my head and ending this whole misery.

Other adolescents noted that borrowing from family members and selling possessions has become much more common, with some wives resorting to selling their gold, and husbands selling furniture. A 16-year-old Syrian young mother whose husband was also a participant in our focus groups explained that:

My husband was not able to find a job for a long time… At first, his father was helping us but then he stopped because he was not able to support us and his family together… I needed milk, medicine and diapers for my two daughters and I had no choice but to sell my gold. At first my husband refused but I insisted, as I cannot leave my daughters without food or medicine.

The crisis and the heightened risks for adolescents

As with married girls in informal tented settlements, adolescent boys in collective shelters reported that forced labour – sometimes in illegal activities such as cannabis fields – is common in Baalbek. As a 16-year-old boy explained:

Photo 7: Photo story by Nada, a 17-year-old Syrian young mother living in a collective shelter in Baalbek city

Nada says: 'My husband was not able to find work and the UNHCR stopped giving us aid. I have children who I cannot buy them anything. My daughter got very sick and I could not take her to a doctor or get her medicine. I had to sell my gold to get my children's needs, because I was desperate. I had no other choice as I did not want to borrow money from anyone because I cannot return it.'

Sometimes, an employer comes and takes workers and you suddenly find yourself in a field of cannabis with armed men around you and cannot do anything about it. You just do the work they ask and do not care even if they will pay so that you can return home safely.

The rise in robberies following the economic crisis, especially in public spaces, has negatively impacted young Syrian boys and increased the emotional, physical and legal risks they face when they work. A 16-year-old boy noted that:

I work for an employer who employs Syrians to collect scrap from the streets. We are women, boys and girls working for him... After the crisis, he started urging us to steal Wi-Fi cables and also cars. Syrians are innocent in this but they need the money.

The government's crackdown on foreign workers and the scarcity of job opportunities has pushed some Syrian boys into working in fields on illegal crops, but doing this type of work has meant that boys risk being ostracised by their community. A 20-year-old Syrian father explained:

We never thought that we will be forced to work in drugs, but we had to in order to feed our families and pay the rent. We do not have any other options. This is the most humiliating thing that we have faced in Lebanon. We did not mind the hard work or the humiliation at the hand of the employers, because we at least knew that we were doing decent jobs to support our families. Now, we are forced to do filthy jobs and risk being caught by the authorities and disowned by our community if they find out what we are doing... The Syrian community will shame us and look down at us.

The desperation that adolescent boys and young men feel, with such limited legal work opportunities, is driving them to engage in illegal activities. A 17-year-old Syrian boy explained that:

All boys are thinking of joining a drug or arms trafficker or any gang... I cannot bring food for my family nor fuel to keep them worm in the cold... When we are not able to provide our basic needs, we are forced to resort to illegal activities...

As the economic crisis progressed, adolescents in collective shelters noted that younger boys were more often going on the streets searching for work or collecting items from garbage to sell or use at home (especially for heating, due to rising fuel prices). Girls in informal tented settlements noted that both girls and boys are leaving school at an earlier age to start working in the fields to support their families, with some so desperate they resort to stealing vegetables. A 19-year-old married Syrian woman explained:

The children used to go to schools, they used to study even if they did not complete their education... But now none of the children in the camp are studying... They need to work and help their families... Some are too young to work and employers do not employ them, but they go to the fields to steal potatoes and run away carrying a bag heavier than them. They are doing this because they want to eat, even older teenagers are doing this.

Even though girls living in collective shelters are less likely to work than those living in informal tented settlements, the girls who took part in our study noted that girls are now leaving education more than ever. A 16-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter described that:

Some families cannot pay the school fees for their daughters. Parents are saying that the school needs a lot of expenses, books, notebooks and transportation. So they force girls to drop out of school.

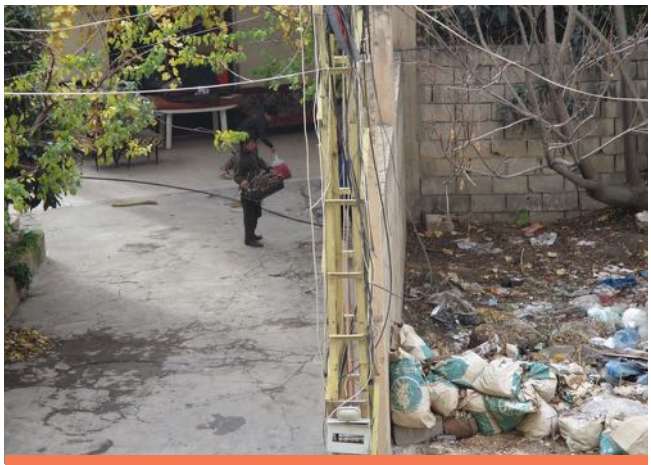


Photo 8: Photo story by Shams, an 18-year-old Syrian young mother living in a collective shelter in Baalbek city

Shams says: 'Children are not going to schools anymore. They are either working or trying to help the family with expenses through collecting wood, trees, leaves, shoes or nylon for heating in the winter. The younger Syrian generation in Lebanon are living the same situation that we lived through the war in Syria. They will grow up illiterate like us. They are suffering the same way we suffered in the war. Instead of going to schools, children are spending their time searching in the garbage containers for clothes, iron or nylon to sell or use at home.'

This increasing incidence of children dropping out of school to take up work leads adolescents to believe that younger Syrian children have lost their opportunity for education in Lebanon and now face a similar fate as older adolescents and young people, comparing the impact of the compound crisis to the impact of the Syrian war. Adolescents perceived that both these events have limited the opportunities for Syrian children and young people to hope of achieving their aspirations. As a 17-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter said:

> *The situation of Syrian children is saddening... No one is studying. They are all on the streets working... How does what the children are going through in Lebanon differ from what we lived [through] in Syria during the war? It is the same! Our generation's future was destroyed by the war and the younger generation's future is destroyed by the crisis in Lebanon. We live the same fate.*

The crisis as the main driver of adolescents' deteriorating well-being

Decreasing access to food and basic needs

Hyperinflation and the steep decrease in purchasing power due to the freefall of the local currency, along with income losses, have resulted in multidimensional vulnerabilities. Many adolescents and their families are unable to access basic services and meet their basic needs. Food insecurity, due to the rising cost of living, has resulted in almost all Syrian adolescents and young people lacking a varied diet or reducing their food intake. This has had a significant impact on vulnerable adolescents' psychosocial well-being, manifesting in high levels of mental and psychosocial distress, including extreme anxiety and depression, and even suicide ideation. Even though adolescents report being affected by different stressors, economic hardship is the predominant concern among girls and boys. They repeatedly expressed concerns over their household's inability to buy enough food due to loss of income and price rises. A 20-year-old Syrian young father explained, '*We are living in famine... No one knows what we are going through... We are tired of life.*' A 19-year-old Syrian young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

> *Our situation has changed a lot, the crisis has affected us greatly. We are not able to buy food, we cannot buy fruits, vegetables, meat and chicken... We used to eat chicken each week, but now we cannot... We are only eating legumes and potatoes but mostly noodles and cooking rice for the children... We need a lot of things, but we cannot get them, and it leaves us with heartbreak... The crisis has destroyed our psychological status.*

Married girls in informal tented settlements reported that they are baking bread at home as they can no longer afford to buy it. A 17-year-old married girl explained:

> *The situation is miserable here... We are not eating, we started baking bread in the camp because we cannot afford it anymore. It is very hard and tiring and I feel I am suffocating under all the pressures.*

Syrian young mothers are also very concerned about being able to afford food, milk and diapers for their children, and reported that their children's nutrition has suffered since the crisis. A 19-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

> *The most important thing for us is to provide food for our children. Of course, we are not able to buy all the food they need. The nutrition of children is not like before... They used to have for breakfast butter and cheese, but now all children only eat oil and thyme, and many times we cannot buy even that because they are expensive... Our children are deprived of a lot of things.*

The shortage of baby milk formula has added to the stresses felt by adolescent parents. A 19-year-old young father explained:

> *I kept searching for milk for my daughter for three days and I could not find it... I did not know what to do! My heart hurts me when I talk.*

Such a dire situation has resulted in a feeling of worthlessness among adolescents. A 17-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter said:

> *Lebanon calls itself a country and they do not do anything or provide anything to people living here... You feel that human beings are the cheapest thing in Lebanon.*

The stresses over economic hardships are even greater for Syrian boys, who are the main breadwinners in their families. They are extremely anxious about their household's survival. A 20-year-old father noted that:

> *I suffer from many psychological problems... I am drowning under the pressures. Most of all, the pressure of finding work and earning money just to buy diapers and milk for my children.*

A 19-year-old Syrian young man described the impact of the crisis on his mental and psychological well-being:

> *I do not want to talk about the financial crisis, because I have a psychological crisis and thoughts of suicide due to this situation.*

Shortage of medicines in Lebanon has been exacerbated by the government's decision in 2021 to lift medical subsidies, leading the price of medicines to skyrocket. Adolescents noted this as an added stressor, especially young parents, who can no longer afford medicines for their children. A 19-year-old mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

> *One of the biggest problems we face is the shortage of medicine, especially when our children get sick... There are essential medications, but we cannot find them... Even when sometimes the medicine is available, it is very expensive and we cannot buy it...*

As a result of this situation, Syrian girls living in informal tented settlements reported that they are resorting to home-made remedies. A 19-year-old married Syrian girl living in an informal tented settlement described how:

> *When we suffer from a medical problem, we search on YouTube on ways to solve it. We are using herbs from home or the lands. We cannot buy medicine so we have to find an alternative.*

In addition to these stressors, the increasing fuel prices in Lebanon have meant that many adolescents have been forced to live without heating during the winter. An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter commented:

> *We will definitely die from the cold as we cannot buy fuel. We cannot operate the heater because there is no electricity. I have been suffering from a severe headache due to the cold. I feel I am dying slowly.*

A 19-year-old Syrian young man explained:

> *We do not have electricity, nor diesel nor gasoline... The winters are cold here and we have no option but to wear more clothes to warm up our bodies... We are dying every day in this country.*

The situation is worse for married girls living in informal tented settlements as their housing is poorly insulated and they are more impacted by the adverse weather in winter. A 20-year-old married woman lamented:

Photo 9: Photo story by Shams, an 18-year-old Syrian young mother living in a collective shelter in Baalbek city

Shams says: 'Since the crisis started and the Lebanese lira depreciated against the US dollar, we have not been able to buy anything. If we go to the market, we only take a look at the stores but cannot buy anything because everything is very expensive. We are not able to buy the very basics we need like many foods, medicine, our children's needs, sanitary pads or clothes. The crisis destroyed our lives, it was our end. We have no water, no electricity, no medicine, and we cannot afford anything. Money does not have value anymore. Everything is very expensive as all products are priced in the US dollar. It makes you feel sad, depressed and fraught to go to the market and see that some people are able to buy what they want and eating meat and chicken while you cannot. We even forgot how it tastes. We are fooling ourselves that we are living but in fact it is a lie, we are dead inside. Our life is ugly!'

> *Things are going so bad for us... We are freezing... The diesel is very expensive and we cannot turn on the heaters as before. We turn it on one hour in the morning and another at night to warm up when we wake up and when we want to sleep, and that is it.*

Decreasing access to basic infrastructure

In Lebanon, state electricity is intermittent, with frequent power cuts. Adolescents reported having electricity for as little as 2 hours a day, and even going for days without power. The high cost of private electricity subscriptions means that most adolescents and their struggling families could not afford alternative electricity sources. The power cuts have had numerous consequences for adolescents' lives, limiting their entertainment, increasing responsibilities and tensions at home, and affecting their relationships and

mobility – all of which affect their psychosocial well-being. An 18-year-old Syrian boy explained that, '*Electricity alone is enough to make you hate yourself and your life*.' Nights are the worst, as adolescents spend them in darkness. A 19-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement said:

> *My house is dark all the time. This psychologically affects us, it makes your soul tired... When there is electricity, and we turn on the light, we feel joy, but it does not last long. They bring the electricity and then it goes off too fast.*

Water access is inextricably linked to electricity supply challenges in Lebanon, as power is needed to pump water into the tanks for some households. As a result, some families lack access to water. Water shortages, like power cuts, have a major impact on Syrian adolescents' lives, particularly their health and psychological well-being. An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained that:

> *I consider both electricity and water are life. There is always no electricity and when the electricity cuts, the water cuts as well. When the water is off, my life is off as well.*

Taking care of self-hygiene has been challenging for adolescents in the absence of electricity and water, especially in cold weather, and this also adversely affects their mental health. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

> *Bathing has become a burden. In the absence of electricity, we cannot get hot water, so we do not know how to take a shower in the freezing weather... Sometimes we are forced to shower with cold water, your body hurts from cold and your psyche suffers from this situation.*

Taking care of children's hygiene has been challenging for young mothers as well. A 20-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

> *You feel psychologically tired when you do not have water... When you cannot shower or clean your clothes and house, you feel bothered all the time, you would not feel comfortable at all... It is the worst with the children. They play outside all day and they are full of mud and dirt and you cannot bathe them.*

Period poverty

Menstruation products are also unaffordable for many married adolescent girls. As a result, they report resorting to borrowing from local stores or using pieces of cloth, tissue, or their children's nappies. Some even reported buying cheaper, lower-quality products that can cause allergic reactions. The lack of water also impacts washing, which presents particular problems for girls during menstruation. This has been hard, especially for young mothers with newborns, putting them at risk of postnatal depression. An 18-year-old married girl living in a collective shelter noted:

> *We do not receive any aid from the UN and my husband is not working now and I cannot go to the fields because I have a newborn... How will we buy food with these prices?... What worries me most is buying milk and diapers for my child. He cries all day because he is hungry and because I am not changing his diapers... I stopped buying sanitary pads and started using whatever clothes I have at home... I am so tired of life, I wish I could sleep forever and never wake up in the morning.*

Local organisations have been supporting some girls and young women by providing washable sanitary pads or distributing sanitary pads to programme beneficiaries.

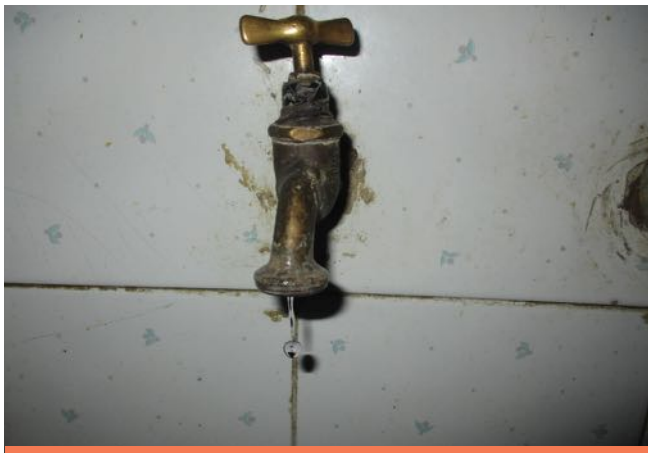


Photo 10: Photo story by Samira, an 18-year-old Syrian young mother living in a collective shelter in Baalbek city

Samira says: 'We barely have electricity in Baalbek and when the electricity cuts, the water also cuts. This is affecting our and our children's hygiene. We cannot shower or bathe our children properly and when our children get dirty or pee on themselves, we cannot wash them properly. Water is all life and it should not cut from houses. We no longer feel we are living and we no longer feel we are at home in our own houses. We are forced to buy water but the private water is very expensive and we cannot always afford it. This is very disturbing situation for people to live in and we always find ourselves wishing to die instead of living a life without water, electricity and basic needs.'

Some of the girls reported that this was the reason they had joined a programme run by a local organisation. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter said:

> *I stopped buying sanitary pads because they became very expensive… I am now getting my sanitary pads from an organisation that provides me with enough pads for three months… Most girls go there just to be able to get the pads.*

An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter also said, '*There is an organisation that gave me washable pads and I started using these and washing them.*'

Available social support

Despite the deteriorating situation for Syrian adolescents' households in Lebanon, there is still very limited social support available. Adolescents in our study noted that aid and other support has been decreasing over the years. A married 17-year-old girl living in an informal tented settlement said:

> *The organisations used to provide us with mattresses, blankets, heaters and food. But they are no longer providing anything.*

Furthermore, many Syrian adolescents reported that they have been removed from UNHCR assistance schemes. A 17-year-old boy explained:

> *Not everyone gets aid. We do not get anything from anyone… The UN [UNHCR] have been cutting aid from many people. They also decreased aid. They used to give an amount of cash for all members but now they only give up to six members in the family…*

For those receiving social assistance from UNHCR, they reported that the amounts they receive as aid, which increased in value following the crisis, have helped them pay rent or get food through food vouchers for their households. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter said, '*We use the aid we get to pay the rent, that is it.*' Nonetheless, some adolescents noted that with hyperinflation and the continuous increase in prices, the assistance they are receiving, though helpful, is not sufficient to meet their basic needs. A 19-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement noted:

> *The UN [UNHCR] aid is not enough for anything… We are all working at home and we get the UN aid and we are barely managing and barely affording food.*

One of the main (and most valuable) sources of assistance mentioned by Syrian adolescents and young people was financial remittances from migrant family members. A 17-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained that:

> *If someone has one of his family or relatives abroad, they can help him. But when you have no one abroad, I swear, you feel helpless. Do you get me? You cannot afford anything.*

Growing migration ambitions and attempts at irregular migration

The dire socio-economic situation facing Syrian adolescents and young people in Lebanon and their deteriorating mental health has resulted in a sense of hopelessness, with many unable to see a positive future. A 20-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement said, '*We have no hope for anything… Everything is getting worse, and it will get even more worse.*' Adolescents' future ambitions are becoming even more limited as a result. A 19-year-old Syrian young man explained:

> *What am I dreaming of? Shall I build my dreams in a destroyed country and a failed generation?… How many people think about tomorrow? What does 'tomorrow' even mean?… We live by the day now, thinking about tomorrow will bring a psychological crisis on me… I get very nervous when I think about the situation, no one can understand the pain I feel in this crisis… There is no solution to this crisis, it will only get worse. People are getting bread now but they will not tomorrow.*

Syrian adolescents and young people feel more than ever that their dreams are lost. A married 17-year-old girl living in an informal tented settlement commented:

> *We all had dreams, we dreamed to have a separate house, and those who have children dreamed to be able to provide them with everything like food… and education… But now there is nothing to dream about in the future… What is important now is to get things that we need in the present time, to eat and drink, and that is it… We let our dreams go, we gave up on them.*

Syrian adolescents in our study sample drew many analogies between the impact of the compound crisis and the impact of the Syrian war on adolescents' opportunities and mental health. Many adolescents even considered the impact of the crisis in Lebanon to be worse, as a 17-year-old

boy said: '*Living through the crisis in Lebanon is worse than the war that we went through*.' Another 17-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

> *The situation in the country is getting worse, Lebanon has become like Syria… I even see that the situation in Syria is better than here. The war was the cause of the crisis in Syria, but in Lebanon, there is no war and nothing is available. Although in Syria there is a war, everything is available, there is diesel, electricity and food.*

Some adolescents expressed fear that war may also erupt in Lebanon, particularly since anti-government protests in 2019. A 19-year-old Syrian girl living in an informal tented settlement explained:

> *The war in Syria started in protests just like the ones happening in Lebanon… We escaped from the war and it is following us to Lebanon… Where can we go if a war started in Lebanon? We are really scared of what would happen to us.*

On the other hand, some adolescents, especially boys, considered war to be a better option compared to the economic and political crisis that has brought such severe challenges and led to their deteriorating mental health. An 18-year-old young man said:

> *We are living through an economic war, which is much worse than an armed war… In a war, you either live or die at once but at least you can fight for your life… In the economic war, you just die every day.*

Syrian adolescents often linked the miserable situation facing Syrian refugees to the state's inability to provide for its own citizens, let alone refugees. As a result, Syrian adolescents and young people increasingly expect no rights in Lebanon. A 20-year-old young man noted:

> *The Lebanese are now like the Syrians suffering in Lebanon… We cannot expect a bankrupt country to provide anything for refugees. They are not providing anything for Lebanese…*

The situation has caused many adolescent girls and boys to consider migration, typically to Western countries, as the only chance of getting a decent life. However, only those who have the economic means or family connections to do so are able to migrate, often opting for irregular migration channels. Some households who lack the financial means and support from relatives to migrate are hoping to relocate through UNHCR's resettlement programme. An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

> *We are living in the hope of receiving a call from the UN [UNHCR]… I keep calling them to ask about our file but they say the selection is done randomly by the computer… We have no hope but to be selected, migrate and escape this misery.*

As well as gaining access to education, social welfare and better job opportunities, migration is also perceived as the only way for adolescents and young parents to gain access to basic services such as healthcare. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained that:

> *The best thing that can happen to us is to migrate… We can go to Canada, Germany, Sweden or Norway… They have education for children and pay Syrians salaries. At least food and medicine are available there… All Syrians are thinking about migration after the events that took place in Lebanon, everyone!*

Many girls living in collective shelters reported that their husband was considering irregular migration, though they were deterred either by their inability to access financial support from relatives or the fear of having large amounts of debts they would not be able to repay if the attempt to migrate was not successful. A 17-year-old young mother said:

> *My husband was seriously thinking about migrating, but he cancelled the idea because it costs a lot of money. He was going to borrow money to travel, but he was afraid that he would not be able to pay back the money that he borrowed.*

Nonetheless, since the compound crisis in Lebanon, more and more Syrian adolescents and young men have tried to migrate through irregular channels, placing their lives at risk. Despite knowing the risks involved, this has not prevented many from seeking a better future in Western countries. A 20-year-old young father who migrated through a smuggler explained, in the middle of his journey to Germany, that:

> *We do not have a life or a future in Lebanon… I know that I will suffer on my way to Germany and I have been through a lot… I was tortured and saw death many times in my trip, but nothing will stop me… In Lebanon, I am already dead but at least I am trying to have an opportunity for me and my children to live.*

Some adolescents and young people also reported that some individuals have begun returning to Syria, since 2021,

Photo 11: Photo story by Sarah, a 17-year-old married Syrian girl living in an informal tented settlement in Baalbek city

Sarah says: 'I had a dream of building my own house in Syria. My husband and I used to work hard and save money to build it. But the crisis in Lebanon killed my dream. Due to the increase in prices, we are barely able to afford our basic needs. We are not able to save money anymore, and we even used the money that we previously saved to buy food and diesel. Prior to the crisis, I had a plan to build a house and move to Syria in 3 years but it became impossible now even after 15 years because the money is worthless and we cannot even save any. If we had a house in Syria, we would have returned immediately there. Many people in the camp who own houses in Syria left because life is very hard in Lebanon.'

although this still involves some risks. A married 19-year-old woman living in an informal tented settlement said:

> *People from the camp are moving back to Syria because this country [Lebanon] is uninhabitable anymore. Everything here is expensive. Syria has become much better. If someone has livestock or land in Syria, they can plant it and there are more jobs there now.*

Although some girls wish to return to Syria, perceiving that they would face fewer financial challenges there, lack of ownership of land, sources of income or houses mean that many cannot return. As a 17-year-old married girl living in an informal tented settlement explained, '*If I had a house in Syria I would have left, because the situation in Lebanon is unbearable*.'

Displacement and increased risk of early marriage

Drivers of girls' early marriage

Displacement has pushed both Syrian girls and boys into early marriage, although according to the adolescents in our study, girls are affected the most. Both groups of married girls – those in informal tented settlements and girls from Damascus living in collective shelters – explained that back home in Syria, girls used to marry after completing their education, but in Lebanon, girls are getting married as early as age 14, and usually when they reach puberty. A 17-year-old married girl living in an informal tented settlement said, '*When a girl gets her period, she becomes a lady… It means, she is about to get married*.'

The girls link early marriage to displacement, which has brought economic hardship for their families and also a social and cultural change about what is the proper age for girls to marry. They explained that early marriage started to become the norm within their community gradually after their displacement; and when families started to see more girls getting married at an early age, it became more acceptable for their own daughter. A 17-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained the difference between her older sisters' lives in Syria and hers in Lebanon, and how her father's attitude towards early marriage changed following their displacement to Lebanon:

> *All my older sisters have university degrees and married only after finishing their education in Syria… When I came here, I was still very young and I had to stop my education… My father refused to marry me off at the beginning… A year later, some girls got married and they were of my age. So, gradually, the girls started to get married here at 15 and 16 years old, and it became the norm… So when I turned 16, they married me off.*

Nonetheless, girls often referred to their lost opportunity for education, linking it to early marriage, with girls living in informal tented settlements also linking this loss to their displacement, as they needed to work in the fields to support their families. An 18-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

> *Back in Syria, it was rare for girls to get married at an early age. Girls used to study in school. But, after the war, there were not a lot of schools available for the Syrians. The girls stopped going to school and started working… The boys also did not go to school, and both girls and boys started marrying at a young age.*

The lack of access to education, alongside the newly emerging norm of early marriage, coupled with family pressures on girls, were reported to make girls feel that marriage is the only option they can aspire to achieve. A married 19-year-old young woman living in an informal tented settlement said:

> *We are not studying and we are not doing anything... Girls start to get married and the other girls become jealous... Our families start convincing us to accept the groom... and we start accepting that we should marry because we feel that there is nothing else in our life to aspire to.*

This pushes girls into accepting their reality, but it does not eliminate their deep desire to envision a different life. Statements such as '*They have better things to do in their lives*' or '*they can have their own dreams*' – to describe educated single girls – reflect a deep sense of lost opportunities and life prospects.

However, some of the girls in informal tented settlements believe that parental and community pressures on young girls, often in the form of '*persuasion*', are a subtle form of forced marriage. An 18-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

> *When someone asks your hand in marriage, you can refuse to get married... but only if your family do not like the groom. If they like him and think he is suitable, the persuasion will start. They talk above your head day and night until you are embarrassed from your parents and agree to the marriage... With this 'persuasion' they are actually forcing us to agree.*

Syrian girls living in collective shelters report more varied experiences. While some enrolled in Lebanese schools, they have lost their education as a direct impact of early marriage. An 18-year-old young mother stated that, '*I left school after my husband asked my hand for marriage... All girls stop going to school when they get married*.' Other girls reported that they did not have access to education in Lebanon, mainly due to their parents' fears for their daughters in a foreign country, especially the risk of sexual violence. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

> *My father refused to allow me and my sisters to go to school in Lebanon... We were in a new country and he was afraid for us... Syrians think that this is not their home... They have no rights in Lebanon. They think that if something happened to their daughter, no one can protect her and she cannot get justice here... If we stayed like my cousins in Syria, I would have completed my education like them and would have not married this young... They are all going to universities and still single while I am raising children here.*

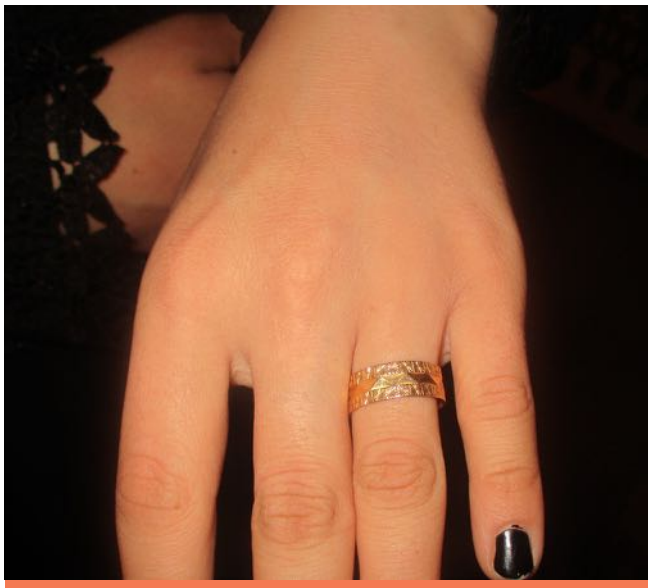


Photo 12: Photo story by Mona, a 19-year-old Syrian young mother living in an informal tented settlement in Baalbek city

Mona says: 'Most girls do not live their youth, they do not live the love feeling and do not understand what they are missing in their life. When a girl is young, she sees other girls marrying around her in the camp and she starts dreaming of marriage. She dreams of having a husband and experiencing the feeling of being a wife and a mother. She thinks marriage will give her a different life, a beautiful life with a husband who loves her and takes care of her. But marriage is very hard on girls and they only realise this reality after marriage. Marriage life is not a wedding dress and a honeymoon full of the husband's love like girls imagine it to be, it is hard and puts the girl under many responsibilities that she did not have at her family's house. The girl gets crushed under these responsibilities. The married life is not the innocent dream girls think it is and the husband is not the loving prince girls think they will marry.'

The threat of sexual harassment and violence, based on girls' experiences in Lebanon, was also mentioned as a main driver for pulling Syrian girls out of school and into early marriage. A 17-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter noted that:

> *My mother-in-law pulled all my sisters-in-law from school because some boys catcalled them on the street... The three of them are now staying at home just doing housework... She says that she will marry them off and will not send them back to school.*

Incidents of girls being kidnapped in Baalbek were also cited to explain the shift to early marriage among Syrian girls in Lebanon. A 17-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained that:

> *A girl from our community was kidnapped and nobody knew where she was or anything about her… When that happened, all the girls in my extended family were pulled out of school and married off, no matter how young they were, including me… This has scared the families and they all thought that they will protect the girls through marriage only.*

Some of the girls in collective shelters indicated that even when a girl is not yet married, her parents would pull her out of school when she reaches puberty due to the strict traditions of their community, and to prevent her having any contact with or interest in boys, thus preserving the girl's chastity – and her family's honour. Early marriage in such cases was reported to be a direct result of the spread and adoption of this new norm, with girls embodying '*family honour*'. There were also reports that parents opt for early marriage through fear of their daughter falling in love or talking with boys, which will subject the family to gossip and harm their reputation. A 17-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained her situation:

> *I did not want to marry my husband, but my family knew that I am in love with a boy and they did not want him because they think his family is not good and I would not be happy with them. Soon after the boy that I loved asked my hand in marriage, my family married me off to my brother's brother-in-law… My family did not force me, but they told me that my husband is a good man and will protect me.*

Although most girls cited displacement, and loss of opportunities and future prospects, as the main drivers of early marriage, in many cases marriage was a way to reduce the financial pressures on families. A married 19-year-old young woman living in an informal tented settlement said:

> *When I got my period, my mother got very excited. She said 'my daughter grew up!'… She was very happy and she started searching for a groom for me… I was shocked but she told me 'It is normal to marry you off now'… I do not know! Maybe it is normal because we are a large family – we are seven girls at home. So that is why it is normal.*

The expectations of early marriage in Syrian communities and social pressures put on girls were reported to push many girls into seeking marriage at an early age so as to secure a '*good marriage*'. An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter noted how:

> *I do not prefer marriage at a late age. It is a bad thing, because girls have to get married. Some girls are getting old and they are not married yet… When a girl turns 22 years old, she becomes a spinster in our community… Some people even say a 20-year-old girl is old for marriage and can no longer have children… Only old men or divorced and widowed men with children will marry an old girl.*

Some girls even recollected putting pressure on their family to marry, as they were in love. A 20-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement said:

> *My parents refused to marry me off to my husband when he asked my hand in marriage because I was too young back then, I was only 14… But I was in love with my husband and I insisted and kept crying… My father could not handle my tears and eventually agreed to my marriage.*

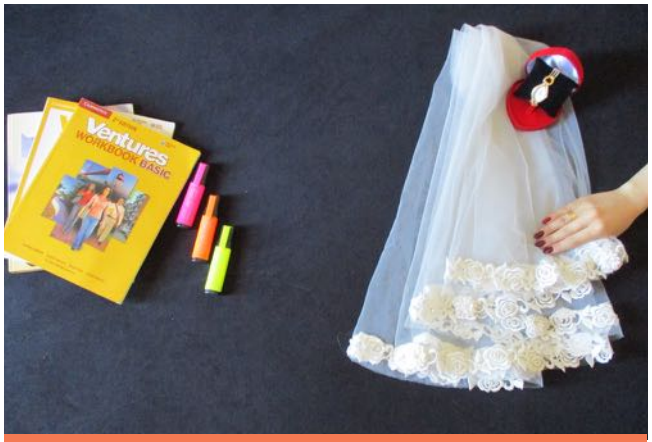


Photo 13: Photo story by Kaida, a 19-year-old Syrian young mother living in a collective shelter in Baalbek city

Kaida says: 'When a girl marries at a young age, she loses her education. Some girls are forced out of school to get married or because they reached puberty and their families fear for their safety and honour. My father never allowed me and my sisters to go to school in Lebanon. I loved school and it still hurts me that I did not study. Had we stayed in Syria and had not come to Lebanon, I would have completed my education and not got married so young. Schools in Syria are in the same village and families do not fear for the girls because people know each other there. All my female relatives who stayed in Syria finished school and did not marry young. I lost the chance of having a life like theirs when we came to a strange country and stayed in Lebanon.'

Nonetheless, most of the girls in our study believed that even though many girls might want to marry earlier, this is always due to lack of maturity, lack of knowledge about what married life involves, and poor support from adults in their lives, mainly their natal family. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

> *Some girls themselves like to marry early. But, when young girls desire marriage, they are in fact ignorant of the nature of the matter and do not have anyone to advise them… At the same time, girls are kind of forced to because everyone is getting married. I do not know!*

Among girls living in collective shelters, some said that early marriage was a tradition of their community back in Syria, and so displacement had not made any difference. A married 17-year-old girl explained that, '*In our community, girls marry at a young age, it is our tradition since we were in Syria.*' Forced marriages (in all instances, cousin marriage) were also reported. Traditionally, such decisions are taken by the eldest male in the extended family (the grandfather, eldest uncle or father). Three out of four girls interviewed cited the use of confinement and violence against them to force them into the marriage. A 17-year-old married girl described her experience:

> *I came from school one day to find my uncle, who lives in Syria, at our home… I had no idea what was going on, no one told me anything… They told me that I could no longer go to school and that I would be married to my cousin in a few days… I did not love my cousin and I knew he was in love with another girl so I refused at first… I was beaten and locked up in my room until my wedding day… Since then I have been living in hell, just hoping for a miracle, to leave my husband.*

Some of the girls who were forced into marriage had come to accept their reality. An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter said:

> *At the beginning, I did not want to get married. I did not accept it! But with time, I got over it and I am happy with my marriage.*

However, others – even after many years of marriage – still cannot accept it. A 17-year-old married girl living in a collective shelter explained:

> *I did not want my husband and I still do not want to be with him. If it were up to me, I would go back in time and I would never get married.*

While a few of the girls in our study reported that they had some freedom to choose their husband or to freely consent to marriage, in most cases, parents were the ones to arrange and approve who and when their daughter would marry, and girls were not able to refuse. A 19-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

> *A girl cannot chose her husband… It is even considered shameful for girls to show interest in the groom… It is customary for the girl to tell her parents 'As you wish' when they ask for her acceptance of marriage – even if she does not accept it… In fact, a girl cannot actually reject a groom if her parents accepts him… It is different for men, they can refuse to marry a girl they do not want.*

Photo 14: Photo story by Rimas, a 17-year-old married Syrian girl living in a collective shelter in Baalbek city

Rimas says: 'Many girls are forced to marry their cousins in our community. In some cases, not even the mother or father have a say in their daughter's marriage because the grandfather or the older uncle takes the marriage decision. Even if they live in Syria, older family males force these marriages in Lebanon. When a girl is 14 or 15, the family want to marry her immediately, this is the traditions of community from Syria. When I got married, I was in school and was forced out of school, locked at home and married in a week to my cousin. I lost my life when I married because I did not love my husband, neither does he love me. I was in love with another boy and I did not have the choice to refuse. I lost everything, my love, my education and my friends. My life is a nightmare that I cannot escape. Although I am still young, I feel dead like a withered flower, strangled by marriage.'

Marriage among adolescent boys and young men

The Syrian boys in our study explained that while girls are under more pressure to marry at a younger age, some boys as young as 15 are also pressured into marriage. However, for most boys, parental and community pressure starts at the age of 18, partly due to their family's fears that boys might become involved in premarital sexual activity, which is forbidden (by culture and religion) within their communities. Furthermore, marriage is perceived by the community as transforming an adolescent boy into an adult man, by taking on responsibility for a family of his own. A 19-year-old Syrian young man explained:

> *The parents think that if we do not get married, we might get into things like talking to girls or watching things on the phone or so. But if the boy gets married, he will settle down.*

Nonetheless, it should be noted that fewer boys now marry at an early age compared to the time prior to the economic crisis, mainly due to the financial challenges they are facing and being overburdened by supporting their households.

Similar to the girls in our study, the Syrian boys cited marriage at a younger age as being due to a change in society and in family attitudes towards marriage due to displacement, but also noted that it is central to assuming an adult male gender role at an early age. While boys indicated that back in Syria, men used to get married at the age of 25 or older, assuming the role of breadwinners and holding financial responsibilities means that boys are considered as adults by their family and community. This social change in the Syrian community in Lebanon, along with lack of education opportunities and future job prospects, coupled with self-identification as adults, means that marriage at a younger age is now a normal path for adolescent boys. A 19-year-old young father described his situation:

> *I got married when I reached 18. I liked a girl, my family approved of the marriage, and now I have a small baby... It is natural for me to get married, what else would I do?!... Men get married when they start working and can provide for their families. Maybe if I was still studying, I would not; but I started working at a very young age and I am the man of my family [breadwinner]. I am not waiting for anything else, as my life will be the same even in another 10 years in Lebanon.*

As gender roles are strictly divided among Syrian communities, when a mother is sick or absent, her sons are pushed into seeking marriage to bring a girl who could take over household responsibilities, including cooking, cleaning and taking care of younger siblings. A 20-year-old young father explained:

> *My parents were pressuring me to get married since I was 15, but I did not want to... Then I changed my mind after my mother got sick... We were 3 men with 10 children left alone without anyone taking care of the house or cooking... I decided to bring a daughter-in-law to help my mother.*

Some boys indicated that mothers themselves sometimes pressure their sons to marry so that they can have a daughter-in-law to help with household responsibilities.

Even though boys have more say about who and when they will marry, mainly due to being the breadwinner, their marriage is still subject to family approval. Boys reported that unlike older generations, today, young men can reject marriage to a girl of the family's choice and choose their own partner. However, they still ultimately need the family's consent (typically the father or other older male siblings). Even though boys can choose their wife, it is customary for their parents to make the choice. A 20-year-old young father explained:

> *When I made up my mind to get married, I went to my father and asked him to choose a girl for me. I did not have any girl in mind at that time.*

For boys from communities with a cousin marriage tradition, forced marriage is common. The boys in our study indicated that such pressures from the families often lead to failed marriages and marital tensions. A married 20-year-old young man explained that:

> *When a boy and a girl love each other and marry, they will understand each other. They will do things together, maybe cook together. But the problem is that this does not happen. When you decide to marry, the family starts to interfere, they keep telling the boy, 'you should marry this girl and not that one', and in the end, you do what they want and end up in an unhappy marriage. There will be no understanding between you and your wife and there will be always fights because of that.*

Married life and its myriad responsibilities are the main driver of stress among girls

Married girls consider early marriage to be their most challenging experience as they become responsible for their families and, in many cases, for their in-laws at a young age, while daunted by the prospect of childbearing and parenting while they are still children themselves. A 17-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter noted:

> *Marriage is a threat to a girl's life, especially when she gets pregnant and has children. She is taking on more responsibilities than she can handle. She is still a child herself. She wants to play like her children as well. That is why we are always in a bad psychological state.*

Separation from their natal family at a young age and lack of knowledge about the demands of married life put girls under even more psychological pressure. An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained how:

> *When the girl gets married, she leaves her home and her family. She also leaves her school. Her friends attend school, while she gets married. She loses everything and does not know anything about her new life. She is always scared and does not know how to act or react to her husband and in-laws because she does not know them well. She lives in anxiety all the time.*

Early marriage not only exerts intense psychological pressure on young girls, it also results in a sense of loss of self-hood. A 19-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement noted that, '*When the girl gets married, she will change, she will not be herself.*'

The gendered division of labour within the family and community overburdens married girls with domestic and childcare responsibilities, which they often undertake without any support. This puts them under even greater physical and emotional strain, often related to pregnancy and the inability to rest. A 17-year-old married girl living in a collective shelter described her role as a married girl:

> *I take care of all the housework and the cooking in the family, and we are a family of 13. My mother-in-law makes me take care of her young children and my husband's children from his first wife as well. I am always exhausted, and I do not feel I have a life. I do not feel anything, I am not even sad anymore. I am just doing the work as a machine.*

Married girls living in informal tented settlements face a triple burden, as they have to do paid work in the fields, alongside their domestic and childcare responsibilities. A 19-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

> *I have a family, and I have to go to the fields for 5 hours each day. I have to finish all housework before noon in order to go to work. When I come back from work, I have to cook and take care of the children. I work for 8 family members... How can I relax?... I have to cope with that but my soul is tired... I am fed up with all the work I have to do daily.*

Such burdens push adolescent girls (especially young mothers) to neglect their own needs as they are focused on their children's needs. A 17-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement commented:

> *We never rest until we sleep, we need to take care of everything... Our last concern is ourselves, even if we are*

Photo 15: Photo story by Shams, an 18-year-old Syrian young mother living in a collective shelter in Baalbek city

Shams says: 'When a girl marries, she spends her whole life in the house doing housework. The housework is very tiring, especially if the girl lives with her in-laws. The daughter-in-law in the house is considered responsible for all the housework and cooking at home. When the family is large, the work does not end, as the girl has to take care of her husband, children and in-laws. She works all the day. Many in-laws fight with the girl if she does not do the housework properly or as they requested. Some husbands also fight with their wives if they see the house is not tidy or is unclean. They do not understand the pressure on the girl of taking care of the children and everything at home at the same time. A married girl's life is a routine that repeats itself every day for her whole life. The housework is not only physically tiring but girls get psychologically tired and bored from doing the same things every day and from the demands of husband, children and in-laws.'

tired and psychologically ill... If the economic situation is bad... The mother does not take care of herself well... She becomes only concerned about her child's needs.

Support from the husband with childcare was reported to be very limited. This is because among Syrian families it is considered '*shameful*' for a husband to care for children – as this is considered a female's role. In the case of the girls living in informal tented settlements, they also perceived it as '*shameful*' for the husband to visibly interact with his children in the presence of others in the community – a perception that was not reported by girls living in collective shelters. A 20-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

The man cannot take care of the children – people will criticise him and gossip. Even if he plays with his children in the camp, they will say that this is 'shameful' and 'where is his mother?' Because we mothers are the only ones responsible for the children... The husband can only play with the children inside the house.

For married adolescent boys, although marriage represents the start of adulthood, it puts additional pressure on them as they take on responsibilities for providing for their family and the extended household. (The impacts of this on boys' mental and psychosocial well-being were discussed earlier in the report.) While few of the boys in our study were married, most thought that marriage was not a viable option, given the very challenging living conditions they and their families are facing, as they could barely afford rent and food for themselves and their families let alone a wife and children.

The crisis has increased girls' responsibilities

The distress experienced by married Syrian girls has been heightened by the extra domestic and childcare responsibilities brought on as a result of the compound crisis in Lebanon. Some of these additional responsibilities are directly linked to economic hardships, like baking bread daily (as mentioned earlier) or inability to afford gas for cooking. A 19-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

The cooking gas is very expensive, we cannot buy as before... All women in the camp are using wood as fuel to cook and boil water... This is increasing the work that we have to do at home as we need to collect the wood, dry it and then light it... When you are cooking, you need to stay next to the fire because the children keep playing with it and you fear they might cause a fire in the camp.... It really makes you hate yourself..

Photo 16: Photo story by Basmala, a 20-year-old Syrian young mother living in an informal tented settlement in Baalbek city

Basmala says: 'Early marriage exhausts girls because their bodies are weak and they do not have enough awareness to take on responsibilities and raise children. Young mothers struggle to balance between caring for their children and doing housework as well as working in the fields to help support the family. Girls bear the burden of housework, cooking and raising children alone without any assistance, resulting in physical and psychological weariness. This is because it is not acceptable in our community for men to help with housework. Girls should not marry at an early age, and the sheikh-religious clerk and court must not register the marriage of under-age girls.'

The electricity and water shortages, however, have had the most dramatic impact on married girls' lives in terms of increased domestic burden. A 19-year-old married girl living in an informal tented settlement gave one example:

We have to wash clothes every day and we are now spending hours daily washing by hand... We need to boil water on wood fire because there is no electricity to use the electric water heater, which alone takes a lot of work... Sometimes we have to wash clothes using cold water when it is raining or windy outside... I cannot feel my hands and back from pain... I feel I am psychologically and physically ill.

Water shortages further complicate girls' lives, as an 18-year-old married girl in an informal tented settlement explained:

When there is no electricity, we cannot fill our house tanks with water because we use a water pump for that… We bring water from the camp's main water camp and we walk all the way to our house. Everything became hard in our lives.

The extra work that electricity and water shortages brings for girls have had a major negative impact on their psychological well-being. An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

There is no electricity, which means there is no water and all the chores accumulate… When the electricity comes, we have to rush to do everything, do the dishes, wash the clothes, charge the devices, turn on the TV for children, and heat the water to shower… I am really tired and bored with everything in this world.

Power shortages mean that young married mothers cannot occupy their children with TV or devices while they do housework. As a 19-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement said:

I used to put the children in front of the TV or give them the phone to play a game or watch cartoons while I do the housework… Now, there is always no electricity, the children are bored. They are shouting and fighting all day and this is making me nervous and I am not able a take a breath.

Children who have trouble sleeping at night due to complete darkness also put more strain on their mothers. An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter noted:

My daughter is afraid of darkness. She keeps crying at night and I do not know what to do for her… My nights became sleepless. I am not resting either during the day or at night.

These increasing pressures on young mothers leave them feeling anger, depression and anxiety. A 19-year-old mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

Women are bearing all the work and the responsibilities at home… I feel psychologically destroyed… I just wait all day for the moment I put my head on the pillow and sleep… I can barely talk with people… My soul is tired.

Photo 17: Photo story by Farah, a 19-year-old Syrian young mother living in an informal tented settlement in Baalbek city

Farah says: 'Washing clothes is the hardest thing that we have to do at home. Due to the electricity cuts, we are not able to use the washing machines. We have to wash the clothes by hand. When the weather is good, we heat water on wood fire in front of the house and we wash our clothes outside. But when it is raining or snowing, we have to wash them inside the house with cold water. We cannot heat the water on the stove because the cooking gas is very expensive. Setting the fire to heat water outside is tiring and takes a lot of time. While we are washing the clothes, the children surround us and keep crying and shouting, which makes us feel more sick and tired. Washing clothes by hand makes us very cold, our hands and back start aching and we get spasms from it all the time.'

Adolescents' opportunities for voice and decision-making within their family and community

Gendered parenting and girls' limited agency

Syrian communities are strongly patriarchal and based on seniority, which significantly limits adolescents' and young people's ability to make decisions about matters that affect them – at both the family and community levels. The highly restricted gender roles and the centrality of girls' honour to family and community life leaves girls bearing the brunt of family control and restrictions from a very young age. Parents use different methods to parent boys and girls, typically focusing on boys and their needs. From a very young age, girls are nurtured to take the role of caregiver and be submissive to parents and males in the family, including brothers. Early marriage plays a major role in these gendered parenting methods. Girls are raised in a stricter way to prepare them for married life and all its responsibilities. A 19-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

The girl is not like the boy in the family. The boy is raised like his father. The boy is sacred in our community, but

the girl is not. People in our community say that the parents should not spoil the girl or give her what she wants because she will get married and live under pressure and violence… I mean, they do not pamper her so that she does not face problems in her married life, and be accustomed from childhood… However, parents never say 'no' to the boy, he does whatever he wants and goes wherever he wants.

As noted earlier, married girls lack agency and thus have little say in decisions about their lives. The family controls girls' key life choices, such as on education and marriage, then the husband controls life choices around timing of children and taking up work. Such control is fundamentally linked to community traditions and norms about girls' role and contribution in the household. An 18-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement commented:

There is violence against girls in our community that no one talks about… It is the repression and control. They control everything in our lives. They never take our opinion in anything. I mean, if they ask you to work, you work. If they ask you not to work, you do not… They are always surveilling the girl and everything is forbidden for her. They keep telling girls 'do not go out, do not go there, do not use these words, do not talk in this way', and we have to do whatever they want all the time.

Photo 18: Photo story by Razan, an 18-year-old married Syrian girl living in an informal tented settlement in Baalbek city

Razan says: 'Girls from a young age take the housework and childcare responsibilities. When a girl is 9 or 10 years old, she stays at home to take care of the house and her younger siblings while her mother is at work. A young girl takes all the mother's responsibilities at home. Mothers teach the girls the housework and childcare responsibilities at a young age so that she gets used to them and does not face challenges and problems with the husband and in-laws after marriage. If the girl is not taught these things at her parents' home, her husband, in-laws and the community will shame her and gossip about her and her family. Girls are oppressed in our community and it is saddening how we are fated to live.'

Lack of discussions within the family impacting knowledge on sexual and reproductive health

Married Syrian girls lack communication with their natal families and do not discuss any issues with them. When girls are involved in negotiations within the family, such as in marriage decisions, parental communication tends to take the form of pressurised '*persuasion*' of girls. The girls in our research also described a lack of communication with their mother about sexual and reproductive health (SRH) issues, including talking about menstruation. Most married girls reported that their first menstruation experience was stressful and full of fear due to a lack of knowledge about what to expect. A 19-year-old Syrian young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

When I got my period, I did not know what was happening with me. I thought I hurt myself, I was very afraid… I used to hear women talking about their period but I did not know what that meant… When my mother found out, she just gave me a pad and said nothing to me… neither told me how to use the pad. My mother feels shy to talk to me about things like that.

Cultural norms and traditions that consider girls' sexuality taboo prevent proper communication between girls and their mother about sexual and reproductive health. This leaves girls with little knowledge of and expectations for marriage and sexual relations, and leaves them vulnerable to violence from the start of their married life. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter noted, '*A girl does not talk to her mother about these things [referring to sex], she will be shy to open such conversations.*' Although girls receive basic information from older relatives, sisters or friends, they often enter into marriage with little knowledge of what it entails. This means that many start married life full of fear and anxiety, especially about sexual relations. An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

My mother did not tell me anything before I got married… My aunt told me a little about what will happen [meaning during sex] a day before my wedding day but she did not

tell me everything... I did not know how it [penetration] actually happens, I was shocked and horrified.

Lack of financial autonomy

Working girls living in informal tented settlements also lack financial autonomy. Prior to marriage, girls hand their income to their father or mother, and the head of the household decides what is spent and how. Girls do not usually get an allowance from their parents but have to ask permission from the head of the household to buy things they need. Similarly, following marriage, the husband or in-laws have control over the girl's income and the household's expenditures. A 20-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

Girls do not keep the money with them... We give it to the father or the husband because they are responsible for bringing the house's needs... If I needed something, I would ask them for money and they will give it to me and buy me what I need – if they have money.

Boys also typically lack financial autonomy and hand over their wages or income to the head of the household (father or mother). However, unlike girls, boys reported getting a small allowance from their income, but they too would have to ask for money to buy things like clothes, for example. Upon marriage, boys gain financial autonomy if they are living separately from their family. However, in households where the married couple live with the husband's family, older family members (male or female) keep control of the household's income and expenditures. Married girls in collective shelters have no access to or control over money; the husband or in-laws retain control. This makes it hard for girls to meet their basic needs, either due to restrictions on their own movement or in-laws' or the husband's absence when at work. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter described such a predicament:

Yesterday my husband went out to work at 6 in the morning and came home at 12 at night. My daughter and I were left all day without food... I did not have money to buy anything for us... This is a habit of his, my husband does not like to leave money with me... He ate at his parents' house and forgot about us... I went through a big crisis during the past two days, I was waiting for the UN [UNHCR] coupon to buy food... This is causing huge problems between us, we are always fighting over it.

Even though boys have more negotiating power within their families, life choices such as marriage and choice of spouse, work and emigration are subject to family (and especially the father's) approval. However, the boys in our study noted that they have more power over their decisions and choices compared to older generations, whose families controlled their life choices. A 19-year-old married young man commented:

Before, the family used to choose a girl and tell the man 'this is the girl you will marry', but today this cannot happen. If a boy does not like the girl, he will not marry her.

Aside from major life choices, boys still lack proper channels of communication with their parents, mainly due to perceptions of lack of understanding and fears of parental violence or criticism from the family and community. A 17-year-old Syrian boy explained:

I cannot tell my father that I love a girl... I swear he will hang me from the ceiling and leave me there for days.

Verbal and physical violence towards boys is rampant in Syrian households, as an 18-year-old boy said: '*We cannot share everything with our family. If we do, the father will beat you for everything.*' This also pushes adolescents to hide any incidences of violence they experience (online or in person) from their family. Instead, they turn to friends, for protection as well as for information on sexual and reproductive health. A 16-year-old boy explained:

You cannot share private matters with your father, you can only go to your friends. For example, if you see a thing on the phone and you know you are not of the right age to see this [referring to nudity and porn content], you go and tell your friend. If your father knows about this, he will immediately strike you.

However, some boys perceive that it is a parent's right to use violence with their children. A 19-year-old young man commented, '*The father and the mother can beat you, they are your parents.*' Nonetheless, it should be noted that although the boys in our study referred to fear of violence mostly perpetrated by the father, they usually refrained from discussing in any detail intra-family violence and its impact on them.

Boys reported that conflict linked to seniority (the generational gap), exacerbated by displacement, was the most common cause of tension between them and their family and community. They repeatedly described being branded as '*a failed generation*' by older adults in the community, mainly due to their displacement, which meant loss of education opportunities and limited work

prospects, so they could not achieve as much as older male generations had been able to. This puts adolescent boys and young men under significant psychological strain due to high expectations on them, which they cannot meet. On the other hand, boys perceived that their generation has a higher level of maturity, intelligence, knowledge and awareness compared to older male generations. An 18-year-old boy explained:

> *We are a caring generation, we understand life better, and are aware of everything. But, they still call us 'the failed generation'. Why?... Our generation was burned by the war, they destroyed us... We are smarter and know more things and then they keep calling us 'donkey'. This makes a person despaired of all life and eventually, you will actually become a 'donkey' because of this.*

Photo 19: Photo story by Basmala, a 20-year-old Syrian young mother living in an informal tented settlement in Baalbek city

Basmala says: 'When a girl gets married, marriage binds the girl with many chains. Married girls are not allowed to have their own opinions and choices in anything. The husband and in-laws decide on everything. They decide if the girl can go out, how much time she can stay out, he decides what she should cook, what she should wear, if she should work in the fields or not. They decide on everything and girls are not allowed to project onto the husband's or in-laws' decisions. When girls work in the field, the husband takes their money because he is responsible for the house expenses. A mother cannot even decide on how to raise her children, the husband does.'

This attitude among older people underscores the generational gap and perceptions that the family do not listen to boys, or understand or support them.

Control of girls by their husband and in-laws

Married girls in our research noted that although their natal families control their key life choices, this control often increases after marriage, as the husband and in-laws control all aspects of a married girl's life. Girls are expected to be submissive and obedient to the husband and in-laws, and are usually completely excluded from decision-making within the household. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

> *Husbands want to control and own their wife's life... Whatever the husband wants must be done. He likes to impose his words. He loves to be in control... The wife cannot make her own decisions.*

Girls believe that men and in-laws usually choose younger girls for marriage because they are easier to control than older girls. A 17-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

> *The man prefers to marry a young girl because he considers that she is too young and does not understand anything. He wants to raise her however he wants. He thinks, 'I can make her do what I want, and to be whatever I want'.*

Similarly, in-laws prefer younger girls for the same reason. A 19-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement commented:

> *They [in-laws] say that it is better to bring the girl younger so that she can learn their customs at home, how they like to do the work and how they like the cooking... They say 'we will raise her on our hands'... If the girl is older, it will be hard for her... Because she will be used to her family's customs.*

Such control is intensified for girls in cousin marriages, which are often forced marriages. This is because girls would be more submissive to their husband and in-laws and would often not seek support from their natal family. The central role of seniority among Syrian communities makes girls feel they are obliged to respect and comply with their older relatives' (in-laws) demands, while also making them fear that contesting or complaining might create conflicts

and rupture the extended family. A 17-year-old married girl living in a collective shelter described her situation:

> *My aunt wanted me to marry her son because she knew that she can do whatever she wants with me and I would not say a word… She knows I cannot leave, no matter what happened with me, so that I do not be the cause of problems in the family… She says that a relative daughter-in-law will tolerate anything and is better than the stranger.*

Girls noted that the husband's control over his wife is strongly encouraged by their community, and husbands who are not very strict with their wife or take their opinions into account are criticised by the community. This is mainly because control of one's wife is widely perceived as a key attribute of masculinity. A 20-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained this attitude:

> *A man cannot take the opinion of his wife, because if he does, everyone will scold him… Women and men will start throwing words at him and gossiping about him… They will tell him things like 'Your wife controls you', 'You are afraid of her', 'You are your wife's sheep'. When he visits someone, they would tell him, 'Did you take your wife's permission before coming?'… They make fun of him.*

Among Syrian communities, showing signs of affection or respect to one's wife is also frowned upon. A 21-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement said:

> *The husband does not call the wife by her name. If he does, the community will mock him. They will say he is very attached to her and loves her… The husbands only give orders when they speak with us. It is always: 'Bring me this', 'Put that', 'Take this', 'Do that'!*

However, although girls often complained about the gendered division of household labour, some also felt this was a valued part of their culture, even though it is discreetly contested. A 19-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

> *According to our traditions and the customs, the man has more authority… We understand it because it is the culture of the Arabs… We grew up on these traditions and we do not have any problem with them… We are happy with them.*

Married girls are always expected to respond to their husband's demands, regardless of what else they may be doing, whether work or childcare. A 17-year-old married girl living in an informal tented settlement explained:

> *The wife should immediately respond to her husband's demands, regardless if she is working or doing something else. If my husband tells me to bring a glass of water, and I do not answer him, he starts fighting with me.*

Girls reported that their husband and in-laws control even the smallest details of their life, such as how they dress, whether they wear make-up, what to cook, in some cases how much to eat, what time they can go to sleep and what time they wake, and contact with their natal family. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

> *My life at home is very stressful. My in-laws interfere in everything and always fight with me. They want to control me and my daughter. They decide what we will eat. They decide if we can buy clothes or anything else… They always criticise me for what I am wearing… They*

Photo 20: Photo story by Kaida, a 19-year-old Syrian young mother living in a collective shelter in Baalbek city

Kaida says: 'Girls marry at a young age when they are still children. Most girls do not understand what marriage is and they would be thinking like any other child about playing or studying. When a girl is married, she loses her childhood, friends and any dreams she has. Although girls are taught cooking and housework at their parents' home, taking the whole responsibility at the husband's and in-laws' house is difficult for them. When they have children, they do not know how to take care of them because they are children themselves. Young girls cannot defend themselves and the husband and in-laws control them, they do not allow them to see their friends, visit their family when they want, or go outside the house. Girls should not marry before the age of 18 until they are mentally and physically mature.'

even do not allow me to visit my family when I want. They say I can only go once a week… My husband listens to his family and does as they like.

Married girls reported that their lack of privacy, living with in-laws, adds to their stresses, as they are expected to dress modestly and wear the veil constantly at home.

Except for during pregnancy, there is little communication and negotiation between a married girl and her husband. As already noted, a husband does not include his wife in decisions within the home or even listen to her views. Although some girls noted that one of the few decisions they make together with their husband is pregnancy, many did not have control over timing of pregnancy or family size. While girls in the informal tented settlements reported that girls (regardless of age) are typically expected (by the husband, in-laws and the community) to become pregnant immediately after marriage, girls themselves believed the same, mainly to avoid gossip and pressure from their community. Similarly, girls in collective shelters noted that childbearing is expected soon after marriage (within the first year) but they noted that they have a greater degree of negotiation with their husband over timing of pregnancy. However, some girls reported that their in-laws control pregnancy and its frequency, and force the girls and their husband to have children regardless of their own wishes. A 17-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

My husband and I did not want children because we are both very young, but my mother-in-law forced us to have children because she said that she married off her son to bring her a grandson… I do not like children and still don't after having two daughters… I became a mother because it is what my mother-in-law wants.

In-laws were also reported to put great pressure on girls to bear a son for the family, criticising them if they give birth to daughters. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter said:

If the daughter-in-law became pregnant with a girl, the in-laws will object. They will not like it… Look at the way they think. It is God's creation. Everything is in the hands of God, what if God gave me a boy, and he was disabled? I reject him?

If the husband is an only son in the family, the pressure on girls is even greater, and they are often pushed into numerous pregnancies until they produce a son (with the threat of the husband getting a second wife if they do not). A 17-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

If their son is the only one they have, the in-laws demand the birth of a male: 'Give us a boy'… For example, right now I have a very big responsibility. My mother-in-law told me: 'You will keep getting pregnant until you have a boy'. I am forced to keep getting pregnant every year until I give them a boy. She said if I do not, she will get her son a second wife!

Boys also confirmed being put under such pressure by their families. A 19-year-old young father explained:

Photo 21: Photo story by Noha, an 18-year-old Syrian young mother living in a collective shelter in Baalbek city

Noha says: 'The husband and his family marry the girl so that she can bear children for the family. Bearing children is considered the main role of girls and the aim of marriage. Many girls do not get pregnant when they get married because they are young and their bodies and womb would not be fully developed. The husband, in-laws and sometimes the girl's family keep pressuring the girl to get pregnant. They keep taking her to doctors and giving her medicine to get pregnant, although doctors tell them it is normal for young girls not to get pregnant until they are older. The pressure on girls to get pregnant makes them stressed all the time and sometimes this causes them problems with their husband and in-laws. Some in-laws force the girl and the husband to bear children even if they do not want to, especially if the husband is an only son.'

My mother wanted me to marry young so that I bring grandsons to the family because I am the only boy in the family... Now that I have daughters, she keeps pushing me to have a son. My mother has a very strong personality, she says she wants me to get a second wife so that I bring her a boy, but I love my daughters and I do want to marry again. However, she is fixated on that because she wants a boy to carry on the family name.

Many of the married girls, and especially those living in informal tented settlements, noted that they also lack control over parenting their own children, and especially boys, as the husband and in-laws control this. The girls noted that parenting boys, as they grow up, is mainly perceived to be the father's role – a tradition which ensures that boys will grow up just as their fathers did. This includes teaching boys to be violent. A 20-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement said:

Fathers are the ones who raise the boys the way they want. The mother cannot talk to her husband about the way he is raising the boys. Even when she does, the husband would not listen to her. The husband would always say... 'We were brought up this way, now what do we lack?' or 'Why are you interfering with me? I raise my children the way I like'.

Photo 22: Photo story by Yamama, a 17-year-old Syrian young mother living in an informal tented settlement in Baalbek city

Yamama says: 'The husband does not help the wife with childcare. It is considered a girl's sole responsibility and shameful for men to take care of their children. Some men do help the mother with their children at home but not outside in front of the people. Sometimes, the father takes the son out with him but not the girls. Fathers try to make the sons resemble them and teach them to be strong even through using violence. Boys also imitate their fathers. They talk like them, walk like them, act like them and even start smoking at an early age like their fathers.'

In some cases, fathers were reported to incite their sons to be disrespectful or violent towards their mother and other females – a behaviour that the girls noted has been going on for generations. A 21-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

The fathers are the ones who incite the boys most to be disrespectful towards their wife and even their mother. The father teaches his son to be like that and even to hit the women and this is bringing out many bad things in our community... This does not exist in Lebanese society, the families live in peace and do not have violence... I mean, the community has a big role – customs and awareness in the community shape our life in the house.

The links between domestic violence, gendered roles, control of girls, and adult support

Domestic and intimate partner violence

Intimate partner violence is widespread within Syrian households, be it verbal, physical or sexual. Girls are often subject to violence when they fail to attend to their husband's or in-laws' demands, or take care of the chores they were asked to do. Failing to comply or if their work is perceived as unsatisfactory is also cause for verbal or physical violence. Girls reported that verbal abuse from their husband is the most common form, citing it as the '*biggest challenge*' in their marital relationship. An 18-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

My husband always curses me, and calls me a 'cow' and 'donkey'. He shouts at me the most when he comes home and does not find the food ready, or if he asked for a specific meal and I cooked another, or if I did not wash his clothes, or if he asked me to do something and I did not do it... Sometimes, he starts shouting if he sees me sitting and not working, it bothers him... When he shouts, I remain silent. If I talk back, he will be angrier...

Verbal abuse has a permanent psychological impact on girls, as a 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter said:

Insults are the worst, and they hurt you deep in the heart. You cannot forget them... When a person shouts or demeans the wife, this is cruelty. The person is cruel

Photo 23: Photo story by Shourouk, a 19-year-old Syrian young mother living in an informal tented settlement in Baalbek city

Shourouk says: 'Verbal violence is normal in marriage. All husbands shout, swear and curse at the wives. Men do not respect women and if we say anything, everyone would reply with the same thing – 'All men are like this, they all curse.' Girls are always blamed and wronged in our community. No one supports the married girl. They do this intentionally so that the girls would not become rebellious and start talking back and leave the husband. A girl in our community should always be calm, obedient, smile to her husband, and should always keep her head down. Parents do not support their daughter at all even when they know that the husband wronged her, they ask her to forget about it and obey him. Many times we feel disgusted by our husbands, we hate and curse ourselves, our community and our miserable lives.'

when he does that, even if he does not hit. Most men are cruel with their words…

Married girls often referred to physical violence against wives as less prevalent (now, in Lebanon) compared to their mothers' and grandmothers' lives back in Syria. They associated this decrease in physical violence with changes in community attitudes towards violence against women, which have been influenced by recent increases in girls' education (which the girls generally measured by ability to read and write). They also linked it to the influence of Lebanese society on Syrian men, as girls perceive that Lebanese men treat their wives better and are not violent towards them, which appears to be influencing Syrian men to change their behaviour. The girls also reported that there is now more family support for girls who are subject to physical violence. A 19-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

In the past, they considered the man who hits his wife to be 'a real man'… The man used to hit his wife until she bleeds. The wife could not ask for her family's protection because they would consider this normal… Nowadays, if the girl is exposed to physical violence, she leaves her husband's house… Her family will support her and talk to the husband and her in-laws.

However, as we discuss below, such support is mainly for girls and women who experience severe physical violence.

Many girls in our research reported being subject to physical violence from their husband. Girls' perceptions and definitions of physical violence partly explain why it is under-reported; most girls consider physical violence as being severe violence only – harsh beating that leads to bleeding or injuries. A 19-year-old married girl living in an informal tented settlement said:

There are only few men who beat their wives… It is common for the man to slap his wife or push her, but it does not reach severe beating.

Some girls believe that failing to fulfil their role and responsibilities within their household justifies verbal and physical against them. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter noted:

It is normal for a man to beat his wife… Some men beat their wives, but there must be a justification for the beating. The husband should not beat his wife for trivial reasons.

However, some girls envisioned marital relationships based on mutual respect. An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter said:

Some men consider [that] belittling and hitting a woman is an expression of masculinity… But the husband should not insult or beat his wife. There should be respect between a man and a woman. When respect is absent, there is nothing left to bind them together.

Even though girls perceive that physical violence is decreasing, boys admitted using both verbal and physical violence against their wife, and considered both to be more common in marital relationships. Boys and girls alike perceived that the younger the girl is when she gets married, the more she will be subject to physical violence from her husband. As with parents who use violence against their daughters, boys perceived that husbands frequently use violence to make the wife do things their way or to be obedient. A 20-year-old young father explained:

There is no man who does not beat his wife. It is compulsory! When the girl marries, she is childish, she does not know anything about marriage, and some things will be difficult for her… Then there will be problems and lack of understanding… You come from work tired and in a bad temper, and find out that there is no cooked food, you would not react nicely, you will beat her. This is the way to make her learn. The next time you come home, you will return to find your food ready…

Boys and girls both believe that violence against married women is often a result of parenting and frequently runs through generations in families. A 21-year-old father who admitted being violent against his wife explained:

May God have mercy on my grandfather, he is the one who destroyed all the men in our family. He always used to tell us: 'beat the woman, abuse her, throw her against the wall and make her learn'.

A 17-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter described how violence is widespread among her natal family and continues with her young brothers against their wives:

All the men in my family are violent, my brothers, father and uncles. They only beat, they do not communicate with women in the first place. They communicate with them through beating… I think they are just used to it. They think that being a man is something like that… They think that the man is always right without really considering what is right or wrong. It all depends on the upbringing.

Although violence against girls within the natal family is typically perpetrated by the father and brothers, some girls reported being subject to violence from other male family members, prior to marriage, such as their cousin, uncle and grandfather. Such violence is often related to coercing girls into cousin marriage instead of love marriage. This is because for tribal extended families, a girl's honour and reputation reflects that of the family; so marriages in such families are an extended family affair. A 17-year-old married girl living in a collective shelter explained:

When my family wanted to marry me off to my cousin, I was in love with another boy… I had not met my husband at that time and I did not want to marry him… I tried to run away, I wanted to kill myself. But my cousins caught me, locked me in a room and beat me… They told [me] I cannot do as I wish and that I will marry my cousin forcibly, it is not up to me to decide, but the family.

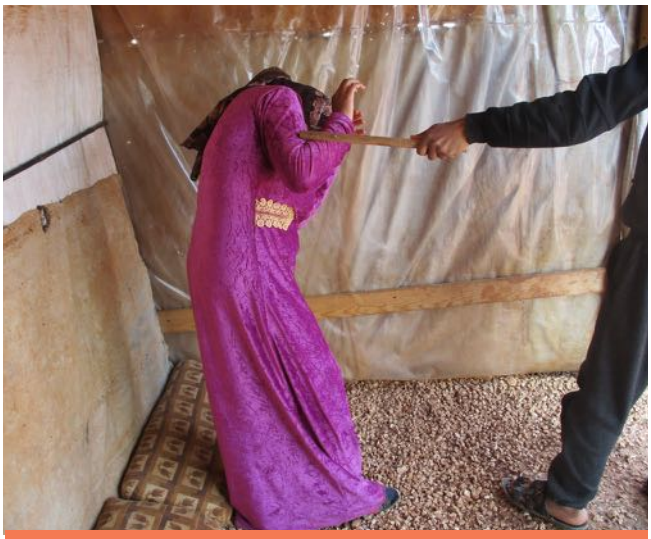


Photo 24: Photo story by Yamama, a 17-year-old Syrian young mother living in an informal tented settlement in Baalbek city

Yamama says: 'Fewer husbands are physically violent with their wives compared to the older generations where the majority were violent with their wives. Physical violence is more spread among young couples, where the husband would be young in age. When a girl's family live away from her, she is more vulnerable to violence from the husband because he knows she does not have anyone to go to or talk to, which makes him fear nothing if he beats her. Girls in the camp usually marry men that the parents chose for them because they want to get the support of the parents if they face violence after marriage. If the girl does not marry the groom of her family's choice, they will not support her after marriage, and if she faces violence, they will tell her to take responsibility for her own choice. Beating is a great humiliation because it shows you that the husband does not respect you and does not consider you his partner.'

Parental support and attitudes towards domestic violence

Girls facing marital violence, especially physical violence, are not often able to make the decision to separate or divorce. Although girls noted that parental support for girls has increased compared to older generations, as previously noted, such support is mainly limited to girls who face extreme violence that leads to injuries. Few parents are supportive of their daughters and even when they are, girls are often pressured to stay with their husband for fear of shame and the community's negative attitudes towards divorced girls. An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

When the husband beats the girl for the first time, she is young and does not know what to do, so she goes to her parents. Her parents will take his side and blame

her, thinking that she is young and must be doing wrong. They send her back immediately to her husband… The next time he does so, they tell her to go back to her husband and they talk to the husband not to repeat it… But the violence continues and then her family would tell her 'What can we do now? Why did you allow him to abuse you?'

Although most girls consider their mother to be their confidante, and reported that their mother is generally more supportive than their father, many reported that even mothers are not supportive when it comes to intimate partner violence. A 17-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter described her situation:

My father is short-tempered but my mother is very understanding… But when I fight with my husband and I tell her, she always takes his side. She tells me it was my fault… All mothers do this! They do not like to incite their daughters and wreck their homes because divorce is not a good thing. In our community, 'divorced' is an insult for the girl. They think that if the girl is good, her husband would not divorce her.

Girls indicated that mothers often take the husband's side because they are the ones who would be shamed and blamed should their daughter divorce, implying that the mother did not raise her daughters properly to be '*good housewives and respect the husband and in-laws*'. This highlights how the Syrian community has normalised violence against girls and their submission to their husband and in-laws.

Girls themselves (especially young mothers) who are experiencing marital problems explained that they try to negotiate rather than leave their husband, for fear of divorce or losing their children. A 20-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement said:

If your husband fights with you, you need to stay silent because of your children… If you leave your husband, he will take your children, so you should be patient not to lose them.

Boys reported that young girls and women accept recurrent violence due to fears of divorce and because they have minimal support from their parents, allowing husbands to continue behaving violently. A 19-year-old young father explained:

Girls bear the beatings… They will get angry and go to their parents' house but then come to compromises… She will accept it forcibly or maybe under pressure… She will not get divorced for a slap or two!

Due to lack of parental support, most girls tend not to share their experiences of marital violence with other females in their family. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

We face many problems but when you tell your mother, she does nothing. You talk to your sister but she cannot do anything for you… In the end, you keep it to yourself. If no one can help you, what is the point of telling them? You just suffer silently.

Some girls also conceal their marital problems to avoid exacerbating them. Syrian girls lack access to psychosocial support networks and services, mainly due to patriarchal gender norms that limit girls' mobility, as well as lack of knowledge about such services, and the cultural norm of protecting the privacy of marriage. A 19-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement said:

You cannot go to the psychologists. You might tell your sister or your aunt, but not everything. Even your mother, you cannot tell her everything. Sometimes when you visit your mother telling her about your problems with your husband, she gets angry and she shouts that she will kill him… Generally, you should not say everything, not to the mother, brother, psychologist, sister.

Overall, the married Syrian girls in our research considered their husband to be their main confidante, even if he was also a source of distress. This stems from a cultural belief that private marital issues should not be shared with anyone. Some of the girls described talking to their husband as a way to decrease their distress. An 18-year-old married girl living in an informal tented settlement explained:

The husband is the only one who knows all your private issues, so he is the only one you can talk to comfortably… The woman should talk about what is hurting her and annoying her and maybe, over time, the husband will realise this and soften… Even if he ignores you and your feelings, then you will at least be comfortable by getting things out and talking about them.

In-laws' protection and support for girls can abate violence and pressures

In-laws can be a source of additional stress for married girls, as they often interfere directly in girls' lives and put

Photo 25: Photo story by Mona, a 19-year-old Syrian young mother living in an informal tented settlement in Baalbek city

Mona says: 'The girl in our community is lonely. No one listens to her or supports her, everyone asks her to remain silent and tolerate her situation. If we face problems with our husband, we cannot talk to anyone because even the mother or older sister will ask us to bear our life with the husband because all men are the same. The neighbours tell us that we should not nag because we could have had a worse husband and they say that all men shout and beat and all women remain silent and tolerate their life. If the in-laws are bad with us, people will tell us all in-laws are like this and we are not the only ones in this situation. When people ask us to tolerate violence, this by itself is violence. Being alone without support make us feel down and depressed and often think about getting rid of our life and dying. We are not allowed to talk or say anything or else we will be accused of being bad women. If the family supports the girl, they eventually succumb to the community's pressure and ask the girl to stay with the husband and obey him so that she does not get divorced.'

them under considerable emotional strain. An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter said:

> *I cannot tolerate it anymore, I feel I am suffocating. My in-laws keep fighting with me, their demands never end and whatever I do they do not like it.*

Furthermore, girls reported that violence is worst when they live with their in-laws. Some girls noted that they are subject to violence not only from the husband but also from in-laws, which is mostly verbal. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

> *When we get married, we live with our husband's family. We are very young and then everyone can have a say on our life. Adults and children in the [husband's] family can insult us, and we cannot have any rights in their house.*

Many girls reported that in-laws play a huge role in inciting the husband to use violence. An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

> *When the husband beats his wife, the mother-in-law has a major role in it... She tells her son 'Go see what your wife is doing! She slept until noon! She did not work'... He gets mad at her and beats her for sure. He would tell her 'I did not marry you to sleep, if you want to sleep, you should have stayed at your parents' house'... His father too would tell him not to go easy on his wife and to beat her.*

Only a few girls indicated that their in-laws are supportive and protect them from their husband's violence. An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter noted:

> *My in-laws are very good with me, they always defend me when my husband fights with me... My mother-in-law treats me like her own daughter.*

However, for some girls, especially those overwhelmed by childcare and other domestic responsibilities, the mother-in-law is considered a great support, particularly when the girl has her first baby. A 16-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement noted that:

> *The in-laws' demands and criticism can put us under great stress... But sometimes it is better to live with them if the girl is young, as the mother-in-law can teach her and help her.*

Girls reported that support of the mother-in-law could sometimes substitute for the absence of the girl's own mother (who had, in some cases, remained in Syria).

Intimate partner sexual violence

Islamic religious inscriptions prohibiting wives from denying their husband sexual intercourse play a major role in shaping both girls' and boys' perceptions of sexual violence. As a result, lack of consent is often not perceived as sexual violence among partners. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter reported that:

> *We follow the rule of religion that a woman is forbidden to tell her husband that she does not want to sleep with him... Our religion and society considers it a must! A woman, no matter how tired she is, even if she has*

Photo 26: Photo story by Shourouk, a 19-year-old Syrian young mother living in an informal tented settlement in Baalbek city

Shourouk says: 'Men in our community do not respect women. Verbal violence from shouting, swearing and cursing the wife is common in all households. But some husbands beat their wives as well. Although words hurt more than beating and they leave a mark on a girl psychologically for her whole life, beating is very degrading for a girl. Men beat the wife for many reasons, including if she does not finish food by the time they are home from work, if they do not like the food, if she goes out without permission, if she wears a dress they do not like because it is tight or colourful, or if she wears make-up while the husband forbids her to do so. Sometimes, the in-laws incite the husband to beat their wife if they have a fight with them or does not listen to them, especially if she goes outside the house before finishing all the housework. In some cases, husbands do not need a reason to beat the wife, they might come tired and angry from work and beat their wife to get out their anger.'

reached the stage of collapse, and her husband asked her for this [sex], she must do it.

Married boys or young men shared the same view. A 21-year-old young father said:

Women cannot refuse the man, it is even in the religion. It is forbidden for women to deny her husband this [sex]. She is obliged to do it even when she does not want it.

However, other boys believe that they should seek consent from their female partner. A 20-year-old young father noted that:

If a woman denies a man sexual relationship, he will not die. I mean, this is something you need to do calmly for her to accept it. If she says no, this means he should not come closer to her.

Girls tends to define sexual violence as being '*sex forced using physical violence*'. An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter said:

There are those who insist to have sex with their wife against her will. In this case, it is considered violence because he beats her until she sleeps with him.

Even though girls comply with their religious and cultural duties, many girls (albeit discreetly) contest being coerced into sexual intercourse by their husband. A 20-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

The husband thinks that being the man means being verbally abusive to his wife during the day, and then wants her to be quiet at night and sleep with him... I mean, the woman is busy all day with her children and is very tired. She is also hurt by her husband's words, and is not in the mood at night for sex. Sometimes the husband leaves you alone, but most times, he just sleeps with you because that is what he wants... All women are very upset about this.

Married girls who experienced forced marriage to their cousin are the most vulnerable to sexual violence. Marital rape was mostly reported as taking place on the wedding night; nonetheless, some girls reported that it continues throughout their marriage. An 18-year-old married girl living in a collective shelter reported that:

My husband forced me to sleep with him on our wedding day because I refused to allow him to come close to me... He knows that I do not love him and did not want to marry him... Whenever he wants to sleep with me I reject [him] and we have a huge fight... Sometimes, I just give up and allow him because I am too tired and sick of fighting with him.

Girls described that they and their husband are often put under family pressure to consummate their marriage on the wedding day. While some husbands understand their new wife's fear and lack of knowledge about sex, others would force her to consummate the marriage either to avoid criticism from the family or feelings of shame that men can face if they are deemed not masculine enough to have sex with their wife and control her. An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

I was too scared on my wedding night so my husband was understanding and he did not sleep with me until the next day... There was a scandal because of that,

Photo 27: Photo story by Jamila, an 18-year-old Syrian young mother living in a collective shelter in Baalbek city

Jamila says: 'Marital violence is very common in all marriages. Girls are always beaten, especially at their wedding day, if they refuse to have sex with their husband. Husbands force their wife to sleep with them and beat her if she refuses. Insults and ignoring the woman are sometimes worse than beating. Husbands verbally and physically violate their wives over anything – if they did not like the meal, if the house is dirty, if he is angry at his work... He finds any reason to do so. Syrian girls are too weak, they are always subject to verbal and physical violence from their husband, and her family does not support her and stands with her husband. The mother is the one who pressures the girl the most and always blames her and tells her to obey her husband. Husbands are violent with the girls because they know that her family will not support and protect her.'

everyone started talking about us... This is why many men insist to have sex on the first night to avoid all the talk and criticism, people will say that he is not a man if he does not.

Girls reported that because sexual violence remains taboo, they do not report it, either to their family or to trusted individuals. As with domestic violence, girls and young women experiencing intimate partner sexual violence also lack knowledge of and access to support services.

Increased marital tensions following the compound crisis in Lebanon

Married Syrian girls reported that household tensions have increased due to the mounting stresses caused by the compound crisis. Financial pressures and inability to afford basic needs were the most frequently cited stressors, affecting males as the household breadwinner but affecting all other members of the household too. An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter said:

During this period there are many problems between me and my husband because of money, I can compromise with many of my needs, but my daughter needs many things... She is growing up, and she needs clothes, food, toys... Our problems are due to lack of money, we are no longer the same as before... My husband also feels upset... Because he works all the time and cannot provide everything we and his parents need, so he creates problems inside the house for trivial reasons.

Boys, on the other hand, reported that due to the stress of finding a job in an extremely limited market and their inability to support their families, they are becoming more violent at home. A 19-year-old young father explained the pressures he is under:

Sometimes you come from work and your wife would ask you to buy her something, and you are working day and night to secure the expenses and still cannot, so you automatically get angry and beat her... It happens due to the pressures on the man at work and the constant search for work. When he comes home tired and stressed, he finds the pressure of demands... Sometimes even if your wife says a word, you would beat her because you are always under pressure. You relieve your anger and despair on her.

Young mothers also reported becoming more violent with their children because of the mounting pressures they are under. A 17-year-old Syrian young mother living in an informal tented settlement commented:

I am always nervous, shouting at the children. They used to play outside, but now they are with me all the time while I am working and baking. I am not able to handle all of this and sometimes when I get nervous I lash out at my children, hitting them to relieve my anger.

Girls and boys both cited electricity shortages as the second main driver of increased tensions and violence at home, particularly in large households. A 20-year-old young father explained:

When we had electricity, everyone was busy at home. Some would be sitting watching TV, others using mobile phones, and some sitting studying. I mean, everyone had something to do. However, with the power outage, chaos and noise prevail. You cannot imagine it! Everything turns upside down in the house. Everyone is fighting with everyone...

Photo 28: Photo story by Shiro, a 19-year-old Syrian young father living in a collective shelter in Baalbek city

Shiro says: 'Physical violence is very common in our community. This man hits his wife or sister because she is not able to fulfil all the house duties... Women fool around social media and forget to cook, wash clothes and do their house duties. In return, the husband gets annoyed and resorts to violence to solve it. In light of difficult economic and financial circumstances, the husband returns home from work not able to bring enough food to the table, so his temper is always bad, and he becomes agitated very quickly inside the house. This is making him hit his wife more.'

Mobility and access to safe places and links to social networks and peer support

Cultural restrictions on girls' mobility

Syrian girls' mobility is highly restricted due to gender and cultural norms that attach central importance to girls' chastity and honour. This limits girls' movement outside the home, especially girls living in collective shelters. Marital status has little impact on girls' freedom of movement. Girls need permission (from their parents if they are unmarried, or their husband and in-laws if married) and must be accompanied by other family members to go outside the home. A 17-year-old boy explained:

> *The girl is not allowed to go out alone. For example, if she wants to go to the market and buy something, her father or brother or mother must accompany her... She must be also dressed respectably and should not wear make-up and perfume outside the house.*

Girls explained that negative attitudes among the community towards girls prevent them being more mobile. An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter said:

> *We cannot leave the house alone, we need to have someone with us... We are afraid of people's gossip if we go out alone. People will say 'Doesn't she have a family that fear for her?' or 'She is impolite' or 'Doesn't she have a husband to keep her at home, how is he letting his wife go out?' or they start wondering what made you go out and what are you doing alone, thinking that it must be something bad.*

Some girls in collective shelters reported that they are forbidden from leaving the house at all. A 19-year-old young mother said, '*Women in our community are not allowed to go outside the house, not alone or with anyone*.' Some girls living with their in-laws reported the same, especially girls whose parents live in Syria. A 17-year-old married girl living in a collective shelter explained:

> *I never left the house since my marriage... My mother-in-law does not allow me... I do not visit anyone nor go to the market... My mother-in-law even chooses my dresses... she buys me one dress each year.*

However, some girls resist their in-laws' control over their mobility, even despite negative consequences. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

> *My in-laws do not allow me to go out because they say they are getting everything for the house and I do not need to buy anything... They do not want me to get out because they want to control me... Their daughters can go out, buy things, and nobody talks to them, but they forbid me... However, when I decide to go out, I do, and do not listen to them. This causes me big problems with them but I will not allow them to control my life.*

For some girls, moving from their in-laws' house to live separately has had a positive impact on their mobility. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter noted:

> *Before, I used to live with my in-laws, so I did not go out of the house at all... But now, we live in a separate house, my husband is always at work so I have to go out and buy my needs by myself.*

Harassment and its impact on girls' mobility

The threat of sexual violence on the streets and in public spaces is an important factor explaining the restrictions on

Photo 29: Photo story by Samira, an 18-year-old Syrian young mother living in a collective shelter in Baalbek city

Samira says: 'When a girl marries, she is locked at her home and only sees the outside world from the windows of her house. We spend our whole time at home. When we get married, we cannot visit our friends or relatives like we used to do when we were single. When we go out, it is to visit our family with the husband. Girls are not allowed to go outside the house, not even to the grocery shop if they needed anything at home. If they need water, medicine or food they have to wait for the husband to come from work and get them. We cannot even throw the garbage and have to wait for the husband to come and do it. We are not allowed to go to the market or even the doctor alone, the husband or someone from in-laws must accompany us. Going to the street is forbidden for married girls. The house becomes the girl's whole world and the outer world is a foreign world for her. Staying at home makes the girl stressed, depressed and feel that she is suffocating all the time, as if she is a prisoner at her own house.'

girls' mobility outside the home. These threats (perceived or real) are related to protecting family honour, which pushes families to put such tight controls on girls' mobility. A 17-year-old married girl living in an informal tented settlement explained:

> *They said that there are many bad men… I mean, the Lebanese men here play with the girls' mind. The boys talk to the girls mostly… they cheat them… They would tell girls: 'We want to marry you. We want to ask your hand in marriage from your family.' They cheat them to sleep with them… We hear it on the TV… I also heard that this happened with a girl here.*

Boys also noted that fear of girls being harassed is the main reason why parents and husbands restrict girls' mobility outside the house or require her to be accompanied. A 19-year-old young man said, '*The parents do not allow girls to go out alone because someone might harass her.*'

Real experiences of harassment on the streets, in markets, shops, on public transport and in public spaces further restrict girls' mobility. The girls in our research noted that catcalling, verbal harassment, unwanted touching, and being followed by boys are common experiences whenever they go out. As a result, some girls avoid going out by themselves. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter confirmed that:

> *We cannot go alone to public places or the market. There are a lot of bad boys. They stare at you, walk behind girls, say things and do a lot of things… These things cause great distress… I do not dare to go alone, I go with my husband… But now I stopped going out altogether.*

Even reporting experiencing harassment to their parents can cause problems for girls, as the parents may react negatively, confining the girl and preventing her from leaving the house. Some parents would deprive the girl of other freedoms too, such as going to school, using a mobile phone or buying clothes. Harassment can even cause problems for girls if they are out with their husband

Photo 30: Photo story by Soma, a 17-year-old Syrian boy living in a collective shelter in Baalbek city

Soma says: 'Women in our community are not allowed to go out alone to public places like the market, city roads and parks so they can avoid getting lewd comments, harassed, or touched by strangers. If they had to go out, they should be always accompanied by their husband, brother or father.'

or in-laws. A 17-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

They think that catcalling is just words and doesn't harm, but it is violence and causing girls another type of violence at home. For example, if a girl goes out to the market with her mother-in-law and someone catcalled her, the mother-in-law will get mad. When she goes home, she tells the husband and the husband will be angry at his wife, they will fight and he will prevent her from leaving the house.

Some boys commented that they would harass girls in public spaces, especially if they are alone, as these places are considered men's spaces and girls should not enter them. A 17-year-old boy noted:

If I was in a public space and saw a girl there, I will harass her. She needs to know that these places are places where sexual harassment takes place and should not go there.

Girls' access to social and peer support

Prior to marriage, married girls' social interactions were limited to relatives and friends in school (for girls who live in collective shelters, as they were the only ones in our sample who had enrolled in school when coming to Lebanon), or friends within the same camp (for girls living in informal tented settlements). Girls in collective shelters who had not attended school had no access to a peer network or support. Girls living in collective shelters who did attend school were not allowed to interact with or visit their friends outside of school hours. A 17-year-old Syrian boy explained:

They [sisters] can go out with my family to visit relatives… The girls cannot go out in our house, they cannot go out! … They do not even have any friends. For example, it is forbidden for them to go out with their friends from school to walk or to go to some place, it is not allowed!

Girls' lack of mobility and lack of access to a mobile phone means they lose support from their school friends after marriage, which affects their psychosocial well-being. A 17-year-old married girl living in a collective shelter reported that:

I do not know anything about my friends… When my family pulled me out of school to marry me off, they did so suddenly and I could not even say goodbye… I wish I can go back in time and be with them in school right now… I was happy back then but I am miserable now.

Similarly, most girls in informal tented settlements had lost access to friends' support due to early marriage or moving outside the camp. A 20-year-old young mother explained how this made her very sad:

The thing that saddened me the most after I got married was that I lost my best friend… We both got married at the same time and she moved to a different camp… I cannot talk to her because she does not have a phone… She was my confidante and soulmate, and I still miss her. I do not have any close friends now, I only have my mother but it is not the same as your friend.

Girls in the informal tented settlements noted that prior to marriage, they were able to freely visit friends and relatives. However, this changes after marriage, because of negative attitudes among the community towards married girls who spend a long time outside their home. An 18-year-old young mother described this change:

Before we got married, we were free. We could go outside the house whenever we wanted to… We could even stay until night with our friends as long as they are in our camp… But all this changes when you are married… They say that it is shameful for the married girl to go outside her house a lot.

After marriage, girls cannot freely visit friends and need permission from their husband to leave the house, and only after having finished the housework and cooking. In some cases, the husband also controls who his wife can interact with. An 18-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement said it is almost not worth going out:

When we want to go out, we have to take the husband's permission and the mother-in-law's. But first, we need to finish all the work at home and see if they need anything before we go… And then when they allow you to go, they will tell you that you have to be back in an hour… You cannot be late or go to houses your husband forbade from visiting, or he will become infuriated and hit you… You just feel fed up and bored with all of this and think that it is better to stay at home.

Upon marriage, girls' interactions are limited to their natal family and their in-laws, and neighbours (for those living in informal tented settlements). Fewer girls living in collective shelters reported having formed relationships or interacting with their neighbours.

Girls in informal tented settlements have slightly greater mobility outside the house compared to girls in collective

Photo 31: Photo story by Sarah, a 17-year-old married Syrian girl living in an informal tented settlement in Baalbek city

Sarah says: 'Prior to marriage, girls are free. They have time to take care of themselves. They can visit their friends whenever they want. When a girl gets married, marriage binds her with many chains. A married girl has many responsibilities. She spends her whole day working in the fields, doing housework, cooking, taking care of the children, husband and in-laws. She does not have time for herself or to rest. If a married girl wants to go out, she has to take permission from her husband and if she does not, this will create problems for her with the husband. If the husband comes home and does not find his wife, he gets angry at his wife and fights with her. Married girls cannot visit others in the camp until they finish all the work they have to do at home. Prior to marriage, girls can go out whenever they want. They only needed their parents' permission to visit friends or relatives in other camps. Girls could come late at night to their home when they visited their friends or relatives in the camp but this is forbidden after marriage. Girls hate going out and visiting people because of being forced to ask for permission from the husband constantly for every move.'

shelters, given the close proximity of houses in the camp to each other. However, their physical interactions are generally limited to family members and close neighbours, especially given that it is challenging to visit relatives or friends outside the camp. Nonetheless, girls reported forming friendships with their neighbours after marriage, and many reported that some older neighbours have been a source of support, especially at the beginning of their marriage, guiding them on parenting or cooking or even providing emotional comfort. An 18-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

> *My neighbour is very good with me… She helps me with everything… She always helps me with the housework when I have a lot of work, and she taught me how to cook many meals… When my husband or I are sick, she takes care of us… When I need anything, I go to her.*

Girls' limited leisure time outside the house

Girls living in informal tented settlements mentioned negative community attitudes towards spouses' outings, which was not mentioned by those living in collective shelters. However, most girls do not go on outings with their husband. Some girls reported that they visit public spaces (albeit infrequently) with their husband, their natal family, members of their husband's family, and a few with friends. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter described how this makes her feel calm:

> *From time to time, I go with my mother and sister to public spaces for a walk… Sometimes, I also go out with my friend or my sister-in-law… When I go out, I feel I am breathing again, it calms me.*

Photo 32: Photo story by Basmala, a 20-year-old Syrian young mother living in an informal tented settlement in Baalbek city

Basmala says: 'Girls do not go out of the camp and cannot go out with their husbands and children. This is because spouses who go out for leisure are criticised by the community in the camp, especially by the older ones. Husbands are ashamed to go out with their wife due to people's gossip and criticism, and the husband usually walks in front of his wife and not next to her so that he will not be bullied by the community who will accuse him of being controlled by his wife. Therefore, girls stay at their homes and cannot go out even for walks in free and public places.'

Girls' limited leisure time is in contrast with their husband's time for leisure and socialising. As a 19-year-old young mother said:

> *When we are married we have to work in the fields to help the husband... The husband is out all day, and he hangs out with his friends at night. We spend all day shouting at the children and taking care of the house and cooking... We are psychologically ill.*

Boys' higher level of mobility and access to peer support and leisure activities

Syrian boys typically have greater freedom of mobility than girls, and this freedom increases with age (older boys enjoy more freedoms than younger boys). Unlike girls, boys are not restricted from accessing public spaces; nonetheless, community violence (discussed below) can limit their access to these spaces. Leisure activities such as going to restaurants, internet cafés, gyms, or playing cards or football with friends in playgrounds were reported to be common. Nonetheless, younger boys face curfews set by parents and can be subject to violent discipline if they stay out beyond curfew hours. As a 16-year-old boy said:

> *My father does not like me to go out a lot, but I cannot stay at home, I feel restless... If I go out, and come home late, I find my father waiting for me at the door and he immediately starts hitting me...*

Boys reported that peer support is their main source of emotional support. As they lack communication with parents, boys often share their experiences with their friends (usually other Syrians) who they trust to understand and listen to them. Friends are also cited as a source of financial support. However, because they have to work long hours, boys do not meet friends regularly, as a 17-year-old noted:

> *Only our friends can comfort us... Friends would listen to you, try to calm you and help you solve your problem... When we are feeling upset or need money, we turn to our friends who would help us... You can only share secrets with friends.*

Nevertheless, the boys in our research reported that displacement and living in a large town like Baalbek, compared to living in small villages in Syria, had affected their access to friends. This is because friends in Baalbek would be living far from each other, making it harder to meet regularly. As a 16-year-old boy explained:

> *In Syria, my friends and I lived in the same village, we went to the same school. We all knew each other and we spent all our time together. Here in Lebanon, we live in a city that is not like our village. We no longer see our relatives and friends. We spend all our time working.*

Impact of community violence in Baalbek on adolescents' mobility

Baalbek city, where the adolescents in our research live, is a heavily weaponised area, and there are frequent armed clashes between local clans. Boys reported avoiding specific neighbourhoods known for frequent clashes; some also reported avoiding going out after dark, which is when most clashes occur. Parental restrictions on boys' movement are linked to the risk of insecurity, which creates feelings of fear and distress for many boys when going out. A 19-year-old young man noted, '*People in Baalbek harm each other and anyone living here a lot. We feel that everyone can hurt or harm us.*' Boys even reported following security groups on social media (mainly WhatsApp and Facebook) that monitor the security situation in Baalbek so they know when there are clashes and when it would be safe for them to go out or go to specific public spaces. An 18-year-old boy explained:

> *We pay attention to the news... For example, if there are gunmen near to the Baalbek ruins we avoid going there... so we check if we need to go somewhere... If there are armed clashes or gunfire, we... stay at home until the situation is calm.*

Weapon-holding among Lebanese adolescent boys and young men, and peer violence in public spaces and streets, were also reported to be common. Syrian boys report being targeted by this violence because of their nationality. They also reported experiencing violence from other Syrian adolescents and young men. Nonetheless, most of the experiences they described involved Lebanese peers. Bullying and physical violence was reported to be common, especially among younger Syrian boys. As well as the emotional toll this takes on young boys, violence can also restrict boys' mobility, as a 17-year-old boy noted:

> *There is a group of Lebanese boys who attack me and beat me whenever they see me on the street for no reason... My mother forbade me from going out because of this.*

Syrian boys also described engaging in street violence with their Lebanese peers. An 18-year-old explained:

One time, there was a boy from our family who was teased by Lebanese boys in a public place... When they see someone alone, they think it is easy to attack him... The boy called his brothers and cousins and they all came to the place... A fight started between us and the Lebanese boys and they were afraid and started running away. Like this, they understood that he is not alone!

Similarly, boys reported being denied access to leisure spaces or being subject to bullying, harassment or violence in some of those spaces. However, some also said that befriending Lebanese boys who become their playmates (for example, during football games in the playground) is common, and has helped deter other Lebanese boys (and, in some cases, local authorities such as the municipality police) from harassing them. Syrian boys shared that their Lebanese playmates are the ones who usually defend them against such harassment and violence. An 18-year-old boy explained:

We were playing football with a Lebanese team in the playground and then some men from the municipality and some Lebanese boys came and asked if we were Syrians and told us that we cannot play here. They wanted to take our IDs [identity documents] but our Lebanese friends interfered and told them 'they are with us' and asked them to leave us alone.

As violence in Baalbek is widespread, some boys reported avoiding going to public spaces altogether. An 18-year-old boy commented:

I do not like to go to places in Baalbek. You cannot know what you would face! You might die in a stray bullet or get into troubles... I only go for walks next to the house, so that my mind will be at ease.

Married Syrian girls also described fearing the spread of violence within the Lebanese community. Some girls living in collective shelters, who have more access to public spaces and the market than their peers in informal tented settlements, reported feeling distressed when going out due to being caught up in violence, thus further impacting their already limited mobility. An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter described her experience:

I was walking one time with my neighbour in a public place... I saw the army tanks on the streets, which means that a clash is about to happen... I was too afraid and started running on the street, I did not want to be killed by a stray bullet! I even lost directions from fear and could not know how to return home, I was just walking fast aimlessly without even realising it... My neighbour was telling me that I am going in the wrong direction but I could not understand what she was saying from the horror I felt.

A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter described how she avoids going out altogether now:

Baalbek is like the jungle! You could be walking or standing on the street or in the market and get killed by stray bullets, you always hear of people killed. Here, there is only fear and horror!... I do not like going out because of this ... If someone tells me 'let's go out', I think that a fight might start and we might get killed as there is nowhere to hide outside... I love to stay at home, this is better for me than getting back home dead.

Girls in collective shelters also reported that community violence is not only widespread on the streets but also extends to their homes, especially in neighbourhoods controlled by armed Lebanese clans. This results in heightened feelings of distress and lack of safety, even when at home. An 18-year-old young mother commented:

Bullets are everywhere, I do not feel comfortable anywhere, not even in the house! ... When they start fighting in the street, the bullets reach my house, all my windows were broken from the fights... When they start fighting, I take my children and hide by laying down, I try

Photo 33: Photo story by Rabih, a 16-year-old Syrian boy living in a collective shelter in Baalbek city

Rabih says: 'Baalbek has a violence problem due to the availability of weapons. Lots of people get robbed and killed by rival gangs. Sometimes it is impossible to go outside during the clashes between different gangs and families, which really affects the work of some stores and establishments.'

to protect their heads… It is terrifying. You cannot leave the house and you are not safe if you stay.

Girls living in collective shelters also reported cases of intimidation, violence and forced entry into houses by armed clans in such neighbourhoods, as one 19-year-old young mother explained:

In some neighbourhoods, they keep fighting and shooting at each other. When they do, they do not allow people to watch them from balconies or windows… My neighbour, for example, was standing on his balcony… they saw him and got angry. They went to his house with their guns and started beating him. They started asking him 'Why are you looking at us?'… They would even beat men passing by on the street…

Even though girls living in informal tented settlements have very limited access to public spaces in Baalbek, and remain both spatially and socially isolated in their camps, the spread of violence in other areas is another source of distress, reinforcing their isolation. A 19-year-old young mother said, '*They are always fighting each other here, it is frightening!*'

The crisis is impacting adolescents' safety, mobility and access to emotional support

The impacts of the deteriorating security situation on adolescents

The worsening security situation in Lebanon, and the deepening crisis, has resulted in frequent thefts and robberies, as well as armed clashes and weaponisation in public spaces and streets, and even arbitrary killings. This highly dangerous and violent environment has adversely impacted on adolescents' mobility, as many are too scared to go outside. Some of the boys in our research had been robbed, as a 19-year-old young man explained:

There were two thieves who stole my phone, which cost 2.5 million [LBP]. I could not do anything about it. They used force, put the pistol on my head and stole my phone… Now phones are very expensive so how can I buy a new one?

Some boys and young men reported that their vehicles had been stolen – their only means of transportation – making their financial challenges even worse. A 20-year-old young father explained:

There is a flea market here where we go to buy cheaper vegetables… One time when I went there, I parked my motorcycle next to a seller and it was stolen… I am poor and I wanted to save 20,000 [LBP] by going there and ended up losing a motorcycle worth 10 million… It is impossible for me to get another one… I cannot go anywhere now.

Similarly, girls in informal tented settlements reported an increase in armed robberies on the road to their camp, creating fears among males and females and limiting their movement outside the camp, which adds to their isolation. Some girls reported that there are even robberies within the camp now, due to increasing poverty. Girls reported that as well as motorcycles, money and mobile phones, bread was one of the main items being stolen. One of the few places girls used to go to was the flea market in Baalbek, as many goods were cheaper there. Now, as the cost of transport has increased, and with numerous reports of robberies at the market, girls have lost that opportunity to travel outside their camp. A 19-year-old young mother explained:

We do not go out of the camp anymore… Even boys do not go outside the camp at night because it is unsafe for them… We used to go to the flea market but it is hard for us to go now. Sellers started coming to the camp and we buy what we need from them.

However, girls also explained that armed robberies on the road to the camp decreased when one of the armed Lebanese political parties in Baalbek set up a checkpoint there. An 18-year-old young mother noted that:

Robbery was the most common thing, it was quick stealing on the road, but now, no, robberies decreased, because the party put a checkpoint on the road. The problem is not solved, but it is better now.

Married girls have also indicated that girls and women are being targeted by armed robbers on the streets, at markets and in other public spaces for their gold jewelry (for example, wedding rings). The rising fears of such threats mean that girls and women are even less likely to leave their home. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter said:

Women are afraid of taking taxis because there have been many cases of taxis taking women to secluded places to steal their gold and money.

Moreover, such fears have been elevated, with girls reporting an increase in financial exploitation of women, especially in public transportation – something that boys did not report. A 19-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

> *Robberies and scamming increased after the increase in prices... Everything is expensive and people are starving. Girls are getting scammed the most by taxi drivers who ask them for unfairly higher fees and would make a scandal on the street if the girl does not pay them what they want...*

In addition to such threats, married girls have noted an increase in sexual harassment and kidnapping, which restrict their mobility even further, making them almost housebound. An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter commented:

> *There is no longer any safety. There have been many cases of thefts in our area, it increased too much recently... There are a lot of cases of kidnapping as well, they recently kidnapped a girl in a public place and she disappeared, no one knows where she is... That is why I hate to go out. I used to go with my neighbour to visit doctors, but now I do not get out of the house at all, I do not dare.*

Electricity shortages have further compromised adolescents' mobility and safety. Married girls in informal tented settlements reported that they are even scared within their own camp. Bathrooms are built outside the tents in the camps (and shared among several tents), and girls reported feeling scared to use the bathrooms at night. A 17-year-old married girl explained:

> *It is very scary at night, there isn't any light. The street is completely dark. When a girl wants to go to the bathroom, she is afraid now, she takes someone with her... I stopped going alone to the toilet because I feel scared from the darkness and the bathrooms are placed next to the road, and there are many boys in cars who might harass the girls...*

Although boys and girls both face restrictions on their mobility, for girls these restrictions apply during the day and night, whereas boys reported restrictions mainly affecting them at night. This did mean they were not so able to meet with friends in the evening, limiting their access to peers and peer support. A 19-year-old young father explained:

Photo 34: Photo story by Hozaifa, an 18-year-old Syrian boy living in a collective shelter in Baalbek city

Hozaifa says: 'It is getting too dangerous to walk or ride my motorcycle in Baalbek. There's always the possibility of getting robbed or even killed if you resist the robbers. There is too much crime now due to less traffic on the street, which the criminals exploit. I feel danger walking in the city now, we can't see what's right in front of us, there is always someone waiting on the corner to steal our phones or attack us. There's no safety in Baalbek. The absence of electricity is causing most of this, especially at night.'

> *There is no safety... When they cut the electricity, the whole city will become dark... If we are on the street coming from work, we would be walking with great fear and constantly looking around us to see if there is someone following us... It is better to sit in my house and not go out instead of being robbed or killed.*

In the face of such violence, adolescent boys reported increasingly resorting to carrying white weapons (such as knives, razors and blades) when they go out to protect themselves. A 19-year-old young man explained:

> *When I go out, I always carry a straight razor in my pocket, especially if I am out at night and in darkness... I can walk normally without feeling afraid, I won't be scared if someone came to steal from me.*

Decreasing access to peers and social networks

The ever-deteriorating financial situation of Syrian adolescents' households has had a stark impact on their

access to peers, family members and leisure activities outside the home. With limited access to mobile phones (discussed below), the increasing cost of transportation and financial difficulties have combined to mean that married girls have lost access to their support networks and natal families far from their homes (for girls in collectives shelters) or outside the camp (for girls in informal tented settlements). This has not only added to girls' isolation at home but adversely impacted their mental health and psychosocial well-being. An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

> *My family lives in Tripoli [north of Lebanon] and I used to go and visit them regularly, but now I do not see them at all. I do not have anyone but them and they only have me [she is their only daughter] and we are now separated as if we live on different continents… I only feel anger and hatred for everything and everyone… I don't know, maybe sadness made me become a mean person.*

Girls in collective shelters also noted that their visits to relatives have decreased as they try to save on transport costs and the costs of hosting visitors at home, thus adding to girls' isolation. A 19-year-old young mother described her situation:

> *Before the crisis, I used to visit many relatives with my husband like my uncles, my mother-in-law, my brothers-in-law, my family, but now I only visit my family because we cannot afford the taxi fees… Going to visit people or receiving people in my house has become a burden, I do not have anything to offer them [hosting] and in the winter, it is cold and people do not have money for heating, so people do not go out of their homes.*

Some of the few girls in collective shelters who used to go on outings with their husband reported that they have stopped doing so as they can no longer afford to. A 19-year-old young mother explained:

> *Before, we had a car and we used to go out sometimes, but my husband had to sell it because we needed money… We used to go sometimes for a ride… for a picnic… and spend the day there. But now we do not do that, we stay at home all the time because we do not have money to go out.*

Even though girls in informal tented settlements live in close proximity to other family members, relatives and neighbours inside the camp, they noted that electricity outages and inability to afford diesel during the winter (for heating) means they have fewer such interactions, even within the camp. As girls need to finish their housework and childcare before going outside the house, they are only able to visit others within the camp in the evenings. Lack of electricity means they have effectively lost access to their families and the emotional support they used to get from people around them. They are mostly confined at home, as a 19-year-old young mother said:

> *People in our camp started sleeping early because of the electricity cuts and because they also want to rationalise diesel consumption… I mean, if you want to go to your neighbours, you would embarrass them, as they would be obliged to light the heater while they cannot afford it and also it makes no sense to sit with them in darkness… When there was electricity, we used to stay up late until 10 or 11 at night, but now everyone sleeps at 7 in the evening… I used to visit my parents every night, but now I barely see them… No one visits others now, because of darkness but also fatigue. We are mentally tired and are not in the mood to see others.*

Boys also noted that visits to family and neighbours were no longer happening because people could not afford to host. A 20-year-old young man said:

> *Before the crisis, we used to go to work and then come back home and meet our friends in the evening to play cards and smoke hookah. We were not worried about anything. But today… We rarely see our friends because we have no place to meet… If I want to invite my friends home, I cannot because I will need at least 4 litres of diesel and I will fail in my hospitality. How can I afford serving them fruits, drinks and hookah?!*

Generous hospitality is an important aspect of Syrian culture, and boys also expressed worries and distress over failing to uphold this tradition, which is closely linked to a man's honour and duty towards visitors. A 21-year-old young father explained:

> *If friends now want to visit you, you feel distressed, and start worrying about where you can get the money to host them. If you do not host them properly, you will feel ashamed… It really causes you a psychological fatigue… The only way for you to afford hosting friends is to steal or borrow money so that you would not lose face in front of your friends.*

Young men can no longer afford sports activities either. Many had found a source of relief in playing football, but

they have less frequent opportunities for this now, as a 17-year-old boy noted:

I used to play football a lot with my friends. We used to go most of the week. It was cheap, but now became very expensive. We go now once every week or two depending on when we have enough money.

As noted earlier, more and more Syrian boys and young men are migrating to find work, which also means that adolescents lose their friends (their source of support) and can no longer do activities with them. An 18-year-old boy explained:

Photo 35: Photo story by Yamama, a 17-year-old Syrian young mother living in an informal tented settlement in Baalbek city

Yamama says: 'Our lives have changed a lot due to the electricity cuts, it became boring and tiring. We started hating our lives and have no will to live. The stress from our financial situation and the increased work and the electricity cuts have destroyed our psychology. Life without electricity is empty and meaningless. We need electricity for everything in our life, to communicate with people and our families in Syria, to heat water, to get water to the house, to watch TV, to wash clothes, to charge our phone, to have internet (access). The children are bored all day and nagging and crying more often. Without electricity, men and children have nothing to do at home, especially at night, and the fights in the family are increasing due to boredom. We used to spend our nights watching TV with the family, but now we have nothing and we sleep early from boredom and tiredness from the increased housework that the electricity cuts brought us. Life without electricity becomes death. Sometimes, we used to visit neighbours and relatives at night after we finish work and the housework, but now we cannot because everyone is sitting in the darkness. Darkness is very hard and it makes us depressed and stressed all the time.'

All my friends migrated and I was left alone in Lebanon... We used to play football together all the time... I stopped playing after they left because I hate playing without them.

These restrictions on boys' mobility and their inability to afford sports or other activities mean that many males now just congregate on the streets with little to do. A 19-year-old young man commented:

I saw some young men in my neighbourhood sitting around a bonfire on the street and playing cards with each other... I started joining them and now I sit with them most nights. This is the most I can do.

The combined impacts of the economic crisis, rising prices, limited work opportunities, and rising violence and insecurity have left many adolescent boys in a very fragile psychological status, leading to feelings of depression and isolation. An 18-year-old young man described how all of this has affected him:

I feel exhausted 24 hours a day... When I leave the house, I feel I do not want to come back. And when I return home, I find myself not in the mood to leave the house. I do not like going out anymore and I always feel I am not even in the mood to go for a walk... When I come back to the house, I become depressed and I put my head to sleep... I sleep most of the time.

Gender, locality and level of mobility shape adolescents' inter-community experiences

Interactions with Lebanese peers

Given that Syrian girls have very few opportunities to interact with others within their own community, they have even fewer opportunities to build meaningful relations with the wider Lebanese society. Nevertheless, a few of the girls living in collective shelters reported that they had formed close relationships and friendships with their Lebanese neighbours. A 19-year-old young mother said:

My Lebanese neighbour in our building and I are very close... She always visits me, we have coffee and talk... She is very good with me, sometimes she brings me food that I like when she cooks it, and when I need to ask about places or doctors, I always ask her.

Such relationships were not mentioned by girls living in informal tented settlements, mainly due to the camps' spatial and social isolation.

Boys, on the other hand, reported having more chances than girls to interact with the Lebanese community due to their greater freedom of mobility and opportunities for work. Nonetheless, most of their interactions appear superficial, and few boys reported having formed close friendships with their Lebanese peers. A 17-year-old explained:

My best friend is Lebanese... We were both working in a vegetables store and became friends... He is very good and I do not have friends except him because I feel only he can understand me.

Other Syrian boys, however, explained that they avoid forming friendships with Lebanese peers, either because of cultural differences or because they cannot afford to go on outings with them. An 18-year-old explained:

I have a Lebanese friend... He keeps inviting me to his house and to places but I prefer my Syrian friend... The Lebanese boy is very good but I do not feel comfortable with him, we are not the same... With my Syrian friend, it is different. We are both Syrians, we both work, we both do not have money to go to places like restaurants and cafes, we both do not have cars. I mean, we are similar and we understand each other and the situation we are going through. I do not have to tell him I don't have money to go out because he would not even ask me to go out.

Other boys explained that they avoid friendships with Lebanese peers due to past negative experiences, with individuals who pretended to be their friend in order to exploit or mock them. A 19-year-old reported his experience:

We used to go to a café and we became friends with the Lebanese boys who go there too... One time, they asked me and my Syrian friends to go to a restaurant with them... We were very excited because we thought they want to be close friends with us. When we went to the restaurant, they ordered many things and when they finished eating and smoking hookah, they started leaving one by one without us realising that... They left us alone so that we had to pay the bill, this was their whole intention from the beginning... Now, I do not go out with any Lebanese.

Some Syrian boys reported befriending Lebanese peers who are members of armed clans, exposing them to drugs and weapons use, as a 19-year-old explained:

My relatives work for a clan here in Baalbek and I used to visit them sometimes at their workplace... I became friends with the boys from that clan and they always invite me for tea and hookah. They even leave their weapons and the drugs they are trading in front of me, it is normal, they do not hide it from me... Sometimes, they loan me their rifles and I shoot with them.

Adolescents experiences within the wider Lebanese community

For wider interactions beyond friendships with Lebanese people, adolescents had mixed views, with boys citing more positive experiences than girls (due to having more regular interactions with them). Married girls in informal tented settlements reported their interactions with Lebanese society as mostly negative. Unlike girls, Syrian boys generally expressed a sense of belonging with the Lebanese community and considered themselves to be blending in well with Lebanese culture, while also preserving Syrian traditions, especially those related to ceremonies. An 18-year-old boy commented:

You definitely feel more comfortable in your own country, but when you move to another country you adapt with life there and you start seeing life there as beautiful... We started using phones here and play the same online games as Lebanese [boys]. We go to the same places, so we started living as them... But so far, we are still living according to the customs and traditions that we learned in Aleppo... for example, we still follow the same traditions for weddings as in Aleppo.

However, the ongoing economic and financial crisis has resulted in increasing tensions between Syrian refugees and host communities, and adolescents are increasingly reporting tensions mostly related to competition over jobs in Baalbek, with Syrian boys rather than girls bearing the brunt as they are the ones that are working. A 17-year-old boy explained:

I work at a grocery shop and I was helping a [Lebanese] woman customer with her grocery and putting it in her car... She was looking at me in disgust and she started then telling me that we Syrians are taking the jobs of the Lebanese and it should be her son working in the store instead of me... This happens a lot, they always tell us we are stealing their jobs... I mean, we work for 12 hours in a day, who would from the Lebanese accept that?!

Nonetheless, adolescent boys and girls living in collective shelters believed that such negative attitudes are the direct result of the impoverishment of the Lebanese community

and the lack of support available to help them cope with the compound crisis. A 17-year-old young mother noted that:

> *The Lebanese are poor like us… They are not able to find work and money, that is why they are bored of the Syrians living with them and are not able to cope with their presence anymore… They say they are not getting anything and everyone is helping the Syrians here, so they get envious.*

With the rise of tensions, many of the boys in our research indicated that they would often use a Lebanese accent to avoid harassment and violence in some situations, which indicates acculturation as a means of protecting oneself. This also reflects the lack of trust and confidence in the Lebanese justice system should they report any assaults, and the discrimination Syrians face from Lebanese authorities (see below). A 19-year-old young man described what happened to one of his relatives when he tried to report an assault:

> *One of our relatives quarrelled with some Lebanese men, and then the Lebanese attacked him at his house and beat them… Our relative went and complained to the [Lebanese] Internal Security, and instead of investigating… They put our relative in prison because he did not have papers… The best thing is to remain silent when something happens.*

The wider hostile political rhetoric against Syrian refugees, which has been increasing following the compound crisis, was also reported as an additional stressor for adolescents, adding to their isolation within their communities. A 19-year-old Syrian mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

> *We keep hearing on the news that they want to send all the Syrians back to Syria. They have been repeating this for three years and we do not know when they will actually send us back… Some of us do not have houses in Syria, and some of our men are wanted for conscription… they cannot go there… And now everyone [Lebanese] keeps saying that Syrians are stealing their jobs… That is why we do not mix with the Lebanese, we do not talk to them, we scarcely go out of the camp now, even the men… If any problems happened between us and the Lebanese, they will surely be able to expel us.*

Syrian adolescents also reported facing discrimination (and even verbal abuse) when they seek services or programming, often at healthcare clinics and local organisations, with Syrian girls living in informal tented settlements experiencing the most discrimination. A 19-year-old married girl living in a collective shelter described this discrimination according to her experiences:

> *Lebanese come first before the Syrians everywhere… When we go to associations to receive aid, they always make the Lebanese stand first in the line and put us at the end of the line… When we take our children for vaccination at the healthcare clinic, they give vaccines for the Lebanese children first and make us wait all day even if we arrived first… Sometimes, they tell us there is no vaccine while they provide it to the Lebanese. When they see a Syrian woman from a camp, they will expel her immediately, and tell her to come another day.*

Due to the compound crisis, shortages of fuel and flour have led to queues at bakeries and gas stations, and Syrian adolescents also reported experiencing discrimination when buying bread, diesel or gas. A 17-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter said:

> *Here in Lebanon, everything is humiliating. They [Lebanese] are belittling the Syrians to the extent that provokes the person, and makes you feel angry and small… For example, when you go to buy diesel, they make the Syrians stand in a line and wait until all the Lebanese fill up… Sometimes, Syrians would wait for hours and when their turn comes, they would tell them they ran out of diesel!*

Syrian girls living in informal tented settlements are more likely to encounter negative interactions with Lebanese people than those living in collective shelters, especially in winter, due to having mud on their feet and clothes. Girls reported being banned from entering healthcare facilities, pharmacies and supermarkets, and from travelling on buses in winter because their shoes are muddy. A 19-year-old Syrian girl living in an informal tented settlement explained:

> *In the winter our feet are full of mud from the camp… [Lebanese] people would not allow us to enter places… They look at us with disgust… They think we are dirty, but why can't they understand that it is not our fault?! We live in the camp and it is muddy, what can we do?*

Furthermore, Syrian girls' physical appearance and their traditional dresses (abaya, a loose over-garment) mark them out as '*different*', exposing them to harassment and negative experiences. This leads them to feel uncomfortable in public spaces and to feel humiliated

Photo 36: Photo story by Basmala, a 20-year-old Syrian young mother living in an informal tented settlement in Baalbek city

Basmala says: 'The camp becomes muddy in the winter, which makes life more difficult... It becomes difficult to enter the bathroom and to go out and to home. Vendors also stop coming to the camp such as gas and vegetable vendors. Mud obstructs daily life in the camp and makes children and homes dirty. It also affects Lebanese people's attitudes towards Syrians, as we are prevented from going into pharmacies and grocery stores and from taking buses because our shoes are muddy, which makes us feel insulted and affects our psychological well-being. Therefore, UNHCR must pave the land with gravel in order to get rid of the mud problem, and compensate the landowners who refuse to do so, because the gravel may damage the agricultural land in which the camp is built.'

and unwelcome in Lebanese society. Married girls in collective shelters did not report such experiences, as their attire resembles that of the Lebanese local community in Baalbek. An 18-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement noted that:

> *They know we are Syrians... It is clear from the way we dress... The Lebanese people do not wear this [the abaya]... When people see us on our way back from the fields, they laugh at us... They tell us in our face, 'you are gypsies'... They make fun of us...*

Girls from informal tented settlements also reported negative experiences based on differences between their dialect and the local Lebanese community's dialect. As a 20-year-old mother said:

> *People laugh at us everywhere... They do not understand the way we talk [the accent] and they laugh... they mock us... We feel embarrassed by this.*

The threat from Lebanese authorities and its impact on adolescents' mobility and psychosocial well-being

The biggest security threat facing Syrian boys in Lebanon comes from the authorities. Checkpoints are perceived as the most unsafe place for them, and are a constant source of fear and daily stress, as they are located at every main road. An 18-year-old boy said:

> *It [army checkpoint] is the place which scares me the most... We see the checkpoints everywhere on the roads... We are afraid... Because most of us do not have official papers... We faced many problems at the checkpoints...*

Unlike the girls who work in fields close to their informal tented settlements, boys need to travel to different areas to get to their workplace, with many working in informal sector jobs. Syrian refugees in Lebanon must hold valid residency papers, which can be difficult for many refugees to obtain. As most boys do not hold valid residency papers, they are at risk of being harassed or detained at the checkpoints on their daily commute to work. A 17-year-old boy explained '*I consider work in Lebanon unsafe for me because there are many checkpoints on my way to work and I have to live with this fear every day.*' Boys are much more likely to experience harassment than girls, as a 19-year-old young man noted: '*They stop all boys but they do not usually stop women... As we are the ones who work and go out every day, it affects us the most.*'

Aside from the threat of harassment and arbitrary detention, boys cited many incidents where they were subject to verbal and physical violence from the Lebanese authorities. An 18-year-old boy recalled one incident:

> *My brother did not have his papers with him when he passed by an army checkpoint at 6 in the evening. When the army questioned him about his papers and he told them he does not have them, they started hitting him with the butt of their rifles and broke his nose... They treat you as if you are a terrorist at the checkpoints.*

As noted earlier, some boys reported using a Lebanese accent to avoid harassment and violence from Lebanese authorities and to help other members of their community. A 19-year-old young man recounted one experience on his way home from work:

> *One day, we were coming from work and we saw the army stopping a little Syrian boy on the street, he was a street seller... We watched the whole thing while we were walking towards them, how they stopped him,*

started teasing him and then started hitting him… When we reached the checkpoint, we went to the officers and asked them what is going on and spoke with them in a Lebanese accent. We did that automatically without even thinking… We told them that we are Lebanese and named a specific clan that we supposedly belonged to, and that this boy rents one of our apartments, so they let him go.

Although girls are less likely to face threats from the authorities and to be stopped at checkpoints, they expressed fears about the safety of their husband and family members in light of the government's recent crackdown on Syrian refugees. A 19-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement noted that:

They are more serious with us regarding the papers [now]… but they did not in the past… All people have papers, but they are expired… We are living in continuous fear.

In particular, married girls living in informal tented settlements expressed major fears about the Lebanese authorities and especially the army, due to raids on their camps targeting men who do not have valid residency permits. A 20-year-old young mother recalled one instance:

One day, they surrounded us in the camp at 6am… They took all the men who didn't have official papers and who had expired papers… They took them for a period of time to investigate….

Girls also noted that they consider the checkpoints a threat, especially when travelling with their husband. An 18-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

It is not safe for us, we feel stressed and worried at the checkpoint until we pass it, this is even if they would not stop us… We only go to nearby places now… We stopped visiting our relatives who live far from us.

Renewing residency papers and obtaining work permits is difficult, as many Syrian boys cannot afford to do so, and finding a Lebanese sponsor for the work permit is challenging. The economic crisis, with depreciation of incomes, has made it even more difficult to afford to obtain legal papers. The government's crackdown on Syrian refugees has also increased boys' stresses and fears of harassment and detention. A 20-year-old young man explained their predicament:

They are chasing us now a lot for the papers but at the same time, they made it difficult for us! The renewal of papers at the [Lebanese] General Security used to cost us 300,000 [LBP] each year, which amounted to $200. It still costs $200, but how much would that be in Lebanese pounds now? How are we going to get this amount now?… Also, you want to get a work permit, you have to go and find a Lebanese sponsor, but he will make you work for him in humiliation to get you the papers… So it is a dead end.

Moreover, the boys in our research said that even prior to the crisis and the financial challenges, they used to avoid going to the Lebanese General Security to renew residency papers because they were treated with violence at the centres. A 19-year-old young man said:

The General Security treat us in a very bad way and they say bad words to us… Also, the General Security men [officials] always shout at us as if they are dealing with animals…

Another 19-year-old young man explained that sometimes the security officials ask for money:

I went to renew my residency papers at the General Security, but they kept telling me to come back tomorrow. I know they were doing this because they wanted a bribe so I told them directly 'If you want a bribe, I do not have money!' So, they started hitting me. They beat me so hard.

The boys also criticised a lack of support and protection from UNHCR in the process of renewing their legal papers. A 20-year-old young man noted:

The UN [UNHCR] keep asking us to renew our papers and send us to the General Security, but they are not doing anything to protect us when we go there.

Home, the safest place for adolescents

Syrian adolescents, both boys and girls, identified '*the home*' as the safest place for them given the widespread violence and insecurity on the streets and in public places. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter said, '*There is nowhere safe except the house… We only feel comfortable at home*.' While married girls living in collective shelters cited sexual violence on the streets as the main reason for considering home their only safe space, married girls in informal tented settlements cited negative interactions with the Lebanese community as an additional reason. A 19-year-old married girl explained:

Because of this [the negative experiences], the house is the most beautiful thing. In the camp, no one belittles the

other, we do not feel this because all of us are Syrians… Usually, we experience an emotional breakdown when we go out of the home. That is why we prefer not to leave the camp… We have value among our people.

These negative experiences and lack of security harm adolescents' emotional and psychosocial well-being, and increase their isolation, especially for married girls. However, this also serves to strengthen intra-community relations, as the local Syrian community offers adolescents a safe haven where they feel they belong and are respected. However, they also reported being subject to violence from within their community, but consider that as having less of a negative impact on them, thus downplaying its effects on their well-being. A 20-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

Generally, we were never exposed to any harm [physical violence] in the camp… It is always verbal… We may feel affected by this, but we do not take it into consideration… When this happens, we just remain silent and we go back to our tent… Because it is better than making the problem bigger… We avoid confrontations and we do not react.

This also reinforces the cycle of violence within Syrian households and the negative cultural practices that results in girls lacking agency, and freedom of choice and mobility.

Access to information and digital technology

Girls' access to mobile phones, albeit limited, is critical for accessing emotional support and leisure

Married Syrian girls have limited access to mobile phones, though girls living in collective shelters have slightly better access. Those living in informal tented settlements and most of the girls in collective shelters are not allowed to own a phone as it is considered '*shameful*' for a married woman to do so (and the few girls who did own a phone before marriage said they had to give it up once married). This is mainly related to limiting girls' ability to socialise online over fears of them being harassed. Most of these girls reported having partial access to their husband's phone. Nonetheless, having some access (albeit limited) to phones gives married girls the chance to connect with family and relatives, especially those who remain in Syria. The girls reported using a phone to contact the people who are their main sources of emotional support (for example, the mother, sister or sister in-law), with WhatsApp the preferred platform. An 18-year-old married girl living in an informal tented settlement commented:

WhatsApp is a blessing… It is cheap… And I call my mother and my sister and we can make a video [call] and see each other, we can also have a group and talk… My mother is my closest friend, when I talk to her I feel relief…

Married girls reported that they are not allowed to have their own social media accounts. Such restrictions were often imposed by their natal family too prior to marriage, reflecting fears about the dangers of socialising with strangers and the potential harm to girls' reputation and honour, which would tarnish the family's standing within the community. Nonetheless, married girls have access to their husband's social media accounts, even if they use them passively; this was one of the main leisure activities reported by girls. Among Syrian girls, YouTube, Facebook, Likee and TikTok, as well as WhatsApp stories are the most commonly used social media platforms. A 19-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

Phones entertain us. We spend entertainment time on YouTube or applications like Likee and TikTok… These applications are very entertaining and improve one's mood.

Some of the girls living in collective shelters and who were forced into cousin marriages reported being denied access to a phone and social media. They were given only partial (although monitored) access to their in-laws' phones to talk with their families, denying them any privacy. In some cases, this is done intentionally by the in-laws to isolate the girl and forbid her from telling her family how they are treating (or mistreating) her; this is especially the case when the girl's family lives in Syria. These girls are left completely isolated and without any emotional support. A 17-year-old married girl living in a collective shelter described her experience:

My mother-in-law does not allow me to talk to my family. Sometimes, when they call, she tells them I am not in the house although I never leave the house… When she allows me to talk to my mother, she sits next to me during the whole conversation because she does not want me to tell my mother about what I am going through in their house… I wish I could tell my mother everything because I know she will understand me. But I know that my mother knows me well, I am sure she understands how miserable and sad I am from my voice, and that gives me some comfort…

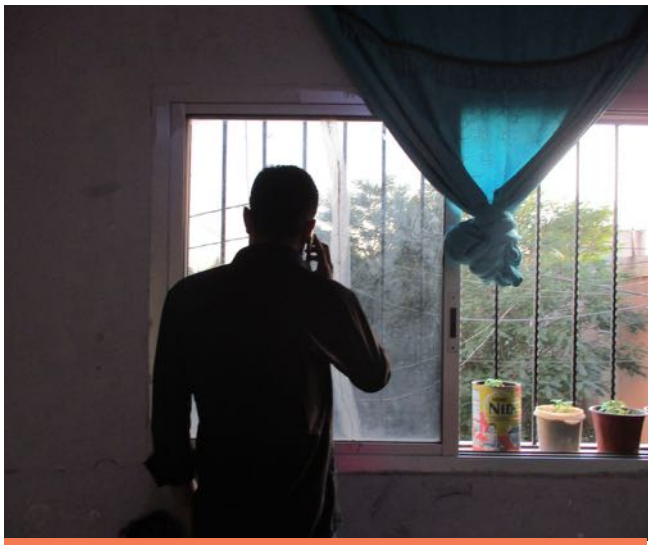


Photo 37: Photo story by Shams, an 18-year-old Syrian young mother living in a collective shelter in Baalbek city

Shams says: 'Many husbands do not allow their wife to have a phone after marriage, and all men refuse that girls have social media accounts. If a girl has a phone, she is only allowed to talk to her family. On the other hand, men do whatever they want on the phone. They have social media accounts and they keep talking to girls on the phone. If a wife says anything to them about them talking to girls, they get angry and can become violent. They say that the girls are their friends. All men talk to girls on the phone and they consider this to be normal. However, for the wife, this hurts her and she considers it a betrayal. The husband does not care about his wife's feelings and how this makes her feel unwanted, unappreciated and have low self-confidence. Men forbid the wife from everything and allow themselves to do whatever they want and do not even accept to be questioned.'

Furthermore, some girls reported that they could be subject to violence from their husband for using the phone for a long time or for receiving content the husband does not approve of. Married boys also reported using violence against their wife for this reason.

Internet is the girls' main source of information

Girls also reported that online access (even when using social media passively) has been their main source of information. For example, some girls cited learning about different subjects, including sexual and reproductive health, through social media. Some also said they follow news and developments in their hometown in Syria, mainly through Facebook feeds. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter said:

> *I learned about contraceptive methods and the reproductive systems of men and women on Facebook… Sometimes, when I am scrolling, I come across such videos and I watch them… I did not know anything about these subjects before watching those videos.*

Many girls also cited actively searching for information on women's and children's health, childcare, child nutrition and cooking, mainly on YouTube. As already noted, girls (especially those living in informal tented settlements) are also increasingly using YouTube to search for home-made remedies for illness due to the shortage of medicines and their high cost. A 17-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

> *I search for many thing on YouTube. When my son is sick – for example, if he has stomach ache – I search for a cure as some YouTube channels provide medical recipes consisting of medical herbs. Sometimes I search about child nutrition at a certain age, such as what children should eat at the age of 1 or 2 years.*

Searching for information on the Islamic religion and the Qur'an was also common among boys and girls alike, with YouTube and Google the most commonly used search engines.

Boys' unrestricted access to mobile phones and social media

Syrian boys, on the other hand, can own a mobile phone and use social media without restrictions. Boys noted that they have greater access to mobile phones in Lebanon than they did in Syria. Unlike girls, boys have an active online presence where they share photos, posts or quotes to express their views or emotions, interact with friends online, or create other content to share. Boys also reported that they follow pages or groups on social media for news and updates on security and politics in Baalbek, Lebanon and Syria. They also look at international news and sports news, and visit trade pages or groups to sell or buy used items such as phones, motorcycles and cars. Some boys reported that they use their phone to develop skills, like learning a new language. Some boys also indicated that they use Facebook to search for jobs on local pages and groups, which had helped them find work. An 18-year-old boy explained:

> *There are many people who put advertisements on Facebook looking for workers. When we find something*

we can do, we communicate with them and sometimes we get the jobs.

Boys also spend a lot of time playing online games, specifically PUBG (a multiplayer online battle game), partly as a coping mechanism to release their stress. They also reported following pages or groups and searching for information about health, fitness, sports, animals, and adult content. Being exposed to violence online was a common experience among the boys in our research, who cited adult content, extremist content, human abuse and animal cruelty content as the main risks. Syrian boys reported that some of the violent content shared on social media by people in Baalbek city had made them more fearful of violence in the real world due to the level of cruelty shown in the online content. A 17-year-old boy explained:

People in Baalbek share videos sniping cats, dogs and the doves in the lake while it is forbidden by the municipality... [Lebanese] people here are very cruel, we feel that they can harm any living being, they even harm each other... It makes us feel that anyone can hurt us here.

Networking on social media is common among boys. While girls are forbidden from interacting with males, boys meet, communicate and interact with new friends (male and female) online. Facebook and Messenger were the most common platforms used to arrange to meet girls (living abroad or from different communities) and to build friendships (mostly romantic) with girls. Social media is also one of the main ways that boys stay in contact with friends who have moved somewhere else in Lebanon or those who migrate, as well as relatives who remained in Syria or have been displaced to other countries. Furthermore, boys also indicated that social media is vital for them to get emotional support from their friends, including (for some) those they meet online. A 16-year-old boy explained:

Sometimes, you meet friends [online] who give you comfort. When you face a problem or if you are unable to find work, you would talk to them about it and they try to comfort you and help you solve your problems. Even if they told you to be patient until things can be resolved, you will feel comfort.

Interrupted internet access limits adolescents' access to support and leisure

Interrupted internet access (due to power cuts), as well as the recent surge in mobile data tariffs (more than a fivefold rise in 2022), limit Syrian adolescents' access to the internet. Given the much more limited physical interactions they have with others due to the compound crisis, this interrupted internet access has exacerbated adolescents' isolation and reduced their access to emotional support and leisure activities in the home. Girls reported that this has made them feel even more lonely and distressed. A 17-year-old married girl living in a collective shelter explained:

My brother is the only person who is close to me, understands me and supports... He is the only one from my family who was against my marriage [forced marriage] and he understands my pain... Since he migrated to Europe, we used to talk every day on the phone... Only talking to him makes me happy in this life, but now we cannot talk. I talk to him once in the week and sometimes we do not talk for two weeks because there is always no internet... Not being able to talk with my brother is very painful for me, life feels terribly ugly and empty... I feel sad and hollow.

Girls also described how electricity cuts and internet interruptions have impacted family time in the evenings, leading to less quality time that the family spends together. A 19-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement described their situation:

In the past, we used to spend our free time in the evening watching TV, we would watch series together [with the family] and drink tea. We used to talk to precious people in our life and it used to make us feel happy... We used to get some entertainment on the phone [social media] and have some laughs ... Now, the TV is off all day, there is no internet, the phones are off all the time [dead battery] and there is nothing to entertain us. It is always dark and we are always bored, so we immediately go to sleep after finishing work... We are unable to feel happy anymore.

Boys who used to spend a great deal of time online reported that their mental health and psychosocial well-being was deteriorating due to lack of internet access, which was reducing their access to friends and leisure activities, while their physical activities and interactions have been becoming increasingly limited as well, resulting in their isolation at home. A 19-year-old young man explained:

Photo 38: Photo story by Noha, an 18-year-old Syrian young mother living in a collective shelter in Baalbek city

Noha says: 'Electricity cuts have affected our lives a lot. Without electricity, we live without water, internet, phones, we cannot shower, and we spend our nights in darkness on the candle light. Life without electricity is intolerable. We do not have any means of entertainment at home without electricity, no TV and no phones and internet. We cannot communicate with anyone, especially our families. If we feel sad and suffocating, we cannot talk to anyone because there is always no electricity and internet. Sometimes, we cannot talk to anyone for weeks. The electricity cuts are destroying our psychology and the stability of our families. We are always bored at home, and due to the suffocating feeling that electricity cuts are causing us, fights are increasing at home. At night, we are always afraid from darkness, especially that there is no safety anymore and there are a lot of armed house robberies. Our children are always bored and crying, making our life harder, and they wake up at night afraid from the darkness and crying. We are not able to take a break anymore.'

Photo 39: Photo story by Nada, a 17-year-old Syrian young mother living in a collective shelter in Baalbek city

Nada says: 'Married young girls have many pressures in their life and they do not have anyone to go to. When I got married, I stopped talking to friends. I have a lot of problems with my in-laws and my husband listens to his mother and takes the side of his family all the time. My husband barely works and we have many financial problems as well. I cannot talk to my mother because she has a lot of worries herself and I do not want to burden her. I fake happiness in front of all people but in reality I am sad and lonely. The only thing that helps me when I feel powerless and depressed is praying and reading the Qur'an. It makes me feel at peace with myself because I know that God is the only one there for me when I need him.'

> *Our mental status worsens every day because we do not go to work, there is no electricity, and this means there is no internet, so people are depressed. What are they supposed to do?... Internet is the most important thing in my life. I stay all night on my phone. Now what? We are living in the age of ignorance [pre-Islamic era] without electricity and internet...*

Adolescents' emotional resilience and strategies for coping with heightened stresses and isolation

Most adolescents reported that sleep is one of their main coping strategies for dealing with heightened stressors and isolation. A 20-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement said:

> *Everything is bad, and there is no dispute about this! It could be the reason for a person to resort to sleep that they are upset. This is the best thing to do when you cannot do anything else about your situation.*

Some married girls reported that they do domestic work and childcare for distraction, even though these chores have also been identified as major stressors. Some girls and boys also reported piety as a major coping mechanism. A 19-year-old young father noted:

> *When I stand before God [praying], I confess to him everything inside me and get out all the fatigue and despair.*

Some boys have resorted to taking long walks with friends to relieve their stress – an option that is not available to girls due to restrictions on their mobility. An 18-year-old boy explained:

> *When my friend and I are bored or depressed, we go for a walk... We keep walking and we talk about everything...*

This is the best thing! I feel extreme relief when I come back home.

Somewhat alarmingly, boys frequently mentioned drug use as a possible coping mechanism, suggesting that this may be on the increase among Syrian boys. Although the boys in our research did not directly report using drugs themselves, the cheap cost of some drugs and easy accessibility in a city with many drug traffickers could make drug use an increasingly attractive coping mechanism among boys. A 17-year-old boy explained:

Taking Captagon [Fenethylline drug pills] is the best solution, it works all day for a small amount of money... There is nothing except that for you to take care of yourself, nothing else... It will make you relaxed and happy and gets you out from your anger and frustration.

Access to programming substitutes limited civic engagement and access to psychosocial support services

Except for the programmes available for Syrian adolescents and young people run by NGOs, there are no civic engagement opportunities available for them either at the community or state levels. Syrian adolescents participate in a wide range of programming, including literacy, life skills, vocational training and cash-for-work. Girls in collective shelters have the lowest rate of participation in programming compared to girls in informal tented settlements and to boys. Programmes were reported to have had several positive impacts on the psychosocial well-being of both boys and girls.

Married girls in particular, given that they lack access to and knowledge of available psychosocial support services and programming, reported that programme participation had had a positive impact on their psychosocial well-being. It offered a rare opportunity to go outside the home and spend time with their peers, combating their isolation and lack of leisure time as they spend most of their time doing housework, childcare, or for girls in informal tented settlements working in the fields. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained the impact of programme participation on her:

Going to the organisations changes one's mood. We stay at home all the time, we do not go anywhere, not even to our neighbours, we are mentally shattered at home. We are exhausted with children and the work and we do not see anyone. When we go to organisations, we feel mentally at ease. We have a chance to go out, it is the only outing for us and we see it as entertainment. We meet new people, and we talk with them. When you go out and interact with people, it is relieving and gives you mental comfort.

Married girls in informal tented settlements reported that programme participation gives them an opportunity to meet friends and relatives who they cannot see often due to their work in the fields and their housework responsibilities. A 19-year-old young mother explained:

When we stay at home all the time, we feel bored and suffocated. We come here [to the organisation] and we meet our friends... For example, I went with my sister for work [cash-for-work programme] at the organisation and I was seeing her every day, whereas I usually see her every two months because we are both busy at work and home.

As well as learning about different topics, married girls reported that programme participation had improved their psychosocial well-being, their social skills and personality, and improved their self-confidence. An 18-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter explained:

The NGO programmes strengthen your personality a lot... Before, when I used to sit with stranger guests, I used to be very shy and not talk to them. But now, I gained a lot of self-confidence because I learned to speak out loud in front of people and to have discussions with them...

For many girls, being able to share their feelings and thoughts during programme activities has substituted for the lack of support and understanding they get from their community. A 17-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement described how taking part in the GAGE programme has impacted her:

I did not know how to express myself before. In our community, we do not talk about ourselves or feelings and no one has ever asked us our opinion on anything... When I first started with you [GAGE programme], I found it hard to talk and I was very shy, I did not know what to say... But when I started talking and bringing out everything, I started thinking for myself and I felt my personality changed, I became stronger. I discovered that talking makes you relieved and that there is someone who cares about us and wants to listen to us.

Some Syrian boys also noted that their social skills have improved following their participation in programmes.

A 17-year-old boy said, of his participation in the GAGE programme:

> *I used to be scared to be in a group of people, I did not know how to interact with people… But when I participated with many boys, it started to slowly become normal for me to be in a group and talk in front of them.*

Many girls also said that participation gave them an opportunity to relieve their stress, as they could distance themselves from the pressures of their responsibilities at home. Others reported that learning anger-management skills also helped them cope with their daily stressors and be less violent towards their children. A 17-year-old young mother explained:

> *When I am feeling disturbed, it affects my home a lot, I get angry at my children or I start fighting with my husband. I no longer behave like that. I learned that our actions are related to our feelings and thoughts. So now, when I am annoyed by something or feel like I want to do something bad, I control myself. I stopped taking out my anger on my children. I do not react instantly, I take a moment to calm down and control myself first.*

For some girls, taking part in mixed-sex programme activities was an opportunity to interact with boys and break the gender-segregation barriers put up by their cultural traditions. An 18-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement described how girls gradually became more confident to share opinions and discuss issues with boys:

> *In the camp I do not talk with boys, we do not have this [girls interacting with boys]. When there were boys with us in the class [literacy programme], we were very shy at first because we never interacted with boys before, but we started talking with them in class about the lessons and exchanging opinions, so we became bolder and we started interacting with them normally.*

Likewise, participation in mixed-nationality programmes was an opportunity for girls and boys to interact with their Lebanese peers, learn about their culture, and – for some, particularly boys – to build friendships. As reported earlier, many girls living in the camps had largely negative interactions with the Lebanese community, so mixed-nationality programmes provided an opportunity for more positive interactions. A 20-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

> *I have never talked to Lebanese girls or interacted with them before. I did not know how to act and talk to them. When I met Lebanese girls at the organisation [life skills programme], I got to know them and became more confident with them. We talk about everything, laugh and have fun together… At first, I did not want to be with Lebanese girls [in the same programme] because the Lebanese girls seem arrogant to us, but when you interact with them, you find out that they are good people… When we talk with them about ourselves, they listen and understand us. I started to feel that our lives are similar.*

Furthermore, some girls reported that encouragement and positive comments they received from Lebanese participants had changed their self-image and improved their self-care. A 20-year-old married young woman living in an informal tented settlement described her experience:

> *When we were in the session [life skills], the teacher asked me to describe myself and I remained silent because I did not know anything about myself! The [Lebanese] girls started telling me: 'You are very pretty' or 'you are very bold' or 'you are very strong' and I did not know that I was. The people that we do not actually know [Lebanese] made us realise many things we did not know about ourselves. They made us feel confident and start thinking about taking care of our appearance and personality.*

Although forming long-term friendships with Lebanese peers was uncommon, few girls had made such friendships and considered it an opportunity to learn about Lebanese social life. A 19-year-old young mother living in an informal tented settlement explained:

> *I met a Lebanese girl in an organisation and we became friends. The programme ended two years ago and we still speak with each other. We do not visit each other but we contact each other by phone. She is a very nice person. Lebanese friendships are good, they [Lebanese girls] have seen many things in life, they go out, and when they talk to you about their life they make your life nicer.*

Married girls also reported that interactions with Lebanese peers, and being introduced to a less conservative culture where girls have more freedoms and agency, had made them reflect on their role and rights as women within their own community. A married 18-year-old girl living in an informal tented settlement explained:

In our camp, everyone has the same opinions and talks about the same things. You feel lonely and trapped in your community. There is nothing new… It is a boring life. You are always pessimistic, living the same routine and struggling with the work at the house… When we meet different people [Lebanese]… You learn about their life and different opinions… I found out that Lebanese girls can drive cars, smoke hookah and go out at night, while we are not allowed to do these things… I came to learn that a girl has the right to make decisions and choose her life path, I became aware that a girl has the right to choose what she wants. I did not think about these things before, we all thought that girls do not play a role in society… It gives us strength when we learn that we have rights like men, it makes you feel differently about yourself.

For Syrian boys, taking part in mixed-nationality programme activities gave them an opportunity to expand their social networks and build friendships with Lebanese peers. An 18-year-old boy said:

I love having friends of all nationalities… When you meet the Lebanese person on the street, you feel happy that he was your colleague. You chat with him and we laugh together, you feel happy to keep coming across [Lebanese] people you know.

Some boys also said that these networks help them access work opportunities and learn skills they might use at work. A 19-year-old young man commented:

I gained a lot from meeting new people. When you meet a new friend [Lebanese], he will invite you to his house. You will learn new things from him. He will teach you things [work-related skills] you do not know, which he has experience in. He would tell you about [available] work.

Other boys reported that programme participation offered them new hobbies like Dabke (Levantine folk dance), photography and football.

Vocational training and cash-for-work programmes have been particularly important for boys as they have helped them gain skills they can use to earn extra income or enhance their work-related skills so that they become more experienced, skilled and knowledgeable in their own profession. A 19-year-old young man explained:

I took a haircutting course and it is a profession that I already liked… It is not tiring like construction, it is clean and makes you good money. When I finished, I started giving my friends and relatives haircuts and earning money from it.

For married girls in informal tented settlements, whose only work is in the fields, vocational training programmes offered them the opportunity to take up a different career within their camp, like sewing or hairdressing. A 20-year-old young mother said, '*After I took a course in sewing, I bought a sewing machine and started sewing dresses for women in the camp.*'

However, girls living in collective shelters have fewer opportunities to join vocational and cash-for-work programmes mainly due to restrictions on their work outside the house. Some girls, who have ambitions to learn specific skills and have a career, have been forbidden by their husband from joining such programmes. An 18-year-old young mother explained:

My dream in life was to become a hairdresser. I told my husband many times that I want to learn it and work as a hairdresser in a salon. But he does not accept that and did not allow me to join any course. I wanted to earn my own money, but he does not allow me, he always tells me that women in his family do not work. I suffered a lot because of that.

Nonetheless, for some girls, even though they are not allowed to work, this has not stopped them from making steps towards achieving their ambitions. Some noted that programme participation had enabled them to learn about the opportunities available to girls. A 19-year-old young mother living in a collective shelter described the impact of skills training on her ambitions:

After I joined a life skills course, I became more mature. I was used only to the house chores and I thought doing anything different would be very hard for me. But the course changed me. It made me improve my personality… I was not aware about many things in life, which I learned in the course. I had forgotten before about ambitions, but talking to many people in the course and learning about their lives made me start getting ideas about the different options available for me. I started having many ambitions that I want to reach. I started thinking that I want to learn hairdressing and nursing, and I did later on.

One of the key benefits of programme participation for Syrian adolescents are the potential financial returns. For married girls living in collective shelters, the stipends they receive for taking part in programme sessions allowed

the girls to generate their own earnings, which is a major positive impact for them, given their lack of access to money and agency in managing household budgets. An 18-year-old young mother explained:

> *It is not allowed for women to earn money for the house. And when you ask your husband to get you something, he says he does not have money or he does not allow you to buy things he thinks are expensive. When we go to the organisations and earn our own pocket money, we can buy whatever we want for our children or ourselves.*

Girls in informal tented settlements reported that the money they earn from learning new skills through programme activities helps them cover basic expenses at home or pay off debts. A 20-year-old young mother commented:

> *You benefit a lot from the money you get, you use it in every way and it helps with the house expenses… When I got the money from my work [cash-for-work programme], it was very helpful for me as I used it to pay back my husband's debts.*

However, married girls in informal tented settlements shared that their husband and in-laws would not allow them to participate in programming unless they would receive compensation or aid in return, which is a common attitude among the Syrian community. A 17-year-old young mother explained:

> *In our community, if we wanted to participate in a life skills programme, for example, people will start asking you about the benefit you will receive from it. If there is no material benefit, then they would not allow you to participate. Our community does not allow us to go out just to get psychological relief. There should be always a financial benefit – aid, food supplies or anything that we would get in return for participating – for them to allow us to go to organisations.*

Boys, on the other hand, reported that generating income through programme participation helps them substitute for scarce work opportunities, stay disciplined and active (waking up and sleeping early) as well as avoiding conflict with their fathers due to being idle at home. A 17-year-old boy commented:

> *When I stay at home doing nothing, sleep late in the night and wake up at noon, my father would be angry and keep telling me to go and work… When I work in organisations [cash-for-work programmes], my parents feel happy that I am working and making money. They always encourage me to look for work with the organisations.*

Even though Syrian adolescents generally reported positive experiences and impacts from programming, many adolescent girls and boys noted that discrimination against Syrians is common in these programmes. A 19-year-old young man noted:

> *Some of the teachers [facilitators] talk to us [Syrians] differently [compared to Lebanese] and discriminate against us… These situations make us feel annoyed and definitely have a psychological impact on us.*

Furthermore, many adolescents reported that programme providers often adopt a hierarchal approach of delivering rather than listening to them. In some cases, adolescents have encountered verbal abuse from providers, mostly shouting. Many adolescents also noted that being accepted or enrolled into a programme with a local organisation is often based on nepotism, with staff registering people from their close social networks first (cash-for-work was most commonly mentioned in this regard). Some adolescents also reported that many of the programmes were of poor quality and targeted the same groups repeatedly (this was mostly mentioned by girls in informal tented settlements, in relation to literacy, and health and hygiene awareness programmes). Married girls in informal tented settlements also reported being coerced into participating in some programming by the landowner, as he was also an employee at a local organisation responsible for some programmes targeting Syrian refugees. A 21-year-old young mother explained:

> *The landowner has built a school [literacy classes] in the camp and told us to register there. Sometimes, we are at work and we cannot attend the classes, but he gets angry and insists that we attend all classes. He keeps threatening to kick us out of the school if we do not come… It is true that we registered… But we cannot keep attending all the time, we have to work.*

Such negative experiences can undermine the positive impacts of programming on Syrian refugee adolescents.

Conclusions and implications for policy and programming

Syrian adolescents' psychosocial well-being

Resilience and emotional intelligence

Syrian refugee adolescents face a multitude of challenges that mainly stem from their displacement. Their socioeconomic vulnerabilities, coupled with lack of access to education, have pushed Syrian adolescent boys and girls permanently out of school and into child labour and early marriage. Indeed, socioeconomic vulnerability emerges as a common stressor for Syrian refugee adolescents.

The ever-decreasing work opportunities and increasing unemployment, the depreciation of income and depletion of savings and other assets, along with hyperinflation, mean that Syrian refugees are often unable to meet their family's basic needs, which results in feelings of depression and anxiety among adolescents and other family members. Lebanon's compound crisis, with decreasing access to basic services (mainly water, electricity and the internet), has resulted in increased tensions and violence within Syrian refugee households, leading to a further deterioration in the mental health and psychosocial well-being of adolescents, especially girls.

For married girls, marred life, with the many responsibilities it entails, is the major driver of physical and psychological fatigue and distress. Married girls are expected to carry sole responsibility for housework and childcare, serving their husband and in-laws (if they live with them), as well as contributing to the household income (for girls in informal tented settlements), often without any support. The economic crisis, alongside electricity and water outages, has overburdened girls and young mothers, which has led to a stark deterioration in their mental health and psychosocial well-being.

For Syrian boys who started to assume the breadwinner role at a younger age than they would have if they had stayed in Syria, doing so has confirmed their adulthood and masculine role within their community, which has pushed some boys to marry earlier than they would have. Yet the duties attached to that role are the main driver of distress and anxiety among boys who have to provide for their household in a context where financial pressures have intensified since hyperinflation and wage depreciation have taken hold. The recent crackdown by the Lebanese government on Syrian refugees, the increasing tensions between refugee and host communities as a result of greater competition over jobs and resources, and the lack of aid in an ever-crumbling economy have all added to the stressors facing Syrian adolescents, especially boys.

Furthermore, the increasing vulnerability of Syrian refugees has put some adolescent boys at greater risk of engaging in harmful or illegal activities. This causes them feelings of shame and fear of being dishonoured should their community find out, which also adversely impacts their psychosocial well-being. Other boys are increasingly seeing migration as their only option to find better education and work opportunities and living conditions in future, although irregular migration also entails extreme risks for adolescent boys and young men. Although such ambitions to migrate under life-threatening risks highlight the extent of despair felt by young Syrian refugees, they also reflect adolescents' resilience in the face of ever-mounting challenges and their will to work towards a better future.

Amid mounting stressors, sleep and isolation emerged as a common coping strategy among boys and girls. Girls, who lack mobility and access to support, resort to piety and domestic work and childcare to distract themselves from stressors. For boys, their greater freedom of movement and access to mobile phones provide them with more opportunities to access social and peer support as well as leisure activities that could distract them. However, such opportunities have been limited by the impact of the compound crisis on boys' mobility and their access to the internet.

Access to emotional support from adults

Mothers and older siblings are a main source of support for adolescent boys and girls alike. However, such support is limited by family structure, which is rooted in seniority and the highly conservative cultural traditions and norms among Syrian communities, which constrain girls' lives

in particular. The lack of communication within Syrian households and taboos around discussing sexual and reproductive health issues mean that girls are left with little support during puberty and before and during marriage. Older neighbours and, for some girls, their mother-in-law have been a main source of support to married girls, especially during their first pregnancy.

The centrality of girls' reputation, and cultural expectations that girls adhere to their gender role at home and submit to the husband, as well as stigmatisation of divorce within the Syrian community, mean that girls are left with little support from adults in their life. In such contexts, partner violence (including verbal, physical and sexual violence) is normalised as it is culturally accepted.

Similarly, the parenting style among Syrian communities, which is authoritative and based on the use of violence and lack of communication, means that boys refrain from seeking support from adults in their lives due to perceptions of lack of understanding due to the age/generational gap, and fears of being criticised or subject to violence, especially from fathers.

Rising poverty, lack of security and lack of internet access have increased married girls' isolation and reduced their ability to access support from family and their main social support networks. This lack of access to support networks is harming adolescents' psychosocial well-being, particularly among girls, and further increasing their isolation.

Access to social support from peers

The gendered norms within the Syrian community affect girls the most as they face the greatest restrictions on their freedoms. Unlike boys, who face few such restrictions, girls' mobility is highly restricted, as is their access to mobile phones, which in turn limits their access to peer support. Girls' mobility and access to social networks and peer support becomes even more limited after marriage. Boys, on the other hand, have much greater freedom of movement and access to friends, who constitute their main source of emotional support. Seeking emotional as well as financial support from peers is common among boys, as well as enjoying in-person or virtual leisure activities with peers, which has a positive impact on boys' emotional and psychosocial well-being.

However, the increase in crime and violence as a result of the economic crisis in Lebanon has affected both girls' and boys' safety and mobility, as the streets are generally perceived as unsafe. Rising poverty means that boys are also less able to spend leisure time with their friends or visit

17-year-old married adolescent Syrian girl spending some time with relatives in the informal tented settlement, Baalbek, Lebanon © Marcel Saleh/GAGE 2022

them. Lack of access to the internet means that boys have limited online access to friends and peers too. Adolescent boys are spending more time at home as a result, with less access to their peers, becoming more isolated and lacking support.

Access to quality psychosocial services

Syrian adolescents in general lack access to psychosocial support services, either due to lack of information about what services are available or lack of availability of those services in their area. The lack of mobility and the culture of protecting one's home secrecy further deters girls from seeking support services. However, participation in youth programming at local organisations has had several positive impacts on adolescents' psychosocial well-being. The boys and girls in our research described changes in their self-esteem, personality, greater emotional intelligence, and being more able to deal with feelings of anger, frustration and conflict, as among the benefits of programme participation.

Syrian adolescents' opportunities to exercise voice and agency

Mobility and access to safe spaces

Although gendered norms affect Syrian boys, Syrian girls face the greatest restrictions on their lives due to discriminatory social norms that limit their agency, life choices and mobility – restrictions that intensify after marriage, when they move from being controlled by their parents to being controlled by their husband and in-laws. While there are many factors that combine to limit Syrian girls' mobility in Lebanon, including lack of money and widespread discrimination and harassment, their own community's cultural norms still limit the very few leisure opportunities available to married girls. The different restrictions and burdens that married Syrian girls bear while isolated at home (or having to be accompanied by a family member when going out) leave them physically and mentally exhausted. Boys, on the other hand, have much greater mobility and more freedoms, especially as they grow older and have access to public spaces and leisure activities outside the home.

However, boys are at greater risk than girls when it comes to the widespread violence and insecurity in the areas of Lebanon where they live, as well as the threat of being targeted by Lebanese authorities, especially at checkpoints. Adolescent boys and girls reported feeling insecure due to the widespread violence among weaponised Lebanese communities where local clans frequently clash. The increase in intra-community violence, with the weakening state and its security authorities, has intensified adolescents' fears, resulting in decreased mobility and increased levels of stress and anxiety.

Access to information and digital technology

Married girls cannot own a phone as it is perceived as '*shameful*' within their community. Girls also denied having their own social media accounts, mainly due to husbands' and families' fears of girls being subject to online harassment or interaction with males. Although girls have restricted access to phones, they remain an important means of contact with their families, relatives and friends who live far away, or back in Syria. Phone and TV are the main sources of entertainment and leisure activities for married girls and their children. However, with frequent and unpredictable electricity cuts in the context of the crisis, access is increasing difficult, further adding to girls' isolation.

Syrian boys have much more access to mobile phones than married Syrian girls, and more freedom to use social media. While girls use their husband's social media passively, boys have an active online presence. They use social media to express themselves and their feelings as well as for communicating with friends online. As with girls, access to phones is a main source of entertainment and leisure activities, as well as peer support, for boys. As mentioned above, however, electricity cuts can hamper their access to online access, reducing opportunities for peer support.

The internet is the main source of information for girls and boys alike. Girls mainly use the internet to get information on health, sexual and reproductive health, and childcare. Boys, on the other hand, tend to use the internet to gain skills, access work opportunities, and get information on different topics, including health and news.

The compound crisis in Lebanon has constrained adolescents' access to digital technology and the internet, which have become central to staying connected with friends and family living elsewhere. The electricity cuts that prevent adolescents going online are isolating them from the virtual world, often for prolonged periods, preventing girls and boys from accessing peer support networks, information and entertainment.

Living in an informal tented settlement, 17-year-old Syrian mother, Baalbek, Lebanon © Marcel Saleh/GAGE 2022

Opportunities for voice and decision-making within the family and community

Syrian communities are highly conservative, and structured around patriarchy and seniority. As already explained, girls' honour and chastity are central to the family's social standing. Parenting styles are authoritative and often include violence against children and adolescents. There is little communication between adolescents and their parents, and parents generally decide key life choices for their adolescents, including on education, work and marriage.

While boys have some agency in making their own choices, the family controls every aspect of a girl's life. Girls are raised within the Syrian community to be submissive to their parents as well as to males in the family. Girls have no say in decisions about their life, which are typically made by the girl's parents. Such control over girls serves to preserve the girl's honour and reputation – and that of her family – within the community, as well as preparing girls for married life, when being submissive to the husband is a cultural expectation.

Control of Syrian girls and their social isolation intensifies after marriage. Although individual girls have different marital experiences, the spousal relationship is typically one in which the husband has all the authority. This is encouraged and reinforced by cultural norms within Syrian communities that perceive husbands to own their wife, her choices, her movement, and her adherence to expectations about her role and responsibilities within the household. In-laws also have substantial authority over married girls, mirroring that of the husband. Such control and pressures result in perceptions of lack of self-efficacy among girls, which have major consequences for their psychosocial well-being.

Civic engagement

Syrian adolescents have no civic rights in Lebanon and little or no engagement in civic life. This mainly stems from feelings of rejection by Lebanese society and the negative experiences Syrian adolescents and youth face when they do come into contact with the Lebanese community and authorities. While participation in programming provides some Syrian adolescents with an opportunity to engage in activities with their Lebanese peers, they lack participation in programmes that could aid their civic engagement in the wider society.

Implications for policy and programming

In order to strengthen adolescents' emotional resilience and access to peer, trusted adult and other forms of psychosocial support, as well as to increase adolescent voice and agency in their family and community the follow policy and programming measures should be considered:

- **Expand aid provision and strengthen economic empowerment efforts.** UNHCR and other UN agencies must increase provision of aid so that it reaches all Syrian refugee households in Lebanon. The amounts provided should be increased to keep pace with inflation and decrease the financial pressures that are driving harmful coping strategies among Syrian families, which are taking a heavy toll on adolescents' well-being. While many Syrian refugees receive some type of cash or food aid, this does not reach all households living in extreme poverty. Poverty is directly impacting on Syrian adolescents' mental health and psychosocial well-being, and underpins many of the risks facing adolescents, including gender-based violence, child marriage and child labour. Expanding interventions to address refugees' immediate survival needs is essential as a foundation for other interventions to support psychosocial well-being, especially among adolescent refugees.
- **Provide employment opportunities to improve the well-being of adolescents and young people from refugee and host communities, to help defuse inter-community tensions.** Ultimately, the Lebanese government should implement corrective economic policies to reduce the severity of the crisis, so that adolescents and young people have better opportunities for decent work and incomes, in the short and the longer term. The international community should support the Lebanese government to structure and implement development policies that would create opportunities for decent work. A healthier socioeconomic environment would give Syrian refugee households better access to earned incomes, and give adolescents and young people better access to education and decent work opportunities. Policies must aim to decrease tensions rooted in competition over scarce resources and opportunities between host and refugee communities.
- **Strengthen psychosocial support services that target adolescents and young people.** Adolescents' psychosocial well-being continues to deteriorate, due to the compound crisis in Lebanon and adolescents' lack of hope for a better future. Many adolescent girls and boys reported that they were unable to envisage a worthwhile future for themselves. Lack of psychosocial support was reported by married Syrian girls and boys alike, and considering the increasing risks to their well-being, it is now more necessary than ever for donors and local organisations to increase programming that targets adolescents. Programming should target married girls in particular, as they are very isolated and vulnerable, and typically lack support from the family or community, and are bearing mounting responsibilities from a young age. The Lebanese government must work towards providing an affordable national psychosocial support system with tailored services designed to meet the specific needs of adolescents and young people, and make those services inclusive of all refugees. Programmes and services should use evidence-based tools and measurable targets to improve adolescents' psychosocial well-being. Interventions should take into account refugee adolescent girls' limited mobility, the impact of cultural traditions and gendered norms around privacy, and broader cultural norms.
- **Increase investment in front-line service delivery personnel.** International donors and local and international organisations should increase investment in service delivery personnel on the ground in Lebanon working within organisations and services that cater for refugees. Reports of negative experiences at the service and programme levels contribute to feelings of dissatisfaction and distrust among adolescents, in the only external space where refugees are supposed to find some support, protection, and a sense of understanding and acceptance. Service delivery must be improved if programming is to be inclusive of adolescent refugees, provide effective responses

to their mounting psychosocial and mental health challenges, and strengthen social cohesion.

- **Expand programming and services that promote and encourage adolescents' active participation.** Local and international organisations must build avenues of communication with and promote active participation of refugee adolescents (especially adolescent girls) who are isolated and alienated, within their own communities and among Lebanese host communities. Active participation is vital for adolescents to feel they are being included and listened to.
- **Invest in targeted social cohesion programmes.** Social cohesion is often mainstreamed in programming that includes participants from both Lebanese host and refugee communities. However, adolescent refugees' lived experiences reveal that there is little social cohesion in practice, which leads to persistent feelings of discrimination and alienation. Programming must address social cohesion directly as a means of improving many aspects of Syrian adolescents' lives. Lebanon's complex political history and ongoing economic and socio-political crisis renders the refugee situation unlikely to be resolved by state-led intervention. In light of this, the weight of responsibility falls to UN agencies, NGOs and donors to implement programming that considers the wider context as well as the specific needs and capacities of each refugee community. Moreover, programming should respond to adolescents' age- and gender-specific needs. Given weakening social cohesion amid the country's ongoing socioeconomic crisis, it is necessary to push for policies that would at least temporarily include refugees.
- **Support Syrian adolescents and young people in acquiring legal documentation.** The lack of identity documents, residency permits and registration papers is one of the biggest obstacles to Syrian adolescents and young people being able to access education and work, and move around freely. It also puts them at greater risk in terms of safety and security. UNHCR, as the main provider and caretaker of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, along with the international community, must pressure the Lebanese government to eliminate the barriers that prevent Syrian refugees acquiring legal residency and, ultimately, legal status in Lebanon. UNHCR and the international community must not only increase assistance but also cover the costs of renewing legal papers.
- **Increase efforts to combat child marriage.** Child marriage remains the main obstacle to Syrian girls having some say in decisions about key life choices. As child marriage is mostly linked to harmful cultural practices within the Syrian community, and as positive social change is typically gradual and can take many years to be embraced, the international community and local civic actors must increase pressure on the Lebanese government to increase the legal age of marriage to at least 18 and unify this across all religious courts. If implemented effectively, this legal change could help decrease rates of child marriage (across all communities) and ensure better life opportunities for girls.
- **Invest urgently in efforts to prevent violence and ensure sufficient redress.** Adolescents reported that lack of safety and security was a key driver of increased psychosocial distress and a challenge to their mobility. The Lebanese government must introduce policies to address the increasing insecurity in the country. Domestic violence also needs to be addressed, engaging with and challenging cultural norms which posit that masculinity requires violence against women. The Lebanese government must also address the very real threat posed by armed groups in Baalbek city (both political factions and drugs and arms traffickers), as their activities are having very harmful impacts on adolescents' lives. With the reported increase in gender-based violence following the pandemic and the economic crisis in Lebanon, there is a need to strengthen enforcement of laws, including safe reporting to protect girls from all types of gender-based violence. Long-term awareness programmes targeting Syrian adolescents, including boys, at the household and community levels, should be implemented to address gendered norms that result in harmful practices, including early marriage, and heightened restrictions on girls' freedom of movement, social connectedness, and opportunities to exercise voice and agency.

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About GAGE

Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) is a nine-year longitudinal research programme generating evidence on what works to transform the lives of adolescent girls in the Global South. Visit www.gage.odi.org.uk for more information.

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