

Youth contribution

'When a girl says something,
I learn from her'

'Sara' with Sarah Al Heiwidi

Sara is a 19-year-old adolescent girl from the Syrian refugee community in Jordan. She joined the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence Jordan participatory research group for married girls in 2019. She has two young children. The group has been meeting regularly for more than four years, engaging in thematic discussions and participatory photography. Discussions have focused on refugee rights to information and basic services; the rights of girls and young women to support and services to protect them from sexual harassment and sexual assault; and the rights of girls to eschew child marriage and secure an education and the skills needed for economic independence. Given the high levels of child marriage among the Syrian refugee community in Jordan, raising awareness about the availability of information, services and support for ever-married girls is critical to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development commitment to 'leave no one behind'.

'We are 14 girls, we got to know each other well in the group. And we learned about photography, child marriage, social life, about challenges and problems, and about hospitals and services. Also we talked after about inequality... I remember in the first session [service mapping] we located health clinics, we used a big sheet of paper and labelled the health clinics and also hospitals that Syrian refugees go to, also we labelled service providers, also services for free and services we pay for, and schools, aid providers, everything... We also went on field trips. We photographed hospitals and schools and malls and we got to know more places. We photographed issues

in the community, including about pregnant girls... It was a great experience, I remember that I took a photo while I had my hand on my pregnant belly – I was 7 or 8 months... When I joined I had been married for almost 6 months, I was married at age 16...

I never missed a session. It was great since the beginning and until now, we hope that we have more sessions and not to have much space between them... We meet each other, we discuss, we share opinions, we know things we did not know before... When a girl says something, I learn from her, and when I share something she does not know about, [now] she knows it... We talked about girls in school when travelling to and fro that they could face someone harassing her and if someone from her family or a male cousin would see her, she would be forbidden from school. And if a girl gets divorced or separated, this is a big problem in our community... I liked all the sessions... because it gets better. Each session we have it becomes greater, with more questions, further conversations, more discussions...

I also share with my mother – but not girls' private stories – I share the questions we talked about and the stories [vignettes]... I tell my husband, if he asked me how the session was, that we had lunch and we enjoyed, but I don't share the girls' discussions as it's their privacy and he never actually asks me about details... My husband is not complicated, he only complains about the time... We go there for long hours. If I leave the child with him and go to the session and am late, he gets annoyed, but when I take my child with me he doesn't mind if I get back late.

During Covid we used an online app – it was our communication channel, we used it for either camera and sound, or just using sound. And we even spoke with girls from other countries (Lebanon). We got to know them – their life and what do they suffer, what services they do have there and what services are available here, where is best to live... and what mistakes we have here and what mistakes they have there... We discuss things in our community – rape, harassment, inequality, divorce, child marriage...

It was good to communicate online during Covid but when we sit face-to-face, a person can understand more and talk more and participate more, but on the [online] app you must give turns – whenever one wants to talk, she should say her name and then speak.

I also love the photography part. I did a lot of photos but I like that one with my sons while sitting in a rocking chair and his toys around him, and we talked about how hard it is to take care of your child and stuff... because I was a new mom at the time and I was taking care of my child all the time, I already gave birth to him during Covid-19....

We gain knowledge, we express our opinions, we can express our opinion in the sessions but we are unable to do that outside. We learn more, we understand

subjects further, we take new ideas about the community... When you tell us stories about girls who are married young, we didn't know the risks before. We gained new thoughts, we didn't know about this before, these stories [vignettes] gave us a new idea to our mind that when we have children we won't marry them young, we will educate them. Education is their weapon – it's better than marrying them off so soon and let our girls lose their selves and their future...

In the sessions, we discuss, we have fun together, but when meeting my neighbours the whole setting is filled with a lot of bad words and sarcasm and laughing – that's it. Outside of this group, I only have my husband, my in-laws – but no one my age...

In our community it's '*aib*' [shameful] for women to move alone, and if the location were far from her house, they would not allow her to participate at all. But if there is a bus that takes her from her house to the centre and then brings her back home, yes, then it's okay for her to participate... Yes, I am telling you, if there was no bus I would not be able to join your sessions anymore, honestly... And yes, childcare is provided, but we like to leave them at home to get more comfortable, and not to chase the child.

If I go back to the younger me, when I first started in this group, I would never get married early, never drop school, especially now that I know that



FIGURE 9.1
Participatory research participant, Jordan.

**FIGURE 9.2**

Participatory activity in a workshop, Jordan.

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education is the best weapon to defend yourself with. I will not be afraid to be myself, like, if in the future I got divorced, how can I work? Or that they might take my children because in court they might not give [me] my child because I don't work and I can't support or provide [for them]... Before participating, I didn't know this at all. Now I have more awareness'.