



Syrian women- headed households: hoping to survive and move on



The Syrian conflict inflicts multiple adverse effects upon the Syrian people. The violence displaces many families, leaving countless broken homes in its path. Due to the unprecedented violence in Syria, many families have lost their customary head of household, usually a male figure. The loss of either a husband, son, or brother has shifted the responsibility of the entire household to the women of Syria. **Almost one in every three households** in Syria are now women-headed. These Syrian women assume both the role of caretaker and breadwinner, making them significant participants in the economy, society and family life.

Laila is a 39-year-old refugee who resides in the Domiz camp in Iraq. Like many other Syrian women, she is compelled to act as head of household. Her husband is present, but he is, severely ill with colon cancer. The destruction of their home in rural Damascus forced Laila and her husband, along with their two sons, to migrate to Domiz camp. The forced migration of women like Laila has left them with little material resources and without proper legal documentation. Moreover, the living conditions and lack of proper services have increased chances of physical and mental health issues. After the Family's arrival in Domiz, her husband's health quickly deteriorated, leaving him partially paralyzed.

Laila's two sons are having difficulty coping with their new circumstances. Hasan, a ten year old, and Judy, a five-year old, have experienced serious disruption from their normal life in they however knew in Damascus, creating a toll on their social and mental wellbeing. Psychosocial issues caused by

witnessing violence and experiencing displacement are common among children and adults. Hasan and Judy do not attend school and are both traumatized by what they have seen. Judy refuses to eat and has a severe phobia from darkness and the wind. Hassan has turned to cutting himself in order to cope with the pain, leaving large pink scars on his body. Stories like these are common in refugee camps. Living in a refugee camp increases the difficulty of building the stable environment that children need to develop social skills and to guarantee future prospects. With no real role models, boys like Hassan and Judy end up lost. There is also an added economic stress, which results in the pressure for young boys to find work and for young girls to get married.

Laila is fortunate enough to have been able to secure work at the refugee camp. She works as an administrative officer in a UNFPA'S women safe space. This space provides women in the refugee camp a place where they can discuss their issues and participate in educational activities organized by UNFPA and its partners. Laila's story is sad, but she states that "working with UNFPA gives me hope that something good will happen soon; when I hear about others' problems I forget mine." Laila's positive outlook on life is inspiring but on the other hand can be gut wrenching, knowing that there are others who are worse off. Many women arrive at the safe space feeling lost, some with broken families and no real social support system and little or no sense of security or financial stability. Furthermore, some of these women have fallen victim to gender-based violence (GBV) and human trafficking.

Refugees go through severe hardships. Programmes like UNFPA'S women's safe space help provide a sense of social support and security. It provides a safe haven for women and children, male or female, to discuss any trauma incurred by their displacement helping them cope with their issues, giving refugees like Laila and those less fortunate hope to survive and move on.

Photo1: Laila in her office in the UNFPA women's safe space, Domiz camp, Iraq. Credit: UNFPA. 2013

Photo2: Judy gets out of the tent, excited to know that UNFPA' photographer, Aral Kaki wants to take photo for him. It was a simple gesture, but has a great impact on him. Credit: UNFPA, 2013.

Background information

	# Syrian females 15 - 49	#Syrian females heads of families
Egypt	29,557	11,696
Iraq	32,811	4,885
Jordan	132,759	54,280
Lebanon	163,415	36,619
Total	358,542	107,480

Source: UNHCR, 1 Oct 2013

About UNFPA

UNFPA delivers a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled.

The agency aims to achieve universal access to maternal and reproductive health (including family planning), promoting reproductive rights, reducing maternal mortality and accelerating progress on the agenda of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the Millennium Development Goals. UNFPA also focuses on improving the lives of youths and women by advocating for human rights and gender equality and by promoting the understanding of population dynamics. Population dynamics, including growth rates, age structure, fertility and mortality, and migration have an effect on every aspect of human, social and economic progress. Sexual and reproductive health and women's empowerment all powerfully affect and are influenced by population trends.