



# Influence of social capital on the experiences of married Syrian refugee women in Al-Mafraq Governorate

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## Abstract

This article examines the influence of social capital on the experiences of married Syrian refugee women who live in Al-Mafraq Governorate/Al-Mafraq city centre. Focus group discussions were conducted with married Syrian refugee women in order to provide a detailed description of their situation. The findings of the fieldwork with refugee women in Al-Mafraq Governorate gathered from June to September 2015 are presented here. It becomes apparent that married Syrian refugee women living in Al-Mafraq city are encountering many difficulties, regardless of the pre-existing and extensive social capital/networks within the city. Therefore, one can deduce that social capital does not play an important role in alleviating the magnitude of the suffering faced by married Syrian refugee women due to space restrictions, economic conditions, social environments and traumatic experiences.

## Keywords

Al-Mafraq Governorate, forced migration, married Syrian refugee women, refugees, social capital

## Introduction

Recent civil and regional conflicts in the Middle East have increased the global crisis of human displacement. The huge masses of forced migration flows have created humanitarian, political and economic burdens within the hosting states. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2015b), ‘the number of refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria to neighbouring countries has now passed four million, confirming that crisis as the world’s single largest

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refugee crisis for almost a quarter of a century under UNHCR's mandate' (p. 1). An overwhelming number of forced migrants have fled to Jordan, not only because of its geographical location in the centre of the Arab world, but also because it has historically been known for its generosity in hosting refugees. The kingdom has embraced an open-border policy based on the umbrella of Arab Brotherhood (Anabtawi, 2012). The Arab Brotherhood policy is responsible for establishing the country as a haven for refugees, with approximately 1.4 million Syrian refugees hosted within the Jordanian territories between 2011 and 2015 (Department of Statistics [DOS], 2016). Although the civil conflict in Syria has attracted international attention, the plight of the people who have fled the country has been burdensome for the international community and especially those countries bordering the conflicts.

More than 4 years have passed since the Syrian crisis exploded, and this crisis has been described as one of the largest exoduses of forced migrants in recent history with no ending yet in sight (UNHCR, 2014). According to the Jordanian government, Syrian refugees will remain in Jordan for no less than 17 years (Speech on Jordanian formal TV, 2015). Syrian refugees in Jordan are considered 'temporary refugees' as stated in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the government of Jordan and UNHCR in 1998. According to the MOU (UNHCR, 2012–2013), asylum seekers have the right to stay in Jordan for 6 months while waiting for refugee status determination (RSD). Therefore, it can be said that Syrian refugees in Jordan are in transit, waiting either to be repatriated or to be resettled in a third country. As a non-signatory country on the 1951 United Nations (UN) Convention and its 1967 protocol, Jordan does not have any specific policy or legal framework to deal with refugees (Zaiotti, 2006). The influx of Syrian refugees to Jordan is challenging due to the huge number of people whom the Jordanian government and international organizations have to sustain.

Shteivi et al. (2014) indicated that 'persons affected by the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan can be categorized into four main groups: Refugees in camps, refugees outside of camps, unregistered Syrians in Jordan, and host communities' (p. 50). According to many reports, 75 percent of the refugees will be accommodated outside of the camps, that is, living among Jordanians in all parts of the country, while 25 percent will remain inside camp boarders (Mercy Corps, 2013; UNHCR, 2014). The largest number of Syrian refugees is located in the capital city (Amman) and northern governorates (Irbid and Al-Mafraq). Together, these governorates are hosting more than 76 percent of the total Syrian refugees in Jordan. According to the Refugee Affairs Coordination Unit, Ministry of the Interior (2016), the number of Syrian Refugees in Amman is about 435,000 registered refugees; in Irbid, there are 90,000 Syrian refugees and in Al-Mafraq Governorate 400,000 refugees (Ministry of the Interior, 2016). Syrian refugees constitute 52 percent of the total population of Al-Mafraq Governorate, with nearly half of them residing in communities outside the refugee camps. Syrian refugees constitute 12 percent of the total population of Irbid Governorate and 7 percent of the total population of Amman Governorate.

Based on the gender breakdown of the current refugee population, the projected number of refugee women by the end of 2014 was 196,800, which represents 25.6 percent of refugee women (UNHCR, 2014). For the purpose of this article, the focus will be on married Syrian refugee women outside of camps, especially those who live in Al-Mafraq Governorate/Al-Mafraq city centre.

## **Area of the study**

The chosen area for conducting this study was Al-Mafraq Governorate/city centre. The selection of this governorate was due to the fact that it provides a safe haven/home for hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees who crossed the borders and settled in the northern part of Jordan. Al-Mafraq city now hosts a large number of refugees which has surpassed its local population. The Mercy

Corps (2013) report indicates that the number of Syrian refugees in Al-Mafraq city outnumbers the Jordanian population (80,000 Syrians to 50,000 Jordanians).

Although many international and local organizations have documented the situation of Syrian refugees living in Jordan (in and outside of the camps) (Mercy Corps, 2013; UNHCR, 2014), the studies are statistical and fail to report how Syrian refugee women's experiences are influenced by the existence of social networks.

The presence of such a large number of Syrian refugees living outside the camps creates heavy demands and could possibly destabilize the country. A Harvard Field Study Group (2014) argues that 'the tendency of refugees to move to urban and out of camp settings has been a factor in exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and pressuring coping mechanisms on refugees and their hosting communities' (p. 2).

## Theoretical framework

The researchers' approach in this study follows Halpern's perspective of social capital (networks) and its role in forming/shaping refugees' experiences in hosting countries. Previous studies illustrate that refugees are facing various kinds of difficulties in their hosting communities (Ager and Strang, 2008; Halpern, 2005). A number of scholars argue that social capital may play a significant role in refugees' resettlement, integration and well-being. It is argued that strong ties with social networks provide support, play a significant role in the emotional well-being of refugees and open up more opportunities for employment and education (Halpern, 2005). According to this point of view, people who socially interact and make the decision to integrate or assimilate within the hosting community are less likely to suffer from mental health problems and can find their way into the labour market and education (De Hass, 2008). Furthermore, a relationship has been found between social capital and refugees' economic performance. In this regard, Halpern (2005) argues that 'It is not what you know, but who you know' (p. 44). Putnam (2000) points to the relationship between social capital and refugees' mental health; people who have social support are less likely to suffer from mental health problems. On the contrary, little or no social capital in refugee communities was related to higher levels of stress and isolation (Derose and Varda, 2009).

Despite the fact that organizations from different levels have begun to work and provide services for the refugees, such as shelter, food, education and health services, the field of how social capital can influence the experiences of Syrian refugees remains underdeveloped. Halpern's (2005) writings about social capital may be useful in understanding the situation of married Syrian refugees in Al-Mafraq city. From Halpern's point of view, we can argue that Syrian women refugees with family and community support would suffer less – socially, economically and physically. In this regard, Castles and Miller's (2009) analysis illustrates that 'social networks make the migratory process safer and more manageable for the migrants and their families, migratory movements once started, become self-sustaining social processes' (p. 29).

Therefore, we argue that Syrian refugees living in Al-Mafraq city centre will face fewer hardships because of the large existence of Syrian refugees and social networks/ties (80,000 Syrians to 50,000 Jordanians) (Mercy Corps, 2013). It can therefore be argued that married Syrian refugee women in Jordan may be able to benefit from the presence/existence of the large number of refugees who live in Al-Mafraq city centre in reducing their negative experiences.

## Intervention with asylum seekers and refugees

As it is generally acknowledged, refugees are more vulnerable and have greater needs which are partly shaped by their refuge experience and settlement process. Hence there are increasing concerns

regarding refugees as they may be under great threat in the following ways: labour exploitation, early marriage, poor mental and physical health, child labour, and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) (Ager and Strang, 2008; Aspinall and Watters, 2010; Cherfas, 2006; Shteivi et al., 2014). Evidence from literature reveals that forced migration has severely influenced refugees' mental health (Hardi, 2005; Warfa, 2006; Watters, 2002). In general, refugees may confront dramatic and overwhelming experiences, psychological reactions, and differences in climate, language, work habits and religion (Hardi, 2005; Roberts, 2005; Warfa, 2006).

With this in mind, great emphasis should be placed on the crucial role social workers have in helping and intervening with refugees. Intervention with refugees and asylum seekers in hosting communities should start with screening and assessing social care needs as early in the arrival process as possible (Free, 2005). Social workers play a critical role in this process. They have been described in literature as follows:

Social workers are at the frontline of solidarity with vulnerable groups in all societies and international exchange of knowledge is necessary for dealing with trans-cultural problems. (Hessle, 2007: 240)

Therefore, social workers working with Syrian refugees in Jordan have to adapt rapid intervention plans and programmes in order to alleviate refugees suffering. They should ensure that refugees and asylum seekers are properly supported and their social care needs met in order to receive a fair and just response (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2015). Accordingly, a heavy stress should be given to the role of social work and care in this area. Intervention with refugees must occur at various levels: individual, family and community (Al-Qdah and Lacroix, 2010). According to the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) Code of Ethics (2010: 12), the scope of social work practice with refugees and asylum seekers includes the following:

- strengths-based comprehensive psychosocial assessments;
- strengths-based community assessments;
- building empathic relationships and working with refugees and asylum seekers in an ethical, respectful, client-centred and strengths-focused manner;
- working with groups, organizations and communities to respond to shared goals;
- linking of individuals and families to community networks;
- facilitating coordination and cooperation across health, welfare and other systems to ensure good outcomes and assist client aspirations;
- advocacy for services and education within the Australian welfare and health systems;
- socio-legal and ethical decision-making within complex legal frameworks;
- advocacy in relation to the rights of refugees and asylum seekers.

Yet despite the great emphasis given to the role of social work in dealing with refugees and programmes conducted by different levels of intervention in the field, it is noticed that the profession of social work in Jordan is still in the development stage (Al-Qdah and Lacroix, 2010; Berti, 2015). Ruth Stark, President of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), announced that the profession exists to help people work through changes in their lives, and refugees are experiencing some of the most traumatic changes imaginable. She added, 'A lot of what they're dealing with are such basic needs such as food, clean water and shelter' (cited in Hardi, 2016). Stark highlights the changing role in social work, which should deal with refugees and asylum seekers as listed previously in AASW (2010).

Once more, in a country such as Jordan, which is hosting the largest number of refugees per capita (Frelick, 2007), the social work presence is essential. Reports from the field indicate that

social work with Syrian refugees and asylum seekers in Jordan is about material survival – shelter, water and food (Mercy Corps, 2013; UNHCR, 2015). During recent decades, the continuing conflicts placed refugees in protracted situations (Crisp, 2003). They are hanging between the UNHCR's durable solutions and live in limbo. Syrian refugees have had to settle in a new territory. In this context, the core of social work value must go beyond ensuring providing food, water and shelter. It is about 'respect for persons' as outlined in the AASW (2010: 12) code of ethics which provides guidance to the social work approach in this field in that it

- respects the human rights of individuals and groups;
- provides humane service, mindful of fulfilling duty of care, and duty to avoid doing harm to others;
- fosters individual well-being, autonomy, justice and personal/social responsibility, with due consideration for the rights of others;
- recognizes and respects group identity, interdependence, reciprocity and collective needs.

### **Background of the host governorate (Al-Mafraq)**

The vast majority of Syrian refugees who fled from Syria settled in the Northern areas of Jordan, mainly in the Irbid Governorate and the Al-Mafraq Governorate. The Al-Mafraq Governorate is located 80 km north from the capital city (Amman) at a crossroad to Syria, with Syria to the north and Iraq to the east. It has an area of 26,552 km<sup>2</sup> comprising 29.6 percent of the total area of Jordan (Al Wazani, 2014). It covers close to 300 km of border with Syria. According to the Jordanian Statistical Yearbook 2013, Al-Mafraq is the second largest governorate in Jordan after Ma'an, with 306,900 inhabitants of whom 159,100 are males and 147,800 are females. Of the total population, 186,500 inhabiting the Al-Mafraq Governorate live in rural areas and 120,400 in urban areas (DOS, 2013). It consists of four districts and 18 municipalities, eight of which are bordered by Syria. Despite its large area, the governorate has the second smallest population density of 11.05 persons/km (DOS, 2013). The governorate already suffers from poverty and water shortage, with a high unemployment rate that reaches 14.5 percent (of which 24.9% for females and 12.3% for males) (DOS, 2013). The Al-Mafraq Governorate relies heavily on a budget for its projects from funds allocated to it by the national budget. Agriculture forms an essential element of the economy for Al-Mafraq, especially in Houran Plain.

### **Profile of the Syrian refugees in Al-Mafraq Governorate**

According to Jordanian officials, no specific survey has been conducted on Syrian refugees in order to address their numbers and characteristics. Syrian refugees in Jordan are part of a group currently referred to as 'rural refugees'. The vast majority of them are from the city of Der'aa, the largest city of the southern Horan Plain and only 20 miles from the Jordanian city Irbid. Der'aa is a rural region with a majority of Sunni Muslims.

The focus of this article will be on the profile of Syrians in the Al-Mafraq Governorate and will be based on the UNHCR's last factsheet (July 2015). Two-thirds of the Syrian refugees are living below the national poverty line (UNHCR, 2015a). In addition, one-sixth of Syrian refugee households are in an abject poverty, with less than US\$40 per person per month to meet his or her needs. There are approximately 10,000 households identified as being financially vulnerable and are on a waiting list to receive benefits from the monthly financial assistance programme. Approximately 2121 households (11,800 individuals) benefited from this programme. Syrian refugees in the governorate have registration certificates valid for 12 months. The unemployment rate of Syrian

women before they became refugees in Jordan was about 28 percent, while at present the unemployment rate of Syrian women living outside the camps is 88 percent. Since there is a low participation rate of Syrian women in the workforce, very few Syrian women are actually being paid to work in Jordan (Stave and Hillesund, 2015).

## Methodology

Drawing on qualitative research with married Syrian refugee women in Al-Mafraq Governorate/city, this article examines the influence of social capital on their experiences. The qualitative method is more appropriate for achieving the objectives of this study since the qualitative method can provide an explanation and in-depth understanding of the issue under study in natural settings (Bryman, 2008). They provide an ideal way not only to collect data, but also to undertake a comprehensive analysis and description of the issue under study.

In order to explore the experiences of married Syrian refugee women in Al-Mafraq Governorate/Al-Mafraq city centre, nine focus groups were conducted. The significance of group discussions originates from the usage of group communication to obtain data that may not be forthcoming in individual interviews (Bryman, 2008). In group discussions, researchers were able to collect more views, data and perceptions in natural settings (Bryman, 2008). In this study, the researchers use focus groups utilizing Ghorashi's (2007) belief that research based on life stories is research designed to

Open up new spaces, to be able to move within shifting boundaries, to create room for different layers of experience and to give voice to people whose voices are often taken for granted or (un)intentionally marginalized. (p. 131)

Due to the fact that this study was conducted by female researchers, Syrian refugee women were selected to be studied. This refers to many considerations: first, researchers' access to women was less problematic than trying to access men due to the traditions of the area; accessing and recruiting women are accepted in this rural community due to gender segregation issues. Second, the selection of married refugee women refers to the researchers' desire to explore the challenges and difficulties of this group. Third, due to security concerns, married women have more space to move inside the community than men in light of lack of documentations and threat of being deported. As independent researchers, access to married Syrian refugee women was independent; the researchers explained to the participants that they were not reflecting particular views or opinions, especially in relation to the organizations in the field. The purpose of avoiding the support from these organizations came from our desire not to be influenced by their own perspectives. Syrian refugees in Al-Mafraq city centre live in neighbouring buildings in a specific area, thus facilitating access and selection of the groups. The first two groups were randomly selected from married Syrian refugee women who were registered with Ruhamaa (a charity organization that provides services for Syrian refugees); after that, the researchers depended on a snowball sampling technique in order to facilitate access and selection of groups. The snowball technique was utilized in this study to construct a sample that recruits more groups of married Syrian women. The snowball technique refers to the researchers' desire to facilitate and recruit more women; access to married Syrian refugee women required a prolonged period in order to build rapport and trust with the participants. Although the first two groups were selected randomly, this step helped the researchers to recruit more groups and opened up a rapport of trust with the participants.

Some of the group discussions were conducted in the refugees' homes, where many welcomed the researchers and other refugees; others were at the charity organization. The groups consist of married women, originating from rural areas and ranging in age from 30 to 50 years. All group



discussions with the refugees were conducted in Arabic and audio-recorded. This enabled the researchers to fully engage with the participants. The participation in the study was voluntary; researchers tried to encourage participants to speak freely by emphasising the value of their contributions to the research. Researchers were conscious not to offer any judgements or questions that could stimulate or restrict their responses. In addition, they were informed that they could stop at any time and withdraw from the discussions. Participants were asked about social, economic, education and traumatic experiences. All focus groups were conducted in Arabic since it is the participants' primary language. Records of each focus group were first translated from Arabic to English, and participants' names were encoded as numbers according to groups (e.g. G1: Pt 3).

Data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis, which provides a framework in which to order and produce data. Emergent themes became evident after repeated reading of the records. In order to evaluate the quality and credibility of this research, a detailed presentation of the adopted method, along with the approach for accessing the field, recruiting participants and data collection, is given. To secure the transferability of the data, the researchers provide 'thick descriptions' by displaying as many quotations as possible (Bryman, 2008). The fieldwork for this study started in June and ended in September 2015.

As researchers, we were unable to go through all of the stories told by our participants during the 3 months of investigations due to the overwhelming number of discussions. Therefore we will only address the most sensitive common themes and draw on the words of these participants in order to present through description of their experiences.

## Findings from the research

The most commonly cited problems were poor economic situation, fear, insecurity, mistrust and feeling hopeless. The findings reveal that legal and future uncertainties have directly influenced participants' experiences. As stated in the MOU signed between Jordan and UNHCR (UNHCR, 2012–2013), married Syrian refugee women are in an RSD waiting for voluntary repatriation or resettlement. As a result, participants and their families are not allowed to enter the Jordanian labour market, resulting in poverty and mental health problems.

The statement below summarizes the problems many married Syrian refugee women have faced; they stated that in Syria they were suffering from war, violence and persecution, but outside of Syria, they are encountering many additional problems, especially the feeling of insecurity.

### *Economic conditions*

Evidence from the participant accounts reveals that their status as refugees (RSD) has a depressing effect on their economic situation. By discussing the economic conditions experienced by married Syrian refugee women, related themes emerged in relation to unemployment, poverty, exploitation and high dependency. Unemployment was a key concern for the participants: 'We are not allowed to work ... so we have to work illegally ... my husband is working in a real estate office ... he is making tea and coffee ...' (G5: Pt 4).

As stated above, some participants have to work illegally; they are forced to do so in order to feed their families despite fear of detention or deportation. Another participant described her husband's experience: 'He is selling fruits and vegetables ... he tried very hard to hide from police and never feels safe.'

Despite the threat of being deported or detained, participants indicated that this work cannot provide a secure source of income for their families; one participant surprisingly asked, 'Do you think this kind of work can provide us sufficient income ... it meets the minimum of our needs'.

Experiencing poverty and unemployment, the participants resort to other sources of income such as seeking money transfers: 'My brother works in Gulf state and he sends money for us' (G3: Pt 6). Participants' accounts also draw attention to the relationship between their lack of ability to work legally and their poor living conditions, and as evidenced earlier, there was consensus among participants that unemployment problems increased their vulnerability, as they do not have secure source of income. Syrian participants' accounts revealed that they live in poor conditions, and some stated that they do not have food to feed their families, money for rent or bills or even enough money to buy bread. A participant explains,

We are living in very poor conditions; sometimes I do not have even (1 JD) to buy bread for my children. I always think about money and how I will pay for rent, and other needs such as food, household bills, and medicines. (G8: Pt5)

When stepping back and looking at the hosting governorate, the unemployment problem is further exacerbated when considering that the native population in a governorate already suffers from poverty and high unemployment. The poor economic situation of the married Syrian refugee women has a shadow effect on their social relationships, and this is clearly revealed in the following theme.

### *Social relationships*

The participants' social relationships with others cannot be understood in isolation from their economic conditions. By conversing with the married Syrian refugee women about their social relations, related themes emerged in relation to their integration within the Jordanian community, discrimination and gender bias. There is consensus about the direct influence of their status as refugees and economic situation on their relationships. However, Syrians had different beliefs about the latter based on their individual experiences.

Syrians in Al-Mafraq city live in buildings where all tenants are Syrians. This facilitates their adaptation and enhances the relationships among them. Conversely, it separates them from being socially integrated with the local community. A participant indicates, 'The best thing here in Al-Mafraq that there are many Syrians who live next to each other, it is good for us, but we still feel isolated because some locals look at us as strangers' (G7: P 1).

Social relations between refugees and their hosting community are crucial as they facilitate the integration process, which in turn can reduce the negative experiences Syrian refugees may face. Feelings of uncertainty have played a key role for Syrians in deciding whether or not to integrate; it seems that many participants accepted their fate as immigrants and strangers. One participant shows that 'feeling insecure pushes us not to socialize with locals, we always feel that people may exploit our need ... we prefer to stay far from problems' (G2: P6). Others prefer to socialize with Syrians only due to similarities between them in suffering as refugees; as a participant explains, 'It is better to find somebody who shares the same suffering rather than talking with locals' (G8: P4).

Some participants indicate that their poor economic situation has influenced their relations; they care more about meeting the basic needs of their families than socializing with others. One participant states that 'if we have money to feed our families, maybe we will be more open with others' (G2: Pt 5). Their ability to work and have money is related directly to their social relations; another participant argues, 'If we have money, we can buy healthy food, have more healthy lives, and regain self-respect which will facilitate our integration with local community' (G1: Pt 3).

In examining participants' experiences of integration into the local community, a sense of SGBV was noticed, which prevented some participants from integrating. Participants indicated that they spent most of their time at home due to fears of verbal or sexual harassment. One participant explains in tears, 'Because we are in need, people think that we are for sale ... ' (G3: Pt 6).



Another theme that emerged from the discussions was that of their education challenges. Poor economic and social situations are interlinked with education and cannot be separated from the other thematic areas that influence the Syrians' experience.

### *Educational challenges*

Despite the fact that all Syrians of school age are allowed to attend Jordanian public schools for free, a large number of girls dropped out of school due to early marriages. Early marriage can be seen as a preferable solution for Syrian girls: 'It is better for them to stay at home' (G2: Pt 6). On the one hand, families can protect their daughters from being sexually harassed. On the other hand, marriage decreases the number of mouths they feed. One participant explains, 'We have to protect our daughters (Sharaf) ... no need for education for them in the situation we live ... best thing for them is to marry even if the groom is Jordanian' (G6: Pt 5).

Moreover, some families give the priority of education to males rather than females due to their traditions and beliefs that females do not have the need to study because they will get married and become 'stay-at-home' mothers. One participant questions, 'Why do girls need to go to schools? Boys have to study as they need to get jobs and provide for their families' (G9: Pt3).

Participants stated that students have problems adapting in the schools; they are exploited, and in some cases they have been asked to clean the classrooms. Another demotivating factor which led to dropout from secondary school education was students' inability to access higher education in Jordan. As refugees in Jordan, they were not allowed to study in the public Jordanian universities. If they want to do so, they must study through the international programmes in public universities (by paying foreign fees) or private ones. One participant speaks in a pained voice, 'My son got 85% in his final grade, and he wants to study at university ... but we have no money to pay for him in private universities' (G4: Pt 1). Obviously, with poor economic conditions participants are unable to pay for higher education, therefore some participants are not convinced about education or sending their children to school unless this would change their social status.

Another important issue that emerged in the discussions as a result of the above-mentioned themes is that married Syrian refugee women are developing traumatic and mental health problems.

### *Traumatic experiences*

Many married Syrian refugee women suffer sorrow, despair, frustration, humiliation, loneliness and other negative feelings. Participants reported suffering from a variety of mental health problems as a result of being a refugee.

Married Syrian women refugee briefly discussed their health status; some of them developed health problems such as blood pressure, chronic headaches and diabetes as a result of the war conditions. These discussions concentrated mainly on their psychological situation with limited discussions regarding their health problems. A participant expresses her feelings:

On the verge of a breakdown ... I saw my mother die because of sorrow and pain over the situation in which we lived ... and I could not do anything for her ... we have no future ... we are completely lost ....  
(G5: Pt 1)

Participants presented symptoms of various fears: fear of going out (*see social relationships*) and phobias from loud voices and the dark. Hearing loud voices and noises such as fireworks always acts as a reminder of explosions and killings in Syria. One participant indicates that

If I hear any loud voice ... I just remember the killing and violence in Syria ... My husband was kidnapped and killed ... My uncle was killed in front of us ... I see them in my dreams ... even in daytime ... I cannot stop remembering that scene ... I have had a complete breakdown ... I have fears of everything ... the dark, being alone, and of the police. (G2: Pt 3)

An uncertain future, lack of legal status and being away from Syria are all factors that greatly influence participants' mental health. Another participant clarifies,

We are afraid ... we do not know what will happen to us .... I am nervous and under stress ... We suffer from the bad image our girls have ... I heard many Jordanians say that Syrian girls are responsible for destroying the morals in the Jordanian community ... because we are living in poor conditions they think that our daughters may enter into sex work. (G1: Pt 5)

Obviously, participants are afraid that their poor economic situation may force them to give up their studies or do things they never would have done before, such as taking humiliating jobs (nightclubs or sex work) which are considered as taboo in their society.

Low self-esteem was another problem that participants developed, especially highly qualified people who were unemployed or working in jobs not appropriate to their experience in their home country. A participant described her husband's situation: 'My husband stays without job ... he was teaching in Syria at university and now he is nothing ... this was responsible for many problems at home because he is unable to meet our needs' (G2: Pt 6). This leads them to feel frustrated, helpless and useless.

Once more, RSD leads some participants to describe their lives as they live in limbo; one participant states that 'We do not know what will happen to us ... we are not able to return to Syria ... and we are not authorized to resettlement programmes ... what will happen to us ... ' (G3: Pt 4). It becomes recognizable that the participants' mental problems are a result of their poverty from high unemployment coupled with restrictions on their social relations and education.

## **Conclusion**

This article is a result of collecting qualitative data from nine focus group discussions from married Syrian refugee women living in Al-Mafraq Governorate/Al-Mafraq city centre. We have identified some key problems encountered by the married Syrian refugee women in Al-Mafraq city centre. The researchers postulate that the existence of social capital/networks may play a crucial role in alleviating refugees' experiences. Findings reveal that regardless of the large existence of Syrian refugees in Al-Mafraq city, participants suffer from fear and do not feel safe in the country. They feel abuse and sexual harassment, especially towards females the findings of this article contradict previous research (Castles and Miller, 2009; Halpern, 2005; Putnam, 2000), which found that social capital provides support, plays a significant role in the emotional well-being of refugees (people who have social support are less likely to suffer from mental health problems) and opens up more opportunities for employment and education. With the revelations from the findings of this article, the researchers have strongly confirmed the significance of the role that social work could play in alleviating the refugees' experiences in Jordan. As previously revealed in the literature (Al-Qdah and Lacroix, 2010; Hardi, 2016), the social work profession in Jordan does not go beyond providing shelter, food and water.

Consequently, Halpern's perspective about the role that social capital plays in alleviating refugees' experiences is inapplicable to the refugees who have been studied here. By interviewing the married Syrian refugee women in Al-Mafraq city centre, the researchers were able to uncover some of their

needs and experiences – needs formed as a result of the uncertainty and temporary status under which they live. (These needs emerged despite the existence of large social ties and networks.) Experiences of these refugees could be influenced by the unstable socio-economic conditions of the hosting country. It is worth noting here that while Jordan is considered an upper middle-income country, it nevertheless suffers from a difficult economic situation (World Bank, 2015). The forced Syrian migration has put additional pressure and increased burden on the shoulders of the Jordanian government, which has continually hosted millions of refugees from other neighbouring states. The findings of this article confirm that RSD causes Syrians to live in a state of limbo (see also Vrečer, 2010), in a protracted refugee situation (Crisp, 2003); they are neither able to return to Syria nor resettle in a third country, and they live in countries of first asylum. Married Syrian refugee women are plagued by uncertainty; their basic human rights (of being secure and respected) and their economic, social and psychological needs will remain unfulfilled. Crisp (2003) defines refugees in protracted situations as

Those who find themselves trapped in a state of limbo: they cannot go back to their homeland, in most cases because it is not safe for them to do so; they are unable to settle permanently in their country of first asylum, because the host state does not want them to remain indefinitely on its territory; and they do not have the option of moving on, as no third country has agreed to admit them and to provide them with permanent residence rights. (p. 1)

In conclusion, Jordan is an interesting case for study in terms of how it accepts and deals with refugees and how it has developed its social work profession to meet the needs of millions of refugees within its territory. This study has a number of implications for future research in this field, especially for the social work profession. Disappointingly, it is beyond the scope of this article to comprehensively discuss this issue, but we hope that it stimulates more exhaustive research in the near future.

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