

## **THE CRISIS OF SYRIAN YOUTH AND CHILD REFUGEES IN JORDAN: INSIDE AND OUTSIDE REFUGEE CAMPS**

I am thankful for the opportunity to produce this special issue on refugees in Jordan, and grateful to Professor Sibylle Artz, Editor of the *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, who motivated and encouraged me. The issue includes four articles that focus in general on the problems and challenges that are encountered by Syrian youth and children who reside in Jordan either inside or outside the refugee camps there. Focusing on children and youth, both male and female, is important to the literature on Syrian refugees in Jordan because this age group has been neglected and overlooked by scholars since Syrian refugees first fled to Jordan in 2011. Furthermore, the challenges and problems of children are both culturally critical and morally sensitive, and that is why this special issue has extra importance. In Jordan's conservative social and cultural environment, certain research topics relevant to the refugee camps are regarded as unlawful and prohibited: sexual harassment, underage marriage, child employment and exploitation, youth unemployment and deprivation, and other violations against children and youth.

I use the term “crisis” to draw attention to the fact that the harsh living conditions endured by Syrian refugee children and youth inside and outside the camps is a multidimensional existential problem. This problem lies in meeting essential needs like shelter, food, and security, and providing necessary psychological and social support. Speaking of “crisis” attracts attention to a situation in which people feel that their identity is threatened. Such feelings and awareness are accompanied by permanent fearfulness because identity represents the essence of existence and lifeworld. Thus, only by supporting their full human rights is it possible to reduce the impact of crisis on refugees, especially child and youth refugees.

The first article in this special issue, “Manifestations of Lifeworld Crisis among Syrian Male Youth in Jordanian Refugee Camps”, explores the conditions faced by these youth in the Za'atari refugee camp. Based on Habermas' legitimation crisis theory, the authors employ four dimensions of the crisis: loss of meaning, psychological distress, anomie, and lack of gratification. To these the authors add coping strategies as a fifth dimension to explore youth responses to the conditions of the camp in everyday life. This article, which is based on a comprehensive examination of living in the camp, shows the extent to which the conditions in refugee camps indicate the absence of a commitment to youth human rights and serve only to destroy their present and future lives.

The second article, “Sexual Harassment of Syrian Female Youth in Jordanian Refugee Camps”, highlights sexual harassment as one of the most sensitive topics in refugee camps, albeit one of the least discussed. This contribution is, in fact, a confrontation with both the mainstream culture and the authorities in the refugee camps. The lack of regulation and control in these camps

and the ubiquity of the sexual harassment, abuse, and violation that female youth are subjected to is in conflict not only with the law but also with public morals and values. This article focuses on the pervasiveness of sexual harassment in the camps, the motivational environment of harassment, and the responses of females to this harassment and violation. Although the Jordanian press and some international agencies that work with refugees have previously recorded sexual harassment in refugees camps, this contribution documents the topic scientifically.

The goal of the third article, “Identity Crisis and Assimilation Problems among Syrian Refugee Women Residing outside Refugee Camps in Jordan”, is to highlight issues of social and cultural assimilation that young Syrian refugee women encounter, and to reveal the causes of the identity crisis outside the refugee camps. Highlighting the question of identity not only offers a great opportunity to understand the situation of refugees, but also provides necessary input for planning social and educational systems that facilitate assimilation, interaction, and unity on the basis of diversity. The authors of this article discuss four problematic issues of social and cultural assimilation experienced by Syrian refugee women: (a) compatibility in community, (b) acceptance by others, (c) good social relationships, and (d) the similarity of customs and traditions.

The issue’s final article, “Refugee Children in Crisis: The Challenges Facing Syrian Refugee Children Residing outside Refugee Camps in Jordan”, focuses on the economic, health, education, and social challenges that Syrian children encounter outside the camps. The authors examination of these challenges shows to what extent the ways these children have been neglected has not received appropriate attention. Many Syrian children work for low wages to help meet their families’ economic needs, and are subject to exploitation and deprivation. Because the children often work long hours in hard and unhealthy conditions, most are not able to continue their education. Furthermore, they are unable to lead normal social lives that include friends and entertainment. These children are overburdened with an economic role that deprives them of their childhood, and this is the core of the crisis.

These four articles provide an introduction to a critical approach toward the circumstances of Syrian refugees. This approach focuses on the concept of crisis, which means that the miserable conditions of refugees are produced by the failure of social policy to provide refugee youth and children with real empowerment and opportunities to enhance their well-being and address their sociopsychological needs. In fact, we know very little about the conditions faced by child and youth refugees in Jordan, so I trust that these courageous articles will provoke scholars’ attention to these sensitive, important, yet too often hidden topics.

Sincerely,

Mohammed Al-Hourani  
Editor