Understanding Gender, Gender Based Violence and Stigma in Syrian Communities

A mapping of three different Syrian communities by Syrian First Responders.

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Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights
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- The LDHR Training Team.
- The Program Team in LDHR, and
- The LDHR Gender Committee.

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Executive Summary

LDHR started its work responding to sexual violence in the Syrian conflict in 2012 as a group of doctors and lawyers being trained to document these crimes using the Istanbul Protocol through medical expert reports. Its documenters soon recognised that responding to sexual violence in a holistic way was necessary not only to provide their documentation and accountability work in an ethical, safe way, but most importantly it was critical to the outcomes for survivors. The challenges faced by survivors in their communities in the aftermath could be as life-threatening and destructive as the horror of sexual violence itself. Societal attitudes and stigma could be fatal.

Since then, our doctors and lawyers have been on a journey to discover how best to help Syria’s sexual violence survivors and encourage better community response and outcomes. In 2016, LDHR started training first responders in local communities so that survivors could have a safer, more effective and more supportive entry point into services, help and recovery. From 2017, LDHR has been working with its trained first responders in three communities to start to map gender norms, gender-based violence and stigma to better understand community attitudes to sexual violence and its survivors, as a foundation to tackle stigma wherever it is found in our communities.

The Syrian conflict has been marred by a high prevalence of sexual and gender based violence against women, men, boys and girls. How Syrian communities respond to sexual violence and its survivors will determine whether and how we can recover from the violence and trauma of this crisis. LDHR recognises - and this collection of gender experiences from Syrian communities emphasises - how gender norms shape lives and heighten the impacts of conflict. Gender norms, violence and stigma are intimately inter-related. Violence and stigma grow from the roots of harmful gender and societal norms. The resulting harm done affects not just the survivor, but their family and the fabric of each community.

Reflection and recognition can open the doors for change. During gender, GBV and stigma workshops, and upon personal reflection by First Responders, small changes started emerging in their home and work lives. Interactions and ideas for community engagement which grew from the workshops show promising pathways to much needed change. LDHR believe this mapping work has been an important start and foundation for community mobilisation to tackle stigma and underlying harmful gender norms.

LDHR and its team of First Responders are sharing this mapping as a valuable collection of Syrian insights and real-life experiences which can help shape policy, humanitarian funding and priority needs, programming and community initiatives, as well as informing gender analyses, how programming needs to be shaped to address gender inequalities and remove gendered barriers to engagement and access. Understanding gender disparities and realities can also help stakeholders to avoid doing harm and further worsening the impact of such norms. LDHR is also using these insights to inform its own programming, foundational gender analysis, and its internal
policies and practices. LDHR hopes to continue to add to this mapping with new communities and more detailed mapping work, and will share its results on an ongoing basis.

LDHR’s First Responders are now using this mapping as a basis to mobilise and start community initiatives to tackle self, social and structural stigmas associated with sexual violence and the underlying gender norms and harmful assumptions which feed them.

Key Findings and Recommendations
- Women and girls in these communities do not have equal rights.
- There is a high prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence and it is a major problem.
- The failure to report cases is due to fear of social stigmatisation, lack of protection from the family, and the futility of a complaint that will not lead to justice and fairness.
- Gender, gender-based violence and stigma are inter-connected - the thread of harmful gender norms runs through and stitches together GBV and its stigma which then stains and impacts the survivor across all aspects of their lives and often for their lifetimes (and not the perpetrator). Such damage can be inter-generational, impacting generations to come, particularly following conflict and crisis, and impacts the community as a whole.

All forms of stigma in all places across our communities need to be tackled, including Institutional or Structural Stigma, Social Stigma and Self or Internalised Stigma. This work can have a preventative effect as well as providing a better response to GBV.

The following ideas and recommendations were put forward by the First Responders based on what they learned from mapping gender norms, gender based violence and stigma in their communities. They noted the need for a comprehensive approach and to secure resources to support these initiatives. The full list appears at the end of this report.

Institutional Stigma and Harmful Gender Norms
- Review and reform laws which entrench harmful gender norms and inequality, and stigma.
- Review policies, procedures and practice within our community institutions – including governance, justice, medical, and all social services and providers.
- Consider gender barriers to access and provision of services to different genders and those marginalised by stigma in our communities.
- Organisations should make sure to engage both genders in their efforts to eliminate gender disparities.
- Assess the attitudes and practice of those acting in official roles and employed within these institutions, and provide training and awareness-raising engagement to change any harmful ideas and actions – with a particular focus on improving our medical, law enforcement and governance institutions.
- Training and ensuring representation in important institutions – for example, training women police officers.
- Set rules requiring compulsory education for girls, and increase the number of schools.
• Marriage must be only over the age of 18 years old. Remove any exceptions in law and practice to this rule.
• Activate maternity benefits and leave in organisations and provide nurseries – support this through donor policies and grant obligations.
• Create accountability and enforcement in law and in our institutions for harmful acts – shift shame and blame to those responsible, and away from the victims.

Community Stigma and Harmful Gender Norms
• Importance of organising awareness campaigns for all groups of society, and establishing centres and teams to do this work.
• Further work to identify and emphasise the impact on all members of the community and on the community as a whole (including men and boys), so all members of the community are included and see why change is important.
• Emphasise the importance of girls’ education, open the way for them to study, in addition to providing schools in all areas, especially within the camps.
• Raising awareness of the influential figures in the community (such as Imams of mosques and teachers in schools).
• Organise awareness-raising sessions for parents, so that they can raise and educate their children about gender, stigma and the importance of education for girls.
• Organise awareness-raising sessions for girls (and women) and inform them about their rights - introduce them to the laws in the country where they live and to success stories from other countries.
• Management and leadership skills training for women – mobilising and empowering women to help develop and shape society, families and workplaces.
• Focus education for men and boys under 30, and awareness-raising around these issues: the negative impact on society as a whole and prospects of recovery because of the harmful side of these norms and attitudes.
• Creating active and engaged civil society.

Self-Stigma and Response Individual Survivors
• Protecting survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, providing them with better psychological and social support, and medical treatment, as well as increasing the capacity of the health sector, law enforcement and governance institutions to respond better to these survivors.
• Raising awareness of women over 30 and emphasising their value and importance to society.
Methodology

LDHR’s doctors and lawyers - trained to respond to sexual violence - recognised the importance of the first response to a survivor in their community. As a result, in 2016, they began a basic first responder training programme, aimed at enhancing the skills and understanding of those most likely to be a disclosure and support service access point for survivors of sexual violence. Since then, LDHR has trained 318 first responders in basic first response skills. In 2017, LDHR added a Child Basic First Response training course for those most likely to encounter child survivors, and has now trained 117 child first responders.

Given the barriers and challenges faced by survivors to even reach a decision to disclose and receive first response, LDHR and its First Responder network decided to try to better understand and tackle some of those issues. Last year, LDHR piloted its Advanced First Responder programme through which LDHR and groups of trained First Responders began to explore some of the root causes and attitudes to sexual violence in their communities. LDHR trained three groups of first responders in different communities facing different situations: one in Aleppo governorate, one in Idlib governorate and one Syrian community displaced over the border to Turkey.¹

The programme began with a workshop discussing and exploring gender, gender-based violence (GBV) and stigma. In the following three to four months, the groups of First Responders in each community then set out to map real-life examples and experiences relating to gender norms, gender based violence and gendered stigma and attitudes wherever they encountered these issues in their homes, work and community. At the end of that collection period, a further workshop was held to collate and discuss what they had found.

Their response and the stories they collected were far greater than expected. What is presented in this report are some of those real life stories and examples gathered through focus group discussions, small informal surveys, work experience and community engagement, as well as through the workshop discussions and debates. It is not intended or presented as formal or academic research but was rather as a small but useful snapshot of community experiences which illuminate the difficulties facing sexual violence survivors in these Syrian communities.

The First Responder work in these communities continues. Mapping will continue and work has started to develop and implement community-driven initiatives (based on this work) to tackle and change some of the stigma and attitudes which harm survivors and their chances of recovery.

¹ 70 in total, including 68 women and 2 men. Professions included nurses, midwives, MHPSS counsellors, physiotherapists, health and nutritionist workers, as well as infant and child health workers (IYCF and CHW) and a small number of teachers, all of whom work in camps and health clinics in their communities.
Terminology and Acronyms

The definitions included in this section were shaped by LDHR First Responders workshop discussions. Some references to international definitions are included where useful.

**Gender** refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women created in our families, communities and cultures. The concept of gender also includes expectations about the potential characteristics, abilities and behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). Gender norms often create unequal opportunities and barriers, benefits and risks, impacts and outcomes based on the perceived gender of a person. They can be extremely harmful to women and men, girls and boys.

Gender roles and expectations are learnable. They can change over time and vary within and between cultures. Social discrimination systems (such as political status, class, race, physical and mental disability, age, etc.) can modify gender roles.

*The concept of gender is vital because it applies to social analysis and reveals how often women are socially sub-ordinate (or men are dominant). As such, subordination can be changed or terminated, as it is not biologically predetermined and not fixed forever.*

**Gender Analysis** is the collection and analysis of information disaggregated by gender. Men and women play different roles, leading to women and men gaining different experiences, knowledge, skills and needs. Gender analysis explores these differences so that policies, programs and projects can identify and address the different needs of men and women. Gender analysis also facilitates the strategic use of the distinct knowledge and skills possessed by women and men.

**Gender Based Violence (GBV)** is violence or a harmful act that is directed against any individual or group of individuals on the basis of gender (not just women, but also girls, boys, men or those who do not conform or identify with gender norms and binaries). It includes all forms of violence including physical, sexual or psychological violence wherever it occurs - in public or private, by family members or strangers, by individuals or when condoned or practiced by the State, its institutions and agents. (*Derived from the United Nations General Assembly Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*). It can also include threats, coercion, arbitrary deprivation of liberty and other rights, as well as economic deprivation. GBV comes in many forms and occurs at all stages of a person’s life.

**Stigma** is a social process that leads to the marginalisation or labelling of individuals or groups. Stigma involves judging, blaming, discriminating, penalising or shaming of individuals, groups or communities for a characteristic, attribute or experience which is judged in some way as ‘transgressing’ the standards of their community or society. Sexual violence associated stigma is not only the expression of individual values, beliefs or attitudes; it is the forceful expression of social norms that are cultivated within a given society through the behaviours and actions of groups.
of people and institutions. It arises from socially and culturally constructed norms around gender inequality, and expectations or perceptions of the role, behaviours and responsibilities of the traditional gender binaries in society, such as that women and girls are the holders of virtue and honour for a family while men and boys are the protectors and guardians. It is an extension of the stigma that is present pre-conflict. (Adapted from Principles for Global Action addressing and tackling Stigma associated with Conflict related Sexual and Gender based Violence, September 2017, to which LDHR Experts were contributors.)

**Early (Child) Marriage** and Forced Marriage is the (formal or informal) marriage of an individual without their consent or agreement. International human rights standards classify the age of 18 as the age at which a person is seen to be capable of giving informed consent and make decision. Therefore the marriage of any person under the age of 18 years old would be considered a forced marriage since they are not legally competent to consent.  

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**Acronyms**

CARSV: Conflict and Atrocity Related Sexual Violence  
GBV: Gender Based Violence  
LDHR: Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights  
MHPSS: Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support  
SV: Sexual Violence

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Foreword on Hope for Change

Initially some of the First Responders had reservations about what could be achieved by their mapping work. They knew that GBV trainings had taken place in Syria as well as in other contexts, yet sexual violence and stigma continued as a serious problem regardless of these efforts. One group thought that without authority and power, there would be no possibility to change the consciousness of the community. They saw the need to change the reality on the ground, in their communities.

Some of the First Responders noted that, after the first training, they learned not to look at issues of gender inequality superficially, but rather to focus on the root causes of the problem. They took time to recognise what has helped bring change where it has been achieved. In their experiences, they saw the important role of parents and loved ones to help change things for the next generation and in support. They recognised too the importance of education for women and girls, but also education and awareness raising of these issues with men and boys too.

One of the First Responders noted that she came from an educated family and was therefore sufficiently empowered to pursue her university studies and career. She is now 60 years old. She pointed out that this situation does not apply in large sectors of society, where families refuse to allow the girl to travel to pursue her studies or refuse to allow her to work after finishing her studies. (Reyhanli)

Another of the First Responders raised the issue of female education - how she provided her daughter with the necessary private lessons, that she wished to help her obtain a university degree, and she refused many offers of marriage for the 15-year-old girl. Unfortunately, many Syrian families are neglecting female education because women are not required to provide for the family since this responsibility lies with the men. (Idlib)

One of the First Responders touched on the issue of society’s view of educated women and that their awareness of their rights may make them rebellious from the point of view of men. She noted that when we talk of empowerment of women, some men to feel it means taking away from their rights. There is a possibility of a negative reaction and impact on women who stand up for their rights.

The same harmful gender norms also impact men and boys, and the damage to them and their families is part of the problem too. There are pressures on men when they are made to feel that they are not meeting expectations or responsibilities – to protect, to provide, to remain strong, etc. The same expectations and norms create barriers for men to express their emotions or seek support or assistance when they are struggling or traumatised.³ Distress, frustration and feeling of

inadequacy can manifest as anger (an emotion permitted to men) which in turn can lead to violence against their wives, children or other loved ones. As trauma and difficulties increase in conflict, so too does domestic violence. It is another example of the impact of gender norms and stigma preventing care and recovery, which has knock-on effects on women, families and the community.

The First Responders stressed the importance of gender and that the basis and source of the difference should be considered so that we can eliminate all gender inequality. Inclusion of men and boys in education and awareness-raising which highlights the community-wide impacts may help address the concerns that many men have about women’s empowerment and addressing gender issues.

Small First Steps

One First Responder indicated that after the first workshop she learned that there was no need to distinguish between males and females when distributing household tasks. She said that she began to divide the tasks of cleaning or arranging the house between her male and female children, while these tasks were assigned to females only before attending the training.

One of the First Responder reflected that after the first training, she began to think about the tasks expected of her and assigned to her - and that the man is also capable of doing them. For example, the man is capable of ironing, and when it comes to working, we find that most of the laundry shops are run by men, instead of females. The same applies to the chefs in restaurants, who are mostly men. Why are the women then expected to do this at home and not the men? And why can’t women make a wage for these tasks, as well as men?

One of the First Responders reported that she no longer differentiates now between her male and female children with regard to the colours of clothes.

As described below, during one of the workshops, the First Responders arranged a debate based on the statement of one of the participants that she would never approve of her brother marrying a sexual violence survivor because of the stigma. They decided to have an initial vote to see who shared this view and who disagreed with it. It was 50:50 among the group. Then each group was given time to present their views and reasoning. Following the debate, the First Responders voted again. The attitudes had changed: 80% supported the marriage and 20% still opposed it. This small exercise shows how attitudes can be influenced through community discussion, engagement, advocacy and reflection. It brings hope that these groups of First Responders can create real opportunities to change attitudes around them in their own communities.

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Gender Mapping and Analysis

Gender analysis is the collection and analysis of information disaggregated by gender. Men and women play different roles, leading to women and men gaining different experiences, knowledge, talents and needs. Gender analysis explores these differences so that policies, programs and projects can identify and address the different needs of men and women. Gender analysis also facilitates the strategic use of the distinct knowledge and skills possessed by women and men.

The First Responders collected insights and real-life stories from their communities to set out the different roles, expectations, behaviours and opportunities between genders. The resulting Gender Analysis is set out below.

What does Masculinity and Femininity mean to you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power</th>
<th>Authority</th>
<th>Protection</th>
<th>Emotions</th>
<th>Will</th>
<th>Passion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Courage</td>
<td>Softness</td>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>Beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting a good example</td>
<td>Domination</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tenderness</td>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Cruelty</td>
<td></td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>Kindness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Life Cycles
The First Responder Groups used life cycles to consider the differences between the lives of men and women in their communities – focusing on differing roles, responsibilities, expectations, opportunities, challenges and impacts.

Families usually rejoice when learning that the next child is a baby boy, and they have no problem to have four male children in a row, on the contrary this might bring

Birth and Babies
Some families get upset when learning that the next child is a baby girl and things get more difficult when the woman gives birth to many females because this might bring her stigmatization by her husband’s family. In many cases, the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Privileged treatment to the woman in the family.</th>
<th>Husband tends to remarry in order to have male children.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If a woman is not getting pregnant, the man usually refuses to have any medical check-up.</td>
<td>If a woman is not getting pregnant, she will have to have several medical checks, take many medication and often she is blamed for infertility.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Male children receive better nutritional treatment. (Idlib)**

**Childhood**

- The majority of malnutrition cases are girls. (Idlib)

- Males usually play with certain type of toys such as cars or weapons. A boy who plays with the kind of toys associated with girls is perceived as a “sissy”.

- Male children are usually allowed to play in the street.

- Some clothing colours are known to be “masculine” (such as blue or dark colours in general).

- Male children practise violent sports such as Karate or football.

**Females usually play with girly toys such as Barbies or tailoring machines, and a girl who plays with boys’ toys is perceived a “tomboy”.

- Female children are now allowed to play in the street, and in case they were allowed to, they must be escorted by their brothers.

- Girls usually dress in pink or light “feminine” colours.

- Even though many girls would love to play football, they cannot do so, because it is confined to males. Girls are also not encouraged to practice sports such as Karate or wrestling.

**Male adolescents are allowed to play in net cafes, and they usually play violent electronic games.**

**Adolescence**

- Female adolescents are not allowed to play in net cafes.

- It is normal for males to play in the street or to go out by themselves.

- Male adolescents are usually allowed to go out with their friends and staying out late.

- Males are allowed to wear whatever they chose.

- A Female adolescent must be escorted by someone to protect her if she wants to go out in order to prevent any harassments.

- Female adolescents are not allowed to stay out late and going out with their friends might raise a lot of questions.

- Females are required to wear specific clothes, including in some places having to wear the veil.
Male adolescents might be scolded by his family if they knew he started to smoke, however it will be much easier for them to accept the idea than the idea of a girl smoking.  

Some parents feel proud of their son having female friends.  

Many schools tend to separate males and females starting from the elementary school.  

It is normal for males to have mobile phones or to surf the net without supervision.  

A male adolescent can post his photos on social media.  

The male can declare his love to his girlfriend.  

Males are encouraged to pursue their education.  

Males are usually prepared during adolescence to learn a profession or to take on responsibility.  

Boys are not married off young as the same drivers for this do not apply to them.  

It is shameful for a female adolescent to smoke, and this would bring her severe scolding, and would never be accepted.  

A female adolescent is not allowed to have male friends.  

Many schools tend to separate males and females starting from the elementary school.  

Females are put under strict supervision when surfing the net or when using social media.  

It is shameful for a girl to post her photos on social media, this is justified by the argument of someone using these photos to blackmail the girl after modifying them on photo-shop.  

It is shameful for a girl to declare her love to a boyfriend.  

Many girls are deprived of their right to education.  

Females are usually prepared during adolescence to be housewives, so they are taught cooking, cleaning the house, doing laundry, etc.  

Early marriage – girls as young as 11, 12 or 13 years old can be married, often to significantly older men.  

It is seen as embarrassing to take a girl to the gynaecologist.  

The male is usually the breadwinner  

Men are allowed to choose his profession – except if something is seen as women’s work.  

Males can travel abroad for work purposes.  

Adulthood  

Women usually cannot travel abroad to work without being escorted by a relative.  

There are limitations on what work is seen as suitable for women. “Some are totally forbidden such as car mechanic, barber, firefighters, civil defence or joining the army.”  

Some countries do not allowed woman to travel without a male escort (an
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A man is nicknamed by the name of his eldest son instead of the daughter (Abo Abdo) even if the female was older, and even if he doesn’t have male children at all.</th>
<th>They are also banned from practicing other activities such as driving cars, sports, going to the movies or stadiums, etc. Such things are not banned in the Syrian society, however there are many societal restrictions which limit them.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make decisions about their own lives.</td>
<td>The woman is also nicknamed by the name of her first son.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men get paid to do the work women are expected to do for free e.g. laundry shops</td>
<td>Responsibilities without decision making powers. Fathers, brothers or husbands make the decisions about their lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Women who work usually get paid less than men for the same work – e.g. at the olive harvests, women get paid half the amount that the men do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Women are more likely to face harassment, sexual assault or exploitation in the work place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A man can marry multiple women (four according to Islam Sharia), and he usually considers this a privilege and strength to “control” a woman.</td>
<td><strong>Marriage</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The male can propose to and marry the woman he wants.</td>
<td>A woman cannot marry more than one man. She often has no choice who she marries or whether they take another wife as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Late marriage is normal thing for males.</td>
<td>The female needs the approval of her guardian to get married. In many occasions girls were not allowed by their families to marry the man they love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If a man cheated on his wife, she has to bear with it in order to keep her family and not to deprive her children from their father. The wife is likely to be blamed for failing to perform her duties.</td>
<td>A girl who is growing old and not getting marries is perceived a spinster.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A woman cheating on her husband might get her divorced in the best scenario, and it might get her killed in the name of “honour” in the worst.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Property rights: husbands own the property for their wives.

Upon divorce, it is the fathers’ right to take the children.

Upon divorce, woman do not have the right to keep their children.

Inheritance: the sons get the inheritance and often divide the daughters’ share between them

Death

Inheritance: In some areas, the law gives inheritance rights to daughters but sons still distribute this amongst themselves or pressure their sisters to sign waivers.

Husbands remarry who they choose if their wife dies.

Wives often end up with their husband’s family if he dies.

LDHR notes just how many times “shameful”, fear of sexual violence and harassment, “not allowed”, restrictions and limitations, and some form of control or supervision appears in the female life-cycle columns. Such ideas and words are almost entirely absent in the male life cycle column.

**Conflict Changes**

All the groups noted changes in gender roles and responsibilities as a result of the conflict, and how the conflict has impacted the genders differently. One group (Aleppo) considered that the increasing responsibilities on women during the conflict had not translated into increased decision-making roles or autonomy.

- In terms of behaviour, most felt that men’s behaviour became more hostile compared to the situation prior to the conflict, while women’s behaviour became more daring in raising their fears. Women’s expectations became less in terms of their lives and futures.
- To date, the majority believes that women have less space to express their feelings during the conflict than before the conflict, while freedom of expression is preserved in the case of men.
- With regard to opportunities, the chances of education prior to the conflict were lower for females than for males, while they became even lower and even vanished for both sexes in some societies after the conflict.
- In terms of employment opportunities, women’s employment opportunities before the conflict were very low and this continued and got worse in the during the conflict compared with males.
- Prior to the conflict, a woman’s role in politics was very limited, and it is still the same nowadays, except for a few women who rebelled against the negative societal attitude towards women, which considers any woman participating in such activities as a woman who lost her femininity and became masculine – like a man.

**INCREASING UNEQUAL RIGHTS AND ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES, RESOURCES AND SERVICES based on gender**
There was no equal distribution of resources, opportunities and services prior to the crisis in Syria, but the phenomenon became more widespread after the crisis. (Reyhanli)

In general, factors such as difficult access to basic services, including health and education, which requires passing frequent checkpoints and travelling long distances, and fear of girls being sexually assaulted on the roads, contributed to the increased denial of opportunities and access to resources to women and girls.

**Education**

**ALEPPO**

There is a large proportion of females who were deprived of their right to education for many reasons, including customs and traditions, the desire of the family to marry the girl at an early age, bad conditions and morals especially in places of mixed communities, fear of the girl from bad companions, and the desire to keep girls ignorant so that they do not know their rights which makes it easier to control them, their lives and destinies. (Educational violence)

**IDLIB**

Prior to the conflict, male educational attainment was greater than that of females, and the gap notably increased after the crisis. A lot of families tend to deprive their daughters of education, even primary school, and they seek to get them married, because they consider them as a financial burden and because they fear their daughters being harassed or raped on the way to school due to lack of security.

**REYHANLI**

Education opportunities were not equal between males and females. Many women were deprived of pursuing their education because of forced marriage or because they were prevented from traveling to pursue university studies in another city. The percentage of study in countries outside Syria was much higher for males and exceeded 90%.

The percentage of men in universities is a lot higher than women. “Despite pre-conflict Syria’s rough parity between female and male attendance at universities, Syrian young women are enrolling at much lower rates in Turkey than their male counterparts. ... Of the total population of university-aged Syrian women in Turkey, we estimate than less than 1% were attending an accredited university in the 2013-2014 academic year.”

“I do not dare to send my daughter to school because her father is afraid of what society would think – females do not normally go to school.”

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4 Institute of International Education Report, *We Will Stop Here and Go No Further*, October 2014
Medical Care and Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights

“Less than one quarter of women have frequent access to reproductive health services, with some women having none at all.”

Save The Children 2014, A Devastating Toll: the impact of three years of war on the health of Syria’s children, p.5.

**IDLIB**

The lack of medical care services has had a clear impact on all groups, but its impact has been more pronounced among females. The man always tries to make the female visit a female doctor, and he doesn’t allow her to be examined by a male doctor, especially in cases related to gynaecology, reproductive health, or surgeries.

There was a significant shortage in the number of female doctors suffered before the crisis, which became worse during the crisis, as doctors started to migrate. In addition, it was difficult for doctors to move around due to the checkpoints, dangerous roads, insecurities, and spread of gangs.

Several factors, such as the lack of medical care, the refusal of some men to allow their wives to visit male doctors, increased obstetric problems and contributed to increased mortality among women during childbirth. Most of the births were conducted at home by midwives or even female relatives who were non-qualified and lacked the experience in obstetrics.

**REYHANLI**

Women and girls face greater barriers to accessing medical care including SRHC: including restricted movement, frequent checkpoints and the fear of sexual assault while travelling/outside the home. Societal gender norms can prevent women patients being treated by male doctors. Denial of education to women has only exacerbated the resulting problem - leading to the shortage of female cadres such as female doctors, especially surgeons (where a female surgeon was viewed as mannish), as well as the shortage of midwives and nurses.

Women have been deprived of their right to contraception as a result of the religious militancy that emerged after the crisis in Syria. Some believe that contraception is religiously prohibited, while others believe that women should give birth to many children to compensate for the men killed during the war and to achieve a sectarian majority in the community to prevent a disruption of the sectarian ratio because the majority of the dead of the Syrian crisis belongs to the Sunni community.

The husband of a woman facing complications during child-birth refused to allow the male doctor to touch or operate on his wife. The woman then died in childbirth. (Reyhanli)
**Governance and Leadership**

**IDLIB**
Prior to the crisis, most of the leadership positions were taken by males, and the case remained the same following the crisis.

**REYHANLI**
Access to leadership positions and decision-making positions was largely in favour of males, as it was very difficult for a woman to reach positions of leadership or positions of power. It is clear that women are mostly absent from decision-making positions in Syrian opposition institutions such as the National Coalition, the Negotiations Committee or the interim government.

**Work and Employment Rights**

**IDLIB**
Most of the jobs remained for men, as they are the ones responsible for the families, because the society thinks that men are more capable of bearing physical burdens than women and they are better able to protect themselves in cases of assaults during insecurity. Therefore, women’s tasks were limited to taking care of her household and serving males in her family. Male workers far outnumber female workers in most government and private institutions.

Moreover, the fact that women are employed makes them vulnerable to many difficulties at work, since most organizations currently do not take into account women’s needs for maternity and sick leave during pregnancy. Women are also harassed by their male colleagues at work and suffer from society’s view of them as being like a man.

**REYHANLI**
Some organizations deprived pregnant women of job opportunities, because they did not intend to grant them maternity leaves.

There are some professions which are forbidden for women, such as taxi driving. The disparity also appears in wages, for example, female workers in olive harvesting earn much less than male workers.

One woman explained that she once had a job opportunity in one of the Gulf countries, but she couldn’t get the job due to pressure from her husband, and because she didn’t want to leave her children. However, she would like her husband to find a similar job.

One woman was forced to return to work only a week after she gave birth to her child because she was not granted maternity leave or even a health permit because her organization did not take these issues into consideration. She also took her child to her workplace, causing health problems for the girl, which made her quit her job in the end.
All the teachers in a Syrian school in Turkey used contraceptives in order to keep their jobs, as the school used to discharge any teacher when she gives birth. However, the law changed in Syrian schools when the Turkish government interfered in this issue, and all teachers gave birth that year.

There is another case of an employee who was in her fourth month of pregnancy when employed, however the rules of procedure of that organization would only grant her the maternity leave after six months of employment. The woman had to take some kind of medicine to delay her delivery until she completes her sixth months in her job in order to get the maternity leave.

**Financial Independence**

**ALEPPO**
Depriving females from financial resources, and abridging their financial rights, such as seizing a female’s salary by her father or husband, in case she is working, or seizing her dowry by her father. We found that many fathers tend to marry their daughters in return for money, and this has become a business for some of them. The dowry often goes to the father or the brother.

**IDLIB**
The economic exploitation of women in some societies, in addition to families who denied their daughters the right to marriage so that she will bring money to the family from working (often in the fields).

**Autonomy and Decision Making**

**IDLIB**
Women have very little ability to determine their future, because decision-making on this issue is due to males in their family, such as the father, brother and husband. This applies to all aspects of life, whether at work, travel, health, or inheritance. And even extends to intellectual freedom, the possibility of leaving the house, or the decision to emigrate. Everything is in the hands of men. There is a belief that men are more capable of running things than women. The marginalization of women after the conflict has been exacerbated by ignorance, lack of education, early marriage, insecurity and lack of resources.

**REYHANLI**
During the crisis, the decision-making power is limited to the man and he is responsible for the decisions he takes. Many men have made deadly decisions to the whole family, such as staying in an area under bombardments, which destroyed the house and killed the entire family, while some men decided to emigrate by sea, which drowned all of the family, in addition to other decisions taken by the man without the participation of women.
Perhaps the phenomenon that we found clearly and widely in society is depriving the female of her right to the inheritance of her father on the grounds that the inheritance must remain within the family and may not go out to a stranger (the daughter’s husband). We noticed many cases where the mother encouraged family members to deprive her daughter of inheritance, because she doesn’t want her son-in-law to share the inheritance with her sons. This assumes the female has no right at all. Male guardianship over women does not allow him to seize her money (Economic violence).

Denial of inheritance was common before the conflict, but it increased considerably during the crisis due to lack of accountability and rule of law.

It is also common for women to be deprived of inheritance, sometimes amounting to physical assault, in order to pressure them to renounce the right to inheritance or to force them to marry their paternal cousin to keep inheritance inside the family.
Gender-Based Violence Mapping and Analysis

Similarly, the First Responders identified different forms of gender based violence (GBV) in their communities, comparing the situation before the conflict and what has happened during the conflict.

At a psychological clinic in Aleppo where some of the First Responders work, based on their observations and accounts of the beneficiaries of the clinic, they estimated 20-25 out of every 100 women were subjected to violence. Over a four-month period, the number of beneficiaries to the centre who had suffered violence was 483 women. This was recognised as only a very small part of the picture as many fear disclosing this type of violence to anyone.

a. Common Typologies
The same group of First Responders identified the following kinds of GBV in the home:

• **Marital violence**: when the husband forces the wife to perform “her duties”.
  [Note: in other countries, this is criminalised as rape.]
• **Early Marriage**: when girls under 18 years old are married (before the age of consent).
• **Physical violence**: beaten by husband or sometimes his family, also some girls are beaten by their own fathers and brothers prior to marriage.
• **Psychological Violence**: such as threats, intimidation, insults, tampering with feelings, treating and making someone feel inferior or not good enough. Isolation, control.
• **Verbal violence**: insults, defamatory and derogatory comments, threats.
• **Other Family violence**: practiced by the family based on societal norms including restrictions imposed on women and girls, deprivation of rights, treatment of divorced and widowed women.
• **Coercion, Control and Deprivation of Autonomy**: When women and girls cannot make decisions about their own bodies and lives, and when women’s opinions are not sought or listened to.

**RAPE AND OTHER FORMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

*Before the crisis.*

Before the crisis, the perception was that rape was limited to individual cases, often by relatives, neighbours, co-workers or drug and alcohol addicts. These cases were often ‘resolved’ by the forced marriage of the victim to the rapist, where the Syrian law protects the rapist and prevents his punishment through marriage. Some cases end with honour killings, where Syrian law also protects the murderer if his crime is for purposes related to honour.

*Gender norms and stigmas are institutionalised and entrenched into law which assigns blame and shame to the victim regardless of their lack of consent. Violence and lack of consent is not considered in marriages, with the law tolerating and permitting this – siding with the violent men rather than protecting women and prevent violence against them. Reform is needed.*
During the war.

Rape in Syria was used as a weapon of war after the outbreak of the Syrian crisis. It was widely used by members of the Syrian regime in prisons, checkpoints, and houses during raids. There are many reports of using rape as a weapon of war for many purposes:

a - Breaking the will of the people

   Forced migration and displacement with the aim of demographic change (such as the city of Homs where rape was used as a weapon of war and ended with the displacement of Sunnis and control of the city by Shiites and Alawites).

b - Destabilizing society and destroying families.

Other forms of Sexual Violence in the Crisis

- There are also reports of child abuse by the guard at the camp in a country of asylum.
- All detainees are subjected to forced nudity in detention centres for search purposes, and they get sexually harassed during the search.

A 30 year old woman already had three daughters. When she became pregnant with a fourth daughter, her husband forced her to abort when she was in her fourth month. He forced her to take abortion pills at home without medical supervision. This cause labour and severe uterus rupture. Both the mother and the foetus died as a result. (Idlib)

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

The First Responders documented the following forms of sexual exploitation in the crisis:

- Sexual exploitation of widows or wives of detained or injured persons in return for giving them a sum of money.
- Sexual exploitation in asylum countries in return for providing housing or avoiding being expelled from a house.
- Sexual exploitation by some managers or heads of organisations for girls in return for employment.
- Sexual exploitation by smugglers in return for crossing borders between countries or during asylum trips to Europe.
- Many cases of sexual exploitation of refugees in European countries have been reported through promises of better accommodation or faster residency permits.
- There is also some type of sexual exploitation in the countries of asylum by some influential people such as the intelligence service. In case of refusal, the refugee would be denied an identity or residency permit or would even be threatened of expulsion from the country of asylum.

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

Against women and girls
### ALEPPO

In our society, and according to our observations, within working environments or social relations, we find that females are being subjected to violence merely for being females. There are many women who are being beaten by their husbands, fathers, or brothers, and some of them were severely beaten, which left scars on their bodies.

One woman recalled that her husband used to beat her in front of her children. She was deeply embarrassed by this in front of her children. Her husband also sometimes used to insult her with bad vocabulary, which affected her on the psychological level, and it is not easy for her to forget these things. (Emotional and physical violence).

There are cases where husbands physically abused their wives in order to make them file for divorce, so they have to waive all of their rights.

### IDLIB

Prior to the conflict, cases of physical abuse of females by the husband, father or brother and sometimes in schools were recorded.

After the crisis, the incidences of physical assault on females has increased in general, where the proportion of widows and divorcees also increased. These women were often forced to either remarry, and in this case get abused along with her children by her new husband, or remain with her family, in the presence of her father, or brothers so that they can provide for her and take care of the children. In this case, women were often physically abused by them, due to the high psychological pressure resulting from the conflict, spread of psychological illness, hardships, and material conditions.

The wives of detainees are often physically abused by their husbands after leaving the prison, due to the poor psychological conditions and mental illnesses they suffer from when they leave prison.

Cases of physical violence have also increased in children, where children play games that mimic war and use tools that hurt the other side (learned behaviour and trauma).

### REYHANLI

Before the crisis, most cases involved physical abuse by the father, brother or husband, as well as cases of violence and beatings in schools, making the culture of physical violence the dominant culture in society.

After the crisis, cases of physical abuse increased for several reasons:
- The rise in divorces or the death of the husband led to the marriage of women to a second husband, who in turn violently assaults children and physically abuses them.
• Stress and mental illness were associated with increased physical violence (e.g. detained men who had been subjected to torture or sexual violence were practicing violent behaviour against family members after their release).
• The spread of arms leads to increased physical violence for purposes of power and control, and many cases of shooting were recorded in this regard.
• Overcrowding and lack of resources also increase physical violence.
• Physical violence in schools in asylum countries against Syrian students.

EARLY OR FORCED MARRIAGE

Syrian Personal Status Law.

Article 16 of the Syrian Personal Status Law stipulates the following:
“The age of eligibility for marriage is 18 years in the case of young men and 17 years in the case of young women.”

However, Article 18 of the same law states:
“If the adolescent has claimed puberty after completing the age of fifteen or adolescence after completing the age of thirteen, and they requested to get married, the judge shall authorize the marriage if the truthfulness of their claim and the endurance of their bodies were proven.”

Statistics show that early marriage is common in Syria. In its 2015 report, UNICEF estimates that the proportion of Syrian girls who married before the age of 15 reached 3% and before the age of 18 reached 13% before the crisis.

Because of the crisis and displacement, the rate of early marriage has risen to 32% in 2015, given the difficult conditions experienced by Syrian refugees. Syrian refugees often lack the means or documents to register their marriages formally and do not comply with the legal rules imposed.

Aleppo Findings

Early marriage deprives a female of her right to a proper childhood and forces her to shoulder the burdens of early marriage and motherhood. Early marriage has recently spread and has become a phenomenon.

Where the girl is married at a young age and before reaching adulthood, and the husband is also often at a young age and has not attained the age of majority. This is due to many reasons, such as customs and traditions, ignorance or poverty, or the fear of young men and women being overtaken by lust and getting involved in sin, or fear of the girl’s guardian of spinsterhood for his daughter or his fear of his death and leaving her behind without a breadwinner or provider, or because of the social heritage, as the countryside communities often encourage early marriage.

Early marriage is one cause of deprivation of the right to education for women and girls.

Idlib Findings
The rate of forced and early marriages notably increased during the crisis. We notice marriages in a very young age (some as young as 11 or 12 years old), where girls have not yet reached the age of puberty. This may be attributed to several reasons, such as fear of the girl getting raped or sexually assaulted due to the deteriorated security conditions, lack of education, deprivation of right to education due to lack of schools and security, losing the breadwinner of the family which forces the mother or the eldest brother to force his sister to marry to alleviate the financial burden on the family, or to capitalise on financial gains or a job opportunity, or any other type of gains, which the man proposing to the girl might offer.

There is also a fear of spinsterhood amongst young girls: where a girl who chooses to continue her education and reaches over the age of 20 without being married, she may not find any marriage opportunities.

The man is often not suitable for the girl in terms of age, or he might be a foreigner who is seeking a ‘pleasure-only’ marriage, and would treat the girl as a commodity. Some males seeking marriages look for a young female who has no life experience, and who is not aware of her rights, which make it easy to control her and absorb whatever the husband wants to teach her.

There is a high rate of divorces among early marriages.

One of the First Responders told the story of a 13 year old girl whose father was deceased, and who was subjected to physical abuse by her 25 year old brother - the then breadwinner of the family. Her brother was a teacher, however he deprived her of education. He did not allow her to leave the house as he feared what would happen to her. The girl was unable to bear this and she escaped to her friend’s house nearby. When her brother found out about this, he forced her to return home and made her marry a 40 year old man.

Reyhanli Findings
Prior to the crisis, forced and early marriages were widespread, especially forcing a girl to marry her paternal cousin, or forcing girls to drop out of school to get them married and get rid of their expenses, or to attain a financial benefit, such as a high dowry, or to marry the son of a business partner, or a relative to keep the inheritance within the family. However, following the Syrian crisis, cases of forces and early marriages overwhelmingly increased. Many girls were forced to marry in the age of 13.

The father of a beautiful girl started a business of marrying his daughter. He arranged for her to be married five times in order to gain material benefit.

One of the trainees, who works as a teacher in a school of Syrian refugees in Turkey, said that one of her sixth grade students, who was only 12 years old, was forced to marry a Turkish young man, and when she asked her about what she knew about marriages, she said that she doesn’t know
anything. The teacher later learnt that the student’s father was a martyr and that her maternal uncle was the one who forced her to marry.

In Syria, some young girls have been married to fighters as a way to gain protection. This is particularly harmful to the girl if she is married to foreign fighters (Mujahideen) as they are often killed or leave the girl after a short time.

In Turkey, there is also a dangerous trend of marrying a Syrian girl to a Turkish man as a second wife. Polygamy is prohibited in Turkey so the marriage is criminal, unregistered and leaves the girl with no rights or protections.

The change of ideas and beliefs after the crisis has contributed to the spread of early marriage and forced marriage (such as the tendency to religious extremism).

The idea of marrying an inexperienced young female child is widespread in the Syrian society (because the husband and his family would want to raise her as they wish), and because her lack of knowledge of her rights would make it easier to control her.

The problems of forced marriage and its far-reaching effects have emerged among immigrants in European countries, especially when women have become financially independent as refugees and have become familiar with their rights. There is a very high divorce rate among Syrian refugees in countries of asylum in Europe.

The foregoing findings confirms the existence of the problem of early marriage in Syrian society before and after the war but indicated that the problem increased significantly after the war.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE**

The rate of psychological and emotional abuse increased significantly after the Syrian crisis, including abuse by elements of the Syrian regime in the detention centres and checkpoints and during raids on cities. These abuses included the use of verbal insults aimed at honour and religion. As well as verbal abuse by people distributing humanitarian aids, service providers and camp guards. The threat of a second marriage became commonplace after the outbreak of the crisis, due to the large number of widows and the ease of marriage because of financial need and poverty.

One of the First Responders reported the story of a man who brought his overweight wife a pair of pants (size 38) and told her he would remarry if she could not fit into them in a short time.

**Impacts of GBV**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Chronic pain, disability, deformities, bruising, bleeding ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>Crying, depression, anxiety, fear, anger, self-blame, addiction, self-harm and suicide ...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reproductive Health
Unwanted pregnancies, STDs, abortion, menstrual disorder, complications, infertility ...

Cultural and social
Blaming the victim, shame, stigma, loss of social role, honour crimes, social rejection and isolation, migration, family disintegration, divorce ...

Community
...

Drivers in the Conflict for Increasing GBV
- Lack of Accountability – Impunity
- Displacement and the situation in the IDP camps
- Overcrowding and shared use of WASH facilities.
- Increasing poverty
- Lack of Security
- Lack of Protection
- Heighten feeling of insecurity and fears
- Decreasing education
- Increasing weapons
- Abuse of authority and power
- Drug use and addiction
- Trauma
- Family disintegration
- Increasing female-headed households and the absence of male family members (regarded as the protectors, therefore household is seen as vulnerable)
- Exploitation of need and aid.

The Aleppo group noted how hard it is for women and girls to confront and escape the violence against them. They highlighted both societal gender norms and social and structural stigmas which trap women in the cycle of violence.
- Women fear losing their family, children and home – including the stigma of divorce, loss of means of support/survival and losing guardianship of children.
- Women face further violence from their partners as revenge for resisting or complaining against their treatment.
- Lack of information, education and awareness about their rights, values and that violence is not something they should have to bear.
- Lack of legal protection: violence against women in marriage is not criminalized in law and there is no accountability in practice.
- Fear of stigmatization – the blame and shame of departing with customs and traditions remains with women for life and seriously impacts how they can live their lives.
Stigma Mapping and Analysis

“Stigma kills: it is possible to survive sexual violence, but not survive the ensuing ostracism, abandonment, poverty, “honour” crimes, trauma that can lead to suicide or self-harm, unsafe pregnancies, and untreated medical conditions, including STIs and HIV, that may result. There needs to be a heightened sense of urgency about fighting stigma because rape survivors are literally dying of shame.”

The First Responders groups considered and mapped examples of all different types of stigma in the community, with a specific focus on sexual violence and the gendered aspects of stigma.

Stigma Associated with Sexual Violence in the Syrian Conflict
There were many examples from all three communities of stigma and its devastating impact on survivors of sexual violence, and their loved ones.

Against female victims:

Aleppo Case Study – Detention Stigma
One year after Fatima’s release from Syrian regime prison, people around her in the Camp still avoid interacting with or talking to her, as they blame her for being detained, knowing she was detained just for being the wife of an FSA member.

Some families announced that their daughters were killed in detention, and they secretly sent them abroad. One young Syrian woman fled to Europe and changed her name so that she could start a new life and no one would know that she had been raped in a regime detention centre.

A female detainee was beaten by her father and brothers every day after her release, so that their torture was much worse than what she was subjected to during detention. She later had to escape to Istanbul to live by herself. (Reyhanli)

Some women were killed by their relatives following their release or after being subjected to sexual violence.

Women and girls are also stigmatized for talking about the sexual violence, which they were subjected to. This is apparent through documentation or during psychological treatment.

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6 Letitia Anderson, Office of the UN SRSG on Sexual Violence, Wilton Park 2016 quoted in PRINCIPLES FOR GLOBAL ACTION PREVENTING AND ADDRESSING STIGMA ASSOCIATED WITH CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE (2017) to which LDHR Experts were contributors.
Many women suffer from psychological illnesses (such as depression and PTSD) due to stigmatisation after being detained and subjected to sexual violence. Some girls are also forced into prostitution following sexual violence, due to their isolation, lack of any means of support or survival, and due to their vulnerability to exploitation. (Reyhanli)

**Against male victims:**

A lot of men suffer from stigmatization because of the sexual violence they were subjected to during detention. This is usually reflected in the violence these men then inflict upon their wives and families, and in detaching themselves from the society, in addition to depression. (Reyhanli)

A young man in his twenties was subjected to sexual violence in detention. When he was released, he was unable to find a job and no woman would marry him.

**Against spouses or families**

A woman was raped in front of her husband when she was visiting him in his detention, which later caused her death due to a heart disease. The stigma became attached to the husband and he also blamed himself for what happened to her. (Reyhanli)

“Stigma attaches to most of the male and female survivors of detention, and it is extended to their families also. This is due to the assumption of the sexual violence they were subjected to in detention.”

After a Syrian woman was released from detention, no one in the neighbourhood would play with her daughter. (Idlib)

“I cannot accept a raped woman to be a wife to my brother, because he will live his entire life in stigma.”

The impact of stigma on both male and female survivors: The social stigmatization of the male or female sexual violence survivors implies numerous impacts on them such as isolation, avoidance of social relations, lack of engagement in the community, in addition to a sense of being unaccepted by your own society. This may lead to suicide in some cases. Stigmatization also undermines confidence, and can deprive both male or female survivors from accessing medical, social services and assistance. Moreover, societal blame on a survivor enhances self-stigma, and makes him/her even less willing to engage in society. (Aleppo)

**Aleppo Case Study – Sexual Violence in the Camps**

Khadija left the camp in attempt to forget the fact that her young daughter was raped. Khadija’s mother approached the psychological support centre in the camp trying to explain her granddaughter’s issue to the supervisor, but she was extremely concerned about being exposed. The four-year-old child was referred to the hospital, where they took the necessary procedures. The girl had been raped in one of the camp’s group showers. The grandmother
The low level of awareness of women about their rights and the psychological, physical and social impact which violence has on them, prevents them from accessing available services.

**Idlib Case Study**
Fear of stigma made a woman accuse the doctor who treated her 4-year-old daughter, who suffered from bruises and lacerations on the perineal area. The doctor had informed her that it is impossible for a car accident to have caused such injuries on the girl and that he suspects the girl had been raped.

**Accessing Care and Support:**
Societal and self-stigma can prevent survivors and other stigmatised groups from accessing and receiving critical health care and psycho-social support.

**Idlib Case Study**
The mother was embarrassed to take her 5-year-old daughter to a female doctor for fear of stigma.

**The Compounding Stigma of Mental Illness**
Prior to the conflict, people who visited psychological support clinics were considered insane. This perception did not totally vanish, however, the scale of the need for this kind of help in our area as a whole made society alleviate its tone of speech in this regard. The majority of people are calling for more psychological support centres to be available. So for mental illness, there is a glimmer of hope which appears in the distance, regarding women and men visiting psychological clinics, especially after what the area was subjected to, displacement or the loss of a family member or more. (Aleppo)

**Divorce - A Common Outcome of Sexual Violence Stigma and an Additional Stigma in Its Own Right**
Many detained women were stigmatized following their release, and many divorces were recorded against women who were subjected to sexual violence. (Reyhanli)

Women often tend to accept being subjected to physical and verbal abuse fearing divorce and post-divorce stigma, which might extend to their children, especially daughters, as they would be called “Daughters of the Divorced”.
A girl was raped by her cousin and was forced to marry him to remove the shame and stigma. After one year, he wanted to divorce her. Her family begged him to keep her and urged him to just take a second wife instead. (Idlib)

Reyhanli Case Study Before the Conflict
A woman was gifted on her wedding to the head of a tribe. He was already married. This second wife felt she had to bear this situation fearing that she would be stigmatized if she decided to divorce on her wedding night. She remained married to this man until he passed away 17 years later, during which he married other two women, to have four wives in total.

Aleppo Case Study Before the Conflict
Samiha was forced by her husband to work in prostitution, claiming that his monthly salary was not sufficient to support the family. Several years later, when Samiha was 43 years old, her husband divorced her and threw her in the street with her children. He claimed that the children were not his. Samiha is ostracized by the community and she isolates herself away from them. People look at her in a way that always reminds her of the shame she brought to her family because of this work and her divorce. (Aleppo)

Other forms of gendered stigma in the community:

Hidden Patterns in Aleppo
Children who were born to fathers affiliated with Da’esh are rejected by people around them, as they think these children would take the same path as their fathers. People are more careful when talking in front of women who are married to Da’esh members. This is the issue with Iman, who left her husband in Da’esh-controlled areas and sought refuge in Aleppo.

Enuresis or bedwetting
“You cannot find a man or a woman who can talk about the enuresis issue which escorted them since childhood. There are some families who marry their daughters without informing the husband and his family about such issues, which makes the female a victim of such secrecy, so she either gets divorced or lives in constant fear of being exposed in case the husband does not accept her condition.” (Aleppo)

Infertility
“None of the husbands I know would ever say that he is unable to have children. They always blame the wife for such a thing. A husband might resort to polygamy to prove his manhood and get society on his side. However, our society wouldn’t accept at all the idea of a woman leaving her husband to marry another just to enjoy her right to motherhood.” (Aleppo)

Idlib Example
A man killed his ex-wife after she remarried and gave birth, because this exposed that he suffers from infertility.
Impotency

“With regards to impotence, this issue is totally unacceptable. A man wouldn’t even talk about this issue with himself, so how can he talk about it with other people? This would make him lose his prestige and manhood among people. As for the wife, the society is divided between two sides: one part which cares about her problem as a woman and about her right to enjoy a healthy condition, and the other side which thinks that her husband has the right to replace her- there is no man who can bear this.” (Aleppo)

A female divorcee

An independent working woman

Having baby girls

Female activists who have been arrested or detained.

Illegitimate Children

Children born to foreign men

Foundlings

Children born of rape

“A woman who has been harassed and has reported it.

“Virginty

A young Syrian woman was accused by his new husband on their wedding night of not being a virgin. She was taken to the doctor who declared that she was a virgin. The husband was not convinced and divorced her. No one would marry her. Her family migrated.

Aleppo Case Study

A 28-year-old woman who had a son in her first delivery, so she was very well-treated by her in-laws. But when she got pregnant for the second time, the foetus was female, which made her treatment by her in-laws change: they started to make her do hard household chores, such as carrying heavy weights, so that she would lose her baby. When she gave birth to her daughter, her mother-in-law told her to continue breastfeeding her two-year-old son and to refrain from breastfeeding her daughter - as “females do not deserve to be naturally breastfed.”

Idlib Case Studies

Mrs. M. J. was stigmatized having given birth to five daughters. She was divorced. No one proposed to her later, because she only conceives female babies

A woman was forced to abort her foetus by her husband because it was a baby girl.
How Stigma Manifests

1) Individual – Self-Stigma: self-blame and a guilty conscience.
2) Family – Social Stigma: Everything about the female and her presence is a source of shame to the family.
3) Societal – Social Stigma: the perception that the woman is an inferior human being, and the downsizing her role in public life.
4) Structural and institutionalized: the manifestation in discriminating laws, policies and practices embedded in national and local institutions, governance, systems and services.

The Groups observed that patterns of stigma are more prevalent in rural communities than in large urban settings.

Example of Structural and Institutionalised Social Stigma – Reyhanlı
In one case, a girl approached a clinic after being raped in order to get medical care. However, the doctor accused her of being a prostitute - she was defamed and deprived of medical care.

Syrian Law and Structural Stigma
In Syrian law, structural stigma (and harmful gender norms) can be seen in the criminal law which allows a man to commit rape without punishment if he then marries the victim. It can also be seen in the lack of criminal law prohibiting rape and other forms of violence in marriage.

At each of these levels, stigma can compound and worsen. Internal, personal factors can heighten self-stigma and affect how that person will react to social and structural stigma. Again, at the family level, family and friends can mitigate stigma through acceptance and support, or can amplify the damage through rejection and blame.

OVERCOMING STIGMA

“I was born in a family of three males and six females, whom all have pale skin and green eyes, except me, as I was the only one with a dark skin and brown eyes. My mother used to treat us differently in regard to clothing, and vocabulary. I was called the “Black One” during my childhood, and I lived in a society who loves beauty and light skins. I always remembered the words of my mother saying, “who would accept to marry you?”

But my father used to encourage me and my siblings to continue our education, and he always whispered in my ear saying, “Education will bring you the happy fate”. I completed high school and I got married to a university graduate. I wanted to continue my education in university to prove to my mother and society that I can succeed (The Black One did all of this and completed her education, what would she have done if she was white then?). I am grateful for my husband as he was the one encouraging me to be successful in my family, life, and work.
I was only able to change a small part of the beliefs of the society around my family, however the larger society still have the same perceptions. I expect that society will drastically change in the future, because of the increase in the number of voices calling for the rights of women through organizations and institutions, which seek to make women enjoy their rights, and develop them, and advocate the policy of non-discrimination.” (Case Study from Aleppo)

At one of the Aleppo workshops, following a declaration by one of the First Responders that she would never approve of the marriage of her brother to a sexual violence survivor because of the stigma, the group decided to have a debate to try to understand each other’s points of view. First, they voted to see how many agreed with the statement. The LDHR Trainer describes the experience. “When we voted about whether we would approve of a family member married a victim of sexual violence, it was 50:50 to begin with. So we facilitated a discussion – hearing both sides of the argument. It was fascinating – with many passionate about the rights of survivors. In the end, we voted again. It was 80:20 in favour of the survivor. I think the women who were advocating to support and accept the survivor were disappointed that they couldn’t change everyone’s mind! I can imagine these conversations happening all over communities if these women felt empowered to do so.”
Recommendations and Next Steps

After examining the Group reports from the three communities and based on the results of the quantitative research, we concluded the following:

- The majority of Syrians in the target communities indicated that women do not have equal rights.
- The majority of targeted communities recognize the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence and see it as a major problem.
- The majority of Syrians in the targeted communities above acknowledge that failure to report cases is due to fear of social stigmatization, lack of protection from the family, and the futility of a complaint that will not lead to justice and fairness.
- That gender norms, gender-based violence and stigma are all closely intertwined and connected.

Recommendations and Ideas for Tackling the Problem:

All forms of stigma in all places across community need to be tackled including Institutional and Structural Stigma, Social Stigma and Self Stigma. This work can be both preventative as well as providing a better response to GBV.

The following ideas and recommendations were put forward by the First Responders based on what they learned from mapping gender norms, gender based violence and stigma in their communities. They noted the need for a comprehensive approach and to secure resources to support these initiatives.

Institutional Stigma and Harmful Gender Norms

- Review and reform laws which entrench harmful gender norms and inequality, and stigma.
- Review policies, procedures and practice within our community institutions – including governance, justice, medical, and all social services and providers.
- Consider gender barriers to access and provision of services to different genders and those marginalised by stigma in our communities.
- Assess the attitudes and practice of those acting in official roles and employed within these institutions, and provide training and awareness raising engagement to change any harmful ideas and actions – with a particular focus on improving our medical, law enforcement and governance institutions.
- Training and ensuring representation in important institutions – for example, training women police officers.
- Organizations should make sure to engage both genders in their efforts to eliminate gender disparities.
- Set rules requiring compulsory education for girls.
- Increasing the number of schools.
• Remove exceptions the rule that marriage must be only over the age of 18 years old.
• Activating maternity benefits and leaves in organizations and providing nurseries.
• Create accountability and enforcement in law and in our institutions for harmful acts – shift shame and blame to those responsible, not the victims.

Community Stigma and Harmful Gender Norms
• Importance of organizing awareness campaigns for all groups of society, which include advocacy, engagement, information leaflets.
• Establishing awareness-raising centres and activating the role of existing centres.
• Further work to identify and emphasis the impact on all members of the community and on the community as a whole (including men and boys), so all members of the community are included and see why change is important.
• Emphasize the importance of girls’ education, open the way for them to study, in addition to providing schools in all areas, especially within the camps.
• Raising awareness of the influential figures in the community (such as Imams of mosques and teachers in schools).
• Organizing awareness-raising sessions for parents, especially mothers, and explaining the dangers of early marriage to the health of the girl and the formation of the family, in addition to raising awareness about the high rate of disintegration of the family and its problems in the case of early marriage.
• Organizing awareness-raising sessions for girls and informing them about their rights and introducing them to the laws in the country where they live.
• Management and leadership skills training for women – which will upgrade and develop the workforce to include more women in leadership position.
• Mobilising and empowering women to help develop and shape society – their engagement and voice would have a great impact for individuals, families and society. Political, economic and legal empowerment of women.
• Open schools and institutes to teach handicrafts to those who cannot or do not want to continue their education.
• Focus education for men and boys under 30 and awareness raising around these issues – the negative impact on society as a whole and prospects of recovery because of the harmful side of these norms and attitudes.
• Combating early marriage would not be successful in isolation from addressing the rest of the problems in Syrian society.
• Creating active and engaged Civil society with growing role, respected by officials and appreciated by ordinary community members
• Emphasize during the training on the success stories of girls in other countries, especially in countries experiencing war.

Self-Stigma and Response Individual Survivors
• Protecting survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, providing them with psychological and social support and medical treatment, as well as increasing the capacity of the health sector, law enforcement and governance institutions.
• Raising awareness of women over 30 and emphasising their value and importance to society.