

# The Effect of War and Displacement on Syrian Refugee Children in Terms of Increase Deviation and MHPSS: Afield Study at the Za'atri, Syrian Refugee Camp in Jordan

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## Abstract

This field study aims at revealing facts about the effect of war and displacement of Syrian refugee children in Jordan in terms of deviation increase and MHPSS .Away from media for profit and reports. Researcher visited the Zaatri camp several times, spent long hours in observation and talking to camps children .Also conducting interviews with UN personnel and other professionals at several field hospitals.The study revealed some important results, such as: children are in need for everything because they have nothing. This condition pushes children to suffer from chronic psychological illnesses, and disorders. They suffer from increasing deviation among other things. what makes child's deviation in the increase and remain a prey for chronic MHPSS. is the war still going on fiercely in their home country Syria with no solution or a hope for solution in the horizon.

**Keywords:** Deviation, Al Za'atri Refugee Camp, children war victims, MHPSS, Psychotrauma.

## Introduction

Some Arab countries such as: Syria, Iraq Libya and Yemen have been going through out of the ordinary armed conflicts and wars. These fierce conflicts have resulted in hundreds of thousands of people to flee war zones in these countries to neighboring states such as Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon.

In regard to Jordan, although it is a tiny country with limited resources, has opened its borders allowing millions of Iraqi and Syrian refugees mostly women and children, to enter the kingdom.

With the help of the United Nations and the Gulf states, Jordan established more than four refugee camps such as: Al Za'atri, Mrajeb Fuhud, Al Azraq and others in order to host these refugees. In addition, to more than million and half Syrian refugees live in almost every city throughout the Kingdom.

According to the United Nations Higher commission for Refugees, (UNHCR), it is very close to 80% of war victims are women and children. These victims are subject to lose everything they used to own, being tortured, raped, killed and 25% of the children survivals are subjected to psychological MHPSS mainly trauma, increased deviation, and child labor (UNHCR, 2014).

In a report by Chris Niles (2014) assistant of Valerie's Amos- Assistant UN secretary general for Humanitarian affairs- that, there are 6,8 million Syrian people including 4 million Syrian children who are in desperate need to humanitarian assistance among them 1,6 million child out of Syria who suffer anxiety, fear, hopelessness, behavioral deviation, social isolation, trauma among other miserable things.

In 2014 the World Health organization with the international medical Corps published results of a study they conducted in Al Azraq and Za'atri refugee camps on may, 2014 as follow:

- A wide spread of mental health disorders that include frustration, fear, anxiety, anger, behavioral deviation, post trauma disorders and social isolation, among refugees in general and children in particular.
- 18,8% of children are unable or finding difficulties in conducting activates necessary for their daily life because of their feeling of carelessness, fear and anger.

The above mentioned study reported that, most popular strategies that refugee children utilize in order to cope with their daily living and MHPSS disorders are as follow: 41% doing nothing, 11% quarrel and anger 15% socializing while 10% work in shops and menial Job.

When authors tried to introduce solution or put forward certain recommendation they were sure that all what charity and aid local, Arab and international organizations do, are temporary remedy against huge and complicated problem, refugee children are living in its midst, this problem stems from the war in Syria is still going on a long with the influx of refugees to Jordan. This indicates that there will be no solution for these children dilemma in the near future. Consequently the state of anger and hopeless are increasing with every passing day. "May be live, may we die" is the most said phrase by the refugees in the Za'atri camp (HRM, 2014)

## The problem of the study:

The aim of this study is to investigate a psychological topic namely deviation and mental health disorders Syrian refugee children suffer from.

According to UN statistics, there are about 14, million Syrians have become refugees, in and out of Syrian in inhumane living conditions. Furthermore, the most affected from war calamities are the children. In

addition to their suffering from body injuries and death, the survivors suffer from multiple mental health and psychological problems such as: hopelessness, frustration, fear and being horrified, the feel of degrading and the loss of human dignity and the extreme violation of human rights. At the top of that, children suffer from behavior deviation and being aggressive (UNHCR 2014).

Thus, the problem of the study is: the effect of war and displacement on the Syrian refugee children in Za'atri refugee camp in Jordan, in terms of their suffering from MHSP and trauma.

### **Uniqueness of the study**

This study is considered to be unique for several reasons:

- a- It was conducted inside the Syrian refugee camp, with children directly in an extensive and deep manner, so as to find out truth about life they are living especially their mental health in particular.
- b- It was conducted by an expert in psychology, a lecturer in a reputable university in Amman, and the study itself is for scientific purpose only, not for profit, nor for any personal benefit.
- c- This study come as "First hand facts finder" unlike previous researchers which comb the camp looking for and soliciting some data to report. Beside this researcher was looking for any mental disorders such as "Narcissism" "war trauma""behavior" disorders and deviation may camp's children suffer from.

### **Significance of the study**

This study considers to be significant because it discusses an important topic or a problem that is, entire generation of Syrian children have been deprived from natural living as the rest of world's children. They are deprived from education and mental health care (Un reports 2014). One can not imagine how the future of these children will be. Researcher focused on children face expressions and body language before listening to their stories and problems. Researcher knows very well that Syrian refugees in Jordan are very well treated by the government and aid from UN organization, they have reasonable shelter, enough food water, electricity and clothes. There are schools and hospitals and other facilities to make their living conditions little bit easier. However, there is no professional mental health care in Al Za'atri camp (Several Media reports 2013/2014) However, the author's main focus is to find out the psychological aspects, disorders and illnesses (if any) which may the refugee children suffer from. That what makes this study important.

### **Terms of the study**

- 1- **Al Za'atri camp:** it is a camp place near the northern borders with Syria. It hosts about (170) thousand Syrian refugees mostly women and children. It is the fifth largest city in Jordan (Government reports 2014).
- 2- **Children of war:** children whom displaced from Syrian because of ongoing war. They live in camps in the neighboring counties, such as Al Za'atri camp, the topic of this study.
- 3- **Deviation:** a kind of negative force that pushes youth and children to act with an acceptable behavior pattern by society where they live in its midst (American heritage Dictionary 1994)
- 4- **Trauma:** in psychology, trauma is a strong or fierce psychological hit, a bang known as. Psycho trauma It caused by painful accidents such as natural disasters, kidnap, rape, war, displacement and similar other violent incident.

Psycho trauma according to ICD-10

Exceptional incident or accident that causes to every person whom subjected to it and becomes hopeless, for example: Natural or manmade disasters, war duty, seeing violent death of other persons, or being tortured, terrorist act or rape etc.

### **DSM-IV-TR adds to the causes psycho trauma**

Wars, forced displacement, terrorist attacks or the death of one or both parents. Unfortunately, Syrian refugee children experienced all of the aforementioned.

### **Objectives of the study**

This study aims mainly at investigating the effect of war on the Syrian refugee children In the Al Za'atri camp in terms of soundness or disorders of their mental health.

In order to achieve the objective of the study attempt is made to answer the following questions:

- 1- What are the effects resulted by the suffering of Al Za'atri children from psychological, physical familial and academic problems and difficulties on deviation and MHPSS increase with these children.
- 2- What is the relationship between disorders the camp children such as: anxiety, worry, depression, fear and behavioral deviation, and their mental health.
- 3- What is the effect of therapeutique programs- if any- such as cognitive behavioral therapy in decreasing depression disorders with children of war that development by Koufax (1985) on Za'atri children? or children depression Inventory (CDI)?

4- while war and armed conflicts are still going on in Syrian. And the influx of refugee still crossing border since 2011 until now, what can be done by the international community to lower the degree of children suffering in Za'atri camp?

### Study's limits

- 1- Place: Al Za'atri Syrian refugee camp in Jordan.
- 2- Time: Summer 20014
- 3- Participants: study population and sample from the Syrian refugee children in the camp.

### Previous studies

Due to the short time since the war broke out in Syrian (2011- until now) it is hard to find good and meaningful books to use as references. However, we see avalanche of reports and articles have been issued and written by Journalists, reporters and United Nations. There are some:

In a study conducted by Damrah and Nassar (2014) entitled "the effect of cognitive behavioral therapy" focused on trauma in lowering depression with a sample of 30 Iraqi refugee children fled their war torn country Iraq

i to Jordan between the years 2009-2010 Koufax (1985) approach was used on an experimental group of the sample. Results revealed that Koufax method has positive effect on lowering the depression level with those children.

However when there is 461,500 Syrian refugee, half of them children living in refugee camps as Za'atri in Jordan (UNHCR 2014) and their number increases every passing day, an important question appears that is: what is the remedies for population who face similar problem stem from the same source?

In other aspect most of the available relevant books and studies were about children of war after WWII In Europe and Fai East (Raider et al,2011 Hasanovic et al 2008), while Syrian children of war are understudied (Damrah&Nassar2014).

A study conducted by UN entitled "Country operation profile- Jordan" points out that the suffering of the Syrian refugees from psychological problem are not restricted on those refugees in Al Za'atri and other refugee camps in Jordan only, but also the majority of all Syrian who live in the Jordanian cities from Irbid in the north to Ma'an in the south. These refugees constitute 20% of the entire Jordan's population. Furthermore these refugees suffer from violation based on gender, or (SGBV). However, the core problem lies in the government institution and UN organization inability to protect children's huge population from violent deviation, sex exploitation and child labor.

- A report was issued by Human Right Watch (HRM) (2014) "entitled maybe we live and maybe we die". This report is about children recruited by force to carry arms and fight with (Al Nusrah or ISIS) terrorist organizations. A Syrian Reporter conducted interview with 25 of such children and some adults. The interviews took place out of Syria, in Turkey and Jordan. Reporter noticed that all the interviewees were suffering from abnormal state of anger, oppression, and social isolation.
- The United Nations on 11 May 2014, issued an article entitled the "Lost Generation" it talks about Syrian children whom left without education in and out of Syria, for almost four years, because of war.
- UNICEF IMC issued a length reports under the title of "Mental Health/psychosocial and protection for Syrian Refugee adolescents in Za'atri refugee camp in Jordan", (July, 2013).

This report starts with general information about the Za'atri camp as follow:

- The camp opened on August 2012 to host Syrian refugees.
- About 53% of camp inhabitants are children.
- The camp is supervised by the Jordanians and UN UNHCR and SRCD.
- One million dollar the daily cost of the camp.
- The major challenges that the refugees face are: domestic violence, fear of sex violence and managing children without parents. In addition, there are wide spread case of: Child labor/ early or forced marriages and MHPSS.

What makes this study important is, it does not report numbers and cases; rather author puts her hand directly on children involved and observe their problems in a very direct way.

- In a report by Syrian Human Rights Network (2013) children between the age 9-12 have become thieves, criminals with violent acts and carelessness. Many of them do not go to school (if there is a school open) very few schools available in the camp but it is not enough to receive all the children in the camp, this has led to an entire generation of children who do not know reading and writing (Info@snthr.org.2013). Jordanian Interior Ministry reported that "there are children who organized themselves in Mobs", practice criminal acts: murder, theft, assaults and harassing people and rape. (2012-2014). The report mentioned that 25% of the camps children suffer from trauma and post trauma disorders. To compact these abnormalities in the camp, the Jordanian government with the UNICEF have opened schools that receive 110.000 students or 75% of total children

population, while the rest are waiting idle for more school openings. These children without school are children at risk and are potential criminals.

Kamm, F.M (2004) wrote an article entitled "Failures of Just war theory, Terror and Harm" in which he criticizes the just war theory and Jus in bellow theory which describes how to deal with warriors and not warriors. Also, author discusses the principles of Discrimination. "May be the target is a just one, however, terrorism is not a just means to achieve that just target". To kill civilians for instance so as to achieve victory is not a justified means. Killing civilians is pure terrorism, for instance, to drop a nuclear bomb over Hiroshima by the United States in WWII to cause horror in the heart of the Japanese and force them to surrender, is pure terrorism.

However; when Kamm criticism is applied to the Syrian case it would not be sufficient to cover everything of violence that takes place everywhere in that country, and every one there fights the other; too many war participants there: the government and tens of terrorist organization fight each other without having just targets nor just means. This chaotic situation leaves grave consequences on civilians including children. The violence in Syrian is so severe and fierce and in monstrous way that it leaves deep psychological scars on children.

Furthermore, this author attempts to find out the nature of psychological scars that are already inflicted on the war children with all of mental disorders and illnesses.

#### **Procedures of the study:**

Author development a study's instrument while relying on her direct observation of children of war in the camp. This instrument consists of structured questions, directed to children who answer them verbally.

#### **Methodology of the study:**

Author visited Al Za'atri Syrian refugee camp several times. She met with the sample of the study and some officials from international organizations and the Jordanian government.

#### **Population:**

All the Syrian children in the camp who are 9-12 years old.

#### **Sample:**

The sample of the study consists of (20) male and female children who are 9-12 years old.

Author divided her visits to the camp to ten visits in order to give her ample of time to complete this study in good and scientific manner, as follow:

##### **- First visit- exploratory visit on 5/10/2014**

Author wanted to tour the camp which resembles a small city (Jordanian Ministry of Interior, Oct 2013). There, she met with several officials, aid workers and some adults and children.

Al though, there are a vast amount of reports and information whether local or international about Syrian refugees especially their sufferings; being hungry without proper shelter and other physical related difficulties, however, author, is determined to uncover children, in particular, real psychological problems and difficulties for the purpose of producing a meaningful study.

##### **- Second visit- 9/10/2014**

This visit designed for the purpose of finding the nature of institutions, establishments, hospitals and schools and what type of service and care these institutions provide to children. Thus, author found the following:

- ACTED with collaboration with UNICEF- Hygiene programs for school students age 5-16 years.
- Finland church-illiteracy, sports programs and dispute solving skills, for students 15 years old.
- IFH/UNFPA- teach girls 15 years and older the art of sewing.
- International Medical volunteers: socio/psychological, and empowerment programs for 12-18 olds.
- Korean Embassy and IRD- 2-15 years old.

And tens of other volunteer and International, Arab and local organization During this visit, author was able to look into and attend some of these programs sessions.

##### **Third visit 12-16-2014-**

Author is determined to have frequent visits to Al Za'atri camp to be sure to have sufficient time so as to cover every aspect of this study as it is mentioned earlier. In this visit, the population of the study is determined-children between the age of 9-12 years old, male and female. Author sought aid from previous studies conducted by UNHCR, Save The Children, IMC and UNICEF (2-3 JUNE, 2013), W.H.O tool kit for high risk groups.

Working organizations in the camp possess significant amount of relevant data and information, thus, the use of their data was helpful.

**Visit on 15.10.2014:** A police permit is necessary to enter the Za'atri camp; and aid employee accompanied the author in her trips to boys and girls schools.

**Sample taking procedures:**

Sample was taken from female student school. There, classroom over capacity crowded with the help of teacher and volunteers author addressed girl student as follow:

- The purpose of this study is exclusively scientific.
- The participating in the study is on voluntary basis.
- No need for participants to give their names, every aspect is confidential.
- There is no monetary compensation for participating.

**Fourth visit 17/10/2014**

Following up in previous procedure but for boys school.

In the next visit 19.10.2014, seven female and seven male students age 9-12 have been chosen for the interview Then 3 girls and 3 boys who are not attending school were chosen (7n+7n+3n+3n= N20)

With the coordination with school principals, it has been agreed to conduct the interviews on 25/10/2014, 9 am in the room of the head mistress with presence of a Syrian female volunteers. On 27/10/2014 it has been decided to have boys interview in the principal room with the presence of a Syrian male volunteer.

In due data the following questionnaire were read to participants individually, their responses were recorded by an assistance.

Table 1  
 MHPSS and refugee children

Terminology	Description
Depression	Do you feel depression, sadness, crying with your friends
Tension	Do you feel tense: don't accept the other words, sleep difficult loss of concentration and food appetite
Nervousness	Do you feel very nervous, get angry for no reason, turn to a mass of anger for trivial matters
Trouble maker	Do you cause problem, participant in troubles, neighbors and friends complain from your behavior
Sadness	Do you suffer from feeling guilty and sad, frustration and grief for a loss of friends in Syrian, continually remembering them, isolation
Fear	Do you feel afraid, have night mares, bad dreams and fear from military action may reach the camp
Source: UNICEF 2013	

Author added a clause to fear item and directed it to female participant that is "Are you afraid from rape, early marriage, sexual harassment and forced marriage?"

In regard to other six participants another questionnaire was developed, its items was read to participants individually and separately. Their responses were recorded by an assistance

Table 2  
 Narcissistic personality Disorder

No.	Items	yes	no	Kind of
1	Are you selfish and love yourself very much			
2	Are you greedy, like to acquire everything			
3	Do you take good care of yourself			
4	Do you like to be superior and belittle other			
5	Do you feel and like to great			
6	Very self confident, does not care about others' feelings			
Source: UNICEF 2013				

**Results and Discussion:**

The interviews with study's participants were characterized by having similar responses and mistrust of others. Author spent lengthy periods of time talking to participant to gain their trust in order to get true responses to the study's questions. Two points were observed by the author: first, a response by one of the girls who summarized their life in the camp that is;

"We come to school to spend a boring time in learning; the classroom is overcrowded, teachers do not

understand us trying to teach us difficult and unfamiliar Jordanian curriculum".

"Our difficulties start when we go back to our tents or caravans, boys harass us on the way, to the tent, shop or to WASH which is far from the tents (100 meters away). Roads at night are horrific. At the tent which we call it home, we as girls don't know what awaits us: early marriage proposals or forced one and other things never expected which keep us edgy, anxious and worried" she said.

Second: 12 years old boy: "I joined a mob because I lost everything including myself. I wanted to be strong and have other children listen to me and obey my orders".

A case like this is a common occurrence in the camp as one of UN volunteers told the author.

Refugees including children suffer from psycho trauma, which can be noticed on people. Almost every family in the camp suffered or one of its member, neighbor, friend or relative, from kidnap, killing, rape, torture and forced displacement. All of these have caused deep psychological scars which reflected in deep tension, anxiety, disability feeling, and horror accompanied by painful memory or remembrance of a horrifying incident.

When these scars remain with people for a long time without treatment it could lead to PTSD post traumatic stress disorders (American) DSM-IV-TR

### Response analysis

Girl responses:

- Depression- 54% answered yes, 39% kind of, 7% don't know
- Tension- 30% answered yes, 51% kind of, 19 no opinion
- Nervousness- 29% answered yes, 43% kind of, 28% don't know
- Trouble maker 7% answered yes, 13% kind of, 80% no
- Sadness- 87% answered yes, 9% kind of, 4% don't know
- Fear- 91% answered yes, 8% kind of, 1% no

The above data is summarized in table 3 below

Table 3

Item	high degree	middle	low/none
Depression	54%	39%	7%
Tension	30%	51%	19%
Nervousness	29%	43%	28%
Troublemaker	7%	15%	80%
Sadness	87%	9%	4%
Fear	91%	8%	1%

Data in table 3 above indicates that girls suffer mainly from:  
 Depression, Sadness and fear

### Boys Responses

Item	high degree	middle	low/none
Depression	51%	30%	19%
Tension	45%	32%	23%
Nervousness	79%	11%	10%
Troublemaker	60%	31%	9%
Sadness	69%	23%	8%
Fear	41%	45%	14%

Data indicates that boy participants suffer mainly from:

- Sadness 69%
- Troublemaker 60%
- Nervousness 79%

When soliciting comments on this data from volunteers who are expert in the field they said, data is realistic however.

Depression and fear are the common coefficient among Syrians in general and children in particular

Second interviews  
 with six participants:

**Girls' response**

No.	Items	yes	no	Kind of
1	Are you selfish and love yourself very much	-	3	-
2	Are you greedy, like to acquire everything	-	3	-
3	Do you take good care of yourself	3	-	-
4	Do you like to be superior and belittle other	-	3	-
5	Do you feel and like to be great	1	1	1
6	Very self confident, does not care about others' feelings	2	-	1

Girls expressed that they like to take good care of themselves 3 or 100%, while rejecting being selfish 3 or 100%, being greedy 3 or 100% and belittle other 3 or 100%

**Boys' response**

No.	Items	yes	no	Kind of
1	Are you selfish and love yourself very much	1	2	-
2	Are you greedy, like to acquire everything	-	1	2
3	Do you take good care of yourself	3	-	-
4	Do you like to be superior and belittle other	-	1	1
5	Do you feel and like to great	2	-	1
6	Very self confident, does not care about others' feelings	-	1	2

Boys' response differ from girls, we notice that very low portion have the tendency to become narcissistic while girls do not.

In sum, although Syrian children and adults too, are trying to show that they live as ordinary people, they go to schools, play in the yards, marry and beget babies go shopping in several markets and shops, etc. however they try to hide a painful reality deep inside their souls: Depression, Fear and deviation.

**Recommendation:**

Author recommends to conduct further studies to include Syrian refugee children live in cities and town out of the camps. These refugees constitute 85% of total Syrian refugees in Jordan (ministry of Interior 2014).

**Conclusion:**

The aim of this study which considered as fact finding is to investigate the extent of war effect on children in the Za'atri camp in terms of psychological disorders they suffer from.

Author determined to sit down with and listen to the Syrian children in Za'atri who are the prime victims of the ongoing Syrian war.

A small sample of 9-12 years old children was chosen to represent a homogenous population. Who live within closed environment surrounded by high fences guarded by officers from the Jordanian security forces. This type of confinement is by itself a source of misery and frustration to the camp inhabitants including children, who escaped war to live in a prison like camp not for from their home land Syria. At the top of that, people in the camp still hear between now and the then sound of explosions and gunfire coming from Syria. Life under these conditions adds misery and frustration and hopelessness to what they going through already: misery, frustration and hopelessness.

Furthermore, the study reached the following results:

- Children in the camp suffer from multiple psychological disorders which increase the level of their deviation and other MHPSS such as: fear depression, Frustration, anger, social isolation and other disorders typical for war victims syndromes.
- Some children 10% (UN, 2013) established mops or criminal groups who indulge into activities such as: theft, assault, drug trafficking and prostitution.
- There are cases of rebellious children who manifest the narcissistic characteristics in alarming levels.

There is a report published by a major media establishment which one of its reporters had an interview with some of the camp girls 9-12 years old (4.11.2014).

In the report one girl said, They provide us with food shelter and clothes, however, they (officials and volunteers) little or do not pay attention to what we feel, fear and horror. The second girl: I live with constant fear from being given in marriage to an old wealthy man from the Gulf States. Many of my friends were forced to marry old people from Saudi Arabia for a fist of dollars.

This author found in her study similar cases and more.

Finally, there will be no cure nor any remedy for the problems that Syrian refugees suffer from, except:

the end of war in their home land Syria and go back to their homes.

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