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What is the nature of SGBV?

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Abstract

Based on a review of scholarly work and reports, this working paper analyzes different facets of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) by revealing the constraints that potentially cause gendered presumptions. Reviewing the conceptualization of SGBV in the literature dealing with gender and the governance of international migration not only juxtaposes existing approaches to understanding SGBV and its defining parameters but also presents how vulnerabilities, insecurities and victimization are presumed to intersect with that violence. This framework enables a critical analysis by indicating the theoretical and empirical gaps, which are enumerated. The final part of the paper proposes some notes for further research and asserts the need to understand the nature of SGBV from the perspective of refugees themselves, rather than from the perspective of humanitarian and/or medical professionals providing refugees with services. The view of SGBV violence as mainly consisting in physical violence against non-European women who lack agency, is juxtaposed with the absence of gender as an overt ground for protection under the Refugee convention.

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Contents

The Gendered Refugee..... 5
Review method 7
SGBV in Governing International Protection: Incorporating a Gender Perspective..... 8
Approaches to Understanding SGBV..... 11
Different Facets of SGBV 15
Different Places, Different Actors 20
Final Remarks 24
Ways forward 26
References..... 28

The Gendered Refugee

Since the outbreak of civil war in Syria, millions of people have been forced to leave their homes and search for shelter in neighbouring countries - Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Europe. Over 5.6 million people have fled Syria since 2011, and as war continues, the conflict and resulting refugee mass movements (sometimes referred to as a refugee crisis) have shown once again the difficulties and complexities of ensuring protection for forced migrants. According to UNHCR data, as of June 2018, Turkey is hosting the largest number of registered Syrian refugees, 3,589,384, followed by Lebanon with 986,942. While the Middle Eastern region has already become home to many refugees from Palestine and Iraq, “the overall picture ... is both deepening and becoming more entrenched” in the area (Zetter and Ruadel 2014: 7). As a result of knowledge accumulated through the governance of many episodes of forced migration, policymakers at local/national/international levels are recognising the complexity of *securing* the lives of people escaping conflict. The provision of humanitarian assistance as part of a national approach to supply basic needs has proven insufficient in responding to humanitarian crises caused by war, conflicts, natural disasters or environmental changes. Conflicts that are prolonged, spread across more than one region, that involve millions of people on the move and arriving in receiving societies require a multi-stakeholder response that matches the complexity of the underlying causes of the movements and the conflicts. Refugees fleeing from their countries of origin to countries of settlement experience inequality in relation to social class, ethnicity, and religion. Since refugees from the Levant region have arrived in Europe in significant numbers their plight has received greater attention from migration governance bodies that include European Union representatives, IOM, UNHCR and non-governmental organisations. Human rights violations are prevalent at various stages of the refugee journey. Sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) constitutes a significant aspect of these violations. The gendering that is inherent throughout the processes of forced migration needs to be identified and set out, as part of mapping how SGBV affects refugees.

This paper accounts for the legal definition of a refugee and aims to move beyond those definitions. Instead of focusing solely on the legal and / or administrative *identity imposed* on those who have been forced to flee their countries, this study accounts for the changing legal status in the context of the everyday lives of those on the move. In so doing, the perspective of the refugees is brought into conversation with that of policy makers, health care workers and others involved in the refugees' experience. Women's, men's, youth, elderly, disabled, and LGBTI refugee experience differ significantly (Ryan and Webster 2008; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014; Freedman 2017). Despite efforts to understand migration processes in terms of their gendered nature, gender sensitivity remains an approach worth exploring. Furthermore, the literature has had little to say about the *fluidity* of gendered experiences during the refugee journey, and their short as well as long-term consequences for these individuals (Baines 2004; Grabska 2014; Allsop 2017). Moreover, literature examining gender tends to homogenise the refugee into *female victim* and *masculine threat* (Freedman, 2017). Such a limited gendered framing for refugees risks constraining how their experiences can be understood. In addition to fluidity as to how gender is defined, performed, experienced and governed, the literature pays little attention to the dynamics of gender with other aspects of identity and with power structures. By making visible the complexities of how gendered constraints and experiences interact with other aspects of structure and identity, we seek to show how refugee experiences of gender-based violence are re-negotiated throughout the processes of forced migration. To get beyond a unitary, *essentialist* refugee experience, we are introducing a framework that can make visible the interconnected and constitutive nature of multiple forms of oppression in migration processes, and especially map the nature of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) as the quintessential form of gendered 'harm'.

Review method

To make sense of the gendered violation of human rights during forced migration, various sources were reviewed covering scholarly articles, International Organisation (IO) reports, NGO reports and policy briefs. As the magnitude of the problem requires the inclusion of multiple stakeholders including researchers, activists, policy makers, and experts, to map existing parameters, different sources with different objectives were covered in this review. First, academic databases (Google Scholar, EBSCO, J-Stor), IOs websites (UN, IOM, ICMPD, WRC) were searched using the following keywords: ‘SGBV’, ‘refugee’, ‘SGBV and refugee’ for publications from the late 1990s onwards. After a detailed reading of the existing literature identified using these keywords, the articles and reports were re-organised into categories that focused on the nature of SGBV and its attributes. The analysis was shaped by a focus on the implications of *vulnerabilities*, *insecurities* and *victimisation* within the process of forced migration.

Our first observation from the literature is that SGBV has been under-documented and under-studied over recent decades. Most of the existing literature focuses on the consequences of forced migration and internal displacement in Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans in the context of ethno-political conflicts, terrorism and religious militancy. Our second major observation about the patterns emergent in the literature is that there is very little research on countries of transit and resettlement.

The purpose of this review is to examine the literature on the nature of SGBV throughout forced migration processes and to accomplish four tasks:

- (1) to define the scope of SGBV as referred to in the existing literature;
- (2) to define the parameters the literature uses for identifying SGBV;
- (3) to present the main discourses on vulnerabilities, insecurities and victimisation; and,
- (4) to critically analyse the literature by indicating the theoretical and empirical gaps.

SGBV in Governing International Protection: Incorporating a Gender Perspective

Scholars of forced migration in the 1980s were aware that the existing literature ignored women in human mobility, as reflected in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) 1990 Position Paper on Gender-Related persecution and the adoption of the guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women in 1991 (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014: 397-398). More recently, women have been included in research literature and policy briefs to a greater extent and yet refugee women tend to be depicted as non-agentic victims who are both dependent and vulnerable. The construction of the refugee woman as a victimised individual has depoliticised her, with not only research but also policies established by national and international bodies, reflecting a simplified and homogenised view of refugee women as victims (Grabska, 2011). This denial of political agency within refugee regimes has been criticised with calls for a gendered analysis to support more effective policy making (Baines 2004; Soguk 2007; Freedman 2010; Hyndman 2010). Especially from the perspective of the refugee regime, international organisations' and governments' emphasis on the victimhood of women refugees, neglects interconnected categories of disadvantage for women. Furthermore, this neglect has also been reflected in NGO practices which tend to present data on their psycho-social support for SGBV survivors and their advocacy efforts while reporting on and justifying their work. Re-inscribing women refugees' vulnerable victim status has been a key strategy to justify the devotion of resources to their cause (UNFPA 2014, UN Women 2014).

Rather than presuming female gender to be inherently vulnerable and open to exploitation, conceiving gender as a relational construct offers an alternative approach. Only recent research on forced migration scrutinises gender dynamics in social situations with a focus on male as well as female refugees' gender. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh argues that men and women are differently involved in and affected by migration in general, and forced migration in particular (2014: 399). Men's gendered experience within the migration process has tended to be overlooked and while male refugees have

been included more recently, studies that cover men are still far fewer than those focusing on women's situation and experience. Ryan and Webster (2008) in their study entitled "Gendering Migration" highlight how accounting for the impact of migration on men and masculinities extends the understanding of gender and migration. In deconstructing *gendered harms* within the processes of migration, it is fundamental to note that

"many men and boys are also subjected to harm typically characterized as 'gendered harms' against women and girls, such as forced or underage marriage, sexual slavery, and forced sterilization" (Edwards 2010: 41).

In order to include men and women in the analysis of gendered harm, multiple power relations need to be included, rather than simply looking for victims who might be men. The complexity of doing this without excusing responsibility for men's violence is touched on by the following Syrian refugee in Lebanon who said:

"I don't feel that I am a real man after what has happened to me now, and to be honest, I can't handle it anymore ... When my wife asks me for vegetables or meat to prepare food, I hit her. She does not know why she was hit, neither do I" (Anani 2013: 76)

At this point, in line with an intersectionalist perspective, it is also important to unravel interactions of experiences shaped by race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc. Hence, the growing literature on different sets of social relations, hierarchies and discourses and their framework exposing both structural and dynamic consequences of multiple forms of differences (Pittaway and Bartolomei 2001; Edwards 2010; Vervliet et.al. 2014; Davis 2015).

Seeking to understand the different needs and aspirations of refugees with different backgrounds is part of an inclusive and comprehensive international protection regime. The Convention relating to the Status of Refugees entered into force in 1951. Since then, in addition to this treaty and the 1967 Protocol, the UNHCR's Guiding Principles have governed the refugee regime at the international level. Alice Edwards (2010), in her comprehensive work on the history of international refugee law with a special emphasis on the UNHCR, made a feminist effort to capture gendered reflections within this regime. For Edwards, the realisation of the rights of refugee women and girls under international law

has progressed from a time prior to the 1990s when refugee women's interests and needs were ignored or marginalised from the "mainstream". Edwards argues that

today, the rights of refugee women and girls are relatively high on the international agenda, albeit there remain many obstacles to their full enjoyment. Much of this progress can be attributed to feminist theorizing about and activism in order to change the international protection regime. Yet, this theorizing has created as many new challenges as it has settled old ones. (Edwards 2010: 22).

Her article traces changes in the approach to refugee women across five time periods: from the complete exclusion of women in the drafting of the main refugee instruments, with women's subsequent inclusion within the instruments (1950–1985), to later stages focusing on women as a specific group with special needs (1985–present), to "gender mainstreaming" (1997–mid-2004) and a later variation known as "age, gender and diversity mainstreaming" (AGDM) (2004–present). For Edwards, this final stage, which is still in its infancy, refocuses attention on refugee men and boys from specific communities as victims of gender stereotypes, constraints, and violence (2009–present) rather than seeing them only as perpetrators of violence. UNHCR's report on Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM) states that

UNHCR's AGDM strategy supports the meaningful participation of women, girls, boys and men of all ages and backgrounds, using a rights and community-based approach, in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of UNHCR policies, programmes, operations and activities on their behalf.

This strategy recognises multiple forms of discrimination.

In accordance with Edwards' categorisation of historical periods, UNHCR's response to SGBV followed a similar line. The 1995 "Sexual Violence Against Refugees: Guidelines on Prevention and Response" (UNHCR, 1995) enabled the creation of greater awareness and understanding of these human rights violations. This 1995 Response laid the foundations for strategies to introduce programmes for combatting violence. While the Response primarily addressed refugee women's experiences of violence, the "New Guidelines for the Prevention of and Response to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence against Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons" (UNHCR, 2003) expanded in

perspective and mainstreamed gender. The policies that developed from the 2003 Guidelines were intended to ameliorate the quality, efficiency, and appropriateness of refugee protection. June 2011 marked an important milestone for UNHCR's governing document on forced migration. In parallel to their AGDM policy, UNHCR's "Action Against SGBV: An Updated Strategy" (2011) reaffirmed incorporating different dimensions into the response plan. Both LGBTI persons and those with disabilities were added into the categories of higher risk groups. In addition, the greater engagement of men and boys in prevention activities was also recognised where the lack of sufficient involvement "weakens the protection environment for women and girls as well as men and boys" (2011: 5)

Against this backdrop, describing the significance of a comprehensive response regime to address a complex form of violence, it is important to map the nature of SGBV and its determinants.

Approaches to Understanding SGBV

SGBV is a multi-dimensional violation of human rights with different indicators. It encompasses not only sexual, but also cultural, political and economic dimensions and an evolving approach is needed. Skjelsbaek (2001) identifies three different conceptualisations of the relationship between sexual violence and war in her research entitled "Sexual Violence and War: Mapping Out a Complex Relationship." These conceptualisations are 'essentialist', 'structural' and 'constructed' and are examined in turn below.

The first conceptualisation - essentialist - addresses all women as "potential victims of men asserting militaristic masculinity" (Skjelsbaek 2001: 216). Skjelsbaek discusses the war-zone as a place for heightened masculinist *cathexis* which has been reproduced through existing patriarchal, hierarchical gender order. For instance, rape is a widely used weapon that reinforces gendered relations "to display, communicate, and produce or maintain dominance, which is both enjoyed for its own sake and used for such ulterior ends as exploitation, expulsion, dispersion, murder" (Card, 1996:7).

As Enloe's canonical work entitled "Bananas, Beaches and Bases" points out, the patriarchal dimension of militarism is critical to investigate as it follows the tracks of gender through the violence-producing practices of the military (Enloe, 2000). She further investigates rape occurring as a *routine* recreational activity and demonstrates how local women in war zones are represented as available to soldiers. Enloe also defines "systematic mass rape" as an instrument of war (2000:132) - "the dirty secret of war" (Barstow 2001). Nikolic-Ristanovic, in her book, analyses wartime rape faced by refugees in the Balkans and argues that "rape should be principally regarded as a crime against women as such proved and punished" (2009: 81). War-related rape is also assessed by Amowitz and colleagues' research on displaced persons in Sierra Leone (2002). War-related sexual violence and other human rights abuses are analysed in three refugee camps and one town, where rape was reported by 84 of the 94 sexually assaulted women, with 31 reporting having been gang raped (Amowitz et. al., 2002). In parallel to the findings of their research, Swiss et. al. (1998) document women's experiences of violence, especially rape and sexual coercion, at the hands of a soldier or fighter during 5 years of Liberian civil war in the early 1990s. Hynes and Cardoza mention that "rape as a weapon of war is not a new phenomenon. Many hundreds of thousands of women have been raped in wars in this century" (2000: 820). Last but not least, reports and research on the current Syrian civil conflict and ongoing war show that women and girls are experiencing war-related rape (Freedman 2007, Allsop 2017) and other forms of gendered violence (Anani 2013).

Sexual violence, especially rape, is prevalent especially against women who are unaccompanied (Freedman 2017). The Syrian case also presents another angle of this multifaceted issue: given the stereotypical image of Middle Eastern men as dangerous, Rettberger and Gajjala argue that many Syrian refugee men have been cast as potential rapists and/or terrorists (2016: 179). ISIS jihadists and the news reporting about the rape of women also reinforced stereotypes of gendered vulnerabilities, where men seen as perpetrators shift the focus to the incidents rather than the larger context within which they take place. To summarise, according to the essentialist conceptualisation, all women in the war-zone are potential *targets* for sexual violence while men are considered potential *rapists*. An

essentialist conceptualisation presents a static, unchanging and unchangeable view of gender and has been supported by the effects of violence on refugee women being associated with poor reproductive health outcomes (Reese Masterson *et al.* 2014; Usta and Masterson 2015).

According to the second conceptualisation of the relationship between sexual violence and war, the structuralist approach, “targeted groups of women” are at greater risk than others (Skjelsbaek, 2001). This approach serves to outline other identities, political, cultural, and ethnic, that intersect with other forms of discrimination. Forced impregnation in camps is an example of structuralist analyses of gendered violence (Allen 1996, Fischer 1996). Freedman describes mass rapes that occurred in the war-zone of the former Yugoslavia. These attacks were not simply a way of controlling women’s biological reproductive capacity, but also, through forced pregnancy, induced women to bear their enemies’ children (Freedman, 2007: 54).

To achieve some specific political and/or militaristic objectives, rape has functioned as a multidimensional *tool* in different conflict zones. For instance, in Bosnia-Herzegovina rape camps were identified where women were held captive until they became pregnant, where all the buildings, not only brothels, were being used (Allen 1996:65). Skjelsbaek argues that the identity of a woman is also coupled with ethnicity, politics, and religion (2001:223) as well as her gender. Although this structuralist conceptualisation underlines that certain groups of women in the war-zone are more targeted than others, focusing on the female victim overshadows militarised masculinity. In addition, “this conceptualization cannot ... explain the fact that men also can be victims of this kind of violence” (Skjelsbaek, 2001: 223).

Rape is also used against men as a form of persecution. Although it is under-documented by governing authorities, some research stresses that despite being rarer than rape against women, men and boys have experienced this gendered form of persecution (Freedman 2007, Allsjob 2017). For Freedman this marks another complex form of gendered oppression as “the message of rape of male opponents

may be to show them (male combatants) that they are inferior like women and that therefore they will be treated like women” (2007: 47-48).

Finally, the third conceptualisation of the relationship between sexual violence and war - social constructivism - understands gender as constructed. With scepticism about the *one size fits all approach*, different conceptualisations of sexual violence need to be considered. Men and women can be targeted in an attempt to feminise victims in parallel with hierarchical gendered relations that subordinate the feminine. Power as the key element of masculinity, as well as related constructions, functions as a form of domination. Skjelsbaek aptly states that

the victim of sexual violence in the war-zone is victimized by feminizing both the sex and the ethnic/religious/political identity to which the victim belongs, likewise the perpetrator’s sex and ethnic/religious/political identity is empowered by becoming masculinized (2001: 225).

This is the crystallised rationale behind gendered hierarchies and discrimination. This conceptualisation embraces a dynamic understanding of gender, in general, and gendered violence, in particular.

[G]endered ideologies and practices change as human beings (gendered as male or female, and sexualized as homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual) cooperate or struggle with each other, with their pasts and with the structures of changing economic, political and social worlds linked through their migrations (Donato et al., 2006).

Hence, this conceptualisation embraces the most comprehensive understanding of the *victimisation of men and women* in ways that are gendered. Its flexibility enables moving beyond a fixed vulnerability status approach to women and girls. It facilitates voicing different experiences of individuals as it focuses on their own perceptions. This can be illustrated by the following Syrian refugee participating in a focus group discussion in Lebanon who seems to be acknowledging the continuum of survival sexual abuse, whereby his female relatives have to use their sexuality in order to access basic needs for the family.

“And if you want other help from other NGOs you should send your daughter or your sister or sometimes your wife... with full make-up so you can get anything... I think you understand me” (Anani 2013: 57).

By incorporating an approach that accounts for considerations of subjective experiences of SGBV, a comprehensive and integrated research agenda can focus on the causes, contributing factors as well as the context of violence.

Different Facets of SGBV

The complex and contingent nature of gendered experiences of migration becomes clearer by understanding different facets of SGBV. A more nuanced view of the gendered experience of sexual behaviours that vary over time, across cultures and also in relation to circumstances, should include under-scrutinised gendered vulnerabilities, insecurities and victimisations. The hidden nature of SGBV has led to under-reporting of this violation and also fostered homogenous reading of gendered implications in explicit or implicit ways. Being enmeshed with other forms of oppression and inequalities, a hierarchical gender order produces and is produced by SGBV and the resulting discourses have reproduced *fixed* positions of vulnerabilities and insecurities. As a consequence of SGBV, in the form of sexual, emotional-psychological, physical and socio-economic violence, refugees face “combined forms of victimisation” (Keygnaert 2012: 515). It can be argued that the embedded processes that reproduce vulnerabilities, insecurities and victimisation further silence refugees. Hence, it is important to offer a re-reading of hierarchical gendered experiences within the movement of refugees as well as the asylum regimes in different countries so as to understand the nature of SGBV.

After Castles and Miller’s argument on the “feminisation of migration” (1998), researchers began to question the invisibility of women in this line of research. As one of the “general tendencies”, Castles and Miller argue that

women play an increasing role in all regions and all types of migration. In the past, most labour migrations and many refugee movements were male dominated, and women were often dealt with under the category of family reunion. Since the 1960s, women have played a major role in labour migration (1998: 9).

In addition to being dependent on men, *women were also on the move*. Since the late 1990s, the literature has addressed different aspects of the feminisation of migration. Freedman argues that “studying feminised migration patterns” shows “that there is a huge diversity in the situation of women who migrate globally and it is thus almost impossible to generalise about their experiences” (2007:13). This claim highlights the significance of examining different experiences of women shaped by their class, race or ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation. In some studies, women and their different gendered experiences were analysed with a special emphasis on gender in conflicts and in refugee camps (Hyndman, 2000; Giles et al., 2003; Giles and Hyndman, 2004). These studies were also linked to feminist engagements in *malestream* international relations (Enloe, 1989, 1993, 2000; Baines, 2004). As previously mentioned, the need for a more comprehensive gender policy to be pursued by the NGOs working in the field was also highlighted. This literature discussed the ways in which international organisations responded to the needs of refugee women (Hyndman, 2010; Freedman, 2010). While national and international actors operating in the field of migration and international protection increased their efforts, so did scholars researching women’s gendered situations throughout the migration process. This policy and research realm continued to reproduce the conceptualisation, discourse and images of women as vulnerable and dependent. Rendering women as vulnerable has had two critical implications: underestimating women’s agency in migration and justifying violence as an almost inevitable form of dominance over women. In this framework, according to Freedman,

women are made vulnerable by constructions of femininities which assign to women particular and often subordinate positions within many societies and which legitimate or justify violence against women with reference to the symbolic and practical roles assigned to them: roles as biological and cultural producers and reproducers of the nation; roles as principal providers of care; roles as ‘modest’ wives (2007: 20).

Such representations of women were reflected in national and international political systems (Edwards, 2010; Grabska 2011), in protection programmes (Baines, 2004; Sigona 2014) and in the media (Alhayek, 2014; Özdemir, 2015). Carpenter (2006) points to another angle on the representation of women. As gender is relational, the construction of women as vulnerable may result in protection

programmes targeting women, and thus men's gendered harm, and their vulnerabilities may be rendered invisible (Carpenter, 2006).

International organisations' programmes and reports provide significant clues as to the construction of different facets of SGBV, especially vulnerability. The United Nations Population Fund's Regional Syria Response Hub *Reporting on Gender-based Violence in the Syria Crisis: A Journalist's Handbook* (2014) presents data on gender-based violence. This Handbook is developed by the UNFPA and sets out to examine some of the terminology, ethical questions, and practical concerns associated with covering gender-based violence. The Handbook also presents statistics on women's experiences of GBV. According to the report, based on an overall evaluation of the humanitarian crises of forced migration, an estimated 1/5th of all displaced women experienced GBV in a complex humanitarian setting (UNFPA Regional Syria Response Hub 2014: 9). The report also gives examples from different regions:

“Between 50,000 and 64,000 women who were displaced during civil war in Sierra Leone reported war-related assaults. Between 2001 and 2009, around 500,000 women experienced sexual violence in Colombia as a result of conflict” (UNFPA Regional Syria Response Hub 2014: 10).

In the Kurdistan region of Iraq 1/5th of 1660 displaced women who were interviewed reported being offered money for sexual services and 1/10th of women indicated that they had been pressured to have sex by government officials, organised gangs, security forces, religious/community leaders, or NGO members (2014: 10). While offering a glossary to understand varying terminology for SGBV, the report maps out how women are put in vulnerable positions by attempts at and acts of violence.

UN Women has also published different reports that offer insights into SGBV. Two of them focused on Syrian refugees and dealt with similar themes. The UN Women's Inter-Agency Assessment on *Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection Among Syrian Refugees In Jordan With A Focus on Early Marriage*

(2013) aims to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the risks that Syrian refugee families – especially women and girls – face in Jordan. The report specifically focused on GBV against adults and children and early marriage. Findings from this report reveal that women and children are extremely vulnerable, rates of early marriage are high, and restrictions prevalent on the mobility of women and girls which constrains their participation in social and economic activities and their access to basic services. For example, women are employed mostly in domestic work or agriculture. Both sectors are known to be high-risk for physical and sexual exploitation (UN Women Inter-Agency Assessment 2013: 37). Moreover, some general recommendations on GBV, early marriage, child protection, access to basic services and community relations are provided in the report. It is recommended that steps be taken at all levels, local, national and international.

A report by UN Women on Syrian refugees living in Iraq also analyses GBV based on their qualitative research. The report, entitled *'We just keep silent': Gender-based Violence amongst Syrian Refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq* (UN Women 2014), sheds light on the range of gender-based violence (GBV) issues affecting Syrian refugee women and different challenges of its prevention and response in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). The report analyses data from 1,660 household surveys, 27 key informant interviews, and 19 focus group discussions with refugee women, men, and youth (UN Women 2014: 10). The report finds that married women experience higher rates of intimate partner violence than they did pre-conflict; girls, women and their male relatives have deep-rooted fears or experiences of GBV and other types of violence. The report emphasises unique hardship due to the state-led systematic discrimination against Kurdish communities in Syria, so they are considered *more vulnerable* compared to the other refugee groups. The report offers data on varying issues including both men and women's opinions about sexuality, marriage, violence, as well as the reasons for violence, risks, reactions from the local community and different sources of tension. This report is significant as it brings out the complex nature of vulnerability. The report highlights intimate partner violence occurring during refugee movements. In a neighbouring country, Jordan, research conducted

in 2004 also provides important insights on “domestic violence among married persons living in the refugee camps” (Khawaja, 2004). According to the research, among 3,100 Palestinian refugees who were interviewed, 61.1% reported ‘yes’ in support of domestic violence. Khawaja in other research with Tewtel-Salem also analyses domestic rape using household data collected from 417 Palestinian refugee couples in Lebanon (Khawaja and Tewtel-Salem, 2004). According to their research, 29.5 % of husbands and 22% of their wives reported that wife beating occurred at least once during their marriage (Khawaja and Tewtel, 2004). An increase in violence suffered by Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon underlines women and children’s exposure to higher levels of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), early marriage, survival sex, and the threat and fear of violence from the local community (Charles and Denman 2013). Exposure to one form of violence seems to make other forms of violence more acceptable, as for instance higher rates of domestic violence are significantly associated with exposure to political violence (Memmi 2015).

Oxfam, in a report analysing the EU’s refugee policy, stresses the critical issue of domestic violence and/or domestic rape.

Domestic violence is most common, often affecting women with polygamous husbands and survivors of sexual violence. Women who were raped during flight are frequently harassed, even disowned, by their ashamed families once they reach the relative security of the camp. Another widespread problem is forced marriage, particularly for recent widows, who face pressure from their in-laws to remarry within the family. Finally, rape is reported in the camps, particularly when the victim is a minor. (Oxfam, 2005: 63)

This report also analyses three country profiles, Sri Lanka, The United Republic of Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with an emphasis on camp conditions and discusses the limits of “securing protection”. Based on the report (Oxfam, 2005), and despite the similarities of the refugee situations in the Middle East and North Africa and the efforts to solve problems, no effective solutions were provided by the EU for preventing and responding to SGBV in a comprehensive way.

A report prepared by the UNHCR (2015) evaluates current humanitarian crises and discusses prevention of SGBV world-wide. Response programmes focus on improving the quality, effectiveness, and coherence of services aimed at preventing SGBV while tackling the root causes of SGBV by empowering women and girls and promoting non-discrimination. These programmes support multi-sectoral intervention in four key areas: health, psycho-social services, protection and legal aid. The programme is tailored according to an age, gender, and diversity (AGD) approach. For the particular vulnerabilities in both urban and camp settings, the programme specifically aims to address the needs of children on the question of early marriage, school drop-out and child labour as well as engaging with the problems of refugees with disabilities, the elderly and LGBTI persons. The report also states that in the efforts to prevent SGBV, attention needs to be paid to human trafficking and smuggling because this form of migration significantly increases the risk of exploitation. Through the AGD approach, LGBTI people are also categorised as vulnerable as they experience

“under-identification, stigmatization, discrimination, marginalization, lack of awareness on sexuality, SGBV, and access to labour and health services are presented as impediments” (2017: 27).

LGBTI people are expected to experience similar patterns of discrimination as women throughout the refugee process by being “feminized” and especially in the form of “marginalization in times of conflict and being prone to systematic endemic sexual torture” (Moore and Barner 2017: 34).

Different Places, Different Actors

As discussed in the existing reports and scholarly work, SGBV is complex and begins from the first phase of displacement. As Freedman argues

Sexual and gender-based violence can occur at every stage of the refugee cycle: during flight, while in the country of asylum and during repatriation. For example, in Darfur (Sudan) where civil war has displaced more than a million people, gender-based violence has been rampant (2007: 60).

After arriving in a new and unfamiliar country, the first experience of vulnerability for a refugee is in trying to find or set up a home (UNHCR, 2014). A lack of housing and limited resources means they often face a dramatic drop in living conditions, having to live in collective shelters, tents or caravans while lacking basic needs and privacy which causes physical, mental, and emotional harm. In Lebanon, for example, female-headed households are amongst the most vulnerable group in terms of shelter in that they generally have to stay at informal settlements, garages, tents or unfinished buildings (UNHCR, 2014). Landlords are sometimes reluctant to provide shelter for women because of the common view that there is a risk that rent will not be paid. There are reports of abuse and sexual harassment by landlords. However, some of the women mention there are landlords, neighbours or other local community members who help them a lot as well. In addition, two-thirds of 150 Syrian refugee female heads of household between 17 and 85 years old in Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt described moving more frequently due to the economic hardship of paying rent (UNHCR, 2014). Finding enough money for their basic needs and entering the labour market is a related challenge for refugees, especially women (Freedman, 2007). Similarly, almost four in five of the women interviewed in a UNHCR study (2014) said they were not in paid employment. This was due to a variety of reasons, including having small children at home, caring for family members, being unable to find work or other gender barriers. Many of the women had not worked in Syria and had less access to work opportunities than male heads of household. UNHCR and its partners offer training to equip Syrian refugee women with practical life skills, although prospects for economic empowerment have been limited given legal restrictions and overstretched labour markets. Some of the women interviewed had been highly skilled professionals back in Syria, such as pharmacists, lawyers, architectural engineers, and office managers. They mentioned it was difficult to find a job in exile that corresponded to their skill levels. While most of the women interviewed were not working, very few said they had steady financial support from family members. So, they found alternative means of supporting their households such as selling family treasures, relying on local communities' help, obtaining cash assistance through aid agencies, marrying early or relying on child labour. Also, some women mentioned they borrowed money from friends,

relatives or neighbours, bought food on credit from local shops or accepted one-off donations from family or friends. Many described it as *humiliating to rely on the mercy of people*.

The UNHCR (2014) report asserts that women living alone encounter multifaceted challenges in their everyday lives. In addition, living in camps in overcrowded settings with lack of private spaces renders women vulnerable to different problems such as dealing with an increase in tension within their household or facing domestic violence. In addition to the way camps are spatially organised (e.g. the location of hygiene facilities and accommodation), within-camp relationships and networks regulate women's gendered vulnerabilities. The camp routine is gendered with respect to women's ascribed role of housewife, and the tasks are regulated and framed by domestic gender roles of women.

Regarding women's tasks in the camps and the gendered routine in their daily lives, the Women Refugee Council's report on refugee camps in Jordan recounts that:

Intimate partner and domestic violence in homes, particularly targeting women and girls, is becoming more common, while challenges for reporting remain, especially in the case of sexual violence. This kind of violence may be aggravated by the fact that households are socially isolated, suffering from tremendous financial stress and lack of privacy due to overcrowding, which all contribute to increasing tensions that sometimes lead to violence, often perpetrated by a male head of household (Women's Refugee Commission, 2014: 12).

In line with these reports, widespread intimate partner and domestic violence against displaced women reflect only one aspect of the whole journey. Those women not only experience violence that provokes their displacement, as previously mentioned, but also SGBV in the conflict/war-zone and during their flight.

NGO and activist reports regularly highlight the moments where vulnerable migrants are particularly at risk from violence, in a specific city (Parker 2015) or country (UN Women Inter-Agency Assessment, 2013). Identifying moments of increased risk on the refugee journey is one part of understanding the nature of SGBV, while providing a suitable context for these data from the perspective of refugees themselves is also important.

In November 2015, the Nobel Women's Initiative and the International Campaign to Stop Rape and Gender Violence in Conflict formed a delegation of Nobel Peace Prize laureates and human rights experts to observe and conduct research on the women refugees at risk in Europe, specifically in the countries located on the route through Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Germany. Their methodology included field research and interviews with refugees, officials, UN representatives and NGO representatives who were primarily from women's organizations (Nobel Women's Initiative, 2016).

The assessment specifically seeks answers to the question, *where in the migration process are refugee women most vulnerable to violence?* The first three distinct phases are identified: (1) Traveling with abusive partners, (2) boat crossings, and (3) violence and exploitation along the journey. The journey is very dangerous, especially along the border between Turkey and Greece. Cold weather and diseases, trafficking, pregnancy and related health issues are considered to be specific difficulties of the journey. For example, based on interviews conducted with key informants, an estimated 12 % of the women were pregnant while crossing by boat. The 4th phase of the migration process with an increased vulnerability to violence is in the bottlenecks and informal settlements in the Balkan region; many of the women and children being stuck in this region. Lastly, conditions in the (5) detention and (6) refugee reception centres which include overcrowding and lack of services often underpin vulnerabilities. Such vulnerabilities persist because of the unwillingness of local authorities and police to improve the conditions, or low salience attributed to gender-based violence, or lack of private spaces such as separate washrooms or sleeping rooms. All of the phases mentioned in the report highlight common threats to refugees such as robbery; sexual, physical, psychological or economic violence; exploitation from abusive partners, smugglers or other refugees (Nobel Women's Initiative 2016: 5).

Freedman, in her research on SGBV against refugee women, presents similar findings. In the countries of origin, transit and destination, women are subject to SGBV due to a variety of factors. Qualitative research carried out in Greece (Kos), Serbia (Belgrade) and France (Paris and Calais area) between June

2015 and January 2016 documented different situations from the beginning of the flight, within the transit countries and in permanent destinations. War-related violence experienced by women migrants who were mostly Syrians was perpetrated by all players in the war including the official Syrian army, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and rebel forces. Violence experienced during the journey was documented as very frequent, mostly perpetrated by smugglers, human-traffickers and coast guards (Freedman 2016: 18).

Whether forced and early marriages create vulnerabilities for refugees and whether they count in and of themselves as a form of gender-based violence is contested.

Forced and early marriages have reportedly increased compared to the pre-crisis period and incidents of domestic violence, sexual and gender-based violence and violence against children are also identified as high (Zetter and Ruaudel 2014: 9).

Forced and early marriages pose a potential threat to the security of young women and girls, and according to reports on Syrian migration, they became common practices in refugee camps across the region (Freedman 2017). These marriages are also often justified as cultural practices. The key role in reproducing the culture, attributed to women, justifies early marriage for young women and can justify violence within that marriage. In this framework, it is important to note that “varying types of insecurity and violence for men and women, depending on their varying social and economic positions and the relations of power between them” shape the wider context (Freedman 2017: 128). The necessity of including the wider context, particularly where non-refugee hosts are resource poor themselves, is emphasised in research from settings beyond the Levant (González 2016).

Final Remarks

This review points to several continuities and gaps in the literature that discusses SGBV. **First**, most of the studies develop approaches that focus on gender as an object of study. They emphasise mostly the experience of women. Only recently have studies expanded to include the experiences of men and LGBTI persons. **Second**, the existing research focuses on the causes and consequences of sexual and

physical violence, especially rape, in different cases around the world. However, studies that address the causes and consequences of economic and socio-cultural violence are lacking. Put differently, while explaining and analysing SGBV, the existing literature mostly focuses on physical violence and its context. For example, many studies of physical violence elaborate on how rates of domestic violence increase during wartime, and how physical violence affects the lives of the victims as well as the perpetrators. There is need for more comprehensive and integrated research examining the causes, contributing factors as well as the context of SGBV. **Third**, the current research consists of case studies that revolve around instances of conflict and refugee situations. Therefore, there is almost no continuity regarding how different factors change as SGBV is experienced in different contexts. For example, the nature of SGBV in a context of resettlement is highly likely to differ from the nature of SGBV in a context of conflict. The nature of SGBV conceptualised in one context could result from cultural incongruity across context or be a result of a combination of socio-economic as well as cultural factors. There is a need to conduct further research to connect different contexts and their consequences for the occurrence of SGBV. **Fourth**, the existing research that discusses the policies tailored to respond to SGBV challenges remains fairly general. These existing policies provide only immediate and short-term relief for survivors of SGBV and are a long way from offering sophisticated prevention strategies. There is also a need for further research on the repercussions of SGBV on different individuals and groups. Moreover, tools need to be developed for understanding how to address SGBV related challenges for refugees in a comprehensive manner. **Fifth**, there are very few studies which aim to explain how the SGBV experience may impact larger processes of social inclusion. **Sixth**, there is a reliance on professionals' views, whether they are humanitarian, medical or social workers, rather than documenting refugees' own views themselves. **Seventh** efforts to describe SGBV among refugees have not often developed into prevention strategies that have been robustly evaluated.

Ways forward

This review has identified limitations of existing attempts to assess the nature of SGBV among refugees as outlined above, and it is these gaps which the current SEREDA project seeks to address. The focus on women and on physical violence in particular (often non-European) field settings can be addressed by using a more person-centred and contextualised approach to understanding SGBV across the process of exile, seeking asylum and resettlement. This needs to include the widest context in which refugees live, during both exile and settlement, in relationship to the local non-refugee host population, and other aspects of the host society including legal, economic, religious and social constraints that shape gendered lives.

We assert the need to understand the nature of SGBV from the perspective of refugees themselves, rather than from the perspective of humanitarian and / or medical professionals providing refugees with services. Failing to speak to refugees themselves gives a limited view of the problem, as illustrated by an analysis drawing on interviews with humanitarian workers and key policy texts that found refugee men to be represented in one of three ways, as “perpetrators of violence and discrimination; as powerful gatekeepers and potential allies; and as emasculated troublemakers” (Olivius 2016: 57). Furthermore, recent reporting from a setting where women and children’s best interests are championed and with a long history of receiving refugees found child migrants reporting rape were being denied access to essential health and social services, let alone suitable accommodation (Riddell and Human Rights Watch (HRW) 2016). Therefore, we might question the extent to which professionals can offer a full picture of vulnerable refugees’ needs around SGBV.

Existing research demonstrates that male and female refugees in asylum reception centres are capable of survey-reporting on a range of related forms of gendered violence being performed and experienced beyond the physically sexual, including socio-economic and emotional violence, despite the sensitive nature of the topic (Keygnaert *et al.* 2015).

We further assert that establishing the nature of SGBV is not an end in itself unless it is associated with efforts to devise strategies that reduce the gendered harms of violence in all its forms. We note that where prevention strategies are devised, they need to take account of refugees' own perspectives alongside the range of actors and agencies involved in order to be effective. The need for police stations, health clinics and the wider community, including religious leaders to be involved in devising culturally appropriate strategies to be effective has been asserted (Hough 2013). A further step will be to perform proper evaluations of such strategies so that the effectiveness of efforts can be reliably assessed. A willingness to undertake good quality evaluation is linked to how SGBV and migration are conceptualised: as long as we have a limited view of this violence as confined to particular sites of conflict, remote from the heart of Europe, largely concerning physical violence against women refugees who lack agency, good quality evaluation is unlikely.

The inherently gendered nature of migration that our review has emphasised, is notable given that gender is absent as an overt ground for protection under the Refugee Convention (McPherson *et al.* 2011). Thus migration governance is a place where the nature of SGBV is being operationalised through court decisions that construct different forms of violence as criminal acts that are gendered or not.

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