

Briefing Paper: Violence Against Women in Syria - Breaking the Silence International Federation for Human Rights

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In December 2012, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), in collaboration with the Arab Women Organisation (AWO), sent an international fact-finding mission to meet with Syrian women who had fled the crisis to seek refuge in Jordan. The mission focussed on the impact of the ongoing conflict on women and sought to document specific forms of violence targeting women. The FIDH delegation visited three refugee camps, Al Zaatari, King Abdullah Park and Cyber City and held meetings with 80 refugees living outside “official” camps in Amman, Rusaifa, Dhleil and Sama Sarhan (Zarqa Governorate).

It remains extremely difficult to measure the extent of crimes of sexual violence or to draw conclusions on patterns, in particular due to the stigma surrounding such crimes. However, all those interviewed reported having witnessed or heard about cases of sexual violence and said that the fear of being raped had motivated their decision to flee the country. Several of the women interviewed gave indirect accounts of rape and other forms of sexual violence committed by pro-government forces during house searches, following arrest at checkpoints and in detention. There were also accounts of such crimes having been committed by anti-government armed groups.

Many of those interviewed also spoke of the risk of women being abducted, by all parties to the conflict, in order to obtain information or as bargaining tools for the release of prisoners.

According to several women and organisations providing support services, survivors of rape are sometimes forced into marriage, in order to “save family honour”.

Risks of stigmatisation and rejection of survivors impose a culture of silence, preventing women reporting crimes of sexual violence. As a result, the vast majority of those in need of medical and psycho-social support do not have access to such services.

FIDH presents at the end of this briefing paper a set of recommendations towards different stakeholders.

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