

# LEBANON

## Making sense of early marriage among Syrian refugee girls

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### BACKGROUND

Syria has been engulfed in a violent civil war since March 2011, resulting in at least 250,000 deaths and the displacement of 11 million people. Reports have highlighted the many ways in which children are being impacted by war, including physical injuries, psychological stress, being separated from family, food insecurity, and lack of basic health services as well as educational opportunities. Girls face additional risks including harassment and sexual violence, and recent reports have raised great concern over alarming increases in the rates of child marriage among Syrian refugee populations.

Child marriage is widely recognized as a human rights violation and as a form of gender-based violence. More than 700 million women alive today have experienced child marriage with more than one in three of those women being married before the age of 15. Child marriage has a profound impact on the lives of young girls around the world. In addition to the negative impact on their physical and psychological health, child marriage usually limits access to formal education and increases vulnerability to gender-based violence. Girls who marry

early tend to be less healthy, less productive and less empowered, all of which has an impact on their children and their families. In this respect, the impact of child marriage is intergenerational and represents an impediment to societal as well as economic development.

Vulnerability to early marriage is often heightened during humanitarian crises as a result of dire economic circumstances and a desire to protect girls from harassment and sexual violence. There are likely other unidentified factors contributing to the increased rate of child marriage among Syrian refugees that are specific to Syrian cultural and social norms and specific to the experiences of trauma and loss that have ensued during the last five years. To date, there has been very little research to identify which interventions are effective at addressing child marriage in humanitarian settings.

This mixed methods study will investigate what contributes to child marriage in a large-scale humanitarian setting and will identify community-based interventions to help Syrian families feel that they have options other than to marry their young daughters prematurely.

### PROJECT AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Our aim is to reduce the rates of child marriage among Syrian refugees by using Cognitive Edge's SenseMaker and a participatory approach to assist communities in the self-identification of acceptable, feasible and sustainable interventions that will enact change from within. To do so, this project has the following four objectives:

1. Provide new insight into the societal, economic, security, religious and psychosocial factors contributing to child marriage during the Syrian crisis.

2. Identify interventions to address child marriage that have been proposed by local communities.
3. Contribute to the evidence base on child marriage overall and provide scientific data on interventions to reduce child marriage in humanitarian settings.
4. Pilot an innovative mixed methods research tool in humanitarian settings.

### PROJECT METHODS

In collaboration, ABAAD and Queen's University will take an innovative approach to understanding child marriage by using SenseMaker to extract meaning from large collections of personal experiences contributed by community members. Twelve trained Syrian research assistants (6 females, 6 males) will collect the data. Interviews will be conducted in Beirut, Tripoli and the Bakka Valley. All research related materials and tools will be translated into Arabic and all data will be collected on iPads.

Using SenseMaker, narratives about the experiences of Syrian refugee girls living in Lebanon will be collected from approximately 1200 participants, including married and unmarried Syrian girls, Syrian mothers and fathers, husbands who have taken Syrian child brides, unmarried men who might be eligible to take a child bride and community leaders including teachers, health care pro-

viders and religious leaders. Syrian girls will be eligible to participate if they are aged 13 or older.

SenseMaker is unique in that it asks the participants to self-interpret their own narratives. SenseMaker then identifies clusters of self-reported themes and generates plots where clusters reveal widely held perspectives on child marriage and related issues. The data is considered statistically valid due to the larger sample sizes and a deeper understanding of the results is available from the qualitative narratives that are linked to data points. After initial analysis is complete, findings will be presented back to Syrian community members through focus groups and their interpretation as well as ideas on culturally appropriate, feasible interventions will be incorporated into the advocacy and programming planning.

### PROJECT INNOVATION AND IMPACTS

The project will result in the following outputs and outcomes:

OBJECTIVE	OUTPUT	OUTCOME
Provide new insight into the societal, economic, security, religious & psychosocial factors contributing to child marriage during the Syrian crisis.	A more nuanced and contextually specific understanding of the contributing factors that underlie child marriage among Syrian refugee communities.	Focused recommendations that will inform more effective interventions aimed at reducing child marriage in Lebanon and elsewhere in the Middle East.
Identify interventions to address child marriage that have been proposed by local communities.	Community-based interventions to combat child marriage that have been proposed by local Syrian community members.	Feasible and more sustainable community-level programs to address child marriage in the context of the refugee crisis in the Middle East.
Contribute to the evidence base on child marriage overall and provide scientific data on interventions to reduce child marriage in humanitarian settings.	Rich data on interventions to address child marriage during humanitarian crises.	Data that could be explored for potential applicability to address child marriage more effectively in other settings.
Pilot an innovative mixed methods research tool in humanitarian settings.	Use of SenseMaker as a novel research tool in humanitarian settings.	A novel mixed methods research tool that has been piloted in a humanitarian setting, providing lessons learned that will allow for its adaption for use in other crises.

Additional research outputs will include:

- A minimum of one to two peer review publications
- A full report with key research findings, policy recommendations and advocacy implications, which will be primarily aimed at humanitarian organizations and donors
- Two page policy brief for key stakeholders
- Presentation of results at an international conference
- Policy recommendations and advocacy campaigns through ABAAD's national and international dissemination channels

