

## THE IMPACT OF THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR ON INTRAFAMILIAL RELATIONS AND THE PARENTAL FUNCTIONING OF SYRIAN REFUGEES<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

*The civil war in Syria that has been ongoing since March 2011 has caused millions of people to become forcibly displaced. By employing in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 37 female Syrian refugees in Türkiye and adopting the social ecological model and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory as the theoretical framework, this study examines how the Syrian civil war and the refugees' migrations to Türkiye have affected their intrafamilial relations and parental functioning. The findings of this study show that living in overcrowded groups in Syria, the loss or leaving behind of beloved ones, the economic and emotional hardships experienced in Türkiye, and the conflict between the co-wives and their children in polygamous marriages deteriorated the intrafamilial relations of Syrian refugees. Increase in marital conflicts, domestic violence, divorce, and family violence toward children were found to be the main impacts of the war and migration on Syrian refugee families in Türkiye.*

**Keywords:** *Intrafamilial Relations, Domestic Violence, Marital Conflict, Syrian Refugees, Türkiye.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In March 2011, the public protests that began in Syria transformed into a protracted civil war with the violent crackdown of Assad government's security forces. This war has caused 6.8 million Syrian citizens to become internally displaced, with an additional 5.5 million seeking sanctuary from nearby countries, including Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2023a). Among these countries, Türkiye has offered protection to 3.4 million Syrian refugees since the outset of the war (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2023b).

When a war break outs and armed conflicts spread nationwide, not only does the infrastructure of the country collapse, but so does the daily routines of the country's citizens. Witnessing the loss of or having to leave behind beloved ones (e.g., family members, friends, neighbors, colleagues), being exposed to violence, having a lack of access to healthcare and education services (Khawaja et al., 2008),

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being imprisoned or witnessing the imprisonment of family members (Lipson, 1993), and experiencing the loss of possessions and social networks (Farhood et al., 1993) are some of the devastating effects of wars on individuals. Further, depression (Westermeyer et al., 1983), somatic issues (Tyhurst, 1951), intrusive thoughts, nightmares, and survivor's guilt (Kinzie et al., 1984) are some of the psychological effects observed in war-affected populations.

Refugee families face manifold hardships resulting from traumatic events, distinguishing their experiences from those of other families. However, limited research has been conducted on the impact of forced displacement and migration on intrafamilial relationships and parenting practices among refugee families (Akesson and Sousa, 2019; Sim et al., 2018). In addition to being separated from loved ones, refugees also experience disruption in their bonds with family and cultural systems. These overwhelming emotions often lead to poor social functioning, withdrawal from their social environment, and challenges in parenting (Shweitzer et al., 2006). For example, Osman et al. (2016) examined the parenting experiences of Somali-born parents and discovered that changes in parental roles, coupled with the challenges of losing their homeland and extended family, contributed to additional stress in refugee families. Similarly, Heger Boyle and Ali (2010) found that trauma, loss of extended family support, and separation from family members placed significant strain on refugee families and their relationships. Degni, Pöntinen, and Mölsä (2006) conducted a study on Somali parents in Finland, which revealed that the hardships experienced by refugee families negatively affected their parenting practices and spousal relationships. In an effort to shed light on the intrafamilial dynamics in refugee communities affected by forced displacement and migration, this empirical research focuses on the pre- and post-flight experiences of Syrian refugee families in Türkiye. The study aims to understand the changes that occur within the family unit after war and migration to Türkiye, and how these challenges impact intrafamilial relations and parenting functioning.

This study is significant for two reasons. Firstly, the Syrian refugee crisis represents the largest humanitarian disaster since World War II, and Türkiye, hosting over 3.4 million Syrian refugees, has been profoundly affected. While the adverse effects of war on the well-being of refugees are well-documented, this study is the first to examine how the experience of the Syrian civil war and migration to Türkiye specifically affect the intrafamilial relationships of Syrian refugees. This is crucial because the family unit is the foundation of society, and the well-being of families not only influences their adaptation in the host country but also holds implications for potential repatriation. Furthermore, gaining an understanding of the experiences of refugee families from their own perspective can assist health and social practitioners in addressing their unique needs (Merry, Pelaez and Edwards, 2017) and facilitating successful settlement in their host countries (Lewig, Arney and Salveron, 2010: 325).

To address the existing gap in the literature, this study seeks to investigate two primary research questions:

1. How have the Syrian civil war and migration to Türkiye impacted the intrafamilial relations and parenting functioning of Syrian refugees?
2. To what extent have the Syrian civil war and migration to Türkiye affected the parenting functioning of Syrian refugees and their relationship with their children?

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a basic qualitative approach, which focuses on understanding individuals' interpretations of their experiences, the construction of their worldview, and the meanings they attribute to those experiences (Merriam, 2009). To explore these aspects, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Syrian refugees. These interviews aimed to uncover their perspectives on their life conditions before and after their flight, their intrafamilial relationships, parental functioning, and the significance they ascribe to their experiences during the civil war. By utilizing this methodology, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the subjective experiences and meaning-making processes of Syrian refugees in relation to their family dynamics and parenting practices.

### **2.1. Participants**

A total of 37 female Syrian refugees residing in Gaziantep, Türkiye were selected as the sample for this study. Maximum variation sampling was employed to capture a diverse range of characteristics relevant to the study, including marital status (e.g., married, widowed, divorced), economic status, ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Arab, Turkmen, Kurd), and neighbourhoods. Participants were chosen based on their verbal consent to participate, and their identities were anonymised to ensure confidentiality.

### **2.2. Data Collection Tools**

A semi-structured interview form was developed by the researcher after an extensive literature review. The interview questions were also reviewed by two field experts, and minor revisions were made based on their feedback. Before initiating data collection, a pilot test of the final interview form was conducted with a female Syrian refugee residing in Gaziantep to ensure clarity. Participants were informed about the study's objectives and provided the freedom to withdraw from the interview at any point if they felt uncomfortable. The interviews primarily focused on participants' descriptions of their family lives, financial situations, relationships with spouses and children, and experiences of violence from spouses in pre-conflict Syria. They were also asked to share any changes they observed in their intrafamilial dynamics since the outbreak of the war in Syria and their migration to Türkiye.

### **2.3. Data Collection Process**

Between February 1 and 15, 2020, a total of 37 semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with Syrian refugees in Gaziantep, Türkiye. Gaziantep was chosen as the research location due to its high concentration of Syrian refugees. The study received ethical approval from the Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Uşak University [Decision Number: 2020-1]. A female cultural broker was engaged to act as an interpreter during the interviews and facilitate participant recruitment. Participants were given the option to terminate the interview if they felt uncomfortable. The interviews, lasting between 30 minutes and 1.5 hours, were audio-recorded and conducted in either Arabic or Turkish. All interviews were subsequently translated into English.

### **2.4. Data Analysis**

The data analysis process employed a descriptive analysis method. Deductive reasoning was applied as the analysis categories had been identified in advance through the literature review. The interview data were analysed using the Dedoose qualitative data analysis program, with emerging codes organised under the predetermined categories. Each category directly corresponded to the research questions.

## **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework of this study draws upon the social ecological framework and the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory to develop a comprehensive model for understanding family functioning in both pre- and post-flight periods. The social ecological model posits that stressors experienced during the war and after displacement have detrimental effects on the well-being of asylum seekers and refugees. Within this model, these stressors are conceptualised as ‘displacement-related stressors,’ encompassing not only the traumatic events and violence witnessed or experienced by refugees in their countries of origin but also the daily challenges faced in the aftermath of displacement (Miller et al., 2002; Miller and Rasco, 2004; Miller and Rasmussen, 2010; 2014; 2017). Examples of exile-related stressors outlined by the model include poverty, social isolation, limited employment opportunities, overcrowded housing, loss of social roles, and a lack of material resources and social support mechanisms, such as separation from family members (Miller et al., 2002; Miller and Rasco, 2004).

The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, on the other hand, posits that individuals strive to acquire, retain, and protect valuable resources (Hobfoll and Lilly, 1993: 129). According to the theory, sudden and devastating events can lead to resource loss, resulting in stress stemming from the actual loss of resources, the threat of resource loss, or the failure to acquire resources (Hall et al., 2006: 230). Resources play a crucial role for individuals as they shape their ability to cope with stress and rebuild their lives in new environments.

Building upon these theoretical foundations, this study proposes that the rapid loss of resources, both economic and social, experienced during the Syrian war, coupled with the challenges of regaining these resources in Türkiye, act as daily stressors for Syrian refugees in Türkiye. Consequently, these stressors have had a negative impact on both their intrafamilial relations and parental functioning. By developing this model, the study aims to shed light on the complex interplay between resource loss, daily stressors, and their effects on the well-being of Syrian refugees in Türkiye.

#### **4. FINDINGS**

##### **4.1. The Impacts of the Syrian Civil War on Syrian Families' Intrafamilial Relations in the Pre-Flight Period**

In conflict zones, refugees often undergo traumatic experiences, including exposure to life-threatening events such as torture, detention, and the loss of loved ones. The process of migrating to a new environment further compounds the challenges faced by refugee families, as they must navigate unfamiliar cultures, unemployment, and discrimination, while also coping with the loss of their homeland and social support networks (Osman et al., 2016). These hardships contribute to elevated levels of stress among individuals. In the case of Syria, as the war escalated and aerial bombings and military confrontations intensified throughout the country, numerous Syrian families were compelled to relocate in order to secure their safety. Besides being exposed to unabated aerial bombardments, the diminishing opportunities in Syria for citizens in regard to making a living distressed many Syrian families. The narratives of the female Syrian refugees revealed that many families had begun to live together to survive the war, both physically and financially. During the interviews, the interviewees stated that their relationships with their spouses began to be affected while living in crowded spaces in Syria:

My sister-in-law's sons came, we stayed together. My mother-in-law was taking care of them. ... After a year, I had no energy since we were too overcrowded. In the midst of this overcrowdedness, everything was a source of conflict. Even changing my clothes was a problem. ... There had been too many issues between my husband and me. We were arguing about anything. We were going against each other. Eating, drinking. Even a spoon on dinner table [at that time] had been a big deal. We even argued about that. ... I was such a mess; I was hating my husband. I wished he did not approach and touch me. [Habiba, mother of four]

Living in overcrowded settings and poor conditions can cause a strain on social relationships (Eggerman and Panter-Brick, 2010) since it leaves limited room for privacy. Several of the interviewees echoed similar statements and stated that living in overcrowded groups rendered them more aggressive toward their spouses and children.

## **4.2. The Impacts of the Syrian Civil War on Syrian Families' Intrafamilial Relations in the Post-Flight Period**

The impacts of the Syrian Civil War on Syrian families' intrafamilial relations in the post-flight period will be discussed under four sub-headings.

### **4.2.1. Financial Hardships and Their Impacts on Intrafamilial Relations**

One of the hardships that the majority of refugees face in the post-flight period is financial (Khawaja et al., 2008). In a traditional Syrian family, meeting the needs of the family members was the role ascribed to men; while women were responsible for the household chores (El-Masri et al., 2013). However, the majority of Syrian refugees today have lost their assets, possessions, and social support mechanisms due to the war. In addition, most of the refugees' educational credentials are not recognised by Turkish authorities and, as such, are coerced into working in unqualified jobs in unsafe conditions with low pay (Crawley and Skleparis, 2018). In some cases, when the man in the family cannot find work and, as such, cannot sustain his role as the breadwinner in the family, it causes additional stress within the family (Yalim and Kim, 2018). This stress then transforms into anger and shame and, sometimes, even violence toward his spouse (Horn 2010; Rees and Pease, 2007; Riggs et al., 2000). In other words, this sense of insufficiency might push a man to restore his authority within the family via violence (El Jack, 2003; Lee, 2004).

Changes in gender roles and responsibilities are also a common experience among refugee communities (Williams, 2008). The Syrian interviewees stated that the main cause of conflict between them and their spouses were financial hardships and poverty. Although some of the Syrian women entered the labor market to make ends meet and contribute to the household finances since their spouses could not find work or were no longer able to work, this transformation in gender roles caused further tension and marital conflict between the spouses.

When I first started working, my husband resented me bitterly and said, 'You are a woman, you cannot work. I should go and work as a man. You are woman and paying the bills for us. You are able to bring income. I am not able work and bring money home as a man. He was making too much trouble...[Kareema, mother of five]

Numerous studies have demonstrated that the stress associated with migration (Umubyeyi and Mtapuri, 2019) hinders the development of peaceful dialogues within refugee families and contributes to increased marital conflict (Hyman, Guruge and Mason, 2008; Stewart et al., 2015). Syrian refugees, like other refugee communities, confront additional challenges in their daily lives while already grappling with the repercussions of witnessing traumatic events in war-torn Syria. These challenges encompass various aspects, including financial obligations such as rent and bills, access to healthcare, and the expenses associated with education in their new environments. These bills and the refugees' inability to secure proper employment in Türkiye often cause them considerable stress and increase

marital conflict. The interviews with our participants showed that, while the refugee women did not need to work in Syria, the hard living conditions in Türkiye caused them to need to contribute to the household finances by joining the labor force. However, this change in the household dynamic strained the relationship between the spouses and further increased their marital conflict.

#### **4.2.2. Increase in Domestic Violence, Alienation, and Divorce**

Domestic violence is one of the serious issues that should be addressed in our contemporary world. It is not just an act that violates basic human rights (World Health Organization, 2020), but also adversely affects both the well-being of individuals and society. According to the World Health Organization (2021), one in three women in the world is the victim of domestic violence. Domestic violence has multiple forms, such as physical abuse (e.g., hitting, pulling, choking, pushing), emotional abuse (e.g., shouting, humiliating, name calling) (Bhuyan et al., 2005), financial abuse (i.e., limiting the expenses of the partner by holding the resources on his/her own), and social abuse (i.e., monitoring or limiting the partner's relationships with her social network) (Rees and Pease, 2007).

A variety of studies have focused on domestic violence in migrant communities (Horn, 2010; Khawaja and Barazi, 2005; Pittaway, 2004; Riggs et al., 2000). Traumas experienced in the pre-flight period, the unemployment of men (Rees and Pease, 2007), problems adapting to the culture of the host society (Bhuyan et al., 2005), and changes in gender roles (Nah, 1993) are some of the factors that can increase the likelihood of domestic violence in migrant groups.

In conjunction with the economic challenges faced by refugee families, the separation from family members and the loss of extended kinship bonds also exert a detrimental impact on the well-being of these families (Bacallao and Smokowski, 2007). Such circumstances have been shown to contribute to increased levels of marital conflict and domestic violence. During the interviews, participants expressed that in addition to the financial difficulties they encountered in Türkiye, the intrusive and distressing memories of their loved ones left behind intensified the strain on their intrafamilial relationships and exacerbated instances of domestic violence.

My husband became aggressive when thinking about his family [in Syria]. Whenever our child approached him or said something to him, he raised hell about it. His mind is sometimes full of his family. Children jump and play in front of him. He beats both children and me and says, 'Why are you making noise? Why are you playing? Why are you messing up?' Sometimes he says bad words to the children. [Rabia, mother of three]

We came to a point where he was not able to bring even a piece of bread home. My children were too hungry. One day, I could not bear it and said to him 'whether you divorce me or find a solution to this poverty...if you were a man, you would not leave us hungry. You would not pauperize us. How do people leave? How do they make their ends meet? If you are not able to feed us, send me to my father [in Syria]'. These words hurt him a lot. [Wabisa, mother of two]

According to the findings of this study, while the physical and emotional abuse toward the Syrian women by men intensified after the war, the Syrian men have also begun to be exposed to emotional abuse from their spouses due to their insufficiency in regard to covering the basic needs of their families. The Syrian women stated that, when they think about the financial and emotional adversities they face, they sometimes blame their spouses for not provide them with decent lives.

Despite the intensity of their domestic violence situations in comparison to the pre-war period, most of the Syrian women stated that they do not share what they are going through both economically and emotionally with their families in Syria or their friends in Türkiye. The interviewees expressed that their families already strive to survive in Syria and, as such, they do not want to frustrate them with their personal issues. In addition, the Syrian women indicated that they do not trust their friends or relevant authorities in Türkiye.

Alienation and distancing between partners were found to be another result of the war on Syrian refugee families. Most of the Syrian women stated that although there were occasional conflicts with their spouses in pre-war Syria due to the involvement of the elder family members of their spouses, their treatment to their children was kind and they were germane to their family affairs. However, they noted that the Syrian civil war and migration to Türkiye have caused observable changes in both parties' approaches to each other. They said that they no longer feel their femininity since the war wiped away their emotional bonds with their spouses, and the reciprocal love and sharing diminished. Their husbands have become more aggressive, worried, easily angered by the children, and apathetic to family matters.

We had a nice marriage before the war. My spouse [husband] consulted me, I consulted him. ... He was a respectful person and used to love me so much. The war changed my husband a lot. He does not talk or banter with me. He does not understand me when I say something ... no desire is left in our marriage. We are living without feeling ... we have become like siblings. Whenever he calls me, I say to myself that I 'wish he did not want something from me.' Whenever I call him, he says 'I wish she did not want something from me.' We've reached that point. [Yashira, mother of two]

The traumatic experiences endured by Syrian refugees have led to the breakdown of marriages within some refugee families (Palmer, 1981). The psychological stress and financial challenges accompanying these circumstances not only create distance between spouses but also have the potential to tear families apart (Darvishpour, 2002). A study in Uganda on Sudanese refugees showed that the families began to break up because they were not able to cover their basic needs (Payne, 1998). In a similar vein, it has been found that the divorce rate increased among Iraqi refugees in London and almost one in four Iraqi refugees in the United Kingdom are either separated or divorced from their partners (Al-Ali, 2005). How the war in Syria and migration to Türkiye have affected the family unity of the refugees is reported by the respondents as follows:

War has affected many families. For instance, my aunt-in-law is divorcing now. Her psychology is ruined because of what she experienced in the war. Their relationship was perfect [in the pre-war period], like two lovers. Whatever happened, it happened after we migrated here [Türkiye] ... She came here, meet with new people, and wanted to be just like them ... Then, she took the children and the money at home. Then, her brother called my brother and he informed my brother that she wanted a divorce. [Zubaida, mother of three]

This war affected the marriages of people. The divorce rate was low in Syria. Right now, I am sure it is 80%. When I recently went to Syria and met with my lawyer, she told me that they get too many divorce cases. It was around 40% in the pre-war period. It is 80%-90% right now. It [the war] has dramatically affected the people. First, financial hardships; second, chemical weapons and bombs have affected the people. I am sure. [Amina, mother of one]

The narratives of the respondents to this study have shown that the financial and emotional struggles faced by the refugees and the long absences of family members loosen the solidarity within and cause the breakdown of family unity in some Syrian refugee families. A report published by the International Medical Corps (2017) showed that both marital conflict and divorce rates increased among Syrian refugee families in Jordan due to distress.

#### **4.2.3. The Impact of Polygamous Marriages on Inter marital Relations**

One another factor that causes marital conflict and strains the intrafamilial relations among Syrian refugee families is polygamous marriages. Polygamy can be defined as a type of marriage in which a man has more than one partner (Al-Krewani, 2010). Polygamous marriages are a prevalent practice in the Middle East (Al-Krewani and Lev-Wiesel, 2002), including Syria (Kivilcim, 2016). In polygamous marriages, the wives might live either in the same or separate houses with their children (Al-Krewani, 2013), and the likelihood of conflict is high due to disputes related to the distribution of material and sexual resources compared to monogamous marriages (Adams and Mburugu, 1994).

The interviews showed that some of the Syrian women had been in polygamous marriages for a few years, but were living in separate houses from the other wives in Syria; however, some of the wives were unaware of the additional wives until the outbreak of the war when they were informed that their husbands would be bringing the co-wives to Türkiye with them. These women reacted to their husbands' additional marriages with anger and sadness, and felt that their happy marriages had been torn apart.

The interviewee expresses her feelings and experience living with her co-wife as follows:

One night, my husband came home around 11 p.m. He was drunk and he told me that he wanted to say something to me. I said 'I am tired. I am in pain. Let's talk tomorrow.' I was sleeping and he woke me up around 2 a.m. He said, 'I got married.' I said 'You are kidding.' He said, 'No, I swear. I got married.' I said, 'No, I don't believe you. I took care of your mother and father for 10 years. I have

never broken your heart. You can't do this to me. You can't get bring another wife into the house.' He said, 'I got married and I have been married almost four years.' ... We fought a lot; the neighbourhood heard all my shouting and screams ... I decided to leave the house. The fight got intense. I insulted him and he beat me. He said, 'You can't go. You can't leave your children.' I stayed for my children ... I wanted to have a separate house [in Türkiye, like we had in Syria] since I was not able to live with her, but my husband said, 'My finances are not appropriate to have separate houses.' [Maahirah, mother of three]

The Syrian civil war and economic hardships that the Syrian refugees have experienced have forced co-wives to live under the same roof, which has increased family tensions between spouses, co-wives, and children in Syrian refugee families. A loss of interest and love between the spouses as well as envy, rivalry, and anger between co-wives are some of the detrimental effects of polygamous marriages on women and causes of domestic violence (Yılmaz et al., 2015). Polygamous marriages adversely affect the well-being of women as well by causing co-wives to lose their desire to live (i.e., contemplating suicide) (Naser-Najjab, 2013) and suffer from somatization, depression, anxiety, distress, and hostility (Al-Krewani, 2010; Al-Krewani, 2013).

#### **4.2.4. Increased Family Violence Toward Children**

Violence and armed conflicts cause traumatic effects not only to adults, but also to children (Kinzie et al., 1986). Bed wetting, being frightened by loud voices (El-Khani et al., 2016), somatic complaints, sleep problems (Ehnholt and Yule, 2006), PTSD symptoms, survivor's guilt, avoidance behaviours (Kinzie et al., 1986), depression and anxiety (Al-Eissa, 1995) are some of the detrimental effects of war on children. A study conducted with Syrian children in refugee camps in Türkiye found that 60% of the refugee children suffered from depression, 45% had PTSD, and 22% had aggression problems (Özer et al., 2016: 36).

Refugee families' coping abilities related to wartime stressors affected their children's coping abilities as well (Betancourt et al., 2015). Thus, if the parents lack the capacity to cope with wartime stress, then their children will likely experience hardships related to their parents being unable to properly care for them due to their psychological damage. As such, the children might have difficulty managing their stress levels as well (Elbedour et al., 1993). Therefore, the psychological well-being of the parents has a direct influence on their parental functioning and interactions with their children (Sim et al., 2018).

The devastating events and trauma experienced by refugees can cause anger in their family members, which can transform into violence aimed at both spouses and children (Tolan and Guerra, 1998). In particular, post-flight stressors, such as poverty, affect refugee families adversely and render them more aggressive. This state of mind reverberates to the children as an increase in physical abuse

(Catani et al., 2008). The interviewee explained how she reacted to her children when their needs were not satisfied as follows:

There have been several times when I've gotten angry with them [children] and beat them. I get really angry when I cannot buy something they want. My son goes to school, and when his friends eat different meals, when he says 'Mom, they [Turkish children] eat this. They buy this.' I get too annoyed. Even though I explain to them that we do not have money, and will buy them when we have an opportunity, they do not understand and cry. Then, I get angrier and beat them again. [Souzan, mother of two]

As stated by the interviewee, the consequences of the financial issues that Syrian refugee families experience is not limited to marital conflict, but also transformed into violent behaviours toward children. Lipson (1993) found that the monetary issues that Afghan refugees experienced who lived in northern California caused them to be violent toward their spouses and children. Another study conducted in Lebanon showed that female Syrian refugees beat their children to relieve their stress (Usta et al., 2019).

Family violence impacts the well-being of children in a negative way. Studies that have examined the impact of domestic violence on children's mental health showed that children who witness domestic violence have PTSD symptoms (Kilpatrick and Williams, 1997). It has also been found that the children who experience family violence have fewer interests, fewer social activities, and lower school performance (Wolfe et al., 1986).

While some of the interviewees stated that they did not have any communication problems with their children and that the children understand why their needs are not being met satisfactorily, some of the Syrian women stated that their children's behaviours have changed since the war started and that their emotional relationships with their husbands have weakened. Thus, they have little authority over them. They stated that their children have become more aggressive and began to blame them for not fulfilling their parental responsibilities. The interviewees described this change as follows:

For two days my daughter has not spoken to me. My little daughter came to me and told me that her shoes had holes in them that were letting water in. I borrowed some money from my neighbour and bought new ones. She used them for a day. We woke up in the morning, and realised they had been stolen. She cried and cried ... She wants a jacket and shoes. She is not speaking to me now. It has been two days. She is 16-years-old. Recently, she came to me and said, 'Let me work. Put me to work. Either you are able to cover my needs or let me work.' [Amena, mother of three]

My eldest son reproaches me a lot. He says, 'If you do not have opportunities to take care of us, why did you have too many children?' He always complains and reproaches. [Zeinah, mother of three]

Some refugee families' inability to respond to the needs of their children make the parents lash out at their children in an effort to relieve their anger at their inability. However, some refugee families' aggressive attitudes aimed at their children aggravate the parent-child relationship and cause alienation from the children toward their parents. A study with Bosnian adolescent refugees showed that they felt more depressed and less self-satisfied with their lives due to their poor living conditions (Fazel et al., 2012). Betancourt et al. (2015) found that Somali refugee families in the U.S. experienced communication problems with their children due to living in poverty and dangerous neighborhoods. Thus, family support is an important factor in children's management of traumatic events since how families cope with stress directly affects the children's well-being (Elbedour et al., 1993).

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The last few decades have seen the mass displacement of millions of people due to wars and armed conflicts. Wars leave deep economic and emotional scars on individuals by disrupting their traditional ways of life. In pre-war periods, while the majority of refugees had jobs matching with their credentials and skills, social support mechanisms, valued social statuses, and possessions, the war from which they are escaping have stripped them of what they owned and valued and forced them to rebuild their lives in unfamiliar settings.

This study provides evidence that wars and conflicts have wide-ranging negative impacts on the intrafamilial relations and parental functioning of refugee families. Consistent with the social ecological model and supported by our findings, it is evident that both pre-migration stressors, including traumatic events experienced in their home countries, and post-migration stressors, such as economic challenges, unemployment, the loss of extended family support, and separation from loved ones, significantly influence the well-being and social functioning of Syrian families. Further, in parallel with the assumptions of the COR theory, losing most of the invested resources the Syrian refugees have in their homeland, and being unable to regain these resources in the host country, places Syrian refugees under considerable stress and hinders them from coping effectively with their daily stressors.

The findings of the semi-structured interviews with female Syrian refugees in Türkiye showed that the inability to earn satisfactory income causes strain on intrafamilial relations and increased marital conflict and domestic violence. In addition, war and migration have changed the traditional gender roles in some Syrian families and rendered some of the female Syrian refugees as the family breadwinners. However, this shift in gender roles has been seen by the Syrian men of these families as a challenge to their masculinity and made them more aggressive toward their spouses.

Another ramification of war on the Syrian refugees has been the alienation or distancing of spouses from each other. The interviewees revealed that war stripped their emotional ties with and reciprocal love for their spouses, and converted them to strangers living in the same house. In some cases, traumatic events witnessed during the war and the financial hardships experienced in the host

country brought about changes in the reciprocal relationships of the spouses and caused some refugee families to be torn apart.

Marital conflicts in Syrian refugee families who are in polygamous marriages also intensified after migrating to Türkiye. Financial hardships have forced these women to share houses with their co-wives and children, and some female Syrian refugees only learned that they had a co-wife afterward the war broke out. The accounts of the interviewed women showed that physical and verbal fights between the co-wives and spouses were prevalent and affect both their own well-being and that of their children in negative ways.

Finally, in addition to the emotional burdens of losing or leaving behind family members, the monetary issues faced by refugees make them feel overburdened and cause them to lash out in aggression when they cannot provide for the needs of their children. Syrian parents who feel they lack the capacity to satisfy the demands of their children become easily aggravated and violent toward their children. In addition, some Syrian refugee children who feel that they are not able to live their childhoods as they desire due to a lack of financial opportunities, unlike their Turkish peers, feel frustrated and angry and distance themselves from their parents.

Domestic violence in Arab societies is considered a private affair and, as such, the police and judiciary mechanisms are not involved (Douki et al., 2003). Although domestic violence is one of the major issues of the contemporary world, the consideration of issue as a private affair means that it is underreported and often ignored by relevant authorities. Our findings showed that domestic violence increased in Syrian refugee families due to the war. One should note that domestic violence not only causes physical, but also emotional damage for women, including feelings of shame, humiliation (Al-Natour et al., 2019), and guilt (Riggs et al., 2000). At this juncture, educating men on the negative effects of domestic violence is important in combatting the issue (Bhuyan et al., 2005).

Further, it is important to note that the well-being of children is connected to the well-being of their parents. A study conducted by Garbarino and Kostelny (1996) with Palestinian children and their mothers in the West Bank showed that negative functioning within the family had a strong influence on the well-being of the children. Another study by De Silva et al. (2020) showed that exposure to interparental conflict might cause adolescents to feel emotionally unsafe and experience adjustment issues.

This study highlights the importance of implementing comprehensive programs by governments, civil society organizations, and family practitioners to address the economic hardships faced by Syrian refugees. Family intervention programs, as suggested by Miller and Rasmussen (2014), can play a crucial role in creating income opportunities and fostering supportive social networks for refugee populations. Moreover, providing social support is vital in helping refugee communities cope with stressors and rebuild their self-confidence to navigate the daily challenges in their new

environments (Simich et al., 2005). Additionally, measures such as cash assistance and recognizing the educational credentials and skills of refugees can alleviate their economic burdens and foster a sense of contribution to the host country, thereby potentially reducing the risk of domestic violence and intrafamilial conflicts within these families.

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