

# *voices of* Iraqi Refugee Women and Girls in Jordan

SEPTEMBER 2007



## violence against women



After the war [began], my husband started working for [an international humanitarian agency]. After a while he was kidnapped. We paid the ransom for him. After that, my daughter and I were kidnapped while we were shopping. We stayed there for 19 days....I was nine months pregnant at the time....We were tortured very much...**They raped me.** I had just one week to deliver the baby...but she was dead inside me. We were tortured there. We are threatened here. Our life is full of fear.—**28-year-old Iraqi refugee woman**

Four or five days ago [we found out that] our neighbor [in Iraq]...was abducted by a group of people. She was taken aside and she was raped and then she was killed. And, I really liked her very much. She is a mother of several children....**[If a woman has been raped] she would never go to a doctor.** Rarely that would happen. This is taboo. We cannot speak about it. She would only shut her mouth and that's it. And, of course she would feel depressed because she couldn't speak out. This is a very difficult situation she finds herself in. She cannot even face her own children, especially her male children, her husband, her brothers. She cannot do anything.—**35-year-old Iraqi refugee woman**

We are having this situation [of domestic violence] here. Nobody is patient with the other. Even the youngest, he wouldn't accept any kind of criticism. Everybody is tense....**The women bear the brunt of the anger.** We always get the lion's share of this....The lady stays at home, suffering.—**Iraqi refugee woman**

## lack of health services

My 9-year-old daughter needs help. She had an appendicitis operation at a private hospital in Palestine. It cost 450 dinar [US\$635]. But now her bowels are swelling. She needs a medical follow-up and a doctor....We went to [a clinic for refugees]. **They said my daughter can have an appointment after 3 months.** She will die before then.—Iraqi refugee woman

In April 2004 I came to Jordan. I have a tumor in my womb....I need to remove it right away. Every 25 days I have a bleeding problem. **I lose so much blood.** In Iraq, I had medicine. I can buy it here, but it is too expensive. I need an operation to get rid of what's inside, but I can't afford that because it is very expensive.—40-year-old Iraqi refugee woman

I worked at the Baghdad Airport for over twenty years. One day my neighborhood was hit by a bomb....I now have breast cancer. Ten people from the neighborhood died....many others have cancer. I was getting chemotherapy here in Jordan but **I used up all my money.** I am all alone here. I need four more chemotherapy treatments. —Iraqi refugee woman

If I have money, I will go to the doctor; if I don't, then I am quiet....We need a doctor; we need to get medicine. We need help. **No one is helping us.**—45-year-old Iraqi refugee widow

*“no one is helping us”*



*Photos by Mary Jane Escobar-Collins & Megan McKenna*

## trauma and psychosocial needs

All the children, they used to go to school. My husband also used to work. He used to have a car. He used it to deliver goods and stuff. In fact our life was very easy. We had a very convenient life. [After the war began] we felt that the situation was really a disaster. We were frightened. At the beginning of the war, the situation was better. [After] the first year we started to be afraid and things started to get more and more difficult. They started to threaten my husband. The National Guard took him. He was arrested and he was tortured. Up to now he cannot hear with his ear because of torture....Being tortured has psychological effects on him. **When he is sometimes sleeping at night he wakes up very frightened.**—Iraqi refugee woman

I was raped [in Iraq]....[An international organization in Jordan] sent me to a psychologist....The psychologist said that you [are struggling] because you're thinking of what happened to you. Stop thinking of that and he just wrote things down and he sent my file to the UN. **He said to stop thinking and try to have some fun in life.** That's all.—28-year-old Iraqi refugee woman

Three years ago insurgents kidnapped my 15-year-old son. We negotiated with them for ten days—**they tortured him, pulled his nails out, beat him and a bone came out through his nose.** He was released after we paid our life savings, \$30,000. —Iraqi refugee and director of an Iraqi women's organization



## desire for education

I studied to the 8th grade. I would like to go to school, but I don't have any papers so I can't. **I stay in this room all day and clean it.** I have no friends. I don't leave.—14-year-old Iraqi refugee girl

**When I stopped studying, it was like someone killed me.** I was studying computers and engineering [at Baghdad University]....All my friends are still in Iraq. I lost connections with my friends there....Now I am sad. My country is damaged. I need education to build my future.—20-year-old Iraqi refugee woman

My children are not able to go to school. Of course that makes me very sad. My daughter cries. **My son says he'll just go to Iraq to fight if it's going to be like this.**—44-year-old Iraqi refugee woman

I do feel frustrated when I see my neighbors' children go to school and mine don't have this ability. So, this is why I have [high] blood pressure and I became diabetic also. Most of the day [my children] are sitting at home with me. And **they always ask if they can go to school** or to have the other life standards similar to kids their age. But I cannot afford it, what can I do?  
—35-year-old Iraqi refugee mother of seven

*“when i stopped studying,  
it was like someone killed me”*



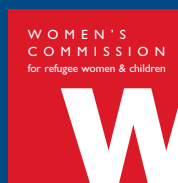
## impact on youth

As for young people, they are lost. Most of them they left their schools and you can see them in the streets and some people started to make use of them, to utilize them. The situation for young people in Iraq and Amman is deteriorating....[They are] a generation of young people who are confused. And basically **they are starting to deteriorate towards crime and violence.**—Iraqi refugee and founder of an Iraqi women's human rights network

## economic opportunities lacking

My husband and my eldest son tried to work several times. Whenever they get a job, because they do not have a residency permit, they work only for one week and the employer would say **thank you very much, you cannot work anymore** and they wouldn't even pay them. —Iraqi refugee woman

When I first came here, I worked as a maid. After 2-3 years, I started getting tired, so I started to sell things on the streets [perfume and lighters]. Now I just want to pay the rent and eat. Sometimes I get 2 or 3 dinar [US\$3-4] a day. I work from 6am to 7pm everyday. I live with four other women in this [one] room. Everybody thinks of the future. **This is not life here.** —45-year-old Iraqi refugee woman



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