

## Displacement and violence against women in Afghanistan

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Violence against women (VAW) is endemic in Afghanistan: from early and forced marriages to domestic violence, so-called honour killings, rape and dispossession. Although obtaining reliable data on violence against women remains difficult in the Afghan context, the findings of an IDP Protection Study in 2012<sup>1</sup> seem to support the idea that displacement increases the vulnerability of displaced women to VAW, and that amongst the dynamics that link violence against women and displacement, two are particularly acute:

Firstly, the degraded **socio-economic conditions** of households in displacement increase the risks of violence against women. One striking example was the fact that underage internally displaced girls were targeted by outsiders to the IDP community for cheap marriages. The survey showed that 26.9% of IDP households had at least one child who had been forced to marry, and this was particularly true among female-headed households (of which there is a higher proportion in the IDP population). Some IDP households rely on the bride price as a livelihood strategy:

*"We do it out of hunger, for our children. In Ghoryian, it was not needed as often as it is needed here. I gave her away. I gave her away because I needed to. Her husband found us (...) They came because they knew refugees were here and they know our daughters are cheap."* (IDP woman, 35 years old, Herat province)

Uprooting from a familiar and normal environment, overcrowding or simply the pressure on the head of household to bring in an income may create an anxious environment where domestic violence is more likely. In particular, domestic violence may arise from the difficult adjustment process that IDPs have to go through when they move from a more rural location to the city. The negotiation of social roles that often accompanies displacement is not always favourable to women who, upon arrival in the city, may lose the relative protection and freedom of movement they had in their village.

Secondly, women often lose their traditional **support and protection mechanisms** when they relocate to a new and unfamiliar area. When faced with risky

situations, such as forced marriage or domestic violence, women cannot easily access external protection mechanisms, such as the police or the justice system, without facing great risks of being ostracised – or worse – by their own family. 19.3% of IDP women surveyed in the study were widows, compared with 3.6% nationally,<sup>2</sup> which means that in risky situations, such as negotiating a marriage or attempting to break an engagement, IDP women often do not have the support of male relatives, making them more vulnerable to violent outcomes.

These findings call for further investigation into the impact of displacement on violence against women in order both to help inform targeted interventions and to bridge the knowledge gap that surrounds these issues. As Afghanistan's National IDP Policy opens the way for greater protection of IDPs, it should also provide a framework for enhanced protection for IDP women against VAW.

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1. Samuel Hall-NRC-IDMC-JIPS (2012) *Challenges of IDP Protection. Research Study on the protection of internally displaced persons in Afghanistan*. [www.nrc.no/arch\\_img/9665970.pdf](http://www.nrc.no/arch_img/9665970.pdf)  
See also Majidi N and Hennion C (2014) 'Resilience in Displacement? Building the potential of Afghan displaced women', *Journal of Internal Displacement*. <http://samuelhall.org/REPORTS/Building%20the%20resilience%20of%20Afghan%20displaced%20women.pdf>.  
See also *Afghanistan: Women, Peace, and Security – Review of Key Reports (2010-2013)*: literary review of key findings from reports since 2010, especially in light of the current security transition in Afghanistan. <http://tinyurl.com/TLO-women-peace-security-2013>
2. According to the Afghan government's latest National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment. <http://cso.gov.af/en/page/1726>

### Sexual violence: weapon of war, impediment to peace

Forced Migration Review issue 27 (January 2007) explored the challenges and opportunities for combating sexual violence in conflict, post-conflict and development recovery contexts. Available online in English, French, Spanish and Arabic at [www.fmreview.org/sexualviolence](http://www.fmreview.org/sexualviolence)

*"Reducing sexual violence in all war-affected countries will be a true sign of national recovery."* Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, former Executive Director of UNFPA (taken from her Introduction to the FMR issue)

