

HOW DO SYRIAN REFUGEE WOMEN RECONSTRUCT THEIR LIVES IN  
TURKEY?:  
AN ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDES, BELIEFS AND EXPERIENCES OF SYRIAN  
REFUGEE WOMEN ON CHILD EDUCATION AND CHILD LABOR



by  
NURİYE NUR AYAK

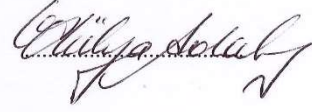
Submitted to the Institute of Social Sciences  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

Sabancı University  
January 2018

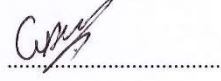
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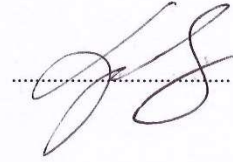
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DATE OF APPROVAL: January 10, 2018



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## ABSTRACT

# HOW DO SYRIAN REFUGEE WOMEN RECONSTRUCT THEIR LIVES IN TURKEY?: AN ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDES, BELIEFS AND EXPERIENCES OF SYRIAN REFUGEE WOMEN ON CHILD EDUCATION AND CHILD LABOR

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Master Thesis January 2018

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Hülya Adak

Keywords: Syrian Refugee women, Child Education, Child Labor, Motherhood, Forced Displacement

The main purpose of this study is to understand Syrian refugee women's experiences in Turkey after forced displacement of war in Syria. It explores Syrian refugee women's beliefs and attitudes on child education and child labor. The study refers data gathered in semi-structured interviews with eleven Syrian refugee women in Okmeydanı neighborhood to portray their experiences on adapting to the neighborhood, child education and child labor. Refugee women's accounts indicate that Syrian refugee women in Turkey struggle in adapting to the new environment due to lack of social capital, language difficulties, economic hardships and social exclusion. Refugee mothers consider their children as the main motivation for holding on the life, but they feel powerless as a mother, and they have safety concerns about their children. They have difficulties in providing quality education for their children because of language barrier, financial difficulties, bullying and discrimination by peers, and child labor. Economic hardships are considered as the main reason for child labor among Syrian refugee mothers.

## ÖZET

# ÇOCUK EĞİTİMİ VE ÇOCUK İŞÇİLİĞİNE OLAN TUTUMLARI VE BAKIŞ AÇILARI ÜZERİNDEN SURİYELİ MÜLTECİ KADINLARIN TÜRKİYEDE HAYATLARINI YENİDEN İNŞA ETME DENEYİMLERİ

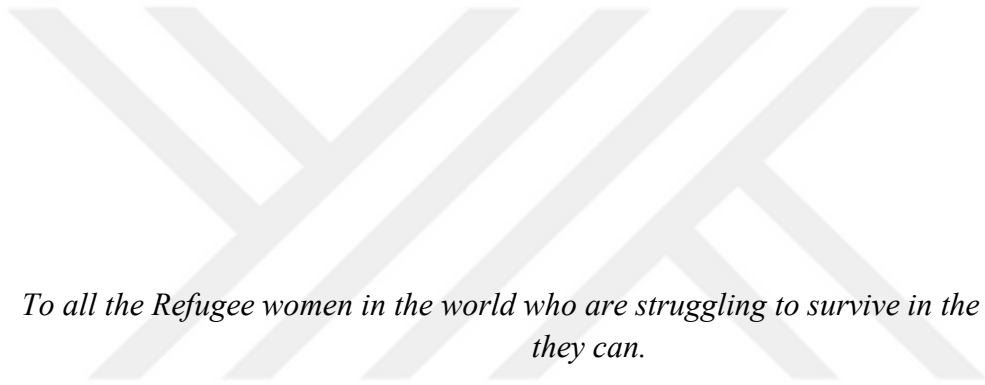
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Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ocak 2018

Tez Danışmanı: Doç.Dr. Hülya Adak

Anahtar kelimeler: Suriyeli mülteci kadınlar, çocuk eğitimi, çocuk işçiliği, annelik, zorla yerinden edilme

Bu çalışmanın temel amacı savaş sonrası zorla yerinden edilen Suriyeli mülteci kadınların Türkiye’de yeniden yaşam kurma deneyimlerini analiz etmektir. Bunun yanı sıra mülteci kadınların çocuk eğitimine ve çocuk işçiliğine olan tutum ve yaklaşımlarını araştırır. Çalışma İstanbul, Okmeydanı semtinde on bir mülteci kadınla yapılan görüşmeler sonucu elde edilen verilerle mülteci kadınların yabancısı oldukları şehirde yaşama tutunmak için neler yaptıklarını ve hangi taktikleri geliştirdiklerini, çocuk eğitimi ve çocuk işçiliği üzerine tutum, yaklaşım ve deneyimlerini analiz eder. Görüşmeler sonucu elde edilen veriler mülteci kadınların Türkiye’de yaşamlarının yeniden inşasında sosyal sermaye eksikliği, dil engeli, ekonomik nedenler ve sosyal dışlanma kaynaklı zorluklar yaşadıklarını gösterir. Bunun yanı sıra mülteci kadınlar çocuklarını yaşama tutunma ve adapte olma konusunda motivasyon kaynağı olarak görürken onların güvenliği konusunda kaygı duyarlar ve annelik görevlerini yerine getiremediklerini düşünerek zaman zaman güçsüz hissederler. Mülteci kadınlar dil engeli, ekonomik güçlükler, arkadaşlar ya da öğretmen tarafından şiddete ve ayrımcılığa maruz kalma nedeniyle çocuklarına kaliteli eğitim imkanı sağlamakta zorluk yaşarlar ya da çocuklar eğitimin dışında kalır ve çocuk işçiliğine yönlendirilir. Suriyeli mülteci kadınlar ekonomik zorlukları çocuk işçiliğinin temel sebebi olarak değerlendirir.



*To all the Refugee women in the world who are struggling to survive in the best way that they can.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Since I started writing my thesis I dreamed of writing the acknowledgement. Finally, it came true.

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor Assoc.Prof. Hülya Adak for the continuous support of my research, for her patience, motivation, and immense knowledge. Her guidance helped me in all the time of research not only academically but also emotionally through the rough road to finish this thesis. Besides my advisor, I would like to thank the rest of my thesis committee: Prof. Kenan Çayır for his insightful comments and encouragement. Having him as a committee member has been an invaluable experience for me. I greatly appreciate his thoughtful comments as well as his enthusiasm for and interest in my project. Asst.Prof. Ayşecan Terzioğlu, who graciously spent time with me and inspired me to think about ethnography and methodology in new ways. Her insightful suggestions opened new doors for me that I did not know existed.

I would like to express the deepest appreciation to the women in Women to Women Solidarity Kitchen (Kadın Kadına Dayanışma Mutfağı). They opened me their homes, they gave me their time and generous hospitality during the course of the fieldwork. They shared their experiences for this study and touched every part of this thesis. I owe a very important debt to Feride who was with me all the time in the fieldwork. She helped me know the women, open their doors to me and win the hearts and minds of my participants. She spent special time and effort during the interviews as an interpreter. Without their persistent help this thesis would not have been possible. Thank you for inviting me into your lives and allowing me to learn from your experiences and making this thesis alive.

I appreciate the feedback offered by Natalie Reyes in every step of writing this thesis. Her feedback and support were invaluable. My master years were precious with her.

Thanks for being my thesis buddy. I have had the support and encouragement of Ayça Oral since I started my master study. Thanks for giving me constructive comments and warm encouragement.

I would like to offer my special thanks to my friends: Özlem, every time I needed she was there; Selin and Melike who have been with me in my ups and downs during this journey and accepted my excuses for not meeting up with them for a while. I feel very blessed to have you in my life and your patience and solidarity have kept me going.

I would like to thank my family: to my parents and my sister who have always been there for me and for supporting me throughout my life. Thanks for providing me unfailing support and continuous encouragement throughout my years of study and through the process of researching and writing this thesis. This accomplishment would not have been possible without you.

Finally, I would like to thank my dear fiancé, Seçkin, for his infinite love, kindness, support, and encouragement, especially throughout this thesis. Thanks for tolerating my grumpy face, for making me laugh and feel better. Thank you for being in my life.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFAD Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency of Turkey

DGMM Directorate General of Migration Management

GCSR Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees

LFIP Law on Foreigners and International Protection


TPR Temporary Protection Regulation

UNHCR United Nations High Commissary for Refugees

UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION



*no one leaves home unless  
home is the mouth of a shark  
you only run for the border  
when you see the whole city running as well*

*[...]*

*you have to understand,  
that no one puts their children in a boat  
unless the water is safer than the land*

*[...]*

*no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear  
saying-  
leave,  
run away from me now  
i don't know what i've become  
but i know that anywhere  
is safer than here.*

*Warsan Shire, from "Home"  
(2015)*

Since anti-Assad demonstrations started in 2011, eventually leading to the war in Syria, there has been a tremendous refugee flow to neighboring countries. Turkey, which shares a 911-kilometer-long border with Syria adopted an open door policy towards Syria,

becoming one of the largest host countries for refugees from Syria by 2015 (Erdoğan, 2014). The current estimated number of Syrians living in Turkey is more than 3 million.<sup>1</sup>

This study uses the term of a refugee contained in the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol, which defines the term “refugee”, the rights of the displaced and legal obligations of States to protect them. According to the international refugee law and international human rights law, refugees are persons who are forced to leave their homes and countries because their lives and freedom are in danger; it is defined as:

“owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.” (GCSR, 1951, art. 1 A (2)).<sup>2</sup>

However, Turkey adopted the Convention with a “geographical-limitation”. Namely, Turkey grants refugee status to those coming from countries that are members of the Council of Europe. Turkey may grant limited protection in the form of one of many temporary statuses (conditional refugee status, humanitarian residence permit, or temporary protection) for those coming from outside of this zone. Non-Europeans can apply for temporary asylum, which lasts until the determination process for refugees is over. After a waiting process, asylum seekers under temporary protection are able to resettle in a third country with the support provided by UNHCR (UNCHR, 2014). However, for the status of Syrian migrants in Turkey, the Turkish Parliament passed a new legislation, the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LRIP), with regard to legal procedures and bureaucracy, in April 2013, which was implemented in April 2014. According to Article (91), “temporary protection may be provided for foreigners who have been forced to leave their country, cannot return to the country that they have left, and have arrived at or crossed the borders of Turkey in a mass influx situation seeking immediate and temporary protection”. That is to say, all the Syrians and stateless people living in Syria would benefit

---

<sup>1</sup> For the number of Syrians living in Turkey, see [http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/temporary-protection\\_915\\_1024\\_4748\\_icerik](http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/temporary-protection_915_1024_4748_icerik)

<sup>2</sup> For convention and protocol relation to the status of refugees see <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.pdf>

from this temporal regime. The regime provided “indefinite residence, protection against forced returns and emergency supplies.” Nonetheless, the geographical limitation is still the part of the new law ((LRIP) which does not provide no long-term solutions for Syrians in Turkey (Szałańska, 2017).

The Syrian migrants in Turkey are under temporary protection and at a waiting process. Temporary protection may come to an end with the decision of the council of Ministers. The absence of time limit and lack of any criteria assessing their status in Turkey are problematic (Uyar and Erdoğan, 2017). Thus, having temporal status has indefinite effects on Syrian refugee women fleeing war and endeavoring to hold onto life in a new context as documented by the report of Powell (2017) and study of Sert (2016). The living conditions of Syrian refugees in Turkey are investigated in another study (Villasana, 2016). Additionally, certain studies acknowledge integration and settlement of Syrian refugees in Turkey and attitudes of host community towards them as well as the economic consequences of migration on the society (İçduygu, 2015; Tümen, 2016). Furthermore, there are studies picturing refugee women’s access to public services especially health services (Döner, Özkara, & Kahveci, 2013; Villasana, 2016; Ekmekçi, 2017) as well as exploring the effects of legal context on female Syrian refugees in Turkey (Kıvılcım, 2016). This study cites experiences of Syrian refugee women in Turkey in terms of rebuilding their lives in a new neighborhood and their access to basic services based on the legal framework of Temporary Protection Regime for Syrian refugee women, and how their overall conditions influence their experiences, beliefs and attitudes on child education, and child labor, which is a negative coping strategy, and an alternative to schooling among refugee families. It aims to reveal the meanings, feelings, and prospects the women have attached to their children’s education. Instead of portraying women as victims, this study attempts to highlight their response to the circumstances they have gone through.

Education is not only a fundamental human right, but also an essential element of the humanitarian response to crises (Sinclair, 2002). According to Unicef (2017), in spite of an increase in the rates of school enrollment among Syrian refugees, more than 40 percent of Syrian refugee children in Turkey are missing out on education, leading to the risk of a “lost generation.” Refugee children face diverse challenges in the new environment such as adapting to new socio-cultural expectations, psychosocial and educational transitions,

which may result in psychosocial maladjustment, resilience, school dropout and exclusion. In the course of resettlement, education plays a crucial role in the refugee children's mental health, psychosocial adjustment and educational achievement (Pastoor, 2017). Education is significant for refugee children, not only for their psychosocial development, but protects children from abuse, specifically child labor and child marriages (Bircan & Sunata, 2015; Kirişçi & Ferris, 2015).

This study offers a glimpse into the Syrian children's educational experiences, constraints and possibilities from the women's perspectives. Language and curriculum, safety concerns, procedural issues, discrimination against children, transportation, financial cost and the need for additional income have been acknowledged to influence the quality of education for Syrian children in Turkey (Culberson & Constant, 2015; Beyazova; 2017). Also, there are studies addressing the lack of education program development mainly because of economic hardships (Bircan & Sunata, 2016; Beyazova, 2017; Uyan & Erdoğan, 2018).

As well as education, this study discloses Syrian women's beliefs, feelings and experiences on child labor because child labor has taken precedence over education among some refugee families. Children comprises one of the most vulnerable groups affected by the conflict in Syria. They strive to overcome the impacts of forced displacement and surviving in another country. Displacement, unemployment, absence of sufficient social protection mechanisms induced poverty among Syrian Refugees, and they have increasingly depended on child labor (Yalçın, 2016). A report titled "On the Brink of a Lost Generation," prepared by Kaya Heyse (2016) from Open Society Foundation also indicates that economic hardships are one of the main reasons for children not enrolling in school as well as the language barriers and psychosocial impacts. Working has been an alternative to schooling because children need to work to meet basic needs such as food and shelter (Culberson & Constant, 2015). Lack of humanitarian aid, deficiency of savings are reasons for children to participate in labor force. As wages for Syrian workers are very low, all of the family members are compelled to work, which results in an increase in child labor (Kutlu, 2016). Also, some employers would rather hire children than adults as children cost less than adults. Thus, as the rate of school dropouts among Syrian Refugee increases, the more refugee children become deprived of education (Caspani, 2015). Syrian children's

educational experiences from the perspective of school administration and teachers are explored in a study by Beyazova and Akbaş (Kaya, 2016). According to the study, language is one of the major drawbacks in the integration of Syrian children at school environment. Also, lack of psychosocial support by counselors, discrimination and bullying against Syrian children aggravate the children's adaptation to the school. Even though overview of the circumstances, and barrier in child education has been investigated (Culberson & Constant, 2015; Semerci & Erdoğan, 2018), parental beliefs of Syrian refugee families around children's roles in the family, child education, and child work have been understudied. There is only one study addressing the parent's perspectives on seeking education for their children (Beyazova, 2017). As documented by Beyazova (2017), overall living conditions of refugee families have adverse impacts on children's education, and language is cited as a barrier for parents as well.

As emphasized by Kaya (2016) a major shortcoming in refugee studies in Turkey is "statisticalization". He exemplifies that most research carried out in Turkey regarding Syrian refugees are "either statisticalizing refugees or concentrating on the host society's perceptions of refugees" (p. 5). The missing in refugee studies is the lack of anthropological research enabling refugees to speak for themselves. Refugee women's perspectives towards education policies in Turkey is significant in terms of providing support for educators and policy-makers. Thus, this study is not intended to represent the entire non-camp Syrian refugee women's situation and children's educational experiences in Turkey through a quantitative sampling. The goal is rather to identify crucial experiences and challenges that exist for people through a qualitative study aspired to present the narratives of Syrian refugee women, which could pave the way for future inquiries. In short, in this research I attempt to highlight refugee women's agency and resilience and discuss these gaps in the literature by focusing on their life experiences. Namely, I will try to explore the following questions:

- 1) How do Syrian refugee women rebuild their lives in Turkey?
  - a) What challenges do they experience in Turkey?
  - b) What are the coping strategies they use in adapting to life in Turkey?
- 2) What are refugee mothers' beliefs and experiences on child education and labor?
  - a) What are their experiences concerning their children's education in Istanbul?



- b) How their overall living conditions influence their beliefs towards child education and child labor?
- c) What are their coping mechanisms for the educational constraints they encounter for their children?



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a map that situates my research questions outlined in the introduction chapter. The first section lays out a summary on the legal framework of Syrians in Turkey as it is crucial to put this study in a sociopolitical and legal context. It is followed by the literature on the experiences of Syrian refugees in urban life. The perception of Syrian migrants and challenges for Syrians after forced displacement are presented. Sequentially, motherhood during migration, refugee parents' experiences of their children's schooling, educational challenges for Syrian children, child labor as a reason or as a consequence of school enrollment, are discussed.

#### **2.1 Legal Framework for Syrians in Turkey**

İçduygu and Şimşek (2016) evaluate Syrian refugee flow in three phases. The first period starts with the flow of Syrians into Turkey in 2011 and continues until 2015. During this time Turkey adopted open-door policy and constructed tents in Hatay, Kilis and Antep. Syrians were called as “misafir” (guest) and the temporariness of the situation was emphasized. Thus, they were not granted legal rights. Syrians were represented as if they were ‘welcome’ by the host states and societies with rooted values such the ‘Turkish

hospitality' (Kirişçi, 2014; Erdoğan, 2015). The second phase is marked with the refugee flow from Turkey to Europe, lost lives at sea and sufferings at European borders. During this period EU and Turkey agreed on Joint action plan to control and reduce the refugee flow. Third phase is marked by the policies and practices such as work permit, laws concerning labor market integration, which overall aim integration of Syrians (İçduygu & Şimşek, 2016).

The need to make a new law and adopt new migration policies rose to the surface with the Syrian refugee crisis and Syrians in Turkey receive a “temporary protection” status according to the Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR), issued in 22 October 2014 under Article 61 to 95 of the LFIP. Temporary protection in this Regulation is defined as:

A protection status granted to foreigners, who were forced to leave their country, and unable to return to the country they left, arrived at or crossed our borders in masses or individually during a period of mass influx, to seek emergency and temporary protection and who international protection request cannot be taken under individual assessment. (Temporary Protection Regime, Art. 3)

Law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) was put into force in April 2013, which was the first comprehensive legal measurement concerning foreigners, refugees and asylum seekers in Turkey. Temporary protection maintains a geographical limitation, and it provides an alternative category for refugees. According to the LFIP no. 6458 there are four statuses: “refugees” “conditional refugees”, “international protection” and “temporary protection”. LFIP no. 6458 classifies newcomers from West as “refugees” (art. 61) and out of West as “conditional refugees” (art. 62) where conditional refugees are granted a right for a temporary settlement in Turkey, and they seek for resettlement in a third country. Another status called “subsidiary protection” (art. 63) refers to “a foreigner or a stateless person, who neither could be qualified as a refugee nor as a conditional refugee”. According to article 62, “refugees from outside of Europe shall be allowed to reside in Turkey temporarily until they are resettled into a third country,” which refers to the fact that non-European refugees are expected to leave in a long run (Öner & Genç, 2015).

With the LFIP Turkey has provided Syrians an open-door policy for all Syrians; no forced returns to Syria; and unlimited duration of stay in Turkey (Kaya, 2016). Also, temporary protection defines the rules and how to have access to basic services such as primary and secondary education, medical assistance and labor market for the people granted international protection. Accommodation shall be arranged by migrants, but for those in urgent situations may be set up in certain accommodation centers by the directorate (Law on Foreigners and International Protection, 2014). The temporal protection falls short in three areas. Firstly, Article 16 of the 2014 regulation alleges that before temporary protection comes to an end, international protection applications will not be proceeded. That is to say, Syrians will not be transferred to the third countries. The second problem related to temporary protection is it does not clarify the maximum time limit of temporarily staying in a host country. Thirdly, gaining access to international refugee status is not made clear. Thus, there is no path demonstrated for Syrians who acquire temporary protection to gain refugee status neither in Turkey nor in other countries (Öner & Genç, 2015).

According to 2013 and Circular on Educational Services for Foreign Nationals (Circular 2014/21) access to education for Syrians are provided for free. 2013 LFIP, 2014 Temporary Protection Beneficiaries are issued unlimited free health which enables Syrians have access to health services. Work permits are issued by the Regulation on Work Permits for Foreigners under Temporary Protection since January 2016 and International Labor Force Law No. 6375 since July 2016. Introduction of work permits in early 2016, enabling access of Syrian children to the school, and creating space for higher education Syrian youth indicate that the policies are not temporary, they aim inclusion and integration of Syrians into society (Kaya, 2016).

Although Syrian refugees are granted certain rights most them are partly implemented because of language barrier, procedural difficulties and difficulties in being informed. Therefore, it is argued that instead of being effective, the temporary protection system increased refugees' vulnerabilities. The majority of refugees who live outside of the camps have faced harsh conditions, especially in finding shelter and being able to afford the rent. A shortage of housing and increase in the rents have left Syrian refugees with no choice but to live in houses with no facilities (lack of water, electricity and heating) or to share apartments with other families. Temporary protection does not provide an explicit

right to work, education and social assistance. Syrians who fled from war are still in limbo, which brings about certain issues like lack of proper education, work in informal ways, exploitation in the labor market and no path to citizenship (Öner & Genç, 2015).

Uncertainties and instabilities arising from socio-political contexts shape the lives of vulnerable groups, and they result in poor conditions of housing, low quality of education and limited access to healthcare. In Turkey, the legal framework for “temporary protection” fails to provide explicitly defined rights for Syrians. On one hand, it has allowed Syrians to have the same social rights available to Turkish citizens. On the other hand, it denies granting them a status that provides the right to have residence or full citizenship. This dilemma contributes to the precarious nature of Syrians and being in a position of precarity brings about irregular access to basic needs such as food, products and social services (Baban, Ilcan, Rygiel; 2017).

## **2.2. Consequences of Forced Displacement for Syrian Refugees**

This part emphasizes urban refugees’ daily lives, challenges and insecurities in adapting to life in Turkey. Forced displacement created a new set of challenges and concerns for the displaced people as well as the receiving communities and continues to challenge refugees socially and economically. The increasing nature of the conflict in Syria has had social and economic effects not only on Syria, but also on host countries. The unexpected continuation of war in Syria brought about mass displacement of threatened Syrian civilians. Like Syria’s other neighbors, Turkey has been hit by the refugee influx (Bircan & Sunata, 2015). There are 3,181,537 officially registered Syrian refugees in Turkey (UNCHR, 2017).

Previous research provides into the living conditions of refugees in Turkey. After Syrians escape their homeland, they become refugees settling in poor neighborhoods of host countries, especially in the border cities. Syrians’ young age and household structure indicate that majority of Syrian refugees have particular needs like schooling and health care as well as protection, shelter and nutrition. Those needs turn into challenges for Syrians trying to adapt to their new environments. The policies of Turkey towards refugees

have a direct impact on overall living conditions. Non-camp Syrians live in very poor conditions in urban areas in Turkey. They are financially constrained and have suffered from having no access to basic services and employment opportunities. Thus, they may be susceptible to human exploitation, trafficking, rape, and crime. Their access to basic services is denied because of the limited capacity of institutions. Additionally, they have limited access to the labor market and economic opportunities (Amnesty International, 2014; Baban et. al., 2016; İçduygu & Şimşek, 2016; Kirişci, 2014; ORSAM, 2015). They suffer from erosion of human capital because of prolonged gaps in education and inactive use of skills and professions. Poverty has the highest rate among the age group between 35-40. Probably, it is due to the fact that this age group consists of married people with young children. The high rate of poverty and low welfare are harmful to refugees, hosting governments and communities and the future of Syria. School-age refugee children encounter challenges in registering to educational institutions. Children are out of school due to psychological stress, lack of resources, financial limitations and crowding. Children who are not able to enroll in schools become vulnerable to child labor (Mazlumder, 2013).

Very few Syrian refugees, only 10 percent to be precise, have settled in camps. The majority of refugees live outside of the camps, especially in urban spaces (Demir & Kahya, 2017). Urban Syrian refugees reconstruct their live in poor neighborhoods where they can work and live informally, live in crowded houses with high rents, which results in high cost of living for both refugees and natives in the host community (Senses, 2016; Culbertson & Constant, 2015; İçduygu, 2016). Challenges for Syrian refugees result from Syrians' socio-economic conditions, their integration into society and social acceptance by the community. Syrians are vulnerable to economic exploitation, and they become victims of black market practices by working in construction markets, collecting recycled papers, selling mussels or working in sweatshops. Refugees encounter difficulties in obtaining a work permit. According to Turkish DGMM there were 7,053 Syrians who had work permit in 2016. In November 2016 11,102 Syrians were granted the right to have work permit. That is to say, a great majority of Syrians do not have work permit because of restrictions, complex procedures, and lack of information about the bureaucracy. Also, as the unemployment rate in Turkey is already high Syrians do not compete equally with their Turkish counterparts in seeking for job due to language barrier and discrimination (Uyar and Erdoğan, 2015).

Especially, unclear procedures for work permit make things harder for refugees. Although the Work Permit of Foreigners Under Temporary Protection was regulated in 2016, Syrian refugees are mostly employed in the informal sector, which makes them work under unhealthy, dangerous and unstable conditions (Kirişçi, 2014; İçduygu, 2016; Man, 2016; World Bank, 2015).

In accessing public services, language is a barrier. It is hard to find a translator at hospitals or at schools. Even though public services are provided free of charge, refugees run into problems such as lack of language support at hospitals and discriminatory acts against refugees. As Turkish homeowners quote higher rent prices to Syrians than to Turks they live under unhealthy conditions. Majority of them cannot afford the rents, so they share the same apartment with other families. Therefore, their situation is mainly left to judgement of local authorities, and this prevents refugees from integrating into society smoothly (Yıldız & Uzgören, 2016). Refugee crisis started as “guests” who were accommodated in camps and provided emergency help in 2011. With temporary protection 90 percent of refugees started living in provinces near border and in urban spaces in the neighborhoods populated with low income. Their integration was superficial. Since January 2016 the temporary regime has enabled refugees to have an unlimited free access to health care, work permit and education through either enrolling in public schools or attending Temporary Education centres. Additionally, they have been able to get their contracts for services (electricity, water, gas, TV, mobile communication, etc) (Turkey’s Refugee Crisis, 2017).

As Syrians lack work authorization, they either work in informal sectors; work without contracts, casual or day laborers, domestic workers or they work under harsh conditions, which result in child labor and illegal activities among refugees. Additionally, urban unregistered refugees are more liable to exploitation, and they do not have access to basic services. Also, increase in rents, housing cost, unemployment and competition resulting from Syrians establishing new businesses create tension between host populations and refugees (İçduygu, 2016). In addition, the fact that local people become more indifferent to the concerns and sufferings of Syrian refugees is acknowledged in certain studies (Kaya, 2016; Aslan, 2015).

“Refugees from Syria remained unsure of what they could expect in terms of support from the Turkish authorities and how long they would be welcome in the country (Amnesty International, 2014). Thus, there are certain push factors leading them to take dangerous journeys to Europe. These push factors have been lacking documentation such as residence and work permit as well as accompanying rights such as opening a bank account, legally renting and paying for utilities. Even though education is free, and Syrian children can enroll in schools, there are inconsistencies in terms of implementing policies. For instance, some schools have rejected Syrian children, and there are health services rejecting Syrians by showing language barrier as an excuse. The lack of consistency in implementing the policies makes refugees situation insecure and unpredictable (Woods, 2016).

### **2.3. Motherhood in a Time of Conflict**

Refugee women go through multiple challenges and transitions due to warfare and during resettlement. Motherhood is an important phase of life which has special meanings for women and their families. Being a mother means experiencing emotional and physical changes resulting in the responsibility for the baby. Also, mothering involves changes in roles, new assumptions and responsibilities which are affected by social and moral discourses of motherhood (Benza & Liamputtong, 2017).

Forced displacement influences every part of human life. The most vulnerable members of the society affected by the conflict and displacement are women and children. In a time of conflict women encounter loss of home, death, separation from family, relatives and friends, loss of role and livelihood and erosion of culture. Because of these challenges which they face during forced displacement women start questioning their roles as a mother, and how they make sense of their role. They try to cope with strong feelings of frustration, guilt, regret and being unable to do good enough job in parenting (Kelly, Nel & Nolte, 2016). As the research by Merry et al. (2017) describes the parenthood experiences of refugees, asylum-seekers and undocumented migrants while parenthood is challenging because it requires emotional, social and physical changes and adaptations of functional roles, it is more difficult for migrant parents because migrant parents come across



difficulties of adaptation to new environment and cultural context, discrimination, change in socioeconomic status, and lack of access to health and social services (Merry, Palaez & Edwards, 2017). The challenges they face during resettlement in a new country are unique to migrant mothers because of differences in cultures and social constraints between their country of origin and their host country, such as language barriers, social isolation, and limited resources (Tsai & Huang, 2011). In adapting to new culture, women are considered as agents of social change in their role as mothers and household managers. Instead of passively absorbing the new culture passively, mothers actively take part in acculturation process. Namely, they interpret the culture, and complex aspects of livings in a new culture (Raghavan et al., 2010).

War has negative impacts on refugee women's motherhood. "War and political conflict disrupts basic parent functions, such as protecting children and enhancing trust, security and human virtue" (Punamaki et al., 1997, p. 718). Refugee women struggle in coping with their past traumas, discrimination, unemployment and poverty which results in a loss of normality. Being labeled as a "refugee" influences their adaptation to the new environment negatively. The war disrupts the image of traditional family and parenting experiences are shaped by these changes such as a lack of parental support, past trauma, and resettlement difficulties. To fit into their new environment parents are forced to make changes in their beliefs and traditions to solve the tensions (Deng & Marlowe, 2015). As it is documented in the literature family support provided in refugee families plays a significant role in overcoming barriers in the new environment, and it has a good impact on physical and psychosocial wellbeing of children (McMichael, Gifford & Correa-Velez, 2010).

Refugee women who strive for reconstructing their lives in a new environment may experience a significant change in their financial resources. Some of them settle in impoverished neighborhoods which brings about parent-child conflict as children try to adapt to the environment where they live in. refugee women who has lost their emotional and physical support provided by their extended families try to cope with the challenges by themselves, and it causes energy loss for mothers (Betancourt et.al., 2015).

Parenting issues are some of the most challenging problems refugee women face. These are challenges in relation to their child's schooling, such as language barriers and differences in cultural expectations (Lewig et.al, 2010).

#### **2.4. Refugee Parents' Experiences of their Children's Schooling**

Zorica Mrsevic (quoted in Matthews 2008) says that the opposite of war is not peace – but creativity. Indeed, Matthews claims that education itself is creative and therapeutically transformative as a settlement aid. She says “Education is a creative endeavour that strikes in a myriad of ways to address conflict and sustain settlement. It provides teachers and students alike with the tools to craft the future, in memory of an unsettled past and unsettling present” (Matthews, 2008: 42).

Refugee children face diverse challenges in the new context such as growing up in an unfamiliar society, adapting to a new sociocultural environment, and psychosocial and educational transitions which may end up psychosocial maladjustment, resilience, school dropout and exclusion (Pastoor, 2017). Refugees are different from other migrants because they are forcibly displaced instead of voluntarily, they have not prepared for living in a new country, and they have faced trauma and significant loss which includes loss of family members, homes, material possessions, loss of dignity, respect, status, human rights, safety and “normality”. The loss and traumatic memories can create isolation, stress and anxiety (Hayward, 2017).

In the course of resettlement, education plays a crucial role in the refugee children's mental health, psychosocial adjustment and academic achievement (Pastoor, 2017). School environment has a healing and calming impact on refugee children thanks to its order, ritual and predictability. Formal education helps refugees form healthy relationships which facilitate re-establishment of daily routine, respect and trust. Besides, through education, refugees are able to acquire critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Thus, they cope with the challenges of adapting to the new environment (Pastoor, 2017). Also, schools ease settlement of refugees, and stabilize their lives. They become safe spaces which facilitate social participation through interactions. Besides, schools create diverse learning

opportunities and deliver literacy. Therefore, young people can increase their educational success, define their post-school options, and make their choices through schooling. Also, schooling correlates with income since it plays a major role in choosing jobs and interacting with the community. Therefore, schools should provide a welcoming environment where refugee children feel a sense of worth, security and belonging. Making new friends can raise intercultural awareness among refugee children. Thus, schools must make sure they use all of their resources to assist the progress of socialization, acculturation, accommodation, integration, involvement and care. The more successful refugee children are, the better they feel. As they have better experiences at school, they start getting over their traumas (Matthews, 2008).

Additionally, education is critically important in peacebuilding. Every armed conflict has different causes and a post-conflict environment is open to different threats and opportunities. Conflicts resulting from ethnicity and belief are driven by intolerance, prejudice, hatred and bigotry. Education plays a crucial role in making changes in beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of people as well as creating senses of identity. Also, education makes societies stronger against violent conflicts. That is to say, education is crucial in refugee's lives in terms of searching for peace and searching for concrete solutions to displacement (Long, 2011). It is important to highlight that refugees lose their trust in post migration context. Schools are one of the best places where they redevelop their trust because they meet those people regularly, and share information, which eases belonging and inclusion. In short, with a supportive environment, strong communities and provision of personal skills schools help refugee children function effectively (Hayward, 2017).

Failure in school or having bad experiences at school can produce lessening self-esteem, feeling hopeless for the future, and an overall obstacle in reconstructing their lives (Matthews, 2008). There are many causes of refugee youth dropping out of school. School dropouts may result from a short stay in a new city, interrupted schooling, different learning environments and cultures, and discrimination against refugee children. Additionally, mental and psychosocial difficulties have a negative impact on students' school performance and educational outcomes. Lack of proficiency in the second language and inadequate knowledge about host culture negatively influence education. When accommodation, care and support are provided, refugee children can handle the adaptation

phase better. As long as emotional and educational support are provided, the number of refugee children enrolling in the education is likely to increase (Pastoor, 2017).

Also, school is a crucial element for refugee families in interacting with the community and learning about the new culture where they resettle. Through schooling refugee families participate in the culture (Tadesse et al., 2009). It can be argued that schooling is a priority for some refugee families. On the other hand, findings show that many of the refugee families face certain challenges in providing educational opportunities for their children (Atwell et al., 2009; Lewig et al., 2010; McBrien, 2011).

According to the study carried out by Atwell et al. (2009) related to the refugee children in Australia, there are factors which have an impact on mothers' perceptions of their children's future, and parents' support in establishing and achieving goals for their children. Although the women value their children's education they struggle in accessing to quality education. One of the participants in the study emphasizes a reason of inability to provide educational opportunities, and she discusses the significance of language proficiency in communicating with the teachers for parents. Language barrier makes her feel powerless in solving an issue related to her children's education, which influences the child's and mother's overall adaptation to education. Additionally, Tadesse et al.' study (2009) focuses on beliefs of parents and teachers on African refugee children's early education in the United States. The study has found that there are differences between teachers' and parents' expectations from African refugee children and the mothers in the study have concerns about teachers in relation to low expectations and racial stereotypes.

McBrien (2011) sought for understanding parental involvement of refugee mothers from Vietnam, Somali and Iran in US schools through Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems (1979) as a theoretical model which discusses the role of social and environmental contexts in the lives of individuals and the challenges that refugee mothers and children encounter in the layers of the system and how these challenges shape parenthood of the mothers. Also, it is argued that challenges that refugee parents encounter may make it especially difficult for them to be involved in education of their children.

In addition, there are different obstacles in access to education for refugees in host countries. What prevents refugees from enrolling in formal education is physical access, financial barriers and school policies of enrollment. Namely, lack of infrastructure such as

lack of space in classes, language barrier, unable to meet educational expenses like school uniforms and learning materials or transportation fees, and lack of documentation such as residence permit, birth certificates or report cards are the barriers in refugee education. Quality of education is affected by social exclusion at school, racism and xenophobia and lack of proficiency at the medium language of education at school. Lack of language support at school increases the dropout rates (Buckland, 2011).

### **2.5. Schooling is in Crisis for Syrian Refugees in Turkey**

According to the international and legal framework, every state is responsible for providing universal, free and compulsory education for all. Namely, non-nationals are expected to have the same access to nationals regardless of their migrant status (Bircan & Sunata, 2015).

As of April 6, 2017, the number of Syrians in Turkey 2,973, 980. For Syrian refugee children, education is provided through public schools or TECs (Temporary Education centers), centers set up and operated by Syrians in camps and urban areas. There are 187,910 Syrian students enrolled in Turkish public schools and 292,765 children registered in TECs around Turkey. TECs following revised Syrian curriculum in Arabic are hard to be monitored and evaluated based on content and quality criteria. They also create challenges to comprehensive education system enabling plurality, diversity and equal opportunity (Aras & Yasun, 2016).

The initial policies of Ministry of Education focused on the temporariness of Syrians in Turkey. Because they were considered as “guest” they lacked a comprehensive right to education by the beginning of the crisis; educational policies were generally geared towards camps (Coşkun & Emin, 2016, p.14). As mentioned by the minister of education, Ömer Dinçer Syrian refugee children were guests who would go back to their country soon. Temporal guest status ended up applying short term education policies (Özer, et al., 2016).

A study of Beyazova (2017) provides insight into Syrian parents’ perspectives on their children’s education. The study claims that accessing to education has an impact on not only Syrian children but also family wellbeing. For Syrian parents education is related

to “power”, “dignity”, “independence”, “future”, “self-fulfillment” and “hope” for their children. Syrian mothers highlight that they have lost their future, but children might still have a chance for a better life through education.

As documented by Ozer and Komşuoğlu (2017) in public schools, Syrian children encounter challenges due to lack of proficiency in the Turkish language as well as adaptation problems, which are more visible in secondary school. Thus, the enrollment rate decreases as children get older. The school enrollment rate is 26 percent in primary school whereas it is 18 percent in middle school and 14 percent in high school (Ozer & Komşuoğlu, 2017). Syrian children living in urban areas can register to schools with their residence permit. If they do not have residence permits, they can attend school as “guests”, “misafir”. Education is not limited to formal schooling; certain NGOs and volunteers promote informal educational activities among refugees. Even though it fits into the legal framework, there are procedural problems in practice. Boys are more disadvantaged since they participate in the labor force to contribute to family income whereas girls are in risk of early marriage (Bircan & Sunata, 2015). Also, there are certain challenges in access to education for Syrian refugees. Child labor is a very common issue among high school students who are expected to contribute to the family budget instead of going to school. Syrians who have completed high school in Syria or in other countries are capable of taking the high school proficiency exam and equivalency examination for international students so that they can get high school diploma (Uyar and Erdoğan, 2017). However, they have to support their families rather than go to school. Also, there is no sanction for Syrian families who do not send their children to the school. Furthermore, the parents may be unaware of educational opportunities offered by the Ministry of Education. School fees are another reason why families do not send their children to the school. Even though schools are free of charge, some schools may ask for donations, which could put pressure on refugees to some extent. When it comes to assessing quality of educational opportunities, refugees missed years of education, which created a huge gap between children and their peers in the same grade level. Also, children experience social barriers. For instance, Turkish teachers do not pay enough attention to Syrian children as they are considered as “guests” in classes although they are in need of greater assistance due to language deficiency. There are some discriminatory barriers among Turkish teachers and students, who isolate refugee children

from school, and make integration process harder. Furthermore, Turkish teachers are not certified in teaching non-native speakers. Accreditation issues related to diploma and contextual differences turn into barriers in the education of refugee children in Turkey (Aras & Yasun, 2016).

Educational needs and obstacles for refugee children are numerous and complicated. There are certain associations which focus on analysing and meeting Syrian refugees' needs in Turkey. To overcome educational challenges for Syrian children Yuva Association designed a "Flying Library" and "Ideas Box" which facilitate interaction among refugee children and disadvantaged kids through resources such as books, laptops, tablets, cinema, theatre, video games provided for the children with the support of the trainers (Yuva, 2018).

Mavi Kalem Association conducted a project in Balat neighborhood of Istanbul with the aim of identifying refugee children who were not able to go to school. It was planned to provide psychosocial support and language support for the refugee children to learn Turkish and to overcome their traumas. The goal was to make children be ready for the school (Istanbul'daki Suriyeli mülteciler, (n.d)).

In short, even though there are not legal barriers for education of Syrian refugee children in Turkey, there are procedural obstacles in accessing education and in light of these factors, parents' involvement with their child's school and connections within the school environment are low.

## **2.6. Child Labor among Syrian Refugee Children**

Illegality symbolizes an obstacle in accessing to education, public services, justice and social protection. Being excluded from basic social services, such as education, and health care services increases the risk of child labor among migrant children. One of the concerns for Syrian children is child labor which makes children susceptible to abuse and developmental and health related risks and being excluded from formal education (Save the Children, 2015; World Bank, 2015).

Because of discrimination and racism against refugee children, they are devoid of equal protection, education and opportunity. Thus, they get involved in diverse markets, institutions and practises. As discussed by O'Connell Davidson (2011) migrant children can suffer, in particular, suffer from immigration policy and its enforcement in the contemporary world. Migrant children are exploited in domestic work, agriculture, work in catering, hospitality sector, mine and factory. Also, they are forced into begging, marriage and prostitution. They are vulnerable to illegal adoption and organ trading (O'Connell Davidson, 2011).

As highlighted in a study on the risk factors associated with child maltreatment in Latino immigrant families in US, when families immigrate to a new country, they encounter new challenges such as language barriers, unfamiliar traditions and customs. Being unable to find a job, pay the bills and get benefit from school and medical system aggravate migrants' lives. Furthermore, undocumented migrants strive in adapting to their new life in the post-migration context with the fear of being deported. These migrants are weak to many forms of exploitation. Thus, many of the risk factors experienced by immigrant families as a result of immigration and acculturation may lead to increased risk of child maltreatment (Dettlaff et.al, 2009).

However, the humanitarian assistance provided is insufficient to cover the needs of all the refugees. This leaves the Syrian population in unbearable living conditions. In response, coping mechanisms have emerged. Child labor is a negative coping mechanism of refugees in a new context, and it has been on the rise in Turkey since the Syrian crisis. Child labor already existed in Turkey, and it has become worse as Syrians escaped from war and settled in Turkey. Refugee children can be found in small shops, bakeries, factories and they can be engaged in domestic labor. Besides, they work in garbage collection, construction, clothes shops, and coffee shops on an illegal basis. In some families, children are the breadwinners of families, and they work due to inadequate family income. They work under harsh conditions with very low wages (Because We Struggle to Survive Child Labor Among Refugees of the Syrian Conflict, 2016).

Children work in several types of workplaces such as construction areas, agriculture, markets and streets. Being with their families in post conflict settings have not prevented child labor. Child labor can be seen in camps or outside the camps in places



where refugees live. Refugee children in Turkey have been observed on streets selling tissues and cleaning car windows, as well as they work in car mechanics, industry, restaurants and bakeries. Besides, some of the refugee children work at tailor's shops, shoe-shining, cleaning, helping electricians, painters and plumbers. They also collect scrap iron or plastic items from rubbish bins (ICMPD, 2015). Additionally, Syrian refugees make up a particularly vulnerable section of the workforce in the textile industry in Turkey. Because they are unregulated, they are paid less than the locals and their payments are mostly paid late. They work under very poor conditions and they claim that they have to do it to survive in Turkey, and what they earn does not meet their needs. Thousands of children work in different industries (Johannisson, 2016). There are many reasons why child labor is prevalent in non-conflict settings among refugees. Child labor results from economic reasons such as adults' lack of access to legal work, a lack of access to education because of legal problems related to registration or long distance to the schools, health issues, including illnesses of family members, and restricted access to the health system. Additionally, lack of adequate humanitarian aid or taking responsibility for single-headed households encourages boys and girls to work in different fields for long hours (ICMPD, 2015).

As laws in Turkey do not regulate refugees' work permits, Syrian refugees are vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. They are exploited in several industries in order to meet their basic needs (The least bad option, 2017). Restrictions on Syrian adults working (e.g. getting official work permits, certain restrictions on the movement of Syrian adults within country, discriminatory acts against Syrian adults at workplaces) are one of the reasons why child labor is prevalent among refugees as parents consider sending their children to work to cope with these issues (ICMPD, 2015).

Most of the children displaced due to the Syrian crisis have to work for survival. They take part in the labor force so that they can contribute to their families. Some of the children are the sole or joint breadwinners of the family. This situation creates the fear of a lost generation as it prevents children from going to school, growth and development (UNICEF, 2015). Namely, uneducated children will have profound influence on Syrian society as well as host countries.

According to the reports by Save the Children and UNICEF, "As families become increasingly desperate, children begin working primarily for their survival. Whether in Syria or neighboring countries, children are becoming main economic players." Additionally, because they work under very poor conditions, their health and well-being are at risk. Instead of going to school, children go to work, and they are at the risk of being a "lost generation" (Urgent Action, 2015).

The study of Uyan and Erdoğan (2017) attempts to understand the factors that influence being out of school for children from Syria living in Turkey, and the study's findings indicate that the most frequently expressed reason for working children is the lack of another breadwinner in the household. The second reason of the child labor is the children who are volunteer to work to contribute to the family income (33%). Nonetheless, families may interpret the second reason as the justification of this undesired situation. The findings show that mothers' educational backgrounds have an impact on their children's education. The women who have social and cultural capital are aware of their rights, and this influences their overall beliefs towards their children's education.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter outlines and the research design and methods which were employed for this study and gives an account of data collection and analysis. This is a qualitative study, based on a constructivist ontology. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews and analyzed using a constructivist approach. Finally, ethical issues are given proper consideration.

#### **3.2 Why did I choose a topic?**

The main reason behind choosing Syrian refugees as a thesis topic is the fact that I have been working as a secondary school teacher at a school in a neighborhood populated with Syrian refugees. Some of my students are refugee children. The neighborhoods with refugee influx have disclosed certain tensions, social relations, changes in daily lives as

well as poverty and isolation stories resulting from migration, I could not be indifferent to their lives as a social studies researcher.

As participants I preferred to work with women because I observed that gender roles among refugees have changed since they were displaced. Before they immigrated they were not supposed to work. Contrary to this, they were at home raising children. However, after they migrated to Turkey and they run out of their savings they started to work, and some of them became breadwinner of the family. Additionally, I assume that as a mother they spend more time with their children daily.

### **3.3 Research Paradigm**

The study uses constructivist paradigm. According to constructivism there is no single truth, namely; meaning is not discovered. Each individual construct his/her own reality, and through multiple interpretations meaning is constructed (Crotty, 1998). In my study, forced displacement, adaptation to new life, challenges and experiences have different meanings for the mothers.

As stated by Crowell (2003) the constructivist researcher relies on the participants' perspectives towards situation which is studied as well as identifying their influence resulting from their background and experiences (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). In my study women create their own tentative stories and meanings. Their backgrounds, experiences, challenges and hopes for children's future are different, and this has an impact on their interpretations of their personal accounts and experiences.

According to Guba & Lincoln (1989) "asserting instead that realities are social constructions of the mind, and that there exist as many such constructions as there are individuals (although clearly many constructions will be shared)" (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006). In parallel with my research paradigm, in my study I attempted to respect heterogeneity of the women's experiences instead of generalizing the findings.

### 3.4 Methods

My study aims at analysing how Syrian refugee women rebuilt their lives in a neighborhood of Istanbul, Okmeydanı after they were displaced due to war by focusing on their attitudes towards child labor and child education. The study also looked at women's life experiences before their migration as previous life experiences and attitudes play a crucial role in shaping the person and their experiences in post-migration context. It analysis how refugee women's attitudes and perceptions changed after they were displaced and how their post migration experiences affected these changes.

In the study, qualitative research methods, which are effective in gaining an insight towards changing tempos and rhythms of movement and connection in migration context, were used. They are useful for analysing what implications of migration for people and places are. Migration is rich in meaning for individuals, families, social groups, communities and nation, and ethnographic methods help researchers reveal the meaning in this sociocultural context by looking at the lived experiences of people (McHugh, 2000). Interview methods strive for documenting and inquiring an individual's or a group's perspectives, attitudes, beliefs, opinions and values about their personal experiences and social world as well as factual information. Besides, interview methods pave the way for going into unexpected areas, and getting insights for further inquiry (Saldana, 2014) Namely, the goal of the interview's is to enclose people's "how's" in their lives. Without enforcing any prior categorization semi-structured interviews endeavor for comprehending and analysing complex behaviors of members in a society (Fontana & Prokos, 2007). Hunt (1989) explains that the narrative of the interview "is partly biographical reflecting something about the researcher's personality as well as those of the subjects".

For this research semi-structured interviewing method was used. Using semi-structured interview method is crucial because interviewers become in the role of respondents instead of initiator of the information. Semi-structured interviews compose of open-ended questions which are asked in a mildly formal setting. Because they are open-ended questions the respondents shape the interview and which direction it will go (Fife,

2005). According to Benney and Hughes (1970), the interview is the “favored digging tool” of social researchers. In-depth interviews are flexible, dynamic, non-directive, and unstructured. They are used as a tool to comprehend informants’ perspectives on their lives, experiences and situations. Besides, they help understand the lived experiences and the meaning that they make of that experience. Through narrating their stories people make sense of themselves and their world. It is important to analyze how people talk about their experiences, what they may be doing with the words. The way they talk is crucial for understanding what they really mean because as a limitation of study we cannot assume what they say is what they really believe. Thus, setting where informants share their experiences must be free and positive enough in case they may feel bothered by talking. Snowballing is building a pool of informants metaphorically. As we get to know our participants enough the participants introduce us to others. It saves time on the other hand it limits the diversity among the participants. Meanings are constructed and the information and attitudes existing in people’s heads can be elicited through asking the right questions.

As a research tool semi-structured interviews were open ended and meant to last 30 minutes. Some of them lasted less than 30 mins as the participants gave short answers. It was a research guide for the researcher, but additional questions were asked during the interview. During interviews direct questions related to adaptation to life in Turkey were not asked. Instead, indirect questions about how and why they came to Turkey, how their lives were before migration, and how they reconstructed their lives in Turkey, which strategies they used in coping certain challenges, access to public services such as health and education were asked. I had to ask help from a translator who was half Kurdish half Arab. She was from Mardin. She worked at kitchen with the women, and she was very close friends with refugee women.

Whereas qualitative methods can get crucial data and analysis, they are not aimed at being generalizable and it is worth considering briefly the problems raised by the lack of representative and thus generalizable data (Jacobsen, 2016).

### **3.5 Study Setting**

This study was carried out in Okmeydanı where many internally displaced migrants and refugees live together. It is very central in terms of having access to formal and informal jobs. Housing is much more affordable compared to other central neighborhoods. It is populated with migrants from Anatolia and refugees. There are innumerable textile mills where especially migrants work without state social insurance without a minimum wage. On the walls of streets of Okmeydanı there are many slogans of organizations from the leftist groups.

### **3.6 Sample Selection**

Participants were recruited by a combination of convenience and purposive sampling. Through convenience sampling I limited my selection to women who were currently living in Okmeydanı because I had access to public organization in the neighborhood that work with the refugees. There is a “Women to Women Solidarity Kitchen” where refugee women produce jams and pickles and sell them. All the women in the kitchen know each other, so I could get in touch with them and build trust relationship faster. I tried to recruit mothers whose children are at school age. They either go to school or they work. Also, these mothers with whom I spoke had lived in the city for at least a year because they need to have time to resettle and reflect on their experiences.

I contacted my participants through the "Refugees", We Are, "Neighbors" Solidarity Network (Mülteciyim Hemşerim) which is formed of several subgroups, one of which is “Women with Women Refugee Kitchen” (Kadın Kadına Dayanışma Mutfağı). “Women with Women Refugee Kitchen” is formed of women which are active under Okmeydanı Social Assistance and Solidarity Association (Okmeydanı Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Derneği). In the kitchen, 15 Syrian women work to produce jams and pickles with their neighbors in order to contribute to their income. A high percentage of the refugee mothers are active beneficiaries of the association. A coordinator from the association shared information about my study with refugee mothers, explained the reasons to be interviewed, and asked for their permission to be contacted. A woman from kitchen speaks Arabic, Kurdish and Turkish, and she helped me visit the women and communicate with them.

Feride who helped me carry out the interviews in the role of interpreter. Finding an initial contact was helpful as refugee women were not open to talk by a stranger. As claimed by (Ruane, 2015) this sampling is effective when the participants are not open to talk to somebody they do not well. The initial contact helps the researcher find possible participants through her network and referrals.

### 3.7 Participants

The study comprises of 11 refugee women. One of the participants is Kurd while the others are Arab. The age group of participants is 25-55. The women are not employed, all of them are housewives. They only go to “Kadın Kadına Dayanışma Mutfağı” (Women to Women Solidarity Kitchen) to contribute to the family income. Based on their accounts, culturally they are not allowed to work. They work at the kitchen or make ornaments at home so that they can make money. Their husbands work in the informal sector (mainly textile sweatshops, some in restaurants, some as mechanics) with no social security or health insurance.

Only one mother is high school graduate. One mother never went to school. One of the mothers went to first grade for a couple of months. Other women left school after they went to school by 6th grade, 9th grade or 10th grade. The household size range is between 5 and 10. Most families live in nuclear households only one women live in extended family with her mother and sister in laws.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For the demographic information about participants see Appendix B.



### 3.8 Data Collection

Introduction meetings were organized in July and August 2017. The researcher contacted potential participants and asked them to participate in the research after explaining the nature and the scope of the study. After the participants expressed that they were willing to take part in the study time and place of the interviews were arranged. The interviews were carried out between September and November 2017. The interviews took place in the houses of participants with the help of the interpreter, Feride. The interviews lasted 20-30 mins. Before having started the interview, the researcher wrote notes about her observations. Observation notes helped the researcher gather data and analyse them. Five of the participants allowed using recorder whereas 6 of them did not. The interviews did not take place in a very silent environment as mothers had their children around. In some of the interviews other participants wanted to come by, and I allowed them to be at home as long as the interviewee was not bothered. Women were not bothered by another women's existence. Contrary to this, they felt more comfortable and keen to talk. Being alone may have brought about feeling pressure and a sense of insecurity. With the help of Feride I built trust relationship with my participants. Because refugee women trust Feride, it was easier to open their doors to me. Feride who has been living in Okmeydanı for a long time has become women's first call when they are in need of help. Because she can speak Arabic, they have become friends. Women call Feride whenever they need somebody to translate at certain places such as hospital, school, market etc. having a good relationship with Feride helped me build friendships with refugee mothers.

During interviews Feride translated the questions and their answers. In the conduction of the interview, respondents were free to express their views even in topics which were not included in the questions. The conversations were interrupted at times by the children, but it did not create an obstacle in the flow of the interview.

### **3.9 Data Analysis**

Data analysis is crucial in terms of interpreting our experience and what we have learnt from reading. By means of thematic analysis the interviews were analyzed. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) “thematic analysis a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data, and it minimally organizes and describes the data set in (rich) detail.”

As the first step of the analyze, the interviews were transcribed. One of the interviews was carried out in Kurdish, the other interviews were done in Arabic. Thus, it was required to do translation. The translation was done during the interview by the interpreter. Then, the interviews were transcribed in Turkish. As they were in Turkish, it was required to translate them into English. The attempt was to stay as close as possible to the participants’ choice of words.

Through transcription, the researcher got familiar with the data (Riessman, 1993). To be able to identify the common themes across a set of data, it was important to familiarize and immerse in data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The transcribed interviews were read through multiple times with the aim of identifying codes. Thus, initial codes which were sorted into different themes related and unrelated to the research questions were produced. Then, quotes regarding to the themes generated from interview questions and observations were selected.

### **3.10 Ethical Considerations.**

Data collection was approved by Sabancı University Ethics after revision of study protocol and guide. The researcher thoroughly read the consent form to the participants explaining the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. We maintained confidentiality at all times and did not collect names or any identifying information. The participants were also informed that their interviews would be anonymized. The names and any details that may have identified the participants have been omitted or changed to

protect their identities. Except from the above, participants were not harmed or abused, both physically and psychologically, during the conduction of the research



## CHAPTER 4

### VOICES OF MIGRATION

In the previous chapter, I discussed the methodological concepts chosen for the research and explained in detail how the research was conducted. In this chapter, I shall be looking at the results obtained from the interviews, the process of data analysis, interpretation and the discussion of the interviews conducted at the research setting in Okmeydanı.

#### **4.1 Narrating Experiences of Forced Displacement of Syrian Women**

Leila: I am Leila, I am Syrian from Halep (Aleppo). I came here due to war in Syria. I came here for my daughters. I fled so that nobody would take my daughters from me, nobody would punish them. We just wanted to survive.

Rana: War was hard. We lost our neighbors in the war with bombings. My children are afraid of going out, even now.

The war in the area and increased feeling of unsafety in the region caused Syrian families to leave their homeland and came Turkey. While a quarter of the Syrian refugees, having fled from war, live in camps; the majority of Syrian refugees have sought ways of resettling in cities of Turkey. According to the report of European commission (2017), there are out of

the more than three million Syrian refugees in Turkey and, 246 720 of them are registered and hosted in 23 camps run by the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority of Turkey (AFAD). In the camps refugees have access to shelter, health, education, food and social activities. However, 90 % of refugees live outside the camps under harsh conditions with limited access to basic facilities due to registration problems and language barriers. (The EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey - European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations - European Commission, 2017)

Refugees with enough savings are able to find a decent apartment whereas the majority of them are confined in shanty houses in urban slums (Sullivan, 2013). As Tumen (2016) argues Syrian refugees who are employed in informal labor market search rental units in low-quality neighborhoods where they have access to various informal jobs. According to De Groot (2010), refugees in neighboring countries have tendency to less-productive works. As it is consistent with findings highlighted in these studies, the majority of women stated that they preferred living in big cities instead of camps because they had social networks in the cities, and through these networks they could find jobs and accommodation. Additionally, they emphasized the fact that they felt safer when they lived as a family. Also, refugee women preferred coming to Turkey because they thought Turkey was the nearest option. One of the participant pointed out the fact that Turkey opened its doors to Syrians unlike other Muslim countries and she was grateful to Turkey: “Turkey was a Muslim country that opened its doors to us. Not Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Egypt, only Turkey did. This help was priceless. We lived very close to the Syria Turkey border. I was easier to come to Turkey”.

Registering and obtaining identity cards eased adapting to life since refugee women could benefit from public services, especially hospitals, for free. However, the participants stated they encountered challenges in registering and obtaining their identity cards as Sayyida claimed that the procedures took such a long time that even they were about to give up. There are refugees who are still not registered like Gazwa as her house has not been officially unauthorized. Her family does not have a contract with the landowner. Thus, they have not been able to apply at general registrar office. In parallel with the report of Powell (2017) issuance of Kimlik cards is restricted, and the refugees face bureaucratic challenges. Babies who are born in families having kimlik cards guarantee it. However,

recently arrived Syrian refugees may be turned down and they are not certainly granted for their own cards.

According to the women's accounts the participants who have limited literacy skills, proficiency in Turkish and beliefs in traditional gender roles experience migration differently than men. They face obstacles in socializing with others in a new context and making friends with locals due to lack of language, and they become marginalized. Also, the women face environmental, social, and physical dangers pre, during and after migration. Because of the loss of extended family and community support resulting from displacement and community disruption, refugee women are supposed to handle these difficulties by themselves. According to the study of Gasseer (2004) presenting issues confronting women, children, and health care workers for care of women affected by war and disasters the women face difficult challenges during times of conflict and disaster. Also, refugee women who have new, unfamiliar roles such as female-headed households may be obliged to offer sex in exchange for food, shelter, or protection when they are not provided by any governmental agency or voluntary organization. As the study highlights due to social instability, communicable diseases, including HIV/AIDS, can rapidly spread in complex humanitarian emergency settings where sexual violence and exploitation of women are on increase. Therefore, refugee women suffer from mental health problems as they face physical or mental trauma in humanitarian emergencies. (Gasseer, Dresden, Keeney, Warren, 2014). Paralleling with this study the women stated that they felt depressed, unhappy and helpless when they first arrived in Turkey. Without any support whom they knew it was much harder to overcome the feelings that war, and migration brought about.

This chapter looks more closely into women's narratives on forced displacement, and it allows us to see the similarities and differences in the lived experiences of migration and adaptation to life as a refugee. Also, it highlights the struggles women have experienced since they came to Turkey, and their coping strategies in reconstructing their lives during resettlement.

#### **4.1.1 Challenges for refugees**

The challenges of Syrian refugee women include economic hardships, social isolation and language barrier. Economic hardships result from unemployment or working illegally for low wages in the labor market. Economic hardships result in poor living conditions for Syrian refugee families with limited access to essential items. Social isolation has two dimensions: Syrian refugee women have left their friends and family behind. Namely, they have lost their social capital. Therefore, they long for being with their friends, family and neighbors whom they have left behind. Also, as they cannot make new friends in new neighborhood, so they suffer from loneliness. Additionally, the lack of competency in Turkish turns into a barrier for refugee women in accessing to basic services such as health, education and transportation as well as navigating in the city and establishing relationships with locals since language facilitates interactions with people.

#### **4.1.2 Economic Hardships**

All the participants mentioned that they suffered from economic hardships, and they were barely coping. Refugees are facing a desperate situation as they lack humanitarian aid, work opportunities and they run out of their savings and are unable to meet basic needs. Because living conditions are becoming more difficult for refugees, they are more vulnerable to exploitation and problems associated with protection. Therefore, as a solution to economic hardships that refugee women encounter; they look for financial assistance, they cut out their food, borrow money or send their children to work.

##### **4.1.2.1 Lack of humanitarian aid**

Rana: “Our needs are increasing but help is decreasing day by day”.

According to the report of European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations EU provided humanitarian funding (for refugees €1.4 billion) as well as the €3 billion Facility funded by the EU budget and other member states to deliver efficient and complementary support to Syrian and other refugees and host communities in close

cooperation with Turkish authorities in 2016-2017. Also, the flagship humanitarian programme was launched by the EU under the Facility is the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) which is a debit card based social assistance scheme aiming at providing the essential needs of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees. Electronic debit cards in collaboration with the Turkish Red Crescent and Turkish government institutions are distributed to the members of refugee families. Through the debit cards payments are made directly, and refugee families can benefit from the financial assistance. (The EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey - European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations - European Commission, 2017). Even though the report alleges that there is assistance for refugee families, most of the refugees living in urban areas are lack of humanitarian aid packages which would rehabilitate the economic hardships. According to the accounts of refugee women, only two of them received financial assistance from Red Crescent and school whereas others did not get any financial help. Even though women did not work outside of the home, they sought for identifying and applying to various government agencies or voluntary associations to provide financial assistance. Based on their statements, the financial help was not regular, and it was mostly random. Additionally, they were offered help in the form of clothing, furniture and food by the neighbors and voluntary organizations in the neighborhood. As Fahima mentioned, she received help from school for a moment as well as the help provided by Okmeydanı Assistance and Solidarity Association. One of the participants received help from municipality and Red Cross. Unfortunately, some of the attempts of women did not result in finding financial assistance as Mubina told that

“I applied for financial assistance to district governorship. They gave me a debit card. I went to ATM but there was no money in it. I took it six months ago, I still go and check at times if they have loaded any money in it but there is not. If we received some help, our lives would be better of course. Without any support it is really hard”.

Problems associated with identity numbers or residence permit can impede refugees benefiting from financial assistance offered by the organizations as Ofa told that she did not get any assistance from any government agencies because of a problem resulting from her husband’s identity number in his identity card, kimlik. Also, Gazwa emphasized that residence permit was necessary to apply for financial help:



“I applied to agencies for financial assistance, but I could not receive any help. My next-door neighbor’s and my residence seem same as if we were living in the same house. Our house was divided into two. Our neighbors are Syrian too. As both of us applied for the same agencies, I could not receive any. I attempted to solve the problem resulting from the same address, but without interpreter, I could not figure it out”.

As well as difficulties in accessing to financial assistance offered to refugee, some of the refugee women were not aware of where they could apply to receive help. Thus, they could not get benefit from humanitarian aid like Humeyra stated “If I knew where I could get financial assistance, I would go and ask but I don’t know, I cannot ask help from anybody”.

As a result, even though there are humanitarian aid packages funded by national and international partners, host governments in the region and help provided by non-governmental organizations are low. The existent funding is not adequate for meeting the needs of refugees in host countries, and it is necessary to take certain steps to find additional funding (Lack of Funding Putting Help for Syrian Refugees and Hosts at Risk, as Brussels Syria Conference Set to Open, 2017). In paralleling with the news, the financial assistance provided by government agencies or voluntary organizations are irregular and insufficient for meeting the expenses of refugee families. Additionally, participants of the study encounter inefficient bureaucracy. Namely, they cannot benefit from the humanitarian aid because they either have registration problems resulting from identity cards or residence permit or they are not acknowledged where they can apply to receive help. Language is a barrier in searching for financial aid. Therefore, refugees continue suffering from economic hardships.

#### **4.1.2.2 Unable to meet essential needs**

Faiza: “Life is expensive here. What my husband and my children earn do not meet the expenses. Rent, bills, food, transportation, everything.”

Economic hardships put refugees in a situation where they cannot meet their essential needs such as shelter and food. Refugee women struggle in paying rents and bills as they have exhausted their savings. What the breadwinners of the family earn do not meet

the expenses. Compared to pre-war Syria, refugee women argue that life is more expensive in Turkey. They face challenges in affording basic items such as rent, bills, and transportation. As it is highlighted in the news "People are living in shopping centers, empty garages or makeshift tents on derelict land. They are struggling to survive on little or nothing, and many are falling through the cracks. People who left Syria with nothing and are striving for reconstructing a new life for themselves in a new environment are starting from scratch, for them everything is expensive; from accommodation to bills. Therefore, to be able to survive, refugees are getting into increasing debt said Hugh Fenton, Danish Refugee Council Regional Director in North Africa and the Middle East. (Syrian Refugee Crisis Stretching Aid Effort to Its Limits, Say Aid Agencies, 2013). Refugee women expressed that when they were in Syria they did not have any financial problems. Their husbands' salaries were enough to sustain. However, after migration, their income was not enough to have an access even essential needs.

Humeyra: Look, this is television. It is electricity, water, gas. When we don't pay, they cut it. Turkey is a very expensive country. Electric, water, gas, internet everything is expensive. As everything is expensive, I would like to get financial help. Only two of my children work, two of them don't. I also had to send my co-wife (kuma). My daughter goes to school, we have to pay her school bus per month. It is really hard.

The majority of women compared the lives they were living in Turkey to their previous lives in Syria in terms of providing basic needs such as food and shelter and accessing to basic public services. They stated that they owned houses in Syria instead of renting like Rana emphasized "We used to live very, very good life. We had our own house, a very big house with a garden, our car, everything was great, my husband used to earn our living, and suddenly we are a refugee". While they expressed how grateful they were for having survived as Turkey opened its doors, they emphasized the dramatic change in their lifestyles, especially financially, as they thought that Syria was much cheaper than Turkey in terms of accessing basic items such as electricity, water and gas. Here they lack many forms of essential supplies and services.

#### 4.1.2.3 Unemployment and informal labor force

“We are not allowed to work. How can we survive?”.

As claimed by UNDP (2009), in resettlement countries, forced migrants may be expelled from labor systems and basic services, so they may be prone to exploitation economically and personally (Davidson & Carr, 2010). Also, they are disadvantaged in terms of integrating into labor market. Thus, it is crucial to remove the restrictions on refugees and asylum seekers in regard to work permit which facilitates better working conditions and livelihoods for vulnerable migrants as discussed by Davidson & Carr (2010) in a study highlighting the impact of poverty and social exclusion that forced migrants have experienced on their experiences of resettlement, poor mental health and overall wellbeing.

Refugees cannot find jobs, or they cannot integrate into formal labor force, thus they earn less than minimum wage without social benefits. A decree enabling Syrian refugees to have a work permit was issued by the government in January 2016. However, Syrians cannot apply to work permit individually, and the process should be carried out by the employers on behalf of the workers. Also, at a workplace where a work permit is requested, the number of working refugees cannot be more than 10% of the Turkish workers. Actually, the quota is expected to encourage employment among Syrian refugees but as it involves paying Syrian workers less than the minimum annual salary for Turks motivates employers to hire informal labor force. Additionally, refugees' lack of proficiency in Turkish aggravates the situation. Thus, refugees face the risk of being unemployed or they are coerced to work without work permit for low wages because they are not considered as the legitimate candidates for most of the open job vacancies (Esen & Binatlı, 2017). According to Çetin (2016) most Syrian refugees work at industry and textile mills as well as finding seasonal jobs without insurance and certain benefits. Thus, they are vulnerable to being abused by their employees. Late and irregular payments, precarity of jobs, working for long hours, earning less than their Turkish counterparts are challenges of working refugees in Turkey as they cannot take part in formal labor market. Therefore, they continue suffering from economic difficulties. As it is consistent with these studies, refugee women highlighted discrimination, language barrier, working under precarious conditions without work permit, late and irregular payments at workplace. Refugee women stated that their husbands and working children were coerced to work under harsh conditions as it is

the only way of making money and survival. As Bahiyya said “my husband and my son work for long hours at wages less than Turks. They are discriminated even though they do the same job. Their employer withholds their wages. They are paid late and irregularly”.

The participants of the study also stated that they were supposed to work for long hours even though they were not paid well in jobs which they found. As argued by İçduygu (2015) refugees work in informal market for low wages and under harsh conditions. This result in illegal activities or child labor. In her article, Deniz Sert (2016) focuses on the precarious lives of most migrants: Even though they have higher cultural capital and occupational qualifications in Turkey they go through a process of disqualification and deskilling due to accreditation problems, language barriers, lack of information, and identity-based discrimination. Their lives become more precarious and complicated as they go through these challenges. In parallel with these studies one of the refugee mothers, Humeyra stated that her children worked at textile mills under unacceptable conditions for low wages, and their salaries were mostly delayed. This unfair abusive treatment at workplace ended up a decision for her children to make their road to Europe by taking a dangerous boat journey. She sent some of her children to Europe through smugglers. She gave all of her savings. She mentioned finding money, and fleeing Turkey as she regarded living in Turkey hard and being separated from her children heartbreaking:

“Our children wanted to go, so we owed money to people so that we could send them. We sent them one by one with the money we put together. They are living in camps without their parents now. Two of them are very young. One of them was born in 2001 and the other one was born in 2002. Their brothers are working, not making much. The younger ones are going to school. So, I want to be there. I want to be with my children. As soon as I get my papers, I will make my road to Europe to draw the family together”.

As a result, participants’ accounts emphasize the relationship between their lack of ability to work legally and their poor living conditions. The women agree that unemployment problems or working informally increase their vulnerability as they do not have secure and regular source of income, and it influences their adaptation in the new environment in a negative way.

### **4.1.3 Longing to be Together**

“We have nobody here. We miss our homes, we pine away our homeland”.

Migrants and refugees are among the population groups on the margins of society who experience loneliness and isolation because of loss of family and friends, lack of social networks language barrier, cultural differences, discrimination and stigma resulting from being a foreigner in a new environment, and isolation. Refugee women are prone to be socially isolated; they address that they do not talk about having close friendships with locals. There is no sign showing that refugee women are part of the community they live in. The reasons why they are isolated are being separated from their family and friends in their hometown and obstacles (not being able to speak Turkish, not knowing the neighborhood enough, not knowing where to go) in meeting new people in Turkey.

#### **4.1.3.1 Loss of Social Capital**

“You have no one to talk to, no one to share with. But then you are just kind of getting used to being lonely.”

The participants of the study mentioned feelings of loneliness resulting from living away from their parents, relatives, and friends. Through forced displacement, refugee women lose their social networks and emotional and practical support. As a study carried out by Vrečer (2010) on the integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina forced migrants in Slovenia claims forced migrants suffer from several losses: the loss of family members, other relatives and friends, the change of culture, loss of social networks, longings, their language, loss of economic standard and it has an impact on their adaptation and integration. As it is similar to this study Syrian refugee women emphasizes missing their home and family in pre-war Syria although they are grateful for having survived like Sayyida stated “Of course, I am not as happy as I was in Syria but at least there is no war here. But I miss family, my parents...”

Refugee women have lost family members, ran out of their savings, do not have enough to eat, try to handle daily threats to their safety and are being forced into isolation because of losing all of this (Atassi 2014). As supported by Oruç (2015) analyzing the

effect of mass forced displacement on urban poverty in Bosnia and Herzegovina because refugees settling in a new environment lose their pre-war social networks, they feel a sense of loneliness, and they are socially marginalized. According to Döner et.al. (2013) being away from home and encountering uncertainty about the future influence Syrian refugees psychologically, socially, and physically. Similar to these studies, the women's accounts indicate that they miss their homes, relatives and friends even though they claim that they feel secure and happy in Turkey. Refugee women suffer from lack of social capital since they leave their relatives, friends and neighbors behind.

Due to language barrier refugees often have little interaction with locals, limited transportation options. Thus, they are isolated, which makes it difficult to practice language or learn about differences in social interactions (Green, 2017). Paralleling with the article written on Syrian refugees in Germany refugee women in Okmeydanı neighborhood struggle in making friends and establishing social connections due to language barrier, and they do not learn social interactions with the locals. Thus, they suffer from lack of the support provided by their extended families and networks, and they become marginalized.

Also, Syrian refugee women express their sadness about being detached from their relatives. Lack of families' emotional and social support makes them feel lonely and unhappy. They have to handle the hardships of taking care of a household and raising the children by themselves as Leila who gave a birth to her third daughter a month before the interview said that she was happy here, but she would like to go back to Syria because she had friends and relatives whom she missed a lot. She reported that it was very difficult to take care of a baby without her mother's support. Mubina expressed that even though the war was harsh it was better to being with a family when confronting with difficulties than being alone in an unfamiliar environment:

Mubina: "I did not want to come to Turkey. Living in your own country is different. Of course, there is war. We had to move from one city to another to survive. At least, I was with my family, I had my relatives around. However, my husband had to flee. Otherwise, he was taken to the army. After he came to Turkey, he kept on calling me. He wanted me and children beside. Then, we came here. I could not stand to be apart".

As described by Putnam (2007) social capital, is described as the relationships between people and their networks and the associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness. That is to say, social capital has features of "networks, reciprocity, trust

and shared norms (Elliott & Yusuf, 2014). In simple terms, it is the value of an individual's, household's, or community's connections. (Elliott & Yusuf, 2014). Ager and Strang (2008) acknowledge that social networks and social capital play a significant role in the integration outcomes of refugee populations. According to Ager and Strang social capital has two forms, which are bridging capital and bonding capital. Bonding capital refers to the social links within a community for example, bonding capital occurs within the Syrian refugee community in Turkey as well within members of an extended family. Namely, it refers to family connections and connections with people from the same ethnic community. Bridging capital refers to links a community forms with other groups Syrian refugees' relationships with locals in the host country. For example, one family's relations with another is bridging capital which is formed with other groups through dialogue as refugees take part in the community. Through their connections and networks in a small community and wider context refugees try to re-establish their life. Migrants with greater levels of social capital can improve livelihoods, adapt to life and integrate into community more easily (Ager & Strang, 2008).

When these findings are applied to the participants, it is argued that bonding capital is strong among the women because they have made friends with the women from the same community. They pay a visit to each other, share their issues, and ask for help when they are in need of help. They greatly appreciate being surrounded by Syrians, whom they define as relatives. Namely, as argued by Smeekes et.al (2017) ethnic group belonging can serve as a protective factor for refugees' mental and physical health, it creates a source of safety, solidarity, and support, and it helps them overcome the feeling of loneliness. However, bridging social capital is weak as refugee women are friends with only other refugee women because of language barrier and social exclusion. Lack of proficiency in dominant language prevent Syrian refugee women interacting with locals in their daily lives. As the the participant women cannot speak Turkish, they have not been able to make friends with their neighbors or locals.

#### **4.1.3.2 The role of the Kitchen in Socialization of Refugee Women**

“The best thing here: Syrians who live next to each other”.

Okmeydanı neighborhood populated with internal and international migrants is a source of social capital for Syrian mothers, especially Women’s solidarity kitchen supported by the Okmeydanı Solidarity association. Refugee women who came from the different regions of Syria were strangers in the beginning, namely, they did not know anybody when they first arrived in Turkey. Then, they started knowing each other at kitchen located in the neighborhood. The women started sharing their experiences and giving advice to each other as well as producing pickles and jams to contribute to the family income. While they miss their homes, friends and family members they have left behind, they strive for rebuilding their lives through the support of what they have in Turkey, new friends who have similar stories in a new neighborhood. As they make friends, they pay a visit to each other and they engage in shared traditional rites for births or funerals. Thus, through the networks and friendships in the neighborhood, they recover their social capital that was lost in war and exile.

When refugee women need help, they ask for help from the women working in the kitchen. As Sayyida stated that “After my husband found a job, things became better. When I moved here my Syrian neighbors whom I first met in the Kitchen helped me. They gave me furniture, kitchen utilities and clothes. They helped me get used to living in this neighborhood”, the Kitchen is not only a place where refugee women produce pickles and jams, but also it is a source of social support and solidarity.

Association and Kitchen created a space where refugee women could socialize and make friends. Namely, Syrian refugee women developed social capital through the Kitchen which was supported by the Okmeydanı Solidarity Association, the community center and the community association. These social connections contributed to refugee women’s feelings of well-being and reconstructing a new life because the kitchen provided a familiar community where refugee women could enjoy the same food and speak the same language.

Relationships with other refugee mothers were very important since they shared similar experiences and needs and felt that they could support each other by sharing their experiences and giving advice. Refugee women could not establish friendships with their Turkish neighbors because of language barrier or social stigmatization. They would rather



talk to people from the association and kitchen. Refugee women's socialization with other women changed with migration. When they were in Syria, they used to spend their days mostly at home. However, after they came to Turkey they started making friends, paying visits to each other, and working at Kitchen as Bahiyya said: "I did not have friends when I was in Syria, everybody was in their own house, they had their own issues to think. However, when I came here, I knew people who had similar experiences. I made friends. Now, we have chit chat and help each other".

Kitchen and Okmeydanı Solidarity Association provided support for the women in times of need, providing not only food and clothing, but also emotional support. At Kitchen, women have a space to share their experiences, make friends and ask for advice. These friendships gave the women the opportunity to spend time with someone, and to be part of a community. It was a good way of overcoming the feeling of loneliness that forced displacement brought about. Through Kitchen, as women started knowing more Syrians they gradually recreated their hometown in the city. Kitchen turned into a social environment to a certain degree where they could share their experiences and help each other when any of them is in need of help. Their new friends who have similar backgrounds help them feel secure in the new environment and cope with the feeling of loneliness.

#### **4.1.4 Language Barrier**

Proficiency in Turkish restricts refugee women's access to healthcare services and pharmacies, and it limits their interactions with the community outside their own and navigating in an unfamiliar living environment. To have access to health care services women need interpreters, and to handle their daily errands refugee women ask their friends' help.

##### **4.1.4.1 Barrier in Getting Care**

Gazwa: "We go to hospital, but they accept us only if anybody speaking Turkish is with us".

Having access to efficient quality healthcare is significant. However, language and translation issues are cited as obstacle in accessing to health care around the world among refugees. Language has an impact on interactions with healthcare professionals in terms of describing the symptoms or discussing the medicine as it is highlighted that accessing health services provided for Syrians in Germany are hindered at times due to lack of competency at the dominant language (Green, 2017). Like the Syrians in Germany, refugees in Turkey encounter difficulties in benefiting from health services.

Refugees who live outside the camps have free access to primary and secondary health services (Ekmekçi, 2017). However, they cannot get benefit from health services effectively since the women's concerns related to language in getting care at hospitals are related to making an appointment, interacting with doctors and nurses, understanding the illnesses and directions of medicine. As highlighted by Schouler and Ocak (2017) in an article on refugees in Europe the problems resulting from language proficiency can lead to misunderstandings, misdiagnosis and incorrect treatment. Paralleling with the findings, refugee women expressed that they did not explain the symptoms clearly without the help of the interpreters. Thus, most of the doctors send them back without any treatment. Namely, even though refugee women are aware of their rights to have access to free public services, especially health services, they cannot get benefit from them easily due to lack of proficiency in Turkish as Bahiyya claimed:

“I know that I can go to hospital for free. When I have minor health issues, I go to community clinic in the neighborhood but when I have bigger issues I go to hospital. At hospitals without interpreters, they do not examine us. I was asked to find an interpreter and come again at Baltalimanı as there was not any interpreters at the hospital for us. When I go to private hospitals, I can find one to help me, but I don't have money for that. I went to public periodontology, but they did not do checkup. Then, I went to a private dentist, but she asked me 400 TL, and I could not pay it”.

Refugee women can get benefit from health services as long as they are accompanied by someone speaking Turkish or when they go to hospitals where an interpreter is provided for the Syrian patients. According to Ekmekçi (2017) Turkish government has been trying to solve the problem by appointing interpreters to the hospitals but their numbers are not enough to meet the needs. Not only at hospitals but also at pharmacies Syrian refugees need interpreters to explain the regimen of medicine

(O'Donnell, Higgins, Chauhan, & Mullen, (2007). As it is consistent with the findings refugee women expressed the challenges they face while they get medicine from the pharmacies. Because the healthcare system is dependent on the use of informal interpreters (or none at all) refugees' medical communication will be poor and less than effective as one participant emphasized:

“I do not want to go to pharmacy or a hospital without my daughter who can speak a little bit Turkish. Without her I am afraid of getting the wrong medicine. I am not sure if they understand me because I mostly cannot understand them. It is almost impossible without knowing Turkish. I know that I have to learn Turkish”.

#### **4.1.4.2 Barrier in Navigating in the City**

“I have been trying but still... I couldn't get used to life in here. It is so hard without knowing the language”

Lack of proficiency in the dominant language causes social distance between the participants and local people. They feel stranger due to their inability to communicate in Turkish. Language plays a crucial role in adapting to life in Turkey for the women. Namely, they consider language as a barrier in reconstructing their lives in Turkey. They struggle in adapting to life in the neighborhood because of language as supported by Bahiyya:

It was hard to get used to living in Turkey; we fled from war and we did not have any other choice except for living in Turkey, what we struggled most was language because we could not navigate in an environment where we were supposed to reconstruct our lives. We even did not know how to ask directions.

The fact that women did not speak Turkish made it harder for them to navigate city life. The simplest tasks such as going to open market was precluded as they could not express themselves in Turkish and they were afraid of being lost in the city due to incapability of communicating in Turkish. They were mostly at home as outside of the house was unknown and intimidating:

“When I came here, I was a total stranger. I didn't know anyone. I didn't know how to walk around the neighborhood. I didn't know how to go to the market or take the bus. I didn't know anywhere I could go like taking children to the park. So, I couldn't even get out of the house, I was scared. After I knew people and the neighborhood day by day I felt better”.

The proficiency in Turkish facilitates interaction of refugee women into Turkish society. Men who are supposed to work can acquire Turkish at the workplace, and children acquire Turkish by going to school or playing with their Turkish peers. However, women who are left behind are not able to overcome the language barrier without language training classes (Here's what should be done to continue helping Syrian refugees, 2016). Mubina told that she wanted to take Turkish classes, and she showed leaflets of an institute teaching Turkish. However, she did not have more information about the classes, and she emphasized that she was willing to learn Turkish and she practiced the language with her children at home.

In short, refugee women struggle in their daily lives because of language barrier. Incompetency at Turkish limits women's even simplest daily activities including shopping or taking a bus and prevents them from navigating in the city. Also, language is a barrier in getting care because hospitals do not offer interpreters for Syrian refugees who are not accompanied by someone speaking Turkish.

## CHAPTER 5

### REFUGEES IN THE CITY: THE NEIGHBORHOOD EFFECTS

As people from different social groups come across in public spaces such as community centers, schools, hospitals everyday neighborhoods can potentially be mediators of either inclusion or exclusion for immigrants (Meier, 2017). Additionally, in a neighborhood context, families are embedded. The influence of neighborhood characteristics, social dynamics, interaction between communities and societal agents on families have been documented by a study of Brooks - Gunn (1997) argued that growing up in impoverished, inner-city neighborhoods has negative social, educational, and developmental impacts on children. Brooks - Gunn (1997) highlight how neighborhood poverty endangers children's social adjustment, educational attainment and overall wellbeing in US. This study seeks for analysing the impacts of neighborhood on Syrian children from the eyes of mothers.

In Istanbul, Syrian refugees settle in districts which are characterized by widespread poverty, high levels of cultural conservatism and religiosity, a strong sense of community solidarity, and low costs of living (Erdogan, 2017). Paralleling with Erdoğan's findings (2017) Okmeydanı is also the destination of a significant influx of Syrian refugee people seeking affordable housing and services.

"The new neighbors of Okmeydanı district to which Turks, Arabs and Kurds migrated from Turkey's various cities is now Syrian refugees". Okmeydanı is very central

area with affordable housing, and informal job opportunities. There are textile mills in the basement of apartments where migrants from Syria and Anatolia have been working (Vardar, 2017). Okmeydanı is in a central area having an easy access to transportation and business centers. It is also near to formal and informal job opportunities. Refugee women expressed that they preferred living in Okmeydanı because they heard from their social connections who came there before that they would find jobs easily in the neighborhood.

Also, there is a renewal project encompassing Okmeydanı neighborhood. The residents of the neighborhood are against the project since they have fears that the neighborhood will lose its cultural identity and heritage. Besides, the inhabitants will be exposed to forced displacement as they will not be able to afford the residences constructed in the districts (Stewart, 2016).

Additionally, the difficulties refugees face in their search for affordable housing results in Okmeydanı neighborhood, and the reasons are similar for other marginalized groups such as Alevis and Kurds who migrated to Istanbul. During Gezi protests similar to other neighborhoods, in Okmeydanı police used extensive and disproportionate force against the riots, and the use of force was justified by the government by labeling protesters as terrorists. Still, there is police patrolling around the neighborhood during day and night (Mutluer, 2016).

In short, the area is characterized by informal labor market, poverty, renewal project, political and marginalization (Gezi protests and migrants) and safety issues. These characteristics have an impact on refugee children and refugee women's attitudes and perspectives towards their children. Thus, in this chapter, I explore refugee women's lives in the Okmeydanı neighborhood, their experiences and challenges in resettling in the neighborhood, and the neighborhood's influence on refugee women's beliefs and attitudes towards their children. Refugee women have concerns related to housing and social exclusion in the neighborhood, it influences their attitudes towards children as supported by Brooks-Gunn (1997).

In this chapter, I explore through women's eyes the experience of living in an inner-city neighborhood for Syrian refugee women and children. I will discuss how refugee women's experiences on resettling in the neighborhood influence raising their children.

## 5.1 Housing

Except for refugee camps, there are no public housing opportunities for Syrians. Refugees can live in any province, but they are supposed to be registered in order that they can access to public services for free, and they need to meet their housing expenses by themselves (İçduygu & Şimşek, 2016).

In the reconstruction of a new life housing plays a crucial role, and it facilitates resettlement of refugees. Based on a study of the housing experiences of recently arrived refugees in Winnipeg, Canada poor housing impedes refugees from rebuilding healthy social and family life with job opportunities whereas affordable and adequate housing eases integration. Also, challenges refugees encounter in their search for affordable housing results in many settling in older, inner city neighborhoods characterized by urban decline (Carter & Osborne, 2009). Similar to this study, when Syrian families search for accommodation on Istanbul's private housing market, they face discrimination, high rents and poor-quality housing. The houses are affordable compared to other neighborhoods and people living in Okmeydanı have access to public transportation and public services in the neighborhood. However, they find their housing choices constrained by social stigmatization, high rents, and unhealthy living conditions without basic facilities houses (insects and rats, smelly and damp houses).

### 5.1.1 High Rents

“It's haram to pay this much, it is too much for this house”.

Housing affordability is a challenge for refugees all around the world as it is underlined in various studies emphasizing the housing as a vector of settlement and integration in Canada and Australia (Rose, 2001; Wayland, 2010; Ziersch, et.al; 2017). İçduygu and Şimşek highlight that it is necessary to provide public-funded housing and shelter mechanism for the majority of refugees who live outside the camps because they cannot afford the houses in urban spaces that results in unhealthy living conditions or overcrowded households. Similar to these studies, the participants of this study states that they struggle in paying rents. They consider high rents as the biggest challenge after they migrated to Turkey. The rents for two-bedroom houses vary from 200 to 300 US dollars in

the neighborhood, which is over budget of refugee families. The women underlined the change in their lives in terms of their accommodation as supported by Fahima:

“Of course, life is not like as it was in Syria, but it is similar to some extent. We were very comfortable there. We did not have to pay rent, life was similar but rent, bills wear us out here. In Syria, when only dad works, he can bring the bread to the family, what he earns is enough for the family. But here, it is not enough. Not only my husband but also our son is working so that we can survive”.

Migration causes an increase in house prices in certain areas. Refugee inflows have generated an increase in housing rents because Syrians have created a high demand for rental houses not only for refugees but also for natives. Natives who are reluctant to living in the same neighborhood with refugees as they are concerned about their safety, demand living in “better” neighborhoods where there is not refugee threat. (Tumen, 2016; Erdoğan, 2014). The women’s accounts supported these studies:

“When we came here five years ago, nobody wanted to give their houses to us. They were afraid that we could not pay the rent or we would make trouble. In the beginning, we could not find jobs, we shared houses with other families as our savings would afford those houses. Then, landowners were bothered by us because households were overcrowded. After that, they increased the rents so that we could move but we could not, we did not have any other choice. Finally, they noticed that they could make more money when they rented their houses to Syrians. They did not care if we shared a house or not. Now, Turks are blaming us for the high rents in the neighborhood.”

The interviews were carried out in the participants’ houses. Most of the places probably were not planned for houses but later on they were used for accommodation. For example, some of the landowners divided their apartments into two and rented them individually to two Syrian families. That is to say, as a solution to high rents, the women started living in very small houses like houses with two rooms and scratchy kitchens. (Field notes, 2017).

As a second solution to high rents, some families were left with no choice except for sharing cramped accommodation with other families. Therefore, overcrowded houses became another challenge for refugees. To sum up, the participants of the study consider rents as the biggest trouble in reconstructing their lives in Turkey. When they compared their houses in Syria, and they disclosed the meanings they attached to their houses in Syria, they had a desperate longing for home:



“I miss my home, my kitchen, my room everything in my house. Who does not? I brought the keys of my house. I know that I won’t find my keys when we return but the keys are my hope for going back to home one day. The war will be over, we will be back to homes even though we will have to rebuild them again”.

The majority of participants argued that when they were in Syria, they had their own houses because people afforded having their own houses in Syria instead of renting. Also, they did not pay that much bills, and for utilities of their houses. Thus, in Turkey they struggle in allocating money from the budget for the housing expenses which has made their adaptation to life after migration harder for the women.

### **5.1.2 Unhealthy Living Conditions**

“I was afraid that I would have to live with the rats forever”.

In the neighborhood, because of high rents, refugee women can afford houses which are lack of essential facilities and have poor conditions. According to the women’s accounts, the houses are not big enough for crowded families, and they have heating and humidity problems. As Bahiyya claimed some the houses are even lack of concrete ground which lets insects go inside:

“When we first came to Istanbul, we rented a house which was 400 TL per month. However, it was not like a real home. It was a shanty house with many insects around. The ground was not made of concrete, it was soil. Thank God, we moved. Now, we are paying 775 TL per month. At least there is no insects around, it is better than the old one”.

Unhealthy living conditions and lack of funding mechanisms for the non-camp Syrians result in health problems. As highlighted by Gasseer et.al., (2014) in the case of humanitarian emergencies, women and children are vulnerable to various health risks. Because they do not have control over financial resources, they cannot handle the financial burden on their shoulder. It is possible that they encounter challenges related to accommodation and nutrition which cause health issues for children and adults. As supported by Matte & Jacob (2000) who provides insight into the ways in which the home environment can have an impact on human health as well as describing how specific health concerns in housing are related among Americans and argues that poor housing conditions

influence the physical wellbeing of family members. Adults and children can suffer from diseases such as allergies and respiratory infections. Besides, poor housing conditions have an impact on the mental well-being of individuals (Matte & Jacobs, 2000). Nonetheless, children are at most risk because poor housing has been acknowledged to increase the risk of severe illnesses such as asthma, respiratory problems and communicable diseases in a study comparing the quality of houses in a slum and a non-slum community and its impacts on child development in Ghana (Lawson, 2014). As consistent with the findings of these studies, the families living in houses which do not get daylight are vulnerable to diseases. Additionally, interviews revealed that some of the families live in houses with no windows or doors. Mubina stated that since they rented their house she has had asthma because her house has broken windows which they have not been able to repair yet and Rana expressed her misery related to her house:

“I don’t like my home. It is underground. It does not get daylight. I pay 650 tl for a house which does not have daylight. We turn the lights on during the day. It is dark and damp. I am not happy with my home. How can I be? My daughter has asthma. She has had since we moved in this house. We have to live here, we have nowhere to go”.

### **5.1.3 Social Stigma**

Fahima: In my first house I had a neighbor, I noticed that she didn’t like me, but I never thought that she would dare to do harm. She was bothered by me, especially by my little daughter because she was crying a lot. She reported me to the police. She accused me for beating my children. The police came, they would have taken my children if they had believed her. I even couldn’t speak to them. Another Turkish neighbor helped me and told them that she was lying. Thank God, nobody took my children away. I moved to another house because of her.

The housing search is difficult for the refugee women. Lack of awareness about housing market and renting process makes the searching housing harder. Also, as claimed by Rose (2001) in a study on refugees in Canada the lack of familiarity with the neighborhood and inability to communicate in the host language are barriers in search for better housing conditions. İçduygu (2015) mentions the difficulties refugees encounter in search for housing. Paralleling with these studies many landlords are reluctant to rent properties to Syrians especially after they have discovered that more people are sharing a

room than agreed. The majority of the participants claimed that they faced discrimination in searching for a house and some of the landowners did not want to rent their houses as Bahiyya said “when we were looking for an apartment, the first question was whether we were Syrians or not. Without trying to know us, they are biased against us”. They also argued that any property owners and agents refused to rent to refugees as they required proof of a regular income and employment before signing a rental contract or they simply did not want to rent their houses to Syrians.

Ofa: “I saw people trying to rip off us in this neighborhood. I went to a market in the neighborhood. The owner tried to sell a packet of biscuits for 5 liras, which was normally 1 lira. I didn’t buy it. They are doing the same thing when we are looking for a house. They are overcharging us for the houses they will never think of living. They are overcharging us or they just simply do not want to rent their houses”.

Not only in searching for housing but also in their relations with their neighbors the women faced discrimination and social stigma. Interviews indicated that the women struggled in establishing relations with their neighbors because of social stigma such as Syrians were thieves or terrorists. Some of the participants had to move to another place because of their neighbors’ racist behaviors. Two of the mothers expressed that because they were Syrians people would not want them in the neighborhood:

“We had neighbors they did not treat us badly, but we recognize that some of them like us, some of them hate us. When we look at their eyes, we can understand what they think about us. We know that they do not want to live with us I hope that one day I will in my house again with my family and my neighbors”.

Contrary to the other refugee women, one of the participants expressed that she did not face any problem with her neighbors. She said her neighbors were all Turkish, and they were very helpful to her. When she was in need of help her neighbors provided help in the form of clothes, furniture and food. They also provided language support for their Syrian friend, but the woman was Kurd and she could communicate with her neighbors in Kurdish, the lack of language barrier may have facilitated interaction between her and her neighbors.

## 5.2 Social Exclusion

Fahima: “Because I was breastfeeding my son I didn’t notice that I was pregnant. We were at the borders, waiting for crossing the borders through smugglers. I didn’t know that I was going to have another baby. After I settled in Istanbul, in three months I noticed the pregnancy signs. Then, I went to hospital, and the doctor told me that I was pregnant. I cried when I learnt that I would have another child living under these conditions. Everybody condemned me by saying “you fled war, but you are living your own life here”.

According to the study by Roosa (2005) highlighting the social exclusion as a variable in adaptation among those in poverty in United States, social exclusion is a result of social barriers which are visible in social attitudes, language policy, institutional policies and other social mechanisms. Social exclusion prevents a group of people integrating into the social mainstream, and it limits their rights to social and economic capital. Social exclusion can be identified in individual level when access to paid work, housing conditions, welfare support, access to education, health and transport services are considered.

### 5.2.1 Inability to Establish Relationships with Locals

As argued by the study of Green (2017) Syrian refugees in Germany do not have a chance to practice language or learn about differences in social interactions because they often get in little interaction with locals, have limited transportation options. Therefore, they are isolated (Green, 2017). Similar to Syrians in Germany the participants of this study abstain from getting in touch with locals in the neighborhood. They argue that people in the neighborhood have concerns about the large Syrian presence. Some of the Turks accept the presence of Syrians but they do not like them. As refugee women are aware of local people’s concerns they refrain from building relationships with them as Rana stated: “I don’t talk to people around me. They don’t talk to me either. I only know people from the association and kitchen”.

Two of the mothers stated that they refrained from getting in touch with locals because they thought that there was a tension between Turks and refugees. In their opinion

to be able to live together refugees and locals should not intervene in each other's lives, and refugees should not create any trouble disturbing locals as Sayyida expressed:

“I cannot say anything about the neighborhood as I do not have any Turkish neighbors. I do not have any Turkish friends, I don't go to their houses, they do not come my place either. My relations with my neighbors are not more than saying “hi”. I pay my rent to the very day, so my landowner does not give us any troubles. There is a border, and we are trying to be cautious not to pass it accidentally”.

All participants faced social exclusion while they were running their daily errands such as going to open market, hospitals, pharmacies, and using public transportation. They argued that Turks did not understand why Syrians fled their homeland. They did not regard Turks as strangers, and they tried to adapt life in Turkey as it was the only way for survival as Ofa emphasized:

“We had to get used to living here. While we are walking on the street people are trying to stay away from us or they are gazing at us. For instance, when I was in the bazaar, and I bumped into someone. Then, she started shouting at me as if it was a very big deal. It is because of the fact that I am Syrian. As a Syrian I don't regard people as strangers here, I don't understand why they condemn us. Because we wanted to survive?”.

Because of their ethnic identity the participants argued that people outside of their own community treated them differently. The women faced discrimination and social stigmatization in their daily lives. Sometimes, they were condemned by locals and labeled, that influenced their perceptions of local people as Fahima and Rana claimed:

Last day, I was on the bus. A woman I was sitting next looked at me and acted weird. She tried to stay away from me so that I could not touch her by accident. She even pulled her coat as if I was a dirty person and if I had touched her clothes, they would have gotten dirty too. I heard people called us “Dirty Syrians (Pis Suriyeliler)”.

Rana: When I ask Turkish people to help me, some of them do some of them do not care. I went to bazaar today. I asked a lady if she knew where I could load money to my transportation card near here. She gazed at me as if I was asking her money, and I was a beggar. She did not deign answering my question, she just disappeared.

### **5.2.2 Social Stigmatization**

“We are here not for stealing Turk's jobs. We are here to survive”.

The women participating the study stated they were exposed to social stigmatization, and they were socially isolated. Locals perceptions of Syrians had an impact on their relations with their neighbors. All the participants alleged that they condemned because they had more children than locals. Women realized that people condemned Syrians for having children under war and migration circumstances. The children bothered local people as Syrian children were or viewed as threats to ensuring their own safety and finding a job. They were seen as a rival in informal labor market as well as potential thieves due to the poverty they were living in. Therefore, the women were not able to make friends. Besides, they had concerns about being in the public places, having relations with local people. That's why, the women were socially marginalized which had negative effects on their psychological and mental health as Fahima highlighted:

“I am embarrassed of taking my children out. I am twenty-six years old, and I have five children. People on the bus, in the neighborhood, at park, they gaze at me, they ask me “you fled war, and you gave birth to five children, really? So, I would rather stay at home than go out not to be exposed to their gazing. I feel depressed when I notice the way they look at me. People are surprised, especially the ones who one or two children. They regard having more children strange”.

Because of social stigmatization interaction between the participants and locals were extremely limited. The women were more marginalized because they did not work like their husbands. Being in touch with the locals was not part of their daily routine. The women socialized with people through kitchen but mostly with Syrians. In their daily errands they communicated with the locals but not with an aim of building relationships. This is supported by Chemin (2016) who conducted a qualitative study in Mersin and Adana and documented that Syrian refugees feel stigmatized as the majority of participants agreed with the statement “when a Syrian does something wrong all Syrians get blamed”. This influences the relations between host community and Syrians, and the women's motherhood. Because they were stigmatized they did not want their children to go out and play with Turkish children in case their children were bullied by locals:

“I don't allow my children to go out. My neighbor had chickens. When she saw my children near her chickens she thought that the chickens would be stolen. She came to me and blamed my children for having stolen her chickens. How could I let my children go out?”

## CHAPTER 6

### MOTHERHOOD IN A TIME OF CONFLICT

Bahiyya: “My child is my soul, my heart, my life, everything...”

Families live in changing ecologies where there are many contextual factors influencing their parenting. From an immigrant perspective parenting is harder since caregiver is experiencing a new environment whereas she is trying to provide a stable environment for a family. A parent's cultural background and their newly acquired context are crucial on her/his parenting as the study on parenting of refugees in Canada underlines (Ochocka & Janzen, 2008). The experiences of refugee mothers in post migration environment affect their perceptions and attitudes in rearing their children and their children's education.

Across societies, traditionally, mothers are responsible for ensuring their children's safety, education, socialization and integration into society as well as providing food and shelter. However, migration has an impact on the mothering of women, and the women struggle in fulfilling their roles at times (Moorhouse & Cunningham, 2012). Refugee mothers need to make adjustments in raising their children in a new environment. Through their narratives, refugee mothers shared experiences that underlined four patterns in the data: Syrian refugee women prioritize their motherhood, they feel powerless as they encounter difficulties in providing children their needs due to economic hardships, and they worry about their children's safety.

## 6.1 Motherhood as a Main Motivation of Survival

Fatma: “We came here for our children, we live for them. Child is everything for me, they are my everything”.

Leila: “I am grateful that my children are safe. I am living for them”.

Participants of the study themselves prioritized their motherhood. They did not view their mothering responsibilities as a burden. Instead, children were their motivation in searching for ways of survival. Contrary to Kelly et.al. discussing parenting experiences of refugee women in UK (2016) even through refugee women tried to cope with strong feelings of frustration they strived for being a good mother to their children. In spite of challenges in life and concerns all of the mothers spoke about their children as a source of happiness and joy. Even though some of the women stated that sometimes the responsibilities of being a mother were burdensome, they believed that taking on the responsibilities of caring for the children and household duties were the mother's role.

Therefore, the participants proudly spoke of the unconditional love they had for their children and their motherhood roles. Contrary to the Merry, et. al. (2017) which describes the parenthood of refugees through the interviews mostly completed with the migrants in US, although parenthood is challenging for migrant parents because they come across difficulties of adaptation to new environment and cultural context, discrimination, change in socioeconomic status, and lack of access to health and social services for refugee women their children were a motivation for reconstructing their lives in Turkey. They claimed that children were a reason to flee war through dangerous journeys such as smuggling or thinking about travelling by boats. As the mothers had been trying to get used to life in Turkey, many of the mothers saw their children as their main motivation as they wanted to make sure that their children would be safe. For the participants having a family was the reason for them to exist and to keep on believing that they will have a better life.



## 6.2 Feeling Powerless as a Mother

Sayyida: “My children are not old enough how we get by here. They are children, they want to buy things. I feel powerless when I cannot get what they want. But I have to pay rent, bills, food...”

Due to traumatic events in their past, and being constrained by housing, employment, and poverty the women experienced powerlessness. They felt inadequate and unsupported in coping with the pressures of migration. As they were away from their extended family, they tried to cope with the challenges of mothering by themselves. Because of financial difficulties they were not able to meet their children’s needs:

“I have to work in here so that I could provide my children’s needs. I didn’t have to when I was in Syria. Men in Syria can take care of 10 people family with what they earn but here, I have to work. I go to kitchen and make ornaments at home so that I can contribute to the family income”.

The participants could not meet their children needs because they suffered from financial difficulties. In pre-war Syria they used to provide what their children needed. They felt powerless when they could not overcome financial difficulties as Rana said “It was very hard and upsetting. Think about just one day your family says, ‘Give me something to eat.’ You know, you don’t have anything, and you are helpless.”

Also, they argued that children generally had Syrian friends as they were socially excluded by their Turkish peers due to their ethnic identity. Turkish children would rather not to play with their Syrian peers. For Bahiyya, being a mother without an ability to protect her children from the experience of racial discrimination also brought about feelings of powerlessness and hurt. This created feeling of inadequacy as a mother:

“My daughters are excluded by their Turkish peers. Some Turkish children do not want to play with Syrian kids. It is very heartbreaking for my children. At times, she comes to me, she cries, and says “Even though I can’t speak Turkish I can understand them, I can play their games. Why don’t they want to play with me?”

In addition, the women who were apart from their children did not have enough power to protect their children from the dangers. One of the mother expressed that she fell apart from five of her children as they preferred making their way to Europe. Humeyra who

was away from four of her children for almost two years missed her days when the whole family was together:

When we were in Syria, I used to take care of my family, my children and my house. My children used to be at school by 4 pm. I used to prepare their food and clean the house during the day. My husband used to come around 7. We used to have dinner together. Our life was nice before war, we were together. But now...

In parallel with the findings of study describing Congolese refugee women's action responses to difficult living situations (Pavlish, 2005) although the participants encountered challenges, and felt powerless at various times they continued to do what needed to be done every day for their family and children. Despite being victimized the participants were not helpless victims of a war and forced displacement. The refugee women exercised agency throughout the displacement. They strived for reconstructing their lives by giving sense to their lives, creating social connectedness through kitchen, finding a job to contribute to the income, looking for ways of sending their children to school, and trying to learn the language.

### **6.3 Safety Concerns**

Fahima: We are away from home, away from the people we know. we heard that Syrian children have been kidnapped. Last week a Syrian girl was kidnapped, her dead body was found. She was raped and killed. We have fears that my children would be snatched by anybody, and I will never see them again.

Mothers who survived after war were traumatized because of the loss of family members, cultural identity, economic resources such as home and employment. They also suffered from precarity and being unsure of future as discussed by Dybdahl (2001) in a study on mental health of mothers in war-torn Bosnia and Herzegovina. These factors influenced the ability of parents who were responsible for providing safety and security for their children. As highlighted by MacDermid Wadsworth (2010) in a study analysing the implications of mass violence for families, with particular emphasis on families around the world living where mass violence occurs, traumatic events has long term influences such

as inability to provide food and shelter, lack of employment, and poor quality housing which has an impact on parent-child relations in terms of providing supplies, food and supervising children's safety. As documented by these studies, the participants had concerns about their children's safety in the neighborhood. Okmeydanı, is an inner-city neighborhood, influenced the mothers' attitudes towards children as it provided space where children socialize and establish relationships. According to Jarrett (1995), in African American family's adolescents have restricted access to economic, social and institutional resources in inner-city neighborhoods, so parents develop their own ways to keep their children secure, away from danger on the streets. Similar to the work of Jarrett (1995) the women had concerns about their children's safety; such as being snatched from the street. They watched many news on the television or heard from the people they knew that kidnapping, raping, and killing of children were widespread. In their opinion nobody would care, and they had nowhere to report if their children were kidnapped. The mothers stated that being away from home, living in an unfamiliar environment without language made them vulnerable. They claimed that if something bad happened to them, they would not know where to go or whom to ask. It has been acknowledged that refugees often struggle in trusting authority in their new society, and under the rule of former oppressive governments, refugees typically learn not to trust people in authority as a means of survival as documented by Hynes (2003) in a study investigating the relationships of mistrust before arriving in the UK by analysing the experiences of refugees from Myanmar in refugee camps and urban centers in Southeast Asia. Similar to the refugees in UK, the women in this study stated that they did not let children go out as they were worried about their safety.

Additionally, the women struggled in ensuring their children's safety and security as environmental and social factors were constantly changing in the new environment. Mothers expressed a fear that their children could be kidnapped when they were unattended. In their opinion, it was easier to kidnap a Syrian child compared to Turkish children. Thus, they argued that they did not allow their children to go out, make friends and play outside without someone's eye on them. Thus, children spent most of their time at home compared to life in Syria because the mothers thought that there was no safe space where children could spend time except for houses.

Mubina: I have heard that Syrian children are kidnapped. So, I don't allow my children to go out without me or their dad. I am afraid of the possibility that my children can be victim of an organ trade or a rapist. We used to allow our children to go out in Syria, but we had a garden where they could play. Here, we don't have a garden or a balcony. Thus, they are always at home. They love drawing and watching TV. They sometimes help me.

Besides, the women considered language as a barrier in resorting to police or hospital when their children were in trouble. One of the women told a story of a Syrian child who was crashed by a panzer in the neighborhood, but he was not shown on the news, he was ignored. She stated that "I understood that day. Our lives would not matter for anyone". Also, in their opinion being Syrian meant people care about them less as they had no support system here as Bahiyya argued:

"People presume that we are all alone here, and we have nobody who can help us. That is true. We are lonely here. For instance, robbers broke into a Syrian family's house months ago. They went to police, the police took their statement down, and they were sent back to home. Still, they have not got any news about robbery. People are unsusceptible here. Nobody cares us, they are indifferent to our problems."

Because the mothers did not feel safe they did not let their children go out as a coping strategy or setting curfews for their children. They were worried when their children came home late. One of the mothers stated that she allowed her children play outside on the condition that they let her know where they were once in every 15 minutes to make sure that they were safe as Sayyida claimed:

"I feel safe, but I have fears that my children may be kidnapped. So, while my children are playing outside I ask them to come to me once in fifteen minutes and tell me where they play to make sure that they are safe and not far away from home. I am worried about them even when they are at school."

As most of the houses were lack of a balcony or garden, children did not have any proper space where they could play. The participants preferred taking their children to the park or accompanying them when the children played in the street, which was a good way of monitoring children when they were out. Mothers whose houses opened to highway did not have a chance to take them out, so those children only played when they were in the school garden or when their parents took them to the park:

“Children are always at home. My home is very near the main road where it is dangerous to play. I don’t let my children go out. Sometimes, I take them to the park. They don’t have any friends from neighborhood. They have a few friends at school. School is the only place where my children can play with their friends”.

Only one of the mothers allowed her children to play in front of the house as her children were very proficient in Turkish, and had Turkish friends playing with them. All participants claimed that children should play games, have fun while they grow up. Nonetheless, they argued that it was hard for their own kids under these circumstances as they did not feel secure in the neighborhood where they lived and some of the kids were expected to work as the family suffered from poverty.

Safety concerns were also reason for dropping out of the school because the mothers considered that their children under threat when they are unaccompanied by their parents. Even though mothers were willing to send their children to school they felt worried about their children’s safety outside their home as Faiza expressed:

“Children should go to school. While they are young they should play games and go out with their friends. I worry about my children here. Even though they are old enough when my sons are a little bit late I worry in case something bad happens to them. I worry about my daughter too. She goes to middle school. I take her to school in the morning, when the school finishes she calls me and I go and take her. I am always with my daughter, I never leave her alone”.

## CHAPTER 7

### SCHOOL or WORK to SURVIVE?

This chapter outlines the way in which the women spoke about their attitudes towards child education and child labor based on their experiences in Turkey. It analyses how refugee women's migration experiences influence their attitudes and beliefs on child education.

#### 7.1 Education of Children

Rana: "Education is crucial for children. It makes change in their lives. My children were traumatized due to war in Syria. They felt better when they participated in activities organized by the Okmeydanı association. I could not go to school, but I want my children to enroll in school and to go to university so that they can have a better life".

As claimed by Ager and Strang (2008) in a qualitative research aiming an initial insight into local dynamics of integration processes in refugee impacted communities, schools create a space where refugee children can interact with local host communities and build relationships. By establishing friendships refugee children can adapt life and integrate in post-migration context more easily. Paralleling with these findings the participants considered education significant because it helped children overcome their traumas, and it facilitated having a better future through learning language and following the curriculum. Even though the mothers valued education women's narratives revealed that their children

were opt out of education because of financial reasons. Besides, according to the mothers even though their children had access to education its quality was affected by the language barrier, isolation, exclusion in the form of racism, bullying, and challenges in making friends.

## **7.1.2 Negative Experiences of Refugee Women on Education of Children**

### **7.1.2.1 Language barrier**

“My daughter did not want to go to school in the beginning. She said she did not have any friends because she could not speak Turkish. Now, she can but still... She does not have any Turkish friend”.

Syrian refugee children who were born before the war may have not been to school or they had access to educational resources for up to five years in some areas. Children’s lack of access to education prevented them from language and literacy learning at a critical age (Wofford & Tibi, 2017).

The interviews revealed that language was a fundamental challenge for refugee children in accessing quality education at schools because children struggle in communicating with their friends and teachers, and lack of ability to express themselves resulted in misunderstandings, and negative feelings about school. To be able to overcome language barrier schools provided language support for Syrian kids. Thus, refugee women were willing to send their children to school because they considered that it enabled children to learn Turkish as Faiza stated:

Faiza:“I send my daughter to school, she was a successful student when we were in Syria. I want her to be successful in the future, that’s why I am sending her to the school. Also, I want her to learn Turkish. She can study Turkish at school. She needs to learn so that we do not need anybody else when we have to communicate with people in Turkey, we go to hospital, we ask directions”.

Language and literacy support provided by schools prevented children from spending time with other children and catching up with the age-appropriate curriculum. Refugee children were placed at lower grades with the aim of teaching Turkish. However, as they were not at age appropriate classrooms they had problems in socializing with other

children. Thus, they became prone to drop out of the school because schools turned into a scary environment where children could not express themselves. In parallel with Sarah Dryden- Petersen's argument "I have been in too many classrooms where refugee teenagers cram themselves into tiny benches or sit on the floor in early primary classrooms because that is where language learning happens" Syrian refugee children were placed in the classrooms where they were taught Turkish no matter how old they were.

The children were not accepted to other classes where they could learn with their local peers. The mothers complained that their children could not take other curriculum courses with their Turkish counterparts as their inability to speak Turkish was a barrier. The mothers had fears that their children would fall behind the main curriculum as highlighted by Fahima:

They didn't take my child to the school. She must be at 2nd grade but her teacher didn't accept her to the class. She has been taking only language courses. She isn't like her friends. I want my kid to be like other students learning Math, Science etc. but they claim that they have been testing my kid's Turkish to see if she is proficient enough at Turkish or not. So, my child goes to school only after 2 pm with other Syrian students.

The mothers were satisfied with the language support provided by the schools. However, they also had concerns about mother tongue. They had fears that the children may forget Arabic as they did not practice it in their daily lives as Bahiyya said that "I am pleased that my children have been learning Turkish, but I am also afraid that my children will forget Arabic language". As documented by Wofford & Tibi (2017) promoting language and literacy development in mother tongue and foreign language facilitates adaptation of refugees during resettlement based on the learner theoretical background and empirical evidence.

As documented by Hamilton (2013) there are factors which remain the key to enabling migrant worker parents to establish and sustain effective links with their child's school. According to the findings of the study there should be collaborative effort between teachers and families so that refugee children could be successful in integrating into the education (Hamilton, 2013). For the mothers involving in their children's education is crucial. Nonetheless, language is a barrier in collaborating with parents and school. When the women had any issues related to their children's educational experiences they struggled in explaining themselves and searching for ways of overcoming problems. When mothers



had complaints about the teacher's attitudes towards their children or when they would like to solve children's problems related to school, they did not know what they should do. They felt desperate because of lack of proficiency in Turkish.

“My daughter's teacher did not accept my child to her class. She said, “you don't understand the class”. When I went to school to take my child, I saw her sitting outside, in the garden. I couldn't go to anywhere to make any complaints because I could not speak Turkish. I couldn't communicate with them. She could not learn Turkish. Then, a Turkish teacher was appointed. Mustafa teacher, he was better. He taught Turkish to my children”.

As argued by Sirin & Rogers-Sirin (2015) an overwhelming majority of Syrian refugee children are not enrolled in school in Turkey, partly because of language barriers, and about half of them suffer from Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and/or depression. Also, refugee children who do not have literacy skills will have great difficulty in all academic areas, which results in tendency to participate in class less, and to be socially isolated. As refugee children are not able to adapt to school environment, they are likely to drop out of school. In parallel with this study, the participants were concerned about their children's language and literacy development, and they considered language as the most prominent thing provided by the school.

#### **7.1.2.2 Discrimination and bullying against Refugee children at school**

Mubina: “My children are at 1st grade. Their teacher is short-tempered. He discriminates against my children, he maltreats them. Yesterday, the teacher asked students to put their books on the bookshelf, my son misunderstood, and he put his books in his backpack. Then, the teacher got mad at him, and he slapped in my son's face. My son hit his head to the table. He is not good at Turkish. Now, they don't want to go to school. They are afraid of their teachers. When they leave the house, they start crying”.

Refugee children feel alienated in this new environment where family and lifestyles are different, and limited language skills prevent them from making friends in new peer groups. Social exclusion from peer groups, bullying and being mocked at school due to biases alienate these children and may cause them dropping from education. Unless more resources are provided, there is still a very real risk of a 'lost generation' of Syrian children (UNICEF, 2017). The participants highlighted similar challenges to the ones underlined by

the reports of UNICEF (2017). Their children encountered direct and personal discrimination in schools ethnically based bullying by their peers. A study examined ethnic identity, perceptions of discrimination, and academic attitudes and performance of primarily first- and second-generation Mexican immigrant children living in a predominantly White community and its findings indicated that discrimination can occur at the peer level in the form of peer exclusion or teasing as well as being treated unfairly by their teachers (Brown & Chu, 2012). Teachers are either not trained how to address the significance of inclusive classroom environment or they do not realize the psychosocial burden on the shoulders of refugee children. Thus, school turns into a scary environment for Syrian children (UNCHR, 2016).

The interviews revealed that the children could not establish friendships with the local children as they were excluded from playing together, sharing, doing groupworks or pair works, being left alone during recess time. They were exposed to discrimination by their friends at school and in the neighborhood, and they were bullied by their peers as Mubina highlighted:

“My children’s Turkish friends always push my kids to the back of the rows, they call them Syrians, and they say that Syrians should be on the back row. As a mother, I tried talking to Turkish kids, and called this behavior “ayıp”. Then, they screamed at me. My children think that they cannot be friends with Turkish children because they are different.”

Four of the mothers stated that their children were exposed to physical and emotional violence by their peers. Thus, school was considered as an unfriendly environment where their children marginalized. The mothers expressed that their children had difficulty in adapting to school environment because of discrimination and bullying. Some of them had to change their children’s school due to discrimination against their children by their Turkish peers. Sayyida emphasized the discrimination against their children:

“When my children started going to school they could not speak Turkish. So, Turkish kids were making fun of my children, teasing them. So, they did not want to go to school for a while. When we were in Syria they used to love the school. They had fun with their friends but now...”

As documented by Brown and Chu (2012) Mexican immigrant children who have teachers valuing diversity in the classroom feel more positive about their ethnic identities,

school and classroom atmosphere. Similar to the Mexican immigrant children, the mothers pointed out that teachers did not know how to treat their children and how to handle their traumatic experiences. They did not want to have Syrian kids in the classroom assuming that Syrian children were not able to communicate with their teachers and classmates due to language barrier and ethnic differences.

Rana:“My daughter’s teacher did not accept my child to her class. She said, ‘you don’t understand the class, you are not like other children’. When I went to school to take my child, I saw her sitting outside, in the garden. I couldn’t go to anywhere to make any complaints because I could not speak Turkish. I couldn’t communicate with them. She could not learn Turkish. I didn’t feel like there was a lot of time given to mentoring students. Then, a Turkish teacher was appointed. Mustafa teacher, he was better. He taught Turkish to my children”.

Contrary to the majority of mothers, one of the refugee women expressed that her children did not face any unjust treatment by their teachers at school, but she claimed that she heard about discrimination against refugee children at school environment. The mothers shared their experiences about their children's’ education, and they asked for advice when they encountered a challenge.

Bahiyya:“Teachers treat fairly to my kids. They do not discriminate against my children because they are Syrian. My children are given same homework, they have same responsibilities with other kids at class. My children attend the lessons like their Turkish peers. Nonetheless, I have heard my Syrian friends that there are teachers who discriminate Syrian students in favor of Turks. Some of the teachers do not want Syrian kids in the class, they even do not check Syrians’ homework”.

Exclusion and discrimination were the major problems Syrian refugees encountered in their daily lives (Kaya, 2016). Discrimination, exclusion and bullying at school were also common aspect of school for the mothers (Beyazova, 2017). In parallel with these findings the women stated that their children encountered bullying by their Turkish peers at school. They expressed that Turkish children did not want to sit with Syrian kids in the same classroom or play with them outside, which induced marginalization of Syrian children at school environment.

### 7.1.2.3 Financial Constraints

School is a long-term solution for overcoming financial challenges. All of the participants' motivation to send their children to school was their aspiration for their children to continue to high school and university. They believed that children would be able to find a qualified job through the diploma which they would receive in the end of their educational experiences. Nonetheless, the women had concerns about certification of their children's educational outcomes. They were not certain if their children would get diploma or not as they needed it when they looked for a job. Their previous learning should be recognized so that Syrian children could continue higher education and search jobs in the future (Dryden, 2016). The certification of their education was crucial for refugee mothers. Bureaucratic barriers in issuing diploma and certificates to foreigners in Turkey impede refugee children from continuing further in education (Seker & Sirkeci, 2015).

Paralleling with Seker & Sirkeci (2015) and Beyazova (2017) arguing that some of the refugees prioritize education so they desire to go to Europe. Humeyra's children could not continue their university education as their pre-war educational experiences were denied. She claimed that they asked money for the university education, and they could not afford it. Thus, they were left without any option except for taking dangerous boat journey to Europe. Humeyra stated that even though their children were university graduate they could not find qualified jobs in Turkey, they participated in a labor market where they were paid irregularly. As it is consistent with the study of Wadsworth (2010) with an emphasis on families exposed to mass violence around the world, as long as refugee children are impeded by getting quality education they will not be able to have necessary skills for jobs. This will result in prolonged periods of poverty for refugee families.

“When we were in Syria, we attached particular importance to our children's education. Three of my children graduated from university but here two of them are working at textile mill. Five of my sons are in Germany now. They escaped through smugglers. We gave all of our savings. The one who studied engineering took his brothers who wanted to go with him and took to road to Europe. Only my daughter can go to school. She is fourteen, and she is at 8<sup>th</sup> grade”.

According to study of Hernandez (2004) who describes life circumstances of immigrant families in US emphasizing household composition, educational accomplishments of children and their parents, engagement in paid work and poverty,

poverty has negative developmental consequences for immigrant children. Children who come from families with financial constraints may be prone to educational failure due to lack of access to adequate nutrition, health care, dental care, or vision care. Also, the parents with lower incomes cannot afford to purchase educational materials for their children. Similar to Hernandez's study (2004) the participants stated that they did not afford the cost of school materials and transportation cost because many schools in urban areas could not adequately accept all of the children in their vicinity. Two of the refugee mothers expressed the struggle in paying the school buses as the schools were not close enough. They were not accepted by school near their houses, so they had to commute to the school every morning. Mothers considered distance as a safety issue, so they signed up for school buses. However, school bus fees were a burden on the shoulders of the family members:

“The school is far away from home. Thus, my daughters need to take school bus to home. We have to pay 500 TL for my daughters, only for commute. There is another school near here, but they were not accepted by that school as there was not space. Then, they leaded to Imam Hatip which was far”.

All the participants stated that they used to prioritize child education and participating in social activities when they were in Syria, but, in Turkey, they could not send their children to school due to lack of financial means or safety concerns. They hoped for sending their children to school. However, they encountered difficulties especially financially they were vulnerable. The accounts revealed that there was a dramatic change in socioeconomic status due to immigrant status. Poverty influenced occupational status, career aspirations, academic performance, relationship dynamics, and available social support systems of the students and their families.

Rana:“When my children were in Syria they used to go to school and private courses. We don't know anything in here. They cannot join any activities. Because we don't trust anybody in here, we don't let our children go out without us”.

According to the women's account the mothers considered education as crucial. They thought that education played a significant role in their children's lives in terms of having a good career and overcoming their traumas. Even though they were opt for sending their children to school they faced challenges in making children enroll in schools or the

children struggled in adapting to school environment and benefiting from it due to several reasons. Some of the children were left out of formal education system because they were supposed to work. Some of them encountered challenges such as bullying and discrimination at school, inability to adapt to curriculum and school environment due to language, affording transportation costs or working. Three participants prioritized work over education because of financial hardships.

Paralleling with the findings of Uyan and Erdoğan (2017) and Beyazova (2017) the women's account highlighted that to overcome the language barrier children were offered language courses to support their Turkish but as they were not accepted to classrooms with their Turkish peers they fell back in other curriculum courses such as Math, English, Science, Social Studies. As schools concentrated on language support, less attention was given to learning needs of students. Their access to mainstream curriculum was denied. Also, the language courses were offered afternoon which prevented Syrian children being integrated into other kids' school environment. Additionally, the majority of the children struggled in making friends with Turkish children as they faced physical and emotional bullying. The mothers did not want their children to be separated from other kids by their teachers and peers, otherwise school turned into a place where their children felt intimidated. As teachers were not trained enough or they did not realize refugee children's needs children were lack of the necessary attention on how to get along. Since classrooms were overcrowded, teachers did not pay special attention to refugee children. For the majority of parents, transportation fees to distant schools and school materials were financial burden on the family's shoulders.

## **7.2 Child Labor**

In Okmeydanı, there are textile shops all around the neighborhood. The basements of apartments were turned into textile shops, and it was hard to recognize them as they were underground, or they looked like an entrance of an apartment (Field Notes, 2017). Most of the participants' husbands or children work in the textile industry to make their income. In the textile industry, the wages are low, people are expected to work for long hours, and they

do not get benefit from the insurance. However, families still send their children to work as they do not have any other options. Sending some children to work is regarded by the family as a “survival” strategy.

## **7.2.1 Positive Attitudes about Child Labor**

### **7.2.1.1 Economic hardships as a reason for child labor**

Gazwa: “My sons noticed that the conditions were tough for us and for their father. As only their father worked, we could not make ends of the month. Then, they suggested working. I could not say no even though I was very upset”.

Child labor is a common negative coping strategy among Syrian refugees. Although it is logistically and practically possible, a great number of Syrian refugee families cannot send their children to school as they send them to work in informal labor market. Findings of the study carried out by Kaya (2016) in Istanbul indicate that 26,6 percent of the survey participants send their school-age children to work to support their families financially, 20,3 percent expressed that they do not have money to spend money on their children’ education, while 14,1 percent mentioned difficulties in registration at schools which do not accept them because of limited capacity of classes at the local schools. Refugee families who send their children to work express that their children are able to find jobs in textile sector (clothing, shoes, etc.) service sector (small shops, catering, cafes, restaurants), construction sector and industrial sector (furniture factories, automobile factories, etc.). In parallel with the findings of Kaya (2016) the women’s accounts revealed that the mother who were positive about child labor were homogenous in the reasons behind sending their children to work. The reason for working children was or would be an option instead of going to school was financial hardships that refugee families were going through since they migrated to Turkey. In some cases, like Ruveyda, children were asked to quit school or like in Bahiyya’s case the child did not attend the school at all since they came to Turkey. The mothers of working children stated that their children were able to find at textile sector, and there were lots of Syrian children working at the textile shops in the neighborhood, factories and small service shops. Therefore, as it is in the literature, “a family will send the

children to the labor market only if the family's income from non-child-labor sources drops very low” (Basu & Van, 1998: 416).

Working children cannot enroll in school, and they take part in perpetual poverty and low wage employment. That is to say, if the adults’ income in the household decreases the parents will cut down the schooling expenses of children. Based on the women’s accounts poverty was the main reason behind child labor. The mothers whose children was working due to the financial reasons were asked whether they tried anything else before they sent their children to work, and they replied they had no other choice. Also, in some cases, children themselves wanted to work. Children who noticed that the family had been going through many challenges especially financially wanted to take certain responsibilities to contribute to the family income as Bahiyya emphasized:

“My husband got injured at work. He got surgery on his back and knees. He could not work for some time. My son said his dad could not take care of us. He claimed that he would quit school and find a job to make a contribution. It was a family decision”.

As documented by Blunch & Verner (2001) investigating the link between poverty and child labor in Ghana child labor interferes with education. Children who are supposed to work dropout of school. Also, as argued by Beyazova (2017) children become susceptible to child labor due to lack of ways of livelihood. Paralleling with the findings of these studies the women stated that child labor was the last option but they did not have any other means to get by. When mother talked about why they sent their children to work instead of school their sadness, regrets and despair were on their faces. They longed for their days in Syria. According to the women’s accounts children were not supposed to work when they were in Syria. Only the father worked and took care of the family. They never thought of sending their children to work before as they prioritized their children’s education as Bahiyya highlighted “in Syria, only my husband worked. A father was able to take care of the family by himself but here what he earns does not meet the expenses”. Besides, mothers’ accounts did not reflect any tone of abuse or lack of affection towards their children, but rather a necessity for survival.

According to the research of Edmonds, Pavcnik, and Topalova (2007) on child labor and related questions about how children spend their time in low income countries, schooling cost of children has an impact on the relationship between poverty, child labor



and schooling. Because household income decreases, and poverty increases children are at risk of child labor activities that can directly generate income. In parallel with this study the women stated that sending children to work was the only option to meet their expenses as Bahiyya expressed:

“My sons used to go to school when we were in Syria. They were very successful, they got 100 out of their exams. Their father works too but it is not enough. What he earns does not meet the expenses, so our sons work. I feel so sad that my sons are not able to go to school. They have to work so that we can make a living here”.

School is a distant dream for working refugee children. Because children do not enroll in school, they are more vulnerable to child labor and begging on the streets. According to Strulik (2008) household poverty is a powerful push factor for child labor and working frequently comes at the expense of schooling for children. Also, education and child labor are interrelated because children who are working cannot spare time for going to school or doing their homework. In addition, the length of school day plays a crucial role in the incidence and intensity of child labor. Syrian children out of school are more at risk of child labor in Jordan and Lebanon (Verme, 2016). Similar to Jordan and Lebanon, Syrian children in Turkey are at risk of child labor because they are not enrolled in school.

#### **7.2.1.2 Physical demands of work and working conditions**

The participants stated that because of financial difficulties their children had to work instead of going to school. The interviews revealed that working hours were long, and the children were paid weekly. Their payment could be delayed at times. Children working full-time worked about 11 to 12 hours a day, including Saturdays. They did work informally without a contract or any insurance benefits. They made up a vulnerable section of the informal labor market with low payments and long working hours. They were supposed to work under dangerous conditions, use dangerous machinery in factories, and they were at risk of being abused by employers.

Working refugee children started work before the age of eighteen. Parents decided where their children worked. Social networks played a critical role in finding a job and choosing the workplace for the children to ensure that they were safe at work. Some of

them claimed that they found jobs for their children through their acquaintances as Sayyida argued “first, we looked for a job for my son, but we could not find it, then one of our friends suggested a sweatshop. He started working there”. All the participants stated that their children worked at least 12 hours per day and they were paid weekly which was very low as Gazwa stated “one of my sons who is 12 years old work at a textile mill. He works from 7am until 8pm. He is paid 250-300 TL per week. ”

The mothers expressed their concerns related to their children’s safety while their children were going to work and coming back home. Also, they were worried about physical harm resulting from working long hours with over work demand.

“My son is 13 years old. He said he felt exhausted after work, but he did not face any kind challenges at work. The older one is paid 1000 lira per month the younger one gets 600 lira per month. While he is going to work or coming back I am afraid that somebody would kidnap. That is my concern”.

The participants expressed their sadness about working children. They tried to see it as a destiny (the only way of survival) to overcome the feeling of sadness and despair as Humeyra stated that “My relations with my children did not change but I know that they are very sad as they have to work instead of going to school now. I know it is hard, I understand how they feel but we have nothing to do. This is our destiny, I am sure God has a plan for us”.

When families faced destitute economic conditions such as paying high rents and bills they resorted to child labor as a coping strategy. Not only parents but also children considered working as an only way out. Refugee mothers having working children knew that their children could not live their childhood under migration circumstances as they had bigger concerns. Mothers could not work instead of their children. The reason why they could not work seemed traditional gender roles as the women were not allowed to work outside their homes or they had little children at home. The mothers were expected to raise their children, and to take care of the family.

### 7.2.2 Negative Attitudes Towards Child Labor

According to the women's accounts the majority of the participants were negative about child labor. They claimed that they were trying to cut down their expenses as much as possible so that their children would go to school. The reason why many mothers were against the child labor was their beliefs about their children who would continue their higher education. They also argued that sending children to school would be more useful in finding a job in the future as the children would be more qualified.

Leila: I can't send my daughters to work. My husband works, it is not enough but I eat less, live in one-bedroom house but I can't let them work at a very young age. I want them to go to school, I want them to be a doctor. If they start working now how can they live their childhood. How can I eat the bread that a little girl brings?

Even though some of the refugee women were against the child labor they thought that families who were sending their children to work did not have any other alternative way of getting by. As a coping strategy of survival in Turkey, they resorted to child labor. In some families children are the breadwinners of the family or some of them consider that they should support their families.

Rana: I know there are Syrian children going to work. They work at textile shops, and they make little money but here we suffer from poverty. I know their parents are helpless, so they send their children to work. Otherwise, who can let a child work under those conditions.

Nonetheless, women who were against the child labor were the ones who had younger kids or daughters. Based on their accounts among participants gender played a role. All of the working children of the participants were boys. Thus, it can be argued that in the future the mothers who were against the child labor before can send their children to work if they are not able to meet their expenses.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

This study analyzed experiences of Syrian refugee women in a neighborhood of Istanbul, Okmeydanı. It portrayed different aspects of Syrian refugee women's lives by focusing on forced displacement, poverty, non-camp livelihoods, motherhood and their perspectives towards child education and child labor. I have attempted to voice Syrian refugee women's experiences, challenges, and individual and shared perspectives in reconstructing their lives. To analyse Syrian refugee women's experiences it is important to place them in multiple contexts such as family, neighborhood, social, cultural and political context. All of them have an impact on the lives of Syrian refugee women and their beliefs on child education and child labor.

The violence in Syria has been a reason for an increasingly large-scale displacement of the civilian population. Turkey has been a host country receiving a great number of refugees since the outbreak of war in Syria. Due to "geographical limitation" of Geneva Convention Syrians who have migrated to Turkey are acknowledged as "misafir" (guest) and not as "refugees". However, as the war continued Temporary Protection Legal Framework was implemented in April 2014 Syrian refugees are under temporary protection which grants them right to stay and get benefit from certain rights such as free access to healthcare and educational services. Unable to be granted refugee status situates Syrian migrants in a position of precarity, and this brings about irregular access to basic needs

such as food, products and social services, and increases their vulnerability (Baban, et.al., 2017).

Refugee women have faced several struggles in Turkey, and they have gone through similar challenges in adapting to new environment. These challenges are economic hardships, longing to be together with their families and friends, and language barrier. They have developed several mechanisms to cope with the consequences of forced displacement that resulted from war in Syria. These strategies are looking for financial assistance through governmental and non-governmental agencies, working at home (making ornaments, selling basic clothes etc.) and kitchen (producing jams and pickles with Syrian refugee women) to contribute to the income, trying to learn Turkish, relying on neighbors and relatives in the neighborhood.

As the neighborhood receives more Syrian refugees the women feel less lonely although they still long for being together with their relatives and friends and hope for going back to Syria. Language is a barrier in navigating in the city and building relationships with neighbors. Because of language handicap, the women become marginalized and they only build relationships with other Syrian women. Language facilitates their mobility in the city and having access to basic services in the city such as going to hospital, doing shopping at open-air bazaar, and school registration of the children. As well as language barrier, they have faced social stigmatization and discrimination in the neighborhood which have prevented them from building trust relationships with their neighbors. To be able to overcome language barrier the women practice Turkish with the people they know through the association, and with their children.

Economic hardships are another challenge in the community. Because Syrian refugees are not able to get work permit they are either unemployed or they take part in informal labor force where they are paid irregularly, and they are forced to work under harsh conditions, which results in poverty. As they suffer from poverty they could not afford better housing conditions, and they struggle in paying bills and meeting essential needs. Because their husbands work during the day the women are responsible for searching for financial assistance and applying for them. However, lack of sufficient financial assistance or irregularity of help by the agencies do not ease economic hardships of refugee families; they continue struggle in meeting their basic needs. They work at

Kitchen and they make some ornaments at home. They also sell basic clothes and makeup stuff, which make them contribute to the family income.

Okmeydanı, which is home internal immigrants and Syrian refugees because it provides informal labor market and affordable housing, is a space where refugee women and children spend most of their time because financial constraints do not let refugees move out the neighborhood often. As there is increase in the population of Syrian families in the neighborhood the women have created their own community where they back up each other, share their experiences and give advice. Thanks to the support provided by Okmeydanı Assistance and Solidarity Association and kitchen the women have known each other, and they have created their own social capital which they lost in war. Thus, neighborhood facilitates social and emotional support provided by refugee women to each other in the neighborhood.

In spite of being proactive, Okmeydanı is risky for refugees, especially for children. The women are concerned about their children's safety because they are afraid that their children are snatched by the strangers in the street, and due to their ethnic identity, they will be helpless. Thus, most of the time the children are at home. As long as being monitored by their parents, they children can play outside at parks and playgrounds in the neighborhood. Being trapped at home prevents children meeting and playing with their Turkish peers, which is a barrier in socialization of refugee children. In addition, because the women are socially stigmatized they encounter racial discrimination by their neighbors when they try to handle their daily errands and accessing to essential services such as housing, hospital, education and transportation. That's why they do not let their children play outside or interact with their Turkish peers in case they argue with their friends or cause any trouble. As a coping mechanism woman personally supervise their children, they take them to the parks and playgrounds. When children are allowed to play outside mothers they put time limit. They also send their children to the activities organized for the children by Okmeydanı Assistance and Solidarity Association.

This study suggests that while the women started reconstructing their lives, making friends in a new context and recovering social capital, language barrier and economic hardships continue to be a structural force that make Syrian women's' lives hard and influence their beliefs about child education and child labor. The women prioritize their

motherhood, and they do not acknowledge their children as a burden on their shoulders. They value their mothering roles at home, and they consider that mothers are responsible for keeping the family united and taking care of each member of the family under any circumstances. Thus, they consider their children as hope although they feel powerless at times because of inability to meet their children's basic needs or protect them from discrimination and bullying. Children help refugee women feel motivated to adapt to the new environment.

The mothers struggle in providing quality education for their children. Although formal education is offered for free at schools or there are afternoon shifts for providing language support for Syrian children it is still hard to overcome barriers such as language difficulties, enrollment requirements, bullying and discrimination by peers, child labor and fees for transportation and educational resources. The women who have negative attitudes towards school consider that their children encounter difficulties at school resulting from language. Even though they recognize language as the most crucial element of school they are bothered by the school policies which place Syrian refugee children afternoon shifts where there is only language support. As the majority of the participants believe that school is a way of having a good career in the future they would like to send their children to school where they can also follow main courses which they will need in the long term. According to the women discrimination and bullying by children's teachers or peers make their children feel unmotivated to go to school. Because of teachers who devalue diversity in the learning environment children struggle in adapting to the school. As they encounter bullying by their peers due to their ethnic identity children feel negative towards school, and they tend to quit school. Additionally, financial constraints of refugee families result in inability to afford school materials, enrollment fees (even though the schools are free there are schools who charge an amount of enrollment fees) and transportation fees or some of the refugee children do not enroll in formal education and start working at an early age.

Children are at risk of child labor (Because We Struggle to Survive Child Labour among Refugees of the Syrian Conflict, 2016; ). Poverty is the main reason for child labor according the the participants. Mothers with children working state that they have to make this decision as they could not meet their monthly expenses as long as only one person from the family works. Child labor is addressed as a survival strategy of refugee families.

Nonetheless, the mothers who are against sending their children to work consider taking care of the family as the responsibility of parents not children. Thus, they argue that decreasing expenses is a way of sending their children to school not to work. According to the mothers who are against child labor children should grow up by playing games, going to school and having fun not having the responsibility of contributing to the family income.

### **8.1 Policy and Implications of the Study**

Refugee women encounter similar challenges in Turkey. A feeling of loneliness resulting from longing for being together with their friends and family is eased by the increase in the Syrian population of the neighborhood as they have become the part of the refugee community. Although the women are away from their relatives they do not feel alienated as they live in an neighborhood where Arabic is spoken by their friends and neighbors. Thus, the women support each other in adapting to their surroundings. Nonetheless, they still struggle in building relationships with the locals and handling their daily errands as they are not competent at Turkish. Therefore, the existing social capital of refugee women can be reinforced by providing language support for them. For the ones who are motivated to learn Turkish, language courses should be offered for free, and the women should be informed by the existence of the courses.

Interventions and policies should target multiple levels. As poverty is a persistent challenge for Syrian women efforts to eradicate poverty should continue. To be able to solve the problem to some extent the government should enable refugees to have work permit which looks out for the rights of the workers and prevent them from being vulnerable to the exploitation by employees. Also, to integrate women into the workforce vocational trainings should be offered. Although the women consider taking care of the children as their main responsibility they are willing to contribute to the family income as long as there are opportunities such as working from home or under flexible conditions like Solidarity Kitchen provides.

To overcome educational challenges there should be policies motivating children to attend to the school and pursue higher education. The parents and children should be



supported financially as economic hardship is regarded as the reason for school drop-out. If dropout prevention programs are implemented in school, and refugee children's attendance are followed on a regular basis student are more likely to go to the school.

To promote the quality of education effectively, school resources and needs should first be identified. Culturally appropriate programs should be developed to raise awareness about the value of diversity in a learning environment for teachers and the students to lessen the discrimination against refugee children by the teachers and children.

To overcome language barrier, Turkish language support should be expanded but it should not turn into a barrier in accessing to the other main courses for refugee children. They should not fall behind the main courses or should not be isolated from their peers for the sake of learning the language. The children should not be separated from other children so that they can integrate into education and not to be marginalized.

Refugee children enroll in the activities organized by the Okmeydanı Assistance and Solidarity Association which refugee women mentioned as a community where their children were supported academically and socially. Based on their accounts it may be argued that community centers in the neighborhoods or voluntary associations play a significant role in the positive development of children in the neighborhood. Thus, community centers should be expanded and supported.

The women feel helpless against the kidnappers and thieves and they think that the police will not solve their problems as they are discriminated because of their ethnic identity. To increase the sense of safety among refugee women police force should establish protection mechanisms or take necessary steps to eradicate the criminal activities especially kidnapping. Neighborhood should provide safe spaces such as parks and playgrounds with well-equipped facilities for refugee children.

## **8.2 Limitations of the Study**

The sample size is limited, and it influences the richness of the material. The goal was to reach more than ten interviews; however, things went slowly, and the snowball did not roll as easily as had been imagined. I did not know the languages, Arabic or Kurdish, so

I was limited by the interpretations of my initial contact. Working with an initial contact as an interpreter had advantages and disadvantages at the same time. It was positive in terms of building trust relationship as my participants had known her for a while they felt comfortable while they were sharing their stories. However, if I had spoken Arabic instead of working with an interpreter I may have captured nuances of the comments and explored feelings and opinions of the participants in depth. Namely, working with an interpreter may have an impact on the depth of the interviews.

The parental beliefs and experiences on child labor and education were only explored from women's perspectives. Although some mothers mentioned their husbands' opinions on child education and labor, future qualitative research should have larger samples that include fathers' views as well. Also, further research should focus on children's own beliefs and experiences on education and labor and explore how they perceive the school and work.

This study only focuses on Okmeydanı neighborhood. Syrian refugee women in other neighborhoods of the city might have a somewhat different set of concerns, problems, and a different set of coping strategies. For instance, the families living in Fatih may not have to worry about protecting their children and other members of their families from the dangers of the or refugee families living in have different safety concerns as well as kidnapping of their children. On the other hand, they may still need to handle economic hardships which have an impact on the development of children. Thus, refugees' livelihoods in different neighborhoods are different from each other, and this influences refugees' beliefs and experiences on child education and labor. Thus, further research should include samples from different neighborhoods.

## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Bana kendini anlatır mısın? Kaç çocuğun var?
2. Ne kadar zamandır buradasın?
3. Kaç yaşındasın? Okula gittin mi? Çalışıyor musun?
4. Nasıl geldin? Yolculuk boyunca sorunlar yaşadın mı?
5. Bana İstanbul'a gelmeden önceki hayatını anlatır mısın? Sıradan bir gününü?
6. Neden Okmeydanı'nda yaşamaya karar verdin?
7. Mahalle hakkında neler düşünüyorsun?
8. Nasıl gidiyor burada hayat zor mu? Bu zorluklarla nasıl baş ediyorsun?
9. Burada mutlu musun? Güvende hissediyor musun?
10. Mahalleyle ilgili sevdiğin/sevmediğin şeyler neler?
11. Komşularınla ilişkilerin nasıl?
12. Bir problemin olduğunda ne yapıyorsun?
13. Herhangi bir yerden yardım alabildin mi? Hala alıyor musun?
14. Yardım istediğin kişiler karşılığında bir şey istiyorlar mı?
15. Buraya alışmanda sana neler yardımcı oldu?
16. Suriyeliler'e tanınan haklardan haberin var mı? Bunlardan faydalanabiliyor musun?
17. Türkiye'de hiç hastaneye gittin mi? Herhangi bir sorunla karşılaştın mı?
18. Çocukların okula gidiyor mu? Gitmiyorsa neden?
19. Suriye'de okula gidiyorlar mıydı?
20. Okul hakkında ne düşünüyorsun? Öğretmenleri ile ilgili ne düşünüyorsun? Herhangi bir zorlukla karşılaştılar mı?
21. Çocuklar dışarıda oyun oynayabiliyor mu?
22. Suriye'de çocuklar günlerini nasıl geçiriyordu? Burada neler yapıyorlar?
23. Buraya gelmeden önce çocuklarıyla ilişkilerin nasıldı? Şimdi nasıl?
24. Eğitim insanın hayatında değişiklik yapar mı?
25. Eğitim, okul senin için ne kadar önemli?
26. Burada çocuklarıyla ilgili en çok korktuğun şey ne?
27. Burada çocuklarıyla ilgili seni en çok üzen şey ne?
28. Çocuklarının güvende olduğunu düşünüyor musun?

29. Çocukların hayatında eğitimin yeri ne?
30. Eşinle nasıl tanıştın?
31. Evlendiğinde kaç yaşındaydın?
32. Burada gelmeden önce çalışıyor muydun?
33. Burada çalışıyorsun, eşin buna ne diyor?
34. Çocuk deyince aklına ne geliyor?
35. Çocukluğunda her çocuk neler yapıyor olmalı?
36. Çocuklarından çalışan var mı?
37. Neden çalışıyorlar?
38. Çalışma kararlarını kim verdi?
39. Ne zaman çalışmaya başladı?
40. Ne iş yapıyorlar?/Nerede çalışıyorlar?
41. Bu işi nasıl buldunuz?
42. Günde kaç saat çalışıyor çocuklar? Evden kaçta çıkıp, kaçta dönüyorlar?
43. İşte kötü bir şey yaşadılar mı?
44. Bazı aileler çocuklarını işe gönderiyor? Bununla ilgili ne düşünüyorsun?

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Name	Age	Years of living in Turkey	From	Nr. of children	education/employment
1	30	3	Damascus	4	Enrolled in school by 6th grade/Housewife
2	26	1,5	Aleppo	5	Enrolled in school by 10th grade/Housewife
3	55	4	Damascus	10	High school graduate
4	33	1,5	Damascus	3	Secondary School graduate/Housewife
5	52	2,5	Damascus	8	Never went to school/Housewife
6	30	3	Aleppo	4	Dropped by primary school
7	38	4	Aleppo	3	Enrolled in school by 6th grade
8	49	2	Damascus	6	Enrolled in school by 9th grade
9	33	5	Damascus	4	Enrolled in school by 6th grade++Nursing certificate
10	29	2	Aleppo	5	Enrolled in school by 5th grade/Housewife
11	36	2	Damascus	5	Enrolled in 6th grade/Housewife

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