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**The impact of educational barriers on
child marriage among Syrian refugees
in Lebanon**

Fadia Aljamal



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Fadia Aljamal; fadia.aljamal@uniroma1.it

Abstract

Lebanon is currently home to about 1.5 million Syrian refugees. Children make up half of these refugees. Unfortunately, the percentage of girls who cannot attend school because of marriage has increased from 6 percent in 2021 to 13 percent in 2022. To address this issue, I have developed a conceptual paper that analyses the various structural and contextual barriers to education that Syrian refugee families face when seeking education for their children in Lebanon. The paper aims to identify policies that negatively affect refugees' daily lives, increasing the vulnerability of girls and motivating them to drop out of school, engage in labour activities, and get married at a young age. It explores various factors hindering educational opportunities for refugee girls, including socioeconomic circumstances and cultural barriers. The paper emphasises the significance of education in empowering girls and preventing child marriage. Using Bourdieu's framework of field, capital, and habitus, the paper analyses the obstacles confronted by Syrian refugee families. This paper examines how Syrian refugees handle displacement and the challenges they face through the lens of symbolic violence. This paper, part of ongoing research, incorporates an extensive literature review.

Introduction

Education is key to integrating refugee children and is critical in bringing back a sense of normalcy, and routine and emotional and social well-being in the lives of refugee children (Guo et al., 2019). Lebanon currently has the world's highest per capita refugee population, with 1.5 million Syrian refugees (NRC, 2020a), including 832,053 refugees registered with UNHCR (2022), living among its 6.8 million population. The lack of international support exacerbates Lebanon's severe economic crisis. The aftermath of a civil war that lasted from 1975 to 1990 has left the country in turmoil. According to the (NRC, 2020a), Lebanon has a fragile political balance among its diverse ethnic and religious groups in a densely populated setting. Lebanon is currently facing multiple socio-economic crises that have worsened in 2022, including the 2020 Port Blast, political paralysis, the protracted Syrian crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, economic deterioration, and currency devaluation (LCRP, 2023). Despite not being a party to the 1951 Convention on Refugees, and does not employ a legal definition of refugees nor a legal framework that regulates their presence and status (Dionigi, 2016). Lebanon is bound by the customary law principle of *non-refoulement* and by the obligations of the human rights treaties it has signed and incorporated into its Constitution (Frangieh, 2015; Janmyr, 2016). In 2015, the Government of Lebanon instructed UNHCR to stop

registering new refugees (Dionigi, 2016). The regulations, which came into effect on 5 January 2015, delineate two categories of Syrian refugees: those registered with UNHCR and those with a Lebanese national sponsor (Janmyr, 2016). The former signed a pledge not to work to receive a residency permit, while the latter must have their subsistence guaranteed by their sponsor. Both groups need to renew their residence permits every year, and individuals over 15 years old must pay \$200. The new regulations left around 70-80 percent of Syrian refugees without legal residency permits (Lenner & Schmelter, 2016). The Lebanese government has refused to allow the establishment of official refugee camps for Syrians, citing a longer history of Palestinian camps and their militarisation (Sanyal, 2017). As a result, most Syrian refugee households (69 percent) live in residential structures, (21 percent) in non-permanent shelters, and (10 percent) in non-residential structures in informal settlements (VASyR, 2022)¹. People establish informal settlements in an unplanned and unmanaged manner, and they go unrecognised. The establishment of most of these settlements occurs through private negotiations between the landowner and a Syrian representative or a *Shaweesh* (Sanyal, 2017). Overall, 58 percent of displaced Syrians live in inadequate shelter conditions, disproportionately distributed across the three shelter types (LCRP, 2023). The highest population concentrations of Syrian refugees in Lebanon are in Bekaa (38.8 percent), Beirut (22.2 percent), North Lebanon (27.9 percent), and South Lebanon (11.1 percent), according to UNHCR (2023). Refugees often settle in urban and peri-urban areas, posing unique challenges compared to rural areas (UN-HABITAT & UNHCER, 2014). For instance, refugee children in rural areas often work in agriculture, while those in urban areas work as street peddlers or in construction. Various international conventions, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, recognize basic education as a human right and protect it (Buckner et al., 2017). Lebanese schools are hosting over 500,000 registered Syrian refugee children and youth between the ages of 3-24 (UNHCR, 2022a). However, more than half of school-aged children (6-17 years) did not attend the 2021-2022 school year because of the cost of transportation and educational materials. The economic strain also pushed the rates of girls not attending school because of marriage and boys not attending because of work to double from 2011 to 2022. A 2022 report showed that 22 percent of girls between 15 and 19 are married, and among them, 68 percent did not attend school during the 2021/2022 academic year. According to the

¹ VASyR (2022) classifies the shelters used by refugee households into three categories: residential (apartment/house), non residential (factory, workshop, farm, active construction site, shop, agricultural/engine/pump room, warehouse, school), and non-permanent (tent, prefab unit).

2022 report, Beirut had the highest rate of child marriage at 36 percent, whereas Akkar had the lowest rate at 16 percent (VASyR, 2022). Factors contributing to child marriage following forced displacement include limited educational opportunities for girls forced to move to Lebanon because of conflict (Bartels et al., 2017). Deep-rooted social and cultural norms drive child marriage, making it an accepted coping strategy². Child marriage is a significant hindrance to girls' education by people worldwide. Girls lacking education are three times more likely to marry or enter a union before 18 than those with secondary or higher education (LCRP, 2023). The occurrence of child marriage indirectly affects women's subordination. Religion and social norms have a role in perpetuating child marriage, reproducing subordination, and symbolic violence against women (Fatimatus Zahro' Jihan Fiteri et al., 2022; Khohno et al., 2020). Society often expects child brides to abandon education and focus on household duties. This prevents the girls from acquiring independence and empowering themselves. Illiteracy makes children dependent on family for sustenance, putting them at risk of exploitation and abuse (Dhankhar, 2018). Attending secondary education delays the age at which girls get married. Once they are no longer in school, however, girls are more likely to be viewed as marriageable, which leads to a heightened vulnerability to early marriage (Sekine & Hodgkin, 2017; Save the Children, 2014). Child marriage leads to negative health, economic, and social outcomes. According to Kohno et al. (2020), socio-economic imbalance, spousal age gap, power imbalance, and lack of female autonomy catalyze this phenomenon. Women and men without legal residency are at risk of being exploited, such as through delayed or non-payment of wages, denial of weekly time off, passport confiscation, and restricted freedom of movement. It obstructs access to justice, dissuading people from seeking help and leaving women more vulnerable to sexual harassment (LCRP, 2023). Addressing the matter of education for refugee girls is intricate and multi-dimensional. An understanding of forced displacement and the norms in the new environment is required. Understanding the threats and challenges faced by Syrian families in Lebanon is crucial (Hattar-Pollara, 2019). Multiple overlapping barriers hinder accessing education. Barriers can include financial constraints and depleted family resources, like transportation costs and school supplies, as well as the need to support family economies. The impact of these barriers can vary. The frequent preference for

² Child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM) is defined as a marriage involving at least one party below the age of 18. It also encompasses marriages of individuals under 18 in countries where legal adulthood is achieved earlier or through marriage. The term "early marriage" can also encompass marriages where both parties are 18 or older, but other factors, such as inadequate physical, emotional, sexual, and psychosocial development, or a lack of knowledge about available life choices, make them ill-prepared to give their consent. Moreover, any marriage that lacks the complete and voluntary agreement of one or both parties, or where one or both parties are unable to terminate or leave the marriage due to coercion or significant societal or familial influence, is also considered as child, early, or forced marriage (CEFM). According to the WHO in 2016.

educating sons and implementing discriminatory laws posed a threat to girls' education in various countries. Girls' educational opportunities are limited by factors such as the distance to schools, which jeopardise their safety (Bhat, 2010). Although this topic is important, there is still a lack of current literature. The literature shows a lack of empirical evidence on the connection between child marriage and limited education. This paper seeks to fill the gap and contribute to the existing literature on the relationship between limited education and the increase in child marriage, as well as identify related risk factors. My argument is that alterations in Lebanon's regulations can shape the educational opportunities of Syrian refugees. Increasing girls' enrolment in school reduces the occurrence of child marriages. To explore the connection between child marriage and limited education, the paper utilised grey literature and International NGOs and relief organizations. This review aims to analyse the correlation between child marriage and education gaps and investigate the factors contributing to the escalating child marriage rate among Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The first part of the analysis focuses on threats and challenges that hinder education. This study investigates the adverse impact of host country policies in Lebanon on children's education, particularly girls, resulting in child marriage and labour. The second section examines how socio-economic factors and cultural customs obstruct the education of refugee girls, leading to an increased prevalence of child marriage. To analyse the various obstacles and challenges to education, I opted for Bourdieu's framework. This analysis allows us to explore the structural and symbolic violence experienced by Syrian refugees in their daily lives of displacement. It contributes to our understanding of the relationship between education and violence against women, specifically in child marriage.

Barriers to accessing education and host country policies towards Syrian refugees in Lebanon

The state of Lebanon is defined by sectarian divisions and post-conflict dynamics. Lebanon experienced a devastating civil war from 1975 to 1990, involving various factions. The breakdown of Lebanon's public school system during the civil war led to approximately 70% of families opting for private schools linked to their specific sect or religion (Buckner et al., 2017). Most Lebanese students attend private fee-based or subsidised schools associated with religious communities or foreign organizations. The rise of sectarian schools in Lebanon results from its complex colonial past and the unequal distribution of power and wealth based on socio-religious affiliations (Maadad & Matthews, 2018). According to Buckner et al. (2017), Lebanese children in public schools belong to economically disadvantaged backgrounds with parents who have lower education levels.

Although most Syrian refugees in Lebanon are over 18 and may pursue higher education, they encounter various legal and socioeconomic barriers in their path. Various factors (Fincham, 2022a) contribute to this, which we will further explore in the following paragraph. The education environment in Lebanon is challenging because of deficits in the public education system and funding shortages (Abu-Amsha & Armstrong, 2018). According to data, 59% of Syrian youth aged 15-24 are not engaged in education, vocational training, or employment (VASyR, 2022). It is important to highlight that the geographic distribution of families in Lebanon does not match the distribution of schools. Schools in rural and distant regions often have low enrolment rates, which results from being underserved (Akersson et al., 2020). The percentage of Syrian girls in Lebanon not attending school because of marriage increased from 6% in 2021 to 13% in 2022, while the rate of boys not attending because of work doubled from 19% to 35% (VASyR, 2022). The study by El Arab and Sagbakken (2019) revealed that early marriage is associated with negative social outcomes, such as school dropout, unemployment, and limited educational achievements. Accessing tertiary education poses difficulties for Syrian refugee youths in Lebanon. This is contributed to by factors like financial hardship and the high cost of living in Lebanon, lack of identity documents and residence permits for refugees, and institutional rigidity and limited capacity of Lebanese higher education institutions. The AUB Policy Institute (2019) found that Lebanese universities enrolled just 2.9% of Syrians in 2015-2016, putting their finances and quality of life at risk. Two distinguishing debates often approach integration in refugee contexts: the debate on structural integration, which focuses on access to formal systems like education and health, and the debate on social and cultural inclusion, which aims to foster a sense of belonging and connection within communities (Salem, 2021). In Lebanon, UN agencies made it possible for integration into the Lebanese school system by agreeing to cover the registration and parents' tuition fees in 2012-2013. This allowed Syrian children to enrol in regular public schools. In 2013-2014, there was a policy change to introduce a second shift and separate Lebanese and Syrian students because of concerns about the impact on Lebanese students' learning. Refugee children in the second shift miss out on arts, sports, and music, which could benefit them (Crul et al., 2019). However, various obstacles hindered the achievement of fair school access. Syrian families view the afternoon shift as informal education and opt not to enrol their children in it. Non-formal education schooling systems frequently lack accreditation and certifications, hindering children from demonstrating their educational attainment for continued schooling (Akersson et al., 2020). One of the most serious concerns is the lack of formal education among refugee children³. The

³ Formal education refers to certified educational services offered by the Ministry of Education Schools. Non-formal education (NFE) is a structured educational activity outside the formal system, serving specific learners with clear

Lebanese Ministry of Education has attempted to help Syrian refugee children who are fleeing the conflict. However, space limitations remain a significant obstacle. The increasing number of refugees exceeds the capacity of Lebanese schools. Another obstacle to ensuring equal access for Syrian children is their high levels of poverty and distress. As they sought refuge from war, many experienced significant breaks in their education, spanning several years. There is a contrast between the social capital of Syrian refugee children and Lebanese children. There are significant distinctions in the curriculum for refugee children. In Lebanese schools, students have the option to study maths and science in French or English, while in Syria, they study only in Arabic. Hence, students encounter difficulties in comprehending a different math and science curriculum until they have learned language skills (Hamadeh, 2018). Migration disrupts children's lives and leads to the experience of many traumatic events. Social injustice, a lack of a sense of belonging, alienation, exclusion, differences between past and present life conditions, social acceptance, and social adaptation issues can worsen problems with education (Dolapcioglu, 2021). Before the uprising, Syria had high enrolment rates for both genders and a strong literacy rate (Charles & Denman, 2013). The primary enrolment rate was 93%, with net secondary enrolment at 68%, gross tertiary enrolment at 26%, and adult literacy at 84%. The existing conflict in Syria has brought about a substantial transformation in this context (UNHCR, 2014). Refugee families, including those in Lebanon, often prioritise education when deciding to move to host countries, as shown by studies conducted by (Akesson et al., 2020; NRC, 2020; DeJong et al., 2017). Akesson et al. (2020) found that education plays a crucial role in shaping the aspirations of Syrian families, both before and during their displacement in Lebanon. Girls and boys encountered distinct challenges, with girls often citing transportation, caregiving responsibilities, and school schedules as obstacles, while boys mentioned the necessity of working to support their families (NRC, 2020). HRW (2016) also recorded various instances of families opting to keep older girls at home instead of permitting them to attend school because of safety concerns, such as the fear of sexual harassment. This situation is clear when girls walk home late at night because their parents cannot afford transportation expenses (HRW, 2016). Families face another barrier to enrolling their children in schools because of mistreatment, discrimination, and violence (Akesson et al., 2020; DeJong et al., 2017; NRC, 2020). A study (DeJong et al., 2017) found that respondents highlighted the negative experiences of Syrian children in Lebanese schools. More specifically, boys shared their experiences of being excluded and bullied by Lebanese schoolchildren. The exclusion of families

learning goals. Governments, UN agencies, trade unions, sports clubs, youth organizations, and national institutions can all provide non-formal education (UNHCR & REACH, 2014).

acts as a major obstacle to enrolling and ensuring their children go to school, resulting in decreased attendance and increased dropout rates (Akesson et al., 2020; HRW, 2016). Syrian families face additional contextual barriers because of legal restrictions. Key barriers for children seeking to continue their education include their lack of legal status, inability to register in programs, and inability to verify previous education levels (Akesson et al., 2020). The requirement for Syrians to have a Lebanese residency permit caused anxiety, affecting parents' ability to support their children's development. Constraints on refugees' freedom of movement can limit children's play and socialisation with peers, negatively affecting family dynamics (Sim et al., 2018), and impeding children's access to education (Akesson et al., 2020). Restricted mobility, according to Fincham's (2022a) study, had a significant impact on refugees' ability to access higher education opportunities in Lebanon. A report by HRW (2016) highlights the hurdles faced by Syrian refugee children in Lebanon in getting an education. Some of these factors are poverty, which leads to children working instead of going to school, and school administrators demanding hard-to-get documents for enrollment, like health records and proof of local residency. These requirements result in increased costs for refugees. Based on HRW (2016) and NCR (2020) reports, some families are pulling their kids out of school to work. Schools in Lebanon are denying Syrian children the opportunity to take mandatory exams unless they possess legal residency (HRW, 2021). This legal residency is mandatory at age 15, yet only 20 percent of Syrian refugees have got it (HRW, 2022). Moussa and colleagues (2022) found in their study that educational access barriers are not solely because of learning deficiencies, but also have an economic aspect. For example, the additional funds could reduce women's dependence on others and minimise the necessity for extreme actions, such as premature marriages (Moussa et al., 2022). The erosion of education contributes to a larger pattern of social decline. The increasing severity and duration of the refugee crisis have had a damaging impact on children's well-being, largely because of the lack of access to education. When education is absent, children face a greater risk of being exploited in labour markets or being forced into early marriages (ODI, 2014).

Theoretical framework

Drawing on Bourdieu's work, specifically his concepts of fields, capital, and habitus (Bourdieu, 1977), I have explored the relationship between barriers to education and child marriage among Syrian refugees in Lebanon. According to Bourdieu, the term "field" represents the social context where capitals gain their value (Bourdieu, 1986), and capital only exists and functions within this field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Economic, social, cultural, and symbolic aspects can

interchange capital. *Habitus* relates to the field and capitals. According to Morrice (2013), Bourdieu defines habitus as enduring, embodied dispositions that manifest through thoughts and emotions. According to Bourdieu, the habitus can generate a diverse range of actions, allowing individuals to access both transformative and constraining options. When habitus confronts an unfamiliar field, it can lead to change and transformation (Reay, 2004). This is the case when Syrian refugees are trying to adapt to a new country and new environment with different requirements and expectations. Before the 2011 conflict, Syrian youth had a better education than other Middle Eastern countries, with nearly all attending primary school and a high rate of completing secondary education. Public schools make up 97 percent of all basic education schools in Syria. The Syrian population depended on public services, particularly in education, health, and infrastructure, although there were significant disparities between rural and urban regions. Since the Lebanese Civil War, people have learned to cope individually, even with basic needs as electricity and water. The educational systems in both countries differ significantly because of social differences, particularly in parental expectations. Lebanese parents rely heavily on private schools, facing individual challenges in planning and financing their children's education. In contrast, Syrian parents were familiar with the advantages of having access to free public education services that were available to everyone. As a result, the contrasting nature of the two societies creates obstacles for the Syrian refugees and their children in acclimating to the new and surprisingly diverse environment (Abu-Amsha, 2014). According to Bourdieu (1990), the logic of practice arises from the interplay between *habitus* and field. Syrian refugees consider education as a crucial factor for relocating to Lebanon (Akersson et al., 2020). According to Sekine et al. (2017) study, there is a strong correlation between school dropout and child marriage, both of which harm adolescent girls. Syria has taken steps to prohibit child labour and has ratified international conventions to ensure the rights of children, including those who work (ILO, 2012). According to an estimate by The Freedom Fund (2016) around 60 to 70 percent of Syrian refugee children in Lebanon are engaged in employment. The decision of Syrian refugee families in Lebanon to have their children's work is a direct consequence of their desperate predicament. The fundamental driving force is the need to survive, not the exploitation of children. In Bourdieu's framework, the various forms of capital are resources that individuals can draw upon to secure an advantage in particular fields (Morrice, 2013). Bourdieu argues that capital loses its value when it is not within a specific field (Joy et al., 2020). Scholars observe capital produced in domestic fields loses value when migrants attempt to utilise it in foreign fields. The devaluation of their capital portfolio causes migrants to occupy lower positions in the social hierarchy in host nation fields (Joy et al., 2020). Kikano et al. (2020) discovered that Syrian refugees in Lebanon will accept lower pay and tolerate more

challenging work. Because of the absence of identity documents and evidence of prior study, they face barriers to accessing higher education (Fincham, 2020). Schools have an age limit that prevents sufficient students from registering for classes. Because of the conflict in Syria and difficulties in Lebanon, students who have missed several years of education cannot register and receive an education (Cain, 2020). Symbolic violence practices are analysed in this paper through the perspective of Bourdieu's lens. In particular, this paper highlights the symbolic violence encountered by Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Lebanese immigration policies have increased the vulnerability of refugees by imposing restrictions on residency and work permits. This has shifted the responsibility for managing the refugee crisis to municipalities (Kikano et al., 2020), resulting in curfews being imposed on Syrian refugees and restricting their freedom of movement (Janmyr, 2016). Residence permits in Lebanon have a direct impact on the educational opportunities available to refugees. The requirement for a valid residence permit resulted in the exclusion of Syrian refugees in Lebanon from pursuing higher education (Fincham, 2022a).

Barriers to education caused by cultural customs

Child marriage often leads to the disruption or termination of education for young girls. The combination of social norms, family expectations, and legal restrictions often leads to girls ending their education upon marriage. Women's financial independence and earnings are significantly affected by the long-lasting effects of restricting girls' education (Arthur et al., 2018). Child marriage exacerbates poverty through reduced education, higher fertility rates, and limited employment options (Wodon, 2015). Therefore, policymakers and researchers should conduct more studies to better understand how girls are at risk of dropping out of school or marrying early. Researchers and policymakers believe that education serves as 'the single most powerful antidote to early marriage' (Sekine & Hodgkin, 2017). Lack of education leads to less financial freedom and a limited impact on women and society. Girls who do not receive education are at a higher risk of engaging in sex work and early marriage (Charles & Denman, 2013). According to Bhat (2010), education plays a crucial role in both individual and societal development. According to recent UNESCO data, 60% of 161 countries have achieved gender parity in primary school enrolment, compared to only 38% at the secondary level (Mc-Cleary-Sills, 2015). Syria had more women than men in higher education before the crisis, but this did not lead to an equal increase in female participation in the labor market⁴. The explanation lies in the socially and culturally constructed

⁴ The Syrian female labor force participation rate averaged 15.72 percent from 1990 to 2021, according to the Global Economy. The 2021 average, was calculated using data from 181 countries. Italy's percentage for the same period is

gender roles and obligations in Syrian society (Finchman, 2022). In the Syrian community, gender has historically played a significant role in the connection between higher education and employment. In Syrian society, men and women perceive differently higher education. Men see it primarily to achieve economic success, while women have the freedom to pursue it for various reasons, such as personal fulfilment and postponing marriage, as stated by Fincham (2020). Some cultures require separate school facilities for girls or a female teacher in order for girls to attend school (Bhat, 2010). In Syria, gender mostly segregated primary and secondary schools, in line with the conservative values of Syrian society. Many conservative Syrian families, particularly fathers, disapprove of their daughters attending mixed schools in Lebanon and consequently prohibit their attendance (Charles & Denman, 2013). Lack of educational facilities and cultural norms influence gender disparity in education, which holds the belief that girls are only 'born to marry'. Prioritising the needs of young girls may hold the answer to promoting gender equality and empowering women (Bhat, 2010). In societies like Syria, personal decisions to pursue higher education are typically subject to family approval, particularly from the household heads, usually fathers (Fincham, 2013). In a patriarchal family culture, the family takes precedence, with women ranked below men and juniors ranked below seniors. Within and beyond family relationships, individuals inherit gender and age hierarchies (Joseph, 2005). In Syrian culture, the community collectively decides regarding patriarchal and age relations. Men and older individuals exert greater authority in the family. The family has significant control over young women's actions and opportunities, including their education (Fincham, 2022; Lokot, 2018). Within this cultural construct, men take control of the 'public sphere', where they must protect and provide for the family, while women take control of the 'private sphere', where they have the responsibility of maintaining the household, giving birth to and raising the nation's children, and safeguarding the family's 'honour'. An individual's position in the world, nation, community, and family contextualises traditional gender norms (Fincham, 2022). A study conducted in Lebanon (DeJong et al., 2017) found that most participants affirmed the influence of Syrian cultural norms on traditional gender roles, emphasising fathers as the guardians of family norms. Syrian females' lack of financial independence from male relatives hindered their ability to make independent choices and take action (Fincham, 2020). According to the Hattar-Pollara study (2019), societal and cultural norms expect Syrian refugee girls to fulfil various roles and responsibilities. The situation of refugees in

39.89 percent. Retrieved from the following link:
https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/Female_labor_force_participation/.

Lebanon has resulted in trauma and a shift away from traditional gender norms in Syria. The re-establishment of patriarchal roles often leads to violence against women and children, reinforcing societal subordination (Charles & Denman, 2013). Syrian parents believe entering their children, particularly girls, into child marriages is the best way to protect their safety, security, and honour in displacement (Najjarnejad et al., 2022). According to Bartels et al. (2017), research, Syrian refugees in Lebanon might use child marriage as a harmful coping mechanism to ensure the safety and honour of their families.

Vulnerabilities in displacement: structural and symbolic violence

Hospitality is unconditional when based on humanitarian and ethical reasons, and conditional when based on juridical and institutional reasons (El-Abed, 2014). Since Lebanon is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol (Dionigi, 2016), it holds significant control over Syrian refugees, which affects their access to welfare and social protection (Fincham, 2022a). According to El-Abed (2014), the hosts can separate the "labelled people" and control them as a distinct category. This leads to increased vulnerability among refugees (Fincham, 2022a). According to Chopra and Dryden-Peterson (2020), the Lebanese do not recognise Syrians in Lebanon as refugees but label them as 'displaced' and 'temporary guests'. In Lebanon, guest discourse pertains to the political agenda (El-Abed, 2014) and emphasises the shared Arab and Muslim identities to foster unity between Syrian and Lebanese communities (Fincham, 2022a). The mass migration of Syrians threatens Lebanon's century-old, but delicate, sectarian power-sharing balance within its government, a fear based on Lebanon's history of long-standing conflict and civil wars, thus Lebanese government adopts more assertive policies and practices that shape the boundaries of belonging for young Syrians in Lebanon, for example, to enter to university, Syrians needed to submit evidence of their high school leaving examinations, previously not accepted without simultaneous proof of legal residency (Chopra & Dryden-Peterson, 2020). Despite sharing culture and language, Syrian families in Lebanon faced social exclusion in schools and community life, besides economic concerns and educational shortcomings (DeJong et al., 2017). As such, people ignore the unique histories, experiences, circumstances, and concerns of individual refugees. Institutions consider them as a homogenous group and implement 'one size fits all' policies (Fincham, 2022a). Approximately 90% of Syrian refugee households are living in extreme poverty, as stated by VASyR (2022). Poverty compels children to contribute to their families' survival through labour. Urban children in cities engage in various street occupations like

begging, selling, and shining shoes. In contrast, rural Syrian children in Bekaa often work in agriculture, sacrificing education because of challenging economic conditions (Habib et al., 2019). Kikano et al. (2020) found that excluding Syrian refugees from national and formal systems increases their vulnerability and reduces the likelihood of repatriation or resettlement. Syrian refugee in Lebanon faces symbolic and structural violence as restrictive policies such as limited legal status, lack of employment opportunities, and lack of financial support all of which place forced migrants at an increased risk of poverty and destitution (Habib, et al., 2019), given the restrictions on residency and work permits, refugees have become illegal settlers who receive little to no protection from local authorities and are facing the mercy of their employers and landlords (Kikano et al., 2020). The absence of valid residency permits facilitated the implementation of practices such as temporary arrests at checkpoints and arbitrary detentions (UNHCR, 2015). Lebanese municipalities became powerful local bodies because of the absence of a state policy on refugees, leading to imposing curfews on Syrian refugees that limited their freedom of movement (Janmyr, 2016). Symbolic boundaries, like aggressive and defamatory social media campaigns, are present in the daily lives of young Syrians (Chopra & Dryden-Peterson, 2020). State institutions in the host country perpetrate structural and symbolic violence, exacerbating the vulnerabilities of Syrian refugees and challenging traditional gender roles (Hourani et al., 2022; Bourdieu, 1986). The interplay of patriarchy and vulnerabilities of protracted displacement prevent Syrian girls from being their own agents, accessing education, and putting them at risk of coercion into child marriage (Hattar-Pollara, 2019).

Conclusion

This paper explores the challenges faced by Syrian refugees in the Lebanese education system. The decline in Syrian children's enrolment in Lebanese schools is because of restricted policies, mistreatment, and high costs. Besides the lack of a proper strategy for integrating Syrian children into the Lebanese education system, which differs from the Syrian system, there are also parents being unable to get the documents for school registration and legal residency. The safety concerns for girls going to school and immigration policies have affected the daily lives of Syrian refugees during their prolonged displacement. In response to these challenges, negative coping mechanisms have been adopted, including arranging early marriages to ease economic and social burdens and safeguard girls from harassment in the host country. The strict regulations pose challenges for Syrian girls, as they cannot get legal residency and employment, resulting in limited agency, disrupted education, and vulnerability to health hazards through forced child marriages. The

increasing number of girls unable to receive education because of marriage highlights the importance of studying the societal, political, and cultural factors that contribute to child marriage in displaced areas and its effects on education. This paper highlights how girls' access to higher education can delay marriage and enhance their empowerment. The study reveals that school barriers are not solely because of limited education opportunities, but also influenced by societal, political, and cultural factors. This paper marks the next phase of my research program, which involves conducting an extensive qualitative analysis of child marriage among Syrian refugees in Lebanon, examining both the causes and potential solutions.

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