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Syrian Refugee Women in Lebanon:
Urbanity and Role of Agency

By

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Syrian Refugee Women in Lebanon:

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Diana Roummani

ABSTRACT

Civil war in Syria forced million of its people to be forcibly displaced. Today, after eleven years of its start, Lebanon is currently hosting over one million Syrian refugees residing in formal and informal camps spread all over its territories. Women constitute over half of the Syrian refugee's population according to a recent report published by the United Nations. Driven by the need to look at the personal narratives of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon this research attempted to add knowledge about them and to examine the correlation between their actions, as creative agents, and the resulting changes in their livelihoods. To do so, a qualitative research strategy and a case study was adopted to analyze testimonies of 40 Syrian refugee women who participated in a "Sewing and Knitting" training project executed by a local NGO, through the lens of the social worker. Results revealed that women showed high and low agency and three major themes were developed: role of agency, role of urbanity and role of NGOs; future recommendations are suggested.

Keywords: Agency, Urbanity, Refugee women, Women empowerment, Syrian refugee Lebanon, Refugee women, NGO.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
2.1 Introduction.....	7
2.2 Theoretical Framework.....	7
2.3 Empirical Studies.....	14
III. METHODOLOGY.....	20
3.1 Research Strategy.....	20
3.2 Research Design.....	21
3.3 Research Methods.....	22
3.4 Study Population	24
2.5 Analysis.....	25
3.6 Ethical Considerations.....	26
IV. Findings and Discussion.....	28
4.1 Introduction.....	28
4.2 Social Worker.....	29
4.3 Narratives.....	32
4.4 Participant Profiles.....	39
4.5 Analysis and Discussion.....	44
4.5.1 Role of Agency.....	44
4.5.2 Role of Urbanity.....	48
4.5.3. Role of NGO	50
V. Conclusion	54
Bibliography	60
Appendix A	65
Appendix B	67
Appendix C	69

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter	Page
Table I	40
Title: High Level Profiles	
Table II	43
Title: Low Agency Profiles	

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Forced migration is a long-standing phenomenon in human history. The concept outlines a complex emergency forcing communities to move as a result of a specific type of disaster; in the modern Middle East it is predominantly a result of armed conflicts or wars raging in the region (Castles, De Haas, Miller, 2013). One of the latter is the Syrian Civil War that constitutes the largest displacement crisis in the world (Reid, 2021). The crisis has forced millions of people out of their homes, and as a result, neighboring nations like Lebanon have had to absorb displaced peoples at an exceptional rate (UNWOMEN, 2018, p.3). Lebanon has the highest per capita number of Syrian refugees; however, precise population estimates are impossible because Lebanon stopped registering refugees in 2015, at around one million (UNWOMEN, 2018, p.6).

However, Lebanon faces the worst humanitarian crisis amidst political, economic and social crisis, according to a recent report published by United Nation Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR) published in 2021, the Lebanese government estimates that it hosts 1.5 million of the 6.6 million Syrians who have escaped the civil war in Syria since 2011. Refugees have been allowed into Lebanon since the turn of the century; men, women, and children live in formal and informal camps and settlements with their families. In Lebanon,

these camps spread out onto the outskirts of the cities due to urbanization and merged with their surroundings to create "city-camps" (Agier, 2002), making it impossible to differentiate forced migrants from city dwellers.

It is recorded that 855,172 refugees are registered with UNHCR as of end of March 20213 (VASyR, 2021). Yet, despite some refugees' voluntary return to Syria, Lebanon is still the host of one of the highest numbers of refugees per capita in the world (VASyR, 2021). The Syrian war and the ensuing refugee crisis have become one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time due to their increased prominence (Fleifel, 2020, p. 1).

Noncombatant women and children are among this already vulnerable population group. Since the beginning of the crisis, most women have assumed greater responsibilities within the household, providing for their families, resulting in an increase in the percentage of female-headed households (UNWOMEN, 2018). As per the 2021 UN Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, the percentage of female-headed households was 19% in 2017 compared to 17% in 2016 (p. 14).

Since the 1980s, there has been a growing recognition that women have been particularly disadvantaged during forced migration processes, despite the fact that women with children make up the majority of those displaced in conflict situations who have crossed international borders for safety (Ohchr.org, 2019).

Women are compelled to leave behind their places of connection, their means of economic existence, and travel in an unsafe environment when they decide to flee for safety during a war. Women typically take responsibility for

ensuring the safety of their families when they are compelled to flee their homes. (Reid, 2021).

For some Syrian women, the hardships of the displacement process and its challenging results have produced an unpredicted result. Harsh economic conditions forced some women to be burdened with more familial responsibilities, including many that were considered to be men's responsibilities. Since they were uprooted from their familiar social constraints, some of them have grown more personally autonomous or empowered than they ever were in Syria. Since they found themselves in different and unfamiliar social constraints than those they had experienced in Syria, these women gained a degree of individual independence. Indeed, some of these women have demonstrated exceptional entrepreneurial skills in a time of need by working in non-traditional, more meaningful income-generating activities (UN, 2014).

The experience of being a refugee has increased their social mobility and economic independence (Boyd & Greico, 2003). New economic and social responsibilities may have changed the power distribution within the family, resulting in increased authority and participation in household decision making, as well as control over the family's resources (Boyd & Greico, 2003).

This is not to suggest that all Syrian refugee women have experienced progress in Lebanon. For some of them "the move restricted their freedom": those who may have been allowed to leave the house freely are now being held within by their fathers and spouses out of fear for their safety. In both cases, the change has been significant (UN, 2014) and highlights the role of agency (people's capacity to act either individually or collectively) and structure (environment of

opportunities and constraints which influence our actions) in the livelihoods of these women refugees (Williams & Popay, 1999). Though agency and structure are important in empowering Syrian refugee women as the next chapters reveal, several research gaps can be identified.

In Lebanon, several plans were adopted by the government to respond to the Syrian crisis, through partnering with international bodies and NGOs. The role of NGOs has been significant in this change; they have been instrumental in providing programs of empowerment to these vulnerable populations (UN WOMEN, 2018). In Lebanon, to our knowledge, comprehensive studies looking at women's experiences in empowerment projects are scarce. One research has shown how critical women are towards NGO (Usta, et al, 2016)) whereas another highlighted their frustration with the neutrality and depoliticization of humanitarian assistance (Capri, 2014).

Nevertheless, instead of the long-term resources they may offer to women in their "empowerment journeys", these empowerment projects tended to concentrate on the metrics, figures, and deliverables (Fleifel, 2020, p. 77). As a result, these projects did not open the door to emancipating Syrian women. Women's actual needs weren't met, and their opinions weren't frequently given serious consideration (Fleifel, 2020).

This is why there is a need to examine NGO-led women's empowerment and follow up on these women's journeys in particular with regards to their expectations and aspirations.

Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to answer the following questions:

1. What role has agency played in the livelihoods of refugee women?

2. What role has urbanity played in the livelihoods of refugee women?
3. What was the role of NGO in empowering Syrian refugee women?

This thesis is constructed as follows: the next chapter goes over the literature pertaining to the study. It introduces the theoretical framework associated with the research topic and summarizes previous studies relevant to the main theoretical pillars. It starts with exploring different definitions of agency and then moves to explaining the interplay between structure and agency. It moves to a detailed explanation of urbanity as related to structure and ends with recent research findings related to the driving forces of migrants and the interplay between structure and agency. The third chapter presents the methodological tools and approaches. It introduces the research methods used to carry out this research. Chapter Four presents the findings of the fieldwork on Syrian refugee women agency, its role and its relation to urbanity and the empowerment programs introduced to them by NGOs with focus on the extent to which these women acted upon their agency. This chapter ends with analysis and discussion of the findings under the different identified themes. Finally, the thesis is concluded with a summary of findings and a number of recommendations for future research and considerations for planning and implementation of women empowerment projects for Syrian refugee women in Lebanon.

The above introduction explored forced migration and women refugees' situation in forced migration due to war. Then it discussed Syrian civil war crisis and its implications on Lebanon with regards to hosting refugees, then moved to assessing the situation of Syrian women refugees highlighting the gap in research pertaining to their situation and identifying research questions that this research is addressing.

The next chapter goes over literature relating to the study. It explores the theoretical framework associated to this study and previous literature on themes of agency, urbanity, and role of NGOs.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the theoretical framework related to the research topic and summarizes previous studies relevant to the main theoretical pillars. It starts with exploring different definitions of agency and then moves to explaining the interplay between structure and agency. It proceeds to a detailed explanation of urbanity as related to structure. The chapter ends with recent research findings related to the driving forces of migrants and the relationship between structure and agency, and notes where gaps remain. Finally, how this thesis will seek to fill these gaps is described.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

It is often argued that there has always been a need in behavioral sciences to “understand the capacity of individuals to act within (and possibly change) their social groups and structures” (Kanal & Rottmann, 2021, p.3). Yet, there has often been quite some confusion when it comes to the explanation of the term agency itself. Social life has been explained as a dialogue between structure and agency (Bourdieu,1977), but no focus was given to individuals’ capacity for systemic change. Early theories of agency have been criticized by feminist scholars. They have claimed that the term is thought to be too binary—in other words, a “passive

victim” as opposed to an “agent” (as cited in Kanal & Rottmann, 2021, p. 2). There have been other attempts by scholars to include agency within concepts such as “structuration” (Giddens, 1984). However, Bakewell (2010) argues that Giddens’ used the concept of structuration as “a way of articulating the balance between structure and agency in migration processes” (p.1694). Structure, as often argued, possesses a dual nature. This is true in the sense that it is the ‘medium and the outcome of the social practices’ (Giddens, 1984). Structure does, he claims, shape social practice and consequently is reproduced and more likely to be changed by this practice. Social structures, it is concluded, act as constraints on individual actors and enable their actions as well, which, ultimately, he argues, are self-aware. “They continually monitor the effects, both intended and unintended, of action and the modification of their behavior accordingly.... people’s agency ensures that they always have some degrees of freedom or some room to maneuver.” (p.1695)

The concept of “duality of structure” that Giddens presents is thought to conflate structure and agency as Margaret Archer (2009) argues. There is a need to acknowledge an analytical dualism between both, which recognizes that they work over different periods of time. She explains the interplay between agency and structure in terms of ‘morphogenetic cycle’: the ‘morpho’ element means that society has no preferred state; the ‘genetic’ part means it is formed by agents; these come from the intentional and unintended consequences of their activities. There are three phases for this cycle: the first phase starts when agents encounter structural conditions; the second phase is when people pursue their interests within these conditions, which leads to the third and final phase. This third phase includes the elaboration or modification of the conditions in the structure set originally. In Archer's work, structures preexist; in other words, what might keep people situated

involuntarily is 'structural inheritance'; this means that they act and behave in the way they were used to. Within this, the original conditions are transformed because of the interaction between individuals and their environment.

Psychologically, agency is conceptualized as the ability to perform actions “that are in line with a person’s conscious goals and intentions” (as cited in Kanak & Rottmann, 2021, p. 3). This understanding of the concept of agency, which is designed to apply to any human being regardless of their cultural context, is often used together with the understanding of a “person” as an independent individual. Accordingly, agency is looked upon as a “form of control”: one can have affect the environment according to their desires, needs and goals (Kanak & Rottmann, 2021,p. 3).

Situating actions of individuals within their appropriate social context is made possible because of the delicate relation between structure and agency (Randell, 2015). This, eventually, has a dynamic relationship with structure (Sewell, 1992, p.19), which acts as “empowerment constrains social actions and...[is] reproduced by that social action”. In other words, when an individual knows the rules and has access to resources and structures, this results in agency. Indeed, there is a subtle interaction between agency and structure, and agency may occur when individuals work on exploiting their structural resources to achieve particular ends. (Randell, 2015)

There has been an attempt to move beyond the “wrangling dualism” of agency and structure. Three modes of agency were proposed by Bandura (2008) who argues that people use them daily no matter what the cultural setting is. The first one is the individual (refers to achieving one’s goals using one’s influence and

resource), the second is the proxy (it refers to using others with more control to achieve desired outcomes), the third is the collective (it refers to how individuals set a common goal and achieve it by combining the resources and skills of the group members). Bandura assures that all individuals, irrelevant of their cultural background, will make use of these levels of agency to survive. However, he adds that the proportions may be different (as cited in Kanal & Rottmann, 2021, p. 3). For the purposes of the current reserach, we can understand NGOs as the proxy agents allowing refugees to achieve empowerment.

For this thesis, empowerment is defined as “authority or power given to someone to do something” in a general sense and in terms of action, “the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights” (Oxford Dictionary, 2022).

One powerful indicator of empowerment is employment which allows individuals to access paid work. This ultimately might increase women’s agency in strategic ways (Kabeer, 2005, p.23). Employment can be described as one type of social support, other than that the family and friends can provide, that helps to promote their satisfaction level and feeling valued. It further empowers women to have a stronger voice in society (Jabbar & Zaza, 2016). In fact, self-employment and even paid work which takes place at home can shift the balance of power within the family itself. Of course, it should be noted that employment is only one aspect of empowerment and it, too, can be experienced as disempowerment in certain contexts.

Refugees surviving forced migration are challenged to adapt to a new culture and a new life. Based on Berry’s model of acculturation, when an individual

arrives to a new culture, the first psychological response is a mental health reduction status. This is an outcome of stress, anxiety, uncertainty, estrangement, and oddness. To reduce the many challenges that women face, therefore, social support for refugees is an asset (as cited in Jabbar & Zaza, 2016, p. 305) and it can positively impact their mental and physical health. It does so by reducing the severity of the situation and improving the well-being of the individual in general.

Governments do consider refugees as guests who are residing for a limited period of time until the problems that caused their forced departure come to an end, and they can return to their homes. Therefore, camps are the most preferred form of habitation used by governments. They use them to house refugees and forced migrants. These camps are scattered in Lebanon all over the country from South to North including the capital Beirut. Cities are usually preferred for many reasons, including services, job opportunities, and connections that individuals can make; what constitutes a real pull for refugees is the possibilities that these urban areas can provide.

According to Liisa Malkki, there is nothing called a typical refugee camp or a typical refugee experience (Malkki, 1995b). The author argues that refugee camps close to the cities are usually overtaken by urbanism and, therefore, we can compare the experiences of the urban poor to those of the refugees. This is possible to do if we look at the governments' act of exercising racialization, sexualization and classist control over both (Malkki, 1995b). Ultimately, urban places are manipulated by refugees to their advantage as they choose them for the same reasons as the residents do. They are definitely marked by development and offer opportunities for income generation, education, health care, housing, clean water supply, sanitation, as well as transportation (Fabos, and Kibreab, 2007, p.4).

Indeed, economic resources and opportunities are what attract these refugees to urban centers. This includes education for their children and access to the social networks that support newcomers. Another advantage is the invisibility that these urban settings provide as authorities who practice segregation, securitization, and criminalization less able to detect the refugees or others who don't belong to the accepted population (Fabos and Kibreab, 2007, p.4). In fact, in such a setting, refugees can work and clandestinely generate income. They actually find different ways to find a place for themselves under these difficult measures, and creatively manipulate the odds in their favor through actively engaging and mobilizing their social networks (Fabos, and Kibreab, 2007, p.3).

Yet, Giorgio Agamben calls refugee camps the “nomos of our time” because they represent a permanent exception (1998) he describes it as a space where “bare life” exists. While being exceptional, the camp does not, however, produce bare life in an Agambenian sense. Although the camp is thought to be an exceptional space meant to deal with individuals who disturb the national order of things, it is argued that in fact life goes on in camps (Turner, 2015) though this life is significantly affected by the constraints imposed on it (Turner, 2015, p. 139). In this sense, we look at refugees not as victims of war only who need humanitarian aid, they are rather, active agents who are in spite of existing in unclear environments where existence is limited to basic, transient biological survival, look for opportunities to develop new identities. In fact, they use these places to their own advantage (Turner, 2015, p. 143). The depoliticization of life, as Turner argues that takes place in refugee camps due to humanitarian government has a paradoxical function. It actually produces a hyper-politicized space where nothing is assumed and everything is up for debate (Turner, 2015, p. 139).

In this context, similarities can be detected between the poor of the city and refugees; this is due to the complex relationship that exists between cities and camps on the one hand and their residents on another. This universal myth has been debunked by Romola Sanyal (2012). Sanyal compares the urban poor and refugees in an attempt to provide a closer perspective on the relationship that cities, refugee spaces, and their inhabitants have with each other. She points out the limitations of Agamben's theories on bare life and state of exception which disregards questions of agency and the ways in which different groups of people struggle over what life itself is and the various ways in which it is negotiated and fragmented. Sanyal (2012) concludes that "refugee camps are not merely spaces of containment for refugees but can be sites that are used and manipulated by refugees to their own benefits."

Though women and children constitute the majority of forced migrants who end up in these camps and shelters, Monica Boyd argues the majority of the literature on female migration focuses on two major status factors that can change as a result of migration (Boyd, 2003). The first aspect is that migration allows for some women to be more financially and socially independent, if they become actively involved in the job market. The shift in their role within their families, due to this independence tends to change their responsibilities into more than what they used to. As a result, their authority tends to increase especially with regards to the financial and other vital decisions pertaining to their families. The second aspect is that when women migrate, they are exposed to new social systems with different forms of gender stratification. The system of patriarchy changes as they migrate. These aspects are highlighted, exhibiting the interaction between women, society,

and family. However, their position in their families may not change when their social status changes after migration (Boyd & Greico, 2003).

2.3 Empirical Studies

The majority of forced migration research in recent decades has concentrated on three key areas, one of which is refugees who flee because of war or political turmoil (Randell, 2016). Key areas of focus of this research is what structurally forces individuals to migrate and the socioeconomic and livelihood impacts of the migration. Not much research has focused on the agency of forced migrants themselves. Studies exploring both structure and agency examine to what extent the decisions of individuals to migrate vary from one person to the other versus their decisions to remain in war-torn areas. These studies explore institutional, economic, and social structures that influence whether forced migrants due to natural disasters decided to return to their countries or remain in their host countries (Randell, 2016). Results indicate that different migration decisions have been made by these individuals and are indeed informed by strategic comparison of their current conditions with those in potential destinations. In addition the comparison is made to the historical, cultural, and social contexts that they have been in before they experienced a situation that forced them to migrate.

Much research on forced migration shows how the interplay of structure and agency produces desired outcomes of empowerment. For example, in 2016, Randell examined how agency and structure interrelate to influence the results of

forced migration. Studying forced migration among farmers uprooted by the Belo Monte Dam in the Brazilian Amazon while using longitudinal, semi-structured interview, data led the researcher to the conclusion that the majority of migrants were able to mobilize resources like social networks, financial capital, skills, and knowledge. Similarly, Lisa Hunt (2018) investigated the actions and experiences of Syrian refugee women seeking asylum and living in West Yorkshire. She has illustrated that some women are able to use the resources at their disposal and are involved in activities that not only help their own integration into the host society but also help create support networks for incoming asylum seekers and refugees.

In a study evaluating a vocational training program entitled ‘Women and Girls Oasis’ at the Zaatari Refugee Camp in the city of Mafraq, Jordan found that the program boosted women's self-esteem, entrepreneurship, and occupational skills, helped them produce revenue to rebuild their broken families' lives, and provided them hope and chances after directly witnessing war (Jabbar & Zaza, 2016).

Three important types of stressors are outlined by another study in Turkey which uses the example of Syrian women rebuilding family and home in Turkey. These stressors are family-related, role-related and place-related. Additionally, the research concludes with three coping strategies that these women use: faith, homemaking, and identity building. The ultimate purpose of the study was to introduce the cultural coping model for the purpose of reflecting on refugee agency which explains how these forced migrants experience different stressors and that would actually depend on which cultural context they are present in. The model assigns different levels of stressfulness to them and takes into consideration that

there are different resources that they can use in addition to personal systems that are based on these cultural contexts (Kanal & Rottmann, 2021).

A study titled “From social capital to social cohesion: Syrian refugees in Turkey and the role of NGOs as intermediaries” explores to what extent activities by NGOs for refugees in İstanbul can produce social cohesion. It explores different types of social capital such as bonding, bridging, and linking and found that NGOs could connect the two communities conducting various activities that were intercommunal. Despite serious limitations these activities might have had in building or bridging social capital, the relations that the NGOs created between the refugees and institutions of authority offer alternatives for enhancing social cohesion (Zihnioglu & Dalkiran, 2022).

The literature above has clearly shown that empowerment is possible when providing Syrian women refugees with resources to act upon so that they can achieve the desired outcomes. Studies have indeed shown that NGOs can and do play a role in empowering these women through targeted programs and minimizing the barriers that refugee women might face. Such empowerment helps these women move up the hierarchal structure of Maslow which is self-realization. Bringing in Margaret Archer’s morphogenetic cycle, these women can move from the first phase, when they encounter structural conditions, to the second phase, where they can pursue their interests, before coming to the final phase, where these actions result in the modification of the original conditions.

Syrian women refugees constitute a large part of the Syrian refugee population. Along with Syrian refugee children, they are considered a vulnerable part of this group according to international communities. Thus, aid programs and

empowerment programs targeting women specifically have been developed in an attempt to minimize the hardships they endure as a result of their displacement experience. Hence, it is important to examine their experiences, opportunities and challenges in displacement as a group. A particularly important aspect of their lives to highlight is the role of agency in these women's lives. No matter how differently agency is defined, it is important to describe and analyse an individual's ability to take decisions using available resources in order to enact change.

Social behavioural researchers and scientists have studied the ability of individuals to make changes within their social groups and in particular, refugees groups. The importance of agency, which has been defined in multiple ways by scholars as shown above, is quite clear in inducing this change. Also, it has been clear that only when structure, which in this paper refers to the urban setting, the camp and the empowerment programs, interacts with agency then the desired outcome is achieved. In the case of Syrian women refugees, their ability to take decisions and make use of whatever resources they have and act upon them, enables them to make changes in their lives. By doing so, they will be able, to various extents, overcome the challenges of not only adopting to the unique environment but also to a new way of life in displacement. In doing so, they feel less alienated and marginalized.

It is quite clear what role an urban setting can play in helping to enhance their experience to the better. Hence, in this sense the refugee camp is not the space "where bare life exists": rather, it is the place where nothing is absolute, and everything is questioned even the meaning of life itself.

Empirically speaking, the above review has shown that much attention has been given to studying the driving forces of migration as well as on its effects—that is, the causes or effects of migration. Few studies have focused on the agency of refugees, and those which do focus on the role of agency as it interacts with structure, show that migrants are able to mobilize resources such as social networks. Literature sheds a light on the ability of women migrants to draw on whatever resources are available to them in order to survive.

While NGOs play a significant role in providing aid and assistance to refugees and are part and parcel of the support system that refugees rely on, the literature evaluating the achievements of their projects in Lebanon has been uneven. Regionally, studies have been conducted in Zaatari camp in Amman, Jordan, and refugee camps in Istanbul Turkey. Moreover, as mentioned earlier the studies have tended to focus on indicators and numbers rather than the personal life journeys of refugee women. Hence, these women's hidden paths were not elaborated on or highlighted, and we could not see through the eyes of Syrian women refugees themselves. Their challenges, their opportunities, and their aspirations have been too often overlooked. Even the above-mentioned studies focused on assessing the outcomes of empowerment projects delivered through NGOs have either neglected completely or only mentioned the personal experiences and life stories of the women themselves. There was no qualitative stance taken, as far as we know, to look through the testimonies of the participants throughout their journeys of empowerment. Nor have there been in-depth studies regarding to what extent the women were empowered and to what extent were they capable of achieving their goals in changing their livelihoods. This gap in the literature is exactly what this thesis attempts to bridge. The thesis attempts to add

knowledge to the literature regarding the real experiences of Syrian refugee women in being active agents, and to discern if they have shown high or low levels of agency in using the opportunities to available to them.

As such, the purpose of this thesis is to fill the gap in the literature concerning the role of agency, urbanity, and NGOs in the lives of Syrian women refugees in Lebanon.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter lays out the methodology used to carry out this research and it is divided to six parts. The first part starts with describing the research strategy used, the second part discusses the case study as a research design, and the third part explains about semi-structured in-depth interview as a research method for collecting data. The fourth part discusses the study population targeted for the study, and the fifth part explains about the method used to analyze the data collected, whereas the last part tackles the ethical considerations governing the process of collecting data.

3.1 Research Strategy

Since Syrian women refugees are individuals capable of making decisions and designing their own life journeys within frameworks of opportunities and constraints, my objective is to explore why some of them make these choices and others do not, given that they all might have same opportunities and might face the same constraints.

For this reason, my research adopts a qualitative approach as a research strategy. Qualitative research can give a deeper understanding of the group under study since it is a flexible approach that provides desired findings (Bryman, 2016). One of the advantages of qualitative research is that it provides “high

environmental validity” as well as being just, truthful, and well trusted (Bryman, 2016). Hence, when researchers engage in conversations with the interviewees in a comfortable and natural setting, they can capture what may be missed from numeric data (Creswell, 2009). Ultimately, this approach best answers my study questions and will help me capture the hidden data that otherwise would be overlooked.

This research strategy has been the most beneficial approach to my study. On one hand, it has opened up sources of data that are not widely available due to the scarcity of the literature on agency of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon. In addition, it has helped me to dig as deeply as possible to push for more information.

3.2 Research Design

For this thesis, a case study research design is adopted. The case study is one of the most important scientific research methodologies that is used in researches in social sciences and humanities. It can be defined as the deep, intense analysis and detailed study associated with one or more individuals, which is taken as a model for a social, medical or psychological phenomenon (Bryman, 2016). Using a representative type of case study can provide a suitable context to answer my research questions because it involves studying a particular community which is Syrian women refugees.

However, this research deviates from commonly understood in-depth interviews due to restrictions discussed below.

3.3 Research Methods

I used semi-structured in-depth interviews to collect data for this study; however, I was not the one who created nor conducted the interviews, as will be discussed below. In-depth interviews can provide reliable, comparable qualitative data and unique and indispensable insights into experiences and perspectives of participants under study. The qualitative interview is a uniquely sensitive and powerful method for capturing the experiences and lived meanings of the subjects' everyday world (Kvale, 1996). It is not only listening to what the interviewee has to say, but it is active participation between the interviewer and the interviewee where it encourages participants to be the heroes of their stories and, therefore, giving them a voice (Gu, 2013). This makes this method the best tool to answer the questions of this thesis. Since it has been argued that interviews should be conducted in fluid way in order to obtain the information needed, it is important that the researcher should prepare an interview guide in advance (Daly, 2007). Daly argues that during the course of in-depth interviewing some control could be lost over the conversation, hence semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to redirect the conversation when needed (2007).

It is imperative to highlight some challenges and limitations that I faced in conducting this research to give an idea about the situation in which this research took place. The main and most important obstacle was LAU's IRB prohibition of graduate students interviewing vulnerable populations to conduct research; Syrian women refugees fall under this category. As a social sciences student in general and Migration Studies student specifically, this proved to be very challenging since

most of the populations that I would like to focus on are considered to be vulnerable or come under the same umbrella. As a result, I had to adopt a pragmatic approach and try to gather data through more creative means.

First, I decided to use a NGO project as my case study. Since one of my research questions investigates the empowerment/disempowerment programs for Syrian refugee women in Lebanon, I had to go through NGOs involved in resilience programs for women refugees to reach the women participants. United Societies Over Straits (USOS) implemented in 2019-2020 a project involving training Syrian refugee women through teaching them specific skills that might help them change and/or improve their livelihoods. The project is called “Sewing and Knitting” and it is part of a bigger project, "Qudra – Resilience for Syrian refugees, IDPs, and host communities in response to the Syrian and Iraqi crises”. It is funded by the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, the 'Madad' Fund and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. The project seeks to target Syrian refugee women in camps, where it is translated into activities to increase individual well-being and capacity to play a positive role in their community. USOS recruited highly trained female sewing trainers with long experience and high skills in various forms of tailoring, sewing and embroidery: 40 female trainees in four courses, each of which lasts three months. Activities took place at the NGO-affiliated centers located inside the cities where it is accessible to the participants.

Second, I carried out two interviews with the social worker at USOS, who is the first point of contact with the participants in the project and who conducted observational work and written follow up reports with the participants. I recorded the participants’ experiences, thoughts, and sentiments through the lens of the

social worker. I had the chance to see her written notes and remarks from the participants themselves and her own personal observations about them. I conducted another interview with the lead project coordinator of “Sewing and Knitting” to obtain information about the aims, objectives, and outcomes of the project. Unfortunately, I was not able to conduct interviews with the women participants themselves (as previously discussed); therefore interviewing the lead social worker was my best alternative. Had I had the chance to conduct the interviews with the participants themselves, I might have not missed out on relevant information such as observing their reactions and engaging in deeper conversations, but this was the best methodological choice, given constraints.

This is not to suggest that there was no upside. I conducted the interviews in English since both interviewees are fluent in Arabic and English so there was no need for translation. The interviews were audio recorded, and after getting the permission from the USOS director, the social worker had no reservations with regards to sharing her notes and observations on the participants that she had previously documented. In addition, participants are usually more open to the social worker handling their cases since she is involved in all the details of their social, economic, and personal lives, so they had no barriers to open up for her freely and with minimal reservations. Thus, I was able to access, albeit one connection removed, many details of the participating women.

3.4 Study Population

Although by no means an exhaustively representative one, the sample (the project involves 40 women) can be seen as a fair reflection of the issue raised in this study: how a NGO-led project can open up opportunities for Syrian refugee

women to increase their agency. The 40 Syrian women who took part in this project were displaced after the start of the conflict in Syria in 2011; they came from different areas in Syria, and they are of literate and illiterate educational backgrounds. Their age range is between 20 and 45 years old, with different marital statuses and all residing at urban camps, namely Sabra and Shatila and Burj El Brajneh camps. Out of 40, three dropped the course after the first week, and four women opted to change to other courses (hairdressing and make up). Thirty-three participants finished the course and earned their certificates, 24 out of them started working and continue to do so, earning their own living, while nine ended up not being employed. I was able to record the narratives and testimonials of ten participants out of the 24.

As for the key informant, she was the social worker and lead project coordinator of a local NGO, USOS. As previously discussed, the narratives detailed in the findings chapter are not the result of my directly interviewing the participants themselves because IRB at LAU prohibits graduate students from interviewing vulnerable populations and Syrian women refugees are considered part of the aforementioned population. Rather, these narratives are the result of interviewing the social worker at USOS about these women and their experiences as recorded in her various meetings with them and her personal reports about each and every participant in the project.

3.5 Analysis

One of the most common methods for analyzing informal interviews is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis strives to identify patterns of themes in the

interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). One of the advantages of thematic analysis is that it is a flexible method which can be used in deductive study like this one. Although interviews render a massive amount of information that can be overwhelming and time consuming to analyze, employing proper analysis ensures that the data is read in a systematic and thorough manner. This facilitates going from information chaos to patterns and themes that represent the most interesting aspects of the data collected and renders results that are much more trustworthy.

Analysis of the interview / informal meeting with the social worker about Syrian women refugees focused on the latter's perspectives on their displacement experience and their understanding of their current and future situations. Identified themes include the role of agency, urbanity, and NGO in empowering Syrian refugee women.

A traditional approach was applied to code and analyze the data, especially that the sample size allows it. After transcribing the interviews, I went through dividing and sorting data relevant to each research questions. I created codes by choosing word themes reflecting reoccurring ideas or words. Data interpretation was aimed at identifying the main themes pertaining to answer my research questions about agency, urbanity and empowerment projects delivered by NGOs.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Since this thesis study involved human subjects, an approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the Lebanese American University (LAU) prior to interviewing the participants. A consent form in English and/or Arabic was administered to the interviewees to read and sign so that they are fully

aware of the purpose of the study; they agreed to participate. The consent form included giving their permission to use a voice recorder. Moreover, another consent form was signed by the director of USOS, giving me permission to interview their employees. Discretion and anonymity was always maintained: pseudonyms were used instead of real names while writing. No harm, invasion of privacy or deception was involved no interaction with the participants in the study was done either. The identities, data collected, and recordings are confidential and will be disposed of properly in conformity with the IRB regulations at LAU.

In this chapter we presented the methodology adopted in this thesis which includes research design, research strategy, research method, study population, analysis and ethical considerations. The following chapter addresses the findings and results obtained using the above adopted methodology.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings related to the main themes emerging from the research questions: the role of agency, urbanity, and NGOs in changing the lived experiences of some Syrian refugee women, with a focus on the extent to which these women acted upon their agency. The results are based on in depth interviews with the social worker at USOS, whose lens detailed the experience of about 10 Syrian refugee women participating in a sewing and knitting training program. First, I describe the role of the social worker at the NGO, providing a foundation for my decision to ask her to be my interlocutor. Then, a short narrative of each case is provided, and then the information is tabulated to allow drawing inferences and highlighting patterns. Two profiles (high agency level profiles and low agency level profiles) have been created according to their level of accomplishment or success. High agency level profiles participants are the ladies who received the training and could sustain a living using the training they received whereas the low agency level profiles are the participants who received the training and didn't maximize on their new acquired skill, not seeking out employment or quitting their jobs for personal, social, or health related reasons. In fact, most of the showed agency in one form or the other relating to employment. Finally, the three major roles of agency, urbanity, and NGOs are discussed in relation to previous literature. It is important to reiterate here that employment is only one

possible measure of agency; there are others that could be investigated using the current study as well as many others using other case studies and/or data writ large.

4.2 The Social Worker

It is important to describe the role of social worker in general and the importance of her role specifically in this research. It is particularly important to discuss why data collection went through her lens and her recorded information about the participants.

The social worker is a specialist in social work. They are an expert not only in the social field but also has knowledge about the basic medical needs of any family they are working with, consequently they can identify the social and medical problems/needs of the family. They are also trained on community work which encompasses all possible services that can be provided for this specific community, and the relations webbed between its members. Thus, social workers deal with any family as a unit and assess their needs on all levels and according to the services that the organizations they work for provide to empower this family in order to access these services.

The social worker I interviewed at USOS is qualified in familial and personal intervention; this means that she is the one establishing contact with Syrian refugee families and doing house visits. She is the responsible for having conversations with the family about subjects related to the whole social status of the family, the dynamics of the family, and the needs of its different members. She records details about the challenges the Syrian refugee displaced families face, about the period before displacement, what every member of the family is doing,

how they are managing their daily living needs, their future plans for the children and adults in the family, and their role of the parents in the family. She is the one who has access to the details of the refugee families' daily lives and can determine how she can provide support and help for these families, and through which channels. She can, in partnership with the families, determine their needs, and propose a work plan that includes all members, in general (where possible), and children and the mother more specifically. This plan helps family members to think about the next steps needed for the future.

This USOS social worker works with Syrian refugee families as a whole and with Syrian Refugee women specifically. She endeavours to build rapport between her NGO and the people who can provide services for Syrian refugee women specifically and can cater for the needs of their families. She establishes networks with the supportive and influential entities or institutions that are available in the area that they live in and connects Syrian refugee families to the services that best match their needs. These needs might be economic, medical, psychological, work related, or social needs of the family.

Moreover, she follows up with the Syrian refugee families when executing the help or action plan. This is accomplished through regular house visits where she monitors their progress. For example, if there is a need for financial empowerment for these refugee families, she monitors their progress to see if they are capable of managing their resources. She highlights for them weaknesses and strengths and directs them or advises them about programs provided in their area that can help them to find available ways to be economically empowered. This support is usually directed to all family members, fathers, mothers, and/or other adult family members.

To zoom in on the project “Sewing and Knitting” executed by USOS for Syrian refugee women who wanted to learn a skill, the social worker’s role was pivotal. From planning to implementing until final execution, the social worker was engaged in interacting with the families, following up with them, and doing necessary reporting. Working with a NGO focusing on refugee women’s empowerment projects, she evaluated the needs of the family as a whole and then she focused specifically on the women and all what’s related to their needs: parental, medical, economic, educational, learning different skills and even communication with other members of the family. Her aim was to put together with the women a work plan for the short, medium, and long term that would allow for the women to be able to be, eventually, independent. As for the other members of the family her duty was to connect them to other organizations or bodies that can help them fulfil their needs according to the projects provided if they were out of the scope of USOS.

The social worker was thus a critical point of contact for her established connections with 40 Syrian refugee women. She was able to introduce me to the project and talk about the training provided, what it entails and what benefit it brings the ladies. She not only provided general information but made sure to include many details about how and when the women joined the project, the timings and dates of sessions, and how and when transport and food were provided. She prepared the place where the trainings took place and she was also responsible for recruiting professional trainers to teach the necessary skills. Also, she notified the participants 24 hours prior to the start date to confirm their attendance. It is important to note that, from the beginning when introducing the ladies to the program, no promises were made about securing job opportunities after conclusion

of the program: only a certificate of completion from USOS. She made it clear that USOS would help and assist in connecting the ladies with the job market, or help referring them to organizations or businesses which can help with marketing of their products if they run their own businesses.

She conducted follow up sessions with the participants, holding group discussions and one-to-one meetings with the ladies after finishing the training. She recorded their evaluation of the training and their remarks and thoughts about the whole experience.

The USOS social worker was a particularly rich source of information that enabled me to dig into the detailed experiences of agency for of Syrian refugee women. While, again, it would have been optimal to interview the program participants directly, talking and meeting with her numerous times was critical to my investigation of the role of agency.

4.3 Narratives

The following narratives are the product of the personal stories of the participants as told and detailed by the USOS social worker, and their testimonials also recorded by the social worker about the training and their status after finishing the training. As mentioned earlier in the methodology section, these narratives are not the result of directly interviewing the participants in the project, rather they are the result of data recording of reports written by the social worker about each participant and also, the result of interviewing the social worker at USOS and asking her detailed questions about each and every participant.

Manal is 42 years old; she is married, and she has three girls. She is literate with basic schooling. She fled Syria after the war erupted; her parents died in Syria; her siblings fled to Turkey. Her husband left her and the girls to fend for themselves. She lives in Shatila camp, and she doesn't know where her husband is nor whether he is dead or alive. She joined the program to get training on how to sew. She was very enthusiastic about wanting to learn. She finished the training and moved to Baalbek where she contacted an organisation in Bekaa with the help of USOS. The NGO provides her with sewing machine and basic materials (fabric, threads, needles, papers and chalk). She has her own sewing business, her daughters are in school, and she is able to secure her own place, rent and expenses for herself and her children. "The freedom I feel brings me happiness no matter how tired I am. There is no feeling of uncertainty about how I am going to survive without my husband. I am a confident person now...."

The world is a frightening place, but I am confident now that I can take care of my daughters and myself. I do not need anyone other than myself".

Noura is 26, she has no extended family or relatives (dead, missing or lost contact with completely). She finished her schooling in Syria before she got married. She fled Syria with her husband's family; he was already working in Lebanon in different jobs. Her husband went to Sweden as asylum seeker. She remarked to the social worker at the intake interview: "I learnt about the program from a neighbour, I had nothing else to do, felt bored with nothing to do all day."

She joined the program to enhance her profile because her husband applied for family reunion in Sweden. After finishing the program, she got her sewing

certificate and she filed it with her application to join her husband in Sweden. She left for Sweden eight months ago. She is learning the language now and planning on taking more sewing and embroidery courses to join the job market there. “Someone told me that if you have a skill, it will help your application for asylum”; “I didn’t know that I will like sewing this much. I enjoyed the company of the girls and enjoyed the classes and learned a new skill”. After she finished the course, USOS helped her get a job at a sewing factory, she worked for six months before her paperwork was issued to join her husband.

Aisha is 45 years old and widowed and has four children. She knows how to read and write. She lives on support and donations from different organizations. She joined the program to learn how to sew at home so she can earn her own money, support her family, and keep her children in schools. She has a room where she lives which the organization helped her to equip with sewing machine and basic materials to start her sewing business. She is bright and enthusiastic. She began to specialize in sewing children clothes for customers through starting to make clothes for her children and other’s children in the camp. At a later stage, USOS helped her connect with online vendors selling children’s clothes. She was able to support her family financially and she even recruited another lady who took the same course with her to be able to run the business. “When you have steady foot and know what you want in this world, you will definitely succeed.” “I am a businesswoman now” laughing. “My life has changed, everything is different now, life is different....Hard but sweet.”

Manar is 51 years old, married, and has two girls. She received basic schooling. Her husband decided to take a second wife, a younger woman. Manal joined the program to be able to learn a craft in order to be independent from him since the second wife was living with them in the same house and they didn't get along. She learned about the program from a text message that had been circulating in the camp. After she finished the program, USOS matched her with a sewing factory where she worked for a couple of months before deciding to go back to Syria with her children and her parents. In Syria, she started her own sewing business, working from home after securing a second-hand sewing machine that was provided for her from a European organization.

Manal noted in her file that "I knew I could do it on my own, I mean I can support my family, not too much but enough to live freely with dignity. I do not need anyone's help anymore; at this age I am a self-made person". She sent her contact details to USOS in case they needed them to support another woman in Syria.

Sabah is 29, married, and has three boys. She received basic education at school. Her husband worked in construction, had an accident and hurt his back so he could no longer work. She joined the program after she learned about it from her sister. She was working in food preparation and helping her husband, who had to work in a grocery shop after his injury. After finishing the course, she worked with her employer's wife who was a tailor selling ladies' Islamic outfits online.

Sabah said, "at one point my husband couldn't get out of his seat because of his injury, so he told our eldest son 13, that he has to go and find work, that he

is the man of the house now...It was the first time that I stood and told him no; the boy will not leave his school, I will support the family; and I did.”

She did find it difficult to convince her husband, however, so she called her father in Syria and told him about the situation and got his permission. Since her father is also her husband’s uncle, her husband finally agreed. “You are the man of the house now, this was the first thing he told me when I started earning money” while laughing she said, “it is weird how free I feel, I would never dare to go out and about... in Syria [the way I do here]; it was never heard of”. “I feel so proud that my boys continue going to school and they will finish their education; this is my goal in life now.... I knew that if my eldest start work, his brothers will quit school and join him.”

Jamila is 20 years old; she single and the eldest in her family of four. She finished her school education and she wanted to join the program along with her mom, but her dad would not allow either of them. They asked the help of USOS social worker to talk to her dad and assure him that it was ladies only training, the instructors are ladies, and it is conducted in a safe environment, and that USOS will arrange pick up and drop off with other ladies from the camp. Eventually he agreed for her only to join, but not her mom. She really wanted to learn a craft. She was bright; she was to go to university and study art if they had stayed in Syria and not fled because of war. She was keen on learning embroidery and sequinning in addition to sewing. After finishing the training, she spent multiple months looking for a place to work, until USOS helped her find work in a clothes factory, but she had to put longer hours than anyone else. One of the factory’s clients offered her to work for him at his “haute couture” sewing shop for ladies in Hamra after he

saw the quality of her work. She is now happy at her work where she does house visits for her customers and get huge tips. “After my dad passed away because of a car accident I moved my mom and siblings from the camp and rented our own two rooms; I am earning good money. My father regretted letting me go on the course, he wanted me to get a skill and work so that I can get a husband, instead I got my own life”.

Amina is 44 years old; she is married and has 4 children. She received basic schooling. She learned about the program from a friend at the camp. Her husband works at a grocery shop. She loves sewing and used to mend her children clothes but wanted to learn the craft properly. She really wanted to be able to work and make her own money. After she finished the program USOS helped her find work at a shop specialized in making custom made curtains. After one month she fell ill, her health situation got more and more complicated, and she became very frail and had to stay at home for a complete bedrest. When reflecting on her overall experience with the training and then getting a job she said, “it might have been the best money I got in my life, I was very happy”.

Souad is 22 years old. She is single, and she had finished her schooling at the start of the project. She was excited her dad let her join the program. She was very enthusiastic and keen to learn how to sew to work and earn her own money. She finished the program, and she went looking for work. She was lucky to find a tailoring shop specialized in clothes alterations and repair. After two weeks working there her mom and dad had a falling out and her mom left the house. Since she was the eldest her dad forced her to leave her work and stay at home to look after her siblings and the housework. She believes that it was a “life opportunity and she lost it.” She wanted to go out to work and make her own money and feels

that she is an independent adult, but her dad's persistence that she should be the one to take care of the family. Her aunt tried to convince him to let her go back to work but he refused. "It is true that I shouldered a responsibility that it is not mine, but at the end of the day I had to abide by my father's and society's rules and after all they are my siblings."

Dunia is 31 years old; she is married, and she has 3 kids. She finished her basic schooling. She got excited after learning about the sewing program from her sister. She was very attentive and keen to learn. After finishing training, she looked for work but the only place that she could find was a uniform tailoring shop that was far away from where she lived in the camp. But still she went and worked there on daily basis. However, the transportation costs were too much for her, she tried to convince her employer to pay her for commuting to work, but he refused. In the end it turned out that most of what she was making was going for transport expenses, so she quit her job and stayed at home. "I wanted to make some money in order to save some for the future, but I spent most of it on transport, there was nothing left to save, it is not worth it."

Salwa is 28 years old; she is married, and she has two children. She finished her schooling. She heard about the program from a WhatsApp message circulating among the ladies at the camp. She wanted to help her husband with expenses since he was always jumping from one job to another. She finished the program, found a job through her networks and started working. Her sister who lived close to her helped with taking care of her children while she was at work.

When she started earning money her husband took the money and assumed it was his to spend. She quit her job and stayed at home. She wished she didn't learn sewing and wished she never worked because of him.

He took all her salary and gave her daily allowance saying that he is the man of the house, and she has no say in that. “I wish I stayed at home and not get taking advantage of my sweat and money by anyone.” She was happy working and earning her own money she felt free away from camp life but the “cost was too high, I was a fool, I am a fool”. She was left with the choice of being happy working but getting taken advantage of by her husband or continue her old life and let him bear all the responsibility. “So, I chose to stay at home.”

4.4 Participants’ Profiles

Based on the narratives described above, two tables were created for the profiles of these women, including demographics such as age, marital status, family members, literacy level, source of support, reason for joining the program, help provided by NGO, current status, and their testimonials. It is useful to mention that they all came to Lebanon after war, were residing in urban camps, and knew about the program from their networks or through NGOs. In addition, they all finished the program and received official certificates from USOS.

As Table 1 below indicates, we have profiles of six participants of different narrative statuses who showed high levels of agency: they took the training and secured work.

Table 1: High Level Profiles

	Manal	Noura	Aisha	Jamila	Manar	Sabah
Age	51	26	45	20	51	29
Marital status	Married	Married	Widowed	Single	Married	Married
Children	3	none	4	None	2	3
Literacy level	Basic schooling	Basic schooling	Knows how to read or write	Finished schooling	Basic schooling	Basic literacy
Support	None	Depending on family	Donations and agencies support	Living with her family	Dependent on husband	Working in food preparation
Attitude	Enthusiastic	Keen	Bright and enthusiastic	Artistic hardworking	Hardworking	Persistent and hard working
Driving force	Financial and social	Knew that certificate would help with asylum paperwork	Eearn her own money, support her family, and keep her children in schools	Wanting to learn a craft	To be able to learn a craft and be independent from husband since the second wife lived with her and they didn't get along.	Husband had a back injury; and wanted his eldest son to drop school and work
Role of NGO in securing work	Brought her sewing machine and hooked her up with another NGO in Baalbek	Helped her work at a factory for 6 months	Equipped her with sewing machine and basic materials. Helped her connect with online vendors selling children's clothes	USOS helped her work in a sewing factory	USOS matched her with a sewing factory she worked there for a couple of months	None

Table 1 Continued

	Manal	Noura	Aisha	Jamila	Manar	Sabah
Current Status	<p>-has her own sewing business from home</p> <p>-pays rent and living expenses</p> <p>-kids in school and university</p>	<p>Left to Sweden, learning language, and planning to take more sewing courses there to join job market</p>	<p>She was able to support her family and she even recruited another lady to help her</p>	<p>Working at a high-end tailor shop, moved her family from the camp and rented her own two rooms</p>	<p>Started her own sewing business after moving to Syria, working from home after securing a second-hand sewing machine</p>	<p>Working with a seamstress who sells ladies' Islamic outfits online</p>
Testimonial	<p>The freedom I feel brings me happiness no matter how tired I am; There is no feeling of uncertainty about how I am going to survive without my husband. I am a confident person now." "The world is a freighting place. But that I can take care of my daughters and myself. I don't need anyone other than myself".</p>	<p>"Someone told me that if you have a skill, it will help your application for asylum"</p> <p>"I didn't know that I will like sewing this much, I enjoyed the company of the girls and enjoyed the classes and learned a new skill".</p>	<p>"When you have steady foot and know what you want in this world, you will definitely succeed." "I am a businesswoman now"</p> <p>"My life has changed, everything is different now, life is different. Hard but sweet".</p>	<p>My father regretted letting me go on the course, he wanted me to get a skill and work so that I can get a husband instead I got my own life".</p>	<p>"I knew I could do it on my own, I mean I can support my family, not too much but enough to live freely with dignity. "I do not need anyone's help anymore; at this age I am a self-made person"</p>	<p>It was the first time that I stood and told him no; the boy will not leave his school, I will support the family; and I did".</p> <p>"it is weird how free I feel, I would never dare to go out and about the way I like back in Syria, it was never heard of".</p> <p>"I feel so proud that my boys continue going to school and they will finish their education; this is my goal in life now."</p>

Table 2 below shows the profiles of four participants who showed low levels of agency, who finished their training, but for different reasons they did not continue their work and stayed at home.

Table 2: Low Agency Profiles

	Amina	Souad	Dunia	Salwa
Age	44	22	31	28
Marital status	Married	Single	Married	Married
Children	4	None	3	2
Literacy level	Basic schooling	Finished schooling	Finished schooling	Finished schooling
Support	Husband	Father	Husband	Husband
Attitude	Very keen	Enthusiastic	Attentive and keen	Enthusiastic
Driving force	wanting to learn the sewing properly	to work and earn her own money	To earn money and save for the future	Wanted to help her husband with expenses
Role of NGO in securing work	Helped her work at a curtain shop	None, she looked for work herself	None, she found work at uniform tailoring shop	Found work on her own
Current Status	Not working, sick and at home rest	Not working, staying at home looking after her siblings after her parents separated	Not working because she spent her salary on transportation	Quit her work and stayed at home
Testimonial	“It was the best money I got in my life; I was very happy”	“Life opportunity and she lost it “ “It is true that I shouldered a responsibility that it is not mine, but at the end of the day I had to abide by my father’s and society’s rules and after all they are my siblings”.	“I wanted to make some money in order to save some for the future, but I spent most of it for transport, there was nothing left to save it is not worth it”.	“I wish I stayed at home and not get taking advantage of my sweat and money by anyone” “Cost was too high, I was a fool, I am a fool” “So, I chose to stay at home”.

4.5 Analysis and Discussion

4.5.1. Role of Agency

As mentioned earlier, out of 40 participants 33 finished the course and earned their certificates. Twenty-four are still working and earning their own living and nine ended up staying at home. Accordingly, it can be said that almost more than half of these women did show relatively high levels of agency. However, we report on and analyze here the experiences of only 10.

All participants acted upon their agency by taking the decision to join the training, even if it was for different reasons. Their commitment to show up to sessions and their positive attitude where they were “enthusiastic, keen, persistent, hardworking” as recorded by the social worker, is also an indicator of their agency. Moreover, for Sabah, Souad, Salwa and Dunia their agency was a level higher than the others, where they looked for work and joined the job market on their own and without the help of USOS.

Their actions link to Giddens (1984) definition of agency, where all these ladies had the ability to make decisions that influenced their lives. It also links to the feminist scholars’ theories describing women as “agents” who resisted, endured and accomplished.

Table 1 represents the high-profile participants, showing six participants of different age levels, some of them were married with children, widowed with children, and single, with different educational levels and source of support. To highlight the role of agency, we look at their status before and after they took the training.

The support they received to be able to live was either through social contributions (charity, organization) or individuals (father or husband). As for the driving force, they all had different driving forces: financial (e.g., supporting children) and self-development (e.g., earning her own money) as well as more specific driving forces, for example, learning a new craft and mastering it, saving for the future, and/or helping the husband with expenses.

The attitude that they showed towards learning sewing and knitting was such a booster: they were all either enthusiastic, attentive, keen, persistent, or hard working, which helped them finish the training and be encouraged to put their new acquired skill into action and benefit from it. For some, this attitude helped them to secure jobs; for others, they went an extra mile and looked for work themselves.

The stories of success of these women reflect the positive impact that agency was a part of. Looking at the current status of the women and what they have achieved we can clearly see how high agency is reflected in them. We find that they are independent, they have sustainable work, they can support their children on their own, they own their businesses and run it, and they can even help other women by providing work opportunities.

The women's mere act of participation in the training reflects that they exhibited various degrees of empowerment. This aligns with the findings of Abdel Jabbar and Zaza, (2016) evaluating a vocational training program entitled 'Women and Girls Oasis' at the Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan, where the program enhanced women's confidence and self-esteem, improved their occupational business, and entrepreneurship skills. It also connects directly to Giddens (1984) definition of agency, where these Syrian refugee women had the power to freely

perform actions that affected their lives. Moreover, the above results are also link to the feminist scholars' theory about agency by considering these women as agents who were able to resist and endure, and to psychologists' conceptualization of agency, where they had the capacity to take decisions and actions that are consistent with their goals. Effectively, acting on their agency (again, to various degrees) demonstrates differ levels of empowerment. This means that when these women are given the opportunities, they can change their livelihoods, and do not have "uncertainties about the future", as one woman puts it; they turn into new persons who are able to explore their potentials as is the case with another woman was proud enough to declare: "I am a businesswoman now".

However, as Table 2 indicates, 4 women had a low agency profile vis-à-vis employment as one indicator of empowerment. The proximate reasons are either financial, familial, or personal. Looking at their current status, we find that even after they finished their training and secured jobs either through USOS or through their personal networks, they were not able to capitalize on the new craft they learned. They quit their jobs and stayed at home either because of: health problems, they were forced to take care of their families, expenses that they could not afford, or family pressure. Their decisions to (or, indeed, ability to) act upon their agency were faced with obstacles that they could not avoid or overcome. This reminds us of the "stressors" that Kanal and Rottmann (2021) found when studying Syrian refugee women rebuilding family and home in Turkey. For this study, the stressor in case of Souad was family-related. She had to quit her work and stay at home to take care of her siblings after her father had a fall out with her mother and kicked her out of the house. In the case of Salwa it was role-related: her husband took all her salary from her because he was the man, and thus it was his role to decide on

the lives and expenditures of the families. As for the stressor in the case of Dunia it was place related. She quit work because she spent most of her salary on transport after her employer refused to pay for transportation costs.

The above results showed that all participants showed some sort of agency high or low, which is the intended consequence of this empowerment project. Nevertheless, this is not to suggest that there were not unintended consequences for the women participating in this project in the sense that they faced negative outcomes due to this empowerment. The case of Salwa, one of the participants put in the low-agency profile, is a valid example where she was exploited by her husband and all her money was taken from her and she wished that she had “stayed at home and not [gotten taken] advantage of my sweat and money by anyone”. She further noted that the “cost was too high, I was a fool, I am a fool”.

For other participants who withdrew from the program in the third and fourth week, one of them was prohibited by her father from leaving the house to attend the session. Her father considered the training unnecessary and a waste of time and that her participation would lead her to be socially corrupted. For another participant, after finishing the training she was stopped by her brother because she wanted to go and look for work. She reported that her brother said they do not have females working in their family as it is an indicator that the girl has bad manners and a bad reputation.

To reiterate, employment is only one of many indicators of empowerment. Other indicators might have emerged from their personal stories had I been able to interview these women directly.

4.5.2. Role of Urbanity

The spatial aspect of the participants' residency also seemed to play a positive role: the displacement experience into a new place and residing in city is instrumental in refugees' life in general and women's lives more specifically. The ease of moving into and out of the urban camps helped in their exposure to different opportunities. It was feasible for these women to do their daily chores outside as well as inside the camp on foot, without any need for transportation when accessing close by areas. This can be seen in the case of Aisha, where being in an urban setting helped her to easily recruit professional help for her business, and also the availability of online services in the city (internet and phones) helped her to expand her business using social networks.

It can also be clearly seen in the case of Sabah but in double fold. Not only was she already working in a food preparation factory situated in the city to start with, but also could easily find on her own work with a tailor who sells Islamic outfits situated in city too. When describing the difference in her life before displacement and after Sabah says, "I would never dare to go out and about... in Syria [the way I do here]. It was never heard of", she said in reference to her life in the village before displacement due to war.

Second, the project "Sewing and Knitting" itself by USOS was targeted to serve refugees in city camps to help create resilience between host community and the refugees. One of the main requirements for implementing this training by the international bodies was to recruit "highly skilled" trainers for the participants and this can really only be achieved in cities. Another important requirement was that USOS who was providing the training has to have their offices or training centers

inside cities in order to be accessible for participants in case commuting expenses weren't to be covered by international donors. In fact, urbanity played a major role for the participants in finding work on their own or being offered work through USOS (since factories and tailoring businesses are situated in cities) or even starting their own businesses and being able to attract customers as is the case of Manal and Aisha who both connected to customers for their businesses to flourish. If it wasn't for their urban setting acting as a facilitator or being inspirational with new ideas and connections, their success wouldn't have been achievable. A case in hand is the online business that Aisha was able to maintain, which is more likely to be possible in urban setting.

Looking at the profiles in Table 2, where low agency was displayed, only one woman in this group reported quitting her job because of commuting expenses that her employer didn't want to cover. Dunia reported spending most of her money on transport and "there was nothing left to save ... it is not worth it." Sometimes urban living can still create transportation challenges.

The above analysis emphasizes the importance of an urban setting for refugees that has been discussed in literature. The results show that urban camps are not "spaces for bare-life" in the Agambien sense, rather these women are situated in areas that are marked by development and opportunities (Fabos & Kibreab, 2007) and can be sites that are used and manipulated by refugees to their own benefits (Sanyal, 2012). It also shows that urban camps are sites where "nothing is taken for granted and everything is contested" (Turner, 2015).

4.5.3. Role of the NGO

When analyzing the role of the NGO, it is imperative to highlight some critical points. As mentioned earlier in the methodology chapter, Syrian women refugees fall under the umbrella of a vulnerable population, as a result they cannot be interviewed for research purposes as per the IRB office regulations at LAU. Hence, it was unavoidable for this research to go through NGOs (in this research a local NGO, USOS) as an entry point in order to access the experiences of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon. Since USOS delivers programs “precisely serving women’s protection, support, equality and empowerment” they were a valid choice as an access point for my research. Obviously, we cannot exclude bias and subjectivity when discussing their role in empowering Syrian refugee women, which constitutes limitations for this study when relying on resources provided by USOS and using their project as a case study and interviewing their social worker for a deeper and richer understanding of the experiences and opportunities of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon.

Consequently, the analysis was based on an in-depth interview with the social worker of USOS, and the organization’s formal documents about their training project “Sewing and Knitting”, from the conception stage to the final stage and their follow up assessments of the project. Researcher integrity, truthfulness and the credibility of the information provided were always maintained throughout. The information provided by the social worker about Syrian women refugees when the social worker gave me access to see her written reports and note down some of the participants own words, Their own testimonials fitted the profiles provided by the social worker.

Since the above-mentioned project falls under the umbrella of women empowerment projects, it is imperative to more fully define what empowerment is in this research beyond the rudimentary definition given at the start of the thesis.

Empowerment refers to the user's perception of power and is about people being able to take advantage of their chances to the fullest without or in spite of limitations imposed by structure and the government (Rowlands, 1995, p.102). For feminist scholars, empowerment goes beyond access to the decision-making process, rather it must lead to procedures that help people feel capable of and entitled to occupy the decision-making space. Empowerment as social construct is used as a means to understand what is needed to alter the situations of marginalized or vulnerable people. Hence, there is widespread agreement in this context that empowerment is a process, that it involves some personal development, and that it entails moving from awareness to action (Rowlands, 1995).

UNHCR defines women empowerment as a “process through which women [...] in disadvantaged positions increase their access to knowledge, resources, and decision-making power, and raises their awareness of participation in their communities, in order to reach a level of control over their own environment” (UNHCR, 2001b:3).

Economic activities may increase the options available to women, but they may not necessarily help them get to the point where they can take the initiative to create, themselves, the possibilities from which they can pick. (Rowlands, 1995). Since we live in a world governed by capitalism, it must be noted that the capitalist system survives on exploitation and control of labor through the market in our modern capitalist economies (Castles, de Haas, Miller, 2014). So driven by profit,

hiring women is increasing in a number of sectors worldwide as too often their wages are less than male ones, and they fit some businesses because of gender bias, like textile companies and fashion industry. All of this is a direct response to the needs of the capitalist market. Hence, while there are aspects of the project that I feel truly provide opportunities for women empowerment, at their core, these programs are economically focused to serve the market and help women refugees generate income. Therefore, USOS empowerment project “Sewing and Knitting” does not deviate from the capitalist consensus. This is why, employment, as a social construct serving the capitalist economy is the only facet of empowerment highlighted by this project.

The NGO facilitating and running the training, USOS, was adamant from the beginning that the training must be successful. Planning, execution, then providing work opportunities or connections with potential customers and/or employers, providing aid where needed and following up, all was purposefully done in order to maximize the benefit that these women would have from this project. From the start they were very active in advertising for the project to reach as many ladies as possible—through messages, flyers, word of mouth and networking. They played a role through their social worker to talk (when needed) to the parents and/or husbands to assure them about the benefits of the project and its logistics. They made sure that they were extremely sensitive and attentive to the cultural and religious barriers of the women’s communities, so they recruited female trainers, they had female social workers and lead coordinator. They provided transport to the training center and made sure that the ladies were escorted with a social worker to and from the training center. USOS provided snacks and to

the participants throughout the duration of the training. The help they provided to the participants is evident in the profiles above. After completion they helped provide work for a number of ladies through connecting them with employers, they provided a number of sewing machines and materials (fabric, needles, thread, clothes...) in certain cases to help ladies launch their businesses from home. They even played a role in connecting ladies with each other when an extra help was needed to run the business.

Another aspect that they were very attentive to was the psychological and mental wellbeing of the participants, the social worker was present throughout the duration of the training observing, helping when needed so that the ladies would benefit from the training. In short, they worked on this particular project with success in mind, so they tried to flatten all the bumps that they faced in order to genuinely empower these women and help them move forward in their lives.

As shown above, the NGO, USOS was the opportunity materialized for Syrian refugee women to shape their choices and actions. The help, assistance, job opportunities, follow up and support that USOS provided, helped Syrian refugee women to manipulate and use to enhance and change their livelihoods. USOS acted as a “proxy agent” as referred to in Bandura (2008) as “using others with more control to achieve desired outcomes.” Hence, the importance of empowerment programs in socially supporting Syrian refugee women, promoting their satisfaction level and the feeling of being valued Abdel Jabbar and Zaza (2016), which brings us closer to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1943) which confirms that when physiological needs, safety needs and love and belonging are met, individuals reach their self-actualization: they are free, self-made and happy.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This research focused on the actions and experiences of Syrian women refugees in Lebanon. It specifically focused on women as creative agents, able to use available resources and engage in activities to help them survive their displacement experience and help develop strategies to cope with their life in exile (Hunt, 2018). Where studies have focused on women as forced migrants, they have often looked at their experiences of violence, access to employment and pregnancy. This study was an endeavor to fill the gap in literature about the experiences, opportunities and life stories of Syrian refugee women in displacement. The results indicate that Syrian women refugees look out for opportunities as creative agents and act upon their agencies in order to change their livelihoods.

Through the lens of a social worker who worked closely on a training project directed specifically to Syrian women refugee in camps, this research was able to dig into the personal narratives of these women. We tried to understand why some of them are active agents capable of taking decisions and seizing opportunities to enhance their livelihoods. The in-depth interviews with the social worker proved to be extremely valuable in letting us into the smallest details of these women's lives: their lives before and after displacement, their current situation, their aspirations, and their future plans. We could draw on their motives

to join the program, explore the challenges they faced and share their success stories.

Their testimonials helped us to understand how happy and proud they were about their achievements. Although their agency was driven by economic reasons to enhance their financial status, the result was beyond their expectations. They were empowered on the personal and social level as well as the economic level.

The research showed also, how important it was for the Syrian refugee women to be situated in an urban setting. Being in the city albeit a camp, it turned out to be more than a “space for containment” (Sanyal, 2012). For these women the camps became places providing different opportunities and way of life different from the lives they used to have back in Syria; they truly turned into “sites that are used and manipulated by refugees to their own benefits” (Sanyal, 2012)

The results also showed the positive role played by the local NGO, USOS. The training program offered for Syrian women refugees changed the livelihoods for the better for some and was an eye opener while serving as a social support and networking mechanism for some others. The way USOS contacted the women, helping them to achieve their aspirations and following up with them, while at the same time being very sensitive to the cultural and social setting was exemplary. This is one of the main reasons that helped USOS achieve their targeted goals of the program in empowering these women.

Going back to Margaret Archer’s morphogenetic cycle (Archer, 1984), we can say that Syrian refugee women who suffered displacement due to civil war in Syria, they as agents, encountered structural conditions manifested in residing in urban camps, which constituted the first phase of Archer’s cycle. Then the second

phase is when they pursued their interests within these conditions which is joining “Sewing and Knitting” training. Finishing the training has led to the third and final phase, where the result was modification of their original conditions.

What emerged from the data detailed in previous chapter is a clear picture of how important it is to capitalize on Syrian women refugees’ agency. Despite the personal and social challenges, when these women were provided with an opportunity to put their agencies into use, they not only succeeded but also excelled in changing their livelihoods. When NGOs develop or implement program that can help empower Syrian refugee women and meet both their daily and long-term needs then they positively impact their livelihoods and in turn their families’. In short, working on projects with success in mind, NGOs should try to flatten all the bumps that they face in order to genuinely empower these women’s conditions and help them move forward with their lives.

This is not to suggest that there were no challenges and/or limitations in conducting this research nor in the outcomes faced by some project participants. As mentioned earlier in the introduction, the Lebanese government used the help of the humanitarian sector for the management of the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon. As a result, all aid, support, training programs and development projects are executed by INGOs and local NGOs. Moreover, Syrian women refugees are considered part of the vulnerable population, and cannot be contacted or interviewed as per IRB rules, as previously explained in the methodology section. As a result, I had to rely on resources provided by the NGO and using their empowerment project as a case study and interviewing their social worker for a deeper and richer understanding of the experiences and opportunities of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon. Conducting the interviews directly with the

participants themselves would have made this research a lot more authentic and enabled for observing the participants feelings and reactions especially when it is discussing themes that numbers and statistics cannot describe.

Another limitation was the inability to access all the NGO documents. They did provide me with all the documentations for the project itself and the follow up reports they have assessing the project. But when it came to the personal details and testimonials of the participants, I was only granted access to check them at their offices. That proved to be extremely strenuous task, since I had to read the assessments and write down needed information for only 10 participants, within a limited time frame over two visits. Having been able to gain access for all of the files fully, it would have given the chance to dig deeper into the detailed information of all participants and rendered even more detailed results.

As for the outcomes perceived as negative for the project participants, it must be emphasized that since the main indicator for empowerment was employment, women who did not secure employment are defined as not being empowered. While we do not want to discount the importance of employment and its ties to empowerment, neither do we want to overstate this connection. Women who participated in the project—whether or not they ended up employed—exhibited various levels of empowerment. Furthermore, as empowerment is about agency in specific contexts, much deeper analysis of these women’s lives—the opportunities and challenges that they faced and how employment did and did not fit in—should be addressed. This is beyond the scope and available resources of the current study.

Nevertheless, this research produced a number of recommendations that will be discussed below. These recommendations might help researchers in the field for their future research as well as provide ideas for NGOs providing empowerment projects for Syrian women refugees in Lebanon.

Building on women's agencies and considering them creative agents. Syrian women refugees are individuals who are capable of making choices and seize opportunities in order to change or enhance their livelihoods. They should be given the opportunity, and training which responds to their needs and capabilities and not the donor's or organizations' targets. The organizations should spend time and effort working with these women to ensure that they are providing adequate training or empowerment programs; tailored approaches like the project discussed in this thesis proved be successful. Follow up strategies with women after each program (Assessments, testimonials, house visits, etc...) to highlight the weaknesses and avoid them and build on the strengths and replicate them for future planning of the projects.

The psycho-social conditions of Syrian refugee women should be addressed to help create a good rapport with them and enhance the success of empowerment programs implemented. Providing professional assistance, more focus group, discussion groups and workshops to help these women overcome their fears and reservations, is essential. Supporting them socially through providing more friendly spaces for them to meet chat and exchange stories and experiences will help them to be able to make more informed choices about their lives and

future plans. Helping them build networks with people outside the camp will help them fight “the state of waiting” they endure inside the camp walls. Helping them build bridges with the outside of camp world will help boost their psychological and social wellbeing for better outcomes.

Within the current difficult economic situation that Lebanon is facing, programs targeting Syrian refugee women should ensure to increase more access to employment opportunities with local businesses in order to actively improve their livelihoods. When delivering an economic empowerment program for Syrian refugee ladies, it is essential for the NGO delivering that program to have an idea about the market’s need for a specific skill or the other, in order to help deliver targeted training programs and help Syrian refugee women put their newly acquired skills into practice. This is not to suggest that jobs should be secured beforehand by the organizations, but referrals and pointers from the NGOs, being intermediaries between businessowners and these women, would be of great help for the latter.

More efforts should be put toward continuing to enhance outreach programs targeting Syrian women refugees. Sharing and spreading information about empowerment, resilience, and different training programs by the organizations responsible for delivering these programs is of paramount importance. Advertising the services provided to reach as many Syrian refugee women as possible and reliance on technology, especially social media platforms, will ensure a much wider participation from this group. Moreover, it will help to

spread the word for all age groups, not only mothers and housewives, but also for the younger generation of adult women.

More studies and research should be done in order to bridge the gap in understanding the challenges that Syrian refugee women face in Lebanon and their aspirations. Their personal stories, life journeys, and testimonials can help more in implementing targeted projects in order to achieve balance with their host community in general and in their livelihoods specifically . Similar to other studies done to address this subject in host countries like neighboring Jordan and Turkey, studies of the same nature should be extensively done in Lebanon. This might help enhance women's ability to manipulate their conditions through their actions and make their protracted displacement to certain extent more bearable.

There also needs to be future research efforts focused directly on Syrian women's refugees agency and aspirations as individuals capable of making choices to enhance their livelihoods. Their personal stories and journeys before and after their displacement, their current situations, and their thoughts and feelings about their lives should be the points of focus for any future research. No doubt more research can and will help the organizations who provide empowerment projects for Syrian women refugees to better understand these women hidden agency and capitalize on it and channel their endeavors to the best interest of these women.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

1. What organization/NGO do you work for?
2. What are your responsibilities in this organization?
3. How long have you been working with Syrian women refugees in Lebanon?
4. What is your position in the 'Tailoring and Knitting' project?
5. How did you enroll participants in this project? Place of training?
6. How many women were enrolled in the project?
7. On what basis did you recruit instructors?
8. Did you find diversity within the participants pertaining to age, education, familial background, motivations?
9. What do you think were the main challenges that the participants faced?
10. How many participants completed the entirety of the training project?
11. What did the participants receive by the end of the training project?
12. How many participants did you assist in accessing employment? Referred to other employment opportunities?
13. How would you rate the success of this training project? What type of outcomes did you expect?
14. In your opinion, what motivated these women to participate in the project?
15. Do you believe that the social status of these women has changed? How?
16. Do you believe that the economic, social, and personal status of these women has changed? How?
17. Do you think there are areas of possible improvement for this project?

18. Do you think that similar projects like yours would help with the empowerment of Syrian refugee women to improve their livelihoods?

Appendix B

Institutional Review Board Approval



Institutional Review Board (IRB)

لجنة الأبحاث

NOTICE OF IRB APPROVAL

To: Ms. Diana Roummani
Dr. Jennifer Skulte-Ouais
Associate Professor
School of Arts & Sciences

APPROVAL ISSUED: 15 June 2022
EXPIRATION DATE: 15 June 2023
REVIEW TYPE: EXPEDITED – INITIAL

Date: June 15, 2022

RE: **IRB #:** LAU.SAS.JS4.15/Jun/2022

Protocol Title: Syrian Refugee Women in Lebanon: Urbanity and Role of Agency

The above referenced research project has been approved by the Lebanese American University, Institutional Review Board (LAU IRB). This approval is limited to the activities described in the Approved Research Protocol and all submitted documents listed on page 2 of this letter. **Enclosed with this letter are the stamped approved documents that must be used.**

APPROVAL CONDITIONS FOR ALL LAU APPROVED HUMAN RESEARCH PROTOCOLS

LAU RESEARCH POLICIES & PROCEDURES: All individuals engaged in the research project must adhere to the approved protocol and all applicable LAU IRB Research Policies & Procedures. **PARTICIPANTS** must NOT be involved in any research related activity prior to IRB approval date or after the expiration date.

PROTOCOL EXPIRATION: The LAU IRB approval expiry date is listed above. The IRB Office will send an email at least 45 days prior to protocol approval expiry - Request for Continuing Review - in order to avoid any temporary hold on the initial protocol approval. It is your responsibility to apply for continuing review and receive continuing approval for the duration of the research project. Failure to send Request for Continuation before the expiry date will result in suspension of the approval of this research project on the expiration date.

MODIFICATIONS AND AMENDMENTS: All protocol modifications must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

NOTIFICATION OF PROJECT COMPLETION: A notification of research project closure and a summary of findings must be sent to the IRB office upon completion. Study files must be retained for a period of 3 years from the date of notification of project completion.

IN THE EVENT OF NON-COMPLIANCE WITH ABOVE CONDITIONS, THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR SHOULD MEET WITH THE IRB ADMINISTRATORS IN ORDER TO RESOLVE SUCH CONDITIONS. IRB APPROVAL CANNOT BE GRANTED UNTIL NON-COMPLIANT ISSUES HAVE BEEN RESOLVED.

If you have any questions concerning this information, please contact the IRB office by email at irb@lau.edu.lb

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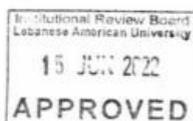


The IRB operates in compliance with the national regulations pertaining to research under the Lebanese Minister of Public Health's Decision No.141 dated 27/1/2016 under LAU IRB Authorization reference 2016/3708, the international guidelines for Good Clinical Practice, the US Office of Human Research Protection (45CFR46) and the Food and Drug Administration (21CFR56). LAU IRB U.S. Identifier as an international institution: FWA00014723 and IRB Registration # IRB00006954 LAUIRB#1

Dr. Joseph Stephan
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED:

LAU IRB Initial Protocol Application	Received 10 June 2022
Research Protocol	Received 10 June 2022, amended 15 June 2022
Letter to USoS	Received 14 June 2022, amended 15 June 2022
Informed Consent	Received 10 June 2022, amended 15 June 2022
Interview Guide	Received 10 June 2022
IRB Comments sent: 10 June 2022 13 June 2022 15 June 2022	PI response to IRB's comments dated: 10 June 2022 14 June 2022 15 June 2022
CITI Training – Jennifer Skulte Ouais	Cert. # 41274868 Dated (22 March 2021)
CITI Training – Diana Roummani	Cert.# 38976872 Dated (20 October 2020)



Appendix C

Consent Forms

Consent to participate in an Interview Syrian Refugee Women in Lebanon: Urbanity and Role of Agency

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project by completing an interview. (I am a student at the Lebanese American University and I am completing this research project as part of my thesis). The purpose of this interview is to collect data regarding the manifestations of agency of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon.

There are no known risks, harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life. The information you provide will be used to enhance and improve knowledge about experiences of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon. You will not directly benefit from participation in this study. The study will involve one participants. Completing the interview will take 90 minutes of your time.

By continuing with the interview, you agree with the following statements:

- 1. I have been given sufficient information about this research project.*
- 2. I understand that my answers will not be released to anyone and my identity will remain anonymous. My name will not be written on the questionnaire nor be kept in any other records.*
- 3. **When the results of the study are reported, I will not be identified by name or any other information that could be used to infer my identity.** Only researchers will have access to view any data collected during this research however data cannot be linked to me.*
- 4. I understand that I may withdraw from this research any time I wish and that I have the right to skip any question I don't want to answer.*
- 5. I understand that my refusal to participate will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which I otherwise am entitled to.*
- 6. I have been informed that the research abides by all commonly acknowledged ethical codes and that the research project has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the Lebanese American University*
- 7. I understand that if I have any additional questions, I can ask the research team listed below.*
- 8. I have read and understood all statements on this form.*
- 9. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research project by completing the following interview.*

CONSENT TO ALLOW AUDIO-RECORDING DURING INTERVIEW

I freely give my consent to allow the research team to record my interview. All of my questions regarding the recordings have been answered to my satisfaction. I know that I may refuse to allow my input today to be recorded in any way and that I may withdraw from the session at any time. **I freely give my consent to allow my input to be recorded through audio-recordings.**

I agree to have my interview audio-recorded

√

CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY

I have carefully read the above information about this study. All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I know that I may refuse to take part in or withdraw from the study at any time. **I freely approve the content of this form and give my consent to take part in this study.** I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in the study. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

Manal Chibbo

Name of Participant



Signature of Participant

07/06/2022

Date (dated by the participant)

STATEMENT OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

I certify that I have fully explained to the person taking part in the study the nature of the above research study, the potential risks and benefits and I have offered to answer any question that he/she may have.

Signature of Principal

Date:

Investigator/Designate:

08/06/2022



Name of Principal Investigator/Designate:

Diana Roummani

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact:

<i>Name (PI)</i>	<i>Phone number</i>	<i>Email address</i>
<i>Diana Roummani</i>	<i>03 065 332</i>	<i>diana.roummani@lau.edu</i>

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or you want to talk to someone outside the research, please contact the:

*Institutional Review Board Office,
Lebanese American University
3rd Floor, Dorm A, Byblos Campus
Tel: 00 961 1 786456 ext. (2546)
irb@lau.edu.lb*