



# Temporary Marriage as a Vehicle for Human Trafficking: A Study of the Practice of Temporary Marriage among Syrian Refugees

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Temporary Marriage as a Vehicle for Human Trafficking:  
A Study of the Practice of Temporary Marriage among Syrian Refugees

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A Thesis in the Field of International Relations  
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

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## Abstract

In-person trafficking reports and recent journalism on temporary marriage in refugee camps raise concerns about the exploitative nature of such marriages. This exploratory thesis examines the temporary marriage of refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. First, the research explores the profile of eloped refugees in temporary marriage. Second, it explores the institutional factors that allow the exploitation of refugees via temporary marriage. Last, based on the United Nations definition of human trafficking, the thesis explores how and under what conditions temporary marriage of refugees becomes human trafficking. Applying the elements of human trafficking to the analysis makes it evident that the temporary marriage of refugees to men from the host and Gulf nations under most conditions constitutes trafficking in persons. Furthermore, the findings suggest that traffickers target ethnic and religious minority women and girls, underage girls, and widows and that governmental and non-governmental institutions play a vital role in the growth of temporary marriages. The thesis concludes and recommends that temporary marriages of refugees be considered *prima facie* as trafficking.

## Dedication

I dedicate this study to my host families in refugee camps in Greece, Lebanon, and Turkey in 2019, who informed me about the issue of temporary marriage, welcomed me into their lives, guided my understanding of the Syrian refugee crisis, and inspired me with their resilience.

To my supportive husband, loving parents, siblings, friends, mentors, and thesis director, who encouraged me to conduct this study.

And to Allah, the source of all knowledge, wisdom, and truth.

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## Chapter I.

### The Phenomenon of Temporary Marriage

The Syrian Refugee Crisis has grown to be the largest refugee crisis in modern history, with 5.6 million Syrians who have fled the country and an additional 5.2 million internally displaced (UNODC, 2020). As of March 2022, the international community is witnessing unprecedented numbers of Syrian and other migrants and refugees embarking upon risky journeys to find a safe and more prosperous future for themselves and their families. The conflict has resulted in the death, injury, and displacement of half of Syria's pre-war population. The ongoing civil war in Syria has increased protection risks, affecting women and children disproportionately. For those who have survived the conflict physically, their immediate and long-term well-being remains a serious concern. Young girls continue to fall prey to early marriage and pregnancy, increased exposure to sexual and gender-based violence, and dropping out of the education system with a high likelihood of never returning. The paradox is that while refugees flee to escape human rights violations and violence, they become vulnerable to additional dangers (UNODC, 2020).

In the midst of all this, temporary marriages have increased in refugee camps. The term temporary marriage refers to a marriage contract for a fixed term in exchange for a dowry, after which the marriage terminates (Masud, 2009). In these contracts, men have the right to maintain pre-existing relationships, engage in multiple temporary marriages simultaneously, and terminate the temporary marriage at any time; women, in

contrast, relinquish several of their rights. Under temporary marriage, women do not have the right to leave the marriage, ask for separation, and/or divorce.

Additionally, women do not have the right to engage in other intimate relationships while under the contract (Mattar, 2001). While this custom dates back to the pre-Islamic era when the Bedouin community practiced temporary marriage (UNODC, 2020), in the years immediately after the Iranian revolution of 1979, the practice was revived and enthusiastically encouraged by the ruling Iranian clergy, persisting into the twenty-first century (Sadeghi, 2010). Simultaneously, temporary marriage has expanded beyond Iranian borders to many neighboring countries and refugee camps (Al-Maena, 2021).

Much of the early conversations around temporary marriage stem from Islamic scholarship that debates the practice of temporary marriage through a lens of Sunni vs. Shiite Islamic jurisprudence. However, investigative journalists have been using a human rights lens to explore temporary marriage in recent years. In the refugee crisis, notably in 2013 and 2018, journalists have reported on the interlinkage of temporary marriage and human trafficking (Hilleary, 2013; Alarabiya News, 2013; Long, 2013; Bar'el, 2018). One article published in 2018 highlights the use of temporary marriage as a means of survival in refugee camps (Bar'el, 2018). This is consistent with 2013 articles pointing out that as the Syrian refugees became more economically and physically vulnerable, temporary marriages were perceived as advantageous to notions of family honor and provided some financial benefits to the desperately poor (Alarabiya News, 2013). Men from the host and Gulf countries, who offer women and their families' money in exchange for pleasure marriages, have free rein at the camps (Long, 2013).

Consequently, the temporary marriage of refugees has also resulted in new vulnerabilities. Since temporary marriages are oral agreements, in cases of abuse and trafficking, victims and their families cannot take any legal action (Hilleary, 2013).

Overall, temporary marriage in a refugee setting is an under-researched topic. While some Western academic scholarship and humanitarian reports mention temporary marriage in refugee camps, they fail to provide sufficient detail. To take one example: the 2015 report published by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (Healy, 2015) is a critical study referenced in the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2020 Report (UNODC, 2020) and the literature about temporary marriage and its intersection with human trafficking. The ICMPD report mentions that men from the Gulf Cooperation Council States use matchmaking services to engage in irregular and short-term marriages. While the report does not go into great detail, it recognizes temporary marriage as exploitative, denouncing ‘forced’ temporary marriages as a form of human trafficking and identifying the immediate family members as perpetrators of trafficking (Healy, 2015). The lack of information cited in this report creates ambiguity around the conditions under which the temporary marriage of refugees constitutes trafficking. Additionally, by identifying family members as the sole perpetrators, the report fails to grasp the issue’s complexity. The involvement of suitors and the role institutions play in the trafficking of refugees via temporary marriage remains unaddressed.

This study aims to fill current gaps in scholarship by drawing upon the insights of refugee aid workers from Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey who work closely with refugees and have knowledge of temporary marriage cases to categorize the personal and institutional factors promoting the practice of temporary marriage. Secondly, since

United Nations agencies greatly influence refugee camps, this research uses the United Nations definition of human trafficking to analyze the act, means, and purpose of temporary marriage. Applying the elements of human trafficking to the analysis will allow us to understand the conditions under which the temporary marriage of refugees becomes human trafficking.

### Research Questions and Hypotheses

In the context of the refugee crisis, understanding the interlinkage between the temporary marriage of refugees and human trafficking and contributing to existing knowledge is critical. Due to the widespread and discrete nature of temporary marriage when it comes to refugees, a case-by-case examination is not a viable option. Rather, to understand the promoting factors and the circumstances under which temporary marriage constitutes human trafficking, it is essential to evaluate the practice of temporary marriage of refugees as a whole.

This exploratory thesis aims to tackle a few key questions. Firstly, I aim to explore the profile of eloped refugees in temporary marriages. Using the refugee profile, I can decipher whether perpetrators target members of specific communities and highlight the similarities between those approached for temporary marriages. Secondly, I aim to understand how suitors are able to approach Syrian refugee women and girls for temporary marriage and what constitute the institutional factors that allow the exploitation of refugees via temporary marriage. Lastly, I aim to explore how and under what conditions temporary marriage becomes human trafficking. Using the definition of

human trafficking formulated by the United Nations, I examine the act, means, purpose, and conditions under which temporary marriage occurs in refugee camps and settlements.

I have three hypotheses in light of existing scholarship and personal experience working in refugee camps. Firstly, I hypothesize that these marriages target under-aged girls from poor refugee families, thus defining these marriages as temporary child marriages. Secondly, since this is an unregulated practice in refugee camps and settlements, I hypothesize that the lack of institutional attention and the degree of institutional corruption promotes the temporary marriages of refugees. Lastly, given the exploitative and temporary nature of such marriages, the inability of women to leave the marriage and the lack of rights given to women points to human trafficking; I hypothesize that the temporary marriage of refugees to men from host and Gulf nations becomes a form of human trafficking when forced.

#### Definition of Terms

*Aid workers:* “All workers engaged by humanitarian agencies, whether internationally or nationally recruited, or formally or informally retained from the beneficiary community, to conduct the activities of that agency” (OCHA, 2008, p. 30).

*Human rights:* “Human rights are norms that aspire to protect all people everywhere from severe political, legal, and social abuse” (Nickel, 2019, p. 1).

*Human trafficking:* This research uses the following United Nations definition of human

Trafficking, since United Nations policies and procedures influence most refugee camps – “The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability, or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for exploitation” (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2004, p. 42).

*Institutions within Syrian refugee settlements:* The institutions covered under this umbrella include camp and urban settlement governing bodies, religious institutions, and NGOs.

*Refugee settlements:* Refugee settlements in this research refers to refugee camps and urban settlements.

*Suitors:* This refers to the men participating in temporary marriage. They may include refugees, citizens of the host nation, and/or international travelers.

*Temporary marriage (Mutah/Misyar):* The term temporary marriage refers to a marriage contract between a man and a woman for a fixed term in exchange for a dowry, after which the marriage terminates. While the man has the right to maintain pre-existing relationships, engage in multiple temporary marriages simultaneously, and end the marriage at any time, the woman gives up several of her rights.

Under temporary marriage, the woman does not have the right to leave the marriage, ask for separation, and/or divorce. Additionally, the woman does not have the right to engage in other intimate relationships while under the contract (Mensah-Ankrah, 2018).

### Literature Review

The callous practice of human trafficking is a global issue and one that is rapidly increasing in scope and magnitude. In the 2017 report *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery*, International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates human trafficking generates over 150 billion US dollars a year through exploiting vulnerable men, women, and children (ILO, 2014). An estimated 40 million-plus individuals are victims of human trafficking and modern-day slavery. Of this total, the victims include 24.9 million labor migrants and 15.4 million women in forced marriages. To put things into perspective, there are 5.4 victims of modern slavery for every 1,000 people (ILO, 2017).

Furthermore, the prevalence of human trafficking amongst women continues to increase. 71% of trafficking victims worldwide are women and girls, and 25% of all victims are under eighteen. Globally speaking, individual vulnerabilities coupled with domestic and international social, political, and economic instability is paving the path for traffickers to take advantage of some of the most vulnerable members of our community in plain sight (ILO, 2017).

International consensus on what qualifies as *trafficking in persons* is very recent (Aronowitz & Isitman, 2013). According to the United Nations, *the Act, the Means*, and *the Purpose* are the three main elements that must be present for trafficking in persons to

exist (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2004). Firstly, *the Act* refers to what is done. Human trafficking involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, and/or receipt of a person. The trafficker must take an action such as those listed above in order for the behavior to be defined as trafficking. Secondly, *the Means* refers to how it is done. Trafficking can include the threat or use of force, deception, abduction, the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability, or other forms of coercion. Lastly, *the purpose* refers to why it is done. The purpose of human trafficking is exploitation, which can include but is not limited to the prostitution of others, removal of organs, forced labor, slavery, and servitude. Trafficking has a lasting adverse impact on the victim and is a direct violation of human rights (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2004).

Additionally, the United Nations Palermo Protocol of 2000 provides some key exceptions and distinctions. For children, trafficking is always deemed illegal and amounts to trafficking regardless of the means. Furthermore, consent is irrelevant, regardless of the victim's age, gender, and agreement; due to the taking away of their freedom and violation of their human rights, the trafficked victim cannot technically consent. Lastly, trafficking does not require crossing an international border; trafficking does not always involve movement. Overall, the definition is purposefully broad and open-ended to include additional exploitative purposes that may be identified in the future (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2004).

In addition to the legal definition of human trafficking, scholars have incorporated a human rights approach to understanding human trafficking. Human trafficking fundamentally constitutes a crime not just against the state, but also against the individual; thereby, it is a human rights violation and an issue of human security as well



as an issue of state security (Mattar, 2006). The violation of human rights via human trafficking can be life threatening and can cause severe physical and psychological health issues (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

As part of their work to expand and clarify definitions, Patterson and Zhuo note that trafficking is a process, not an end state. The adverse physical and psychological effects of trafficking make the victims even more vulnerable. Despite the initial purpose, trafficking can lead to different end states, including debt bondage, state servitude, or even slavery (Patterson and Zhuo, 2018). Perpetrators can traffic and control victims in plain sight through fraud or force, physical or verbal abuse, commodification, isolation, breaking of material possessions, or (social death). Trafficking defies all perceived notions; it can occur at the workplace, out in the open, and even under the protection of one's own home. Unfortunately, no one is immune to this crime, making it that much more significant that we pay close attention to even everyday activities, behaviors, and patterns that can create pathways for trafficking (Patterson and Zhuo, 2018). Due to the illicit and hidden nature of trafficking, it is difficult to gather accurate data on human trafficking. Therefore, it is imperative to evaluate and flag exploitative practices and to pay close attention to global and domestic trends, especially in vulnerable areas such as refugee camps.

Unfortunately, while most refugees flee to escape human rights violations and violence, their vulnerable situation as refugees exposes them to additional human rights violations and, in some cases, makes them a victim of human trafficking (UNODC, 2020). When it comes to the trafficking of Syrian refugees, the difficulty in assessing the prevalence of human trafficking is due to the lack of understanding of the breadth and

variation of trafficking experiences. Efforts to describe typical victims can overlook trafficked individuals who do not fit that profile (Poggi, 2017). Typically, victims of trafficking have experienced chronic trauma involving many perpetrators and many types of trauma, including physical and sexual assault, emotional manipulation and abuse, deprivation, separation from loved ones, and witness to violence. In addition, victims of trafficking often also face significant cultural barriers and challenges, stigma, and discrimination from the public (OHCHR, 2014).

Trafficking can take various forms, including forced and child labor, bonded labor, commercial sexual exploitation of adults and children, sexual slavery, and forced and child marriage (OHCHR, 2014). Some of these practices have evolved into new forms of exploitation, making monitoring and offering protection difficult. In connection with forced and child marriage, a 2015 report by ICMPD mentions the practice of forced temporary marriages in refugee camps (Healy, 2015). While the report only has a short section on this topic, it recognizes temporary marriage as exploitative, denouncing ‘forced’ temporary marriages as a form of human trafficking and identifying immediate family members as perpetrators of trafficking (Healy, 2015). Even though limited academic scholarship is available on this topic, temporary marriage is a well-established practice in the Middle East that some view as liberating. In contrast, others view it as exploitative (IOM, 2014).

The custom of temporary marriage dates back to the pre-Islamic era. The Bedouin and Persian tribes, before the Arab conquest in the seventh century AD, practiced temporary marriage, and the custom continued during the Islamic era (UNODC, 2010). While this erstwhile practice has regained popularity in recent years, it remains a

sensitive and controversial topic. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been an increase in temporary marriages in Muslim majority countries (Al-Maena, 2021).

As defined earlier, the term temporary marriage refers to a marriage contract for a fixed term in exchange for a dowry, after which the marriage terminates (Masud, 2009). These are typically oral agreements that lack permanent commitment (Mattar, 2001; Bradley, 2010). When the contract period ends, both spouses separate without a formal divorce. This kind of marriage can last several minutes, for instance in the case of one-time sexual intimacy, to a lifetime, where the contract terminates upon the husband's death. While men can maintain an unlimited number of temporary marriages in addition to marriage to a permanent wife, women can only take part in one marriage at a time (CEDAW, 2014). Additionally, it is essential to reiterate that while men have the right to terminate the marriage at any point, women, on the other hand, do not have the right to terminate this type of marriage before the expiry of its duration.

Temporary marriage is a complex topic influenced by religious, social, political, and economic factors. Except in Iran, temporary marriage is not legally recognized and is socially unacceptable; nonetheless, it has become increasingly popular in the Middle East (Amnesty International, 2011). In Sunni majority countries, temporary marriage is connected with *Misyar* (travel/tourist marriage), while in Shiite majority countries, the term often refers to *mut'ah* (pleasure marriage) (Sindawi, 2013). Despite the terminological differences, Sunni and Shiite majority countries both propagate temporary marriage through religious and legal institutions. In Sunni majority countries such as Saudi Arabia, UAE, Lebanon, and Jordan, religious institutions promote temporary marriage (Abedi, 2017); Emirates-based scholar Sheikh Ahmad al-Kubaisi argues that, in

moral terms, temporary marriage is no different from a typical marriage (Al-Kubaisi, 2006). In Iran, the government has returned to this erstwhile custom by ratifying a new family law bill that grants men legal justification to conditional polygamy, including multiple permanent wives and temporary marriage (Amnesty International, 2011). While some countries use religious and governmental institutions to promote temporary marriage, others use humanitarian and governmental institutions to limit its practice.

In the case of Iraq, awareness spread by local organizations coupled with the efforts of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has resulted in the monitoring of temporary marriage (CEDAW, 2014). In addition to monitoring temporary marriage, Iraq's new constitution includes an article explicitly prohibiting the trafficking of women and children for the sex trade. Similarly, the Egyptian (CEDAW, 2010) and Yemeni (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2009) governments have passed anti-human trafficking legislation in response to the concerns raised by human rights organizations regarding the practice of human trafficking through temporary marriages of girls from low-income families to wealthy men from neighboring countries.

In response to these concerns and the ambiguity around the conditions that make temporary marriages constitute human trafficking, the International Organization for Migration conducted comprehensive research in 2014 (IOM, 2014). While their report focuses specifically on Yemen, it offers general insights on the act, means, and purpose of temporary marriage that qualify it as human trafficking. Despite temporary marriage in Yemen receiving de facto recognition as human trafficking at multiple levels of society, the study suggests that it is necessary to assess each case individually for

deception and sexual exploitation to determine whether it constitutes human trafficking (IOM, 2014). In addition to IOM, within the international human rights community, institutions including Trafficking in Persons (TIP) and some departments under the United Nations have alluded to the overlap between trafficking and the phenomenon of temporary marriage, especially as it relates to refugees. Overall, however, the topic of temporary marriages of refugees lacks a thorough and attentive examination. Furthermore, the lack of institutional attention has allowed this exploitative practice to grow (UNODC, 2020) and remain unregulated.

It is only through journalistic accounts that one can begin to comprehend the adverse impacts of the temporary marriage of refugees. For many Syrian families, marrying their daughter is a desperate response to extreme circumstances. Journalists suggest that as parents struggle to provide for their children and fear for their safety, they are manipulated into justifying the selling of their daughters with the hope that marriage will protect their daughters from harm and provide them with a level of financial stability (Hilleary, 2013). Due to the lack of political and economic stability among refugees, suitors from the host country and abroad exploit refugee women and girls for sex work (Long, 2013). In 2012, Khaled Abu Toameh reported that Muslim men from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries had even asked their embassies to help them find Syrian girls living in makeshift refugee camps in Jordan and Iraq to marry (Toameh, 2012). These marriages were usually short-term, involving verbal agreements and payment for the bride, and were often forced on young women and girls whose families were in need of financial help. Affluent suitors from the Gulf and even Europe approached women, girls, and their families with the proposal of temporary marriage in exchange for financial

assistance (Toameh, 2012). The victims of temporary marriages had been sold by their desperate family members to men in exchange for a few hundred dollars (Hilleary, 2013).

While it is evident that vulnerabilities within refugee camps promote the practice of temporary marriages, nonetheless, it is unclear how suitors have gained such broad access to these communities and why this practice remains unmonitored. The gaps in existing scholarship and lack of comprehensive research on the temporary marriage of refugees have created ambiguity around the overlap of the temporary marriages of refugees and human trafficking. Hence, using the United Nations definition of human trafficking, this research aims to outline the conditions under which the temporary marriage of refugees crosses the line and becomes human trafficking. Furthermore, this research will analyze the role that institutions within Syrian refugee camps and settlements may have played in the growth of this phenomenon.

### Chapter Breakdown

In Chapter I, I offer background information that sets out the premise of the thesis topic. Next, the chapter defines the key terms and research questions that lay the groundwork for the rest of the thesis. To show existing research on the topic, I review the literature on human trafficking and temporary marriage. This section forms an educated hypothesis that helps answer research questions.

Chapter II outlines the research framework, methodology, and validation process used to answer the research questions and evaluate the hypothesis. I display the participant demographic, broken down by country, gender, and their exposure to cases

involving temporary marriage. I outline the qualitative interview questions and quantitative survey questions put to the respondents.

In Chapter III, I take a closer look at the demographics information and interview responses to analyze the driving factors behind temporary marriage. I analyze the data and discuss the findings by grouping them into social and institutional categories promoting the practice of temporary marriage. This information is used for understanding whether individuals from specific backgrounds are targeted for temporary marriages and further assesses the role institutions play in the practice of temporary marriage.

In Chapter IV, I use the United Nations definition of human trafficking to evaluate the conditions under which temporary marriages of refugees become human trafficking. In Chapter V, I offer some concluding thoughts.

## Chapter II.

### Research Framework and Methods

This chapter outlines the research framework and methods used for this study. The section outlines the data collection activities used throughout the study, including in-depth interviews with aid workers who knew of or had dealt with temporary marriage cases and a short online survey about temporary marriage experiences.

#### Respondents

The refugee crisis has increased the need for professional and volunteer refugee helpers in refugee settlements and urban settlements. Aid and NGO workers undertake valuable work while facing increasingly dangerous conditions in many parts of the world. OCHA defines aid workers as “all workers engaged by humanitarian agencies, whether internationally or nationally recruited, or formally or informally retained from the beneficiary community, to conduct the activities of that agency” (OCHA, 2008, p. 30). In a humanitarian setting, aid and NGO workers typically operate in front-line conditions, distributing humanitarian aid to refugees. In camps and urban settlements, they provide support, food, resources, and infrastructure to people in need. Their direct contact with refugees and the institutions that support refugees gives them a reality on the ground. Hence, this study relies on aid and NGO workers in refugee camps and urban settlements to identify the institutional factors that promote the practice of temporary marriage



amongst Syrian refugees and evaluate the conditions under which temporary marriage of refugees devolves into human trafficking.

All applicable protocols and policies of Harvard University's Institutions Review Board for using human subjects in research were complied with in this research.

### Design

The original study design aimed to contact relevant stakeholders in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey to help identify aid workers and refugees who had experienced or knew somebody who had experienced temporary marriage. Stakeholders included international non-governmental organizations, local non-governmental organizations, religious leaders, and government agencies that worked with Syrian refugee women. The principal investigator identified and reached out to over 100 stakeholders via email (ranging from general information emails to sending a direct email to a department or staff member). Though attempted, it soon became clear through the low number of stakeholders responding who knew about temporary marriages that the target sample size would not be met with this method alone.

As a result, other participant outreach methods were used, including outreach via Facebook and WhatsApp, targeting aid workers who had experience working with refugee women in Jordanian, Lebanese, and Turkish refugee camps directly. All interested respondents were sent a short survey (see Appendix 1) via Qualtrics or Facebook message asking them questions relating to their familiarity with temporary marriages in refugee camps and whether they had the means to participate in a virtual interview. A consent form and interview request were emailed to all respondents who

had the requisite knowledge and were able to participate. The study also used snowball sampling (Biernacki, 1981) by asking respondents to help identify other aid workers who fit the requirements.

### Interview and Survey Development and Procedures

Interviews took place via Zoom or over the phone and lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes. The researcher asked 12 semi-structured interview questions (listed in Appendix 2). Before starting the interview, the researcher revisited the consent and privacy form, and the participant had the opportunity to ask clarifying questions. It was made clear to the participants that in the results presented, their identities would not be revealed; instead they were assigned anonymous numbers (Participant 1, Participant 2, and so on). When applicable, the researcher recorded the audio of the interviews; otherwise, they took notes by hand. After the interview, the respondents were asked to leave the Zoom meeting/phone call and participate in an online 20-item survey (listed in Appendix 3).

### Sample

The researcher conducted interviews with 20 aid workers who knew someone who had experienced or had heard of temporary marriage in refugee camps. Eleven respondents had worked on a temporary marriage case, while nine knew about such marriages in refugee camps. Seventeen respondents worked for either a local or an international non-governmental organization, and three worked for governmental institutions. Overall, 40% of the respondents worked in Jordan, 35% worked in Lebanon,

and 35% worked in Turkey. In terms of gender, overall, 60% of the respondents were male, 40% female. However, country by country, the gender ratio of aid workers differed significantly. Sixty percent of the respondents from Turkey were female, followed by Lebanon at 43% and Jordan at 25%.

Table 1. Participant Information by Country.

Country	Male	Female	Have worked on cases involving Temporary Marriage
Jordan	6	2	5
Lebanon	2	3	3
Turkey	4	5	3

### Measures

After data collection activities concluded, a qualitative coding scheme was created using the initial research questions and interview responses. Five coding themes were developed to analyze the interplay between personal, social, and organizational factors influencing temporary marriages: personal, relational, societal, organizational, and regional.

The personal level identifies personal history factors that increase the likelihood of refugees being tied down in temporary marriage. The relational level examines the influence of close family members that may increase the risk of experiencing temporary marriage. The societal level explores the urban and camp settings and cultural norms that

influence the practice of temporary marriage. The organizational level explores institutional factors such as camp management and programming agencies that allow temporary marriage. The regional, the final level, looks at the broad political factors that help create a temporary marriage climate.

Via these themes, we can understand 1) various factors that make some refugees more susceptible to temporary marriage; and 2) institutional factors that promote the practice of temporary marriages in refugee camps. Furthermore, three additional categories were created using the coding scheme: Act, Means, and Purpose of temporary marriage. Themes under these categories were compared against the United Nations human trafficking definition to understand the conditions under which the temporary marriage of refugees devolves into human trafficking.

## Chapter III.

### Promoting Factors

This chapter analyzes the social and institutional factors that promote the practice of temporary marriage in Jordanian, Lebanese, and Turkish refugee camps. The first section analyzes the demographic backgrounds of the refugees. The aim of collecting demographics of refugees and suitors involved in temporary marriages is to identify the extent to which social factors contribute to the practice of temporary marriage in refugee settlements and assess the correlation between temporary marriages and human trafficking. This section looks at sex, age, religion, location, and economic need to decipher common vulnerabilities associated with temporary marriage. This study finds that suitors are targeting female refugees from specific backgrounds.

To understand the institutional factors that promote the practice of temporary marriage in refugee settlements, the second section focuses on the organizational and regional factors. The organizational and regional lens looks at the role of religious, non-profit, and government institutions in promoting the practice of temporary marriages amongst refugees. This study finds that all institutions, including government, religious, and humanitarian, play a vital role in allowing the practice of temporary marriage in refugee camps and settlements.

#### Social Factors Promoting the Practice of Temporary Marriage

Respondents noted that while anyone can become a victim of temporary marriage, in a refugee setting, the chances of women and young girls entering into this form of relationship is significantly higher. The profile of the victims described by aid workers

are nearly identical across all three countries, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. When asked to describe the brides eloped in temporary marriages, respondents cited several common characteristics, including coming from families with dire financial needs, and those who were religious and ethnic minorities, under-aged, divorced, or widows.

Finding housing is a significant issue, especially for refugees living in urban areas. Even for ordinary people [host country nationals], everything is expensive, and there are no jobs. [Refugee] families are trying to arrange marriage with citizens; they offer their daughters to the landowners as second or third wives. (Participant 15, personal communication, 2021).

I went in and met one family who traded for food, another for less than \$100... it goes to show you the desperation in camps. I think people have this idea that refugees are served every meal, and the NGO meets their [refugees] basic needs, but that is not the case. Some of them never see aid. (Participant 7, personal communication, 2021).

Families are very, very poor. They might have debts to pay or lack just the basic necessities... if it's the aid worker [recruiter], he might control the aid this family will receive and families do what they can to get basic necessities. (Participant 6, personal communication, 2021).

Exploitation is widespread; they [suitors] know the needs of each family... they offer some money or Mahir [dowry] to the family. (Participant 13, personal communication, 2021).

Women and girls are seen as a burden but also used as a currency; it is like they [families] are selling them... Unlike men, women do not have other opportunities... selling their body is a way for them to provide for their families. (Participant 4, personal communication, 2021).

The respondents shared that temporary marriages occur in refugee camps and urban settings. The limited reach of and resources offered by NGOs combined with the host nations' economic challenges create unsafe environments for refugees. While the desperation of these families is unfathomable, some are consciously targeting and exploiting families with dire financial needs. As shared by respondents, driven by their financial situation, some families are selling their daughters for less than a hundred dollars. The economic vulnerabilities of refugees give suitors the power to offer an

infinitesimal amount of dowry in exchange for complete control over the bride.

Depending on the nature of the agreement, this control can last for a few hours while the husband takes the bride to a hotel room for a one-time sexual exchange, or it can continue for years after the bride moves to an apartment where she lives out the contract. In addition to targeting families with severe economic disparities, suitors are also preying on underaged girls, widows, and divorcees.

In Jordan, if you're 15 and have consent from parents, you can get married... but as I mention these [temporary marriages] are different and don't have to be registered. (Participant 16, personal communication, 2021).

People look for virgin girls... these marriages [temporary marriages] are forced. I have seen girls as young as 12 years old, 12! ...they [girls and women] do not have a choice. There is much pressure abuse, and they [refugees] are living under extreme circumstances, and their reality [is] too far from normal... it comes down to survival. Families are willing to do anything to survive. (Participant 3, personal communication, 2021).

We used to have an employee who quit. We got many complaints from the widows and young girls; when he would come for cash assistance, he would joke about that [temporary marriage]... They [people working in the camp] also have relationships with refugee girls... We do not track temporary marriage, but we educate refugees on the long-term adverse impacts of child marriage... Yes, also we educate them about the myths about virginity... purity of the girl is a very big issue, and we do as much as we can to educate people. (Participant 2, personal communication, 2021).

Young girls face a lot of family pressure. Families fear for the safety of their daughters... getting raped or kidnapped, these things do happen, it's better they are married than raped... Men like young girls. They can control them easily. (Participant 17, personal communication, 2021).

The growing refugee crisis and life events have left no options for women and young girls... Men come looking for young girls, widows, and women whose husbands are missing or are back in Syria. Typically, their [husbands'] whereabouts are unknown... They [women and girls] have to provide for their children, so they are also looking for a husband. If he doesn't accept the children, at least he will pay money to the family for her children. (Participant 20, personal communication, 2021).

Family honor is a big deal, and if temporary marriage to someone outside of the camp is an option, the father might say yes. (Participant 10, personal communication, 2021).

Respondents noted that while NGOs are not tracking temporary child marriages, there are reports of child marriages that fit the description of temporary marriages.

Temporary marriage of girls as young as twelve is highly alarming. Some respondents shared that suitors prefer young and virgin girls as it grants them more control over girls' mobility and sexuality. Furthermore, power dynamics allow cases of child abuse, rape, and forced captivity to go unreported.

In addition to child temporary marriages, respondents mentioned suitors targeting divorced women and women who have had premarital relationships. Respondents shared that divorce rates are high in refugee camps, linking this to stress, abuse, and financial instability. However, despite the growing divorce rates, divorce is a highly stigmatized issue and is used to devalue women and girls. Social pressures and low prospects of a second marriage make families more prone to accepting non-traditional proposals.

War widows are another group targeted by suitors. Respondents shared that some women and girls lost their husbands or fiancés during the war and others whose significant others had passed away in the camps. These individuals are often the primary caretakers of their children. In hopes of finding a husband and providing for their children, respondents noted that widows are pressured by their families to partake in temporary marriages. Lastly, all respondents mentioned suitors targeting girls and women from ethnic and religious minority groups.

In southeast Turkey, for them [Kurds], it is common in terms of polygamy. I think you will find more of these marriage there. (Participant 19, personal communication, 2021).



It [temporary marriage] is acceptable in Shiite communities but not in Sunni communities... I think for men, these are travel marriages or affairs, and some do it “to help” the family. (Participant 17, personal communication, 2021).

Families are extremely desperate; they sometimes have more trust in the traffickers than in NGOs... I don't think families think of this as prostitution, it is seen as a marriage under challenging circumstances, and for some Shia Muslims, this is normal. (Participant 20, personal communication, 2021).

It is hard to comment on the prevalence [of temporary marriage] because it is not something that we track, but I think this is common in the Shia community. (Participant 9, personal communication, 2021).

Most common, maybe I think Mutah for Shia people, but I think anyone with money problems would do it. (Participant 2, personal communication, 2021).

Some imams allow temporary marriage in camps, but this is not a common *nikah* [marriage]. It is all done, you know, no paper... Yes, verbal agreement. (Participant 14, personal communication, 2021).

Respondents working in Turkey mentioned the targeting of ethnic minorities; they noted that Kurdish refugees are approached for temporary marriages due to presumed polygamy in the community. While the respondents did not offer further details relating to the Kurdish community, an association of temporary marriage with the Shia community was shared by almost all respondents. While most Syrian refugees are Sunni, the respondents pointed out that the Shiite sect is the primary group practicing temporary marriage.

Some respondents went to great lengths to describe the differences between Shia and Sunni refugees. These differences included various social, cultural, religious, and political differences. A significant difference relevant to this research was the acceptance and understanding of temporary marriage. Respondents viewed temporary marriage as a religious practice that stamps out of Shia doctrine; however, they emphasized that economic need is the driving factor behind such marriages in refugee settings more than religion.

When describing the marriage from the bride's family's perspective, some respondents used the term *Mutah* and noted it as a Shia practice. Interestingly, when describing the marriage from the suitor's perspective, some respondents used the term *Misyar* and noted it as a travel marriage practiced by men from the Gulf. Additionally, it was reported that some use religious doctrine to deceive families living in poverty into selling their daughters. Some religious leaders in the camps are helping facilitate temporary marriages. Overall, the respondents mentioned that socially this practice is taboo in both Shia and Sunni communities and is practiced solely due to economic need. In comparison to refugees, even fewer details are known about the suitors.

This is not common for Syrians. People from Egypt, Saudi, and Iran have these types of arrangements. (Participant 6, personal communication, 2021).

[Suitors] offer the head of the family money; other times, they promise to help the family, get them a job in the city or help them get out of the camp and settle in Europe. The parents will do anything they can. It's not their fault. (Participant 18, personal communication, 2021).

Back in 2014, this was seen as a helping hand. Men from the Gulf would come, pay money, and marry these girls short-term. Now it is more difficult to get into the camps. *Misyar* is like prostitution. There is no difference... This is only for sex. (Participant 7, personal communication, 2021).

As I said, these men coming from the rich Gulf countries, it is very political, so no one talks about it. (Participant 10, personal communication, 2021).

People don't like to involve police. One the case I was helping, one man from Saudi Arabia, age 50, was threatening the family, police heard about the story, and the police visited the family, but the family denied it... They probably don't trust the police and are scared of the man doing something to them. (Participant 12, personal communication, 2021).

We used to have an employee who quit. We got many complaints from the widows and young girls; when he would come for cash assistance, he would joke about that [temporary marriage]. (Participant 2, personal communication, 2021).

Respondents acknowledged that they knew very few details about the men participating in temporary marriages. Overall, respondents shared that suitors range from

aid workers to men from host countries and Gulf countries, notably from Saudi Arabia. Some respondents shared that while men from host and Gulf nations tend to be older; aid workers who partake in temporary marriages are relatively young. Men from the Gulf countries were described as either businessmen conducting business in the host country or men visiting camps to offer aid. While the economic status of suitors is unknown, they are perceived to be more financially stable than the refugee women and families they are approaching.

It was shared that at the beginning of the crisis, temporary marriage was seen as a charitable act, with men willing to marry refugee girls and offer families aid. Responses highlighted that the suitors are aware of the economic vulnerabilities of refugees and use them to advance their proposals. Respondents described these marriages as marriages of convenience fulfilling the sexual desires of the suitors. For suitors, the trade for sexual intimacy hinges on exploiting families who have severe economic needs or are outcasts due to their ethnicity or religion. Furthermore, almost all information shared by respondents regarding refugees and suitors is solely based on personal accounts they recall and/or rumors individuals have heard. Respondents emphasized that while the topic of temporary marriage is well known in the refugee setting, the lack of institutional attention granted to this subject makes it challenging to collect data.

#### Institutional Factors Promoting the Practice of Temporary Marriage

Different and overlapping factors promote the practice of temporary marriage in refugee settlements. This section analyzes where government, religious, and humanitarian institutions play a role in the promotion of temporary marriages of refugees.

Based on the respondents' responses, the key organizational factors that promote the practice of temporary marriage include lack of laws governing temporary marriages, institutional blind spots, and organizational corruption. Even though temporary marriage is well known in all three countries, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, the prevalence of such marriages is unknown. The respondents shared that there are no specific laws that address the practice of temporary marriage.

People don't like to involve police. In one case I was helping, one man from Saudi Arabia, age 50, was threatening the family. Police heard about the story, and the police visited the family, but the family denied it... They probably don't trust the police and are scared of the man doing something to them. (Participant 12, personal communication, 2021).

It is hard to comment on the prevalence [of temporary marriage] because it's not something that we track... government does not have any laws. These marriages don't have to be reported. (Participant 9, personal communication, 2021).

In Jordan, if you're 15 and have consent from parents, you can get married... but as I mention these [temporary marriages] are different and don't have to be registered. (Participant 16, personal communication, 2021).

This marriage is not registered legally, happening under the radar at home. If anything goes wrong, the refugees can just go to the police and report. They have no evidence and should be involved in these types of activities. (Participant 19, personal communication, 2021).

The government does not track these cases. They are very political. You have men from Gulf countries coming on tourist visas, sometimes business visas; if they have these marriages and one of these results in a child, they will not take responsibility. The government wants to stay as far away as possible... I would be very careful and not inquire about this directly, definitely not the Saudi government; they would be extremely defensive and wouldn't want to be associated with this type of attention. I recommend reaching out to aid workers, doctors, and people from the Gulf countries who work in the camps who can put light on this. (Participant 7, personal communication, 2021).

The lack of laws governing the practice of temporary marriage has a domino effect. The lack of legislation means such marriages go unreported and unregulated. The legal void enables each individual to interpret the marriage to his/her own accord. Lack

of laws makes it easy for abusers to exploit vulnerable community members via temporary marriage. Since these are not recognized marriages, there are no established mechanisms for victims to seek legal help or report abuse. Due to the legal void, law enforcement cannot identify, assist, or protect victims of temporary marriages.

Furthermore, one respondent shared that refugees' lack of trust in the legal system and police prevents them from reporting cases of abuse and violence. Individuals prefer to settle disputes and misunderstandings with the involved party instead of reporting the crime to the police. Consequently, exploitation via temporary marriage continues to go unreported and unnoticed.

Furthermore, while the involvement of men from Gulf nations in the temporary marriage of refugees is evident, few respondents elaborated on the role Gulf nations play in promoting the temporary marriage of refugees to men from Gulf nations. On this topic, respondents had mixed responses, ranging from lack of knowledge to general discontent towards wealthy Gulf nations and hesitancy in commenting about Saudi Arabia due to censorship and fear. Some respondents mentioned that Gulf nations, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, are aware that their citizens are traveling to refugee camps to partake in temporary marriages. Nonetheless, respondents expressed that it is unlikely that Gulf nations would be willing to acknowledge that such practices are taking place. Many shared the stark difference between wealthy Gulf nations and host countries when providing refuge to refugees. Some shared that wealthy Gulf nations distance themselves from the refugee crisis, and despite their links to cases involving temporary marriages, tend to disassociate themselves from controversial topics.

Notably, one respondent shared safety concerns about researching Gulf nations' involvement in temporary marriages. Due to the regional sensitivity regarding temporary and child marriages coupled with censorship on journalism and research, this respondent advised the researcher to refrain from contacting government officials from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf nations. Fear and unwillingness to comment on the role Gulf nations play highlighted the barriers, gaps, and challenges in researching the temporary marriages of refugees.

Overall, regional, national, and local governments are not the only institutions failing to respond to temporary marriages, however. Respondents also emphasized the institutional blind spots of non-governmental agencies and camp management regarding temporary marriages.

Organizations have to be diplomatic because of aid. As I said, these men coming from the rich Gulf countries, it is very political, so no one talks about it... UN reports are very sensitive and very political. (Participant 10, personal communication, 2021).

I remember seeing flyers at the airport [a Turkish airport] that warned travelers about temporary marriage. The focus was on Syrian women and girls, but when I got to the camp, no one mentioned this as an issue. There were rumors, and there were definitely families who shared their experience but as an agency, this was not something we worked on... You know if there is no action, after a while, people [refugees] will stop reporting. Unfortunately, we have to be selective. NGOs report and have resources for issues that are funded... I went in and met one family who traded for food, another for less than \$100... It goes to show you the desperation in camps. I think people have this idea that refugees are served every meal, and the NGO meets their [refugees] basic needs, but that's not the case. Some of them never see aid. (Participant 7, personal communication, 2021).

You should reach out to local organizations who work on women's reproductive rights. They might have more information. I can tell you that the big organization doesn't talk about this, you will hear about temporary marriages once in a while in local news, but that's all. (Participant 5, personal communication, 2021).

We don't track temporary marriage, but we educate refugees on the long-term adverse impacts of child marriage. This topic is related [to child marriage] but we address it indirectly as it is a sensitive topic and with child marriage you have to have cultural sensitivity. (Participant 2, personal communication, 2021).

In addition to interviewing aid workers, this research also reached out to United Nations agencies, ILO, IMO, Save the Children, Freedom Fund, Polaris Project, and other international organizations that have produced reports that mention the temporary marriages of refugees. Surprisingly, representatives from the different organizations who responded to the research inquiries shared a lack of awareness and knowledge about this topic. Representatives from all organizations noted that they are not actively working on addressing temporary marriage, and due to the pandemic, their present priorities (at the time of writing) have shifted significantly. Many representatives advised reaching out to a different department or organization. Unfortunately, all departments and organizations offered similar responses, revealing the lack of attention organizations are paying to this exploitative practice.

The aid workers interviewed for this research echoed the institutions' lack of awareness and unwillingness to investigate this topic. Despite informal reports and rumors of temporary marriage, all respondents stated that temporary marriage is not addressed by organizations managing and supporting refugees. Respondents linked institutional blind spots to lack of aid and political sensitivity. The lack of resources and aid was noted as a significant obstacle in understanding and tackling the exploitative nature of temporary marriage. The majority of research and programs about girls and women focus on education, child marriage, and domestic violence. While temporary marriage is interconnected with both child marriage and domestic violence, it was reported that organizations tend not to focus on temporary marriage to avoid political

complications. The involvement of suitors from Gulf nations makes temporary marriage a politically charged issue that can adversely impact aid received from Gulf nations.

Big players [Gulf nations] are involved in this, and it would jeopardize relationships and funding. NGOs are very selective about the issue they pick. Everyone talks about that issues that they can raise funds for and work on awareness. I think NGOs don't talk about issues that involve these countries [Gulf nations]. (Participant 1, personal communication, 2021).

It is all about politics and money, and if you ask me, we are in this crisis because of this. There is not much that organizations can do, they rely on aid. (Participant 15, personal communication, 2021).

International organizations set up programs that local organizations support. There are very very few local organizations that work on their own, everyone follows the issues the INGOs support, and it's easy to get money, you have more resources. (Participant 6, personal communication, 2021).

Refugee aid is highly politicized and strongly influenced by donors. Issues involving perpetrators from donor nations are overlooked to avoid cuts in aid. The privilege held by suitors from Gulf nations grants them the ability to exploit refugee women and girls without fear of consequences. Dependence on aid and political pressures prevent international organizations from designating resources and aid to identify, assist, or protect victims of temporary marriages. Respondents noted that this has a trickle-down effect on local organizations. It is incredibly challenging for local organizations to find funding and resources to explore nuanced issues such as temporary marriage. Local organizations often rely on reports and methods recommended by international organizations. Unfortunately, institutional blind spots and lack of regulation open up opportunities for organizational corruption.

Of course, there is corruption. How do you think people are able to get in and out of camps? Refugees can't just leave the camp. That is not very easy. They [suitors] pay the guard or aid workers to get girls and find families. (Participant 11, personal communication, 2021).



It is not unusual for aid workers to have relationships with refugees because some of us [aid workers] are also refugees, so we come from similar background and culture. And a lot of marriages are short in the camp because of misunderstanding, violence, and money. But of course girls should not trust some of these men [aid workers], they can leak pictures or tell their friends and your reputation can be ruined... Family honor is a big deal and if temporary marriage to someone outside of the camp is an option, the father might say yes. (Participant 10, personal communication, 2021).

I am sure this happens a lot. Women wear a lot of makeup, and wear tight dresses under their abaya. They [refugee women] are escorted by men [aid workers or family members]. No one asks them where they are going. They are basically prostituted for very little money and a lot of abuse. (Participant 4, personal communication, 2021).

We used to have an employee who quit. We got many complaints from the widows and young girls; when he would come for cash assistance, he would joke about that [temporary marriage]. Aid workers, security guards, people just working on the field, they make these types of comments, I can find you a rich husband or why are you waiting for your husband, I can find you better options and they [people working in the camp] also have relationships with refugee girls. (Participant 2, personal communication, 2021).

With great disappointment and concern, respondents shared the role aid workers and guards play in the sexual exploitation of women and girls. The lack of organizational and legal attention accorded to temporary marriage makes it easy for suitors to recruit aid workers and security guards to identify and transport women and girls. Due to the access and information aid workers have, they can target refugee women and girls and exploit their vulnerabilities. The power dynamics and gatekeeping function of aid workers for food and supplies make it extremely challenging for refugees to report exploitation and abuse. The fear of further exploitation and pressure force families to elope their daughters in temporary marriages.

Based on respondents' experiences and scholarly information on temporary marriage, it is evident that institutions play a crucial role in promoting the practice of temporary marriages in refugee settlements. From lack of laws, reporting, and prevention

to organizational corruption, local, national, and non-governmental institutions' negligence has created a loophole for suitors and camp workers to exploit women and girls through the practice of temporary marriage.

## Chapter IV.

### The Linkage between Human Trafficking and Temporary Marriage

This chapter examines the links between human trafficking and temporary marriage by comparing the act, the means, and the purpose of temporary marriage to the elements of human trafficking. Applying the elements of human trafficking to the practice of temporary marriages of refugees allow us to analyze and understand the conditions under which the temporary marriage of refugees becomes human trafficking.

#### The Act

The first element of human trafficking is *the Act*, which refers to the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons. This section examines the act of recruitment, solicitation, and transportation involved in temporary marriage. The respondents shared that refugee women in camps, camp workers, and informal agencies reach out to refugee families, advertising interested suitors who offer a sizable dowry.

It is common for people to help find proposals, it is, you know, a good deed. Refugees are looking for good proposals; everyone wants their family to find good husbands who can take girls and boys out of the camp. But for these marriages, [temporary marriages] are taboo. Not all families accept these types of proposals; it is not common. (Participant 14, personal communication, 2021).

We used to have an employee who quit. We got many complaints from the widows and young girls; when he would come for cash assistance, he would joke about that [temporary marriage]. Aid workers, security guards, people just working on the field, they make these types of comments, I can find you a rich husband or why are you waiting for your husband, I can find you better options and they [people working in the camp] also have relationships with refugee girls. (Participant 2, personal communication, 2021).

If it's the aid worker [recruiter], he might control the aid this family will receive and families do what they can get to basic necessities. (Participant 6, personal communication, 2021).

Hard to find suitable matches in camps; people trust aid workers. (Participant 18, personal communication, 2021).

Aunties used WhatsApp to send pictures of girls. They include biodata of the girls like age, religion, if she was previously married, even though most people hide if they have children. They include everything and share it in WhatsApp groups... there are a lot of different [WhatsApp] groups, pictures are shared with local people and also men from Gulf... they share [with refugee families] how much money the man has and how much he will pay them. (Participant 1, personal communication, 2021).

In speaking with respondents, it became evident that women and trusted individuals such as those working at the camp play a significant role as perpetrators of human trafficking. The role of refugee women and male camp workers as recruiters is a complex theme shared by several respondents. Respondents shared that culturally speaking, finding marriage proposals is viewed as a righteous deed; however, people have mixed feelings about matchmakers in camps. In hopes of finding a suitable proposal for their daughters, respondents mentioned that many families depend on matchmakers and trusted authorities in the camp to find proposals. Unfortunately, the family's dependence on matchmakers, restricted access outside of the camp, and growing economic needs expose them to exploitation by other refugees and those working in the camps.

It depends, I've heard some marriages last three years, others end after a day. (Participant 8, personal communication, 2021).

These women [matchmakers] are not making a big profit; people get creative and find ways to survive and make money. (Participant 1, personal communication, 2021).

[Aid workers are] paid for finding hotels, transportation, and arrange everything. (Participant 2, personal communication, 2021).

[Suitors] offer the head of the family money, other times, they promise to help the family, get them a job in the city or help them get out of the camp and settle in Europe. The parents will do anything they can; it's not their fault. (Participant 18, personal communication, 2021).

While it is unclear exactly how matchmakers find suitors, matchmakers are connected with suitors from the host and Gulf countries. Matchmakers play a critical role in circulating pictures of refugee women and girls in various WhatsApp group chains and sharing the profiles of suitors with refugee families. The practice of matchmaking was described by one respondent as a profitable scheme for everyone involved. First, in exchange for matching suitors with women and girls, matchmakers charge fees that fluctuate depending on the proposal. Moreover, additional charges are made for transporting the bride from a camp to a hotel or an apartment. Secondly, a dowry is a key recruitment strategy that matchmakers and suitors use for luring economically vulnerable families. A dowry often comes in the form of cash payments to pressure families to consider the proposal and achieve consent from their daughters. In addition, some respondents mentioned that the suitors offer to help the families get jobs and relocate to European countries where the refugees will have better opportunities. It was noted that the suitors in fact rarely fulfill these promises after the marriage terminates.

In most cases, the suitors end all communications with the families and the brides once the marriage ends. Lastly, suitors sometimes pay a one-time fee for an intimate relationship that can last as long as the suitor wants. Unlike prostitution, where the men pay for each encounter, under temporary marriage, the suitor only has to pay the one-time dowry and engage in sexual intimacy for as long as they want. The marriage agreement can end after one encounter or continue for years, depending on the suitor.

Under such circumstances, the role suitors, matchmakers, and families play in recruitment and solicitation overlaps. Nonetheless, the onus is on suitors targeting and exploiting the economic disparities of both matchmakers and families in pursuit of temporary intimate relationships with vulnerable women and sometimes-underage girls. Two respondents shared that other forms of recruitment and solidification involved organized crime networks trafficking women and girls via temporary marriage.

There are entire agencies that recruit women and girls; of course, they are not official, and families know that... Human trafficking rings exist, but people look the other way and pray to God that their daughters will be in a better situation. Of course, families know [recruitment is for human trafficking], but they do not accept it, they look away... women go to hotels or apartments where they live for sometimes three months, other times a year, until the relationship ends. (Participant 3, personal communication, 2021).

Human trafficking is a major concern. Families are extremely desperate; they sometimes have more trust in the traffickers than in NGOs... I don't think families think of this as prostitution, it is seen as a marriage under challenging circumstances, and for some Shia Muslims, this is normal. (Participant 20, personal communication, 2021).

I am sure this happens a lot. Women wear a lot of makeup, and wear tight dresses under their abaya. They [refugee women] are escorted by men [aid workers or family members]. No one asks them where they are going. They are basically prostituted for very little money and a lot of abuse. (Participant 4, personal communication, 2021).

While it is unclear how often criminal networks use temporary marriage to traffic women and girls, the mention of human trafficking rings involved in some temporary marriage cases was alarming. The profile of traffickers described by respondents alluded that these traffickers included refugee men, people working in the camps, and local citizens as part of a semi-organized group. One respondent commented on the relationship refugees have with traffickers. Due to the lack of aid and support granted by non-profits and camp management, traffickers are often individuals the family trusts and relies upon for aid. Familiar with the socio-economic needs of refugees, for temporary

marriage in particular, traffickers target religious minorities, families that have young female dependents, widows and/or girls, and women who are known for having had premarital relationships.

Temporary marriages orchestrated by traffickers take place much more secretly. While they are presented as traditional marriages, respondents noted that the families know that these marriages are temporary and purely for sexual intimacy. Due to the unspoken nature of temporary marriage and the infamous reputation of the recruiter, temporary marriages are highly stigmatized, and the same families are approached repeatedly. Interestingly, while this form of temporary marriage resembles prostitution, the families see the two practices differently. Some families have accepted temporary marriage as a new form of marriage and a means of survival, whether through cognitive dissonance, a coping mechanism to face society, or religious manipulation.

Whether temporary marriage is facilitated by refugees, camp workers, or semi-organized groups, three elements of human trafficking ought to be present, starting with recruitment, which hinges upon proactively identifying, targeting, and recruiting vulnerable groups. Next, solicitation involves offering a dowry, gifts, and cash payments to families and women in exchange for an intimate relationship. After the verbal agreement, women and girls are taken from the camp and transferred to a hotel or apartment.

### The Means

The second element of human trafficking is identifying the tactics used to maintain control. This section examines the means of force, coercion, and fraud involved

in temporary marriages. The power dynamic between recruiters, suitors, families, and the bride highlights the issue's complexity.

These marriages [temporary marriages] are forced, I have seen girls as young as 12 years old, 12! ...they [girls and women] do not have a choice. There is much pressure abuse, and they [refugees] are living under extreme circumstances, and their reality [is] too far from normal... It comes down to survival. Families are willing to do anything to survive. (Participant 3, personal communication, 2021).

I would say women don't have a choice even if they agree to it. (Participant 8, personal communication, 2021).

At the end of the day, this [temporary marriage] is a gender issue. Unlike men, women do not have other opportunities... selling their body is a way for them to provide for their families. (Participant 4, personal communication, 2021).

Young girls face a lot of family pressure. Families fear for the safety of their daughters... getting raped or kidnapped. These things do happen; it is better they are married than raped. (Participant 17, personal communication, 2021).

For respondents, the tie between temporary marriage and forced marriage was self-evident. When describing temporary marriage, respondents repeatedly referred to such a form of marriage as forced. Girls and women in refugee settlements are less likely to have a choice – a choice in whom they marry, if they marry, when they marry, and how they marry. Since temporary marriage is a verbal agreement, respondents noted that the head of the family agrees on behalf of women and girls. While this aligns with certain cultural norms of Islamic marriages where the closest male relative accepts the marriage on behalf of the bride, the lack of choice in temporary marriage sets it apart from other forms of Islamic marriage.

Consent is a significant concern surrounding such marriages. Under the understanding that children cannot consent to a marriage, underage girls' temporary marriage qualifies as forced marriage by default. Furthermore, notions of physical and mental abuse faced by potential brides from their families and a lack of other economic



opportunities pigeonhole women into becoming mere sexual objects. Women experiencing such socio-economic and cultural pressures do not possess the ability to exercise any natural choice or give free and informed consent.

The Syrian imams in the camps are not officially recognized [by the host country's government]. Syrians have their imams and hence fewer regulations and new religious practices and understanding. There are cultural barriers that prevent open conversations. (Participant 5, personal communication, 2021).

It [temporary marriage] is acceptable in Shiite communities but not in Sunni communities. (Participant 17, personal communication, 2021).

Some imams allow temporary marriage in camps, but this is not a common *nikah*. It is all done, you know, no paper... Yes, verbal agreement. (Participant 14, personal communication, 2021).

In addition to the force experienced via physical abuse, coercion is another common tactic associated with temporary marriage. Brides can experience various forms of coercion, including psychological, religious, and shaming, and pressure to provide for one's family. Promotion and approval by religious leaders in the camp further legitimizes temporary marriages. The lack of paperwork makes it convenient for suitors to use the influence of the religious leaders and avoid any legal procedures associated with a typical marriage. Furthermore, camp management and local agencies' lack of action against such marriages allows the coercive and forceful tactics of suitors to remain unnoticed. The lack of attention paid to such forms of marriage has also contributed to fraud and deception.

It is not common for parents to say that this type of marriage is *Misyar* or *mutah*. I know of a family that found out much later that this was a temporary marriage... this is not common for Syrians. People from Egypt, Saudi, and Iran have these types of arrangements... women and girls are especially unaware. (Participant 6, personal communication, 2021).

[Suitors] offer the head of the family money, other times they promise to help the family, get them a job in the city or help them get out of the camp and settle in Europe. (Participant 18, personal communication, 2021).

There are a lot of schemes [in the camps], everyone wants to try their luck. These men are not honest about their intentions, but there are no other options. (Participant 20, personal communication, 2021).

Fraud and deception were recalled as two additional tactics used by suitors and recruiters. Respondents mentioned that suitors interested in temporary marriage for sexual intimacy disguised their proposals under the pretense that these were traditional marriages. It was noted that temporary marriage was not a standard or general practice amongst Syrian refugees before the refugee crisis, and even now, it is not widely practiced. With the lack of awareness and familiarity with such forms of marriages coupled with lack of education about such marriages from camp authorities, families are being deceived into temporary marriages. Unfortunately, it is only upon the bride's return, ranging from a few weeks to several months later, that the true nature of the marriage becomes apparent. The mental and physical abuse endured during and after the marriage goes unaddressed, primarily due to the shame and stigma attached. The prevalence of force, coercion, and fraud in temporary marriages makes refugee women and girls susceptible to exploitation, in particular sexual exploitation.

### The Purpose

The third and last element of human trafficking deals with the purpose of exploitation. This section explores the various forms of exploitation, including sexual and emotional exploitation and control over the individual in temporary marriage. Furthermore, it ties together the forceful and fraudulent recruitment and movement of refugee women and girls with exploitation.

Back in 2014, this was seen as a helping hand. Men from the Gulf would come, pay money, and marry these girls short-term. Now it is more difficult to get into the camps. Misyar is like prostitution. There is no difference... This is only for sex. Women are treated like nothing, emotionally and physically abused... Once they [women or girls] have this type of relationship, it is hard for them to find other partners due to the stigma. (Participant 7, personal communication, 2021).

As much as organizations don't like to talk about it, sex work takes place in camps every single day. There might be some religious justification, but overall it is taboo for a reason. No one under normal circumstances would agree to this type of a relation and would call it marriage... You should look into this; there are no resources for girls who are abused. What happens to the baby? What happens to their mental health? I think it's easy for everyone to look away. (Participant 5, personal communication, 2021).

I am sure this happens a lot. Women wear a lot of makeup, and wear tight dresses under their abaya. They [refugee women] are escorted by men [aid workers or family members]. No one asks them where they are going. They are basically prostituted for very little money and a lot of abuse. (Participant 4, personal communication, 2021).

The sexual exploitation of girls and women in Syrian refugee camps started soon after the outbreak of the refugee crisis. Respondents emphasized that temporary marriage was perceived as a form of donation or aid early on during the crisis. Men from Gulf nations would participate in Misyar in exchange for money. Low-security measures made it easy for men to enter camps and recruit young girls and women. Higher security measures in refugee camps currently restrict access; hence, suitors have to rely on internal recruiters who scout for the community's most vulnerable members. The trade for sexual intimacy hinges on exploiting families who have severe economic needs or are outcasts due to their ethnicity or religion. Respondents described the treatment of women and girls in such relationships as inhuman. While women and girls may directly or indirectly consent to temporary marriage, as established in the earlier section, that consent is irrelevant, especially concerning underage girls. Domestic violence was a common trait of temporary marriage. The abuse varies from case to case but most

respondents highlighted physical, sexual, and psychological exploitation. Furthermore, since these are secretive and taboo marriages, children conceived during these marriages are rarely offered any support from their biological father. Sexual and emotional exploitation deprives women and girls of their agency and ability to take charge of their own lives.

The brides cannot leave the marriage; they have zero rights. The men pay the family money; if they [the bride] run away, the husband will come after the family... it is very difficult for the girl to just come back after a certain period has passed; these women and girls can return to camp and receive benefits. (Participant 8, personal communication, 2021).

Men have a lot of power over the bride and her family in marriages. (Participant 13, personal communication, 2021).

Exploitation is widespread, they [suitors] know the needs of each family... they offer some money or Mahir [dowry] to the family. (Participant 13, personal communication, 2021).

Families are trying to arrange marriage with citizens; they offer their daughters to the landowners as a second or third wife. The landowners tell the family that their daughter will live in a different apartment that he has, but no one knows where that apartment is... the wife can't just leave the apartment and go to her parents, the landowner will find her. (Participant 15, personal communication, 2021).

Lastly, exploitation is linked closely to the suitors having complete control over the bride. The economic vulnerabilities exploited by suitors during recruitment subdues the bride to the will of the suitor. Since the brides and their families are in no position to return the money accepted in a dowry, brides are indebted and made to feel they must complete the entire course of the verbal agreement. While the respondents did not use the term slavery, temporary marriage's actions and long-term consequences resemble modern-day slavery. The suitors have complete control over their brides' movements, and due to the shame and stigma attached to these marriages, it is unlikely for the victims to share or report their experiences. The one-time payment, or dowry, grants the suitor

control over the bride. Depending on the nature of the temporary marriage, these marriages can last a few minutes to a lifetime.

Furthermore, the respondents shared that since women and girls are transferred illegally from the camp to hotels and apartments, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to return to their homes without the recruiter's help. Unfamiliarity with their surrounding environment, fear of authorities, and family debt all force women and girls to stay under the control of their suitor. The imbalanced nature of this relationship lends itself to further emotional and sexual exploitation. Unfortunately, the exploitative nature of temporary marriage goes unreported due to fear, stigma, and lack of resources. Such stories are only shared anecdotally and discussed as rumors.

## Chapter V.

### Conclusion

Time after time, history has shared dreadful cases of human trafficking. From war prisoners in ancient Egypt (Loprieno, 2012) to corveé laborers in imperial China (Dai, 2001), and chattel enslaved people in the Americas (Lichtenstein & Turner, 1997), human trafficking has shaped social, political, and economic structures. While the inhumane practice continues, each passing century becomes hidden in plain sight. Human trafficking fundamentally constitutes a crime not just against the state, but also against the individual; thereby, it is a human rights violation and an issue of human security as well as an issue of state security. This chapter first evaluates whether the data collected in this research supports the hypothesis. Secondly, it outlines the research limitations and offers suggestions for researchers who are interested in exploring the practice of temporary marriage of refugees further. Overall, this research adds findings concerning the links between the temporary marriages of refugees and trafficking, the targeted population, and the role institutions play in promoting the temporary marriage of refugees.

Influenced by regional instability, economic vulnerabilities, market demand, power, technology, laws, and policies at the local, national, and international levels, as well as human whims, temporary marriage is complex, multi-faceted, and evolving. I formed three hypotheses based on existing scholarship and personal experience working in refugee camps. The first hypothesis stated that under-aged girls from poor refugee families are targeted for temporary marriages, constituting these marriages as temporary child marriages. The in-depth interviews supported this hypothesis and revealed that in

addition to targeting children, suitors are also intentionally targeting women and girls who are Shia, Kurdish, or widows.

The second hypothesis stated that the lack of institutional attention and institutional corruption promotes the temporary marriages of refugees. The research results found conclusive support for the second hypothesis. Email correspondence from various United Nations agencies and other international organizations reveals the lack of attention organizations are paying to temporary marriages in refugee camps. When reports that mentioned the temporary marriages of refugees and their exploitative nature were shared, representatives from the respective organizations acknowledged that while this topic requires greater attention, the organizations' present priorities have shifted significantly due to the pandemic.

Furthermore, the in-depth interviews with aid workers revealed that the lack of attention accorded to temporary marriages stems from the lack of laws governing temporary marriage, internal organizational corruption, and the organizations' dependency on aid received from Gulf nations whose citizens are often implicated in the practice. The involvement of suitors from Gulf nations whom NGO workers assist makes temporary marriage a politically charged issue that can adversely affect the organization's reputation and the aid received from Gulf nations.

Lastly, I hypothesized that the temporary marriage of refugees to men from host and Gulf nations devolves into a form of human trafficking when forced. The results demonstrate overwhelming support for this hypothesis, showcasing that all cases of temporary marriages in refugee camps shared by aid workers involved the movement of brides through force, fraud, and coercion for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Because

of the economic disparities and lack of freedoms for refugee women and girls, coupled with the secretive, forced, and monetary nature of the temporary marriages, I would argue that the temporary marriages of refugees should be considered a prima facie case of trafficking in persons.

Unfortunately, the physical, psychological, and long-term effects of human trafficking via temporary marriage continue to remain unaddressed. It is time for the international community, host governments, and local and international organizations to intervene immediately. In light of the current state of temporary marriages and their growth, comprehensive interventions must go beyond awareness and education. In order to prevent the trafficking of refugee women and girls, resources need to be designated to further research and data collection. A great deal of pressure must be put on host countries to pass comprehensive anti-human trafficking legislation, develop enforcement and prevention strategies, create reporting mechanisms, and offer recovery and support services to victims.

Additionally, camp management and international and local organizations ought to work together to identify corporate corruption, offer training on privacy, ethics, and anti-human trafficking, and work on education, awareness, and reporting. Lastly, the international community must acknowledge and recognize the role donor nations have to play in the temporary marriages of refugees and start a diplomatic dialogue with the heads of host and Gulf countries to sanction the practice.

#### Research Limitations and Future Research



The limitations of this study include ethical concerns, recruitment limitations, and geographic barriers. In terms of geography, due to Covid-19, I could not travel for fieldwork to the camps. Instead, I had to conduct virtual interviews that may have impacted the participants' comfort level and willingness to talk openly. The locations from which participants joined the call varied – while some respondents joined the interview from their cars, others were situated at home or at work. Those who joined from home and were surrounded by their spouse and children could not speak openly about the topics and refrained from elaborating on certain topics or using certain words. Additionally, the respondents' unstable internet connections, time commitments, time differences, and competing priorities inhibited more focused communication.

Furthermore, due to the sensitive nature of this topic and its having been subject to limited research in the past, it was difficult to achieve and recruit high participation. Moreover, those willing to participate had certain religious and gender biases. While the study aimed to interview an equal number of men and women, the snowball methodology recruited more male respondents. Overall, twelve men and eight women participated. This sample size does not adequately represent the female perspective. Adequate representation of demographic subgroups in future studies is necessary for further understanding the factors contributing to and the impact of temporary marriages. Moreover, while the aid and NGO workers' perspective is beneficial and offers a unique insight, the study lacks the perspective of refugees. Due to ethical concerns, including those relating to mental health, this study did not include the viewpoint of refugees who had eloped in temporary marriages.

The limitation of this research points towards topics to be addressed in future. This research examined the practice of temporary marriage in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. If a researcher were to continue researching the topic of the temporary marriage of refugees, it would be advisable to focus on one country and collaborate with a local or international refugee non-governmental organization. I encourage the principal investigators interested in further exploring the topic of temporary marriage to conduct in-person research and build a rapport before the interview process. By collaborating with a non-governmental organization that works closely with refugee women, the research can benefit from the NGO's institutional knowledge, connections, and outreach.

Additionally, while this research sought to capture the perspective of both male and female aid workers, due to its limited reach and resources, the research primarily captured the male perspective. By collaborating with an NGO, the researcher will have access to more aid workers with diverse backgrounds, which can help in recruiting an equal number of male and female respondents. Furthermore, collaboration between the researcher and the NGO can directly influence prevention and deterrence programs and identify strategies for shifting institutional practices that facilitate human trafficking.

This research relied on aid workers to understand the impact of temporary marriage on refugees. For the future researcher interested in exploring the practice of temporary marriage in refugee camps, it would be advisable to interview refugees who have the knowledge of and/or who have experienced temporary marriage. A survivor's perspective and voice are essential because they can shed light on issues aid workers do not know first-hand. It would be worthwhile to conduct in-person interviews in a safe location and offer the interviewees a voucher for their time.

Additionally, due to the sensitive nature of this topic, this research recommends adopting a trauma-informed approach and incorporating an analytic design that can arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the specific effects of different and multiple types of trauma. Overall, such measures will aid the research in providing a fuller understanding of this phenomenon.

## Appendix 1.

### Recruitment Questions

1. Have you worked in a Syrian refugee camp and/or urban settlement as an aid worker?
2. Are you familiar with the concept of temporary marriages in refugee camps?
3. Do you have firsthand knowledge of temporary marriages cases in the Syrian refugee camp and/or urban settlement?
4. Do you have access to a stable internet connection and a private room?

## Appendix 2.

### Interview Questions

1. When and how did you first hear about the practice of temporary marriage in refugee camps?
2. Can you share how you responded? Did you tell others? Was this well known?
3. Can you tell me about the background of the refugees who take part in temporary marriage? Furthermore, did anything about their background surprise you?
  - a. Age range and sex
  - b. Religion
  - c. Where do they live? (camp or urban settlement)
  - d. Is anything familiar between the types of recruited people, such as economic needs, previous marriages, or anything else?
4. Can you tell me about the background of the suitors how part take in temporary marriage? Does anything stand out?
  - Age range
  - Religion and Country of Origin
  - Economic Status
5. Who is involved in the arrangement of the marriage? How do the suitors get access to the camps? How do the suitors learn about the brides? How do suitors connect with brides?
6. Do the suitors offer a dowry, money, or anything else to the bride or families of the bride?

7. Once the marriage is arranged, where do the suitors take their brides, and for how long? Does the bride have the right to leave or end the marriage at any point?
8. How do the brides view temporary marriage? Before and after the marriage.
9. Does this type of marriage typically occur under free will, or is there any family pressure, social pressure, or economic pressure? Are women or their families forced or coerced into these marriages? Are there ever cases of fraud?
10. What is the response of the camp management, any NGO, or religious institutions to these marriages? Are stakeholders aware of the practice?
11. If a refugee feels exploited in temporary marriages, is he/she able to report the issue, and how effective is the reporting system?
12. Do you think institutions should regulate or monitor temporary marriages, and if so, which institutions and why?

### Appendix 3.

#### Post Interview Survey

The five-point Likert scales questions will include 20 survey statements including (randomly assorted):

1. Temporary marriage is regulated in refugee settlements.
2. Temporary marriage is not regulated in refugee settlements.
3. NGOs are aware of the practice of temporary marriages in refugee settlements.
4. Camp/urban settlement management is aware of the practice of temporary marriages in refugee settlements.
5. Religious institutions are aware of the practice of temporary marriages in refugee settlements.
6. Camp/urban settlement management supports the practice of temporary marriages in refugee settlements.
7. NGOs support the practice of temporary marriages in refugee settlements.
8. Religious institutions support the practice of temporary marriages in refugee settlements.
9. Camp/urban settlement management sees the practice of temporary marriages as a concern.
10. NGOs see the practice of temporary marriages as a concern.
11. Religious institutions see the practice of temporary marriages as a concern.
12. Refugees have a way to report exploitative temporary marriages.

13. The custom is seen as exploitative.
14. The custom is socially accepted.
15. The custom is practiced due to free will.
16. The custom is practiced due to family pressure.
17. The custom is practiced due to threats.
18. The custom is practiced due to fraud.
19. The custom is practiced due to coercion.
20. The custom falls under human trafficking.



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