



A Role to be Recognized

Woman Participation in Community Peace and Stability
Deir Ezzor as a Sample

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FIRST PART

INTRODUCTION

Women are among the groups most affected by armed conflict. Such suffering is multi-faced, i.e. "it means separation, loss of relatives, physical and economic insecurity, an increased risk of sexual violence, wounding, detention, deprivation and even death "¹.

In the Syrian war, women had a share of the suffering, having been forced to flee and seek refuge, lost their breadwinners and livelihoods, and were prosecuted and arrested by various parties to conflict for their political and civil activities. Justice for Life Organization documented the deaths of women after being detained in Syrian prisons².

This is in addition to the significant psychological damage caused by forced displacement, lack of resources and violations suffered by her and her family. During the period of ISIS' control of the province between 2014 and 2017, "restrictions on women that were imposed by the group presented the group vision on woman as it deprived her from her rights and turned her into a

¹ Addressing the Needs of Women Affected by Armed Conflict, An ICRC Guidance Document, 2004.

<https://shop.icrc.org/addressing-the-needs-of-women-affected-by-armed-conflict-an-icrc-guidance-document-pdf-en>

² The Death of a Woman from Deir Ezzor as She was Arrested in Philistin Branch, JFL, 2020.

<https://jflngo/en/the-death-of-a-woman-from-deir-ezzor-as-she-was-arrested-in-philistin-branch/>

mean of pleasure “ , “ the group arrested and executed a number of women in Deir Ezzor by different charges “ , “The group did not consider any of the due processes neither in charges nor in execution ”³ . JFL has documented the death of a sick woman at one of the Syrian Democratic Forces’ checkpoints and prevented from getting into Al-Hasaka Governorate⁴

The war has forced Syrian women to play a new role to ensure a minimum of decent life, given growing domestic pressures, no end to the long war tunnel, and social norms that put women in a tight and constrained role. “Women have not been spared any aspect of the brutality of the Syrian conflict, but they are not merely passive victims. Women are taking on increasing responsibilities – whether by choice or due to circumstance – and they should not have to pay with intimidation, arrest, abuse, or even torture ”⁵.

After 2011, Syrian civil society organizations promoted women's rights and integrated them into their structures and decision-making centres, and a significant portion of their resources were allocated to identify and meet women's needs. Women-focused organizations were established. Syrian civil society organizations and influential parties are engaging women in peace efforts, both at the national level (membership in negotiating delegations and the Constitutional

³ Deirish Women, JFL, 2018.

<https://jfl.ngo/en/deirish-women/>

⁴ The death of a woman at Rajm slaibi checkpoint, JFL, 2016.

<https://jfl.ngo/en/the-death-of-a-woman-at-rajm-slaibi-checkpoint/>

⁵ Syria: War’s Toll on Women, Human Rights Watch, 2014.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/07/02/syria-wars-toll-women>

Committee) and at the local level (participation in community reconciliation initiatives). These efforts have made gains in women's issues having an important place in discussions about the role of women at various levels and the means available to them to obtain their rights.

With the fighting in several areas of Syria waning, and the absence of effective efforts by the dominant parties to push for local but temporary stability, local groups, some organized and spontaneous, are launching mediations, forming teams and initiating reconciliation initiatives to help the local population overcome their problems. Voices are calling for a greater role for women, especially in community peace efforts.

This research paper has taken areas controlled by the SDF in Deir Ezzor as a model, and other areas can be worked on to compare the results. JFL interviewed 10 women in Deir Ezzor and carried out a questionnaire targeting 500 women in a number of villages in Al-Kasra district⁶ in the western countryside of the province.

This paper discusses how women in Deir Ezzor province are involved in building local peace, what is their role in promoting it, what are the challenges they face, and what is the role of civil society organizations in promoting this role. This paper attempts to answer the following questions: What is the role of women in community reconciliation? What resources do you need to play an influential role from the point of view of women? What is the role of civil society in this?

⁶ Located in western countryside of Deir Ezzor, controlled by SDF. It is one of the biggest districts in the province of Deir Ezzor, where the civil council and a number of civil society organizations are based.

<https://goo.gl/maps/WcuB4Aew8s6s9mQa9>

WHY DEIR EZZOR?

The women of Deir Ezzor, as well as other women in the entire Syrian territory, live under the pressures of male domination resulting from customs, norms and traditions, and the effects of these social pressures are evident, especially in rural areas, where women have no priority in the right to education, inheritance, political and community participation or similar rights. This harsh social reality suffered by women in most areas of the province has marginalized the role of women.

After 2011, with different control forces in the province, dealing with women varied according to the controlling party. After the departure of government forces from most areas of Deir Ezzor, armed forces opposed to the Government of Damascus took control, which did not adopt a clear ideology, although the Islamist orientation was manifested in their names and slogans, but did not seek to impose a certain pattern and form of life on the population. In 2013, with the rise of Islamist armed forces such as Ahrar al-Sham (which had little influence in Deir Ezzor) and Jabhat al-Nusra, they publicly promoted what women should be in accordance with their ideological background.

ISIS's control of most of Deir Ezzor in mid-2014 was a milestone in the pressure of the Deirish women, who imposed a uniform and sentences on them, from flogging to prison and stoning to death⁷.

⁷ An interview conducted by JFL with a witness of a stoning case in Deir Ezzor.

At the end of 2017, with the control of the SDF on Deir Ezzor, with support by the US-led International Anti-Terrorism Coalition, which is totally contrary to the ideological background and political orientation of religious groups that have previously controlled, the treatment of women has changed completely. The "Women's House" was established to deal with women's issues. Women were given the possibility to complain to men. The SDF gave women the right to go out and work. Men and women from Deir Ezzor who were interviewed by JFL confirmed that what the SDF is doing has resulted in family problems where the new rules do not fit with societal norms.

As a fundamental consequence of the state of war and the different control that passed over the province, the society became in a state of fragility, chaos and instability, and increased internal conflict⁸s and disputes based on displaced and resident dualities, Arabs and Kurds, opposed and loyal and among the different clans, as some families prevent their children from playing with the children of other families because of family rivalries⁹, as well as old conflicts that exist before 2011. Usually in such cases, disputes are resolved through the intervention of local figured and leaders, without any public or direct role played by women. As a blatant example of this, there is overwhelming male presence in civil society activities and local civil initiatives, whereas there is an apparent absence of the role of women.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgZvDstjr4c&t=4s>

⁸ Deir Ezzor and Peace, JFL, 2019

<https://jfl.ngo/en/deir-ezzor-and-peace/>

⁹ An interview conducted by JFL researcher on 5 September 2020 with a female teacher in western countryside of Deir Ezzor.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACE-BUILDING FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF WOMEN OF DEIR EZZOR – CHALLENGES AND EXPERIENCES

Women in Deir Ezzor province face challenges of different impact and consequences, some of which restrict their movement. In some areas, women can only go out with their husband, brother or father, which restricts their community contribution¹⁰. Local and international actors have recruited women to demonstrate their responsiveness to the conditions of the donors and supporting organizations, but in reality, there is no impact made by those women¹¹.

Despite the chance to lead given to women by the joint presidency in the departments established by the Autonomous Administration in Deir Ezzor province it did not clearly define the powers of them. This led to the absence of an active and leadership role for women in these departments, and therefore the working women found themselves in a state of constant conflict with the rest of the workers¹².

¹⁰ An interview conducted by JFL researcher on 4 September 2020 with a female resident in western countryside of Deir Ezzor.

¹¹ An interview conducted by JFL researcher on 6 September 2020 with a female IDP from Deir Ezzor who works in an international organization.

¹² An interview conducted by JFL researcher on 5 September 2020 with a female employee in one of the Autonomous Administration' civil council departments in Deir Ezzor.

CHALLENGES

Defining their community role in contributing and influencing local conflicts. Women have a key role in conflict cases in Deir Ezzor, either to stimulate and stabilize peace or to incite further clashes¹³.

The denial of the right to education for thousands of women, in addition to the role of customs and traditions in this regard, the successive military groups and their actions¹⁴ on education¹⁵ played a role in absence of a large group in the school benches.

Additionally, security concerns and financial difficulties that form obstacles in front of those want to head to areas by Syrian authorities to complete education¹⁶.

The lack of women representation in the region is a result of several reasons, including the dominant masculinity status, the absence of political empowerment programmes and the

¹³ Deir Ezzor after ISIS - Preliminary Recommendations, JFL, 2018.

<https://jfl.ngo/en/deir-ezzor-after-isis-preliminary-recommendations/>

¹⁴ "We Need to Raise Our Children Away from Ideas of Violence and Extremism" , JFL. 2017

<https://2u.pw/NQa3S>

¹⁵ Education from a Means of Conflict to a Vehicle of Peace and Communal Living, JFL, 2020

<https://jfl.ngo/en/education-from-a-means-of-conflict-to-a-vehicle-of-peace-and-communal-living/>

¹⁶ Deir Ezzor after ISIS - Preliminary recommendations, JFL, 2018

<https://jfl.ngo/en/deir-ezzor-after-isis-preliminary-recommendations/>

prevailing despair of society in general and women in particular about the feasibility of political and civil movements¹⁷.

Women bear additional financial burdens with the loss of breadwinners, lack of financial resources, scarcity of employment opportunities and the fact that aid allocations are determined by the number of males in the family, although the number of women in some families is higher than that of males¹⁸. This has led to women being reluctant to be involved in the community work.

There are poor capacity-building programs targeting women in Deir Ezzor, both in pre-ISIS and post-ISIS phases¹⁹.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

EXPERIENCES

Despite the serious repercussions of the war on women and what is imposed by masculinity power and social norms in determining the role of women and the narrow space granted to them under all these constraints, many experiences have shown that women are able to reduce and prevent conflicts.

Female teachers have succeeded in reaching out to the mothers of students from different clans in Deir Ezzor to contain a dispute and work to ensure that it does not develop further²⁰.

Some women were able to prevent an underage girl from marrying an older man and thereby violating her right²¹.

Another teacher reached out to a female leader within the SDF after a female student had a problem on her way to school, ending the possibility of any conflict²².

An employee of a local organization intervened to prevent the escalation of a dispute between displaced children and others from the host community that almost led to the expulsion of displaced families from a village in Deir Ezzor countryside²³. Women working in local and international civic organizations and initiatives facilitate access to the entire family and

²⁰ An interview conducted by JFL researcher on 4 September 2020 with a female displaced teacher in western countryside of Deir Ezzor.

²¹ An interview conducted by JFL researcher on 5 September 2020 with a female IDP in western countryside of Deir Ezzor.

²² An interview conducted by JFL researcher on 5 September 2020 with a female teacher in western countryside of Deir Ezzor.

²³ An interview conducted by JFL researcher on 6 September 2020 with a female employee in a local organization in western countryside of Deir Ezzor.

contribute to the delivery of awareness messages without which medical and humanitarian organizations would not have been able to achieve their goals²⁴.

Giving women enough space to express and participate in crucial decisions is one of the responsibilities of the community. Women need greater knowledge of dialogue and negotiation skills, human rights and children's and women's rights. There are many women who have personal abilities and competencies, although women have the capacity to initiative many times, especially after the war, and many problems have been solved in their own way and style but have not been able to take up leadership positions²⁵.

The efforts of civil society organizations working in peacebuilding in the region and those that are interested in promoting the role of women are limited to minimal activities and for short periods. The reason may be that the work of organizations in this area is new to the region, but over time it will have a significant impact²⁶. Women can participate in all meetings and discuss various topics. Women managed to overcome a clan dispute that was about to happen after a car accident where they intervened and ended the case²⁷. Women influence their surroundings,

²⁴ Two interviews conducted by JFL researcher on 6 September 2020 with two female employees in two international organizations working in the countryside of Deir Ezzor.

²⁵ Two interviews conducted by JFL researcher on 4 September 2020 with one female resident and a female teacher in the countryside of Deir Ezzor.

²⁶ An interview conducted by JFL researcher on 5 September 2020 with a female IDP in western countryside of Deir Ezzor.

²⁷ An interview conducted by JFL researcher on 5 September 2020 with a female nurse in western countryside of Deir Ezzor.

especially their children. Promoting the concept of peace, accepting their opinions, utilizing and including their experiences means that we will win a whole generation of peace advocates²⁸.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACE-BUILDING IN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS

The United Nations Security Council Resolution (1325) emphasized the important role of women in conflict prevention and resolution, and the need to increase the role of women in conflict resolution decision-making. In article 8, it called in paragraph (b) "to take measures that support local women's peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution, and that involve women in all of the implementation mechanisms of the peace agreements"²⁹.

According to UNSCR 1889, women have a key role in rebuilding and reestablishing the community fabric and their participation has a role to play in taking their point of view and needs in the development and implementation of the strategies. In its ninth article, the resolution "Urges Member States, United Nations bodies, donors and civil society to ensure that women's empowerment is taken into account during post-conflict needs assessments and planning, and factored into subsequent funding disbursements and programme activities, including through developing transparent analysis and tracking of funds allocated for addressing women's needs in the post-conflict phase ". In article 11, the resolution " Urges Member States, United Nations

²⁸ An interview conducted by JFL researcher on 5 September 2020 with a female resident in western countryside of Deir Ezzor.

²⁹ UNSCR 1325, issued in session 4213, 31 October 2000.

https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/res_1325e.pdf

bodies and civil society, including non-governmental organizations, to take all feasible measures to ensure women and girls' equal access to education in post-conflict situations, given the vital role of education in the promotion of women's participation in post-conflict decision-making³⁰.

"During times of armed conflict and the collapse of communities, the role of women is crucial. They often work to preserve social order in the midst of armed and other conflicts. Women make an important but often unrecognized contribution as peace educators both in their families and in their societies.³¹ "

International conventions encourage the peaceful resolution of disputes, the development of peace research involving women's participation in order to study the impact of conflicts on them, and the nature of their contribution to national, regional and international peace movements³².

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in its recommendation 30, article 6 says "Women are not a homogenous group and their experiences of conflict and specific needs in post-conflict contexts are diverse. Women are not passive bystanders or only victims or targets. They have historically had and continue to have a role as combatants, as part of

³⁰ UNSCR 1889, issued in session 6196, 5 October 2009.

[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1889\(2009\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1889(2009))

³¹ Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Chapter 4, Paragraph 139, September 1995.

https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/pdfs/Beijing_Declaration_and_Platform_for_Action.pdf

³² Ibid, paragraph 146.

organized civil society, as human rights defenders, as members of resistance movements and as active agents in both formal and informal peacebuilding and recovery processes'.

The Committee expressed concern in article 43 of the same recommendation in the face of muzzling and marginalizing women. It emphasized the wider participation of women at the national, regional and international levels, considering the involvement of women as a condition for a society in which democracy and peace flourish³³.

"Without the meaningful and inclusive participation of women at all stages of peace and reconstruction processes, as well as on transitional justice and national reconciliation mechanisms, women's priorities and experiences of the conflict will not be fully integrated"³⁴.

³³ The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Recommendation 30.

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/GC/30&Lang=en

³⁴ The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Syria, 18 July 2014.

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/SYR/CO/2&Lang=En

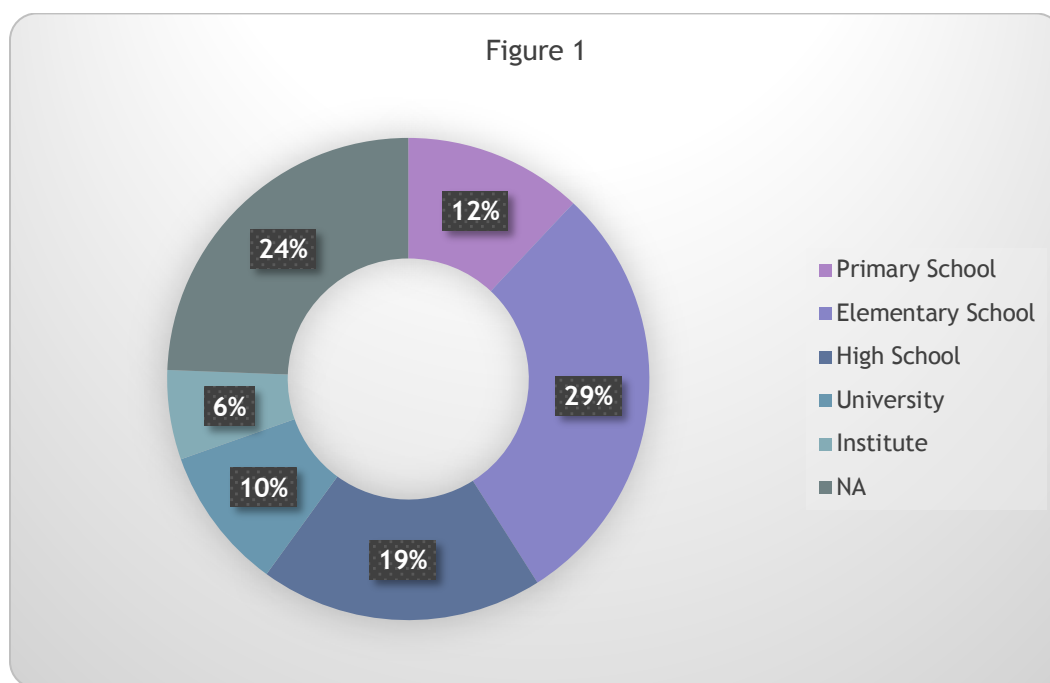
SECOND PART

The questionnaire was based on a random sample of women in Al-Kasra, which included displaced women by nearly 40%.

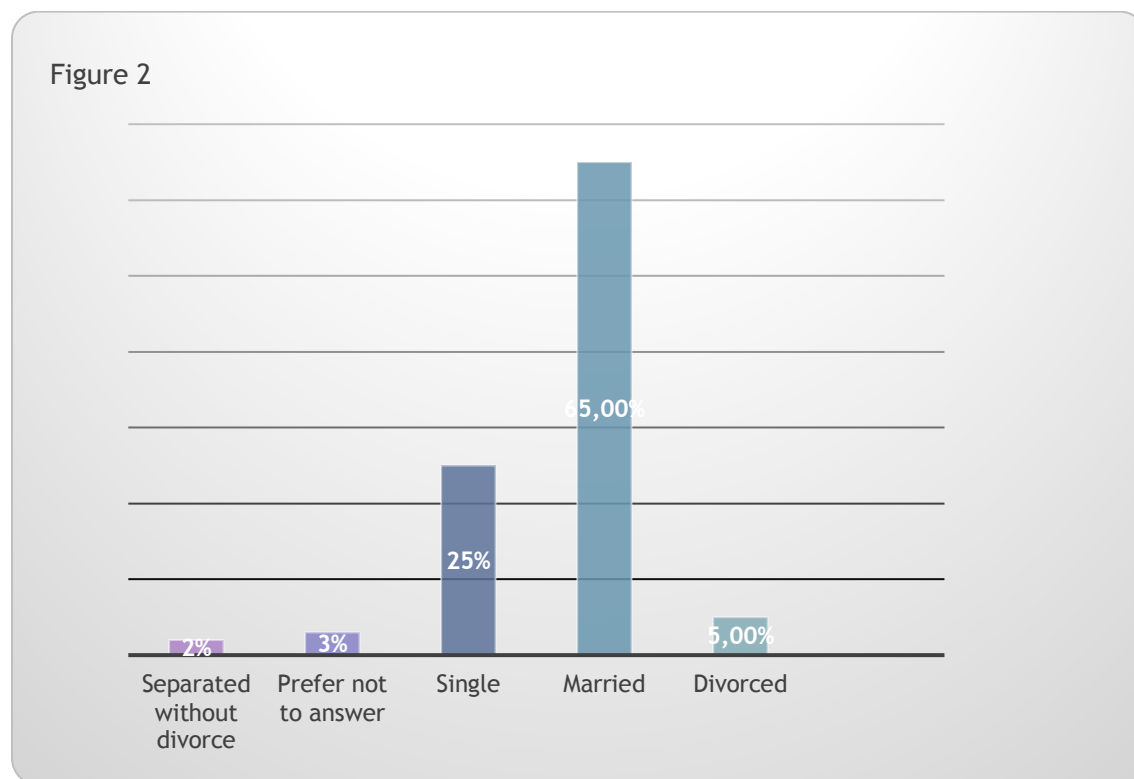
The samples were divided into the first two age groups aged 18 to 35 by nearly 51%, 49% for those over 36 years old.

JFL aimed to limit age choices between only two categories to find out the answers between those who had an experience, have a family for long time, and on the other hand those who did not have a long life or practical experience.

According to educational background, more than (75%) of the respondents held certificates varied between primary ... university. Approximately (25%) don't have any education background. (Figure 1).



Also (65%) of the respondents are married, (25%) Unmarried, and the rest of the samples varied their social status between divorce or separation without divorce. (Figure 2)

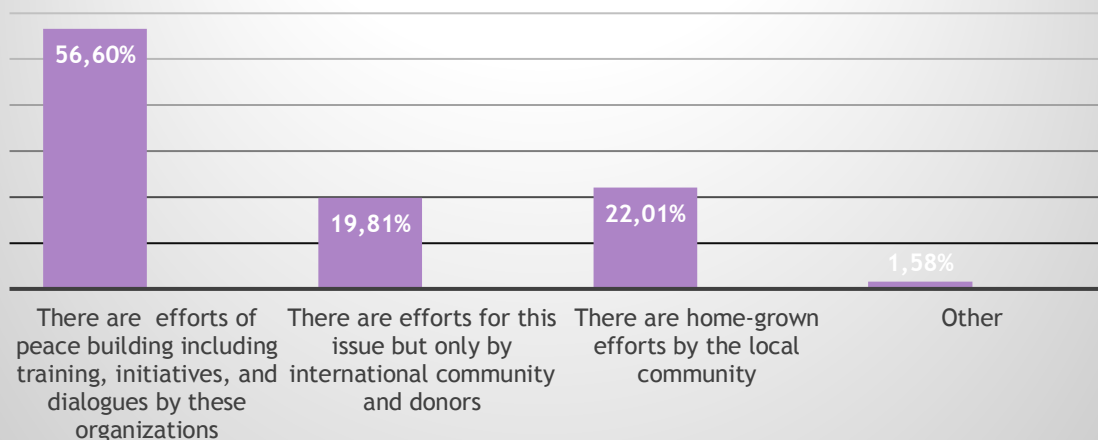


THE ECHO OF PEACE-BUILDING ACTIVITIES ON WOMEN

Most participants (63.6%) heard or knew about the activities of civil society organizations for peacebuilding in their region.

(56.6%) talked about peace-building related trainings, dialogue sessions, and initiatives launched by civil society organizations. About 20% said that interest in this topic is limited to projects funders and to states actors in the region, not local organizations. Whereas, 22% said that the efforts are home-grown ones and are launched by the community in the form of initiatives. (Figure 3).

Figure 3

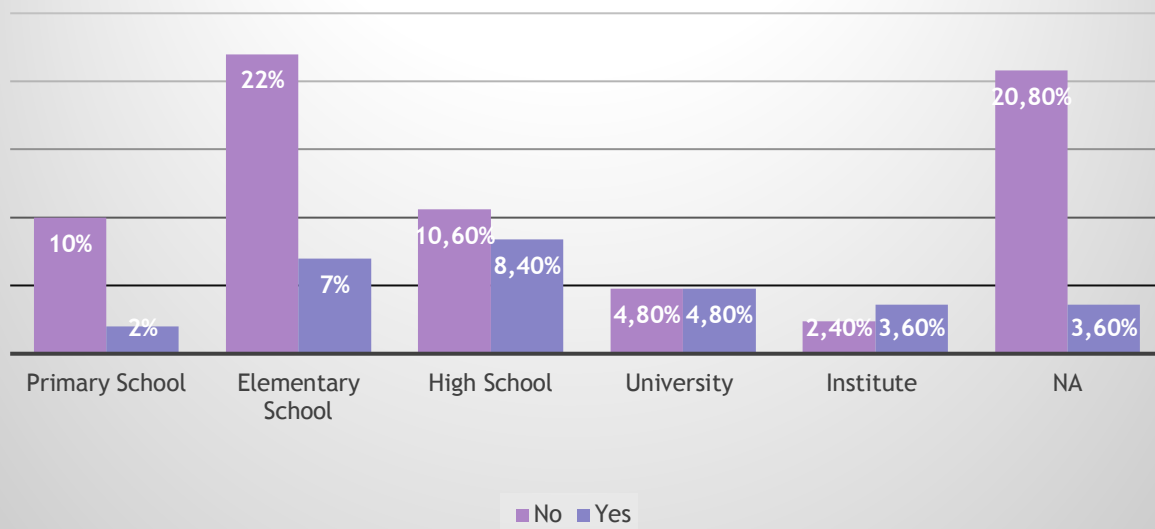


WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACE-BUILDING ACTIVITIES (TRAININGS AND DIALOGUES):

As the answers show, the majority of women have knowledge of the efforts made in their region by civil society organizations, but more than (70%) confirmed that they did not attend these activities.

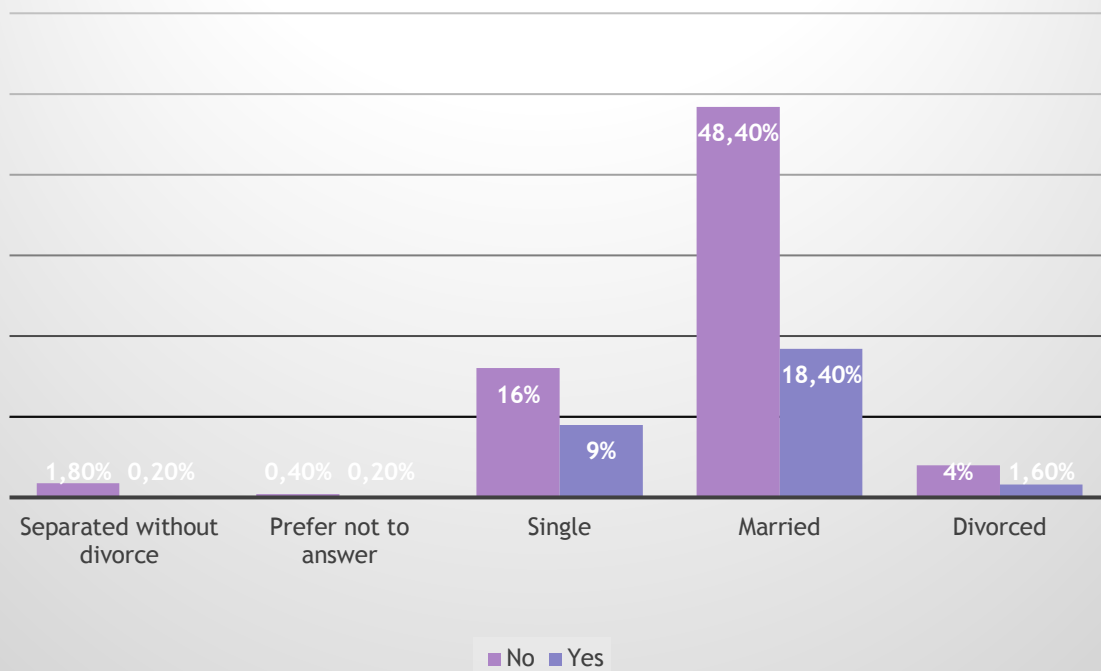
In the details of the answers, approximately (21%) of those who did not attend have no education background. (Figure 4).

Figure 4



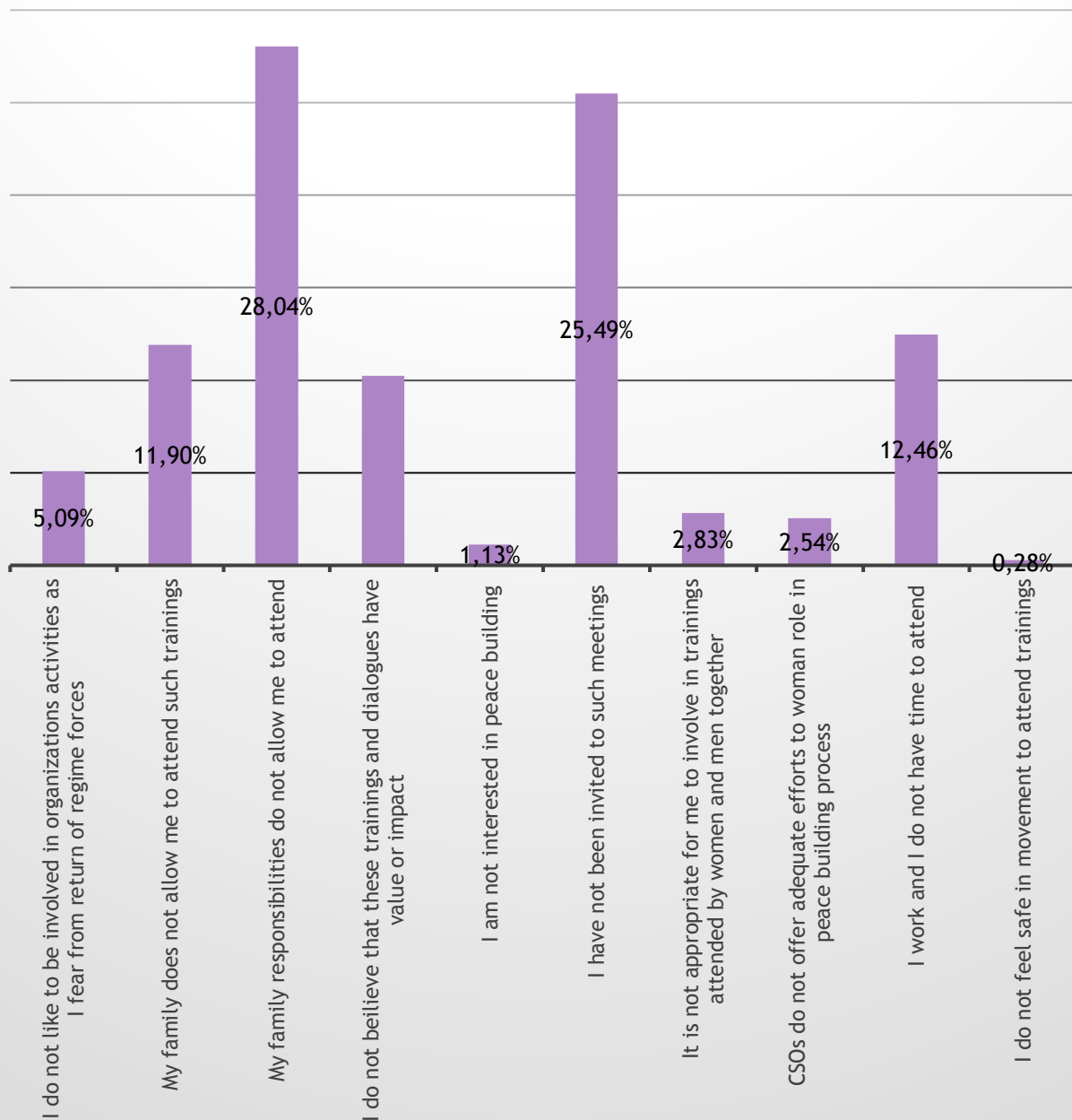
In terms of social status, married women are more with 48%. (Figure 5)

Figure 5



Women's reasons for not attending are consistent with the results that showed the most absent groups. (28%) said that their family responsibilities do not allow them to attend, which is in the same way as the reluctance of a high percentage of married women to attend. (11%) said that their families do not allow them to participate in this type of activities. Women are not invited to these exercises as 25% of the participants mentioned this reason. (Figure 6).

Figure 6



One of the most interesting findings is that the survey participants did not mention security reasons for their lack of participation, and this may be due to a relatively better security situation in the target area (west of Deir Ezzor) compared to the insecurity situation in eastern

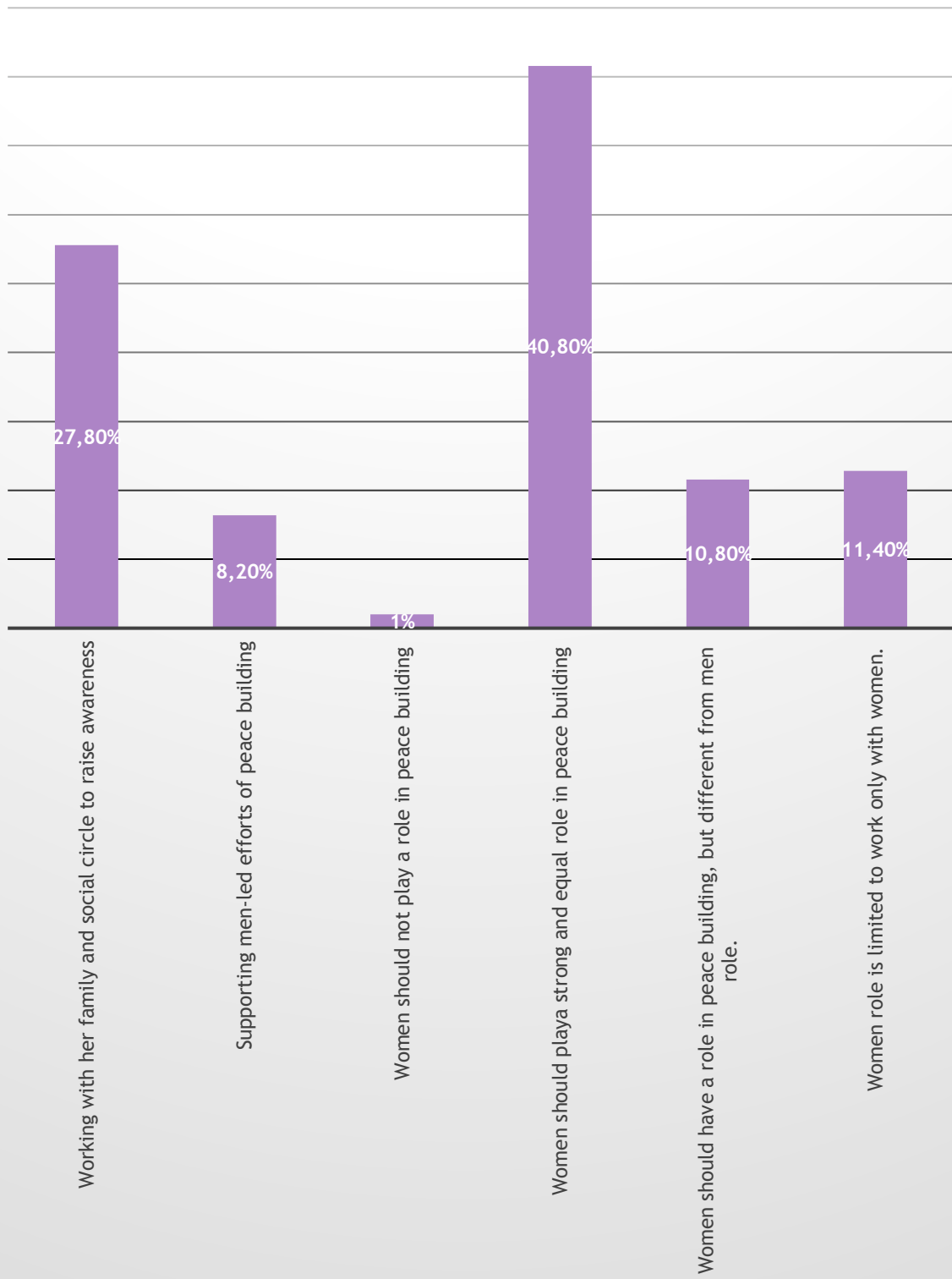
countryside. The participants also stressed their interest in the peace-building process, especially the local one.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PEACE-BUILDING FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

Only (1%) of those who participated in the survey said that women should not have any role in the community peace process, and that these roles were limited to men, while (99%) stressed the need for the role of women.

The women's role in building community peace varied according to the participants; more than 40% said that their role should be equal to that of men. More than 27% defined their role by spreading the culture and efforts of peace in the family and with the close environment. More than (30%) said that their role should be different from that of men, such as working exclusively with women or supporting men in their efforts.

Figure 7



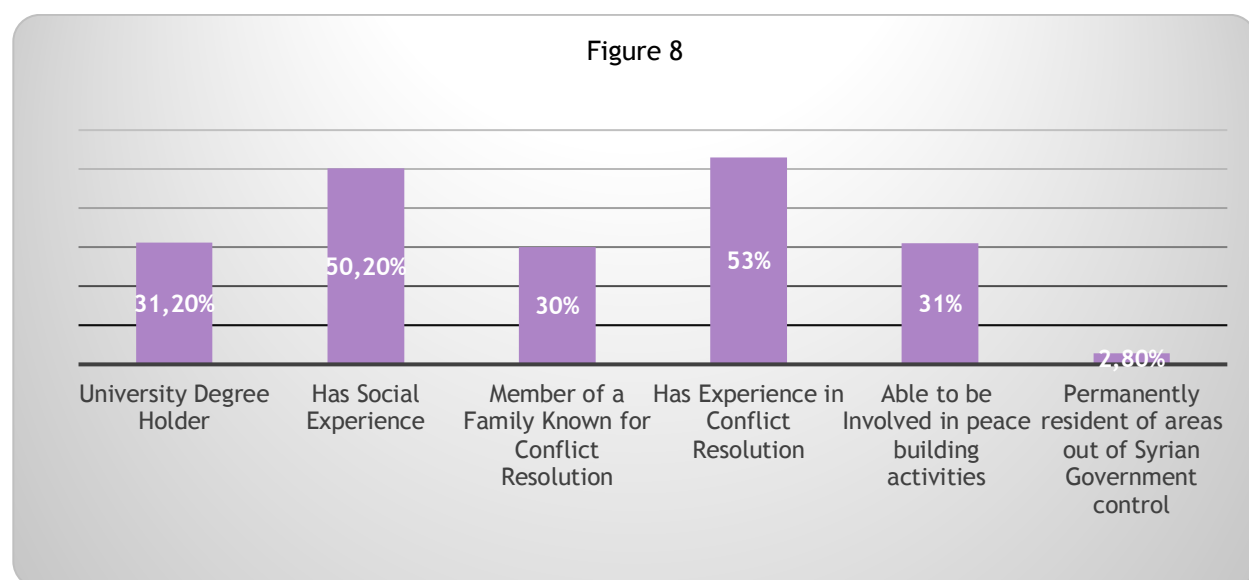
THE QUALITIES THAT WOMEN INVOLVED IN PEACE-BUILDING MUST HAVE:

As for qualities should be enjoyed by women working in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, (50%) of the participants said that experience and practice along with life experience is one of the most important things women should enjoy.

A high percentage 53% of the participants said that knowledge of the way to intervene and communicate with the parties according to each conflict is a key quality that helps the women involved more to succeed in their endeavors.

Nearly (30%) talked about the importance of having a university degree, and the same percentage talked about the importance of the participation of women from families with well-known contributions to the local reconciliation as those women enjoy social acceptance. Moreover, (31%) stressed that there must be no obstacles for women to play their role in peacebuilding, such as limitation to move freely or participating on political and social levels.

Keeping in mind that in this question the participants had the possibility to choose more than one answer. (Figure 8)



SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND RESOURCES THAT ENABLE WOMEN TO PARTICIPATE IN PEACE-BUILDING:

Women need knowledge and skills that enhance what they have and pave the way for their role in peacebuilding, regardless of how they can intervene. This is not limited to training but also to follow up women in their activities after they have acquired skills to ensure that they are able to reach their goals.

(59%) said that women need to be more familiar with the concept of peacebuilding, community cohesion and intervention tools, as well as to learn about human rights principles. (59%) said that women should be empowered with the skills to facilitate community dialogues and provided with opportunities to manage discussions to help them apply what they have gained. (32%) said that there is a need to have a specialist in the field of peace-building and conflict resolution for an adequate period of time during which he/she supervises the process of provision and application of knowledge in order to take full advantage of the opportunities available and not to be satisfied only with the traditional peace-building practices, which may be useless if they are without supervision and application.

CONCLUSIONS

- In Deir Ezzor province, women face challenges, most notably restricting their role, poor representation and depriving thousands of female students of education as a result of school closures and poor rehabilitation and capacity-building programs. On the other hand, the important possibilities and experiences they have are an opportunity to work by adopting programs based on their needs and providing the necessary space for them to express and participate. The strategies required to address the various challenges

must be developed, with women participating in all stages of need identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation.

- The activities of civil society organizations in Deir Ezzor did not meet the needs of women, as most of them did not include women in their own programmes, did not address their needs and demands, and did not provide them with the safe space to discuss difficulties and develop solutions proposals. Furthermore, women's participation was mostly limited and in a pro forma manner. In addition, there is no balance between the resources and time periods of women's projects on a hand, and what is provided to humanitarian sector on the other one.
- The women's answers in the interviews emphasize that women play a powerful role in preserving the social fabric and conveying their experiences and their surrounding women directly from home or workplace. Women form a very influential barrier in preventing or mitigating conflicts. Yet, there is insufficient recognition of these efforts.
- According to the results of the survey, the lack of interest of civil society in Deir Ezzor in an effective and balanced presence of women in peace-building events and women's family responsibilities are real reasons for women's reluctance to participate in civil society activities, despite the high interest of most of the surveyed women to be involved in these activities.
- Interventions that fit the local context and take into account customs and norms in the region must be designed, and at the same time they should form the beginning of the long road for active participation of women in various fields. This requires more influential use of media and social media, and more research that determine the form and method of effective intervention by women. The form and method should be disseminated locally. There is a need to give them adequate opportunity and resources to be applied.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the interviews and the questionnaire, Justice for Life recommends:

Civil society organizations operating in Deir Ezzor or those who intend to work there:

1. To design projects related to women with their participation to help identify their needs, as well as to involve them in management and implementation in an effective manner.
2. Adopting ways of participation that are appropriate to the customs of the local community and working to communicate with all local influencers to convince them of the importance of women's participation, which facilitates their involvement, albeit gradually.
3. Targeting more women and allocating equal seats to the activities of civil society organizations, and taking into account the challenges they face, particularly those most reluctant to participate, such as women whose family responsibilities do not allow them to attend, where activities can be organized in their homes or nearby homes by female volunteers or workers.
4. Identifying practical activities following training and appointing a peacebuilding and conflict resolution specialist in various women's projects who contributes to the follow-up of women to meaningful empowerment, i.e. not to be limited to traditional activities based on small training and initiatives.
5. Further field studies need to be made with the participation of women to identify the most prominent challenges and ways to engage women effectively.

Donors and International Organizations

1. Allocating sufficient support and time periods for women's projects.
2. Supporting research and field studies on women's participation in building community peace.
3. Setting a minimum number of women participating in all projects to take into account the context of the implementation areas, with the aim of equal gender participation, and clearly defining the role and responsibility of women to avoid the pro forma presence of women.
4. Adopting activities to work with women from home, either by going directly to them or through internet, and taking into account the times available to them according to their family circumstances and responsibilities.
5. Providing greater support for women's participation through the media and social media, presenting challenges, opportunities, experiences and tools for participation, and this should be led by women.
6. Rely on women in leadership positions in peace-building projects to encourage other women to participate.

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