



They Exploited My Need

A Brief Report on Sexual Exploitation and Harassment in Deir Ezzor Province

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Introduction

Cases of sexual exploitation and harassment against women have been increased in Deir Ezzor province, especially after thousands of people were displaced from 2012 up to this moment. Justice for Life organization¹ has documented five cases. It is expected that more cases are taking place where, according to witnesses, women who are exploited and sexually harassed feel afraid, and this feeling prevents them from disclosing such behavior.

JFL obtained two testimonies of two women² from Deir Ezzor who spoke about sexual exploitation and harassment they have experienced. The first testimony³ speaks of sexual exploitation by one of the workers responsible for the distribution of food aid in the Abu Khashab camp located in the village of Abu Khashab⁴, and the second one⁵ is about a female teacher who was sexually exploited by her line director in a school in one of areas controlled by the SDF in Deir Ezzor province.

“The term “**sexual exploitation**” means any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes”. Similarly, “the term “**sexual abuse**” means the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions”⁶.

“**Sexual harassment** is any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favor, verbal or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature, or any other behavior of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offense or humiliation to another,

¹ www.jfl.ngo

² Names of witnesses in this report are pseudonyms to maintain their personal safety.

³ An interview conducted by JFL researcher directly with the witness on 20 September 2020.

⁴ <https://bit.ly/36XFfxq>

⁵ An interview conducted by JFL researcher directly with the witness on 23 September 2020.

⁶ According to UN Secretary-General's Bulletin on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) (ST/SGB/2003/13). October 2003.

<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N03/550/40/PDF/N0355040.pdf?OpenElement>

creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment. While typically involving a pattern of behavior, it can take the form of a single incident"⁷.

Silence Despite Violation

Huda, 37-year-old, married at the age of 19 and had four children, her husband died in 2015 as a result of an airstrike on the Hamidia⁸ neighborhood of Deir Ezzor, and became responsible for her children.

"After the regime forces entered Deir Ezzor city in late 2017, we tried to flee to northern Syria, but we were arrested by the SDF and transferred to Abu Khashab camp, where I stayed there until I was discharged in mid-2019" Huda says.

About two months after she entered the camp, Huda was harassed by a humanitarian aid distribution officer.

"The young man tried to get close to me, I thought at first he liked me and his intention is sound, but I later found out from stories I heard from some of the women in the camp with whom I have a friendship later, that he had previous behavior of molesting women," she says.

"On one of aid distribution days, he asked to speak to me in private and he started telling me that he loves me and that he would give me everything I need, and he wanted me to accompany him to a room where the staff used to take a rest, and they sleep there sometimes, but I didn't want to, so I refused and ran away" Huda said.

A day later, the worker refused to give Huda her aid allocation, citing the fact that her evidentiary documents were incomplete.

⁷ UNICEF's position on sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicefs-position-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-and-sexual-harassment>

⁸ One of the eastern neighborhoods that became out of the Syrian government since mid-2012, and reconrolled in late 2017.
<https://bit.ly/3fo9jGI>

Huda did not report against the officer to the camp officials: "I would report him to the security officers in charge of the camp, but I did not because I was afraid that he would lie and accuse me of abusing him as well. I was afraid of the scandal and fake stories he may come up with. It is very easy in the camp to create a scandal against any female IDP."

"It is necessary to establish complaint boxes to report such cases, and there must be monitoring and accountability of those who harass and exploit women and their needs"

Huda continues.

Hanan, 31-year-old, divorced, has a university degree, and has been working at a school in Deir Ezzor since 2018. During her work, she was harassed several times by her line manager.

Hanan tells her story to JFL: "At first, he was flirting with me both at work, or after work through WhatsApp. I thought he liked me, and that his "intention is sound", but he slowly began to ask me for sexual requests, and he started to talk more. One day under the pretext that he wants to see me in private so that people wouldn't see us with each other. He asked me to accompany him to somewhere I think is the house of one of his friends, but I refused, and I told him that he could talk to me without going anywhere."

The manager's way of treatment changed after this situation and he began to lay restrictions on Hanan at work. Hanan talks about the new position of her manager: "He became angry all the time and started treating me differently, as he started to restrict me in the work by deducting my monthly salary three times under the pretext of being absent from work without justification. He refused to give me leave for four months under the pretext of not having someone on my behalf or under the pretext of preventing leave by a decision of the Directorate of Education, which is a flimsy argument."

Hanan's manager did not stop harassing her, however, he repeated the same behavior but in another way: "He tried again to approach me so that this time he harassed me physically and not just verbally as he was touching my body while passing by me. I threatened him

that I would report him to the Directorate of Education if he continues with his actions". Hanan did not make any official action seeking her protection, but merely requested a transfer to another school, and this is what happened.

"Of course, I did not report him, fearing his influence and that of his relatives could tarnishing my reputation, and I was also afraid for my only source of living under these harsh conditions, which I did not want to lose".

Hanan speaks about the need for more awareness efforts, especially for adolescents: **"It is necessary to increase and activate the role of institutions that work to raise awareness against sexual harassment and exploitation. If I were a young teenager, I would have gone with him to his friend's house, but I refused because I know what he intended, so awareness is necessary in such cases as an attempt to put an end to these phenomena while maintaining confidentiality and privacy of the victims."**