

Reframing Syrian Young Girls' Education in Gender Perspective

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Abbreviations

3RP: Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan

UNHCR: United Nations Refugee Agency

CEDAW: The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of
Discrimination Against Women

INEE: Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies

IRC: International Rescue Committee

KADAV: Women's Solidarity Foundation

KSGSM: Directorate General of Women's Status and Problems

Introduction

Gender corresponds to socio-culturally defined gender roles. These gender roles determine our access to sources, our behavioral patterns and opportunities of sharing. Generalizations are asserted based on gender perception claiming that women are more emotional, men are stronger and wiser; certain professions are more suitable and appropriate for women, whereas certain professions are likely to suit men. Yet again according to this point of view, it is inappropriate for women to go out during specific hours of the day. The phrase stating that “Home is the place for women” is an idiom generated with sex-oriented, gendered perception. When a baby is born, characterization is defined in terms of biological characteristics defining the baby as a girl or a boy. The individuals generally are forced to choose one of the above two. Cultural and social order begins to make an impact on the baby starting from the moment she or he is born. Starting from the names given in accordance with their gender, the first notches of the sex are started to be imprinted onto the children’s blank minds. Shaping continues with accelerated pace by buying them different toys again in accordance with their gender. Well-behaved, proper girls on one hand; aggressive and naughty boys who are almost seen naturally that way and treated with the motto “boys don’t cry” on the other hand are raised. As they grow older, these roles are reinforced through education. Occupations and professions are determined by these roles. Women are more likely to assume responsibilities at home, while men are expected to undertake responsibilities in the public sphere outside home. Therefore, education is very decisive in the formation of gender roles.

According to Durkheim’s definition (who is known as one of the prominent founders of education sociology) in 1922,

"education is the action of adult generations on those who are not yet mature enough for social life, and is based on a systematic socialization of the young generation that aims to create the social presence within each of us". (Cited by Zaidman, 2009: 122). Therefore, education is effective in determining the roles of individuals in society as in the family institution, and in creating and imposing power relations. In other words, education is the process of socialization where social gender roles are taught and enhanced and which mediate the continuity of society.

One of the first classical texts of feminist literature, Mary Wollstonecraft's 1792 book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, mainly focuses on women's education. According to Wollstonecraft, education is what will make women independent and self-righteous (p.33). In this book she gets into an argument with Rousseau, discusses the sexist approach in education and criticizes Rousseau's understanding of education for women: "*Although not only the attributed virtues but also knowledge differ between the two sexes, they should be treated as of same kind. Women acknowledged to have moral sense and mind in the same time should be given the opportunity to use the same instruments as men to reach and attain virtues (or perfectionism) inherent in humankind rather than being taught in a manner that would suit a strange quasi-human as defined by Rousseau's chimeras.*" (p. 61).

The study of gender in terms of education starts in the 1960s-70s when the second wave of feminism began to flourish. Studies reveal the role of teachers in the discrimination women face at school, which is the basis of inequalities that women suffer in society. The findings of the 70s show that the education of girls and women is different from men's and unequal to theirs in a variety of dimensions. The children are exposed to appropriate sexually biased

roles defined by gender at school –such as being a mother, housewife or nurse for girls – similar to the learning process in family. Girls become passive at school, while boys become independent. Education provided at school is both the cause and the result of reinforced and enhanced sex-oriented and gendered behaviours.

Before passing on to Syrian girls' right to education, and impediments and obstacles posed before the girls' willing to go to school and proposed solutions which are the themes of this article, let's take a look at the agreements and reports pursuant to the right to education of girls and women Turkey had signed.

Gender Mainstreaming; Agreements, Reports Signed in Accordance with Right to Education of Women and Girls

Starting from CEDAW (The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women) that Turkey had signed back in 1985, Turkey undertakes and commits to take measures for providing and ensuring gender equality in education in accordance with The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), Beijing Declaration and also within the framework of EU Country Report(s).

The CEDAW convention entitles contracting countries to take all appropriate measures to prevent gender segregation in education under Article 10 which asserts the right to education. In 1994, the Convention on the Rights of the Child was transposed into domestic law by Law No. 4058. It is stated that the contracting parties shall acknowledge and adopt the right to education of children and take measures designated in the convention in order to realize this right on

the basis of “equal opportunity”¹ (Ministry of Family and Social Policy Directorate General On the Status of Women, 2012: 11) In addition, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which was formed as an outcome of “Women 2000: Gender Equality for 21st Century, Development and Peace” (Beijing+5) 4th World Women Conference (Social Policy Directorate General On the Status of Women, 2000: 2) report was adopted without any reservations. In other words, the commitments undertaken were namely the regulation of compulsory education by increasing the duration to eight years until 2000 (the regulation was put into effect in 1997), elimination of non-literacy for women, allocation of more resources to the education of girls and women and to apply positive discrimination when necessary, giving priority to disadvantaged women (poor, migrant, disabled) when it comes to literacy and taking measures against gender discrimination in employment.²

1 What is meant by equal opportunity is implementation of the Constitution’s 42. Article, stating that “primary education is compulsory for each and every citizen, for girls and boys, and public schools are free”.

2 In addition to this, despite there is demonstrated increase in awareness and consciousness regarding the necessity of educating women to provide and ensure equality of women and men, there are more related achievements, and also there is an increase in alternative education and formation programs designed for women groups who require special protection in line with Beijing+5, it is a fact that there is no strong political will available or the existing political will is not adequate and efficient, allocated resources are insufficient, and there are infrastructure problems. Thus the goals have not yet been successfully attained. On the other hand, discriminatory patterns in the textbooks, negative female stereotypes, inability to share the child care with men and the state, and some traditional attitudes and behaviors still constitute an obstacle to women’s education and formation. In some countries, the failure to properly formulate and / or implement structural adjustment policies has had negative consequences for the education sector. In addition, the fact that the close relationship between women’s ability to attend higher education institutions and employment market dynamics is not understood well is still preventing to give more importance to the issue.

Article 10/c of the CEDAW Convention is stated as *“To abolish the stereotypes of women and men in all forms and levels of education and to promote this aim, to promote education and other forms of education, to review textbooks and school programs in particular and to organize the training methods according to this purpose”* (Social Policy Directorate General On the Status of Women, 2003: 23). However, we still see stereotypes of gender roles in visual materials and texts related to education (Cited by, Tan, 2008: 72 and Sayılan, 2012: 48–49).

It is aimed to reduce girls’ drop-out from school rate and to bring girls back to education through campaigns such as “Haydi Kızlar Okula” (Girls, Let’s Go To School), “Baba Beni Okula Gönder” (Dad, Send Me To School), “Kardelenler” (Snowdrops) conducted in cooperation with international organizations, private sector and non-governmental organizations (e.g. Turkish Industry and Businessmen Association (TÜSİAD)). However, not all these campaigns are gender sensitive. In addition to all these, although Beijing+5 dictates otherwise, being different from other students means being subject to discrimination in schools and being marginalized.

Impediments and Obstacles Before Syrian Girls’ Right to Education

According to the UN’s calculations, two-thirds of 774 million illiterate adults are women. Education is of vital and crucial importance for women’s lives in terms of expressing themselves, being aware of opportunities and risks, taking part in decision-making processes and most important of all, becoming stronger. The sexist division of labor within the family, the unequal distribution of roles, the hierarchical positioning of individuals are both the cause and the result

of patriarchal exploitation.³ Women deprived of their right to education, girls not allowed to go to school they like in the sense of “reproduction of gendered bodies” and the roles assigned to female students at school lead to the reproduction of the patriarchal system. The patriarchal system is reproduced because of the fact that women are denied the right to education, they are not allowed to go to the schools they want in the sense of the reproduction of gendered bodies,⁴ and the roles assigned to female students in the school.

According to the 2014/21 numbered circular of the Ministry of National Education, it is possible for Syrian children to register in any public school with the foreign identification issued for them (Ministry of National Education, 2014). Thus Syrian students wishing to study in public schools can benefit from all kinds of educational services offered to children and receive education in Turkey with Turkish peers (Emin, 2016: 19). According to the Immigration Administration General Directorate update dated July 19, 2018, there are 3.541.572 Syrians living in Turkey. Syrian children and adolescents do not go to school. (http://sgdd.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/The_Needs_Assessment_TR_WEB.pdf)

According to the Union of Education and Science Labourers’ (Eğitim-Sen) 2018 report titled Sexism in Education At The End Of The Year, 608.084 of 1.358.904 Syrian children within the scope of Temporary Protection in Turkey are able

3 Patriarchy is a system where men dominate women, oppress and exploit women. Patriarchal exploitation is the exploitation mechanism produced here.

4 According to Bourdieu, socialization begins with reproduction of the gendered body, as the production process of “habitus”; the body becomes one of the places where the male-dominated system structure materializes: “symbolic violence” (Zaidman, 2009: 129).

to go to school. Syrian children who are at school age and cannot attend school are employed as cheap labor or they try to survive on the streets. This situation is even worse for girls. A girl who does not go to school is either subject to care/nursing labour (elderly care / medical care) or forced to marry at an early age. A Syrian woman asylum seeker expresses how important education is for women and girls by saying that: *"A girl needs training. If I were educated myself, I would be helpful for my family. A man can find a job, but girl can't. She needs to be educated to find a job"* (UNCHR, 2014: 25. Cited by Ulutaş-Akbaş, 2018: 290). As in the case of Turkish women, tendency of Syrian women to participate and take part in labor market increases in direct correlation with education (ibid. p.289).

The education level of the family also plays a role in the decisions for Syrian women and girls to receive education (ibid., p. 295). As a result of interviews conducted by Melda Yaman with Syrian women who participated in Women's Solidarity Foundation's (KADAV) employment workshops in 2017, the following evaluations were made (Öztürk, 2018: 10): *"The households of Syrian refugees are crowded; caring for children, husband and elderly members of the family requires much labor. Women have to survive amidst strong patriarchal relations. Boys are more respected than girls; most women have more than three children. It is common for men from certain regions of Syria to marry more than one woman; child marriage is frequently seen and widespread; men are approximately 10 to 15 years older than women; women have to get permission from their husbands for activities such as participating in employment"*.

According to "Needs Assessment of Syrian Women and Girls Within the Scope of Temporary Protection in Turkey" research conducted in collaboration with United Nations Women's Agency and Association for Solidarity with Asylum

Seekers and Migrants (http://sgdd.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/The_Needs_Assessment_TR_WEB.pdf)⁵ "62 percent of the individuals who participated in the survey are either elementary school graduates or lower than that level as they have dropped out of school, 19 percent of them had never gone to school and 21 percent of them are high school graduates. Only 5 percent of the individuals pursued university education. Among children participants, schooling rate is 61 percent for the age group between 6 and 14. This rate decreases in older ages (52 percent for the age group between 12 and 14, 20 percent for the age group between 15 and 17). There are differences between the rates corresponding to girls and boys; the rate is higher for girls for the age group between 12 and 14. There is a significant decline in school attendance between the ages of 15 and 17; 37 percent decrease for girls and 27 percent for boys". According to the conclusion of the conducted survey, the decrease in attendance of girls in school indicates that they are less directly related to child labor. Only 3 percent of increase is found for girls' employment rate which suggests and reveals that child/early marriage⁶ and household chores are the common factors effecting girls' drop-out from school. Girls generally begin to work in income-generating jobs from home; or they directly start working outside home in case of absence of the father or other male individual in their families or in cases where the father is sick and/or not working. In some cases, relatives of women and girls offer them housing in return for domestic

5 The data were obtained from an in-depth interview with a total of 291 Syrian women and girls in seven different cities: Hatay, Adana, Antep, Urfa, Istanbul, Konya and Izmir. The study, funded by the Government of Iceland, revealed that the most important problems faced by Syrian women were housing access, language barriers and employment. The research reveals that the Syrian women and girls in Turkey have crucial needs as they live under conditions of extreme poverty and inadequate shelter, with no or very little knowledge of Turkish and limited interaction with hosting community members.

household chores, childcare and/or early marriage thus they exploit and abuse them. In addition to this, despite the fact that women and girls are exposed to maltreatment and discrimination in daily life, it is revealed that 73 percent of them do not know where to get support for protection from violence or harassment. According to the same study, the deficiency in language learning is one of the biggest barriers on part of both Syrian women and their children. Also it can be said that a significant portion of the students in schools go to school in the afternoon and the fact that it gets dark by the time they return from school, plays an important role in feelings of insecurity (Tüzün, 2017: 25). The research mentioned above verifies and confirms this concern. Moreover, the distance between the location of the school and the house(s) in addition to transportation expenses have an impact on the decision of not sending the girls to school. Again, according to this research, the underlying reason for not giving permission to girls and adolescents to continue their education is the fact that they are not allowed to leave the house, girls are preferred to be kept in their homes after primary school education, girls are given care responsibility and forced to marry at an early age. Difficulties encountered during registration process, lack of diploma equivalence and negative attitudes of teachers in charge are among other obstacles. Besides, the children

6 Child marriage: A child marriage, a so-called formal marriage or non-formal marriage under the age of 18, is a reality taking place in the lives of both girls and boys, albeit disproportionately affecting the girls. Child marriage is quite common and can lead to lifelong disadvantages and deprivations. Many international agreements and agreements address the problem of child marriage. For example, Article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women deals with the right to protection against child marriage: *"All precautions will be taken including legislative measures for determination of legal and formal marriage and for enregistration of marriage, otherwise engagement and marriage of young children below 18 years old will not be deemed legal under no circumstances* (http://sgdd.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/The_Needs_Assessment_TR_WEB.pdf).

are required to work instead of attending school. In order to counter these obstacles, Syrian women offer conditional education support, obligatory primary education and segregation of schooling between girls and boys (http://sgdd.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/The_Needs_Assessment_TR_WEB.pdf).

One of the reasons for not sending children to school is families' concerns regarding the risk of forgetting the mother tongue and culture at school (Supporting Syrian Girls' Schooling From Local To General Scale; Mavi Kalem Meeting Report 14 June 2017: 11).

Based on the results of outreach activity⁷ conducted by Mavi Kalem (When Girls Receive Education The World Changes Mavi Kalem Meeting Report, 20 December 2017: 23), the children primarily face problems with language and the lessons taught at schools. The fact that the number of teachers who know Arabic is relatively low may be discouraging for the children's determination to go to school. Apart from these, exclusion and mocking (labeling) are also present. The majority of the girls attend in Quran courses. 6 percent of the children who go to school regularly attend in Quran courses as well. Again in light of this research study, financial problems are the most prominent reasons for not sending the children to school (stationery expenses, school materials, school uniform and transportation expenses). Other obstacles are security concern as emphasized above (the probability that girls may be harmed by a non-Syrian person) and lastly the phenomenon of child marriage.

7 All data are from 182 Syrian girls of age group 0-14.

Suggestions

As a suggestion according to gendered point of view, acquisition of classified data with respect to gender for the needs of Syrian women and men is important. Moreover, indicators in programming should be sensitive to gender; assessments/evaluations and analysis with respect to women refugees should be extended and negotiated; surveys, meetings and plannings including 3RP's⁸ Turkey chapters and also monitoring and evaluation parts, should be continued with participation of women and relevant women associations (http://sgdd.org.tr/wpcontent/uploads/2018/08/The_Needs_Assessment_TR_WEB.pdf). It is also important to monitor and support school attendance when it comes to the schooling of girls (Aysel Madra, Supporting Syrian Girls' Schooling From Local To General Scale; Mavi Kalem Meeting Report 14 June 2017: 19).

One of the basic needs for Syrian girls is that schools should provide and ensure safe and free transportation facilities and increase their current opportunities. (Tüzün: 2017: 25)

Child marriages may be prevented by raising awareness related to early marriage and activities designed for and aimed at empowerment of women and girls. For the purpose of reducing problems related to child marriage and forced marriage, social and economic support may be realized in various ways, moreover a variety of education opportunities may be provided and the establishment of safe training/education areas for girls can support the advancement of girls' education (http://sgdd.org.tr/wpcontent/uploads/2018/08/The_Needs_Assessment-TR_WEB.pdf;.63). For this purpose, it is important to read

⁸ Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan that aims intervention in Syrian crisis.

Özgül Kaptan's experience from KADAV: *"You cannot explain mothers that they should not have their children engaged at an early age, without constituting a trust and confidence relationship with them which takes at least 2 - 3 months. Just talking will be of no use. This is indeed a mutual communication process. For this reason we have meditated on a study which will involve household visits during outreach activity, establishment of relationship on one-on-one basis through workshop activities in order to improve this relationship, organization of workshops in a fixed location based on confidence and support for each other which will include production activity as well..."* (Supporting Syrian Girls' Schooling From Local To General Scale; Mavi Kalem Meeting Report 14 June 2017: 16).

It is necessary to assure the parents and reach their daughters, without forgetting the voice of the father in the decision of girls' education. (See: When Girls Receive Education The World Changes Mavi Kalem Meeting Report, 20 December 2017: 25) Seminars should be held for families and families should be encouraged based on this subject (Yasser Dallal, Supporting Syrian Girls' Schooling From Local To General Scale; Mavi Kalem Meeting Report 14 June 2017: 24). As the period of being out-of-school time for girls is prolonged, the risk that these children are confronted with physical, psychological, mental conditions which threaten their health, such as child/early marriage, pregnancy, motherhood gets higher. It is important to inform families about it.

In order to adapt the Syrian children to the schools of Ministry of National Education and to ensure continuity of their education, it is important to check the learning environments, to support these children in learning Turkish, and to conduct school-based activities against the discriminatory attitudes of teachers as expressed by the participants.

It should be emphasized that the different risks facing boys and girls as stated in INEE's Psychosocial Support Guidelines should be identified and the intervention should become sensitive to these risks (p.35): *"Quality education should be safe and gender sensitive. The risks that boys and girls face may be different, and thus affect the opportunities for access to quality education in different ways. It is important to identify these differences so that the intervention does not cause a gender identity surpassing the other. Boys and girls are faced with various physical and psychological threats, including bullying and violent attacks both on the school path and at school (Pereznieto, Magee and Fyles, 2017: 33)".* Risk of exposure to harassment and abuse for girls is high in comparison to boys in terms of psychological or verbal violence (sexist jokes and physical attacks, for instance). It is necessary to increase teachers' awareness regarding this issue.

Based on the example given in the same guidelines, the inclusion of female class assistants in the education process for the access and learning environment is significant (p.40). *"In 2001, impressions from refugee camps in Guinea revealed that refugee children, especially girls, had experienced widespread sexual abuse and violence. In an environment where girls had limited access to education, these events further reduced girls' attendance. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) launched the Class Assistants program to protect children, prevent new incidents and increase school attendance for girls. Women received training from IRC on how to support girls in the classroom environment. The assistants were assigned to all classes from 4th to 12th grade and were given the duty to visit their homes if the female students did not come to school several times. In such a case, the assistants talked with the child's parents and worked to ensure that the female student returned to school. Based on evaluation results of the program, it was*

seen that by means of this initiative both male and female students began to see the classroom environment calmer than before, they began to attend the school more regularly and they have found learning process more encouraging; moreover the relationship between teacher(s) and student(s) were identified to be more respectful. (UNHCR, 2007)".

According to Mavi Kalem's above mentioned evaluation of the findings within the framework of "Syrian Girls' Education and Advocacy Project" (When Girls Receive Education The World Changes Mavi Kalem Meeting Report, 20 December 2017: 38–39), the teachers primarily emphasized the importance of the need for Turkish language education for Syrian students whose mother tongue is Arabic (p.37). There is a serious decline in girls' school attendance at the age of 13-14; this observation and data verifies the facts of early/child marriage, care-taking labor and child labor.

It is urgently necessary to collect data especially on child/early marriage, to conduct studies with families and educators/trainers in order to increase awareness. It is necessary to underline the necessity of state-provided nursery and home care services to reduce the burden of care labor. Families should be informed and studies should be conducted for security needs.

Conclusion

Education per se is compatible with patriarchal system. Education justifies inequalities between men and women, plays a role in their permanence or acts as if these inequalities do not exist. Studies focused on textbooks show prejudices are in favor of men. These prejudices then continue on in the academic life. When taking into account all these sexist policies and never giving up criticizing them, it is necessary

not to overlook the prevention of the girls and women's right to education. The fact that the Syrian girls, who are the subject of this article, work in workshops or at home unpaid, means that both their labour is appropriated and their right to education is violated, thus they do not have the right to live as they wish. Education is a human right. A concept of education in which gender inequalities are not reproduced and a chance to exist in public realm are the most basic rights for participation in the social life. We all need a qualified accessible education program based on egalitarian policies and endowed with rights-based approach which is free from sexism and discrimination.

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