

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF WOMEN AND ISLAMIC CULTURES

Overview: Muslim Women and Displacement

Dr. Suad Joseph, General Editor

Distinguished Professor of Anthropology and Women and Gender Studies, University of California, Davis

EWIC Staff: Datasheet

- ❖ Over 43 million people worldwide are displaced due to conflict or persecution, the highest number in two decades. Over 15 million are refugees: people who have fled to other countries. About half of all refugees are female, and children make up 41 percent of the world's refugee population. Another 27 million people are displaced within their own countries: these people are called "internally displaced persons", or IDPs.¹
- ❖ By the end of 2009, the largest internally displaced populations were in Colombia (3.3 million), Democratic Republic of the Congo or DRC (2.1 million), Pakistan (1.9 million), Somalia (1.55 million), and Sudan (1 million). Three of these (Pakistan, Somalia, and Sudan) are Muslim-majority nations.¹ By 2012, the number of IDPs worldwide had risen to 28.8 million people, due largely to conflicts in Syria and the DRC.²
- ❖ The largest populations of refugees displaced from their home countries include Palestinians (4.8 million), Afghans (2.9 million), Iraqis (1.8 million), Somalis (700,000), Congolese (456,000), Myanmarese (407,000), Colombians (390,000), and Sudanese (370,000). Five of these (Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Sudan) are Muslim-majority nations, and refugees from Myanmar largely include ethnic Rohingya Muslims.¹
- ❖ A 2010 UN report on eleven refugee and IDP camps in Yemen cited not enough shelters; land disputes with host communities living near the camps; low funds; security concerns which prevented deliveries of food and supplies; natural disasters like flooding; and lack of privacy (especially for women). Displaced people experience high unemployment levels, leaving them dependent on aid.³ These conditions are common in refugee and IDP camps across the Muslim world. IDPs (more so than refugees) tend to stay closer to zones of conflict, putting them at risk of being involved in violence.⁴
- ❖ Displaced women face gender-based violence and sexual assault. Rape occurs frequently in camps and surrounding towns. A lack of employment opportunities for displaced women may force them into prostitution. Women may be abducted by sex traffickers while in transit to places of refuge.⁵
- ❖ Similar to displaced women worldwide, displaced women in the Muslim world do not have adequate healthcare. Some camps lack separate health and sanitary facilities for men and women, education programs for girls, and adequate menstruation supplies for women and girls. Gynecological care is lacking in many camp hospitals, resulting in unsafe conditions for pregnant women.⁶ Emergency contraception is not consistently available, resulting in unwanted pregnancies, many as a result of rape.⁷

¹ <http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/briefingpapers/refugees/>

² <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c23.html>

³ <http://www.irinnews.org/report/90531/yemen-idp-refugee-camps-facts-and-figures>

⁴ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IDPersons/Pages/Issues.aspx>

⁵ <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/genderstatmanual/Print.aspx?Page=Refugees-and-internally-displaced-persons>

⁶ <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c1d9.html>

⁷ http://www.rhrc.org/rhr_basics/gbvfacts.html